

A: We trained-then we went out to the desert. We left Fort Riley on about the 1st of June, as I remember, and went to the desert. It's a desert training center. We spent three or four months. That was when they cut the division down in size and they relieved [some of us]. They only left one brigadier general, and they knocked out all the artillery and the Engineer brigadier and what not. It was left entirely to cavalry and infantry. I was at that time made available to the Engineers. I went with the amphibious force.

Q: Your term "relief" there is just reassignment?

A: Reassigned, but that was a result of reduction in the number of general officers and the cutting down of the size of the division. As I say, they cleaned out the artillerymen who were commanding. First of all, they took the Engineers out who were brigadier generals and then they made them available to the Engineers. Then they took out the artillerymen. So, they had left only the infantry and the cavalrymen generally-the commanders. That was the time they reduced it down to one brigadier.

Q: Then you went down to Camp Gordon Johnston, Florida, I believe, to the 4th Engineer Special Brigade.

A: I think it was the—it was the 4th. I was down there learning something about that. I had never been with the amphibious force, and I had only been there a few weeks when my orders were changed and I was ordered to London to organize and command the 5th [Engineer Special] Brigade. Later I was added to the 6th Brigade.

Q: Were you only at Camp Gordon Johnston in October and November 1943?

European Theater of Operation

A: I got over to England in November. I was supposed to go by way of Africa, but I had to stop to get the yellow fever shots for some reason and then after I got them I had to sit around for a couple of weeks and then they decided to send me up by way of Iceland. So, I had to take off by myself and head up north and get a plane going out of New York.

Q: This was from Florida?

A: From Florida. I went by way of Iceland and on to England that way, and went to London to join the headquarters over there.

Q: It was about Christmas of 1943?

A: It was before Christmas. It was about the 1st of December.

Q: Your time at Camp Gordon Johnston, even though you were the CG of the special brigade being formed there, you weren't there really long enough to—

A: I wasn't. I turned it over to my relief. He took it over to the Pacific, and I went the other way.

Q: The 4th went to the Southwest Pacific?

A: Yes, the 4th went to the Pacific.

Q: Then you got to the 5th in England.

A: The 5th joined me in England. I was over there when they came in. I took them on out to Wales.

Q: Did you do any training in England?

A: Oh, yes. We trained there for—we were in Wales till—let's see, we were there through the spring up till summer and then we were moved down south into Devon near the beaches. We there loaded out to go to France.

Q: I guess you were there from about November 1943 to March 1944. You went into OMAHA Beach in June. So, you continued to train with the 5th and later the 6th. The 6th joined in about March?

A: They came in about that time. I had two brigades. Again we were short on officers. Officers were a big thing and the commanders of these brigades I shifted around. They weren't very lasting either. I remember Paul Thompson [Commanding Officer, 6th Engineer Special Brigade]. He was a crackerjack, and [on] the day of the landing the first thing he did was get shot through the throat and came out on the other side, just missed his vital organs, and he got shot through the shoulder. So, I lost him. I had to improvise with somebody else in that job.

Q: Well, in your training, did you know at that time what mission you were training for?

A: Yes, I knew.

Q: Did the troops?

A: Yes, and we were practicing landing—and then we had maneuvers, went to Slapton Sands in south England, and made a landing there on an English cove, and we had practiced landings in several other places.

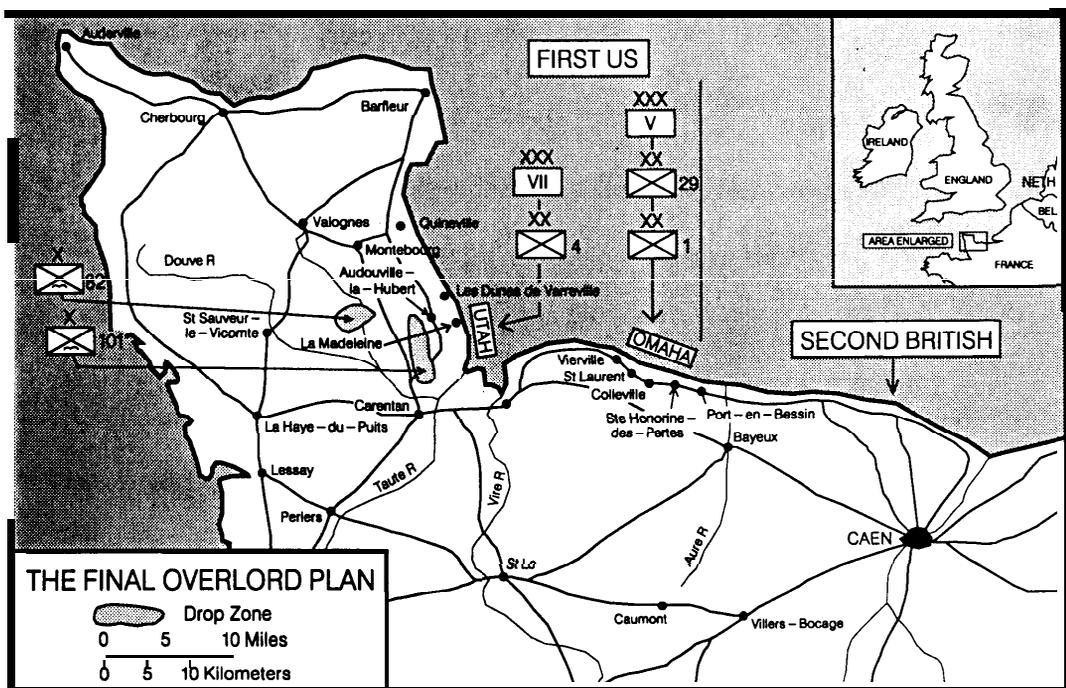
Q: How about the battalions that you had in either the 5th or the 6th?

A: Oh, we had all sorts—those special brigades were a mixture of all types of units. There were straight line Engineers, operators of equipment. We had every type of thing you could think of. We had a medical outfit. We had special supply. People who were stevedores. We had several battalions. There must have been 10 or 12 different types of units.

The organization was built around the Engineer battalion, that was the heart of it, but we had all these other things that were—we didn't have any artillery. Well, we didn't have any riflemen except these Engineers that were trained in it.

Q: What was the doctrine for the landings that you were practicing, i.e., the time that each wave of Engineers would go in, their initial assignments when they hit the beach, this type of thing?

A: We were leading and we were supporting all these other units, infantry, artillery, and what not, right behind them. We were to get ashore as soon as we could and start building landing places and roads across the beaches and get them back into the country. We didn't go back. We had also established areas for the delivery of supplies. For instance, various artillery ammunition, food, and dumps and soon back in the country. We had those only on a map, but we had [it] all set out so that we'd know where to go.



The Final OVERLORD Plan

Q: You also worked on establishing depots, supply depots, beyond the beach?

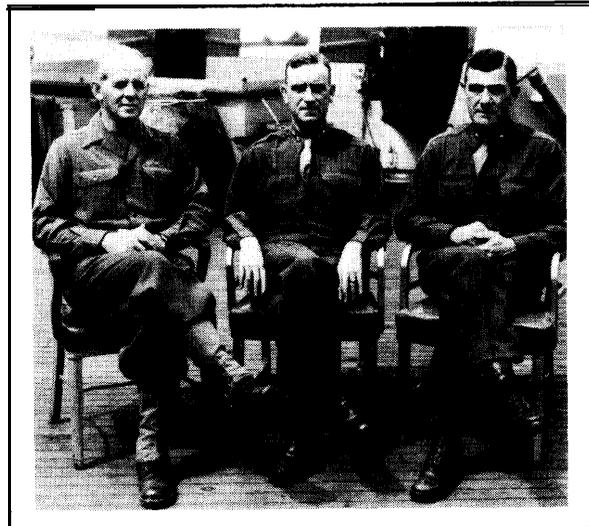
A: We put in these dumps. They weren't depots. They were just dumps out in the fields. When we got these various materials off of the ships, we transported them back to these dumps and stocked those. The combat units, divisions, would come back there to get their supplies, ammunition, food, gas, and what not.

Q: And all that was preplanned. You knew exactly where they were going?

A: Preplanned. We did that before the landing. I'm not sure whether it was very good. Originally one of the battalions we had was a DUKW [amphibious truck] battalion. That was a wonderful piece of equipment, too. But people didn't know how to use it. That landing was a mess from our standpoint. Of course, we started to make the landing on the 5th of June. We got out—all got on board ship, all loaded up—and we got out in the middle of the channel and we all came back. The next morning we were back home again because the storm had come up. There was a warning about that.

Q: You went back into England?

A: And then the decision had to be made that we were going in—that was when Eisenhower had the decision to make because of the tides and so on—we had to be timed in on the tides. You see, the tides in the [English] Channel on the English coast they aren't so high but over on the French coast they went around 20-25 feet in high tide. SO, your landings were sometimes made half a mile or so off the regular coast and you had to get this thing unloaded. So, we had to go out and put out parties to deactivate these mines that were buried and strung on posts of all kinds. [Field Marshal Erwin] Rommel had been over there and had been in charge of that defense. He put out a great amount of mines and



Before D-Day: Major General Hubner, commanding general, 1st Infantry Division; Lieutenant General Gerow, commander, V Corps; Brigadier General Hoge, commanding general, Provisional Engineer Special Brigade Group.

barbed wire and so on. We had to breakthrough that so as to get the infantry through to make the landing.

Q: Were those your Engineers that went in to clear the beaches?

A: Yes. But so much of that was amphibious handling. I had some criticism of the way it was. I think the way it was done in Europe was wrong because we separated the responsibility between the Navy and the Army at the wrong spot. The Navy was responsible for bringing the ships in and furnishing the boats that took the supplies off, and we had the stevedores. We had to get these stevedores on the boats to unload, but we were dependent on the Navy to keep their time schedule. Well, on the beach at France, there were several times we'd put a battalion down—sent it down to the beach waiting for the boats to go out to the ship—and they wouldn't show up at all. They'd just stay there. The men just sat on the beach all night long waiting for the Navy. The dividing line of the responsibility-it should have been-the Navy should bring the stuff all the way in or bring its boats in and have the Army—as they had it in the Pacific-the Army had all the boats. You see they had boat battalions. We didn't have any boat battalions.

Q: So all the LSTs, landing crafts—

A: Everything was Navy. And they wouldn't keep their appointments. They were the damndest people to get along with I'd ever met in my life. They were always alibiing. One of the troubles, too, was a mix-up on the notification of the cargo that was on the various ships. The day after we made the landing, that coast there along the beaches that we were going in would get covered with ships of all kinds, transports and supply ships. We didn't know what was on them, but it had been arranged back in London that they were to furnish the manifest for every one of those boats. But somebody had sent these mail sacks of manifests over on a separate thing, and they'd been delivered to some sergeant or somebody down the line. He didn't know what the hell they were for. It wasn't any of our men; he was just keeping them. Bradley would want a certain type of ammunition. I didn't know what ship had ammunition. He wanted 105s or 155s or something like that, 410s or mortars or what not. But I couldn't tell. I had to get in a small boat and go out and hail the ships, talk over a loudspeaker to the captain of the ship; and some often

wouldn't tell me what they had on board. So, I didn't know which one to unload.

Q: So, you had the total beach responsibility from the stevedore responsibility to off-load—

A: That's right. All we didn't have control of was these unloading boats. But we had to put the personnel on board to do the manual labor. We had the stevedore battalions, but the separation was in the transportation. I remember during that landing, Bradley was anxious to get more supplies in. Our worst time after the landing was that a storm had occurred at about the 16th of June. That storm caused more damage than we had on the landing. It was an awful storm, and you couldn't get from the shore to the water. There were boats of all kinds piled up. They'd been shoved in—you had to crawl in and out and over. They were sometimes three and four deep between you and the water because of these wrecks.

Q: They'd been washed up?

A: Washed up. That caused more trouble than most anything. Anyway just as a sample of our difficulty, Bradley decided there was a—what was the name of that? It wasn't Grandpree. There was a little town up there that had a harbor, peacetime harbor [Grandcamp-les-Bains], up the coast about 15 miles. And they decided we could get some of those unloading barges into that harbor. But you could only do it at a certain time on account of this tide. It was 24 feet high. But I had all sorts of excuses from the Navy about doing this. First of all they didn't know where they were going. I had all these French pilots that knew the channel and where to go. I told them several times but they never—there were a couple of days there that we didn't make contact at all. And the pilots stood around and the boats didn't go out. Well, anyway I got the Navy down and I lined up the captains on one side. The captains of these unloaders, these LSTs—not LSTs—well, some of them were LSTs. But whatever they were—unloading the ships. And I put the captains in a line on one side and I put the pilots opposite. I took them over and I made them shake hands because they said they couldn't make contact—" shake hands, this pilot is going to take you into that harbor and he'll guide you." By God, even with that they missed them. But we finally got through some way. We did unload some ships up there.

Q: Was that all just concerned with OMAHA Beach or did you have responsibility of all the beaches?

A: I only had OMAHA.

Q: And the harbor was part of OMAHA Beach?

A: Yes, it was part of it. It was within OMAHA. They didn't have nearly as much trouble up on the peninsula near Cherbourg, up in that area.

Q: Did they have Engineer Special Brigades up there supporting those landings?

A: They had a special brigade-well, it wasn't, it was a regiment that had been brought up there from Africa. They had made landings down in Africa [1st Engineer Special Brigade]. My men were all green. They'd never operated these practices in England, but they were all right. They were capable enough. My trouble was with contact with the Navy. I had one hell of a time trying to get them straightened out. We eventually did, but that was the worst trouble that we had.

Q: Did you put liaison officers out there with them or people on the ships to maintain contact with you?

A: No. The ships were coming and going all the time. I never could do that. We lost these mail sacks with the manifests so we didn't know what was on the ships or where the ships were.

Q: I guess you eventually found the manifest but probably too late?

A: It was long afterwards. Somebody came up two or three weeks later. They had found these manifests that this sergeant had down in his shack a couple of miles away.

Q: He wasn't part of the brigade?

A: No, he wasn't.

Q: I guess you stayed on the beach there until August of 1944—June, July, and August?

A: No. They turned it over after we got through back into the line where we were holding, pushed back; then they turned the rest of that over to the SOS, the advance party or the Advanced Section of the SOS. So, I was relieved.

Q: What was that SOS?

A: The Services of Supply.

Q: Oh, I see. The Transportation Corps?

A: No, it wasn't Transportation Corps.

Q: Quartermaster?

A: Quartermaster mostly. That was a totally different organization. And after we'd gotten through and gotten back inland about ten miles, that was where we were stopped at the hedgerow, and we stayed there. We didn't break through that until the end of July or early August. So, I went back to England, and I went back to London waiting for another assignment. I was assigned to the Transportation Corps for duty after we got through. So, I took over a new outfit and went back to France again; then I worked out towards Brest. We'd broken through. That was the time the 4th Armored—well, let's see. Did Patton break through there? I guess he did. He was in command of the Third Army. When the Third Army finally came over, they broke in through the line up there where the hedgerows were. After they had made that breakthrough, we went around the end. They decided they had to get a port open beside the beaches and Cherbourg. I believe Cherbourg was open at that time, but it was very slow with supplies. They had planned to use the railroads over to the west. By that time, they made that rush through the gap, opened up, and got behind the German front line. They then decided to open up Brest out

on the end of the peninsula. Brest had been a big port in the First World War, but that was one hell of a way out, about 300 or 400 miles out there; and Brest was still holding out. Well, anyway, the VIII Corps was ordered to capture Brest, and I was attached to the VIII Corps then to support them and open up beaches out on the peninsula. So, I went to a place, St. Michel-en-Greve, as I remember it. Open the beach and you could land LSTs in there. I brought in a lot of LSTs, [first on 11 August], unloaded a lot of ammunition. We were bedeviled by mines all along the roads and fields and everyplace else. We had to clear places to store this stuff as we unloaded it. But that was only part of it. We got out there and Brest was holding. I think Brest didn't surrender for months [18 September 1944]. They gave it up finally, and about that time, I turned around and was ordered to Antwerp-we had captured Antwerp [4 September 1944].

Antwerp had one of the best harbors and it was virtually undamaged. All the other harbors along the coast had been badly mined, and sunken ships in them had made them practically unusable. So, I went to Antwerp and got there just after the British had captured the town. Antwerp was practically unspoiled and undamaged, but there was artillery still falling in the town, and the Scheldt River was not open. It was held by that [Walcheren] island out there in the entrance, and they couldn't get ships through and the British weren't doing a damned thing to open it. So, they finally got the Canadians-the British were just having a big time in Antwerp celebrating. Nobody was doing anything. Nobody was fighting the war at all. That was Montgomery's outfit, but it finally got so crucial, the supply route, that they finally sent the Canadian Army out there and took that island and opened the river to the sea and brought in ships. That became the major supply point for all the front, and it shortened the route carrying supplies by hundreds of miles.

Q: Well, that came before the port of Le Havre?

A: No. We had opened up the port of Le Havre before that. But that wasn't particularly good; but Antwerp was a good one.

Q: Oh, you opened both of them, Le Havre and Antwerp?

A: Yes. I went to Le Havre first and that was badly mined. They even sunk the naval commander's boat right in the harbor. He was an American naval commander. That one had all these oyster mines in them, and they were deep in the water. They were set to go off after a certain number of pulsations in them, and you could set them for any number of pulsations.

Q: They were bottom mines.

A: They were bottom mines, and they were set so that if a ship passed over them once or three times or five, then they'd explode. But the harbor of Le Havre was packed with them. Then we moved up the Seine [River] and got up as far as—we were unloading ships as far as Rouen, I think, on the Seine beginning on 13 October 1944].

Q: So, Antwerp did become the major port?

A: Antwerp did eventually. After I'd been there—we'd opened up Le Havre and got that thing working, then I was ordered to see about opening up the one at Antwerp. At about that time I got orders [on 21 October] to join the 9th Armored again. [Antwerp was not opened until 28 November 1944*]

Q: That was about November 1944 you joined the 9th Armored and then took command of Combat Command B again?

A: Yes. I was dissatisfied with my job with the Transportation Corps. I told John C. H. Lee, who was the commanding general of the Communications Zone, I didn't want any more of that business. I was sick of it. I was trained to be a soldier, and there were plenty of other people that could handle the transportation work, ships and boats, and unloading ships. I wasn't trained for that, and I didn't give a damn about it. I wanted to get back with a combat unit, and Lee was kind of sore about it. He was a damned fool if there ever was one. He'd come over to inspect me. I was trying to get the mines cleared out, and the roads opened, and unload ships; and he'd correct soldiers if their hats weren't on straight and their helmets weren't on straight. He'd go around and sample the garbage pails and so on. He'd reach in and take some of the garbage out and eat it and

he'd say, "You see, I can eat it and you're throwing this away. People are going hungry." He'd do that stuff.

He walked up to one soldier whom he had stopped on this hat business—he had stopped this soldier, he'd been correcting them all. He'd spend his time doing that picayunish stuff instead of the things that really mattered. He always insisted on driving his own jeep and getting in trouble. Anyway this soldier made him mad. He said, "Soldier, is my helmet on straight?" The soldier said, "No, sir. It's a little over on the right side." He pushed it up. He said, "Is it on straight now?" "No, you just pushed it a little too far the other way." "Well," he said, getting sore, "is it straight now?" "No, you ought to tip it back a little." He finally gave up and let the soldier go on. That man finally got to him.

Q: Was that a young private?

A: I don't know if he was young or not. I was told this story by somebody who saw it happen.

Q: So, that stopped him on the hat business.

A: He was still just as big a damned fool, go around sampling—

Q: Which Lee was that?

A: John C. H. Lee. He was a lieutenant general.

Q: John C. H. Lee. Well, did General Lee arrange for you or make you available, or did you use other contacts?

A: He said, "Do you know anybody that would take you?" I said, "I don't know if anybody would take me, but the 9th Armored Division has just arrived over here and I think that John Leonard would take me back again as he is the division commander." Some way they got in touch with Leonard and through Bradley they transferred the combat commander they had out and made a place for me, got me back. I had rejoined the 9th

Armored Division up in Luxembourg. That was just before the Battle of the Bulge.

Q: So it was your appeal to General Lee, the COMZ commander, to leave the 16th Major Port and get back to a combat unit which led to your commanding the Combat Command B of the 9th when you captured the Remagen bridge. Is that the only time that you have sought to move from one assignment to another actively?

A: I think so. I was not qualified for services supply. I'd done my part and the rest of it was just being in SOS for the rest of my career. And I felt [that] here I'd spent my life being trained to be a soldier and that there were many civilians who were more capable of running ports or running truck trains and opening up supply depots. I had no training in that line and I had no liking for it. But I felt that I could. It was that urge to be a soldier and I would not have been a soldier if I had stayed with that. I had some good people with me, some excellent people.

And at the time, the job was important; but it became terribly frustrating to just stand around, and Lee was no great help. He's one of the worst I've ever had anything to do with. You needn't get that on the tape. He was a damned fool if there ever was one. But he had been a friend of mine in many respects, but he had also done some things in the days when I was back at Vicksburg—I mean at Memphis. He didn't help at all. He tried to be helpful. I remember when they started the Fort Peck Dam. [Tom] Larkin went up there to build it. Lee came by and I said that there were big offers to go to my staff and I couldn't stand in the way of them; I mean the civilian engineers and so on. I couldn't stand in the way of them, but they were wrecking me and I had an important job to do right there. Well, he carried tales and immediately went up to Fort Peck and poured out this tale about how sore I was at Larkin and all of them for trying to sabotage my command, and it hadn't been that at all. But he was a busybody—always carrying tales around and getting in somebody's hair.

But his handling of the SOS was disastrous. When he was still in England before the invasion, he was a troublemaker. He came around in a special train to inspect; everybody had to turn out, and I remember when he came to Swansea. I had my headquarters there at that time. He insisted on having the mayor come to dinner—I mean to breakfast—and that was

about five or six o'clock in the morning. They had double daylight savings so you can imagine how dark it was. Nothing [more] special about his breakfast than anybody else's. I had to drag the mayor down to this train and I went down, dark as a pocket, all to satisfy this thing, put this show on. Well, that's just one of the instances.

And after we got to France he absorbed all the transportation, built that big village [Valognes] south of Cherbourg [for his] headquarters, most elaborate thing. I remember they had 5,000 buildings transported across there and erected, and he did it in villages around the center. There was a center complex which was the headquarters and then here was G-1 and G-2 and G-3. I don't know how many buildings there were in each one of these with his staff and so on. The thing wasn't finished until Paris was captured, and then the whole outfit took off for Paris as fast as they could get in an automobile and took over the best hotels in Paris and set up all that business. Then he came around following me. I was opening up Le Havre. Hell, the place was all covered with mines. The harbor was mined. There were ships sunk in the harbor. It was one hell of a place. We were trying our damndest to get the mines out of the way that were on the beaches alone, but we had to bring in something. We couldn't use the harbor. They had these oyster mines in there and they'd blow up; you know how they operated.

Well, the whole place was in a mess and he came up there and went around and inspected GI cans. I told you that, didn't I. That was typical. Well, I just got fed up with it. Then he ordered me up to Antwerp. I was to go up there and start opening a port there. Hell, the British were all in the place and the port was in excellent shape, but the Germans were still shelling the town and the British were having a regular holiday. The place sounded like Mardi Gras in town. They were just parading up and down the streets and the bands were playing and the women and everything was going, and there wasn't an effort made to get that channel open. See, there was a fort or so down the line. The gates and the cranes were all in operation. That was one of the few ports in all of Europe that hadn't been destroyed. Everything was destroyed in most of them. You'd get one and it was no good. It was just another place to clear out and try to get some landing craft or something like that in. But Antwerp was capable of handling 20,000 tons of cargo a day. It was enough to supply us all, and it cut the communication line by hundreds of miles. We were still hauling our supplies from Cherbourg and from the beaches back in Normandy.

Battle of the Bulge

Q: I would like to continue on and particularly get into your experiences with the 9th Armored Division and Remagen and so forth. I think this is a point that you and I both have been looking forward to. I wonder if you'd just start from—you mentioned how you got the job in Combat Command B—first your initial impressions of the unit when you took Combat Command B, the type of officer and NCO they had at that time compared to your knowledge of them at Fort Riley, and then your initial combat with them?

A: Well, they were the same people. They had more discipline, but we were still short of experienced officers particularly in the higher groups. We had so few that were competent in the battalion grades or anything like that. That was the big problem. The men were all right and willing. We spent time on the front line. We were in the mountains before the Battle of the Bulge started. My combat command was separated from the division. It was attached to the 2d Infantry Division in the V Corps, and we were trying to break through to destroy or open up those dams on the Roer River



Brigadier General Hoge as commanding general, CCB, 9th Armored Division, Battle of the Bulge, December 1944.