

**The National Museum of the Pacific War
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)**

**Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas**

**Interview with
Robert R. "Bob" Bridge
USA
By John Tombaugh and Peg Van Meter**

Robert R. "Bob" Bridge
35 898 552
Co. B
325th Glider Inf. Regiment
82nd Airborne Division
Communication Sgt. 542
USA
European Theater

Medals earned:
Combat Infantryman Badge
Glider Badge
Rifle Sharpshooter
EAME Theater Ribbon w/4 Bronze Stars
Good Conduct Medal
Distinguished Unit Badge
Victory Medal World War II
Belgium Fourragere
Netherlands Orange Lanyard

Original Interview by
John B. Tombaugh and Peg Van Meter
completed
24 August, 2004

My name is John B. Tombaugh and I am Peggy Van Meter and we are interviewing Mr. Robert R. "Bob" Bridge.

Mr. Tombaugh

Would you please state your name and address?

Mr. Bridge

Robert R. Bridge at 1235 Bittersweet Lane, Rochester, Indiana.

Mr. Tombaugh

Do you remember your service number?

Mr. Bridge

Sure, 35 898 552.

Mr. Tombaugh

Do you remember your rank on getting out?

Mr. Bridge

Sgt. (Buck)

Mr. Tombaugh

What were your parents names and where were they born?

Mr. Bridge

Harry Albert Bridge born at Monticello, Indiana and Gavis A. (Baer) Bridge born at Sitka, Indiana.

Mr. Tombaugh

What is your wife's name?

Mr. Bridge

Carol Jean (Coplen) Bridge married March 31, 1978.

My First wife and mother of my children was Martha Weddle Bridge. She was born in Johnson County, Franklin, Indiana and died on Nov. 11th, 1976.

Mr. Tombaugh

Do you have any children?

Mr. Bridge

Yes; Stephen, Nancy and John (Jack).

Mr. Tombaugh

Where did you go to school?

Mr. Bridge

Started at Monticello and then Lucerne and graduated from Royal Center in 1943.

Mr. Tombaugh

Where did you enter the military?

Mr. Bridge

I volunteered at Logansport, Indiana.

Mr. Tombaugh

When Was that?

Mr. Bridge

Induction was November 10, 1943 and entry into active service December 1, 1943.

Mr. Tombaugh

Why did you choose this particular branch?

Mr. Bridge

I didn't, it chose me. I took my basic training at Camp Wheeler, Georgia. At infantry camps they solicited for paratroopers and I signed up for paratroopers and they gave the physicals at Camp Wheeler and I did not pass the physical, I was what they called "red lined" out. After coming home for fourteen days I went to Fort Mead, Maryland, then to Camp Miles Standish, Mass., then to Boston and shipped over to Liverpool, England. When we got to Liverpool they put us on a train across England to Leicester, England. They trucked us out to a camp and unloaded us and we lined up and General Ridgway jumped up on a bench and said, "Gentlemen, welcome to the 82nd Airborne, you now are glidermen."

Mr. Tombaugh

What was your specialty in military, was it weapons?

Mr. Bridge

Line Company Infantry.

Mr. Tombaugh

Any special memories of that period?

Mr. Bridge

Not particular. I went through basic training, thirteen weeks of it non stop, nothing outstanding; you went through the regular infantry and you learned to fire all the weapons. You either learned to clean it right or sleep with it.

Mr. Tombaugh

Your clothing at that time was standard issue?

Mr. Bridge

Yes, brown shoes and leggings.

Mr. Tombaugh

When you shipped out what ship were you on?

Mr. Bridge

SS Simons, a converted coast wise cruiser with 2,000 plus troops on board. I drew MP duty and was on the day before we left and stayed on a day after we got there. It was a massive convoy and to tell you how slow it was we were on the back row. That's about as slow as you can get. The front of the convoys were the fastest ships and we were on the back row one row from the right, we were the smallest ship and the slowest.

Mr. Tombaugh

Did you make friends in that period of time and have you kept in contact with any of those?

Mr. Bridge

Not too many going overseas really, only one basic training friend and he lives in California. He also was in the 82nd Airborne Glider in a different company.

Mr. Tombaugh

What were the condition like over there in England?

Mr. Bridge

We were in tent city. 6 man tents with dirt floors. This Camp was set up on serf ridges. In England some of the fields roll about a hundred feet, I don't remember how wide they were now but they ran all the way across the field and the tents were set on top of this so the runways were out about. The serf ridge goes back to Surfton; you rented the land and that was your land and you'd give so much to the landowner. I never found out about it until I was out of service 40 years and was back over in 1984 and found out what they were for.

We had passes to go into the town of Leicester and they told us we'd be moving out before we knew it, the rumor wagon works good. They don't always know where you're going but that you're moving out tomorrow. They knew because the milk or food supply was cut off and this was how they knew it because they didn't want a supply coming and nobody to eat it. I think most of England knew it was evident but they didn't know it was going to be this day. They just knew it was coming up because the troops all moved all their Airborne units to marshaling areas, infantry went to docking areas to get on boats and all the armor was parading down the roads. They had dummy stuff set up for the enemy aerial reconnaissance and which consisted of inflated rubber tanks and trucks. Now when we went to Holland we didn't have much of it. But in the invasion into Normandy there was a lot of competition in where we were going and where we were going to land. A lot false information was given in trying to throw off the Germans. Hitler was convinced it was going to be at Calais and Erwin Rommel thought it could be Normandy, but he went home as nothing was moving in the storm and went to celebrate his wife's birthday and deliver her a pair of shoes.

Now the invasion of Holland was to secure the bridges that would

allow British and American Armor go around the north and come back into Germany from the west. There was no Siegfried Line up there so we went north and the 101st Airborne secured the bridge at Eindhoven. We were assigned a bridge at Nijmegen and secured it, the British and Polish went into Arnhem (that's where you get the movie "A Bridge too Far".)

The main bridges across the Rhine and the canals were those three bridges and they were massive big bridges to save them you had to keep the Germans from blowing them up.

This picture of the glider that we went to Holland in and the men that went with me, as of Aug., 2004 we think only two are alive. The number on the fin tells when and where it was made and this one was made by Ford Motor Company.

Mr. Tombaugh

This was your first combat experience?

Mr. Bridge

Yes, I still was 18 years old when we landed at Grave, Holland.

Mr. Tombaugh

Did everything go for you as planned?

Mr. Bridge

Planning is a lot of it but rarely is it followed out, always changes and exceptions comes into fact pretty fast and that's the reason the American Army was successful all the time because they were more adaptable, and not only that you were allowed to think. Of course so much of your German Army was not allowed to think, only to do. You could improvise and make your own decisions a lot of the times. One time in the Battle of Bulge we had three company commanders in one day; one company got down to a tech/sgt. because they ran out of officers. Being a company commander was a destination that was not a rank. A couple of them were pretty rank (ha ha), but during the Battle of Bulge we were all pretty rank. We went from 17th of December to 23rd of January and nobody had a bath or haircut or anything.

Mr. Tombaugh

When relief came who were they?

Mr. Bridge

I believe it was the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment that relieved us. You know, it's been long enough I forgot about that. We were sent back for a little R&R to a small village of Pepinster, Belgium. We were there for 10 days of R & R.

Mr. Tombaugh

We could elaborate on the 10 days of R&R. It's not really rest and recuperation because of the weather and the food as you were still on c-rations at that time?

Mr. Bridge

No, We had company kitchens that caught up to us at that time and set up in an old factory, matter of fact we all were suppose to stay in the factory. The town people of Pepinster came in and wanted two or more soldiers to stay in their houses and they stayed in the basement because they were afraid of buzz bombs. So we slept in their beds. The couple I stayed with was in their 70's at that time.

Mr. Tombaugh

After you got done in Holland where did you go next?

Mr. Bridge

Sissonne, France, located to the north of Reims. Sissonne was a French Army Camp, big stone barracks and thick walls and had been a World War I barracks but I believe had been used before that. It was a little different manner of transportation when we left Holland, it was on foot and by truck. We were walking in the rain and mud and feeling awfully bad for yourself, but as you walked they had several trucks and they'd go to the back of the line and load and go to the front and drop off and turn around and continue doing this and speed up the moving and not hauling everyone at on time, you were always in the convoy trail and the trucks running by you and as you moved back you knew you were going to get to ride. In two days we went from Holland to Sissonne, don't ask me how many miles I don't know, maybe 100 miles. With hard walking you can do little more then 20 miles a day. You can get 30 miles in one day but that's drag assing at the end but you can do 20 miles a day easy walking.

Mr. Tombaugh

Do you remember your officers and your CO above you?

Mr. Bridge

Yes, quite a few of them.

Mr. Tombaugh

Who was your CO at that time?

Mr. Bridge

Holland, we lost our CO in Holland. Trying to think who brought us down to Sissonne. I believe it was Gibson, Company Commander. You had a Lt. for every platoon, and then squad leaders then your Cpl's.

While in Holland the radio man got hit and the radio still was working so Lt. Williams said: "Pick that up Bridge, let's go." It was an SCR 300 with 24 hour battery and weighed 45 lbs. I was a country farm boy used to working and I got the job (ha ha). By the time I got to Sgt. I had a radio man and I operated the telephone and telephone lines and had 3-4 runners at different times. A runner is a message carrier. No telegraph there, but in basic training they gave you a test. I never made heads or tails of it

and we never used telegraph. Radio and hard wire telephone and sound power telephones.

Mr. Tombaugh

While in the military do you have any humorous events you'd care to tell?

Mr. Bridge

We had one Lt. and we'd tie his shoe strings together. He didn't stay around long, he simply got the Lt. job, maybe political. They shipped him in as replacement and I am not kidding, he was dumber than a box of rocks. You'd be surprised at the tricks we played on that man. Will not discuss it further.

Mr. Tombaugh

When you came home what were the changes like compared to when you left. Here in the states we had scrap drives, victory gardens and rationing when you came back.

Mr. Bridge

I spent three months in Berlin on occupation duty so I really didn't get home until 1946 when things had started to recover. By the time I got home they hadn't quite started producing new automobiles yet but later on in '46 they produced some new automobiles and what not, and when I got married in January of 1947. A friend was able to get us a refrigerator. Things took a while to get back going as there was no regular production.

You know they sold the Waco CG 4A glider crates to farmers and other people and they bought those crate because of the good lumber so they could build with it. See a glider wasn't in a single whole crate, you had five crates to one glider. A lot of things sent overseas were crated and had to be put together after they got there. All had to be tested before they could be used. The whole thing of it is that the whole United States went into the war effort whether you were farming, or making tanks and airplanes or what ever.

In Nebraska the town of North Platte had a railroad exchange there and they'd haul troops through there and those people maintained a constant USO there right along the side of the railroad tracks. During the few minutes while the engines changed or refueled they had things like cake, apples, sandwiches, water, eggs and these people maintained this 24 hours a day. They fed millions of troops who were going through there in Nebraska.

Mr. Tombaugh

Did you take advantage of GI Bill when you got home?

Mr. Bridge

Yes, I took three years farm school at Royal Center, Indiana. I was farming and we went to school two night a week and then we had different projects. It paid off for me for I stayed in the Farm AG business. My Professor was Milford "Shanty" House.

Now there is about 3,000 men in a regiment and I suppose that there were over 7,000 men that passed through the regiment as replacements. Some of the replacements were not there long enough to learn their names.

I have a book at home that if they were killed I can tell you what day and where they are buried and reburied at but can't tell you anymore that. Father G. Thuring at Groesbeek, Holland has done this for the 82nd Airborne. Now remember Airborne is Airborne and regular Infantry is leg soldier. Glider is a little of both but still Airborne. Our regiment did not go on the airborne drop at Wesel, Germany, This was the 17th Airborne Division. I didn't go into the German invasion, I was in Holland. I landed in England and then to Holland and France and had to walk through Belgium to get to France. No way you can get out of Holland without going through Belgium. To Sissonne then from there to the Battle of the Bulge and then back to Sissonne and then to Cologne, Germany. In Cologne we held the west bank of the Rhine River for a month or more, then back to Cologne again and loaded us on a train and we spent about 10 days on a train as they moved us about 10 miles everyday so you didn't get too well acquainted.

After World War I France sent a bunch of these old boxcars over to the USA and they were filled with everything, one for every state and Indiana's at Fort Wayne, Indiana. Some had been discarded and they were short, shorter than our boxcars we have now.

They would put as many as 150 POW's in the boxcars and they were so full the men couldn't lie down; some men died while on their feet. Now in World War II we rode on the 40 & 8, as those cars were called, on the way going up to Hamburg. Those numbers referred to the cars carrying either 40 men or 8 horses. We could lay down we had straw between two doors and kept it clean and you slept on it. Kept door open if needed to do something you simply hung out the door. They came equipped with airflow toilets (ha ha), pants down went outside in the ditch (ha ha). When we got Hamburg and then they trucked us out a ways and fought the war tp the Elbe River, that's where the Americans and Russians met at.

Mr. Tombaugh

What was the condition of the town Cologne at that time?

Mr. Bridge

Was pretty badly bombed but we went down to the Ford Motor Company and dug through the rubble to get parts for the jeeps, spark plugs and things like that. It had been bombed but not destroyed.

Now during the war there was a bank of bags around that Cathedral that were 30 feet high and down to a base of 20 feet wide.

Mr. Tombaugh

While in Germany in the occupation, what was the area like and the people?

Mr. Bridge

The occupation we did in Germany was a little bit there at Cologne. Of course while we were holding the bank we were searching the houses for weaponry, and they were mostly rural areas out in the farm areas.

Mr. Tombaugh

What did you do when you first came back?

Mr. Bridge

Little of nothing, I helped my dad build a barn and farmed. I had some back trouble and they didn't have hydraulic equipment, and the doctor said: "You have to get another job." I went to work for Curtiss and I lacked eight months of being in business with them and myself for 40 years. I was an independent and I'm retired now.

I am secretary of 325 Glider Association.

Chef de Gare of the Forty and Eight.

One night I was reading "The Citizen Soldier" and had forgot all about this; during the Battle of the Bulge when we captured German soldiers we didn't have enough men to send them back with guards. Most of them wanted to give up anyway, so we cut all the buttons off their pants so they had to hold their pants up or freeze their butts off and then we'd send them back. Just imagine holding your pants up trying to run. You can't get into a lot of trouble holding your pants up. Of course the prisoner camp began to bitch at us they couldn't keep there pants up they'd steal buttons and everything else.

Now we had c-rations during the Battle of the Bugle, it was that or k-rations and for water they'd bring it out to us and you would fill up your canteen. You didn't eat snow as you'd get a sore throat and get to cold inside. We really had some water supply but the worst of it was when they brought it you filled your canteens and you had a quart of water and it might be three days before you got anymore. Now it wouldn't freeze because you carried it on your body and you moved a lot and couldn't drink it all because wanted to have some tomorrow. So you still eat the rations and it was pretty tough.

One night got about four hours sleep and somebody yelled; " Are you Bridge ?" I said "Yea." I went to get up and they had turned the motor on the tank off and I was frozen to it! My coat was wet. That was the only time I was really warm when I got in there he was still running the tank and when the fuel gets so low you have to turn the tank off.

Lot of men got frostbite but us old country kids didn't. We old country kids put a sock in each hip pocket and switched them every day, didn't tie shoes tight and kept the clothes loose. You look like a tramp but the air circulating inside the clothes kept you warm inside and I never had any trouble that way. I took my shoes off everyday and you would rub your feet when you changed your socks.

Mr. Tombaugh

How did you come back?

Mr. Bridge

On the HMS Queen Mary. I left Southampton, England on the 29th of December 1945. On New Year's Eve we hit a North Atlantic storm and the Queen Mary went to anchor. That was the only time she ever went to anchor for half a day. When she would rise and drop and you were laying in the canvas bunks you'd hit the guy above you if you didn't belt yourself down. Food was good on the ship. As I was a growing boy I was home before I was 21 years old. I arrived in United States on January 3, 1946.

I left United States May 13, 1944 and arrived in England on the 24th of May 1944. I was overseas for a total of 1 year, 7 months and 21 days.

-End-

14 hours