

V

Trip Overseas

Chester and the rest of the 784th left Boston on April 7, 1944, bound for England. I found credible, but conflicting, information on the ship used for the voyage. One of the official sources, and two veterans' personal histories, indicated that the 784th made the trip aboard the *R.M.S. Queen Mary*. Another official source, and a few other personal histories, indicated that the trip was made aboard the *Susan B. Anthony*. I'm sure the accounts are both correct, but I do not know why the unit would have been split up, with some on the *Queen Mary* and others on the *Susan B. Anthony*. And I don't know which one Chester was on.

The *Queen Mary* was launched in 1936, and was designed to transport passengers to and from Southampton, England and New York. The ship was in New York when the war started, and then sailed to Sydney, Australia to be converted into a troop ship. Before the U.S. entered the war, the *Queen Mary* transported troops from Australia to England, and Australia and England to Singapore. When the U.S. entered the war, the ship was used almost exclusively to transport American soldiers to Europe. Often, wounded soldiers and prisoners-of-war made the return trip.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill made three round trips aboard the *Queen Mary* during the war to meet with President Franklin Roosevelt.

The *Queen Mary* would have been a prestigious target for any German U-boat commander. However, the ship's speed (at nearly 30 knots) was significantly faster than that of any submarine. For that reason, it did not travel in a naval convoy.

The *Queen Mary* was originally designed to accommodate over 2,000 passengers. During the war, however, it carried as many as 15,000 soldiers at a time. It carried a total of 765,429 military personnel in its many wartime trips.

One of them, perhaps, was Chester Boyd.

Today, the *Queen Mary* is permanently docked in Long Beach, California. It has been stripped of its seagoing equipment and is used as a hotel, restaurant, and museum. This is a current-day photo of the *Queen Mary*.



This is a photo of the Queen Mary in 1967, as it was being decommissioned as a ship, and converted into its present use.



This is another current day picture of the *Queen Mary*.



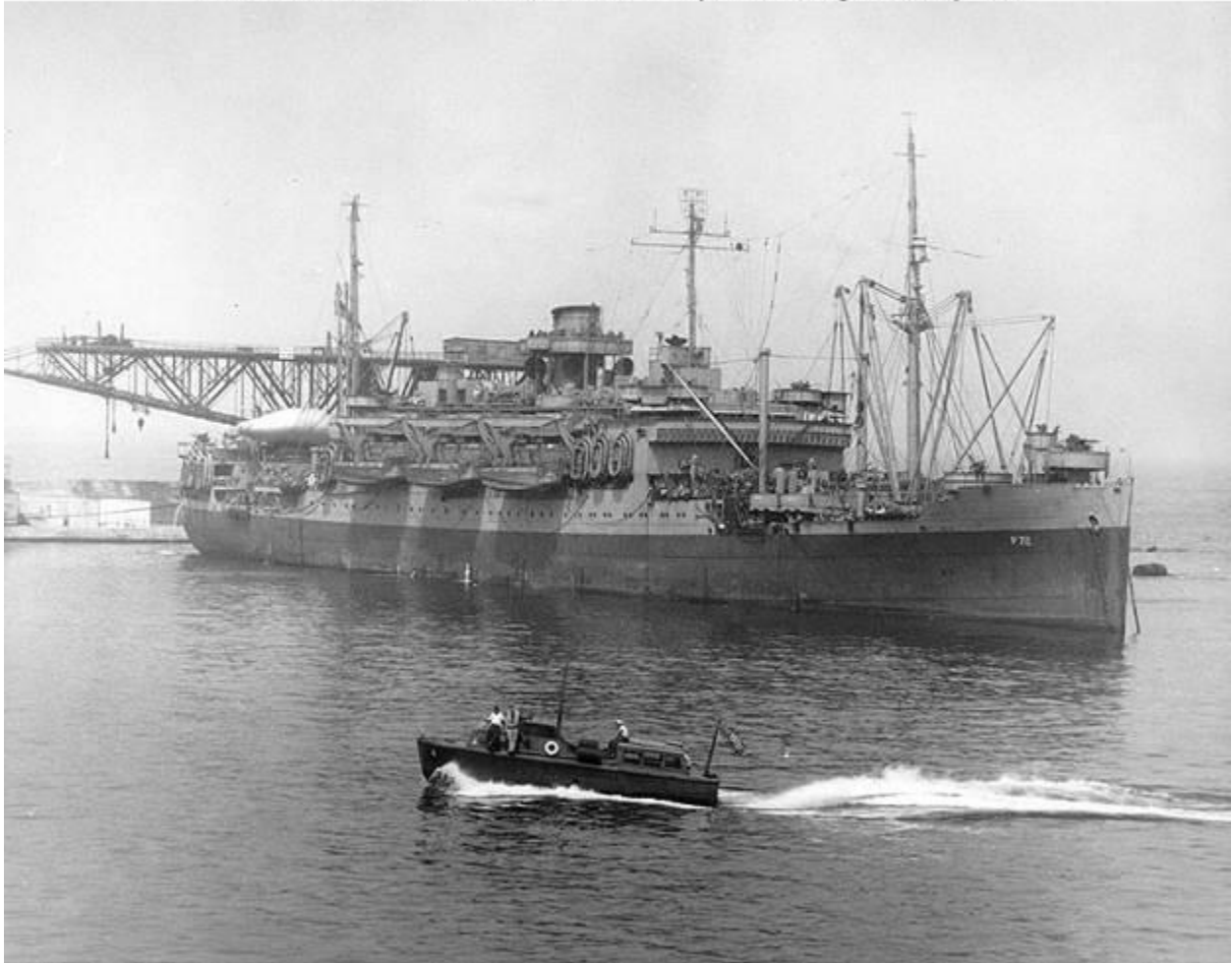
Chester may have made the voyage across the Atlantic in the *Susan B. Anthony*. The *Susan B* had an illustrious career as a troop carrier and was awarded three battle stars for service.

The ship was originally christened the *SS Santa Clara* in 1930. It was acquired by the U.S. Navy in 1940 and renamed the *Susan B. Anthony*. It transported troops in three different amphibious invasions – the 1942 invasion of North Africa, the 1943 invasion of Sicily, and the 1944 Normandy invasion. In between, it transported troops from the U.S. and England to North Africa, and from the U.S. to England.

The Normandy invasion was *Susan B. Anthony's* last mission. On June 7, 1944 (D-Day plus 1), the *Susan B* was transporting 3,000 troops across the English Channel to Omaha Beach. Early in the morning, she struck a mine. The ship immediately lost power and began to take in water. By 8:00 a.m., the ship began to list. The captain ordered the soldiers to move to the port side, and the human ballast temporarily righted the ship. Another troop ship and two destroyers were nearby, and began an expeditious evacuation of the ship. More fires erupted and the ship began to sink. Shortly after 10:00 a.m., the ship sunk. Amazingly, no one was killed and only a few soldiers and sailors were seriously injured in the explosion or the sinking.

This is a picture of the *Susan B. Anthony* in 1943.

Photo # 80-G-215100 USS Susan B. Anthony at Oran, Algeria, 5 July 1943



This is the *Susan B. Anthony*, listing and starting to sink on June 7, 1944 at the Normandy coast.



The records for the *Queen Mary* voyage indicates that it arrived in port in England on April 10th – an extremely fast three day voyage. The record did not note the specific port. According to one of the published personal histories, the *Susan B. Anthony* arrived in port at Swansea, Wales, on April 19th – a 12 day voyage. Another official record shows the *Susan B. Anthony*'s arrival on April 17th. Chester's discharge papers indicated that he arrived in the European Theatre of Operations (ETO) on April 17. This doesn't totally clear up the mystery of which

of these two ships he used to cross the Atlantic, but suggests that it was the *Susan B*.

I did not find any record of any mishap or adventure on the Queen Mary voyage. Those soldiers aboard the *Susan B. Anthony* had one scare, though. At one point in the voyage, a navy destroyer quickly placed itself behind, but extremely close to, the *Susan B*. It then released a full load of depth charges. The sailors obviously spotted a German submarine there, and went in for the kill (or at least to chase it away).

The *Susan B* continued its voyage and the British Royal Air Force (RAF) began its escort as the *Susan B* approached the Irish Sea. And, most fortunately, the ship arrived safely at Swansea.

Swansea, Wales is not shown on this map, but it is located further west on the coast from Cardiff, Wales.



Swansea, Wales

Here, then, is the route of Chester in early April, 1944, on board either the *Queen Mary* or the *Susan B. Anthony*.



VI

Pre-D-Day, World War II Primer

It may be difficult to follow the rest of the story without at least an elementary understanding of the war and some of the strategies employed. This is a brief history lesson.

This is a map of Europe and North Africa in 1939.



Germany had already annexed Austria and the western half of Czechoslovakia (now, the Czech Republic) by this point in time, so you won't see either country on this map. Germany was also allied with Italy.

World War II in Europe started with the German invasion of Poland in 1939. Britain and France had agreed to defend Poland in the event of such an attack, and promptly declared war on Germany.

The first few years in the war went entirely Germany's way. After defeating Poland in 1939, Germany, with some assistance from Italy, proceeded in 1940 and 1941 to conquer Slovakia, Hungary, most of Yugoslavia, Albania, Greece, Denmark, Norway, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. With the conquest of France, Germany and Italy also had control over North Africa (except for Egypt). The Germans also installed puppet regimes in Romania and Bulgaria.

The Germans also defeated the British army in continental Europe, and the British retreated to the British Isles. With the defeat of the British, the Germans and Italians had control over nearly the entire continent of Europe.

Although the British were unable to fight the Germans in Europe, it mounted a successful defense of Egypt and the Suez Canal. The British also maintained naval and, eventually, air supremacy.

Two events in 1941 changed the course of the war dramatically, by bringing into it the two most powerful nations in the world.

In June, 1941, the Germans invaded the Soviet Union.

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese bombed the U.S. naval base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Germany and Japan previously entered a mutual alliance treaty, and Germany promptly declared war on the U.S. The U.S. responded with a declaration of war against Japan, Italy, and Germany.

The U.S. and British strategy in the war acknowledged that it would take some time for the U.S. to gain the strength necessary to invade Europe and Germany. The U.S. had to draft, train, and equip an army. While there had been some preparation for eventual war in 1940 and 1941, the massive U.S. buildup did not start in earnest until 1942. (To give you an idea of the size of the build-up which did occur, the U.S. army had 170,000 soldiers in 1940; within three years, the army grew to 7.2 million. The U.S. produced 800 military planes in 1939; by 1943, the U.S. was producing 8,000 planes per month.)

The first phase of the U.S./British strategy was to invade North Africa. Joint American and British forces invaded Morocco and Algeria in November, 1942. Simultaneously, British forces in Egypt began an offensive on that front. This campaign continued through May, 1943, and led to the total defeat of the Germans and Italians in Africa. (Note, the North Africa campaign was over about the time Chester was drafted.)

The next phase of the strategy was the invasion of Sicily, which began with an amphibious assault on July 9, 1943. Sicily was another successful Allied campaign, although with heavy casualties, and the British and Americans had control over the island by August 17, 1943.

The next phase was the invasion of Italy, which began on September 3, 1943. The Italians surrendered on September 8th, but the German army took over the defense of Italy. (This was about the time Chester ended his basic training at Ft. Bliss, and began his artillery specialist training.)

The Italian campaign was an extremely difficult fight for the Allies. The Americans suffered 114,000 casualties in campaign. The German counterattack at Anzio (near Rome) was completed (and failed) about the time Chester completed his artillery specialist training at Ft. Bliss. The Allies captured Rome on June 4, 1944, about six weeks after Chester's arrival in Great Britain. The war in Italy continued until May, 1945, with the unconditional surrender of Germany, and was ongoing simultaneously with the battlefront in France.

The Italian campaign was never intended to be the only British/American front against the Germans. Rather, it was a phase in the strategy to be followed by an Allied invasion of France.

Meanwhile, the German invasion of the Soviet Union was, at first, highly successful. The German army reached the outskirts of both Leningrad and Moscow. But by late 1943 and early 1944, the Soviet Red Army was taking control and pushing the Germans back.

With the Allied invasion of France, the British and Americans would be pushing west from France, the Soviets would be pushing east from Russia, and the British and Americans would be pushing north through Italy. This was the plan to defeat the Germans.

This is probably more history than you wanted to read, but it gives a context for the Normandy invasion. Chester's trip to Europe was not a vacation, for him or anyone else in the military. Nearly 25 million soldiers and over 37 million civilians (62 million people total) were killed in World War II. This was serious business!

The history lesson now brings us to Normandy – the invasion and the preparation.

VII

The 12th Army Group and the Ninth Air Force

Any description of the army movements across France, Belgium and Germany becomes confusing without a basic understanding of the army's organization. "Army-speak" can be confusing, but I will try to simplify this as best that I can.

Starting at the top, General George C. Marshall was the commander of the U.S. Army, wherever located. General Dwight Eisenhower was the supreme commander of the allied forces (mainly American, British and Canadian) in the European Theater of Operations (ETO).

The largest unit of organization within the U.S. Army was the "Army Group". Eventually, four Army Groups were organized. One for the North African, then Mediterranean Theaters of Operations; one for the invasion of southern France later in 1944 (still part of the ETO); and one for the Pacific Theater of Operations in the war against Japan.

The fourth Army Group was charged with the responsibility for the invasion of Normandy, the offensive through France, and ultimately the invasion of Germany. It was labeled the 12th Army Group and was commanded by General Omar Bradley. (I cannot tell you why this was called the 12th Army Group, when there was only four of them.)

The unit of organization immediately below that of the Army Group was the "Army", with each given a numerical designation (usually spelled out). Twelve "Armies" eventually existed, but only two "Armies" are relevant to this story. The First Army, originally commanded by General Bradley and then by General Courtney Hodges, and the Third Army, commanded by George Patton, were the two Armies within Bradley's 12th Army Group.

The next unit of organization immediately below that of the Army is the "Corps", with each given a numerical designation with roman numerals. Twenty-four corps were activated by the end of the war. Four corps served within the First Army, and three within Patton's Third Army.

Each corps generally had assigned to it three "divisions", the next level of organization. 89 divisions were organized through the course of the war. The

divisions were classified as either “infantry”, “armored”, or “airborne”. Infantry divisions had anywhere between 15,000 and 20,000 soldiers.

There were other levels of organization below that of the division, including brigade, regiment, battalion, company, platoon, and squad, but these are not particularly relevant to this story.

The army also organized countless other specialty units. Examples are field artillery, various engineering units, tank destroyers, medical units – and anti-aircraft units. The army’s practice was to affix these specialty units, permanently or temporarily, to either a division, corps, or army.

Here, though, is where tracing the 784th AAA Automatic Weapons Battalion became difficult. Each division had at least one AAA battalion permanently assigned to it. I looked at the divisional rosters for each of the divisions in the 12th Army Group, and the 784th was not one of the permanently assigned battalions. This actually was not surprising, since most of the permanently assigned battalions were mobile or self-propelled battalions (as opposed to a “semi-mobile” battalion like the 784th.)

However, the organizational structure also used a pool of homogenous battalion-sized units. These pooled units were held by corps or armies, and could be attached, and detached, from divisions as needed. The 784th may have been one of these pooled units. Unfortunately, none of my sources included a comprehensive list of pooled units at the corps or army level, so I could not verify the 784th’s status with certainty.

From the evidence I did find, it appears that the 784th was, at some points attached to the First Army and, at other points, attached to the Third Army. However, I could not identify which corps or division within the First or Third Army to which it was attached. This made it difficult to determine exactly where the 784th was, and what it was doing, at various times.

There was one other army unit involved in the Normandy campaign which was not, at least directly, part of the 12th Army Group. This unit was the Ninth Air Force.

Technically, the U.S. Army’s Ninth Air Force and the RAF’s Second Tactical Air Force were under the overall command of RAF Air Chief Marshall Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory. Very quickly, though, there was a general understanding of the

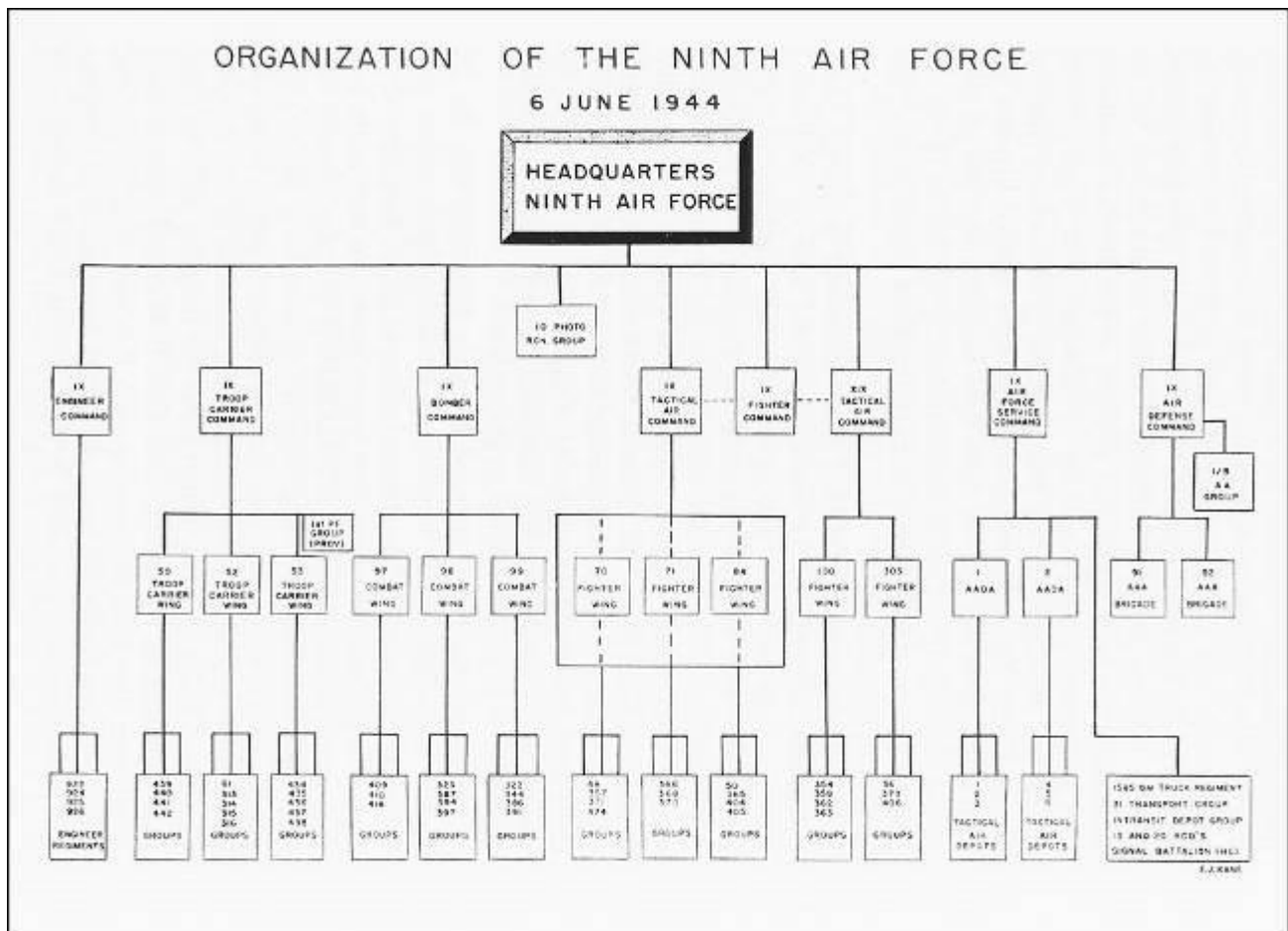
allocation of these tactical air forces. One of the Ninth's two fighter commands – the IX Tactical Air Command – would support the First Army of Hodges; the other of the Ninth's fighter commands – the XIX Tactical Air Command – would support the Third Army of Patton; and the RAF Second Tactical Air Force would support the British 21st Army under the command of Field Marshall Sir Bernard Montgomery.

The Air Force in World War II was not a separate branch of the military. Rather, it was a unit within the army – its correct name was the U.S. Army Air Force.

The Ninth Air Force, by D-Day, included tactical fighter plane units, bomber units, troop carrier units, engineering units, reconnaissance photographic group, supply and support units – and the IX Air Defense Command.

The IX Air Defense Command consisted of three antiaircraft units – the 51st AAA brigade, the 52nd AAA brigade, and a third AAA “group”. The 784th was not part of either of these AAA brigades.

The AAA “group” is identified in the “Organization of the Ninth Air Force”, on the next page. Unfortunately, the name of the group is illegible, and I have not found any source which identified this “group”, or the names of any units within this group.



The IX Air Defense Command is the top box on the far right of this organization chart. The 51st and 52nd AAA Brigades are in the boxes below. The unidentified AA “Group” is the box to the right and below.

We’ll go over some of the assignments of the IX Air Defense Command later in this history, but one of the functions was to act as a reserve unit for the 12th Army Group. The Army Group command, and either of the First or Third Army commands, could temporarily attach an AAA unit to one of its divisions as needed throughout the campaign. Thus any of the AAA units assigned to the IX Air Defense Command – including the 784th – could have spent time assigned to either the First or Third Army.

I read several different personal histories of soldiers within the 784th, that stated that it was part of the Ninth Air Force. I read other personal histories that referred to the 784th as part of Patton’s Third Army. The battalion’s post-war publication

referred to it as part of the IX Air Defense Command. This is probably as conclusive as we are going to get for the time being.

I think it is reasonable to conclude that the Private Boyd served on an anti-aircraft artillery automatic weapons crew which generally acted as part of the Ninth Air Force, but was, from time to time, attached to units in the 12th Army Group.

That settled (at least for now), we can try to trace the steps and roles of the Ninth Air Force and the 12th Army Group, with the 784th AAA automatic weapons battalion, from England, through France and Belgium, and to Germany.

The Ninth Air Force was, for a time, headquartered in Egypt and functioned in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations. In the Fall of 1943, most of the planes and pilots of the Ninth were transferred to the Twelfth Air Force and remained in the Mediterranean. The name “Ninth Air Force”, its commander General Lewis Brereton, and several of its headquarters and service units, were transferred to England and the ETO.

The Eighth Air Force already existed in England, and had primary responsibility over the strategic bombing offensive over Germany and other sites in Europe. The Ninth, though, had as its primary mission the assistance to the amphibious landings in France, and the cooperation with the ground troops in their subsequent sweep into the heart of Germany.

In late 1943, the Ninth existed on paper only. A few fighter squadrons were transferred from the Eighth. But most of the Ninth were the new recruits who arrived from the United States to England from October, 1943 to May, 1944. (This included Chester and the 784th.)

There were two relatively unique strategies within the Ninth which would have had a direct impact on Private Boyd and the 784th.

One was the formation of the IX Air Defense Command – the AAA brigades and groups attached to the Ninth Air Force, under the command of General William Richardson. Anti-aircraft units were not ordinarily attached to air force units. In fact, their attachment almost seems counter-intuitive – a unit trained to shoot down airplanes attached to a unit of airplanes. Even its name is “anti” aircraft.

However, one of the roles of the Ninth after the invasion was to protect rear areas from the German Air Force. Air fields, supply depots, truck convoys, and other key facilities in France would be vulnerable to *Luftwaffe* attack. The Ninth had hoped that this role could be filled by AAA battalions, and thus free up the Ninth's fighters for offensive actions. This was a relatively new concept for the air force. (As it turned out, much to the disappointment of the Ninth, many of these units became assigned – unofficially and semi-permanently - to the ground forces of the 12th Army Group.) Here's how this all read in the IX Air Defense Command's activation orders: “*to provide air defense behind the advancing Allied ground forces in N. Europe*”.

The other relatively unique strategy was an assignment of a substantial engineering command to the Ninth. The air war in Normandy and Northern France was to be conducted from airfields in France, not England. The Ninth Air Force engineers had the task of building and repairing airfields in France in the wake of the advancing Allied armies. The Ninth intended to move from England to the continent of Europe as soon as possible after D-Day.

In fact, emergency landing strips were constructed by the engineers at Omaha and Utah beaches on D-Day. Refueling and rearming strips were constructed within three days of D-Day. Virtually all of the fighter squadrons operated out of France within 40 days of D-Day. The bomber and troop carrier squadrons moved to the continent later, when larger and better airfields were constructed. Eventually, all that remained in England was the Ninth's major aircraft repair facilities.

The wisdom behind this strategy is relatively obvious. The planes were far more effective the closer they were to their targets. Assume, for example, a plane carries two hours of fuel. If it takes the plane a half-hour to fly from England, across the English Channel, to targets in France, then it will use half of its fuel on the trip to and from the target, and can only spend one hour on the target. If, however, the plane flew from an airfield in France, 15 minutes from the target, then it can spend 1 ½ hours over the target. There were, in fact, instances of American construction or repair of crude airfields a few thousand yards from German-held positions, so that planes could spend nearly 100% of their time over target.

Of course there is a flipside to this strategy. With airfields in France, as close as possible to the front lines, American planes would be closer to German targets. But the airfields in France would also be closer targets for the German planes.

What did all of this mean to Chester? It meant that he would go across the English Channel to France relatively soon after D-Day. Once there, he would likely guard key strategic areas, including American forward airfields, from the German *Luftwaffe*. He could also be assigned, at least temporarily, to one of the infantry or armored divisions in the invasion of France and, ultimately, Germany.

VIII

Section Dog, Battery B, 784th Blood Hound

The last chapter was about the “big picture” – the army units well above the 784th in the chain of command. This chapter will paint the smaller picture, of the 784th, the batteries within it, and the sections within each battery, all the way down to Pfc. Chester E. Boyd.

The 784th was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Dallas Haynes, a 1938 West Point graduate.

The battalion was divided into four firing batteries – Battery A, Battery B, Battery C, and Battery D – plus the headquarters battery and the medical detachment. The headquarters battery (HQ) included, besides the senior officers, operations, communications, ammunitions, administration, and the motor pool.

Each firing battery was commanded by a captain with, generally, five first lieutenants. In addition to the gun crews, each battery had battery HQ staff, cooks, a maintenance section, and two outpost sections. The maintenance section was charged with the responsibility of maintaining, in often difficult conditions, the artillery pieces, fire control equipment, communications equipment, vehicles, and anything else mechanical. The outpost sections served 10 to 15 miles away from the battery, and acted as the “spotters” of enemy aircraft. Each gun crew had one or more non-commissioned officers (sergeant or corporal), depending upon the size of the gun and of the gun crew.

I did not, at first, know in which battery Chester served. My first clue was an envelope, found in his papers, addressed to his mother and father in Elm Creek, Nebraska. Inside the envelope were several postcards (made pre-war) from Liège, Belgium (more on Liège is coming). Here is what the envelope looks like.



The return address identifies Chester as in Battery B of the 784th AAA Automatic Weapons Battalion. “APO”, by the way, stands for “Army Post Office”.

The battalion post-war publication confirmed this, and even told me more – it told me the organization within Battery B.

First, the numbers. Battery B had 6 officers, 12 HQ staff members, 5 cooks, 13 members of the maintenance section, four men in outpost #1, four men in outpost #2, and 16 gun crews.

Eight of the gun crews manned 40mm Bofors. These crews, with 9 or 10 men each, were called “One-Forty”, “Two-Forty”, “Three-Forty”, “Four-Forty”, “Five-Forty”, “Six-Forty”, “Seven-Forty”, and “Eight-Forty”. Battery B was the only battery which named its 40mm crews this way. The other batteries merely used “Section 1”, “Section 2”, etc.

The eight other gun crews of Battery B manned quad .50 caliber machine guns, of the type shown before. These crews had 5 or 6 men, with one corporal and a technician specialist (a Tech 5 was equivalent to a corporal). Battery B’s quad

crews were named Section Able, Section Baker, Section Charlie, Section Dog, Section Easy, Section Fox, Section George, and Section How.

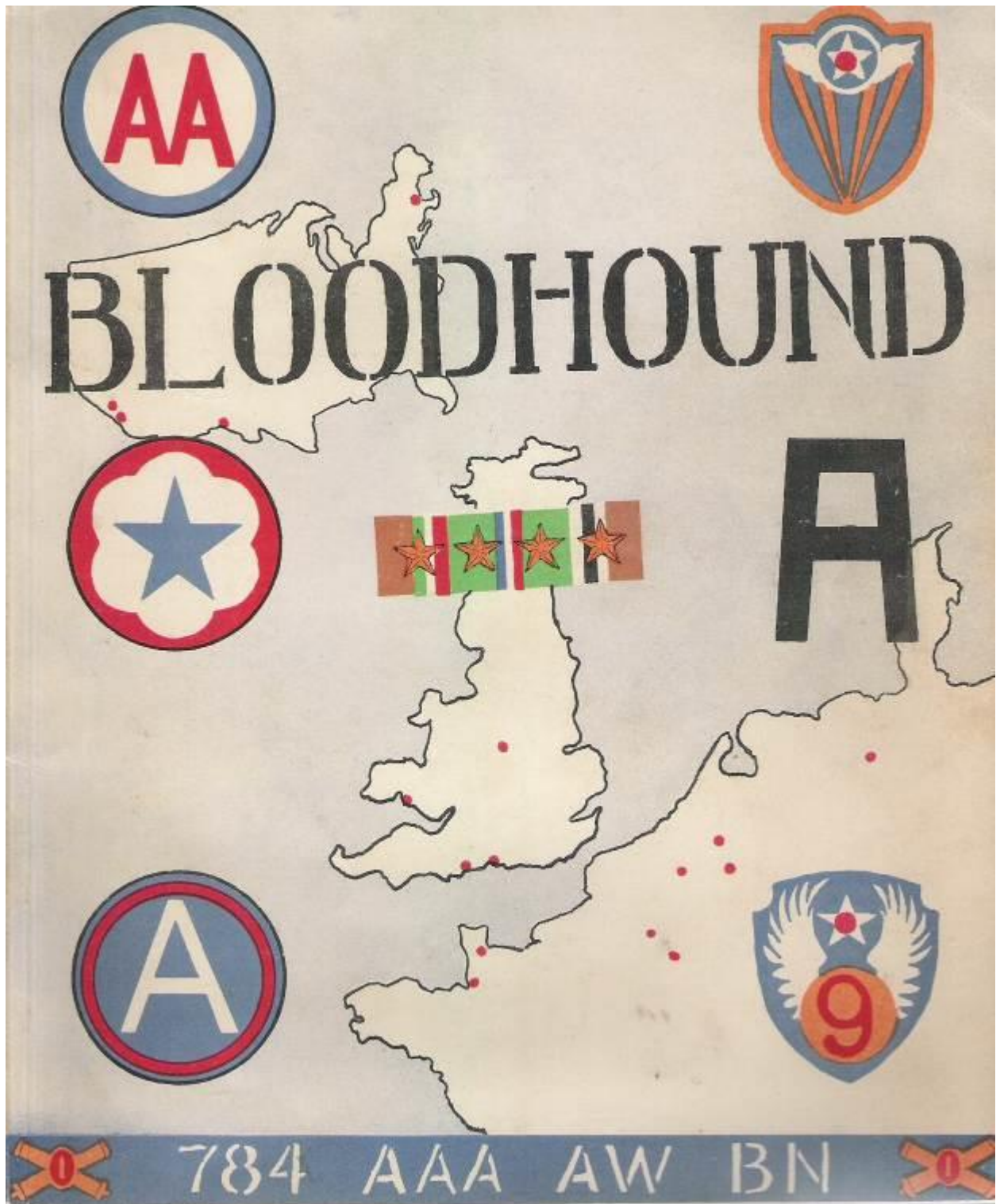
The battalion post-war publication included pictures of each group within each battery. Here is the picture of Section Dog, Battery B. That's private Boyd on the far right. What a sorry looking lot! Note that Chester is the only member of the crew thinking about a smile.



In one of the personal histories, a veteran of the 784th referred to the unit as “Bloodhound”. I didn’t see that reference anywhere else, until I saw the post-war unit publication. “Bloodhound” is on the cover, but there is no mention of the name elsewhere in the publication, nor any clue as to how the name was derived.

The cover is on the next page. A couple of things to note about the cover, besides the “Bloodhound” name. The red dots on the U.S. and Europe maps signify the places “visited” by the 784th. The emblems on the cover, starting from the upper left-hand corner, then moving clockwise, are the antiaircraft emblem, the Fourth Air Force emblem, the Ninth Air Force emblem, the Third Army emblem, and the Army Service Forces emblem. (The Fourth Air Force emblem came from service in California, when the Fourth was protecting the west coast from the Japanese.)

The ribbon in the middle is for participation in the European / African / Mediterranean Theaters of Operation. The four stars within the ribbon are combat recognitions for Normandy, Northern France, Rhineland, and Central Europe.



IX

England and Preparation for the Normandy Invasion

D-Day was one of the greatest acts of deception in modern times. Virtually everyone in the civilized world knew that the U.S. and British armies would invade northern France in the spring or summer of 1944. The only questions were when and where.

The Allies tried to divert German attention away from northern France. Through counter-intelligence and troop movements, the Allies suggested that the invasion might come at Norway, or Greece, or the Atlantic or Mediterranean shores of France. These efforts didn't fool the Germans, but did require Germany to maintain troops and resources in defensive positions throughout Europe.

The Allies also stepped up the strategic bombing from England of German industries in the Rhine and Ruhr valleys, and the bombing from Italy and North Africa of Romanian oil fields and other strategic targets. This forced Germany to use many of its fighter planes to protect against the bombers, and kept them away from Northern France.

The biggest act of deception, though, was the site of the invasion of Northern France. The Germans were absolutely convinced that the Americans and British would invade France at the pas-de-Calais (or, as the British called it, the Straits of Dover).

The pas-de-Calais made a lot of sense to the Germans. First of all, it was the shortest distance between England and France.

You can see this on next map of a current day channel ferry route. (The current "chunnel" runs between Dover and Calais, and ferries have traversed between these two towns for many decades.)



Second, Calais was near the border with Belgium. An Allied army landing at Calais would not have to go through all of France to get into Germany, fighting the Germans every step of the way. From Belgium, it is a short march into the industrial heartland of Germany. Indeed, a straight line drawn between London and the Rhine/Ruhr valleys runs straight through Dover and Calais.

The third reason had to do with German arrogance. In late 1940 and early 1941, the Germans planned an invasion of England. After considering all of the variables and options, the Germans concluded that the best invasion route was from Calais to Dover. Naturally, the Germans presumed that the Americans and British, going through the same mental exercise but in reverse, would conclude that the best invasion route was from Dover to Calais. (The Germans cancelled the invasion plans in 1941, since they could not gain control over the air above England, or naval control over the English Channel.)

For all of these reasons, the Germans built heavy fortifications along the shoreline near Calais, and concentrated their best available troops in this region. And for these reasons, the Allies chose not to invade at Calais.

The Allies, too, saw the advantages of an invasion of Calais. But their biggest fear was being stuck at the beaches (like Gallipoli in the First World War). The Allies were willing to take the extra effort and casualties to cross the width of France, in order to reduce the risk of disaster at the D-Day beach landings.

And so, for the seven or eight months from the Fall of 1943 through the end of May, 1944, the Allies focused their efforts upon (1) transporting as many men and war materials as possible from the U.S. to England, (2) planning the details of an invasion at Normandy (and the offensive through France) and training troops for such an invasion and offensive, and (3) doing everything possible to deceive the Germans into believing that the invasion would be at Calais.

The deception, by the way, worked better than the Allies could have hoped. The Germans were totally fooled by the Normandy invasion. Days after the D-Day invasion, Adolf Hitler and many at the German high command remained convinced that the Normandy invasion was a diversion. The “real” invasion would be coming soon at Calais. As a result, the Germans kept troops at Calais, which otherwise could have served as timely reinforcements in Normandy.

The transportation of troops and materials to England was an enormous undertaking. Ships like the *Queen Mary* and the *Susan B. Anthony* made a return trip to the United States as soon as they were unloaded in England. The number of U.S. fighting men based in Great Britain doubled in the first six months of 1944, from 774,000 at the beginning of the year to 1,537,000 in the week prior to the invasion. A total of 39 divisions were slated to participate – 20 American, 14 British, 3 Canadian, 1 French, and 1 Polish – along with thousands of service and support troops.

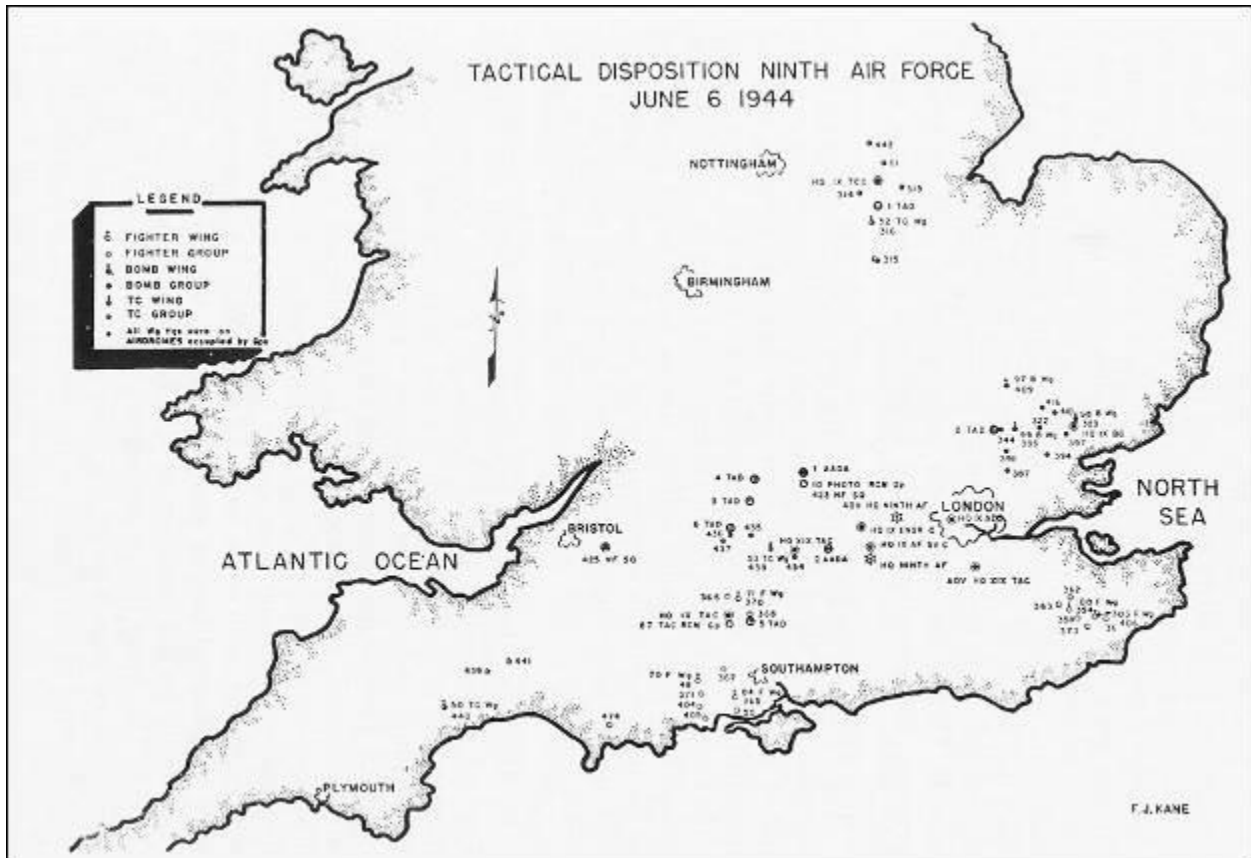
More than 16 million tons of supplies were needed to feed and supply these men. This amounted to 6 ¼ pounds of rations per day per man; 137,000 jeeps, trucks and half-tracks; 4,217 tanks and fully tracked vehicles; 3,500 artillery pieces; and 12,000 aircraft. This is not to mention huge stores of sundries – what one author described as “everything from dental amalgam for fillings to chewing gum and candy bars”.

So much was arriving from America each day, the standing joke in England was: “There are so many American men and materials here, the island is in danger of sinking!”

Chester was one of the hundreds of thousands of Americans who made this trip during this period. And the growth of the Ninth Air Force mirrored that of the entire invasion force. Between October 1943 and April 1944, the personnel within the Ninth Air Force grew from 2,162 to 163,312, distributed among 960 different

units. By May 31st, this number grew to 184,702. By D-Day, the Ninth had more than 4,500 tactical planes and 2,700 gliders.

Before D-Day, the Ninth Air Force was headquartered at Uxbridge, just west of London. Its units, however, were dispersed all over southern England, as shown on this map.



The units were dispersed for at least two reasons. One, the air force wanted to use as many air fields in England as possible, to avoid traffic jams at any one field and facilitate rapid deployment of the planes. Second, the air force assumed that, sooner or later, German spies would discover the creation and the mission of the Ninth Air Force. If the Ninth were concentrated at a single point, it might tip off the Germans as to the likely point of the invasion.

While the dispersal of air fields made sense militarily, it did not help me locate the 784th. Chester could have been at any one of these locations.

In fact, I discovered, he was at more than one of these locations. One theme ran constantly through the Ninth's training programs, and the theme was mobility. All

units were encouraged to “Keep Mobile”, by retaining a minimum of impediments to motion and obtaining a maximum transportation vehicles. When a unit was given the order to “move”, advance elements of the unit were expected to be on the road within two hours.

Units in the Ninth practiced mobility by mobility exercises. A mobility exercise required a unit to move overnight from one station to another. Sometimes these exercises had nothing to do with a station move. A unit might load everything on trucks, make a tour of the countryside, and return to its original station.

A shortage of transportation equipment sometimes made these exercises difficult. In at least one exercise, resourceful GIs staked out a rectangle on the ground, labeled it “truck”, and then placed an appropriate amount of material on it. This, to the extent possible, simulated rapid deployment.

As air squadrons began to arrive to England from the United States, the Ninth began sorties into the continent. These sorties, through March, 1944, were done in conjunction with the Eighth Air Force. The Ninth’s medium range bombers participated in missions over France, Belgium and Netherlands, including the bombing of the German V-1 missile bases. The Ninth’s fighter planes provided escort for bombers of the Eighth and Ninth.

Beginning in April, 1944 (about the time of Chester’s arrival in Britain), the Ninth began the first stage of its Normandy mission – strategic attacks on specific targets in Northern France in preparation for the Normandy invasion. (More on this later.)

Chester only spent about 90 days in England. German air raids during this period were relatively infrequent. Most of the raids which were made were at night and over London. There were only a few air raids on Ninth airfields before D-Day, and they were before Chester arrived in England. By all accounts, no one in the 784th shot an antiaircraft weapon against a German plane while in England.

In all likelihood, Chester did shoot his weapons at targets while in England. The army commanders insisted that all Normandy-bound troops practice, practice, practice.

Each command within the Ninth was ordered to provide specific training for their units, and report the progress to headquarters on a weekly basis. Officers and men

received immediate indoctrination and instruction upon arriving at England and prior to permanent assignment. Thereafter, they received regular “in service” training conducted by their commands.

Upon debarkation (meaning, for Chester, in Boston), men received a booklet entitled “Information for Incoming Units”. This booklet was issued in November, 1943, and contained pertinent facts on the organization of the Ninth and special information on conditions in the ETO. Chester and the 784th would also have received a security lecture within 24 hours after arrival in England.

Training in the Ninth, while in England, was a seven-day week affair. Forty-four hours was considered the absolute minimum. Ground units, like the AAA units, received lectures on defense, basic weapons review, physical training, defense against paratroops, and defense against chemical attack. Troops took special training in mines and booby traps.

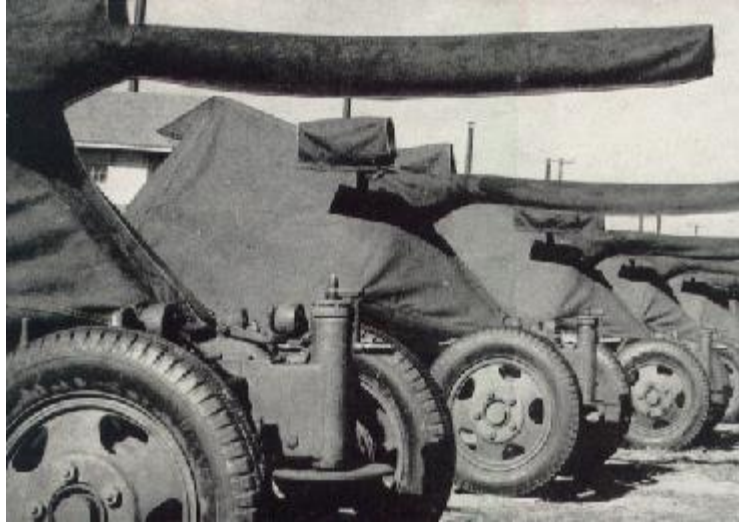
Instruction in tire spotting, motor vehicle waterproofing, and mobile reclamation and repair was given in the Ninth. Ninth’s ground troops were even given special “salvage training”, in order to utilize scrap materials for emergency repairs in the field.

Some of this training was done in special “schools” set up through southern England. Most, though, was done through mobile teams of instructors who traveled from unit to unit.

Artillery training posed a separate problem. Southern England is not as desolate as west Texas or southern New Mexico or the Mojave Desert, so the 784th and the other AAA battalions would not have the same margin of error in practice. I did not find any reports of “friendly fire” killings of an Englishman from American antiaircraft artillery practice. However, there were numerous complaints of broken windows, and frightened chickens and cows.

The other thing Chester would have done is packed and loaded his equipment for the trip to Normandy.

The two photos on the next page are of antiaircraft Bofors, packed and ready for transit across the English Channel.



I suspect that Chester didn't like England very much. It was cold and damp upon his arrival in April, 1944, and the weather stayed cool most of that spring. The food was probably terrible. Fresh eggs, fruit, and vegetables were in very short supply. Keep in mind that the British had already been at war for 4 ½ years by this time.

When not in practice or drills or on duty, the Americans in England pre-D-Day killed time however they could. Softball games and gambling may have been the two most popular activities. Football was popular as well, but too many soldiers suffered broken bones and the army prohibited recreational football after that.

For the Ninth Air Force, the Normandy campaign actually began about D minus 50.

(There were actually many “D-Days” in World War II. For planning purposes, the army and navy would designate the day of a planned invasion (or any major offensive, for that matter) as “D-Day”. Tasks which had to be done before the invasion would have a “D minus” timeline. Tasks which had to be done after the invasion would have a “D plus” timeline. In this way, planners could prepare for an invasion without knowing the actual date of the invasion, in order to maintain security. This vernacular was used for the invasions of North Africa, Sicily, Italy, and the various Pacific Islands. So, D minus 50 would mean 50 days prior to D-Day. Since D-Day for Normandy turned out to be June 6, 1944, D minus 50 was in April, about one week after Chester’s arrival in Britain.)

From D minus 50 to D minus 30, the Ninth’s job was to destroy as many *Luftwaffe* planes in Northern France as possible, and provide reconnaissance of German positions in Normandy.

From D minus 30 to D minus 1, the Ninth’s job was (in this order) German planes, strategic railway centers, selected coastal batteries, and airfields, all within a 130 mile radius of Caen. (Normandy maps are coming.)

(I promised not to bog the reader down with details about sources of information for this history. But two sources were interesting in their own right, and extremely informative. One is Army Air Forces Historical Studies: No. 36 “Ninth Air Force April to November 1944”. The other is Army Air Forces Historical Studies: No. 32 “Ninth Air Force in the ETO, 16 Oct 1943 to 16 Apr 1944”. These were 389 and 245 pages, respectively. Both of these were written in late 1945, after the war, and were declassified in 1959. A copy of the cover pages for these historical studies are on the next two pages.)

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ARMY AIR FORCES HISTORICAL STUDIES: No. 32

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NINTH AIR FORCE

April to November
1944

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Ultimately, I was able to find a chronology of the 784th in England and in Wales. Shortly after arrival, the battalion moved to Leek and stayed there for about one month. Formally, this was Camp 3, Blacksaw Moor, Staffordshire, England. This is where they did some additional training but, I think, had time to fit in short sightseeing tours. The 784th's "Keep Mobile" drills would have taken place at Leek as well.

On May 17, 1944 – almost exactly one month after arrival in England – the 784th was assigned its first "real" duty. The battalion was assigned to defend three ports on Bristol Channel. All three ports were being used for the build-up of forces for the invasion. Batteries A and B were assigned Swansea, Battery C Port Talbot, and Battery D Avonmouth.

The batteries remained at Bristol Channel for over a month. This was a long period of alert. The guns were always manned, and nighttime blackouts observed.

There was only one "combat" incident at Bristol Channel. Battery C came under heavy artillery fire, which caused considerable concern. Turns out, though, that the "attack" came from a British Home Guard unit, who mis-aimed a few rounds in target practice.

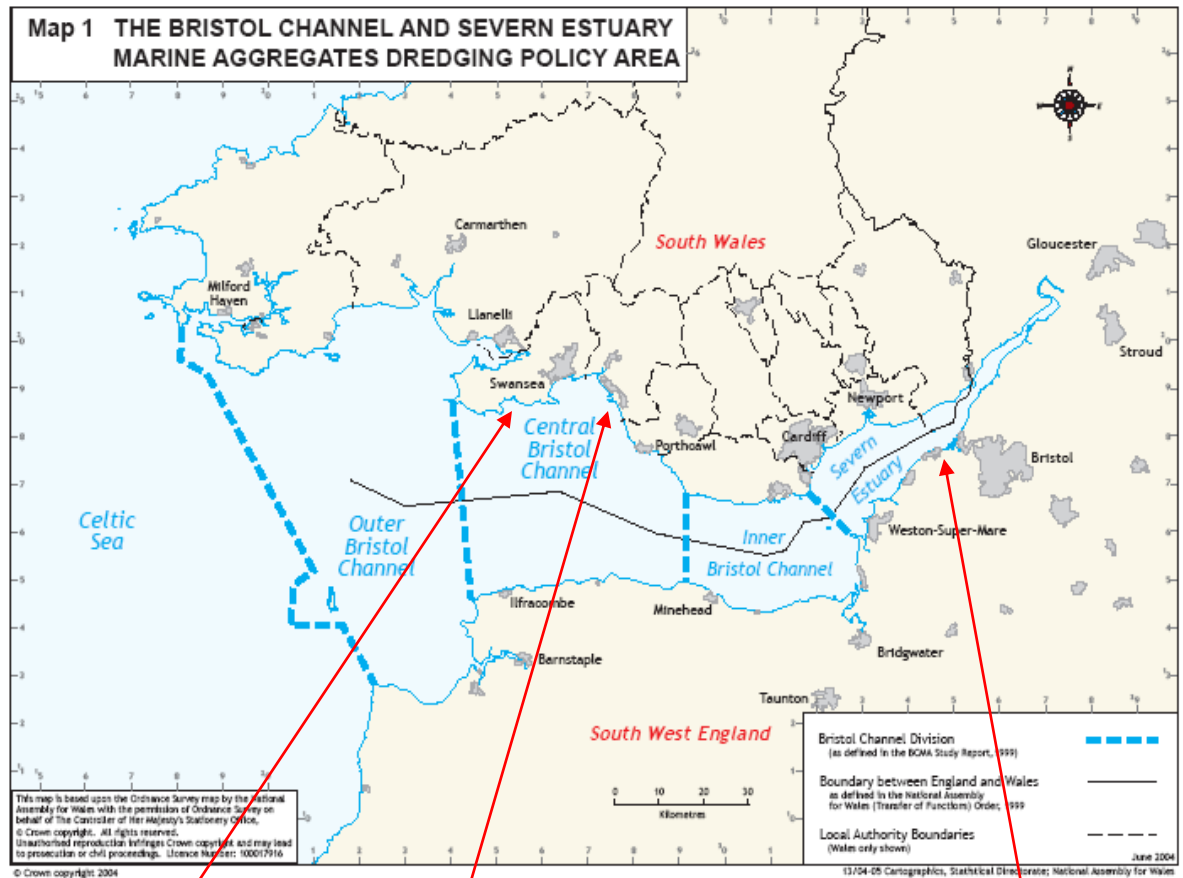
The next map will show the locations of Leek and the Bristol Channel.

Bristol Channel

Leek



This is a more close up view of Bristol Channel. Swansea is shown on the map. Port Talbot is at the mouth of the Avon River in Swansea Bay. Avonmouth is outside of Bristol and is the home of the Avonmouth Docks and the Royal Portbury Docks.



Swansea

Port Talbot

Avonmouth

The batteries of the 784th were at their stations in Bristol Channel on D-Day – June 6, 1944.

X

D-Day and Normandy

The D-Day invasion of Normandy (June 6, 1944) was one of the most monumental efforts ever undertaken. Over 5,000 ships participated in the troops and supplies across the channel on D-Day, and in the naval bombardment of the beaches. More than 100,000 men “hit the beaches” on D-Day, with many more soon to follow.

Chester Boyd did not have a role on June 6th, but he did fairly soon thereafter. To understand what he was doing and why, another history lesson is in order. This includes the “big picture” of the invasion plan.

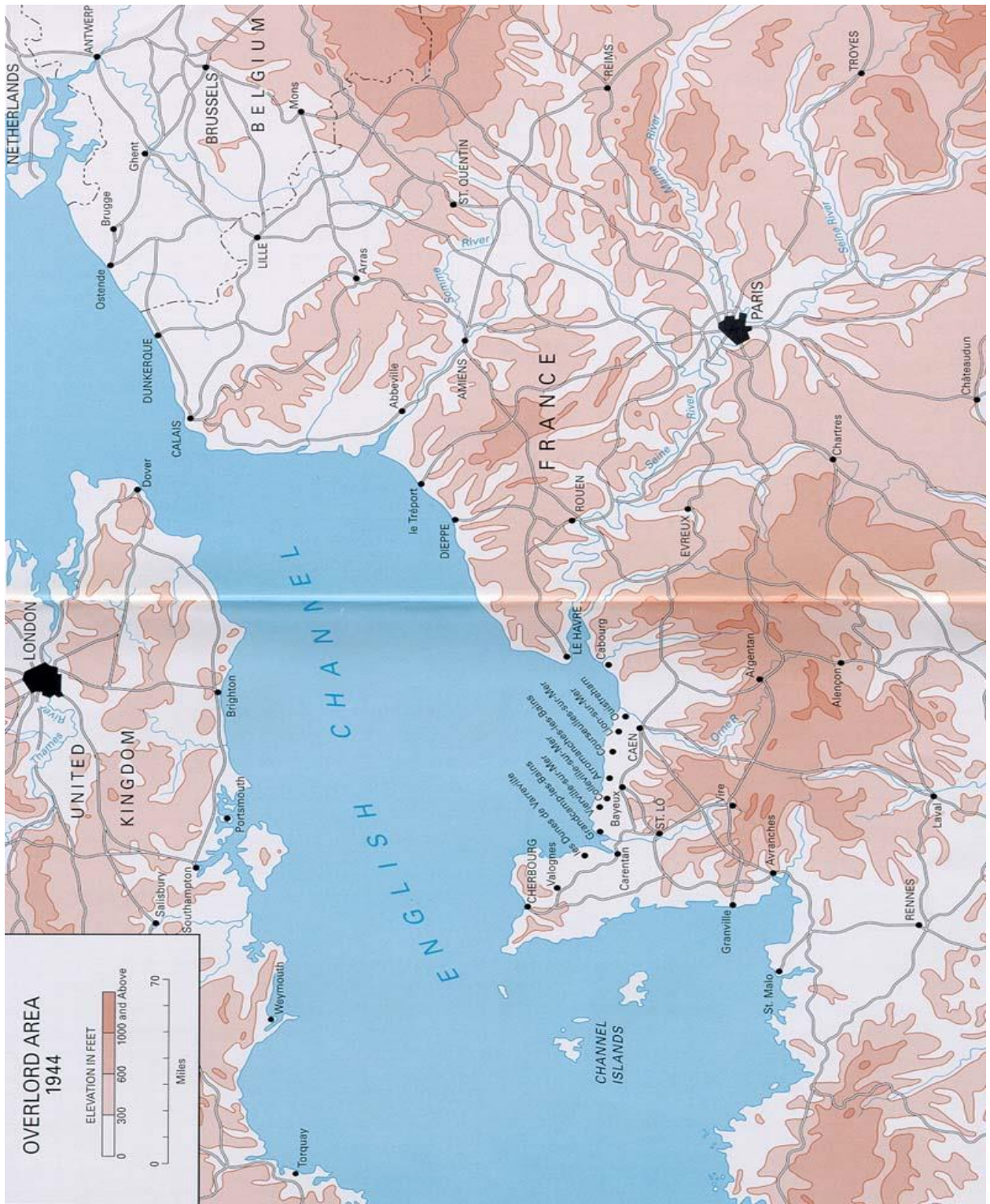
After more than a year of planning, the Allied commanders came up with the invasion plan. Let’s start with this map on the next page.

On the night before the invasion, the American 82nd and 101st airborne division paratroop dropped near St. Mere Eglise.

On D-Day, one division in the First Army’s VII Corps landed near les Dunes de Varrelle (codenamed, and forever-after known as, Utah Beach). Also, one division, and portions of another, of First Army’s V Corps landed near Vierville-sur-Mer (codenamed, and forever-after known as, Omaha Beach).

Simultaneously, a British division landed at “Gold” beach, near Bayeux; a Canadian division landed at “Juno” Beach, near Courseulles-sur-Mer; and another British division landed at “Sword” Beach, near Lion-sur-Mer.

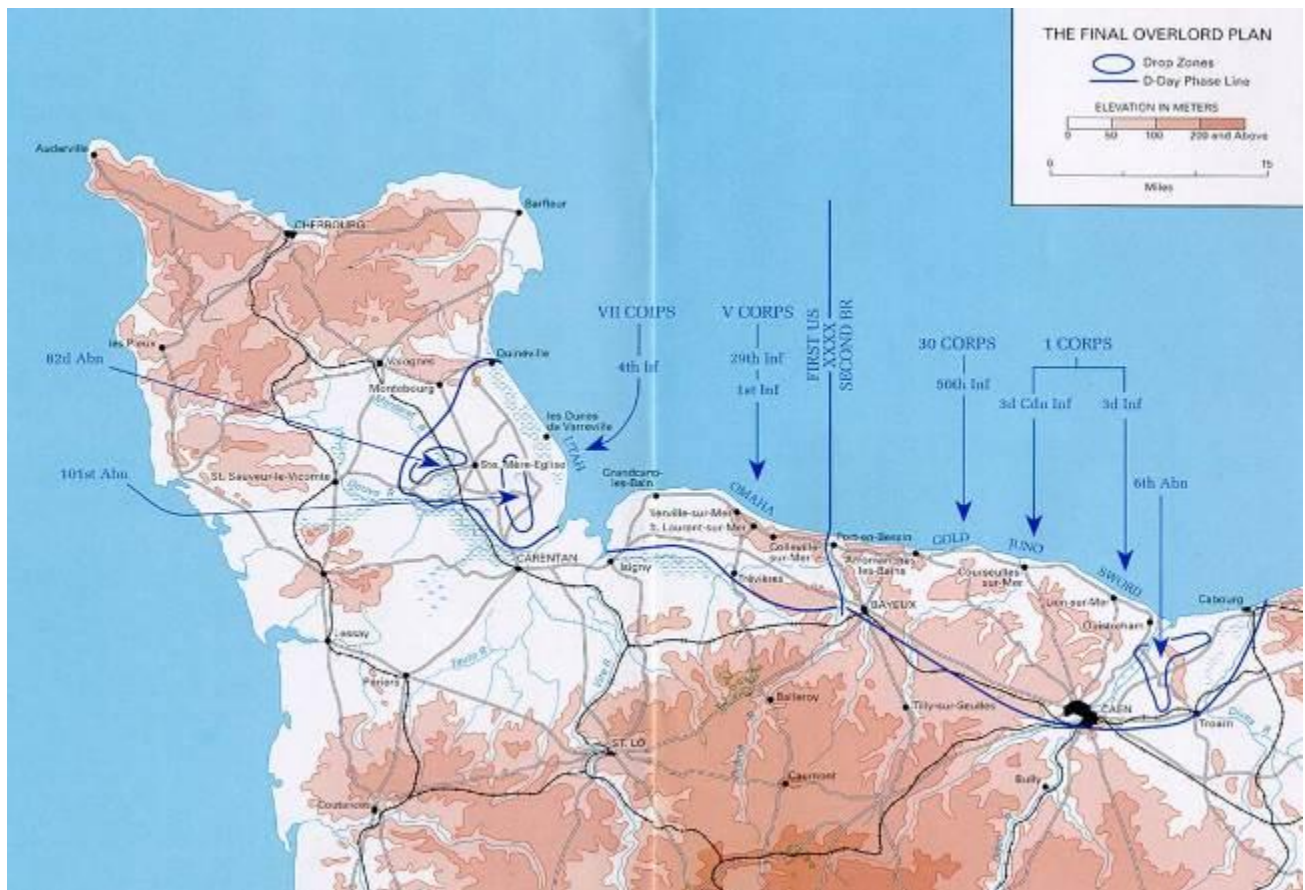
Under the plan, once the beachheads were established, the rest of the American First Army and the British 21st Army would be transported to Normandy. One American corps would press up the Brittany peninsula to Cherbourg, and the other south to St. Lô. When those objectives were attained, there would be room for Patton’s highly-mobile Third Army to arrive and maneuver. The armies would then head east towards Paris (and beyond to Germany), with the British Army on the left, the American Third Army on the right, and the American First Army in the middle.



The map on the prior page shows the invasion sites (with the invasion codenamed “Overlord”).

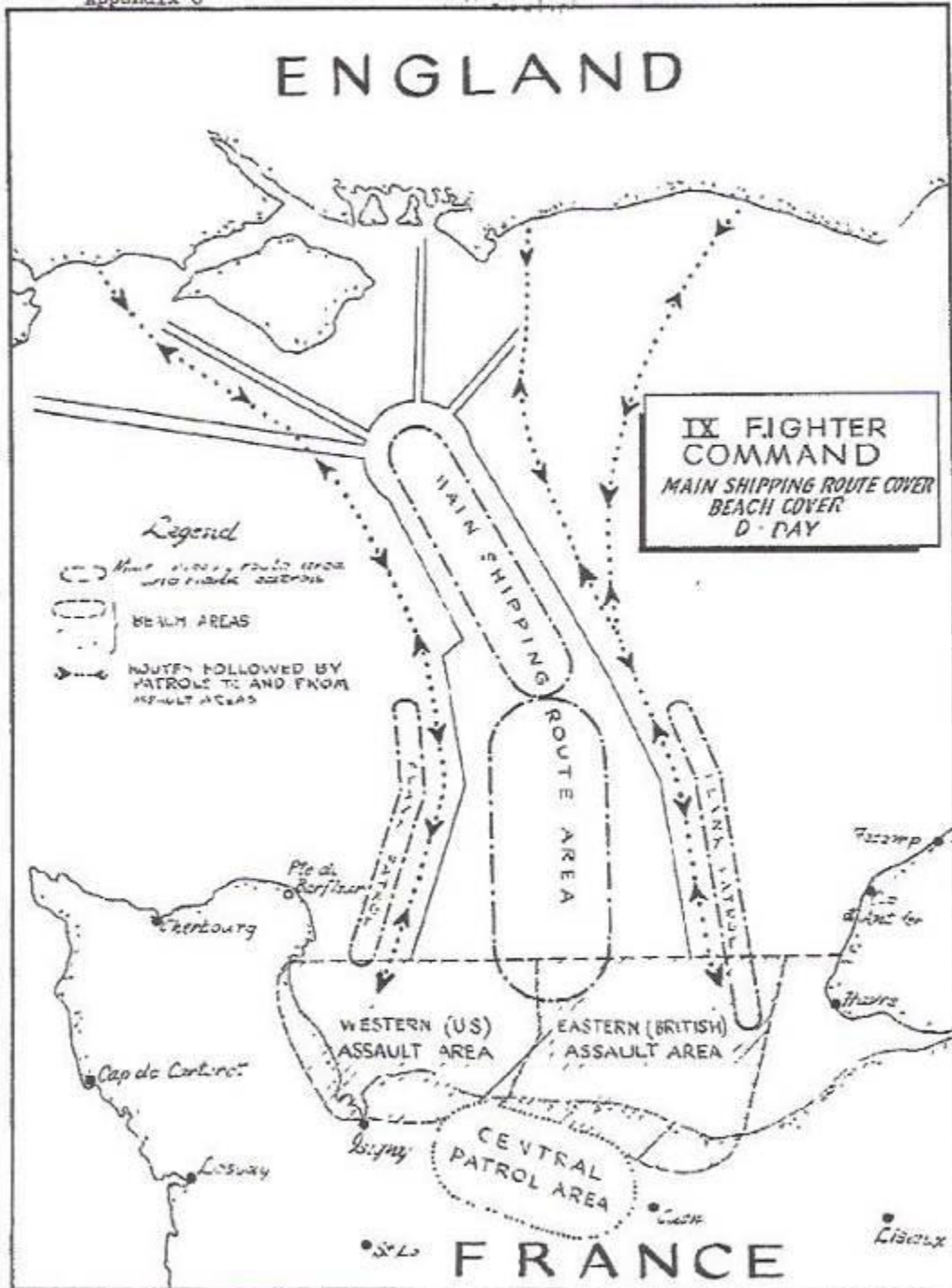
(Before you move on from the map on the prior page, locate the French coastal town of Avranches. It will soon play a part in Chester’s story.)

Below is the final D-Day plan. Note the solid blue line, which is the boundary of the area the Allies hoped to control by the end of June 6th.



On the night of D-Day, the Ninth Air Force’s troop carriers dropped the paratroopers of the 82nd and 101st Airborne at the designated locations behind Omaha and Utah beaches.

To protect the armada of ships transporting the soldiers to the beaches, the Ninth’s fighters continuously provided cover over the main shipping lanes against *Luftwaffe* attack. This next map shows the cover route of the Ninth’s fighter aircraft.



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Immediately before H-hour on D-Day (the hour of the first wave to hit the beaches), the Ninth attacked the German gun batteries on Utah beach. (The Eighth Air Force did the same tasks at Omaha Beach, and the RAF did the same at Sword, Juno and Gold.) The air forces also dropped bombs on the sandy beaches, with the hope of setting off as many land mines as possible (before the troops arrived). This bombing mission was not done prior to D-Day, for fear of tipping the Germans off as to the site of the invasion.

After the beach bombings, the planes returned to England for refueling and rearming. Nearly all pilots and crews made two trips on D-Day, and many had three missions that day. In all, the Allies had 14,000 sorties on D-Day. (A “sortie” is French for “go out”. In air force parlance, a sortie is one plane on one mission, with one take off and one landing.) To show the Allied dominance of the air, the Germans made only 250 sorties at and around the beaches on June 6th. (This disparity also shows the effect of the Allied deception. The German planes around Calais were not used at Normandy on D-Day.)

In the end, D-Day was a tremendous, but costly, success. The Allies had control over the beachheads, and could begin transporting men and equipment across the channel. The Americans suffered few casualties at Utah Beach, but suffered far worse at Omaha. The casualties were 2,500 at Omaha, 2,500 among the two airborne divisions, 1,100 Canadians at Juno, and 3,000 British at Juno and Sword.

In the “D plus” days after the landing, the Ninth Air Force continued its destruction of the *Luftwaffe*, provided air transport of troops from England to the new airfields constructed by the Ninth’s engineers in Normandy, strafed and bombed enemy reinforcement columns and means of transportation, and performed additional reconnaissance.

Two recent movie productions featured the Normandy invasion. *Band of Brothers* is a true story of one company (“Easy Company”) in the 101st Airborne Division of the First Army. *Saving Private Ryan* is fiction, but painstakingly accurate in its historical detail. The protagonist in *Private Ryan*, played by Tom Hanks, is a captain in the Rangers, a unit of the First Army’s 29th Division. Private Ryan is a soldier in the 101st Airborne. Although the Ninth Air Force was not the subject of either film, the Ninth was depicted in several scenes.

One particular moving scene in *Band of Brothers* takes place at airfields in England, as the paratroopers prepare for that evening's drop. As they look up to the sky, they see a countless number of planes wing to wing, from east to west, horizon to horizon. These are planes of the Ninth Air Force (and the Eighth and the RAF Second).

In the same episode, the paratroopers board planes around midnight, June 5, and begin the channel crossing. Once over France, near St. Mere Eglise, the paratroopers made their drop. These planes were planes of the Ninth Air Force.

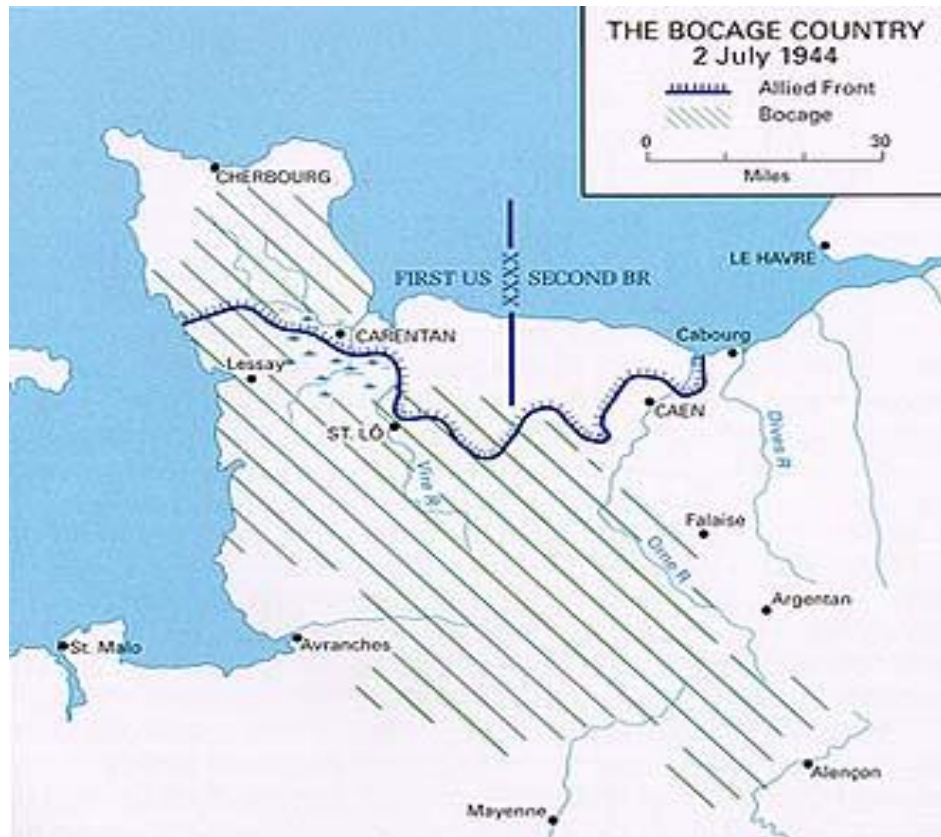
In *Private Ryan*, the Rangers encounter a glider pilot inland from the beaches. His plane was overloaded on D-Day, and crashed in Normandy – killing most of the men on board. This was a glider of the Ninth Air Force.

The Rangers in *Private Ryan* encountered two French towns in pursuit of their mission. Both towns were abandoned by civilians and totally destroyed by prior bombings. This was the work of the Ninth Air Force.

In the climactic scene at the end of *Private Ryan*, Captain Miller was shot and dying on a small bridge. As a German tank approached him, and in a final act of defiance, Captain Miller began shooting at the tank with his pistol. The first five shots bounced harmlessly off of the tank. With the sixth shot, however, the tank exploded into an intense fireball. For a few seconds, the audience is left to wonder, “How did Tom Hanks blow up a tank with a pistol?” At precisely that time, an Allied fighter flies over head. It turns out the fighter bombed the tank simultaneously with the pistol shot. That fighter was from the Ninth Air Force.

If you recall the prior map, it shows the points of the D-Day invasion, and where the Allies hoped, or expected, to be at the end of the day.

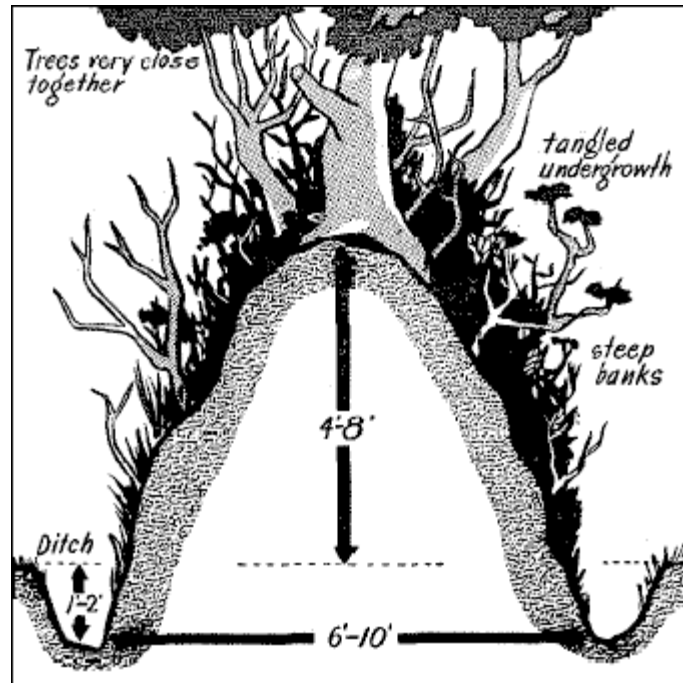
Here's a map of where the Allies actually were on July 2nd – D-Day plus 28.



As you can see, the Allies weren't much further after 28 days, than they expected to be after one.

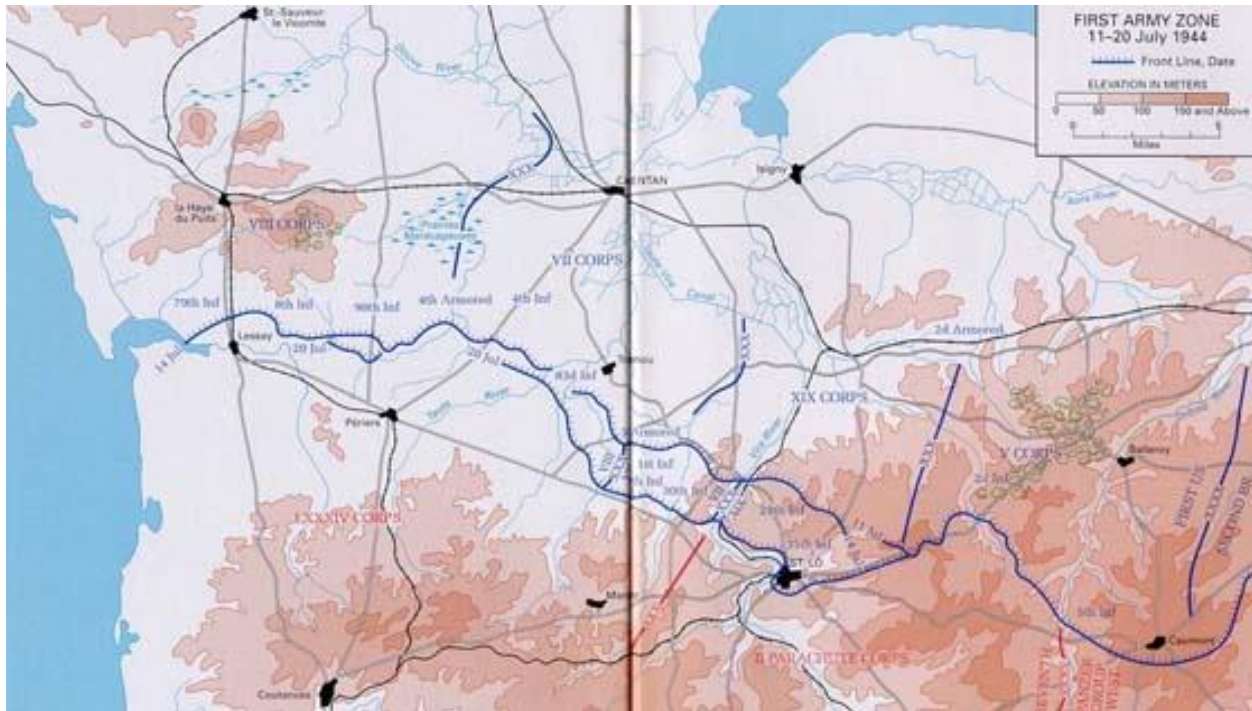
The problem was the *bocage*, or hedgerows. The Allies planned exceedingly well for the D-Day beach landings, but they planned hardly at all for the fight in the hedgerow country inside of the coast. These hedgerows were up to five feet in height, and several feet thick. These hedgerows became traps, concealing German riflemen, machine guns, and antitank guns. An American unit would capture a hedgerow, after incurring heavy casualties, only to be faced with another one only 100 yards further.

This next diagram is a cross section of a hedgerow. Farmers in Normandy have used hedgerows as farm boundaries since the days of the Roman Empire.



The fight across the *bocage* country was excruciatingly slow, and every yard was contested. It took the First Army three weeks to get near St. Lô, and another two weeks to take the town. St. Lô wasn't under American control until July 18 – D-Day plus 44. The British finally succeeded in getting into Caen on the same date.

This next map shows the short movement of the American troops between July 11 and July 20, 1944.



This map shows a near straight line of American forces from the Atlantic coast to St. Lô, continuing east after a “bulge” to Caumont. That’s how things stood in Normandy on July 20 – D-Day plus 46.

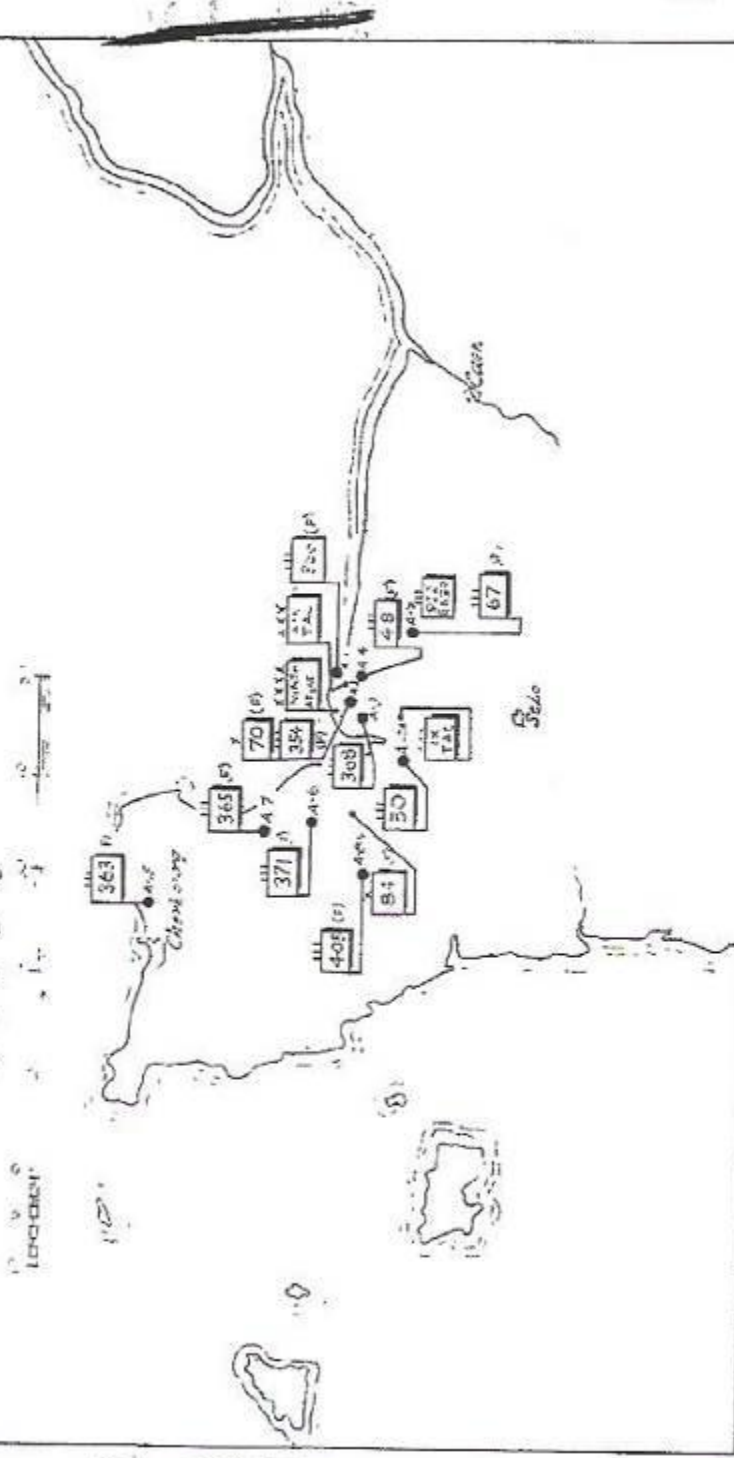
As Allied troops pushed out from the beachheads, the Ninth Air Force engineers followed. Existing French and German airfields in the region were repaired or expanded, and new airfields were constructed. Once constructed, units of the Ninth moved in, to operate out of France instead of England.

Here is a map of the Ninth Air Force installations between the beaches and St. Lô as of July 1, 1944.

Appendix 10

NINTH AIR FORCE TACTICAL INSTALLATIONS
ON THE CONTINENT
1 July 1944

LOCATIONS
M I L E S
0 1 2 3 4



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The Ninth Air Force's daily summary of operations notes the almost daily transfer of operations of a unit from England to one of the new bases in Normandy. The daily summary also notes the major operations of the Ninth on such day.

Here is an example of the daily summary of the Ninth. This summary is from July 14, 1944, which is a few days prior to the capture of St. Lô and is D-Day plus 40.

“Weather again curtails operations; 62 B-26s and A-20s, using Oboe, bomb a railway embankment at Bourth and rail bridge at Merey; fighters provide escort and fly armed reconnaissance over widespread areas of NW France, attacking bridges, trains, rail lines, and military transport targets; 85 enemy fighters give battle near Brezolles and Alencon; 6 fighters are claimed by US fighters, against 5 missing from the IX Fighter Command; the IX Tactical Command strafes and bombs defended positions ahead of the First Army; and fighters cut rail lines in the L’Aigle-Alencon area, bomb troop concentrations near Periers, and marshalling yards at Chateaudun and Aube-sur-Rile.”

July 14th was obviously a busy day for the Ninth, although it was typical of most days in Normandy.

Something else happened in Normandy on July 14th, which the Ninth Air Force neglected to note in its daily summary of operations. And that is: Private Chester Boyd and the 784th AAA Automatic Weapons Battalion arrived from England.

The 784th left Bristol Channel over two weeks before. They moved first to Christchurch, and then to Base C-15, Romsey, both in Hampshire. Their final move was to the Southampton docks. The battalion received their briefing of their role on the continent, and prepared their guns for the crossing, at Christchurch and C-15.

Chester probably saw his first shots “in anger” at Southampton. But the German air raid there was ably handled by a British anti-aircraft unit.

As one might expect, Southampton was extremely congested and difficult to maneuver. The 784th had to wait its turn for both loading and boarding.

Finally, the 784th boarded – Batteries A and B at Pier 38 on Liberty Ship *Charles D. Poston*, and Batteries C and D at Pier 36 on Liberty Ship *Charles Wilson Peale*.

I couldn't find a photograph of either the *Poston* or the *Peale*, or discover their fate. Here's a recent photo of a typical Liberty Ship, the preserved Liberty Ship *John W. Brown*.



Many heavy artillery units crossed the English Channel in transport vessels like these shown in the next photo. These are LSTs (“Liberty Ship Tank”). This photo was taken at Brixham, England, shortly after D-Day. I don't know if the *Poston* was an LST, or if the 784th artillery pieces crossed in a LST. This picture, though, shows the activity at the channel ports, on the English side, shortly after D-Day.



The Allies had yet to create a substantial harbor along the Normandy coast. In fact, the absence of a good harbor would haunt the Allies for weeks and months to come. Since there was not such a harbor, Chester landed at Utah Beach.

The next photo was taken at one of the beaches at D plus two. This scene continued for weeks after D-Day, including D plus 40 and most of the summer.



The channel crossing was uneventful, but there was an air attack on the beachhead as soon as the 784th arrived. The German planes were contested by an AAA unit which arrived a few days before and was already set for action.

As is obvious from the above photo, there was a “bee-hive” activity at Utah and Omaha Beach. It took a full day for the 784th to unload and begin moving to their assignment.

Their assignment was St. Marie du Mont – less than two miles inland from Utah Beach. Battery B was assigned to defend an air force petroleum supply station. The other batteries guarded ammunition dumps and other operational fighter bases.

The 784th's arrival also coincided with the transfer of the Patton's Third Army from England to Normandy.

While the Ninth Air Force was winning the air war over Normandy, the Ninth hadn't yet won. Meaning, planes from the German Air Force were very active in Normandy in July, 1944. By this time, the German military commanders realized that Normandy – and not Calais - was the real invasion, and every available Luftwaffe plane was put into action in Normandy.

The 784th's stay at Utah Beach was short, but intense. There were alerts nightly. Everyone slept in or near his foxhole. The battalion, for the first time, fired their guns “in anger”.

Historians now date the “Battle of Normandy” from D-Day, June 6, 1944, to July 24, 1944. General Order of the War Department 1945 gives the “Normandy” combat recognition to soldiers serving in Normandy at any time during this 48 day period. Pvt. Boyd and the 784th earned the Normandy combat recognition for their 10 days there during this period.

This doesn't mean that the fighting stopped at Normandy on July 25th. To the contrary, the Allies launched an offensive on the 25th (codenamed Cobra) which was extremely intense and prolonged. Historians – civilians and military – mark July 24th as the cutoff because of the significant change in the way the war was fought in France before and after that date.

Before July 24th, the war was fought yard-by-yard on the beaches and through the *bocage* country. On July 25th, the Allies started the “Breakout of St. Lô”, and progress was measured by the mile. The 48 days from D-Day to July 24th took the 12th Army Group from Utah and Omaha Beaches to St. Lô. The next 48 days, from July 25 through August and into early September, would take the 12th Army Group through Paris and Northern France and into Belgium and the western boundaries of Germany.

While July 24th marks the end of the “Battle of Normandy”, July 25th marks the beginning of the “Battle of Northern France”.