

David C. Adkins

U.S. Army



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I went into the Army Infantry on July 26, 1940. I was stationed at Fort Ord, California as member of the 7th Infantry Division, which was being re-activated. When the first group of draftees came, in about the month of November, several of us who had our basic training, were transferred to the 3rd Division to bring it to full fighting strength. We joined the 30th Infantry that was stationed at Presidio of San Francisco, which was located near the entrance to the Golden Gate Bridge. The rest of our Division, the 7th and 15th Infantry was stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington, near Seattle.

Over the next year and a half, we made three trips to Fort Lewis to train with the rest of the divi-

sion. During the summer of 1941, we spent about 6 weeks at San Diego making beach landings and desert training. On December 7 1941, 2 buddies and I were on a weekend pass in Seattle. In the lobby of the hotel we stayed, just before noon, we heard on the radio that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. We ate lunch and had dates to go to an early movie. They also made an announcement at the movie about the bombing. When the movie was over and we were outside, there were army vehicles driving around the streets with loud speakers telling all military personnel to report back immediately to their unit. After walking a block or two, we were offered a ride back to Fort Lewis.

A couple of days later, we shipped out and did guard duty along Puget Sound. They thought there was a possibility the Japanese might try to make a landing on the West Coast. We were housed in a high school gym in Sequim, Washington, population about 200. The first pass I received after Pearl Harbor was St. Patrick's Day in 1942. I went to Bremerton, Washington on an overnight pass. I remember a couple of our ships that were hit at Pearl Harbor were there being repaired. During the spring of 1942, our division was sent to Ford Ord, California where we went through some very vigorous training. Then in late July, we boarded a troop train in San Francisco, and six days later, we arrived at a camp near Blackstone, Virginia. We spent much of our time on the rifle range and taking hikes of 20 or more miles with full field packs. On October 23, we boarded a troop ship (USS Joseph Hewes AP50) at Newport News, Virginia and were told that it was a practice-landing maneuver. After 2 days at sea, we were told that we were making a landing near Casa-

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blanca, Morocco.

We had an escort of several Battleships, destroyers, and destroyer escorts, also a couple of aircraft carriers. We took a course in case we were spotted to make the enemy believe we were landing near Dakar, which was the central part of Africa. Early on the morning of November 8, 1942, we climbed down the rope nets into small Higgins boats in preparation to making a landing at Fedala, Morocco near Casablanca.

On the way to shore, which was about three miles from where the ship was anchored, we began taking on water because of the high waves. We hit a huge wave, and the front half of the boat went under, but righted itself because of a center partition that kept water out of the back portion of the boat. The navy man who was driving, jumped overboard, but got back in when the boat righted itself. We bailed out the water with our helmets and continued with the landing shortly after daybreak. About 300 or 400 yards before we hit shore, we began to draw artillery fire from a battery about a mile down shore. We had three casualties, one killed, and two wounded (before we hit shore).

Our platoon had just landed and I was about 30 feet from the water, when I was hit by shrapnel from an 88-artillery shell. I was hit in my upper thigh, shoulder, and head, which was slowed by my helmet. I spent the day just off the beach and was attended by a medic. That evening, I was taken back to the ship that I had just left that morning. A navy doctor operated on me that night and removed the shrapnel that was deep in my thigh. He said it would have been better if the shrapnel had gone through, as it would have eliminated the cutting to get to the shrapnel. We were told that the wounded would be going back to the U.S. after the ship was unloaded.

They couldn't get into the harbor to unload because of the enemy ships that were sunk in the harbor by our battleships.

Just before dark on November 11, several enemy submarines floated in with the tide and opened fire. Three ships were hit, including the one I was on. Our ship was hit near the tail and also near the center. The wounded were loaded into a landing boat. I was wearing only thin pajamas and no shoes and had to climb down a rope net into the landing boat, having just been operated on a few days before. While we were being loaded, we were strafed by a couple of German fighters. The navy personnel had to jump overboard and were picked up by boats shortly after. Our ship sank in only 42 minutes after it was hit. One ship that carried oil and ammunitions burned and explosives went off for several hours.

An old hotel in Fedala was set up as a hospital. Many of the patients were burn victims from the oil tanker that caught fire after being torpedoed. While recovering from wounds, six or seven of us were sitting on the front porch of this old hotel when George Patton drove up in his jeep. Two ambulance drivers really got chewed out for not saluting, but he couldn't have been nicer to us. He shook hands with each of us and seemed real concerned about our welfare.

After about a month, I was reunited with my company. In January of 1943, our company was picked to guard the leaders of the U.S., England, and France at the "Casablanca Conference." I had the opportunity to see Roosevelt, Churchill, Eisenhower, Montgomery, DeGaulle, and many other Generals and Secretaries of State. I was on guard duty immediately in front of where they were lined up on the hotel patio to have pictures

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taken. Later, Roosevelt rode through our ranks in a jeep, for a Saturday morning inspection. Shortly after, we moved to Oran, Algeria by cattle cars to be back up to the fighting in Tunisia.

Later, we moved to Tunisia as the Germans surrendered. About 200,000 German soldiers were taken prisoner. This was in May 1943. On July 9, we boarded landing craft near Tunis for a landing the next morning near Licata, Sicily. The British also landed on the southeast coast. We had very few casualties on the initial landing. We headed across the island and ended up in Palermo about a week later after a few skirmishes along the way. We then headed toward

Messina and ran into much more resistance. On August 6, 1943 while on a scouting patrol, my partner tripped on a wire setting off a land mine and we were both hit by shrapnel, his in the thigh and mine in the elbow.

We spent about a month at Stalag 2B, and then we were sent to Janikow on a work detail. About 30 of us were split into three groups. One group unloaded boxcars of potatoes. Another group worked in a mill where they made flour from the potatoes. Our group loaded the flour on boxcars to be shipped out.

About February 1945, we began to hear Russian artillery to the east. We were given a couple of days notice that we would be moving out. They started moving us to the north and west, toward the Baltic Sea. We hiked on the average 20 or 25 miles a day. We were mostly on the back roads and passed through small towns. At night, we usually stayed in large barns and started getting only 1 piece of bread or thin soup a day since we were no longer getting Red Cross parcels. Along the way, other prisoners joined us and we became a group of about 200. A

few of the prisoners decided to hide out hoping to be liberated by the Russians as they overran the area. Sometimes we would stay in the same location for 3 or 4 days before moving on. On April 12, 1945, our guards told us about the death of President Roosevelt. It was about this time that we began to hear American artillery. We were now about 100 miles west of Berlin. We estimated that we had walked 500 miles since we started 2 months earlier. On April 14, 1945, Patton's 3rd Army was on a drive toward Berlin and when the forward echelon of tanks began to be sighted, all the German guards took off and we were on our own until our troops appeared. After a few hours, we were taken by truck to the town of Salzwedel, where we spent the night at the hotel Deutcherhof.

The next day, we were transported by a C-47 transport plane to a camp near Le Havre, France (Camp Lucky Strike). We waited there about 2 weeks for a ship to transport us back to the U.S. We boarded the USS General MC Meigs (AP-116) on April 28th in Le Havre and set sail for the U.S. via Southampton, England on April 30th, 1945. We were on our way back when on May 8, 1945 we heard word that the war was over in Europe. Our escort ships were still on the lookout for German subs, just in case they hadn't gotten the word that the war was over. We landed at Newport News, Virginia on May 14 1945, the same port that I had left 31 months earlier. From there, I went to Fort Sheridan by train where I was issued a 60-day furlough and was to report to Miami Beach for examination. After about 30 days, I was transferred to a convalescent hospital at Daytona Beach, where we made roll call once a day and then we were on our own to go swimming, play golf or tennis, or whatever we chose to do. After 60 days at Welch Convalescent, I put on 12 or 15 pounds to the 40 that I lost while prisoner. I received an honorable discharge from the army on October 18, 1945.