

WWII



THE BITTER & THE SWEET

by Bonnie R. Mays

Pictured Above:
This is "Snapper" the dog (who traveled from France to Florida), held by Sgt. J. A. Rowe.

What can you say that would be sweet about World War II ... or any war for that matter. The fact that humans are ever confronted with the horror of war alone is a shame.

Many years have passed since the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Yet the memories of that day, and what drew our nation into the war and beyond, are still as vivid to these men and women as if it were yesterday. Ask anyone where they were or what they were doing on the day Pearl Harbor was bombed. Every one of them explicitly remembers. Some can laugh when they think of good times during the war — yet some shiver, some cry. A few have shared those untold stories with me.

I've had the privilege — and I do mean privilege — of interviewing and obtaining information from these men of the World War II era. To each was posed questions such as: What are your fond memories of the war? What horrors did you encounter? Now that you look back, how do you feel?

Here are their stories —

“It was early morning. There were all kinds of boats as far as you could see. Every man had a place to stand. Everywhere you went you had a place. When we got near to shore the machine guns opened up on us. There was fire flying every which way. They let the ramp down and I took off along with the others. There was water up under our arms. It was a right good ways to the shore. Not a lot of fire by the time we made it to shore. But by the time we made it up there, everything broke loose. We stayed on that beach all day. I saw mines blowing peoples feet off.



PFC Eugene O. Conner
16th Infantry Division

I walked from the shores of Normandy to the road to Cologne. When we got there, three of us which had gotten there on D-Day were left.

It was the roughest terrain in Germany that I've ever seen.”

PFC EUGENE O. CONNER
16th INFANTRY DIVISION

“I was stationed on the Cebu Islands in the Philippines — out-post garrisons and tents. We were staged all around the Philippines, prepared to do what must be done. If it had not been for the bombing of Hiroshima, there would have been three, four or five million

lives lost in the process of taking that area. Those people were buried in the hills — waiting. It would have been disastrous. No one should ever be ashamed of the bombing on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

When traveling across on the ships there wasn't much to do other than a little exercise. So we played cards. You could look across the water and see other ships and aircraft firing ... maybe submarines in the area. It's funny how fast you would find your life jacket when that happened. The waves and sound would ripple for miles. We'd watch til the firing stopped.”

T5 RUSSELL B. ROWE
181st JOINT ASSAULT SIGNAL COMPANY

“It was near the end of the war and I was leaving on the USS Tang (submarine), making the fifth patrol run. We loaded some new torpedoes (ones that followed sound) and prepared to sail. A fellow came running down the docks with papers; we knew somebody was getting transferred. They called for "Rowe" and I was taken off the sub and placed back into the relief crew at Pearl Harbor. While out, as the USS Tang fired its last "fish" (torpedo), this new type bomb circled back around, hit the Tang and it went down. Nine men came up but only eight were alive ... and all were taken as prisoners of war by the Japs. One of the men died in camp. Captain O'Kane survived it all. I felt sick

when I found out. Every two out of three subs that went out ... went down. My life was spared.

Anything nice? Yea, I came home ... and my girl was waiting for me when I got there.

I was in the South China Sea when the A-Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. I had the periscope shears up as high as they would go and saw it hit. I turned to my friend and said, "Brown, we're giving them heck tonight." The sky lit up as far as you could see. The aftershock of the bomb made the waters so rough, we couldn't surface permanently for three days.”

EMP2 F G ROWE
SUBMARINE NAVY
US SUBMARINE SERVICE
IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

“Many Americans are alive today because the Germans used slave labor to manufacture ammunition. Because the laborers were usually POWs, they would intentionally make the ammunition defective.



ROWE BROTHERS SERVE OVERSEAS
Above: A newspaper clipping of the four Rowe brothers enlisted in the services. From left to right James A. Rowe, George H. Rowe, Frederick G. Rowe and Russell B. Rowe. A flag with four white stars hung in the window of James and Gertrude Rowe as they waited for their sons to return.

One time our officers made a mistake in the direction we were to go and we found ourselves walking on land mines. Fortunately they didn't go off — it was too cold and they were frozen.

Fond thoughts ... yea ... the day I heard the war was over!"

T/SGT. J. FINNEGAN
106TH INFANTRY DIVISION



Sgt. James Archer Rowe
76th Infantry Division

"As we were going in, before you could hear the first shots, you would see all the dead animals lying in the streets and all the storefronts and houses blown apart where they were moving that way.

We were mopping up after the war. There were white flags, underwear, anything white hanging out the window to surrender. I was driving the company commander's jeep. He told me to take a turn which was the wrong way. We went into a town that hadn't been taken. But luckily the white flags were out. The people surrendered. We went to the Burgarmeister who was like the mayor or head of the city, and told him to tell everyone to bring their weapons to a pile in the square.

My First Sergeant found a little brown and white Chihuahua-like dog in France. He named it Snapper, hid it in his jacket and carried it all the way home to Florida. He would pat it to keep it quiet. Our whole company adopted and took care of the dog. Cute thing.

The water was so rough going overseas you couldn't go topside or the waves would have washed you off deck.

You had to hold on to your mess kit on the ship because they would slide all up and down the table.

When we arrived in France, it was covered in snow. We couldn't have any tops on the 2½ ton trucks, it would make them too visible from the air. We had icicles dripping off our eyes, hair and hat. We couldn't move because we were too cold. We only had each other to supply a little warmth.

We had a couple of months after the surrender that you could do whatever you wanted to do. That was nice. I remember seeing the castles up there on the hillside of the Rhine River. The scenery was beautiful in Germany. France was the dirtiest place we went. They didn't take care of the property. In Germany people would be out sweeping in the little towns. France didn't seem to care. I would love to visit Berlin again."

SGT. JAMES ARCHER ROWE
76TH INFANTRY DIVISION



This certificate was awarded to Sgt. Raymond C. Mays for his participation on Normandy Beach.

"That was a beautiful sight ... that evening of the invasion (D-Day). Everywhere you looked there were ships and ships and more ships.

I had my head right against that metal cross on the beach and the bullets were hitting it on the other side. I saw a lot of boys dropping that day.

I'll never forget a man named Chin. He always got deathly ill on the boats. When



Seen above are (l) George H. "Speedy" Rowe and (r) brother Russell B. Rowe at their parent's home.



Tech. Sgt. Raymond C. Mays
116th Infantry Division

we hit the beach he was so sick he was dragging across the beach. He didn't care if he was hit or not. But he got through that day without a scratch.



We had rougher fighting farther on in than on D-Day. We had German soldiers that found American uniforms and put them on. They'd be firing at you and you didn't know if they were Americans or not.



A strange thing happened to me there at the Battle of St. Lo when the big bomb of smoke went up. May have happened to a lot of people. I saw my Mama's face, just as if I was looking at one of you. I turned to this boy and I told him my Mama was praying for me. It was a great relief and comfort for me to know that she was there.



Bombs were coming. We had dug trenches to bury ourselves in. A Lieutenant had jumped in my trench. I took off around a hedgerow — no hat, no gun, I had left my rifle laying there. I figured I'd get around this hedgerow and it would protect me from the shells coming in. I ran around the side of this thing and here comes a German with his rifle. He saw me when I saw him. I started running back and he started running the other way. We scared each other. He could have shot me.



I captured a German Major and his driver. He asked me to get the medics for his driver, he was wounded, so I did. While he was there he told this French woman to bring us glasses of cider. He spoke good English. He gave me his side arm, Luger and other weapons he had and we sat there and talked ... friendly ... and both drank cider together. We shook hands. As I turned him over to authorities he said he hoped we would meet again some day under better conditions. Now that's war.



We were in line holding defense until the other side could pull up and go out this way. Boys would go down to an old house right between our line and the German line. This house had hard cider. They would go get some cider in their helmets and come back to the line. The Germans would do the same thing.



I have a story about relieving yourself. You know American soldiers were decent soldiers. And they just didn't expose themselves or anything. We were fighting up there on this little burg and the boys wanted to go and relieve themselves a little bit. So we went into this barn-like thing with straw and stuff laying around. We were all kind of in a circle and water was just flying. And did you know there was a German underneath that straw? He came out from under there ... man we had wet him up some kind of good ... and we had to grab him. We didn't know he was in there.



August, 1945 we were coming back after the war, traveling up the Hudson River near the Statue of Liberty, headed for the Jersey side. It was foggy that day. We heard this plane roaming around up there and next thing you know that plane hit the Empire State Building, way up high on it. That was the end of my combat journey after 34 months overseas.



People talk about being brave. I want the world to know I wasn't the bravest man in the world. I was scared to death on that beach (D-Day). If you weren't, you weren't human. So many good people were lost that day. You just have to be thankful that you're here to talk about that day. And I feel that every soldier that hit that beach felt he was fighting for freedom, his people and the good things in life. And it's a shame that some people today don't appreciate it. I've been asked, "Do you think you're a hero?" No! The heroes stayed over there. They died over there. They gave it all. I only gave a little bit of my life. I came back and got to enjoy what they gave their life for. And I want to tell everybody that I saw some good men ... and I mean good, hard working, honest to God people ... good thinking people ... go down that day for a just cause. And they should always be remembered."

TECH SGT. RAYMOND C. MAYS
116th INFANTRY DIVISION



A commemorative medal of honor was awarded to Raymond C. Mays and Eugene O. Conner in 1994 for their participation on Normandy Beach — D-Day.

Since the writing of this article and prior to the publishing, Eugene O. Conner regrettably passed away from a long bout with cancer. Eugene and Raymond Mays both fought on the beaches of Normandy; however, they did not know each other at the time. After returning home they found themselves working at the same company, living in the same neighborhood, attending the same

church and rode to work together each day. They formed a life-long, priceless relationship. This past June, on the anniversary of D-Day, they were together and recorded their memories of that day. For Eugene, his family and friends, we thank you for sharing those memories with us — and send our heartfelt sympathy for your tremendous loss.
— Chesterfield Living Magazine