

Private John T. Sowders, Jr.
WW2 Service Diary

August 21, 1944

Went to the Army. Sworn in Louisville, KY. Left for Fort Benjamin Harrison that night at 11:00. Got first Army meal in Louisville (KY).

August 27, 1944

Arrived at Fort Benjamin Harrison. Had another physical. During this week we were issued clothes, took shots, filled out records and were classified.

August 28, 1944

Left for Fort Benjamin Harrison on a train at 1:30 to a destination unknown. All equipment with us. Camp Croft. Went to Atlanta, Ga, stayed 2 hours then turned around and went up to Camp Croft, SC.

August 29, 1944

Arrived at Croft. Went to Co. C -31st Infantry Replacement Training Battalion. Took physicals again. Loafed around for the rest of the week.

September 4, 1944

Started 17 week training cycle. Tough week!

December 9, 1944

Left our company quarters, full packs and all for 2 weeks of maneuvers. Ice cold and snow on ground. Arrived at camp site around 5:00 p.m. Lots of night problems.

December 22, 1944

Came off maneuvers three days early. Completely worn out after 25 mile hike with full pack. Arrived 11:35 p.m.

December 23, 1944

Left Camp Croft on troop train at 1:00 to go home for Christmas. On delay enroute to Ft. Meade Maryland.

December 25, 1944

Arrived home in Somerset, KY about 1:30 a.m. Christmas morning. Sure was glad to be there. Went to Stanford, KY for dinner.

January 1, 1945

Left home at 7:30 for Fort George Meade. Stopped at Cincinnati. Left there at 4:00 on a special train. Travelled up through Pennsylvania.

January 2, 1945

Arrived at Ft, Meade about 3:30 p.m. and assigned to quarters.

January 3, 1945

Issues all new equipment and readied for a trip across the pond. We went to Washington DC on pass from 5:00 pm to 5:00 am. Saw Capitol, Library of Congress, Supreme Court, White House, Jefferson Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, cherry trees and all.

January 5, 1945

Left Fort Meade for Camp Myles Standish.

January 6-7, 1945

Issued new M-1 rifle and readied ourselves to get on boat. Left on a train night of the 7th for the docks at Boston Harbor. Boarded Isle de France at about 11:45 p.m.

January 8, 1945

Left about noon on my way to Scotland. Had subs on our tail at least 3 times.

January 8-15, 1945

On way over, went by southern route via Florida, Africa, then to Scotland. Real hot for 2 days. Some submarines chased us.

January 17, 1945

Got off Isle de France in Greenwich Scotland after sitting two days in the harbor. Was at Isrenmock (sp.?) Scotland a few miles from Glasgow. Got on King George IV and went ashore. Got on an English train and left at 1:15 pm for somewhere.

January 18, 1945

Arrived at Southampton England at 4:30a.m. Walked two hours through Carlisle and London packing all equipment to Camp 18 outside of the city. Also Glasgow Scotland.

January 19, 1945

Left Camp 18 at Southampton and walked another two hours to get on the docks. Got on the Altenmor. Left harbor at 10:15 p.m. to cross the channel for Le Havre, France

January 21, 1945

Got off Altenmor on to L.C.T. 764 and went blasted and wrecked shores of Le Havre, France. Walked about an hour to camp of 70th Replacement Battalion which was a disbanded German ammunition dump. Everything was booby-trapped.

January 23, 1945

Walked on icy roads to train station in blown up Le Havre and got in 40 & 8 (40 people or 8 cattle) boxcars to go across France. Ate C rations and French bread and French cider.

January 26, 1945

Arrived at 17th Replacement Depot in Conflans and stayed in a French Garrison. Best chow yet in Army. 2 cans ate. Was at Conflans and Jarvis France. No one was out. Seemed dead.

January 28, 1945

Left 17th Replacement Depot in Conflans on GI trucks to go to Luxembourg about 2:00 p.m.. Stayed in old castle that belonged to the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg. Stayed overnight. First KP overseas. Left the next day.

January 29, 1945

Left Grand Duchess of Luxembourg castle to go to the service of the 80th Division. Left in trucks. Arrived at Services Co. Place where we were supposed to stay was all in flames when we arrived. Stayed in house next to it. This is at Heffinger Luxembourg.

January 30-31, 1945

Stayed in Service Company at Heffinger Luxembourg. Went to our separate companies and platoons there. My Company was in the rest at this town. Left Willimeth there. He went to Company A, 1st Battalion, 317th Infantry. Also left Barton. He's in Company I.

February 1, 1945

First day with Company L - 317th Infantry Regiment, 80th Division, 3rd Army that day. Met all of the boys. They seem very friendly.

February 11, 1945

Left Heffinger and went to Diekirch Luxembourg in trucks. Replaced 5th Division there.

February 13, 1945

Only Battalion, company, platoon and squad was in reserve of Division.

February 15, 1945

Me and 3 others GI's left Diekirch and went to a small town, Walbillig Luxembourg on a road block. Ate with 736 Field Artillery. Excellent chow.

February 20, 1945

Left Walbillig and went on a reconnaissance across the Rhine between Luxembourg and Germany. Entered Germany and dug in for the first time on a hill there. Enemy was on the other side.

February 21, 1945

Left positions and moved out towards the front and pushing Germans back mile by mile. We are really scared. Saw a lot of prisoners and first wounded GI. Also first encounter of enemy artillery direct fire.

February 22, 1945

Still pushing onward, walking day and night. Completely worn out. Excessive artillery fire. Germans threw a lot of artillery at us.

February 23, 1945

Still walking. No sleep. Only rested about 2 hours sleep since the night of February 20, 1945. I Company took town just about 1,000 yards ahead of us. Walked over all kinds of country and through forest. Germans left breakfast on the table, so we ate it. Pretty good and we all hungry. Dug 3 foxholes the night before. Went into first attack and took the hill to the other side of town. Was pinned down for about two hours by burp guns fired just over my head. Very tough day. Shooting all around me including tanks, artillery and small arms fire from both sides. Three killed, two captured.

February 24, 1945

Was dug in on another position on same hill and holding it. Plenty of artillery and burp gun fire. Tank battle with direct fire on us. Really got a lot of casualty. One shell landed 8-10 feet from my foxhole and threw mud in it. Was covered with mud, thrown in foxhole by 89 shell.

February 25, 1945

Strafed by our own P47's which were dive bombing and strafing took about all of us. (NOTE: Dad always said that he was one of 6 people in his unit who survived. No casualties. He also said that the next day, they walked into a town and about 20 German soldiers surrendered to them.)

February 26, 1945

Moved to rear of hill for one day's rest.

March 2, 1945

Left position and walked about 23 miles to try to catch up with 4th Armored Division that was spearheading attack.

March 4, 1945

Arrived in small village. Stayed in barn. Very comfortable. First shelter since February 20th. Killed chickens and roasted them and got fresh eggs and ate them. Old German farmers didn't like it.

March 5, 1945

Issued fresh socks. Removed boots and feet swelled and turned black. I could not put on my boots. Went back to the Battalion Aid about 1:30 p.m. and was sent by ambulance back to 80th Division Evacuation Hospital. Put on liter (sp.?) there. Diagnosis trench foot.

March 6, 1945

Went on back to a hospital in Ettelbruck Luxembourg then went to another air evacuation hospital.

March 7, 1945

Was at evacuation hospital. Flown to Paris, France for 2 hours in C47. Landed at the same airfield that Lindberg did on his transatlantic flight. Arrived at 107th evacuation hospital. Sent to 108th General on the other side of Paris hospital that night about 10:30

March 8, 1945

First day in the hospital. Was on 12th floor. Could see all of Paris from the big window. Everything was nice.

March 9, 1945

Couldn't get out of bed or walk at all. Feet burned day and night. Sleeping pills had no effect. Was in bed about a week and wheelchair a week later.

March 21, 1945

Went through Paris in ambulance to train depot. I sat on hospital train and went to Bologna France. All blown up. Very bad. I got on boat "His Majesty's Hospital Carrier Dinnard" and immediately left port for Dover, England. Bologna completely destroyed. Pill boxes all around. I got on hospital train and started to Cirencestry, England.

March 22, 1945

Arrived at 188 US General Hospital at Cirencestry Gloucestershire England at 7:00 a.m. Place was very nice. Good meals.

March 28, 1945

Went to rehab this week. Lost a job in Chief of Medical Service Office. Job kept me 2 weeks longer than I was supposed to stay. Feet still no good.

April 28, 1945

Did something that the Colonel did not like and I was dismissed from job in Chief of Medical Service Office. Started working in Post Office. Got about 200 letters about two days ago.

May 2, 1945

Left on 7 day furlough from hospital in route to 10th Reinforcement Depot. Stayed there that night.

May 3, 1945

Went to London. Stayed at Mostlyn Red Cross Club in Marble Arch. Stayed two more days. Saw all highlights of London. Went to two good shows.

May 4, 1945

Got first real ice cream and cold Pepsi colas in bottles and a good steak dinner. Met a cute French girl from Bologna, France in the Yankee Doodle Restaurant.

May 5, 1945

Went back to Cirencestry and stayed at Doughnut Dugout. Went to Gloucester with 2 different girls.

May 11, 1945

Left Cirencestry at 1:00 p.m. to go to the 10th Replacement. Stopped in Pennington and got a good meal.

May 12, 1945

Arrived in 10th Replacement last night at 6:30. Signed in. Had a 10 day furlough. 48 extra hours for VE Day. Issued mess gear and was back in the old army routine.

May 14, 1945

Still at the 10th. Got back to the hospital. Been laying around all the past days. Very lazy.

May 15, 1945

Admitted back to the 188th General hospital about 6:30 p.m. due to uncured trench foot. Sure was glad to be back.

May 27, 1945

Put in Class 4. Supposed to get out quicker and get back to states sooner. Maybe by troop ship. Feeling good except for feet.

May 29, 1945

My 19th birthday. Worked all day in Chief of Medical Service office. I got a telegram from Nell Criscillis (Williamsburg, KY) and also from home. Also birthday cake from the Red Cross here.

May 31, 1945

Really nice day. Had my first date with Jeanne Carruthers. Very nice girl. Very good looking too.

June 6, 1945

1st Anniversary of D-Day. Still worked. Nothing to do. Learned how to operate switchboard.

June 22, 1945

First day of summer. Very pretty day. Doing nothing. Still haven't gone home.

June 29, 1945

Put back in Class III E. Going home on next shipment.

July 9, 1945

Leaving tomorrow for USA

July 10, 1945

Left Cirencestry at 9:00 a.m. Arrived in Southampton at noon. Boarded "Frances Y. Slinger" at 1:00. It was an old Italian passenger transport. "Saturmia". This is her maiden voyage as a hospital ship. World's largest and fastest.

July 11, 1945

Still in docks at Southampton. Superior chow. First fresh milk since January 1st. With 23 5th Hospital Ship completely USA. H.S. France Y Slinger.

July 12, 1945

Pulled out about 8:00 a.m. See white cliffs. Last sight of land about 1:00 a.m.

July 13, 1945

Sea is smooth. Ship shaking continuously. Nice trip so far.

July 14, 1945

Another nice day. Ocean still calm. Travelled 439 miles since the noon of the 13th.

July 15, 1945

Very beautiful Sunday morning. Fourth day out. Sea is dark blue and calm. Have gone approximately 1,340 miles until noon today. Approximately 1,920 more miles. Went to bridge today. Saw all instruments and had them explained.

July 16, 1945

Fifth day out. Getting hot.

July 17, 1945

Seventh day on board, sixth day on our way. Getting hotter. Was 2,243 miles from Southampton at noon today. Have 1,099 miles to go. Average speed was 18.45 knots per hour. Sea like glass, so calm.

July 18, 1945

Still very warm. 704 miles from New York, 2,643 miles from Southampton. Expect to arrive tomorrow night.

July 19, 1945

Very nice day. Have travelled 3,041 miles from Southampton until noon today. Was 310 miles from New York at noon. Average speed 16.67 knots. Scheduled to arrive at Pier 16 in Staten Island about 9:00 tomorrow morning. Will arrive sometime tonight. Steak tonight. Went 400 miles since yesterday.

July 20, 1945

Arrived at Pier 16 in New York City about 12:15. Got off Frances Y Slinger about 1:00. Went to the Halloran General Hospital on Staten Island. Very nice. Called home. Met in harbor by WAC band with big sign "Welcome Home, Well Done". Ate 6 cups of ice cream and about 2 quarts of milk today. Everything wonderful.

July 21, 1945

Left at 11:00 for Manhattan. Went to Times Square, top of Empire State Building, Stage Door Cemetery, Seville Hotel, Roosevelt Hotel, Brooklyn, Jersey City, Bronx, Harlem, Park Avenue, Staten Island Ferry, Toffenetti Restaurant in Times Square, LaGuardia Field, Servicemen's Telephone Center, Queens and a night club. Got back about 3:00 a.m.

July 24, 1945

Left Halloran at 8:15a.m. and got on hospital train to go to Camp Atterbury, Indiana.

July 25, 1945

Arrived at Wakeman General Hospital about 8:30 a.m. Eastern Time, 7:30 Central Time. Nice place.

July 29, 1945

Got a call from home today. Feeling good.

July 31, 1945

Last day of July. Expecting to be home in about 3 days.

September 3, 1945

Convoy Furlough to General Hospital A

September 13, 1945

Discharged Wakeman General Hospital, Camp Atterbury, IN