

BAND OF BROTHERS

Friday May 3rd: Left home headed to Atlanta Airport at 0855. Dropped Nicholas and Chinook off at Don Cantrell's at 0930. Turned-in Avis rental at 1340 and arrived at Crowne Plaza at 1430. At 1500 we had a briefing of the upcoming trip and at 1700 we had supper at the hotel. We then left for the Atlanta AMTRAK station. We left Atlanta at 2000 by train. As we arrived at Toccoa, everyone started getting their bags down from the overhead. All of a sudden the conductor told everyone to sit down. Just before that, we passed a good size fire right beside the train (left). We soon discovered the train had hit a car racing to beat the train at a crossing. We sat on the train for four hours until the Sheriff released the train and it went the final few hundred yards to the station. We heard the next morning that three people in their 20s were killed in the accident.

Coroner identifies 3 people killed Friday in train accident
by [MDJ staff](#)

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Stephens County Coroner Chris Stephens has identified the three people from Cobb County who were killed in a train accident Friday night.

Areale Leigh Nunn, 22, and Erich Boecklbauer, 23, both of Austell, and 20-year-old Crystal Crews of Kennesaw were killed after a train struck their car on the driver's side of the vehicle at a railroad crossing on Grand Smith Road in Toccoa.

Stephens said their deaths will be associated with trauma, but he has not released the official cause of death report from the county's medical examiner's office.

According to Gordy Wright with Georgia State Patrol, who is handling the investigation, the accident happened at about 10 p.m. Friday.

"The car was pushed off the tracks and caught fire after impact," he said. "One person was ejected from the vehicle."

The railroad crossing was stop-sign controlled, and the vehicle was hit as they were crossing the tracks.

Read more: [The Marietta Daily Journal - Victims identified in Toccoa train accident](#)

Saturday May 4th. We met at the Toccoa Military Museum (0900). After touring the museum, we were taken in 4-wheel drive vehicles to the top of Currahee Mountain. The soldiers had to run to the top and back in 47 minutes...a two mile distance one

way. The museum is really outstanding. The 506th soldiers stayed in horse stables in Aldbourne, UK, prior to D-Day. The gentleman who owns the horse stables told the museum he was going to tear them down several years ago. The Toccoa Museum arranged for a group of Britishers to dismantle the stables. They were then flown on a Mississippi ANG C-17 to Dobbins AFB, Atlanta, and trucked to Toccoa. They were reassembled in the museum. We then drove to Charlotte Airport for our trip to London. We left Charlotte at 1935 and arrived in London at 0826 the 5th.

Sunday May 5th. We got off the plane, loaded a tour bus from the Netherlands, and started our touring. We drove to Littlecote House. The house dates back to the 13th century. Some of the military officers stayed at Littlecote. The house has quite a history and is said to be one of the most haunted houses in all of the UK. We then visited Aldbourne where the 506th troops lived in the horse stables. We are staying in the Mercure Hotel in Newbury, Berkshire, UK.

Monday May 6th. We left the hotel at 5:30 am headed to Normandy. We caught a cross-channel ferry for the four hour ride. Guess I can say I went “on a cruise” during this trip. After landing, we headed to the town of Ste-Mere-Eglise, made famous by the paratrooper who got hung on the bell tower during the June 6, 1944 invasion. I show some pictures of the church inside and out, the stain glass window honoring the airborne units, a pump a paratrooper hid behind to avoid German fire, and some other sites around town.

We then travelled to Quineville where we will spend the next two nights. The Chateau is as old as it looks but nicely decorated. You can see several bunkers nearby built by the Germans to stop the coming invasion. The bunkers are built on the “high ground” looking down towards the beach. I’ve also included some other pictures from the village.

Tuesday May 7th. Today we started looking at the 506 Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) East Company’s mission in Normandy on D-Day. Look at the pictures Right to Left...backwards. We first visited a memorial to a C-47 aircraft shot down in the early morning hours of the invasion. The monument is in the shape of the tail of the aircraft. The 506th not only lost personnel but their commander as well. We then visited the famous “hedgerows” the troops had to fight through. I’m standing by one to give you an idea of the size...don’t pay any attention the frown, it was early! We visited another 82nd monument listing those members killed during the D-Day battles. And we met a French farmer on whose farm a major battle took place. He was kind enough to let us on his property considering he constantly gets tourists.

Why was the 82nd jumping behind the lines at Normandy? General Eisenhower was afraid the Germans would bring in reinforcements and push the invaders back into the sea. So, the paratrooper's job was to stop German reinforcements from approaching the beach. The 82nd personnel landed away from their assigned areas and had to immediately start regrouping. Twelve men from Easy Company ran into four artillery guns (105s-big guns) raining fire on Utah Beach. The guns were so well camouflaged the Americans didn't know they existed. Easy immediately attacked and over a 2.5 hour period destroyed them. This was a major victory in helping the attackers on Utah Beach. The farmer (blue on the left) let us see where the guns were located.

We then visited Utah Beach and a D-Day Museum. The American troops coming ashore here did not suffer the casualties as did those at Omaha. There is a new monument to Lieutenant Richard Winters of Easy Company. He was recommended for the Medal of Honor for taking out the artillery battery; he was awarded the Silver Star.

Next is a WWI memorial in a French village. When the Germans occupied Normandy four years earlier, the French hid the statue so the Germans would not destroy it. The town's church had a couple of interesting stories. Two German soldiers ask the priest to hide them when the Americans approached. He refused and didn't see the soldiers again. When they were sweeping the church the next day, someone started coughing. They looked under the alter and found the two soldiers hiding. Two German officers were in the bell tower with a map making plans to counter the Americans when a gust of wind blew the map from their perch. They came down to the church yard looking for the map. They saw a painter nearby and asked if he had seen it? He said no. Later he removed the map from his pants and gave it to the Americans.

Next pictures are Omaha beach. You can see the wide expanse the soldiers had to cross under heavy fire. We estimated it was about 600 yards! Then there is a picture of a "Mulberry" that looks like a present day dock. The allies need access to docks to land supplies after the soldiers went ashore. The idea of the Mulberry was borne. A large, hollow, concrete block was made...it floated and was towed across the English Channel. When it was in place, a plug was pulled and it filled with sea water...instant dock! This one is all that remains.

The next view is from inside a German fortification on a hill overlooking the beach. Because the field of fire was "across the beach" it tended to hit more soldiers. Folks coming ashore at Omaha beach stated this gun did more damage to American forces than any other.

Several years ago, French officials decided it was inappropriate to have a gun on the hill so they planned to move it. During the night, veterans climbed the hill and sawed off

the barrel and cemented it in the parking lot. The barrel is the pipe looking thing with holes drilled in the end.

Tomorrow we are off to Lillie on the French-Belgium border.

Wednesday May 8th We started today with a visit to Pointe du Hoc made famous in the movie The Longest Day. The Army Rangers had to scale a 100+ feet cliff to knock-out German guns. In the movie they struggled a lot and had trouble accomplishing the mission. In actuality, they did what they came to do. The first Ranger reached the top of the cliff five minutes after the assault started. And more came after him. We watched an interview (CD) of one of the lead Rangers scaling the cliff. But it is hard to change the impression the movie makes as we all know. The guns they were after were French 150mm WWI guns. The guns in the bunkers at the top of the cliff were telephone poles...fake! The real guns had been moved inland to protect them. The allies were so worried about these large caliber guns they ordered all bombers returning to England with their bomb loads still on board to drop them on Pointe du Hoc. The landscape was so cratered it resembled the moon. The Rangers moved inland and found the guns unmanned...the German gunners were having a meeting. The Rangers slipped-in, destroyed the mechanism that made the guns work and slipped-out unnoticed. Can you imagine what the gunners thought when they returned to their non-working guns. They didn't even know the Americans had landed!

We then visited the American cemetery at Omaha Beach. We visited the grave of Sgt. John Ray and standing behind the cross in the picture is Herb Suerth. Herb was a member of Easy Company joining them after the D-Day experience. He was later wounded and evacuated. He is providing history on the unit as we follow them through Europe. Remember the paratrooper who got his chute hung on the church tower in Ste-Mere-Eglise? There were two troopers on the roof at that point. Ray, although critically wounded, noticed a German taking aim to kill them. He killed the German with his pistol before dying of his wounds.

Thursday May 9th Today we arrived in Holland. We are looking at Operation Market Garden, and the end-run attempt to go around the Germans and into the heart of Germany ending the war early. The mission was to send paratroopers into Holland to capture a string of bridges so armor (tanks) could drive into Germany. Failing to capture all the bridges doomed the mission to failure. The Germans ruined the plan by their quick response. It wasn't a lack of effort on the allies' part. I show pictures of the bridge at Wilhelmina Canal, Son, Holland. This was one of the first bridges and was partially destroyed delaying the advance. You will also see pictures of several memorials along the way and finally the bridge taken intact on Maas Canal at Grave, Holland. The Operation was a narrow south to north affair. Look at picture of the map

of Operation Market Garden. One of the memorials to American and English soldiers shows a coffin with the lid removed...quite moving. The folks in Holland love the Americans for their effort to liberate them from Nazi Rule. Even today, they readily remember the sacrifices of American soldiers on their behalf.

Friday May 10th We continued our march through Holland following the 506 PIR/Easy Company. Our first stop was the Nijmegen Bridge. Since the fortifications were so strong on the south end of the bridge, the paratroopers went down stream a couple of miles and crossed the river. Gun/artillery fire was heavy and they lost about 50 men in the crossing. As they approached the bridge, the Germans attempted to blow it up. Seems some resistance fighters managed to cut the wires and the bridge was taken by the paratroopers. An old castle (built 1646) looking building near the end of the bridge served as a landmark for the soldiers. They called it "The Charlemagne Castle" although King Charlemagne was around many centuries before and was not involved with the castle.

We then visited the Tor Schoonder Logt building where Richard Winters (remember his new statue at Normandy) had his picture made. (I will include the original picture) We weren't supposed to take the picture so we all jumped off the bus, took the picture, and high-tailed it! Nearby was a site where a skirmish took place between Easy Company and some Germans. I have included pictures, although there isn't much to see, and the write-up on a nearby memorial to the event. We passed a strange looking contraption used to control "tidal waves." The Dutch are masters at controlling the water around here.

Our final bridge was the bridge in the movie "A Bridge Too Far;" at Arnhem. The paratroopers seized the bridge and set-up defensive positions. However, the Germans attacked and retook the bridge. Operation Market Garden had failed. The Dutch people hid a lot of allied troops for the remaining months of the war. The Germans exacted a heavy toll on the Dutch people. In the remaining months of the war they were basically starved to death with 250,000 dying of starvation.

Tomorrow we head to Bastogne for the "Battle of the Bulge." Herb, our WWII vet traveling with us, joined Easy Company as a replacement as they headed to Bastogne. It looks to be a very historical visit...and I will mark one off my "Bucket List!"

The final pictures are of a local war memorial cemetery I ran across walking around this afternoon in Mook. Some of them are English and were involved in Operation Market Garden.

Saturday May 11th A good part of this morning was spent driving from Molenhok, Netherlands to Bastogne, Belgium. We visited the American Margraten Cemetery,

Netherlands, as our first stop. We met a great bunch of Dutch citizens who look after American graves. They are assigned individual graves by the Belgium government. And yes, there is a waiting list of Dutch citizens wanting an assigned grave. I have included a picture of the group that spoke to us and then a couple of individuals with their assigned graves. They have really gone all out. They have researched the soldier whose grave they look after. They have even contacted the family and in some instances have hosted the family in Belgium or traveled to the U.S. to meet them. They have pictures and histories of their soldiers. A very impressive group! The Dutch have not forgotten the Americans who liberated their country. It is meeting folks like this that make the trip worthwhile!

We then went to Bastogne for lunch and proceeded to a military museum. The museum is located on an active Belgium military base. The Germans had been falling-back since D-Day. Hitler decided to go on the offensive and seize the initiative. The Germans organized 250,000 soldiers and tanks secretly. And then broke out in the Ardennes Forest pushing the Americans back. Way back. Not only was it a tremendous effort to keep the Germans from succeeding, the winter was the coldest in 50 years. We visited the underground Headquarters of Brig Gen McAuliffe who uttered the famous words, "Nuts" when the Germans asked him to surrender. The museum has recreated McAuliffe's office and the Christmas Dinner had by the Headquarters Staff. The pictures on the sides of buildings are in the same place they were taken in 1944. We heard nothing from Herb today but tomorrow we are going to the spot where he lived through the Battle of the Budge. I expect to hear firsthand how the battle went.

Sunday May 12th Today was a cold and rainy day until we finish touring and then the sun came out! First I'm going to tell you Herb Suerth's (WWII veteran) story of Bastogne and then I'll go through the pictures.

Herb was a replacement for Easy Company. He arrived from England as the Company was being sent to Bastogne. He said they were loaded into a "40 foot open top semi-trailer" and trucked to the front in 18 straight hours of driving. He said they were so crammed in the truck they could not sit down...stood up all the way. He said the American Army was in full retreat when they arrived. Soldiers were telling them to run for it to save their lives. The ill-equipped paratroopers started asking those retreating for their ammo. The members of the Company coming from Holland (Operation Market Garden) had summer uniforms and equipment. They hadn't had time to be re-supplied with winter gear. Herb on the other hand, coming from England, was wearing winter gear. When they arrived in Bastogne, they were immediately dropped off and went about setting up their defenses. The first few days weren't so cold he said. But then the temperature dropped to minus 10 degrees. The winter of 1944-45 turned out to be the coldest in 50 years. He said his friend was sent forward with only a knife as a

weapon as he didn't have time to be issued a rifle. The Company started the Battle of the Bulge with 140 men and at the end 62 were left fighting. About 17 or 18 died, the rest were wounded, had trench foot, or pneumonia. The German Air Force was able to attack the paratroopers but the American Air Force was grounded in England because of bad weather and unable to help. Finally, on December 23rd, the weather broke and the American Air Force arrived with supplies, bombers, and fighters. General Patton's Third Army also arrived. This was the last ditch effort for the Germans and the battle went on into January. It is unbelievable what these guys went through.

The "Star" Memorial outside Bastogne was built and dedicated July 4, 1946...just a year after the war. You have to remember these folk's lives and their town had been destroyed and yet they managed to build this huge memorial. They really appreciated the sacrifices made by the Americans to liberate them. Dean Martin points to his home state on the memorial. Don climbed on a tank to see if he could break something.

Herb is shown standing beside a memorial to the 101st and there is a picture of the woods across the road where the Company was located. The next picture is a field the Company had to cross to get to the Germans in the far off building. Tom Nelson of Texas is shown in the remains of a foxhole occupied 70 years ago by my Easy Company.

We stopped at a Germany Cemetery and learned several interesting things. Per the unconditional surrender terms, the Germans may not fly their country flag...they can only use the light blue flag shown. Each marker has names on both sides. I thought there were three bodies on top of each other. Nope, there are three bodies side by side, a total of six men per cross. Notice the last name...Fritz. He is 52 years old and a naval captain. What is he doing dying with infantrymen in the middle of Belgium? We saw a lot of graves with older men listed on them.

The light colored house survived the war despite being in the thick of it. Note the house number? The number on the bottom (15A) was the original in 1945. The top number is the current number. When the Germans came to the small town of Noville, they selected eight men at random and shot them. One was a priest. The last picture is General George Patton's grave at the American Cemetery in Luxembourg.

Monday May 13th We spent most of the day traveling from Luxembourg to Karlsruhe, Germany. We did make two stops, however. The first was Fort Simserhof (French) on the Maginot Line named after French Minister of Defense (1930) Andre Maginot. After the horrible trench warfare and loss of life in WWI, Maginot decided to build an impregnable defense between France and Germany. He had a series of forts built from France's border with Switzerland all the way to Belgium...see picture of map. The French never thought Germany would violate Belgium's neutrality. Think again! The Germans went around the wall through Belgium and into France...which fell in six

weeks. The word “maginot” today means “someone with grand ideas.” Anyway, we went through the fort on a trolley and saw a movie. I went through Fort Hackenburg on the Maginot Line last year and it is on my travel blog. If you are interested in the Maginot Line, that is a better Blog.

We then visited Haguenau, France, where Easy Company faced off against the Germans across a swollen stream. It obviously wasn't swollen today. Easy was ordered to cross the stream and capture German prisoners for intelligence reasons. The only downside of the raid was Private Jackson was wounded and died...by his own grenade. The picture was taken on the German side looking towards Easy Company's location. The house is the same one Easy Company occupied while in Haguenau. Tomorrow we head to Berchtesgaden for our last three days on the tour.

Tuesday May 14th We crossed southern Germany today...a lot riding. Our first stop was Dachau Concentration Camp in Munich. Dachau was a labor camp, not an extermination camp. As Hitler's forces swept across Europe, able-bodied men were rounded-up and sent to Germany for labor. Hitler considered this his “economic multiplier.” He didn't treat them very well and a lot of them died. Dachau was the first labor camp started in 1933...six years before he invaded Poland to start WWII. At first it was used for criminals and political prisoners. You could serve your time and be released back into society. When WWII came along, Dachau became a concentration camp...and all other camps were modeled after Dachau...that's the single distinction for Dachau! The number of deaths is estimated at around 25-26,000 with over 200,000 passing through during its operation 1933-45. Although Dachau had gas chambers, they were never used. Inmates were shot, hanged, beaten and starved to death, but not gassed. I've included some pictures of this unforgettable place.

Late in the afternoon, we arrive in Berchtesgaden. I took some pictures before supper. A couple of them are of the train station. The three archways are where Hitler arrived on his train trips to Berchtesgaden. He would be met by legions of admirers and take-off in his chauffeured Mercedes. Although you cannot go inside, it provides a look at the history of this area. I have also included pictures of the “Eagles Nest” on top of the mountain. This is my third time here, but the first time I've seen it...no clouds or rain today. We visit the Eagles Nest for lunch tomorrow and see where Easy Company spent their final days of WWII.

Wednesday May 15th We were in Berchtesgaden today. We started by riding around looking at former Nazi sites (buildings) and then visited the museum (Documentation Center). We went into the underground complex designed for the higher up Nazis to use in the event of an attack. We were told Herman Goering filled his underground bunker with his wine collection. We then visited the Eagles Nest and had lunch. This is

my third time there and the first time I could see anything...the two other times it was foggy and rainy.

This afternoon when I had free time I went looking for Paula (Hitler) Wolff's grave. She was the sister of Hitler. Hitler asked her to change her name to Wolff...an alias he had used. Hitler provided her support until she died. She lived until 1960 and is buried in Berchtesgaden. Her grave got so popular with tourists they covered it up by either putting another name on it or burying someone on top of her. Anyway, I found the grave and took pictures. I compared my pictures with her original marker (wood) and the current name plate obviously was placed over hers. They didn't bother to replace her marker, just cover it up. Compare the marker with her name on it with the pictures I took...same place.

Across the street from the hotel is a cemetery. We went over today and looked at the grave of Dietrich Eckart, who is called the father of the Nazi Party. I need to research that some more? I found out today Easy Company was not the first unit at the Eagles Nest but got credit (101st Airborne) for capturing it.

Thursday May 16th We ended our Band of Brothers tour today with a visit to Lake Zell in Austria. The 506 PIR/Easy Company was sent to the towns Kaprun and Zell am See on Lake Zell after the war ended to handle a large group of "displaced persons." These included refugees and former German soldiers. The men really enjoyed the "laid back lifestyle," time off, good food, wine, and pretty local girls. However, in the back of their minds was Japan. They all thought they were going to the Pacific Theater to invade Japan. The last casualty suffered by Easy Company occurred when one of their members drank too much and was killed in a traffic accident.

The members of Easy Company have become popular since the HBO series by Tom Hanks and everywhere we went on the tour folks knew about "The Band of Brothers."