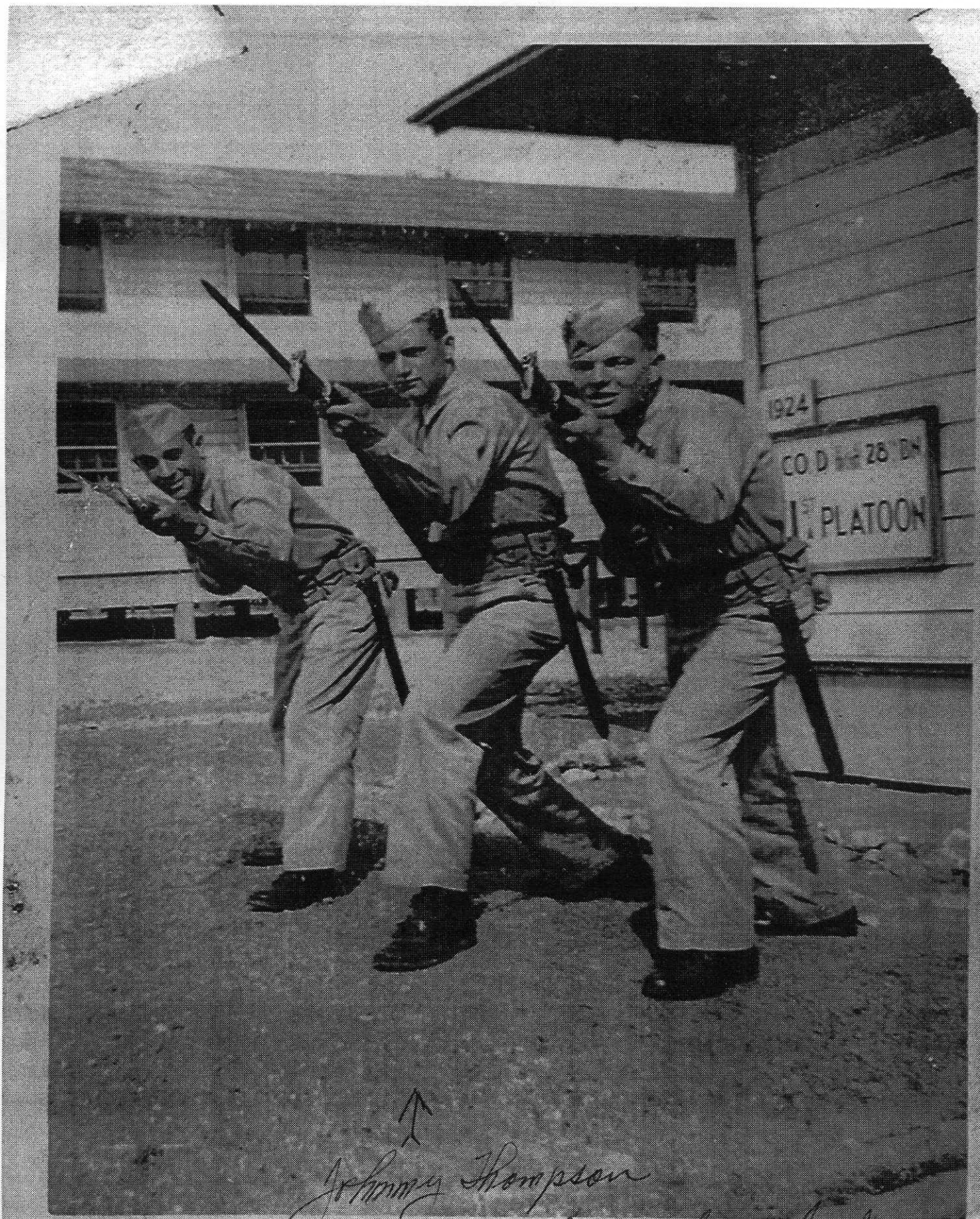
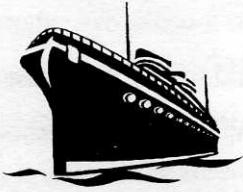


Fort Leonardwood, MO 1943



↑
Johnny Thompson
1943 Fort Leonardwood, Mo.



John W. Thompson
Serial #34809158
World War II Army Career

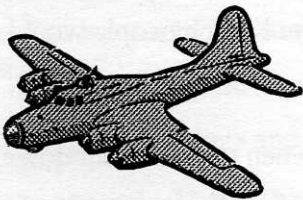
Hearing the Battle Call

On June 11, 1943 I was inducted into the army. I was sent to Fort Leonard, Wood, Missouri for 6 months of training as a combat engineer. From Missouri it was on to New York City.

We sailed from New York City for England on January 8, 1944. Before our ship had cleared the mouth of the harbor a tanker ran into the side of the ship for some unknown reason. We had to go back to the dock for 2 days and nights for repairs.

Five nights into our voyage, a German submarine chased us all night. The ship had to run a zigzag course all night to stay out of range so they couldn't fire on us.

We landed in England on the 17th day of January 1944, where we stayed until the 17th of June 1944. While in England, German bombers flew over many times. Each night they would fly over at the same hour. Therefore, we nicknamed them "Bed Check Charlie". One night they dropped bombs on the town of Plymouth where we were staying.



Invasion of France - June 6, 1944.

Eleven days after D-Day we landed on Normandy Beach on June 17. We would have crossed over into Normandy earlier but we did not have a landing ship available. Therefore, we slept by our trucks on the roadside for five days and nights before we left England. Finally, we were able to cross the English Channel at night. I worried that a German submarine would hit us as we were crossing the channel.

Our first night in Normandy, we were in foxholes and the German artillery opened fire on us with artillery guns. With our artillery firing back, it was like the world coming to an end. This country boy was scared. The

foxhole was shaking like a leaf. I was praying for the good Lord to save me. We came to a crossroad where a German truck had been blown up. It could have been loaded with ammunition. You could hold the biggest piece of the truck in your hands. The only part of the driver that we saw was one foot. We were in Cherbourg the day the Germans surrendered the town to the U.S. Army.



In order to slow up the movement of the U.S. Army, the Germans would destroy bridges with dynamite. It was the job of the combat engineer to rebuild the bridges. The engineer's job is to get the job done: rain or shine, hot or cold, day or night. When a bridge is destroyed and the infantry or tanks couldn't cross, it was the engineer's job to repair or place a pontoon or bailey bridge across the river. We had to work and fight for our lives at the same time. I was in the 341st combat engineers. We had to help the 1st, 3rd and 7th army to cross anything they needed to cross.



After a few weeks into France a bad unsuspected storm came across the English Channel into France destroying the unloading dock that had been placed on the beach by the army. This caused our supplies to run short. We had a captured German Diesel truck that we had to use to go back to the beach for food and gas. We had no gas or food. The German truck saved us. As we traveled through France the French people would show their appreciation to the U.S. soldiers by giving flowers to us as we passed by.

From June 1944 until September of 1945, home was wherever we were at when the sun went down. Sometimes it was in a foxhole under a truck or an empty house or barn. It was cold in the wintertime. The ground was covered with snow and ice and we had to live in it. We were not allowed to have a fire or lights at any time. One day while out in the country from Luxembourg City one day and the ground cover with snow. The Germans was firing 88mm at us. You could see where they would hit the Ground when the snow would fly up.

Often during the daytime and at night you could see the German V1 or V2 buzz bomber come over. On the way to England we saw them fly over many times. As long as you could hear the jet running you were safe. If it cut off before it got to you, you had better hunt a hole to get into.

The day I went through Liege, Belgium, the Germans had dropped some V2 buzz bombs ahead of us. It was a mess. Buildings were destroyed and people hurt all over the street. One morning just inside of Germany, we were so close to the launch pad of the V2 buzz bomber that the Germans Launched 3 V2's at one time. They just missed the treetops when they came overhead. One was so low that it crashed maybe a ½ mile from us.

We made our way from Arlon, Belgium through Bastogne, Malmedy and Spa, Belgium to Stolberg, Germany. While in Stolberg on the 16th of December 1944 the Germans made there last big move to overpower the U.S. army. This was the Battle of the Bulge at Malmedy and Bastogne, Belgium. Had this worked for the Germans it would have cut the U.S. army in two and the Germans would have surrounded me with no way out.

The night of the breakthrough, the Germans sent over a wave of planes and dropped flares over us. It was as bright as day when the flares were coming down. An hour or so went by then the 2nd wave came over dropping bombs. Another hour or so went by and the 3rd wave came over. Nothing happened this time.

The next morning, we found paratroopers all around us that the 3rd wave of planes dropped on us. The 1st and 2nd waves of planes were a cover up for dropping the paratroopers. I captured one of the paratroopers and came close to shooting him in the back. I am glad now that I didn't. We were staying in an old farmhouse the night the planes came over. We were shooting so many tracers at the planes; it looked like the 4th of July.

The 2nd day after the Germans made the big move into Bastogne, I was still in Stolberg, Germany standing by a 50-caliber machine gun. We were overlooking a valley below us. I heard the sound of a plane coming over the valley. It was 2 German 109 Messerschmitt flying at tree top level. I opened fire with the 50-caliber machine gun spraying bullets up and down in front of the 2 planes. I was looking straight into the plane when it went by because of the valley they were flying in. I could see the pilot as he went by. As I was firing the machine gun the plane went through the spray of bullets and was hit. The plane went down about a mile from us, black smoke billowing when it hit the ground. This is the 25th day of January 1999 and I can still see the plane and pilot as good today as the day I shot it down.

Building Bridges

In Duren, Germany, the engineers put a bridge across the Maas River the 3rd time without the Germans blowing it up. The 1st and 2nd bridge that were put across the river, the Germans blew them up with their 88mm guns. There were dead U.S. and German soldiers everywhere you looked.

We had to work on one bridge within 150 feet of 5 dead German soldiers. One was rolled up like a ball of meat. He was shot all to pieces. I saw some dead Germans that had a finger cut off by U.S. soldiers to get a ring they had on.

One night in January 1945, some where in Germany while trying to cross the Mosel River on a railroad bridge at night, I missed some of the crossties and fell about 15 feet into the river. The bridge had been blown up and we were trying to cross on the pieces that were hanging between the piers. The crossties were missing and we couldn't have any light, so I fell in. The river was frozen over with ice. I caught on to a piling and locked my arms and legs around it. I was so frozen I couldn't hold on to a rope that was dropped down to me. Three soldiers had to hold on to the dangling part of the track to get me out. By this time my mind was so cold it was blank. I barely remember being carried back to the field hospital. The field hospital is where they bring the wounded to from the front lines. I stayed in the hospital one day and night.

The only bridge across the Rhine River was at Remagen, Germany. The Germans blew up every bridge across the Rhine River. This bridge failed to fall in the river. It was left weak but still standing. It was known as the Remagen, Bridge.

Since it was the only bridge across the river, the U.S. army tried to get everything they could across it as fast as they could. It was so weak from the dynamite the Germans tried to blow it up with, until it couldn't hold up the load and it fell into the river. A lot of U.S. soldiers were killed when it fell in. One of my best buddies was killed on it.

After the bridge fell in the river, the engineers had to put pontoon bridges across so the army could cross the river. The engineers played a big part in the war. Everybody was looking for us to get the job done.

Long Road Home



It wasn't long after the crossing of the Rhine River the war ended. I went as far as Magdeburg, Germany. That's about 75 miles from Berlin. We left Magdeburg and went to Marseille, France. After the landing on Normandy Beach I had done and seen a lot: thing's I never had dreamed of. We traveled from Normandy Beach to Cherbourg and on to St. Lo, Lemans, Orleans, Paris, Nancy, Metz and Charville, France. Then it was on through Arlon, Bastogne, and Malmedy, Belgium to Aachen, Cologne, Bonn, Koblenz, Kassel

and into Magdeburg, Germany. We then traveled back through Frankfurt, Germany to Marseille, France.

As we made this trip I saw dead livestock, homes damaged, people without homes, kids with no mother or father, and people without food, gas or any place to stay. Entire cities were destroyed to the ground. There were dead U.S. and German Soldiers along the way.

We had to live in all kinds of weather: rain, mud, snow and freezing weather. The winters in that part of the world are very cold. We would wear the same clothes for days at a time before we could change. I had to take a bath and shave in a helmet full of water whenever I could. Most of our food was K-ration. It was a very hard and sad war. We had captured German prisoners that were glad they were captured because they had good food to eat.

From Marseille, France we were to go to Japan. We rode in boxcars for 5 days and nights to Marseille. While waiting for a ship in Marseille, we learned the war was over with Japan. When we did get on the ship we came back to the states. I Left Marseille on the 1st of September 1945 and arrived in New York on the 10th of September 1945. I turn 21 on the 9th of September 1945. I was in the army two years, 3 months and 3 days.

I received the Campaign Medal with 5 bronze stars. I was in the battle of Normandy, Northern France, Rhineland, Ardennes and Central Europe. I also received the good conduct medal. I was discharged from the army at Fort Bragg,

North Carolina on the 18th day of September 1945.



Johnny Thompson