

## **Gordon E. Cross - WWII Diary**

### **35<sup>th</sup> Division**

### **134<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment**

### **Medical Detachment**

#### **Introduction: By William G. Cross, son of Gordon Edward Cross**

Like many combat veterans he never talked much about it. Oh, he'd say a few things now and then but I was too young to understand or appreciate what he went through and didn't have the foresight to follow up and have any detailed discussions about his experiences. My mother said that, also like many veterans, he suffered from nightmares years after his return from the war. Dad never thought he'd be drafted, let alone see combat. Once there he never thought he'd be coming home. Entering the army at age 38 and trained as an X-Ray technician, he felt secure in the knowledge that he'd be attached to some sort of field hospital far from the front. Such was not to be the case.

In 1944 with the war raging in France there was a constant need for replacements. At the time anyone with any sort of medical training often got sent right to the front. So it was he found himself in a fox hole one night with a young soldier who was wishing he were 10 years older. Dad inquired why? The young man said he was 20 years old but had heard that those who were 30 or older were never sent to the front. Dad at the time was 39. He said he didn't have the heart to tell the young man.

Drafted in October, 1943, dad became a member of the 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, a unit that attacked 35 out of its first 45 days in combat. It was a group that suffered over 23,000 casualties during WWII, a level which represents a 180% attrition rate. Originated during the Indian Wars, the men of the 35<sup>th</sup> wore the Santa Fe shoulder patch, a white cross on a blue field honoring the men who blazed the old Santa Fe trail. Although he was never seriously wounded, he saw many that were. This diary is unedited and was compiled by my father after the war from bits of paper he carried with him throughout the war in his pack or helmet headband. It represents his words regarding what he experienced as a front line medic assigned to the 134<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment Medical Detachment between July, 1944 and May, 1945, from Omaha Beach to the fall of Germany.

## **Diary of a Front Line Medic - WWII**

**Gordon Edward Cross**

**35<sup>th</sup> Division**

**134<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment**

Florence, my wife, seven months pregnant, was expecting me home for dinner, but suddenly I couldn't leave Upton, New York and even telephone calls were forbidden. When I didn't call, Florence knew I wouldn't be home for dinner for a long time.

Our ship, the Dominion Monarch, left New York May 1, 1944. Crossing the Hudson River on the ferry I could see our London Terrace apartment building. We marched on board to the strains of "Strip Pokka", played by a WAC band. Jammed into the mess hall, still wearing O.D's with a full horseshoe roll, we were like sardines and hot as hell. Finally hammocks were slung head to toe, as close as possible. During the day they were rolled and stacked and I never saw mine again after the first night. The food was poor and some guys didn't eat half the meals. One fellow I knew lived on candy bars.

The 14 day voyage was not bad. We had good weather. Two or three times there were alerts and sub chasers dropped ash cans around the ship. We gathered we were on a northerly route in a convoy of about 50 vessels. I met Creighton, Brickey and Dugan. Arrived in Liverpool Sunday, May 14, and disembarked to a recording of my old friend Frank Parker singing "Begin the Beguine."

Loaded onto a tiny train, we traveled to Warminster where we arrived about 11 PM. Black as pitch. There had been an air raid the night before. We lined up and stumbled about six miles, carrying that heavy pack. It was so dark I tied a white handkerchief to the man ahead.

The camp was called "Chalcutor" –"Chocolate". It was a tent city, set up that day on the summer place of the sister-in-law of the Duke of Kent. We were handed two blankets and a brand-new army cot which we struggled to set up with numb fingers by match light. This was May, but I have never been colder. It was a penetrating dampness that chilled to the bone. The next morning at daybreak we were all out scavenging for paper, hay, anything for insulation. At night we went to bed early and piled all our equipment on top of us to keep warm. Got to talking to a tent-mate from Connecticut named George Comer. He knew my good friend and fellow singer, J. Alden Edkins. In fact, Alden was now working on George's uncle's farm in East Haddam, Connecticut. (George was destined to become my good friend.)

The English countryside was lovely. I heard my first cookoo. Beautiful flowers in the little villages, but cadence marching on the paved roads was "for the birds". With luck, I managed to get on as "mail

clerk” which got me out of the hikes and KP details. My buddy, Comer, was having real trouble with the hikes, so I managed to get him on the mail detail too. He was most grateful.

The small English towns were very attractive in a quaint way, but the shops had nothing much to sell but postcards. Tried English ale and stout. Decided English teas better than their coffee. Most people very poor by our standards. If a man drove a car, he couldn’t afford tobacco.

We were assigned to a “replacement” package. Theoretically, this included the replacements needed by a division in combat. Men began leaving, a few at a time, depending on their specialty numbers. Finally, our package was alerted and moved about 20 miles to “Tilshed”, a forsaken wind-swept camp which became more pleasant with warmer weather. Creighton, Deeds and I put on several shows which the boys seemed to enjoy. Deeds did a “fire-eating” act, played the accordion and accompanied me on some old “chestnuts”. Our GI show was a big hit.

Spent the early morning hours of “D Day” hanging over fences in the woods and lined up before the latrines which were hopelessly overworked. Overhead we heard the roar of the planes and sometimes could make out the black and white stripes on the wings. The big attack was on.

Moved to a staging area about 6 PM, July 12<sup>th</sup>. This was it, and we were a bit grim. We’d had inspections all the way along, but here we got final shortages, put on wool OD’s with gas-impregnated fatigues over them. Next morning, we moved out to nearby Weymouth, where we could see ships waiting in the harbor. Weymouth seemed nice, and I thought I’d like to arrive under different circumstances.

All along I felt fortunate. I was an X-ray technician headed for an evacuation hospital, while a lot of these guys were headed for the front lines.

Crossed the channel at night. Picked up the French coast early in the morning. About noon we reached Omaha beach where there was tremendous activity. Boats taking men in, ducks unloading supplies, sunken ships, burned-out tanks, barrage balloons – all the grim evidence of war. Went to shore in a small boat. A man just back of me killed himself and the bullet wounded an officer behind him. On shore, still carrying that huge horseshoe pack, we walked up a long landing platform, along a rough sandy beach to a road running parallel to the beach.

Waited for our group to assemble and then began to walk. They said it was a couple miles. We walked three, and then they said two miles. Tapes along the track road read “cleared of mines to ditch”. We walked miles, but it was still two more – now one mile, now 300 yards—just another mile. Finally we made it. It was an empty field. We’d passed through a couple small French villages where old men and women passed out cider—made us feel like the conquering heroes—no mistaking the gratitude of these people. I’ve never been more tired. I spread out a raincoat and slept.

Next morning we took off in trucks. Now we began to see what war was really like. Isigny was one town, “was” is right. I never dreamed of such destruction. Piles of rubbish, half houses which were even worse. Trees stripped of leaves look obscene—fields churned. Here were hundreds of veterans

going back to the front and also a lot of C.E.S. That means “combat exhaustion.” Where is that evacuation hospital? “No, your spec. number won’t be changed.” They seem to need a lot of medics.

All the combat men have 29<sup>th</sup> or 35<sup>th</sup> division patches. The 29<sup>th</sup> came in on D-day. I heard a couple of vets talking—“Sam got it and so did Ed and Pete and that officer and the staff sergeant. There are about four left out of the whole squad.”

How lucky I am to be in X-ray! Strange they should need so many X-ray technicians way up here! Several of the medics are in X-ray.

Air raid—pretty red balls floating through the air. “Keep that helmet on! That is lead and steel floating around up there!”

Sound asleep—clang, clang—a gas attack! Dear God, where is that mask...There, I’ve got it! You clumsy bastard. How about my hands. Should I try to get into that impregnated clothing? Yelling and screaming from the C.E.’s. Good lord, they don’t have gas masks! What’s that sound? The all clear? Thank God!

“Cross, Dugan!!!” Well, here we go. It’s the 35<sup>th</sup> division. What’s that about spec. numbers? Mine is Medical Technician. What the Hell is that? Not litter bearer, thank heaven.

Our truck stops at the 134<sup>th</sup> regiment service company. “You’d better dig in good—there are some holes. There was a raid two nights ago. See that truck and those shrapnel holes.” A guy tries to tell us that it isn’t too awfully bad. He’s a might doleful Joe, but I guess he means well. I wish he didn’t look so sad.

Next morning we move up to Regimental Headquarters—a small tent in a field. “Meet Sgt. Ozzie and Major”—the major seems like a nice guy. “You’re from New York and a singer? Well, glad to have you.” This guy seems smooth—he will fix me up, I know.

We watch a 1000 plane strike at St. Lo. It is wonderful, though we didn’t realize how wonderful. Blasovich and Winters go to second, Casey to first, Dugan and Cross to third battalion.

Dead cows, swollen horses—stink, trees smashed, fields pockmarked. Along a wooded road into a grove where there is a tent, a jeep, several bicycles and half a dozen men. There is gunfire close by. “How far is the front?” All around there—a half circle ahead. Why aren’t these guys afraid? Some of them are! That guy has a haunted look in his eyes, another is trembling, and, dear God, he is crying! Captain Matt, battalion surgeon and our commanding officer has a worried look, too. “Well, paint Red Crosses on your helmets.” Now I know there is no X-ray tent. I felt sorry for Dugan, coming up when he said to Sgt. Osborne that it was a shame to spend all that time and money to train a man for X-ray and then -----.

Third battalion is in two sections. Dugan and I go to Captain Friedman’s section. He seems like a cool duck. Several of the guys seem nice, but a couple are very nervous. “You’d better dig in well, some shelling here.” Dugan and I pick out a spot and dig. Whistle, crack, we hit the dirt. Crack again. Those are 88’s and nobody needs to tell us. Dig, dig, deeper, deeper. Now a roof, more screaming shells.

Dugan and I scramble down and lie trembling. My knees won't stop shaking. That must be all for now. "Where did those hit?" One in the road, one across above us, and one lower.

Wounded coming in. I do what I can. Unfold litters, etc. How those guys rip into that clothing. Scissors slither up a pant leg, rip off a shirt sleeve. "Sulfa powder, carlyles, what in hell are carlyles? Oh, those paper-covered bandages with the tails on them. Triangles for slings, leg splints, plasma, morphine syrettes.

"Bob, Cherry, Cross, Jack, litter squad to the C.P." Grab a litter blanket somebody, got an aid kit? By jeep for about a mile—that's St. Lo. From here on foot. Keep moving! Hit the dirt! Let's go—that building is the C.P.

"This fellow will guide you up." "Yah, it's my buddy, this way." Up through utter desolation. Your mind refuses to believe such destruction. No building not hit. Dead bodies. Through littered streets, into a church, down the front steps. The soldier tells us, "he's in the middle of that field over there, about 200 yards. I can't go any further because we're under observation from here."

"Well, if they can see us let's stand up so they can tell we're litter bearers. That's our only chance." Nothing happens. We go on over a wall, across piles of rubble. How will we ever get a patient back up this way on a litter? Now we're in the field, must be further. There he is. Bandages, morphine. Let's go. R. R. R. ratatat, we hit the dirt! That's a burp gun! Anybody hit? Christ, we can't stay here! Grab hold and swing right, away from that gun. Let's go! My lungs are bursting. Set him down a minute. Change hands. Let's go. Up over the wall. There's the church, here's his buddy. "What in the world were you two guys doing out there?" "We're from the Navy, we were just looking for some excitement."

Same litter squad to the C.P. now set up in a cement crypt in the St. Lo cemetery. Casualties in outpost up ahead, but because of observation can't go forward until dark. Now 3 PM. Climb into a hole in the graveyard, protected by a big headstone. Whistle, crunch! Are you all right? Kicked dirt all over us. More shelling. Thank Heaven for a good deep hole. Tombstones over the living. Scream, crunch, that one hit a stone close by. It's getting dark. "Hey, you guys, let's go!" One man is missing, but we can't wait. Up this street, turn down to the left, over the fence, cross the street, through the gate. "Quiet, watch the light!" Down the stairs into a basement lit by a couple candles. Mattresses along one side. Several guys are hit and there are only two of us. Well, we'll carry the worst one and lead the walking wounded. Broken leg. My God, he's over six feet. We can't even get him up those steps, but we do. Now back to the C.P. Left here, now right, over that fence, across the field. "Down, dam it, they're shelling the road." Run, for god's sake, we can't stay here. "Wait, I can't hold on any longer." Rest a minute. Another 100 yards. Down again. "Sorry, but I can't do any better." Let's go again. "Wait, I gotta stop." A mile and a half of this, it can't be much further. Here's the jeep, thank God. I've never been so tired in my life.

We are going to move up. We pack supplies into packs and move up to that same St. Lo cemetery and dig in. A shell hits a mausoleum we'd inspected two minutes ago. Now I dig in earnest. What are these

bones? I'm a ghoul! Sorry, but the dead must make way for the living. Better one alive than two piles of bones. We continue digging among the graves.

We move on into town. That's a laugh. There isn't a whole house standing. We "captured" a bunch of bicycles, so here I am riding and pushing a bike through St. Lo. Dead men, some GI's. Caved-in earthen sacks. Were these once living men? Bloated, turning black. The smell of death is everywhere. On single file through the rubble. Watch out for bobby traps! There's one taped off by the engineers, a Heinie pistol. An underground hospital, they say it was trapped with a 500 pound bomb. Bicycles trapped too.

On again to a chateau on the outskirts where our aid station has been set up. Wounded pouring in. Litter calls. We go up a street blocked by a blown up tank. Mines everywhere, under little piles of rock, in the open. Some walking wounded. "Some casualties up ahead." Two wounded. We put one on a litter and half carry the other. It's a long haul.

"Two more litters." OK, same trip over again. A dead Heiny in a dark green uniform. It looks like a woman to us. Shot out of a tree. It's dark now. Where the hell were those mines? Careful! Two men carry and one walks ahead to find the path. "Jesus, was that a mine?" We'd sure as hell know if it was.

Engineers, bulldozers working on the streets. It didn't look as though those streets could ever be used again, but those bulldozers are halfway through already. If they can't push it aside, they go over the top. Ammunition bearers going up all night long. Bullets for M-1's, bullets for machine guns, like water through a sieve. Bullets, bullets, bullets. We relay the wounded back from the aid station. The ambulances can't get through yet. Back past those dead Heinies, to the left and the first relief. Dear God, this is only one day of battle!

"Captain Matt wants you."

"Cross, I want you to go out to K company as aide man. Better stock up you aid kits." Sgt. Tomasowitz says, "Don't take any unnecessary chances, take care of yourself. Have you got morphine? Know how to use it? Company K is over there – they're in reserve – report to Sgt. Brown."

I find the Sgt. And he introduces me to Lt. \_\_\_\_\_. "We jump off as spearhead at one o'clock." The boys are stretched out along a hedgerow. Some are writing and others are just sitting. The sergeants pass out bandoliers of ammo., hand grenades and three rations. Writing might not be a bad idea. What can you say? What is written seems empty, feeble, but I put it in my helmet band.

Five minutes to go. Ready? Let's go. "Follow the Lt" they told me, so I stay close to the Lt's heels. We're over the first hedge and nothing has happened. We move up in a scattered line. Still nothing. Suddenly there are shots on the left and then of the right. That's where "I" and "L" companies are. On ahead, breathless, tense, alert. Just like a hunt, except this time the "game" shoots back. Down a little hill, surround a house, nothing here. A river, more like a wide creek, ahead. A bridge downstream about 100 yards, but the Lt. jumps in and wades. They told me to follow, so in to the waist and across. Out running through a meadow and half way across there is a whistle crack of an 88. Thank heaven, I

didn't try to make that bridge. Somebody is hit – the last man across. We get him into the shelter of the hill and find it's only a flesh wound in the calf of his leg. But I would have been behind him.

We move on slowly. It's getting dark, so we dig in around the edges of a small field. The Lt. comes by to check on casualties and we walk back towards the meadow but decide there aren't any more wounded. Back digging again. I am down about six inches when suddenly the sky lights up. Don't move! I remember if you stand still they may not see you. Here they come. Where was that big Kraut foxhole? Over there. When the flare fades, I run for it. Already seven or eight are in it, but there has to be room for one more. Bombs coming closer – all around us – must have got a lot of our boys. Anybody hurt? No answer, so I take a quick look around and decide we were lucky.

Back to the cellar, but no room to lie down. Sit all night with knees under my chin, cramps in my legs and chilling cold. Next morning find bomb craters in a triangle pattern, not 100 feet from our foxhole.

Resume attack at 8 AM. Tiny hedgerow fields. Never see more than your head. We line up along a sunken road and go over the hedge in four or five different places. We're halfway through a wheat field when they open up. Burp guns and machine guns everywhere. "Medic! Medic!" It's the Lt. Hit in the arm, but not bad, and he'll keep going. Another lad close by is nicked, then a man back near the hedge. Base of the throat – a large Carlyle- really hit bad. Have to get him out of here – arm over my shoulder, half turn, crack, crack – brains all over me – great hole in his head. I get over the fence, but I don't know how. We move along the hedgerow – more men hit. Bandage, bandage, bandage. Both aid kits low. Got to get more supplies. Work with other companies along the sunken road. Bandage, morphine, gaping flesh wounds, sucking sounds. The bad ones don't complain, but one kid nicked makes an awful fuss. Must check and see how many litter cases. Go ahead one row and check right, then left. Kid dug in right in the corner of the hedgerow. Move away a few feet and crash – right in the corner. Run back, but there is nothing I can do. On to right again, over a hedge and – a dead man in every foxhole – shells must have come from behind. On along the hedge and –there are men standing looking at me- they are not GI's!! They are Germans! We must be to the right – run, run, run, over a hedge, across a field, another hedge, the sunken road – men in holes here too. All are dead – crossfire. Some S.P's got behind us we heard later.

This was bloody Sunday, July 29. Probably the worst day the 134<sup>th</sup> ever had. One shell in that road got the Major and four others. Took off the back of his head, but he still lived a little while. Blasovitch (came in with me) got it – he was loading an ambulance at the end of that sunken road. The Germans knew exactly where we were on their maps and caught us in a murderous crossfire.

We are in reserve. The Heinies seem to be falling back, fighting a rear-guard action. We move up slowly, checking every point – orchard, farm woods. Dig in whenever we stop –four or five times a day, always some shelling around dusk. Nothing so chilling as an 88. Whistle, crack, and a crunching, rending sound. Feel like an insect and a blind giant swinging a club at you. Am I scared? You're damned right – there are no atheists here.

Must cross the Voire river. We sing right and go through a narrow pass with hills going up at 45 degrees on both sides. One machine gun could wipe us out, but we see only a couple of scared Germans – kids,

probably running away. Find a narrow spot where we cross on a ladder covered by a couple planks. Keep left of the road – mines on the right. We're across and start up a steep rocky path, scouts moving ahead. Crack! An 88. We scatter and dig. "L" company tries on our right. They've hit something – machine guns, rifles, burp guns, 50 MMs. Quiet again. We're pulling back. There go two medics after L company casualties. Should I go too? My company is moving. Maybe I'd better stay. Later I heard both those medics were killed.

Back to the road- we go straight up through the woods, dig in, then on again straight over. I follow Joe Kimberly, best soldier I ever saw. Through one field, halfway up another when all Hell breaks loose – that house is a damned pillbox! "Medic! Medic!" – one hit in the arm, another in the leg. Bandage and help to the hedge. Must be more hit. Try putting my jacket on a stick so the Red Cross can be seen. Start up left side of the field – crump, crump, crump – mortars – walk down the middle of the field.

Man hit in foot – can't walk – help him back to trail. Where the Hell is it? Must be this way. There are some buildings and then a German officer. Run, run. How could we get lost! "Hey, where is that aid station? What outfit is this?" "The 320<sup>th</sup>."

"Where is the 134<sup>th</sup>?" Must be left. Got to get back. Go along river a long way and finally meet litter bearers. K company is left and higher up. Black as ink. Up, up, stumble and fall. Some buildings. K company is straight ahead 200 yards. Finally find them and go to work on wounded. Two bad and five lightly hit. One boy has broken leg and broken arm, got to keep him warm. No blankets, but gather up discarded clothing. Nothing to do but wait for litter bearers. Crash, crash, crump. Whose are those – ours or theirs? Good God, it's both – theirs just barely over and ours just clearing us – never heard anything like this. How can they miss? Two AM, the litter bearers – one team and two litters – aid man Taylor and I carry one. Cross a field, over some barbed wire, now down a trail. Feel with your feet. Stagger and slide. Half a mile more and we're on the road – the aid station? "Maybe a mile." It was two or three. Silent shapes along the road. Were they GI's? The aid station – it's 3:30 AM Tired, numb, K company wasn't wiped out, but they lost 18 men.

Open country again. Jerry is falling back. We're moving somewhere on trucks. The 35<sup>th</sup> getting a rest? Rest, Hell, it's along move. We're on the wrong road. Planes overhead, strafing and bombing, bombing the road we should have been on.

"Cross, I'm taking your place. You go in to the aid station." Nice clean-cut kid named Snowbreak from Minnesota. Killed in the attack his first day. He took my place!

Morphine, bandages, sulpha, splints – faster – there are so many – hurry – move them back – time may save their lives. This is not X-ray, but it's a reprieve after being an aid man. WE didn't know at the time, but Mortaine was a huge trap – the **Falaise pocket**, and we were the stopper. An important victory and the end of one phase. It's Sunday and we're resting. I remember singing "Abide With Me" for the chaplain's service. A lot of men never paid much attention to church before.

The Germans are falling back and we are moving rapidly by jeep. It's just like the movies – crowds line the small town streets, waving flags and throwing flowers, apples, plums. Leo rolls cheese cans down



the road and we laugh as the kids scramble for them. People try to shake hands, throw kisses. It's exhilarating, but I keep thinking there must be a camera somewhere. Le Mans tops everything. This is a big town and it's delirious. Street cafes, curbs, swarming pretty girls. The Makee are a big help now. They know the country and where the Heinies are. The Germans are disorganized here. We capture replacements who do not know where the front is. Stop at "Aix on Othe" while the woods are cleared ahead – thousands of prisoners – rest. The mayor of Le Mans gave us fresh eggs and a black and white puppy for a mascot.

Another sudden move. Stop on battle field of First World War – old trenches, rusted bayonets, parts of rifles, gas masks. Advance on foot under scattered shelling. I receive a letter from my wife, Florence. Tells me we have a beautiful daughter Carol, now a month old. Her picture looks like one of my baby pictures.

Set up aid station in a beer parlor. Bed down. Get orders to move at 10:30 PM. It's black as Hell. How can the drivers see? Seems we are following the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion. They've crossed the Mosel on a bridge and have been trapped, bridge blown behind them.

Out of the darkness – a jeep with a wounded man. Get him on a litter and work under blankets for blackout. He's hit hard, broken leg. Must get him to the hospital. Capt. Matt points where the hospital should be and we move over crooked country roads, back through two villages. "Here's where we were." Turn right along the railroad. Can this be right? Up a hill through a village. Should be here, but it isn't. Back to the aid station. Try to make patient more comfortable, check maps and try again, this time after three hours we make it. Thank goodness, somebody has a bottle.

Daylight we catch up. Jeeps are off road just above Mosel. Shelling. Got to find cover. Left a half mile are deep woods. Dig in. One boy cut off with second battalion comes in. He hid all day in the brush watching German tanks and gun emplacements. At dark we swim river. Take him to Lt. Colonel. He was cited later for this.

Outposts in buildings along road leading to bridge. Under terrific shell fire. Litter call. Nothing to do but make a run for it in the jeep. Trees cut bare by shrapnel, branches on the road, but we get through. One man in ditch two in a basement. Heavy shelling. Get one out, then the other. Shells bracket road behind us, but we're lucky.

Swing up river toward Nancy which we take without too much trouble. Heinie artillery catches us on a narrow street, but our luck holds. Set up aid station in former schoolhouse. French band comes down the street. Snipers still shooting. Old gent on a bicycle – crump, crump – the old man is down. The band hits the dirt but nobody is hurt. All come back gesticulating wildly and covered with dirt.

Our infantry is attacking across the river and up the hill. Throw in white phosphorus. 50 mm machine guns chattering. Darkness. Big fuss about a casualty down on the river. Struggle through rubble and wade in for him. Turns out to be a Jerry with a light wound. Terrific haul to the top of mountain. Move

slowly, carefully. May be under observation. Pick up three litter cases. One medic lay all night in a ditch, but not a whisper, "knew we'd come." Improvise litter from cellar door. Slip, slide, stumble, and we're down again.

Sugarloaf – a death trap. Open round snow-covered knob. Try frontal attack. Mowed down. Finally circle and secure top, but at a terrible cost.

Spot a wounded Heinie lying in a field. Major Wood goes with us to get him. It's a GI, hit bad, but he's crawled over a mile. Out there all night and all day, but still strong. These kids have guts. Wants a cigarette and water.

Move forward slowly. Use back roads. Main roads are mined or blocked. Dig in, wait, then move into a small town knocked to Hell by planes. Heavy fighting on our right. Towns burning. Field littered with German dead. Allencourt, Gramercy Woods.

We are in a holding position. Aid station is in a big stone wine cellar. Hear a voice – "Well, the old bastard looks about the same." It's my brother, Glenn, hale and hearty. I haven't heard from him since before, "D" Day. Didn't know whether he was alive or dead. His outfit is in Nancy and I go back to spend the night with them. Weeks before, one of his buddies had found my pack in a field but never told Glenn. Now they had seen our "Wagon wheel" patch and knew our regiment was in the area. Glenn borrowed a jeep to run us down. Stopped to ask a sentry what was ahead. "Germans". He turned around and finally found us.

Our stone cellar was quite safe, but one morning a goose took a direct hit. Later the O.P. was shelled and a guard was hit in the throat. He came running, the blood spurting. Capt. Matt managed to clamp the artery but the boy died on the way to the clearing company.

One morning snipers and burp guns sounded only yards away. Piper Cubs spotted the enemy forming in a field in the woods and called the location to our mortars, who miraculously had that spot zeroed in. These mortars saved us from capture. Here a shell dropped in front of La Salle, a California boy, who had volunteered to be an aid man.

Again we moved up slowly through mud and water. Six consecutive aid stations were hit by shellfire, but luckily no one was injured. Capt. Matt was spanked in the backside by a piece of shrapnel which came through a wooden wall and his sleeping bag. Mortars hit the room adjoining them as we worked over casualties, and blew off the roof onto our trailers. On the move again, we were narrowly missed by 88's several times. Nothing can paralyze your mind like the scream, crunch of an 88.

Bloody Monday – Hill 108 – We handled 138 casualties that day. The men were caught crossing a bald hill and mowed down. I had a boy emptying the water bucket where I washed my bloody hands as I worked over casualties.

Flint and I set up a forward aid station. A casualty reported up ahead, but directions were vague. Jeep returns after two hours. Got as far as a blown-out bridge. Tried again in an hour and brought back a lad

with a broken leg, wounds right side, liver region, and upper lung. Freezing cold with faint pulse. We did all we could until the ambulance came, but I knew this one would never make it.

St. Jean - the convoy was caught by 88's and our trailer hit twice. I scrambled among some blocks of stone. Forest was hit. Shrapnel through a door in a basement cut the clothing from his arm and shoulder. Luckily, only a flesh wound. Forest came back later. That night it seemed impossible that the convoy wasn't smashed.

The litter bearers followed tanks in attack and Dugan was hit. Wasn't too bad, but Dugan never came back. The tankers had a rough day, caught in the open by artillery.

Puttelange – second battalion, jumped off in the dark, waded a swollen river and captured the Heinies in their foxholes, advanced through rough country over roads where even the jeeps stalled. Approached the Saar and the Heinies fell back desperately. The Saar was a natural barrier which they knew how to defend. Our river bank was wide open and all bridges blown, but the infantry found what was left of a railroad bridge and made it across under a terrific pounding. The fighting moved on, but a stray mortar killed Tommy Tomasowitz. Tommy, who told me not to take any unnecessary chances. Tommy who never shirked anything; he was a section sergeant and could have stayed further back.

Combat engineers, trying to put in a bridge under direct fire. Thill and I answer the call. A run by jeep for a mile or so on an open road above the river. A major waved us under a railway viaduct during a burst of shelling; as it slackened, we ripped across a canal and doubled back 100 yards to the bridgehead where the engineers were huddled behind a pitiful little jumble of masonry and girders. Two more barrages screamed in. We piled on five wounded men and Thill took off as fast as our cargo and the bombed roads would permit. Just got away when the shelling began again. Fifteen men, including the major, who directed us in, were hauled away from that bridge. My hat is off to the combat engineers.

Across the Saar we found our ex-mess sergeant drunk one night. He fired at a German plane with an M1, could have brought on a bombing raid, so he was sent to a line company. Got tanked up whenever possible. One day he started after a tank with a grease gun chattering when a mortar got him.

The move from the Saar to the Blies was one of the weirdest we ever made. Black as ink, over barely passable muddy roads with gun flashes splitting the darkness. Up around a burning house, a devil's torch which must have been visible for miles. Set up aid station in a surprisingly good house, well build, interesting décor. "Tiny" stayed behind to guard the supplies we couldn't take. Tiny, always careful, never took any chances if he could help it. Stopped a couple days at regimental before he caught up with us. I was sitting by the telephone talking to the Chaplain when there was a terrific explosion across the street. Six feet from us in a hall a plate sized piece of shrapnel sliced through Tiny's head. Big, fun-loving, careful Tiny. Nothing in ten months shook me like this. It was also too much for Capt. Matt. Tiny had been his man Friday.

Assault boats arrive too late for the 3<sup>rd</sup> to cross the Blies, but the 1<sup>st</sup> got over and the 3<sup>rd</sup> followed. Bitter fighting here for the Heinies were on higher ground. Newspaper correspondents got a taste of evacuation when Thill took one down the river there. Our boys worked under a Red Cross flag with

some German medics. Several times they helped us and then returned to their lines. About 9 PM the aid station got a call. Troops pulling out of the village have a wounded man. Cherry and I start out in the jeep. It's pitch black and we are in the ditch in 50 yards. Ambulance pulls us out. We crawl along a muddy track to main road to turn off and for two miles I walk in front of the jeep to find the road – pouring rain, deep mud, sporadic shelling. Finally we find five men with bad feet and one with a strained back. They're having a feast of fried ham and potatoes. The rest of the troops are gone and they are positive they took the "wounded" man. Two miles of mud and water to the main road and another mile to that burning house where the tankers are. It's 2 "AM. Their surgeon gives us a "snifter." Back at the aid station, another hour, and there is a call threatening Capt. Matt with court martial if that man isn't picked up. We're too beat to go back, so another crew starts off. They got their man. He'd shot himself in the foot. The officer who threatened Capt. Matt did the same thing later on.

The Blies, our aid station, is in a basement room at the end of a bridge the Heinies are trying to knock out. Several civilian refugees, including a German girl, plays guitar and sings "Pennies from Heaven." We are in French territory but across the river is Germany. Finally, the Heinies are pushed back up the hill and we move over into Germany to an advance aid station Ozzie and the boys have set up. Ozzie is sick and Flint takes over. Buildings are flimsy, but the shelling is mostly directed at the bridge. I come down with something which the surgeon says is pneumonia, but I persuade them not to send me in, as I might not get back to the outfit again. Sulpha and a few days in bed seem to knock it out.

Another outfit is taking over and we pull back across the Biles. Day and night chatter of a machine gun covering a pillbox. Intermittent shelling. One man killed around the corner and another hit bad. New replacements get baptism – one is a Master Sgt. Who has goofed somewhere and this is his punishment. He's really scared.

Fighting here is fierce and promises to get worse, with Germans holding on to Saarbrucken desperately. Word of their breakthrough in the north doesn't sound good.

A long move – the whole division. Bitterly cold, mountains dark and forbidding. Keep interval, watch for planes. The 137<sup>th</sup> was strafed on this move. Sign reads, so many miles to Metz – this has to be the "Bulge." We stop in Metz for Christmas in barracks and have a wonderful turkey dinner. Bill Brown, Lundmark, Waldower and I harmonize on White Christmas and Sgt. Marko stuffs us with turkey. Metz is a part of the Maginot Line. Forts all around – guns pointing the wrong way.

Move on north – Luxemburg and Belgium. Bastogne is somewhere ahead. "The armor has broken through." Ambulance after ambulance speeds by.

It's a winter wonderland. We set up in the summer palace of King Albert of Belgium. Beautiful stone chateau – thank God for the stone, as buildings hit several times – but we're inside. The infantry is out in the snowdrifts. It is bitter cold.

Sainlez knocked to Hell. Old man with hands tied, shot to death. Many civilians died in fire. Half a mile from chateau German mortars hit a barn full of GI's. Twenty hurt bad – two killed.

Every man except medics is armed. Jerry is closing in. We make plans to run for it. Tank and half-track guns chatter all around us. One German tank is hit and medics bring in five wounded. Sentry detects movement in woods, calls for artillery, and we find 13 dead, including three artillery observers. Minutes more and they would have been calling big stuff in on us.

Through the woods about a mile and a half is "Luttrebois." We trade it back and forth several times. Artillery catches eleven Heinie tanks lined up in a row. Planes get eight more. Bless those Piper Cub observers.

Wounded civilians in Luttrebois". We've got to get them out. We go in at night. At the edge of the woods we sweat out a barrage, then start across an open field. Woo-woo-woo-screaming mimmies. Express train through the air, blood curdling. Keep away from the path – it's mined. The people are in one big basement – one Heinie and seven civilians. I help an old lady about 75, her pitiful belongings wrapped in a tablecloth. She slips and slides, goes to her knees a dozen times, as I half carry her up that twisting icy trail. It's bitter cold but I am dripping wet. More shells, more mimmies and then here is the jeep. We have made it.

One of the survivors is a girl. She hesitates, then strips off her dress. She is hit in the side. Her father's arm is green and stinks. Sulfa, bandage, and on to collecting.

Luttrebois is finally ours. Dead men piled like cordwood. These Heinies are SS men. Some of our boys found with 38's shoved down their throats. One of our aid men, Lerner from Brooklyn, didn't make it back.

The 137<sup>th</sup> relieves us and we rest for two days, then swing in a pincers on woods beyond Luttrebois. Beautiful barrage, as infantry and tanks advance forcing SS to fall back. We push to highway and are pinched out. Bitter weather. One boy crawled into the station, his feet blocks of ice. While I work on his feet he tells me his buddy standing behind me is nuts. He is holding a rifle butt in his hands. We talk him into taking some "blue bombers: and he is out like a light. Whew!

Walking outside the aid station, I hear a shot close by. A GI has shot himself in the foot. One replacement claims he can't see. The 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Determined the man was faking, handed him a rifle saying: "There is no one between you and the Germans – you'd better see."

Blasted, burned out US armor everywhere. Stacks of dead waiting to be hauled away. This is by far the worst US disaster we have seen. The enemy was trying to get gasoline and was stopped only some hundreds of yards from one of the biggest fuel dumps in Europe. Hitler's last big gamble didn't quite make it.

From the Bulge we moved down near Linne, Belgium for a brief rest period. On up over a great snowy waste into Hooperdang on the Our river where we sit and look at the Heinies on the other side. This was a holding position, but our outposts catch murderous fire occasionally. A bomb leveled half the building the aid station is in. Two dead oxen and a police dog ripening in spite of the cold.

The first of February we were relieved and swung north through Belgium into Germany through a British section where we saw the devastating results of the British attack. In what had been a handsome border town not an undamaged building remained. Fields dotted with shell holes and dead cattle. Mines everywhere, with only a narrow track cleared. On ever greasy, horrible roads in streaking rain to Randerath on the banks of the Rohr which was at flood state because of a blasted dam upstream. Here we sat for almost three weeks under heavy shell fire, waiting for the floods to abate. Apparently, the Germans were using huge slag piles for observation. Our aid station was in a thin shell of a building and we usually had chow outside. One morning after heavier shelling than usual Sgt. Ozzie had it put inside. Fergy decided to go outside to eat when a terrific explosion rocked the whole building. A big 240 mm landed in the street forty feet from the door. Fergy was twenty feet from the blast, but miraculously the shrapnel went up and over his head. He wasn't scratched, although one eardrum was damaged. Across the street 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Hill, looking out the window, caught the blast in the face. He lost an eye.

Here we heard our first V bombs. The motors sounded like huge souped-up motorcycles. You held your breath, hoping they'd keep going over. One night one cut out suddenly, silence, and then a jarring blast. Two miles away this one wiped out a gun emplacement, killing five men and leaving a hole big enough for a house. This area was dotted with German pillboxes. One day I counted 15 without moving an inch.

Finally, the flooded Rohr went down and we "jumped" across. That day Conger crawled out to a wounded buddy lying in a ditch. He couldn't apply the bandage in the ditch, so in spite of the pleadings of the man he sat up on the edge and worked. A sniper's bullet caught him in the side. He was brought in, apologizing for not doing a better job. Conger came through OK, but the doctors told him an inch one way would have hit his spine and an inch the other way would have hit his liver. Either would have been curtains.

The Heinie troops here were a ragtag lot and surrendered in droves, but they had sowed mines like wheat. One hour I took care of two men with feet missing. Here we worked with some colored tankers who were terrific. It was their first time in combat and they just "barrel-assed." Those boys did a wonderful job.

One night move I will never forget. No moves were good, but night moves were always bad. You crept along, stopped, crept some more, stopped, sue all the time any minute the Heinies would find the convoy strung out like sitting ducks. This night we moved like a snail with terrific cannonades lighting the horizon in sudden flashes. Screaming meemies moaned and we hit the ditch – only there wasn't any ditch. No cover at all. Shells screamed overhead and plowed the field just short of us. A route guide helped us by saying, "They're shelling the next turn." At that turn the convoy stalled. Just ahead a shell crashed and an anti-tank gunner was killed. Slowly we crawled, finally reaching a shack glorified into an aid station. At least we were inside, but there were 29 men in two small rooms and a tiny basement.

I finally slept on a pile of potatoes, certainly the worst bed I ever had. The shelling was almost continuous. Usually one could identify our own guns, but that night they all sounded like German guns.

The infantry pushed off at dawn, sending back long lines of dejected "supermen." At an advance station the boys heard a murderous creeping barrage coming in on the flank. It ripped, tore and plowed the

earth until not a living thing survived. From that direction it couldn't be ours – was it German? The boys watched, fascinated and almost danced when they saw Canadian infantry advancing through the smoke. That afternoon I rode over some of that area and have never seen such unbelievable destruction. Orchards were jagged snags and while fields were churned raw earth. This was the Wesel pocket where, together with the Canadians, we finally pushed the Heinies across the Rhine.

Now came a real honest-to-God ten-day rest period at Brook, back near the edge of Holland, where we played softball, went to Leige, and saw our crazy jeep driver Thill get his Coup De Gras. We had radios or speakers in every room. I helped organize a battalion show and soaked up the sunshine.

March 25<sup>th</sup> we started moving east again. The Rhine was ahead and we knew it had been crossed somewhere. Ammunition lined the road for miles. In the early afternoon it got smoky and we suddenly thought of smoke screens. It was murky dusk when we stopped, apparently just short of the Rhine and heard there were pontoon bridges ahead. Tracers fingered the sky and red balls of anti-aircraft floated lazily overhead.

When do we cross? Tonight! This is it. The last big barrier where the Germans must fight or lose. From Normandy on this has been our goal and here it is. We moved up slowly in trucks, jeeps, gun carriers and on foot over a slight rise, and ahead was the baleful glare of a huge searchlight poking straight away. What the Hell is that? A perfect target! But the light was up the river and against it we could suddenly see our way – that narrow black thread, a murky torrent, tiny silhouetted figures directing the troops waiting to cross.

We're on the pontoon bridge. Overhead a plane roars and strafes. Red dotted lines rise and fall in the blackness. Red balloons float up and away. Ahead riflemen are shooting into the water. Is it boats, mines, Jerry frogmen? The riflemen kneel and shoot at anything that moves.

We're across and up the other side. There is a roar and the hideous chatter of strafing machine guns. The roaring death is diving, it's over and away. We've scattered like quail and nobody is hit. Ahead a whole town is burning and we creep through like ghouls. Shells smashing ahead. We swing left to black buildings where we set up the station and gratefully spread our blankets.

At day light we move on again. A wrecked American tank with the tanker's body smoldering beside the turret. He helped knock out a whole Heinnie artillery battery before they got him. Two hundred yards away are a dozen 88's surrounded by dead Heinies.

A steady stream of wounded – scissors, sulfa, bandages, splints and morphine. After dark we push through horrible bogging and under shrieking shellfire to an isolated farm house. In the morning there are two little German girls horribly wounded. One has a piece of black shrapnel where her eye should be – dried bloody bandages sticking from torn flesh. There would be no war if people could see this or those boys who came in one morning with no faces. From forehead to chin there was nothing. One could still talk and you could see his throat and larynx move. The flesh that had been a face hung in a bloody swinging flap.

The 35<sup>th</sup> is pressing in on the northern edge of the Ruhr valley which is a scattered forest of smokestacks as far as the eye can reach, and we see more evidence of the terrible efficiency of our bombs. There is an awful sameness to Germany's industrial cities. The heart of each is a smashed burned-out desolation of twisted steel and ruptured masonry.

At Gladbeck thousands of civilians are huddled in a coal mine. Women, children, and old men seeking shelter in the dripping, smelly black tunnels. Kirchen has been hit hard. Dazed civilians can't understand what has happened. To escape shellfire, we burst into a house where the owners try to argue. What kind of dopes do they take us for? That Mosel wine they didn't offer us was delicious. The Nazi headquarters next door provided a field day for souvenir hunters – guns, knives, swords. Ray got a beautiful shotgun and Chappie a brand new 45. A Nazi souvenir shop had every Heinie emblem you ever saw. They were not exactly salable items now.

Bochum is knocked to pieces. The center of the city a tumbled wasteland with a few cellars still habitable. We push the Germans across the river and pull back to Buer Resse, which is on the Herne Ems Canal. There is a slave-labor camp here. A mine, where we find some pitiful human wrecks wasted by disease and starvation. Vacant faces and dead eyes. The contractor who should have been feeding these prisoners had been selling the food on the black market.

Pop Mertons, who speaks fluent German, goes through a tunnel into the town and finds it is held by a small group of Heinies. The civilians want to surrender. A wrecked railroad span is bridged by one of the boys swimming across, towing a boat into the break. To the right the engineers have gotten a Bailey bridge across under a smoke screen.

Finally, we are squeezed out as the Ruhr pocket shrinks and we take off on a long motorized move eastward. We are traveling through territory already taken and the most striking sight is DP's thronging the roads. Literally thousands of people are on the move on foot, carrying their meager possessions on their backs or pulling small wagons. Larger wagons stacked with pooled possessions are pushed or pulled by eight to ten people. Sometimes an antique tractor tows three or four wagons and there is a sprinkling of ancient cars crawling along with blow-out and engine trouble at every turn. French, Dutch, Poles, Russians – ragged suffering humanity, but smiling and happy to be free and going home.

An advance party tears into a town and is stopped by German sentries. Our boys do some fast talking. The German soldiers want to quit, but their officer wants to fight. He finally agrees to surrender to a ranking officer.

We stay overnight in a small village, and as we are loading up next morning there is a roar of planes – Heinie planes. Our ack-ack begins to chatter as two go over, and a third blooms smoke and a parachute billows as the plane noses straight toward us. We scramble for shelter as the plane crashes a hundred yards away. No bombs aboard, thank God, but machine guns still crackle for awhile.

The Elbe river – 60 miles to Berlin. We hear the 2<sup>nd</sup> armored got across and were chopped up. Crossing here could be rough. Finally we get the word. This is a holding position. We are to wait for the



Russians! Dear God, we have made it. The worst has got to be over. A few shells, a couple of raids, but this is a holding position – we wait here.

K company is attacked by a raiding party. Two men in the outpost are killed. A bazooka goes straight through a room full of men, but no one is hit. The men swear a woman was calling the orders for the Heinies.

The Germans attack at another point. They crossed and came in behind our position, but the boys were on their toes and of the raiding party 20 were killed, 20 wounded, and 20 captured. Among the seriously wounded was a 15 year old boy who was second in command. He said he had been in our village watching the boys play football. If anyone looked suspicious he would ask for a cigarette.

We wait for the Russians to reach Berlin and now the only thing that matters is “points”. Thank God for five battle stars, my wife and daughter at home, and my age. The war is over for me and soon I will be going home.

## **Conclusion**

**By William G. Cross son of Gordon Edward Cross**

Dad was one of the lucky ones who made it back safely from the war. A singer in New York doing spots on live radio prior to entering the service, he returned to continue his singing career while moving and settling in East Haddam, Connecticut. A decade and a half later, still involved in music, he, along with his brother Glenn Cross, who is also mentioned in the diary, became two of the 25 men who made up the chorus for the popular early 60's television show Sing Along With Mitch. Dad enjoyed his work very much and in his later years seemed to be content to live a peaceful quiet life in the beautiful countryside surrounding his East Haddam home. He passed away in 1973.

He is survived by his daughter Carol Cross and son Bill Cross of East Haddam, Connecticut as well as two granddaughters Kelly Cross and Katelyn Cross.