

This is the story of Sergeant Frederick W. Randall ASN 20454112 of Graham N.C. who was First Sergeant of H. Company 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division. Always a professional soldier, Sgt. Randall had been slated by the then Colonel Gavin, Regimental Commander, to be sent for officer training prior to overseas shipment, which did not occur. He indicated that to recall things accurately after 38 years would be quite difficult and noted that I should fill in the dates correctly. Here is his story written on November 15, 1981 and sent to Les Cruise for H Co. History, and edited by him with the addition of ASN's and full names for positive identification.

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**As you know, we arrived in Casablanca May 10, 1943, and remained there for two days then boarded 40 and 8 box cars for Oujda, arriving on May 14, 1943. Length of stay was until July 1st or 2nd 1943 when we moved on to Kairouan. It was here, I believe, that Colonel Gavin during his pep talk on the eve of the Sicily Drop July 9th 1943 said, "Tonight you are the first men of America".**

**We were widely dispersed on the drop into Sicily. The Germans probably thought that the whole U.S. Army was coming in by parachute. Shortly after the drop a good sized platoon was assembled in the area where I landed. Lt. Alexander H Townsend (ASN 0-1287436) was the ranking officer. We searched for hours trying to locate a familiar landmark with no luck. Finally it was agreed that I take several men and reconnoiter the area which we had not already covered.**

**Just before dawn, experiencing no luck, we took a break under a large tree in the middle of a vineyard. An hour or so later we were awakened by a group of Italians and Germans retreating down a road, perhaps 150 yards from our position. The troopers got into position to open fire; when I noticed some movement in the vineyard to our rear and had the men hold fire. A few moments later a 2nd Lieutenant came crawling up to our tree. By this time the enemy was out of range. The most disappointed man in the group was an ex first Sergeant, who I think was from Hdqtrs Co. 3rd Battalion who had been transferred to H. Co. after being busted for some infraction.**

**We decided to move in the direction from which the Germans and Italians had come. The ex-1st Sgt. was lead scout and I was behind him. We were moving parallel to the road. Sporadic firing was coming from every direction at a distance. I had released the safety on my Tommy gun and when I stumbled I released a burst of lead kicking up dirt at the feet of the lead scout. If looks could kill, I would have been listed as KIA in Sicily.**

**We were picking up troopers as we moved along. We came to a roadblock with a machine gun and one dead Italian. One of the men who had joined us said the Lt. Harold L. Gensemer (ASN 0-1295363 had killed the guy during the night. Late that morning we met an American Infantry outfit coming inland. The 2nd LT., who had**

joined us in the vineyard, disappeared here. He had probably prevented us from becoming dead heroes in that vineyard as the enemy had passed by. I took the remaining paratroopers, perhaps a platoon and move on toward the beach. We found several usable amphibians on the beach and Cpl. Doyle T. Jones (ASN 18076985), from Texas, said that he could drive the amphibians, so we all piled in and headed for what we thought was our original objective. We move forward until stopped by enemy fire, exited the duck and got pinned down along with a Regiment of the 29th Infantry Division. The commanding Officer of that unit requested me to take a patrol and contact the unit on his right flank.

I, along with several troopers returned to the beach area to locate the jeep that we saw earlier. Finding it, we took off again with Cpl Jones driving. We covered a lot of ground, but found only one farmer. As we moved on, a lone ME109 made a strafing run on us as we jumped in the ditch beside the road. Only Cpl. Jones remained in the jeep firing the 50 caliber machine gun at the plane. He may have hit the plane, because it never returned.

We returned to the 29th Infantry Regiment area to report our lack of success. The paratroopers that we had left behind earlier, had grown weary of being pinned down, so they charged the German positions killing several Germans and driving the remainder out. I believe that Frank Sinkavitch (ASN 36507393) of H. Co. was KIA here. I proceeded on to the Regimental CP, and found another of our boys wounded. A few mortar shells were coming in' and the Regimental Staff were in their foxholes while the wounded guy lay in the open. Lt Townsend had arrived while I was on patrol. I started cussing the Colonel of the Regiment and his staff for cowering in their foxholes leaving the wounded man in the open. I suppose that Lt. Townsend saved my bacon that day. He calmed my indignation and soothed the officer's feelings over my outburst.

Events run together at this point, or lose their order. I was a few hundred yards from the beach when the 504 Parachute Infantry Regiment came in on the second night (7/10/43). A plane crashed almost on top of me. I looked up and recognized C-47s. The outfit I was with was firing on the C-47s and the paratroopers coming down. Colonel Tucker landed near me and he was in a frame of mind to kill anything that moved. We raised enough hell to get the firing stopped. Too late, the damage was done. You know the history of this.

Shortly after this escapade, we found our original objective. About 100-150 troopers found it the first night, Biazza Ridge overlooking a road to the beach. Led by Colonel Gorham (KIA), this group had stopped a German panzer unit at the cost of some 30 troopers KIA and I do not know how many more were wounded. Sgt. Costello, 1st. Sgt. of G Co. was in charge of the burial detail. He was a Pueblo Indian from Colorado. German POWs were digging a mass grave and Costello gave them a rough time. We remained here until a semblance of organization was restored, then we moved toward Trapani meeting very little resistance. The Germans and Italians were retreating faster than we could advance.

**I remember one small village in which we encountered slight resistance. Major Krause (later Colonel) was directing an attack on a pill box manned by Italians. Suddenly a white flag appeared through a port hole! Those manning the pill box surrendered! Major Krause decided to show the prisoners their fate had they continued to resist. He ordered a bazooka brought up and aimed it at the pill box. The bazooka misfired with the explosion coming out the rear. The Italians did not laugh, but the troopers had to find some distraction elsewhere to avoid breaking up with laughter. They did not want the Major to see their faces. Within a short time the quartermaster corps arrived with a truck convoy, but many of the enemy had dispersed in the distraction.**

**When we arrived on the outskirts of Trapani (on July 23, 1943) we encountered a little artillery fire. Our truck convoy stopped and we all hit the ditches and fields along the road. Sgt. James D. Edwards (ASN 14062613) and I were in a ditch with two quartermaster guys. A shell landed near the edge of the ditch and one of the guys looked up and said, "I ain't no combat soldier, I'm getting out of here". Two black streaks! Jim and I were trying to get nearer the bottom of the ditch away from the top. Captain Benjamin Vandervoordt (later Colonel) came up and cussed us out of the ditch. We started advancing receiving light sniper and mortar fire. It was during this advance that William P. Molesky (ASN 32289782) was firing his mortar without a base plate. Wilbur J. Jennings (ASN 39173094) had the plate with him elsewhere.**

**Trapani surrendered! I don't think that we sustained any casualties there and with the fall of Trapani, our combat in Sicily came to an end. We remained here for several weeks with our primary duty being the guarding of POWs and manning outposts in a number of villages in the area. There was a beautiful beach at Trapani that was deceptive because at least one soldier was killed by a land mine at or near the beach.**

**When we left Sicily on August 20, 1943, we returned to Kairouan in Tunisia, North Africa for a brief time. We then returned to Sicily to prepare for the Italian jump where we landed near the town of Paestum on September 15, 1943, then on to Salerno to reinforce those troops. There were no casualties here to speak of, although one trooper shot himself accidentally in the leg, either during the jump, or upon landing. The following day H. Co. or part of it was sent into the mountains to block enemy movements where one trooper sustained serious head injuries in a fall. (Lt. Coupe?). The only sign of life we saw that day was a goat herder. I guess that we were lucky to find him, because we had run out of K-Rations and ate goat meat during our stay in the mountains.**

**When then returned to Salerno, and LSTs were provided to move us up the coast to make a beach landing on September 28, 1943 at Maiori just south of Naples where we had to go through a tunnel which the Germans had blocked at the north end. We spent a miserable night in a plowed field during the worst storm that I experienced**

while overseas. Sgt. Bill Reynolds (William F.Reynolds ASN 34212149) and I tried to share a blanket and a shelter half to remain dry: finally giving up the effort I took the blanket and wrapped myself in it, lay down in the mud and went to sleep.

October 1, 1943 we moved into Naples. H. Co. policed the docks and surrounding area. We were billeted in what I think was an old bakery a block or two from Garibaldi Square. The Germans had mined the Post Office in Naples. It blew up killing a number of soldiers. We had Italians helping in the kitchen. One of them got hold of gammon grenade (plastic explosive), screwed the top off, and pounded the stove with it in an effort to get the contents out, and succeeded in blowing himself and the whole kitchen up.

We left Italy November 18, 1943 and sailed for Oran where we stayed about a week. On Thanksgiving Day we departed for Northern Ireland arriving in Cookstown where we remained until early spring of 1944. A short time before we left Ireland, I was reduced to private and transferred to 3rd Battalion Headquarters Co. The reason for this demotion-I had arranged for a taxi driver to pick me up at a location about eight miles from camp in time to make reveille and even paid him in advance, and he got drunk and failed to show. I ran all the way to camp, but missed reveille by 15 minutes. Captain Frederick Mills tried to bust me, but Major Krause refused. Subsequently, I requested a reduction in rank personally from Major Krause. Krause approved the reduction and I was transferred to Hdqrs 3rd Battalion. I was made Battalion Messenger chief a month later. We were shipped to England on February 14, 1944, and were stationed near a small village called Quorn.

I never knew the name of the airport from which we flew to Normandy, (Cottesmore) We were billeted in a large hanger and were not allowed outside except for mess call and latrine activities. I will say that the Air Forces ate well. Par for the course, we missed the drop zone in Normandy. Thirty to forty troopers got together during the night. Most from Hdqtrs 3rd and H. Company (505). Believe it or not, Lt. Townsend was in this group. We came upon a hut beside a hedgerow where a medic had carried the wounded from a glider that had crashed in a hedgerow about 200 yards distance from the hut. Due to the appearance of Germans in the area he was unable to get the medical supplies from the broken glider. We could see the Germans moving to the front of the hut, but none to the rear where the glider was. I requested a volunteer to obtain the medical supplies from the glider. A private by the name of Turner (Charles?) and one other trooper whose name I never knew accompanied me. We were about halfway to the glider when all hell broke loose. Turner and the other Private ran to the hedgerow and began firing from there, I flopped on my belly and snaked across the field. I wanted to get back to the group manning a machine gun. I don't know how far I crawled, but it seemed like a mile though it was approximately 75to 100 feet. There must have been several Germans trying to get me, judging by the number of bullets kicking up dirt in my face. I made it to the area where the machine gun was manned by Sgt Johnson (Donald S.), Hutchinson (Earl J.), and Private Stone (James H.). Johnson and Hutchinson were from Hq.Co, 3rd Battalion and I believe that Stone was too. There

were two privates with them I was not acquainted with. Private Stone exposed himself briefly and was hit. We could not get to the machine gun. No fire was coming from the hut where I assumed that Townsend was or the hedgerow where Turner and the unknown Private were.

I made the suggestion that we get out. After giving Stone a morphine shot I told Hutchinson to move out and I would follow. We had to cross an open space about 15 feet wide. I felt that the Germans who had been shooting at me could not miss forever, so I suggested to Hutchinson that he move first. He did and I followed. Five of us were left. If my memory serves me correctly, we hid in a hedgerow the rest of that day and all night, and part of the next day. We could not move, the Germans were swarming everywhere. I think it was on the 8th of June that a group of Germans were making a hedgerow to hedgerow search and flushed us out. We were scattered along a ditch in the hedgerow. The guys nearest the Germans started firing at them, and in a matter of minutes we were pinned down by machine gun fire, and hand grenades were being thrown into the ditch, so we had to surrender. One man failed to come out when we surrendered. I thought that he must have been wounded and tried to go to him, but a German stopped me and turned a burp gun on the trooper\*\* (This man may have been Stu Milligan). We were taken to a concrete block house several miles from point of capture and locked up. The next day we were taken to Cherbourg, probably about the tenth or eleventh of June. All we saw was a mass of rubble. Apparently the Air Force had been at work, and everything seemed to be burning.

It seemed that we were transported all over France in trucks, buses, and cattle cars, I am sure that you have heard of the conditions of cattle cars. I recall passing through St. Lo. We were locked up for days without food, very little water and one bucket for nature's call. We were packed in like sardines. We arrived in one village in the Loire valley near Chartes where the Air Force had just hit an orphanage. I thought that the people were going to kill the whole bunch of us. At this stop we were moved to a prison compound, forced to shave, one razor for over several hundred prisoners, and our pictures taken. I do not recall all the places of internment. I do remember internment at Chartes a town made famous for the stained glass windows of its cathedral. We could see the cathedral in the distance. Here I encountered Lt. Townsend again. Officers, non-coms, and privates were separated here and started on the journey to their respective internment camps. I do not recall any other towns we were in, except Paris.

At long last we reached our final destination in eastern Germany near a small village called Kistrine-Stalag 3-C in the early fall of 1944. We were first taken to a wooden building, herded in behind wire enclosures, forced to remove our clothes, and steam began entering the room from pipes on the ceiling. Somebody yelled, "they're gassing us!" however it was steam, they were delousing us.

As I entered the gate of the prison compound, I recognized a boy, Jim Kelly whom I had not seen since September 1941. We had entered the Federal Service together in

1940 when the 30th Division was mobilized. He was taken prisoner at St. Lo. I was in St. Lo before the allies liberated it. We were kept in small buildings of three rooms each, 30 men to a room. Half of the men slept on shelves on each side of the room: the rest on the floor. Kelly and I managed to get in the same room. I don't recall the date that we arrived at Kistrine in the fall of '44.

An young English soldier and I struck up a friendship at one of the camps where we made a brief stop. He had swapped identities with an American GI and was with us for a brief time in Kistrine-Stalag 3-C. Due to several mass escapes from this camp security was unusually tight. He hoped that he would have a better chance to escape within our units, however, the American GI eventually turned himself in, and Letherland, who was the Englishman, was returned to his own camp.

The only thing that I recall as significant during our stay here was an attempted plan to escape, that was foiled when the Germans were tipped off, by whom we did not know, and they shut that door.

In January 1945, the Russians were approaching the Oder River and the Germans decided to evacuate our camp. I suppose that there were about two thousand POWs in the American compound. A small Russian compound, a French compound, a compound with a few other nationalities that I never became familiar with, which were lumped together in the fourth unit. It was never quite clear to me why the German evacuation route was directly toward the advancing Russians. We had moved far enough from Stalag 3-C to qualify for a break. As we reformed on the road after the break, three Russian tanks opened fire on the column at almost point blank range killing and wounding a number of both Germans and POWs. The Germans started to retreat and most of the POWs with them back to Stalag 3-C. The Germans deserted the camp and their Air Corps dropped butterfly bombs on the camp. I later heard that some more POWs had been killed.

We had buried ourselves in the deep snow until the Russians had quit firing, then rather apprehensively move forward toward them with our hands up and yelling *Americanski !* The Russians let us pass to their rear and about fifty of us moved into a large farmhouse (more like a mansion). There were dead Germans scattered all over the area. One of my most gruesome memories was of the hogs eating the dead Germans. We remained here for several days thinking that the Russians would provide some kind of transportation. The Russian army was passing the farm in a steady stream. We first encountered tanks, then trucks and half tracks, and then there came an endless column of sleighs pulled by horses, cattle, and I even saw a couple of camels. Upon seeing this, I gave up hope of obtaining any kind of transportation. I concluded that the only way out of our intolerable situation was to try to join the Russians.

One unit permitted me to tag along, and we had only gone a few miles when I saw the Russians shoot down an American plane. The pilot bailed out and the Russians picked him up, and the brass knowing that I was an American, brought him to me

for identification. I identified him as an American. He was in a buggy as a prisoner and hopping mad. He said to me, "What the hell are you doing here", and before I could answer, the Russian driver flailed the horses and off they went. That was the last time I saw that American. Subsequently I was taken to what passed as the Russian Headquarters in that area and given a decent meal, a shave and a haircut and returned back to the farmhouse where the others were.

Conditions there had gone from bad to worse, and I knew that we had to move away from there, but not in a large group. It would have to be in small groups if we were to survive. Jim Kelly and three others, whose names I do not recall, and myself decided to move out. One of the boys spoke polish which proved to be an advantage later on. We moved out without telling the others that we were leaving. We hoped to reach a seaport; however we were blocked from this, first by the Russians, then by the Germans, so we decided to make our way to Warsaw (about 280 miles to the east). As we crossed the Oder River on a plank bridge which was setting on the bottom of the river which was very shallow at that point, a group of German planes began strafing the bridge area. A truck slipped off the bridge in this attack and the Russians forced us at gun point to help get the truck back on the bridge.

Every way that we turned we ran into pockets of Germans. When we asked the Russians for direction, they would often point us toward the Germans lines to serve as decoys for them when the Germans fired we would be caught in the middle. Amazingly we survived all this. In one village we found a pile of bicycles that the Germans had wrecked and discarded. With a little ingenuity we managed to construct five usable bikes out of these, although I had to pedal going downhill.

We came upon an abandoned locomotive, which several Americans were trying to fire up, and finally succeeded. There were by this time about twenty of us and none of us knew where we were, or where the track led. After chugging along for a few miles we found ourselves in a small village. The track was completely blocked by a large number of cattle cars filled with refugees of a dozen different nationalities. We remained here for a couple of days, and then the original five moved out again. Our luck improved from this point on, when we came to another small village off the beaten track. The mayor of the village kept the Polish speaking soldier and Kelly and I overnight in his home, and made arrangements for the other two elsewhere. The Mayor and the Polish speaking soldier communicated very well and we received directions to Warsaw.

We departed the next morning for Warsaw which took us about two weeks, living off the land as we went, to reach the outskirts of Warsaw. I do not know from which direction we entered Warsaw, but we entered through the Jewish Ghetto area. It seemed that every other person we met was a refugee. Once again our group grew to a mob of several hundred. We spent the night in the shells of bombed out buildings. The next day a large number of Americans made their way into Warsaw to a large Catholic Church in the heart of the city. The Church provided shelter until someone reached the American Embassy and arrangements were made then to transport a

large number of them to Odessa. We were provided with bread to eat on the trip. Once we reached Odessa, barley was added to our diet and this was a big improvement over the German menu. I can't remember how long we remained in Odessa; however, we were eventually put on an English troop transport on its way to Port Said, Egypt. We stayed there for several days and then would be shipped to Naples, Italy, however, I thought that my luck was finally running out when I managed to break my leg in Port Said and had to be transported to Cairo to have it set. It was fixed and I returned to Said and on to Naples, Italy.

The 82nd Airborne Division was shipped overseas on the S.S. Monterey prior to its conversion from a luxury liner. I returned to the States on the Maria Rosa sister ship to the Monterey. It had been converted into a troop transport; Boy what a difference that was! I arrived back in the United States in April 1945, landing in Massachusetts and from there I was sent back to Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. Five months after our escape, I arrived home.

Sincerely

Fred Randall