S. S. BRAZIL

Slipping into Boston under the watchful eyes of the F.B.I. and Military Police, the train found its dead end 'neath the concealing sheds of Boston's fish pier. It was near 10:00 o'clock May 10, when the battalion formed in companies in the piers warehouses to be checked onto the boat. To ease the tension of waiting, Red Cross workers passed out coffee and doughnuts. In orderly fashion, carrying burdening bags and gear the companies filed past the checker at the gate and directly up the gang-plank onto the S.S. Brazil, the ship which was to take them,—somewhere.

Immediately quarters were assigned, Company "A", being quartered on "C" deck. The quarters were very crowded. Men were bunked three deep, and bunks were jammed end to end leaving very narrow passageways between them. It was an ultimate in housing efficiency. Bunks seemed to hang from every wall and ceiling.

After a short orientation lecture on ship routine, most everyone turned down his bunk, placed his equipment near by and made for the decks to watch the hum drum of sea faring life run its daily course. They spent most of three days at the rail, until the scenes in the channel lost their freshness waiting for the ship to make ready to leave. A large percent of the other troops to join the 371st on board were from the Air Corp.

The day, Saturday May 13, finally came when the ship's whistle blew, and her engines moved her cautiously into the harbor and out to sea to join the other ships of the convoy. Before that third day, however, the men had become well acquainted with their new home.

Again there was plenty of spare time. There was K.P. to be done and supervisal jobs for the officers and non-coms, so that everyone had something to do, however trifling, but not so burdening as to employ the entire day. Because of the great number of enlisted men

aboard ship, the men had to forego their three regular meals a day. There were but two meals being served. Chow was served constantly and each group of men, according to the location of its quarters, was given meal cards, which allowed the group to eat at a certain time. The card was then punched to insure the man's not returning. There were clean up crews appointed each morning to swab out the quarters. Inspections usually followed.

There was endless entertainment aboard, all of it originating from the men themselves. Besides the endless pastime of peering across the expanses of water and watching the maneuvers of the convoy, there were movies, and boxing matches to while away the tedium of the trip. There were also the inevitable card games and crap games which somehow always manage to find their place regardless of prohibitions. Several men were reported to have acquired small fortunes from these games of chance. Some men occupied themselves with making little aeroplanes and derigibles and even flying small kites from the promenade deck. Some past the larger part of each day fighting off sea-sickness, either drooping pitifully over the rails or lying silently on their bunks, latrines were miserable places at night. Men bathed on the sunny decks by day, read books, and wrote letters and feasted on delicacies from the ships store. There were religious gatherings on deck in the evenings, graced by the glory of a sunset at sea.

When all else was overdone the lasting wonders of the ocean called men back to the railings to dream in her vastness. The convoy was a city of ships. One could count a hundred, if so inclined. Occasionally destroyer escorts broke formation and went scurrying in odd directions. Alerts were few, and only once did the sailors take their posts in seriousness. Even in dangerous water nothing changed the calm routine of life aboard an Army Troop Transport. Nothing changed except

the maneuvering of the ships into different positions within the convoy.

The crossing seemed to last forever despite the many deversions aboard ship. One of the men Fred Paine, "A" Company's first T/4 cook was lost to the company when he became ill with pleurisy. He was transferred to the Port Surgeon upon arrival in Liverpool. There had been no Physical examination for the men before leaving P.O.E. The only contact with Medics came when shots were injected into their already needle hardened arms.

The dim shore line of Ireland could be seen in the late afternoon of May 21st and later England appeared and once in sight remained so almost continuously. There was now little doubt among the men that our port would be one in England. The dim line of land in the distance began to grow, and, becoming more clear, buildings and roads could be seen. Fishing skiffs were drifting past and occasionally close enough to shout a word to the occupants. The convoy had divided and subdivided, each departing group seeking out its designated port. The S.S. Brazil was now one of the last ships of a single long line making its way through one of the many narrow mine cleared channels in British waters.

The ships began to slow and collect together outside the entrance to Liverpool Harbor. It was late evening and while some others of the convoy steamed into dock, the Brazil anchored there to wait for another day. At this hour of the day the tide in the British Iles begins to ebb dropping some 40 feet, a strange phenomenon causing the channel to become hazzardously shallow.

Well after day break the next morning came the orders to enter the harbor and the ship made way. Inside the harbor came another long wait, in fact another night was spent aboard ship, giving ample time to whistle and wave at the girls on the many ferries that

passed. It proved to be the only good look the men were to get of the city.

The trip was a new and strange experiencefor most every man aboard, and most every man had no reservations in saying he was damn glad it was over. It was a difficult task to handle so large a number of men as were aboard the Brazil, but it was well and ably managed through the cooperation of the troops themselves.

ENGLAND

England, from the railings of the ship was green, with the rusty red color of her brick factories and houses lending a certain heavy quality to the landscape. As the ship drew nearer, the crude cobblestone streets of Liverpool appeared deserted, and there seemed something mysterious about the place. There were few automobiles, and those that were seen were traveling on the left side of the road, an oddity. Now as the boat docked there was plenty of life about. The ship builders were busy, the riveters setting up a deafening clamor. The men had quite some time to practice their so called British dialect shouting their remarks in an unpolished Limey accent to the civilians on the pier. The British took a lot of teasing.

Many troops had already left the ship when the 371st began its disembarking. The time finally came, and barracks bags and the same heavy equipment was again grappled from ship to train. The relatively short distance to walk brought heads of perspiration popping on every forehead.

At the train were pretty British girls in Red Cross uniforms ready to serve coffee and donuts. They gave the men newspapers, assured them they would find bits of America about England, and lingered to talk with the boys until the train was ready to leave.

The coaches in the train were surprisingly nice, broken almost entirely into compartments, well cushioned and very comfortable for four men. The cars were much smaller than those in the States, true not only in England but throughout all Europe.

It was late afternoon May 25, when the train was loaded and got under way. The men again knew nothing of their destination except that it would take a full night's traveling to reach it. The train seemed to make very good time, blowing its shrill whistle at every crossroad

and puffing ever on. The English landscape was beautiful. Its rich green fields and tidy hedge rows, boxing them in to little squares, gave extreme contrast to the rougher expanses in the States. It was extremelz noticeable that no land was standing in waste. Gardens were everywhere a mark of the supreme effort needed for Britian to sustain itself through a war so immense as this had become. Late in the evening the route lead through Manchester in time to see the crowded streets. The train made a short halt on its way through the city and everyone made his first acquaintance with the "Any Gum Chummer." A little later it was time to black the coaches out, so the men were informed by the train men, and there was now little to do but sleep.

SALISBURY

The train brought its human cargo into Salisbury, England early the next morning. Trucks were waiting and there was little chance for more than a glimpse in this or that direction before they were roaring out of town in convoy to camp at Druids' Lodge in the Salisbury Plains. The name of the camp pictured in the minds of the men an exclusive dwelling. However, the lodge was well out of sight a and, with the expanses of open country surrounding the camp, the lodge must have been far away. Druids' Lodge, so far as the battalion was concerned proved to be long rows of pyramidal tents spread over two barren rolling hills, a patch or two of woods, and more rolling hills beyond. The place appeared to have been a golf course at one time. Companies were assigned specific sections among the tents, and every man began immediately to find a corner for himself in the tent assigned. Salisbury was not far away, but for the present the companies were suffering an orientation period in which no passes were available and anywhere outside camp boundaries was "Off Limits."

At the moment time was taken in getting settled in an entirely new phase of army life, reading the hoard of mail that soon came in, and observing England from the camp confines. Most impressive was the late hour at which the sun set showing the change in latitude here in England, which is considerably north of most of our 48 States. The twilight lasted until well past 2300 hours at the turn of the verwal equinox. Dawn was also earlier, leaving very little of the dark hours.

Here in England a new Army life was begun. The men had seen the last of plates and cups. Mess gear replaced them entirely. Accommodations were a luxury a man might or might not have. Today he had a pyrynidal tent, tomorrow perhaps a house, old barracks, barn, half shelter or nothing at all to sleep in. This was the European Theater of Operations. Here a man must be able to provide his own needs to a large extent. At this early stage in E.T.O. experience, the knack was yet to be developed but its importance was easily recogniyed and soon well on its way. The new conditions were better impressed upon minds by such little needs as entrenchment winding past the tents, which thez now dug with the thoughts of self preservation.

During the orientation period and before jobs were assigned to companies, the battalion seem to have returned to Ellis. Old training schedules were again to be followed. The day was filled with close and open order drill, gas mask drill and lectures. The men took calisthenics in the morning andstood retreat at night.

The first day of such ordeal and subsequently the first retreat parade overseas irked the men so that they had to find an outlet for expression. They proceeded to mock Colonel Adcock in his commands, giving the command of execution simultaneously with him. There were

nervous twitchings among the officers over their concern for the folly of the men. However, the colonel, showing surprise at first and flinching a little, but with one or two disapproving glances went on with the ceremony. There was then an immediate meeting among the officers. What was said could not be heard in ranks, but posture was a bit more errect and salutes a little smarter.

The company was soberly reprimended when it returned to its area. And the pleasure of fouling the Colonels' first retreat parade overseas was paid for with extra hours of drill in the evening's twilight. To make the insult worse there was considerable talking in the rank as the company marched to its area after retreat. The company was halted and the men were asked to tell who the guilty persons were. When there was no reply the formation marched on.

In the area the names of all the privates were taken and these men were given a very special detail, the psychology being to punish the privates who would in turn make it so hard on the non-coms that they would surely not do such a thing again. The camp had three latrines. The detail sent to burn the contents of its buckets was humorously dubbed "the honey detail" for in one way it did resemble men tending bee hives and carrying away huge buckets of honey. These unfortunates picked to pay for the crime of talking in ranks were put on the honey detail for three or four days.

Officers from the Service Commandfinally made their inspection of the battalion. The reports seemed favorable for the orientation, restrictions were partially lifted. The training programs continued through the day, but of an evening trucks took a few men to Salisbury on pass. Men also slipped out of the area to make visits to the quaint little towns near by. The men became initiated in British directions, inevitably ending in the remarks, "You Cawn't Miss it."

You might as well have missed it, for the bitters and ale were ranks and watery to the palates of men just over from the States. The stay was not pleasant at Druids' Lodge, and it was a happy moment for the men when it was announced that they had a job and were moving out. Snafu foiled the first attempt at leaving, but the next day the company was successfully off to its new location, Hollington House, a wealthy estate near Newbury.

NEWBURY

Hollington House was in an attractive community some 4 miles from Newbury, called Highclere. It was the house of a Mr. Cohen, quite wealthy, and evidently interested in fine horses. The company was quartered in his stables, which were old but well built brick buildings, and in temporary barracks formerly used by British troops. The place was well hidden from air view by huge oaks and pines.

Company "A" had been assigned the job of helping in the unloading and organizing of supplies in one of the army's largest Engineering Depots known as G-45. It was June 2 when the company arrived at Hollington House, and work schedules were immediately arranged.

In order to take full advantage of daylight hours because of necessary blackout regulation, it was decided to work the men in two shifts, starting the first shift at 5:00 a.m., the second at 2:00 p.m., and working until 11:00 p.m. Revielle sounded at 4:00 a.m. the next morning, John Altenbaugh blowing the blasts. It was an early hour, not zet daylight, and cold. But, in order to be working by 5:00, it was necessary to get an early start. The men were busy working in crews unloading landing barges, Bailey bridges, and rail, the things most likely to be needed immediately

after the invasion of France. The invasion seemed ever to loom more vividly on the horizon. Daily there were hundreds of planes in the air and the numbers seemed to increase. D-Day could not be far off.

Pub life was something new to Americans. In peacetime it was the evening's gathering place for the community. There friends got together for their bitters and ale, and a few hands of cards, or a game of darts. The pub was a homey place having many rooms, furnished, too, as a private club. Pubs were the pride of the average man and the center of his social life, but, with the flood of soldiers, they became service clubs, meeting places and an opportune medium for making acquaintance. The enormous demand for drink plus the shortage of help in breweries caused the brews to become ever thinner and more watery. Some proprietors were unable to make their supplies last more than half the week, closing their doors, then, until fresh supplies arrived.

The Pub was now, as it was to the civilians, the soldier's center of social life in England, when time permitted him a chance to relax. The soldiers daily drank barrels of what they insisted on calling beer and went merrily back to quarters feeling their drink a little, for the brew had some of its old punch left. The Axis and Compass, the "Red House" and "The Pheasant" will be long remembered. Added to the pub life around Highclere and Woolten Hill were several dances given at the Women's Club and planned bz the company The Irish girls came from Birchfield to dance the new American jitterbug and in turn, the men learned to do the "Hokie Pokie." The cooks served sandwiches and tea and the parties were well enjoyed. Passes were also available to Reading andNewbury as a part of a relaxed policy.

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The long awaited day of invasion finally arrived, though it was

not confirmed until later. On June 5 the air activity had increased its already heavy schedule to almost unbelievable proportions. In the late evening there was no doubt that something great had happened. As the huge bombers and transports returned in the early morning hours of June 6 there was certainty in the minds of the men who watched that D-Day had arrived. The planes flew low over Hollington House dropping flares and signals. It was a magnificent sight. The men just returning from work or the evenings "pubbing" watched and talked for hours about the posibility of an early victory. There was a new found optimism and a certain lightheartedness at work the next morning. Speculation on an early finish for the Germans, becoming boundless optimism in some, soon led to costly wagers. Thez talked of being home by Thanksgiving or Christmas.

The men were becoming better acquainted with the Britisher. Some were being invited to their homes, and the army encouraged such friendliness by allowing the men to take a ration of food along when they were invited for dinner. A fine gesture in view of the close rationing being adhered to in England at the time. It was easier now to appreciate the problems of a people plagued with an enemy on its door step.

After the Allied Invasion on the coast of France, the Germans began sending their newest weapon, the flying bomb, as a part of their insane effort to halt the drive in France. Again British civilians began evacuating London and other larger cities. The pubs buzzed with discussions on the new V-1 weapon. Occasionally, a wildly directed bomb dropped in the vicinity of Newbury.

Because of their work the men traveled quite a bit, and on many occasions had a chance to see the effects of the 1940-41 blitz on such places as Coventrz. Reading had suffered some severe damage,

and Newbury itself had been hit.

The average Englishman had long since foregone such pleasures as driving autos. Bicycles had replaced them. The streets were full of them, ridden by people of all size and age. The good sense of having such an efficient means of getting around took well with the army, and company "A" was no exception. Laying out sizeable portions of pay, there was soon an ample supply of bicycles in the company. Even the officers were pedaling off in the evening on social calls.

The stay at Hollington House, pronounced " 'Ollington 'Ouse" by the native, was about five weeks. Work at G-45 slowed some, but the regular work schedules continued. Truck loads of men left morning and afternoon with men usually resigned to a quiet ride, but in the return trip full of song and chatter. They rehearsed "Minnie the Mermaid" and "Roll Me Over in the Clover." Many tunes. The T.O. was even yet being changed. But while in Newbury most of the long expected ratings came through. Almost daily the bulletin board presented new promotions. The day finally came when new orders were received and the company packed its bags and moved.

TAUNTON

It was July 9th when the convoy reached the outskirts of Taunton, but not going into the city, turned short and halted with its load at Walford House, an Estate in Sommerset near the historical village of Monkton. It had rained that day and the weather was cool, asever in England when the warm rays of the sun are hidden. England, with its incessant cloudiness, knows no summer as Americans know it. The estate at Walford House was scattered with pyrmadal tents. Enough of them to house twice the number of men in Company "A". No doubt the former home of men already across the channel.

After setting up cots and making ready their new home, the

company, except for orderly room personnel and necessary kitchen help, was moved to a camp near Exeter the next day. The pains of constantly moving from one place to another were yet to begin. After a few days or two working with the platoons at salvaging bedding and cleaning up the old British camp of the Devonshire Regiment, headquarters platoon left the rest of the company to complete the job and returned to the tents at Walford House.

Headquarters platoon had its own particular assignment involving general construction and repair at the 61st General Hospital. There were sections of buildings, not yet completed, needing some brick work, carpentry, and most important, plumbing installations. Besides these there was a road to be built from the airfield into the hospital area. Planes were already arriving loaded with wounded from the Normandy front. The job proved quite interesting and much more agreeable than the business of cleaning out deserted camps and billets. The morale of the men charged with the cleaning out of camps in the Exeter vicinitz andlater at Torquay and Truro had dropped. It was a miserable state to feel one had been trained so long and traveled so far simply to empty straw from old tickings, salvage blankets, and sweep out quarters or tear down tents. Many men became very pessimistic foolishly picturing the outfit as a scavenger battalion.

The work at the hospital progressed in good order. As Transport planes arrived in even greater numbers with the wounded from Normandy, it was good to fell the company had contributed a thing, even so unimportant as a road, to make the painful trip from ship to hospital a little easier. Some wounded in improved condition, stepped from the planes unaided, and even had a cup of coffee and donuts in a rest tent before loading into a bus which carried such patients.

Some of them still wore their torn blood stained clothing, and were rough products of battle. Few had any comments to make except to offer a smile of relief at being out of it at least for now.

As work in the hospital neared completion, or stalled for lack of material, there was time to look the airport over. The pilots were friendly and invited many of the men to ride with them. It was routine flying time for them but a thrill to a land-fast Engineer. On some occasions they were making trips to some point in England on business, and lucky men got as far as Scotland and back in time to return to camp with the truck for evening chow. The gliders were also good sport, if a man could keep from becoming air sick for a glider towed behind a fast Transport is not nearly the smooth ride one might expect it to be.

The beautiful weather that finallz came to southern England together with the freedom the men enjoyed in the evening made these weeks very pleasant. The men who were in the vicinity of Exeter, Torquay, and Truro reported a good time as well as those who spent their evenings in Taunton and the vicinity of W. Monkton. It was here at Wolford House the company was first split up to work in separate locations. Here also first requests for replacementswere made and many of the younger men were transferred into outfits soon to cross the channel. Some went into the Infantry, some into the Combat Engineers. All were sorrz to leave having been so long a part of the company and having good friendsamong the men.

The motor pool was shaped into a completelz mobile unit. Although the company had been issued its jeeps while at Newbury, the trucks and heavy equipment had not. While at Wolford House these were issued and the mechanics and drivers were busy with their new equipment. All vehicles had at once to be numbered and marked with

tXXXXXXX identifying stars. There was a lot of work involved, but it was a pleasure for the company to have its own machinery and transportation.

The platoons had by now their full of moving and camp cleaning. The 1st and 2nd platoons had cleaned barracks and training areas between Exeter and Torquay while the 3rd platoon spent its time near Truro. In the meantime, Headquarters platoon had completed its work at the hospital, and began to work in camps in the vicinity of Taunton. The stay in Wolford House was now at an end. Special orders arrived August 8 and on the following day the platoons converged on Wolford House to join Headquarters, which was already packed up and waiting. Together the company left August 9 for station S.O.S.A. on a mission involving strict secrecy.

S.O.S.A.

The destination of the company proved to be an airstrip near Kingsclere and about 10 miles from Newbury. Here it was the task of Company "A" to build a camp for, and to aid the departure of the 101st Airborne division which was to make a jump behind German lines in the vicinity of Paris, which was now being approached by our armies in France.

There was nothing at the airstrip in which to house the airborne infantrymen when Company "A" arrived, and, of course, the Engineers were the first on the sites. A camp was to be built from pyramidal tents, large enough to house 3000 men and care for them. It was necessary to erect a minimum of 250 tents, 12 latrines, three huge dining halls, and an immense kitchen capable of feeding the entire personnel in 30 minutes. Besides the city of tents five hundred men were housed in a enormous hangar which also had to be made ready. The time limit was to be three days. Crowded into close quarters

themselves and heavily guarded from the outside world the company went to work on the job.

As the work neared completion some 90 men from the 29th Infantry Regiment arrived to join us and help company "A" serve the airborne, for when the 3000 men arrived it was to be the job of the Engineers, with the help of the Infantry men, to cook for, serve and play nursemaid to them while they were being briefed and fully equipped for action. The men pulled guard duty, K.P. and served in countless ways.

The 101st began arriving promptly after the three day deadline and soon the camp was swarming with them. They were a hardy bunch of men, some of them veterans of campaigns in Africa, Sicily and Italy, besides spearheading the Invasion on D-Day. All of them were hardened to their job. They were soon down to the business of preparing, ridding themselves of every piece of excess equipment, and anxious to obtain knives, pistols and ammunition for added protection.

Tension increased among them as their briefing concluded and H-Hour arrived. They alone knew the particulars, and there was little talk between them and the other troops. Later it was found progress in France made their task unnecessary. H-Hour had been postponed and finally cancelled. Their part in the campaign was eliminated by the quick fall of Paris and, while "snafu" in the army is irksome, in this instance it came as a blessing, for the job, already costly, was accomplished without their blood. As suddenly as the maneuver had started it was abandoned, and the entire unit relaxed to wait further order.

In the meantime restrictions were withdrawn. The men could now leave camp. The airborne unit soon returned to its base to await

further orders, and Company "A" remained to tear down the camp.

During the period when the airstrip and its secrecy was being heavily guarded, one of Company "A's" drivers, John Steagall, tested the alertness of a guard by presenting him with a false pass, which he himself thought was in good order. Not realizing the mistake he proceeded and did not hear the guard's command to halt. Immediately a situation developed that, though humorous, could easily have become a tragedy. Upon seeing a truck driver so brazenly violate standing orders, and after shouting "Halt!" the proper number of times, the guard proceeded to shoot the tires off the vehicle, having first sent a round whistling past the truck's cab. Steagall was pretty bug-eyed about it all, and confessed he must have been sleeping. It was suggested he have another entry made on his records showing a second experience on the infiltration course.

Before headquarters was moved from S.O.S.A, and while the rest of the company finished the work at S.O.S.A., the 3rd platoon went on to Druids' Lodge near Salisbury where battalion headquarters was still located. One day later August 20th the company followed.

DRUID'S LODGE AND FONTHILL GIFFORD

After moving back with battalion into the tents in the heart of Salisbury plains, Company "A" was together less than 24 hours when the platoons began to leave on individual jobs. Two days later Headquarters platoon itself moved with battalion to a new location near Tisworth called Fonthill Gifford, the huge estate of a parlimentary member.

On moving back to Druids' Lodge, rumors had it that the battalion was being alerted for duty on the Continent. As easily understandable, the talk cooled rapidly and froze for the time being.

On August 21 the 2nd platoon split its men between the 158th

and 104th General Hospitals, and the 1st platoon divided its men between the 110th General Hospital and the 327th Station Hospital. The 3rd platoon was stationed at the 120th Station Hospital. Headquarters detached some of its men with the platoons where their particular skills were most needed. The following day the remainder of headquarters joined Battalion at Fonthill Gifford.

The hospital jobs proved interesting. The men were working in small groups, and being attached to the respective hospitals for quarters and rations relieved the men of the ordinary details of camp life. With no revielle to stand, they simply went to work in the morning at an agreeable hour, and after the days work were free to visit near by towns, or enjoy the recreation rooms the hospitals provided. They spent little more than a week doing odd construction work in and around the hospital, such as building shelters over walkways between buildings, building storage rooms, putting in partitions, and doing general maintenance work. September 1st the platoons were called back to headquarters at the new location.

Fonthill Gifford offered ample room for the whole battalion in the fabricated buildings, once the home of a large British unit. Headquarters, with little more than motor pool personnel, cooks, supply room and office help, was busy cutting grass along the walkways; generally policing the area, and starting new tasks bound to excite talk again of moving to France. The motor pool made final checkups on equipment. Special shipping marks were being stendled on the last of the supply room crates, this job having been started at Wolford House but not completed. Camouflage netting was woven.

Soon after, the platoons were called into headquarters and the rumors became truth. The battalion was rapidly preparing to leave England. The men seemed now to be trying their level best to

wear out their bicycles before leaving England, for it was a certainty they wouldn't be taken along. There was a dance given in camp, and, while the company was taking part in farewell festivities, it was also was having clothing checks and re-issues of clothing and equipment. There were training films shown as well as Hollywood productions andthere was a last minute lecture on bridges,--the Bailey Bridge in particular. The day came when, ready for France or not, the company and battalion was off.

The men visited the "pubs" for the last time thus in a symbolic way saying goodbye to all England. They sang in the streets and almost liked the brews they had at first blasphimes. Their boisterous manner always perplexed the Britisher, and the Yanks counfounded the Limey for their staidness. Still, there was a much better understanding between them, and most men left feeling they had left a few good friends in England.

STAGING AREA IN ENGAND

Except for a "walking party," which was left to make its way across the channel by foot, train, bus and boat, the battalion, packed, and dressed in gas impregnated clothing, and wearing full field packs, loaded on the trucks and started for the staging area at Hursley Park camp about 4 miles southwest of Winchester on the morning of September 5th. A walking party was necessary because of a shortage of transportation. It was made up of men from all companies, including 59 men and one officer from Company "A." This party set out on foot ahead of the motorized unit and marched 4 miles in the hot sun to Tisbury where it boarded a train and rode to the staging area. By the time they arrived by train, there being a long wait at the Tisbury station, the main body of the battalion had arrived at Hursley Park and sent trucksto the station to meet them.

The battalion and company was all together again at the staging area with nothing to do but roam the camp, eat "C" rations, and wait orders to move to the docks in Southampton. It was yet mid-afternoon on arrival in the Staging Area, and though companies did not expect to leave before morning, they were alerted and were at all time subject to leave with only an hours notice. Most of the men went to the theater in the area that evening, and heard William Bendix shout, "Feed 'em, they're hungry." A line the men adopted in their chow lines for months to come.

The battalion was sleeping soundly the next morning early when what turned out to be a false alarm aroused them, and had them out in the night loading on trucks for nothing more than aride around the camp and then back to bed. The real signal to move out did not come until the early afternoon when the convoy loaded again but this time moved on to Southampton. The walking party was left to ride busses and, reaching Southampton, loaded into another boat, thus being separated from the rest of the battalion for a few days. There was also a party of men following with the heavy equipment which loaded into another landing ship behind the company.

At Southampton the convoy lined the streets waiting for dock No. 2 to clear itself of other convoys and make ready to receive the 371st Engineer Battalion. At 1800 hours the battalion loaded into the huge open maw of L.S.T. 208 and trucks loaded with men and equipment were moved into the belly of the ship where Hydraulic lifts moved the load from deck to deck.

The weather had not been bad but the evening and night brought a heavy, cloudy sky and a slow cold rain. Few of the men aboard had bunks in the ship's quarters. Most of them had to find likely spots to curl up for the night, whether it was on the deck, in trucks, or

on pile of supplies. The night aboard was cold and uncomfortable. The ship lay at anchor throughout the night.

At 0630 September 7th the ship was underway. The crossing consumed the entire day. The weather remained drizzling and dull, and it was late September 7th when the L.S.T. dropped anchor off Utah beach to await a return of the tide.

The men awoke in the cold dawn of the 8th to get their first good look at an invasion beach from the windy upper deck. Half sunken ships and desolate landing barges that had carried the first troops ashore D-Day lay beached, and wrecked equipment of many descriptions strew the beach itself.

The battalion loaded into its vehicles again, which were now free of their deck anchors on the ships decks and at 6:30 when the tide had ebbed, drove again from the ramp onto the beach. The battalion was, on D plus 93, officially on French soil.

The beach, though smoothed by tides and time still showed the evidences of the struggle. Ugly pill boxes and entanglements and brestwork lined the shores. Behind the beach was a confusion of traps, trenches and still treacherous minefields. Shell holes and bomb craters covered the no-mans-land. Broken equipment and battle litter lay everywhere, while muddy roads bound the whole miserable scene together. The gloom of the over cast sky blended perfectly. This was only the start for France was the battle field, and, while here was an introduction. Normandy lay just ahead.

The trucks groaned thrcugh the drench of mud to transit area B where Company "A" made camp for the night in an open field. Near the area was the ruin of a once proud farm house. Orchards were broken but still faithfully zielding their crop, and cows grazed peacefully 'neath their boughs. In the damp chill of evening milk-maids came with their milk cans to milk, moving from field to field through massive hedge rows. The same hedges that made the fighting so mean. Normandy had been beautiful,—It's peacetime landscape easy to imagine. Quaint farm buildings, linked one to the other to enclose intimately the life that was within, set like white gems amid green fields orchards and hedges. The men spent their time, until the next afternoon when they started deeper into France, roving about the green fields and orchards eating the half ripe fruit, stopping to watch the milking or examining ruins and emplacements. Cautious, however, of mines and traps.

The next days' move took the company 346 kilometers to a bivouac area near Charlo St. Maas. The men witnessed the devastation of St. Lo, Vier and Alencon. The ruin France was suffering hit them hard. Hours were spent absorbed in a thousand thoughts. These were

no longer pictures but the real tragedy. People picking pitifully in the ruins of their cities, pushing an odd assortment of carts and wagons loaded with bedding, baskets of dishes and the last of their earthly possessions. Hundreds of them milled about the streets. One wondered where they went at night for shelter, how they managed to live. If there was a single wall intact in the city of St. Lo it was not to be seen. Debris had been pushed back against the bleak shells of buildings, and endless convoys moved through. In spite of the heartaches they bore most people found a way to smile a little and wave a welcome. The company had been eating "K" and "C" rations entirely for nearly a week, and, with pockets full of gum, sugar, and boullion powder, they tossed the only tokens they had to the civilians.

Along the highways was every evidence of the battles that were. German tanks, trucks and artillery lay everywhere, wrecked and burned, pushed from the road with bulldozers into crazy heaps at the side. Every field in the Normandy area was a trench entwined battleground. Every crossroad a strong point, and the neighborhood at such points a shelled shambles.

As the miles moved by the destruction of battle lightened, for as the German was put to rout his stands were less firm. There were some villages almost entirely intact, but damage was severe wherever the Germans made a stand.

The company reached its bivouac area late in the evening, pitched its shelter-halves, posted guards, and, after a final can of "C" rations, which most men made an effort to heat before blackout precautions made it inadvisable, the men rolled up in blankets on the stubbled ground and tried to sleep.

The next morning brought the same weary business of breaking camp. The company had been alone in convoy but was now to meet

Battalion in Etampes. It did meet Battalion in the day at a huge chateau which had been taken over by the Germansand made into a General Headquarters. The battalion pitched its shelter-halves on the ground, visiting the building only on curiosity.

The battalion was now almost all together. Parts of each company were absent, but the whole well represented. Major Jackson had the men together here in an open area and talked to them of what thez might expect in the near future, giving them, not so much factual information as perhaps material for future rumors. He did, however, make it known that the next move would take the company within reasonable reach of the enemy, and that consequently it would pay to be aware and mindful of the training Camp Ellis had provided. Major Jackson was now in command of the battalion, Colonel Adcock having been placed in command of the 355 Engineer G. S. Regiment while the 371st was still in England.

On September 11th the battalion moved on to Vitry le Francois some 224 kilometers farther east, and marked the end of the company's first major move across France. The last lap had taken the convoy through the outer suburbs of Paris but hardly slowing at all, the trucks lumbered on. The convoy, however, did drive through Rheims and everyone got a glimpse of its famous cathedral. It was heavily barricaded against bombing.

The walking party, which had taken another ship across the channel, arrived on Utah beach with no transportation and with instructions to meet the battalion at area B. The rain, having already made roads and fields soft with mud, continued, and, in the damp chill of the late afternoon when they arrived in France, they became lost. Cold and wet, and weary f om the weight of full field equipment, they finally gave up the search and bivouaced. Muddy as well as

tired and wet from the eight miles march in search of the designated area, most of the men simply wrapped themselves in blankets and shelter-halves, picked out the dryest spot possible, and went to sleep in the open--officers and men alike.

The following day they were found by Lt. Weinstein of "A" Company who ordered trucks sent to pick them up and bring them in. They were not long with the company when the company again left them on its trip across France with orders to wait for trucks to return for them. Thus after reaching Vitry le Francois drivers returned to Area B just off Utah beach to pick up the lost platoon. The walking party had had a rough crossing, but the weather changed and their spirits were repaired.

By the 14th the company was together again at the Marne River. While Vitry le Francois was the nearest village of any size the camp was several kilometers away in the midst of young willowy forests. It was a weary unshaven bunch of men who arrived. The long trip across the channel and through France had allowed little chance to bath and shave. The weather was warm and bright now and men walked to the river's grassy banks carrying bundles of laundry and plenty of soap. They emulated the age old customs of