

5/29/06

John,

Attached is a personal
memoir of Norman Warren.
He is now deceased, but
was a former resident of
Wilson County. His son,
Philip, sent this to be included
in the WWII collection.
Norman was a good family
friend.

Thanks,

Bucky Yel



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On April 18, 1941, I was inducted into the United States Army in Newport News, Virginia. Prior to induction I was employed in the timekeeping department of Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt sent me one of those letters which read, "Greetings From The President, You have been selected, etc., etc." Approximately forty of us were sent to Camp Lee (near Petersburg, Virginia) for indoctrination. From there I was sent to Fort Meade, Maryland, and assigned to Company "L," 116th Infantry Regiment of the 29th Division, known as the Blue and Gray Division. Company "L" was originally a National Guard Unit from Staunton, Virginia. Captain Malcolm R. Weller was the Company Commander. After a few months of basic infantry training the Battalion Commander asked me to go over to the base exchange and help them straighten out the accounting procedures. I worked there for several months after setting up a system of record keeping. Most of our field training was done in Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. We were in New Bern, North Carolina, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. We realized then that our tour of duty would be longer than the one year originally planned. Our regiment continued training until October, 1942, when we were sent to Camp Blanding, Florida, for about two weeks. From there we entrained for Fort Dix, New Jersey, where we were issued full equipment. A few nights later we slipped out under the cover of darkness and boarded the British Liner "Queen Mary." There were about twelve thousand of us aboard heading out to sea. The Captain changed course quite frequently so that German submarines

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would not have time enough to get a reading on us. The trip was uneventful until we approached the harbour at Greenock, Scotland. Several small English ships came out to escort us in and to look for mines. One of them apparently underestimated the speed of the "Queen Mary" and was cut in half while crossing in front of us. The "Queen Mary" was so large that we hardly felt the collision. I happened to be standing on the top deck and saw one half of the ship as it floated by. The collision did some damage to the bow which allowed water to get on some of our equipment. After debarkation we boarded trains and headed for Tidworth Garrison located near Salisbury in Wiltshire County, England. We enjoyed the cookies that the Scottish women had placed on the seats in the train. Sgt. John Lewis Gibbs, Jr., from Staunton, Virginia, and I were assigned to a room above Company Headquarters. I was a corporal at the time and had been assigned to the job of Company Clerk. Our Company Commander at this time was Capt. Charles East.

The Germans let us know by radio that they were aware of our arrival at Tidworth Garrison and commented that they would be over to see us. A few weeks later they did just that. The air raid alarm went off and by the time we could get outside there were flares being dropped that lighted up the entire area. This was my first air raid and I do not mind saying that I was just as scared as the next man. The anti-aircraft guns in the area were really putting up the flak. We heard bombs dropping but none fell closer than about one hundred yards. We trained about eighteen months in England and Scotland for the invasion on D-Day.

Our training also took place near Bristol and Plymouth. About two weeks before D-Day we were sent to a staging area near the coast. No one was allowed to leave or enter this area. We were shown maps of the French coast and told that we were to land on Omaha Beach. It sounded real simple, but it did not turn out that way. On Sunday, June 4, 1944, we were loaded on a troop ship and told that we would go in Monday morning, but due to weather conditions the invasion was put off until Tuesday, June 6th. The air force and navy bombarded the French coast just prior to our going in at about 7:30 A.M. on Tuesday morning. The skipper of our landing craft managed to get us pretty close to shore. We were pinned down right on the beach by Germans in concrete pillboxes up on the hill. A demolition crew managed to blow up the pillboxes late that afternoon and about dusk we were able to drive about one mile inland. For several weeks the fighting was from hedgerow to hedgerow. By this time we had lost over fifty percent of our Company. On July 13, 1944, another soldier and I were sent out on reconnaissance. We came across an anti-personnel mine marked with a white flag and as we turned to leave, there was an explosion. I assumed that the mine had been set off, how I do not know. Several pieces of shrapnel hit me from the hips down to my feet. When I came to, two medicos were cutting my pants off and putting something on my wounds. They put me on a stretcher and took me to a Red Cross station where a jeep took me to an evacuation hospital near the coast. The shrapnel was removed and I was flown to a hospital in England. At the time I got hurt our troops were close to capturing St. Lo

which was more or less a turning point in the invasion. My Battalion Commander, Colonel Howie, made a statement that he would get to St. Lo one way or the other. He was killed in the battle for St. Lo and his body was carried into St. Lo. A memorial has been erected there honoring him for his service. One of the first things I did at the hospital in England was to write my parents to let them know that I was alive. My letter got there before they received a telegram from the War Department saying that I had been seriously wounded in action. While in the hospital an aneurysm developed in my ankle. Later a decision was made to send me back to the States for further treatment. I certainly did not argue with that decision. A hospital ship brought me and several others to a hospital on Staten Island, New York. The aneurysm in my ankle disappeared on the trip back. From Staten Island I was sent to the Greenbriar Hotel in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. The Hotel was converted to an Army Hospital. While there I got to see my family for the first time in over two years. I had been looking forward to this meeting for a long time. After a few weeks at the Greenbriar I was sent to Northington General Hospital in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. While there they operated on my left knee. After several weeks of recuperation I was sent to Camp Pickett located near Blackstone, Virginia. I was sent here for rehabilitation and discharge. On August 28, 1944, I was given my discharge papers and I headed home, a free man.

Norman E. Warren ~~SGT~~
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