

William N Parker

Technical Sergeant, Army

Company E 116th Infantry 29th Division of the U.S. Army,

Entered Service July 13, 1943 -Discharged Oct 25, 1945

Rifleman 745; Combat Infantryman

Battles and Campaigns: Normandy Go 33 WD 45 Rhineland GO 40 WD 45 Northern France Go 46 WD 45 Central Europe GO 48 WD 45

Decorations and Citations: Good Conduct Medal, Distinguished Unit Badge Go 26 Hq FUSA 44

*EAME Service Ribbon and Four Bronze Service Stars; Bronze Star Medal GO 299 Hq 29th Inf Div 45 Purple Heart Go Not Avail and **

Wounds Received in Action EAME Theater 6 Dec 44

Continental Service, 4 months 29 days; foreign Service 1 year, 9 months 2 days: EAME

Date of departure Jan 17, 1944

Date of arrival Jan 25, 44, Oct 18, 45

TSgt William (Bill) Parker – first man on Omaha Beach

“I claim to be the first man on bloody Omaha Beach with the first wave. The reason I claim this is because there were no dead men in front of me. They were all behind me. The 116th Infantry of the 29 Division that I was in lost 1,000 men that morning. All of us were 18 or 19-years-old,” said Bill Parker.

Bill remembers training in Fort Sill, Camp Wolters and Camp Shanks, and finally in England, preparing for the invasion.

“We came down rope ladders from the ship to the landing craft. The sea was rough. Sometimes we were against the ship, sometimes 29 feet away from it,” he said.

Bill was the leader of the wire cutting section and had to get off the landing craft first with his five men. The beach was being shelled by the enemy. “Shells were bursting everywhere! I crossed the beach with a machine gun hitting the sand about three feet in front of me.”

Bill wrote in a memoir of his time invading the beach, “We got to the wire. I put my Bangalore torpedo under the wire, next man put his in the end of mine, next men put theirs in the ends of ours and the last man set it off. We blew the wire. That’s when we knew there was no one behind us. The ship and landing craft, had gotten shelled. If there was any wire we couldn’t cut with wire cutters, we were to fall on the wire and let the soldiers walk on top of us - we were not going to let that happen.”

Bill and his team could not move forward due to shots coming from the enemy in a pill box ahead of them. Bill’s support, including the tank artillery, had drowned in the ocean.

“We cleared the bank but could not go further because of the machine gun in the pill boxex,” said Bill. Shots fired from a Navy battleship finally knocked the pillboxes out.

By dark, Bill and about 20 men now following him were a few miles inland, all of them Privates. The men were nearly out of shells, so Bill made a morning trip back to the beach to search the dead men for ammunition. Bill and his fellow soldiers walked to Vierville-sur-Mer, France. A Lieutenant promoted Bill to Sergeant and ordered Bill assist in taking the town. They then went to St. Lo to fight, afterwards rejoining their regular units.

Bill said they walked and fought their way across France, through sleet, snow and ice. He saw wounded who had sat by a tree and froze to death. “After the war was over, the 29th Division sent me a map of where we had been. It said we walked 600 miles across France.”

Bill carried a six-shooter .45 Colt. "I used it every time I went into a building or dug-out. I got some plastic out of a German air plane windshield and made me some pearl handles for it. I put my girlfriend's (Colleen's) picture in each side of it."

Bill tells of going into a dark building one night and seeing the silhouette of a man. Bill told him twice to put his hands up and turn around. He did not move. "I shot him with my .45 – shot his head off. I went down to see what I had done. I had shot Hitler – it was a chalk bust of him. My men thought it was funny, they had to tell it over and over about me shooting Hitler."

A close call was when Bill entered a dugout to check it out and three Germans came in after him. "I hid under some dirty mattresses; held my breath until they left. They had some schnapps hid. They got their drinks and left," said Bill.

"I was wounded two times" said Bill. One of those wounds was a small piece of shell in his foot. "We were fighting, I could not quit. About two weeks later, my foot had swollen up and I could not get my boot on and off." Bill was sent back to an evac hospital where he doctors planned to amputate his foot because of gangrene. Bill said "No!" and was heard by a Captain who ordered the others, "Get a bucket of hot water, fill it with Epsom salts, soak it till it comes to a head." The shrapnel came out and Bill kept his foot.

The other time was a shoulder wound that looked like "hamburger." He was only away from the front for three days.

"I got two Purple Hearts, a Bronze Star, ribbons for battles we fought, a Good Conduct medal and a Sharp Shooter medal," said Bill.

As platoon sergeant, Bill handled records, made morning reports, and ration reports. His discharge papers state he supervised supplies and equipment for a company of 189 men.

Bill said when a child, he and his brother played a lot of Cowboys and Indians. "Jim would always find me, shoot me, and we would start over. I got to where I would not hide, I would go around him and slip up behind him. This also worked on the Germans when I was on patrol at night."

As a teenager, Bill met Colleen, his future wife, who lived several miles away. I would try to see her on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday nights; that made me ride a good horse about 60 miles a week. For fun, he and friends would rope and ride. He began riding in rodeos – and was paid \$1 each to ride a bull or a bronc. He did this on Friday and Saturday, making \$4 a weekend. "I could buy my girlfriend a candy bar and pop every day," said Bill.

After a summer working in the Kansas wheat harvest, Bill was able to buy a '35 Ford Coupe for \$125. "There was a boy from Bokoshe who wanted to trade for it. He had a '34 Plymouth coupe, real slick. I did not want it. All that was wrong with mine was having only two good tires with the other three worn out. You could not buy tires then because the war was taking them."

"Colleen and I went to a picture show at McCurtain. Her mother said to get her home by ten," said Bill. On the way home, they had a flat on a front tire, put the spare on, then had a flat on the spare. Bill said, "The boy from Bokoshe came along driving his Plymouth, said, 'How you trade now?' I said just like they sit. I won't help you fix a flat, and I won't take you anywhere. He traded with me. Worst trade I ever made in my life. I never owned a Plymouth after that. But I got her home on time."

Bill returned to Belgium for a week in December 2022 at age 97. It was eight decades after the Battle of the Bulge. He said reliving the memories of wartime experiences was very painful. That pain was balanced by the appreciation shown by the Belgian people during his trip. Bill and his travelling companion, David Rule, were housed with a local family while in Belgium. They toured Luxembourg American Cemetery, where they walked among 5,000 crosses marking the

graves of Americans killed in WWII. Bill said he was honored by the warm gratitude shown by the people in that country, and was surprised by everyone asking for his autograph!

Recent honors for Bill include being presented with PBR's *Be Cowboy* award in January 2023.

The award plaque states:

It's not the hat, the buckle, or the boots.

It's not what you ride or what you drive.

It's the values you embrace and the way you live your life.

Be Badder Be Bolder Be Braver

BE COWBOY

At the age of 98, Bill still cowboys – riding his horse almost every day.

Recent illustrations of appreciation include Bill ceremoniously receiving the French Legion of Honor in 2022, and being named the Oklahoma State Veteran of the Week in 2022. He was honored by Chief Gary Batton in 2021.

Bill enjoys speaking to groups, and especially visiting with youth. He is proud of being a veteran, and proud of being a cowboy.