

Crossing the Rhine...continued

BY ZANE BAGLEY

In late March, my wife, Becky, and I made our second trip to Oklahoma to visit Bobby and Louise Cobb to learn and hear more stories about my dad, Walter Bagley's WWII service. While there, I digitally recorded over 35 hours of cassette tape that had been recorded over a period of 6 years in the 1990s by a friend of Bobby's starting with leaving New York City on the Queen Mary until the end of the war and their return home.

While there, we took Bobby and Louise to Oklahoma City to the 45th Infantry Museum. In the museum's arsenal, they have an M-8 tank like my dad drove and Bobby commanded during the war. Before leaving for Oklahoma, I had talked to the director of the museum and made arrangements for our visit. We were met by three staff members including the director, Mr. Brown. The director gave me permission to climb into the tank and sit in the driver's seat and see the same view that my dad had 70 plus years ago. What a thrill! Bobby looked on with pride as I climbed into the M-8. Bobby explained the operation of the tank including fueling, loading of ammunition, changing the tracks and bogie wheels of the track. I can't thank the 45th Museum enough. It is one of the largest military museums in the United States.

Bobby explained how during the war they were hit a lot of times. He said it was mostly small arms and machine gun fire. There were a few memorable hits. One time a 20mm anti-tank gun ricocheted off the turret and twice an 88mm from German tanks went straight through the turret leaving two holes, luckily not hitting any ammo or it would have blown up. The first time the shell went through above the head of the gunner as he was bent over looking through the sight of his 75mm. The second time only Bobby was in the tank as the crew was handing him ammo from their two wheel trailer which they pulled with the tank. Bobby said they took the tank to cover before the Germans could fire at them again. Luckily no one was injured during either of those strikes. Later in the war, Bobby caught shrapnel from an 88mm in his shoulder, but he continued on as the tank commander.

During the war they were credited with taking out several Panzer tanks and two of the Tiger tanks that Hitler said were indestructible due to their 4" armor. Bobby said my dad spotted one of the Tiger tanks under a bridge, facing away from them. They shot an armor piercing round into the engine compartment, blowing it up. The German tank commander stood on the bridge and watched them approach. When asked after his capture, why he didn't run or try to stop them, he said that he didn't think that their little tank could hurt his Tiger. The second Tiger was spotted on a hill at night while my dad's tank crew was on a reconnaissance mission leading the 9th Armored Division. Bobby said to my dad, "Do you think we can get behind it?" Dad said, "Let's give it a try." Bobby told me that my dad drove up behind the Tiger until their tracks were no more than a foot apart. Dad buttoned up his hatch where he would look out of while driving. They fired an armor piercing round into the engine compartment and it blew up. A German climbed out right onto their tank. Bobby grabbed his arm and he surrendered. The German prisoner said they had all been asleep, not thinking the Americans were that close.

I feel it has been a gift from God that I found Bobby and Louise to learn stories first hand. Bobby is one of the rare people in the world with an incredible memory. He can tell what the weather was and what they were doing during the war, giving almost day by day accounts even now, at 91 1/2 years old. I would like to thank everyone that called or spoke to me about my first article. I hope to continue writing more articles about my dad's service in WWII. Again, thank you to all who have served our country.