

Sam Carrubba 14 Jul 2004 Interview Notes

By Wesley Johnston, 23 Nov 2016

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These are my notes to clarify and correct items on the Veterans History Project interview of Sam Carrubba of 1st Squad, Anti-Tank Platoon, Company B, 38th Armored Infantry Battalion, 7th Armored Division in World War II. The interview is at

<http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.33424/mv0001001.stream?start=0>

2:30 “I was shipped overseas [from Camp Van Dorn, MS] before the Division. I went into England before the Division left for overseas duty.”

Sam joined 7th Armored Division in England. So “the Division” that he refers to here is the Division with which he trained at Camp Van Dorn. I am not sure, but I did find that the 63rd Infantry Division was training at Camp Van Dorn at the same time that Sam was there.

2:44 “When I went into England, I was assigned to the 7th Armored Division, 38th ... actually I wasn’t in the 38th at that time. I was in a service battalion ... company rather.”

I have yet to find the unit that Sam was in before he broke his ankle. If he was in 7th Armored Division in a service company, there were only two, neither of which was organic to 7AD: the 446th Quartermaster Truck Company and the 3967th Quartermaster Truck Company. The 3967th was a segregated unit of black troops. I am not sure about the 446th. He may also have been in 7th Armored Division Trains, although there was no service company in Trains. There was the 147th Signal Company. The events that he describes in France all fit with him being in 7th Armored Division. And he broke his ankle near Metz, he was clearly in the same area as 7AD. Once I have the Morning Reports for the combat months for all elements of 7AD and long-term attached units, we may finally find Sam in those records. I plan week-long intense working trips to the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis in 2017 and 2018 to gather the Morning Reports for all elements of the Division.

4:20 “I was reassigned after I healed up. ... in about October-November of 1944. We were in Holland by then.”

The Morning Reports of Company B, 38th Armored Infantry Battalion (B/38) have three entries for Sam. The Morning Reports only include a man when he has a change of status. There is no entry for him after 28 December 1944.

1. The MR of 14 November 1944 shows B/38 in a location 3 miles Southeast of Heer, Netherlands, with Sam as a Private, a replacement who was assigned to duty 13 November 1944. His MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) was then 604, which was Light Machine Gunner. One of the other guys who came in as a replacement in the same group told me that there were a bunch of

replacements brought up to a place where the rifle platoons had first choice. They chose all the big guys. And what was left – small guys like Sam, guys with glasses like my Dad (Walter Johnston), etc. – were assigned to the anti-tank platoon, which had no machine gunners. So Sam's MOS was changed once he was assigned, but that did not show up in the Morning Reports until later.

2. The MR of 26 December 1944 shows B/38 at La Beole, Belgium, with Sam (still a Private) being sent to the 7th Armored Division Clearing Station "slightly sick" – which was a huge category covering anything other than combat injuries and wounds.
3. The MR of 28 December 1944 shows B/38 at La Beole, Belgium, with Sam (still a Private, now with MOS 745, which was Rifleman) being transferred from the 7AD Clearing Station to the 77th Evacuation Hospital.

4:55 "We were reassigned to the Ninth Army in northern Germany. We were supposed to start an offensive up there when we were rerouted from ... back into the Battle of the Bulge in a little town called St. Vith [Belgium] from Ninth Army and we were re-assigned to the Third Army again."

The situation in the Netherlands was complicated. Technically 7AD was assigned to Ninth U. S. Army. But operationally they were under the command of and received their orders from Second British Army. So Sam is correct in the first part of this: re-assignment to Ninth U. S. Army, for both administrative and operational control. But Sam is incorrect about which Army the Division was assigned to at St. Vith. They were assigned to the First U. S. Army and not the Third U. S. Army. After 25 September 1944, 7th Armored Division was never again assigned to Third U. S. Army during the combat months.

7:00 "They assigned me at that time to an anti-tank platoon. They taught me how to fire a 57mm anti-tank gun, which was useless at the time when it hit the tank."

In the 38th Armored Infantry Battalion, each squad had its own half-track. Infantry squads pulled a supply trailer. Anti-tank squads pulled a 57mm anti-tank gun. Sam is correct that the gun was pretty much useless against German tanks, since the shells would not penetrate the tank armor. The only chance of stopping the tank was either a very lucky shot that might hit the rear of the tank (which was not likely when you were being attacked) or to hit the treads and bogey wheels, which was a difficult shot from head-on.

7:23 "We lost this town of St. Vith once, and we had to go back after we retreated and came back, and we ended up taking the town again. St. Vith, Belgium, that is."

Since Sam was transferred out of 7th Armored Division 28 December 1944, with no record of him ever returning to 38 AIB, this and his subsequent reference to it being warm in Germany in 1945 indicate that

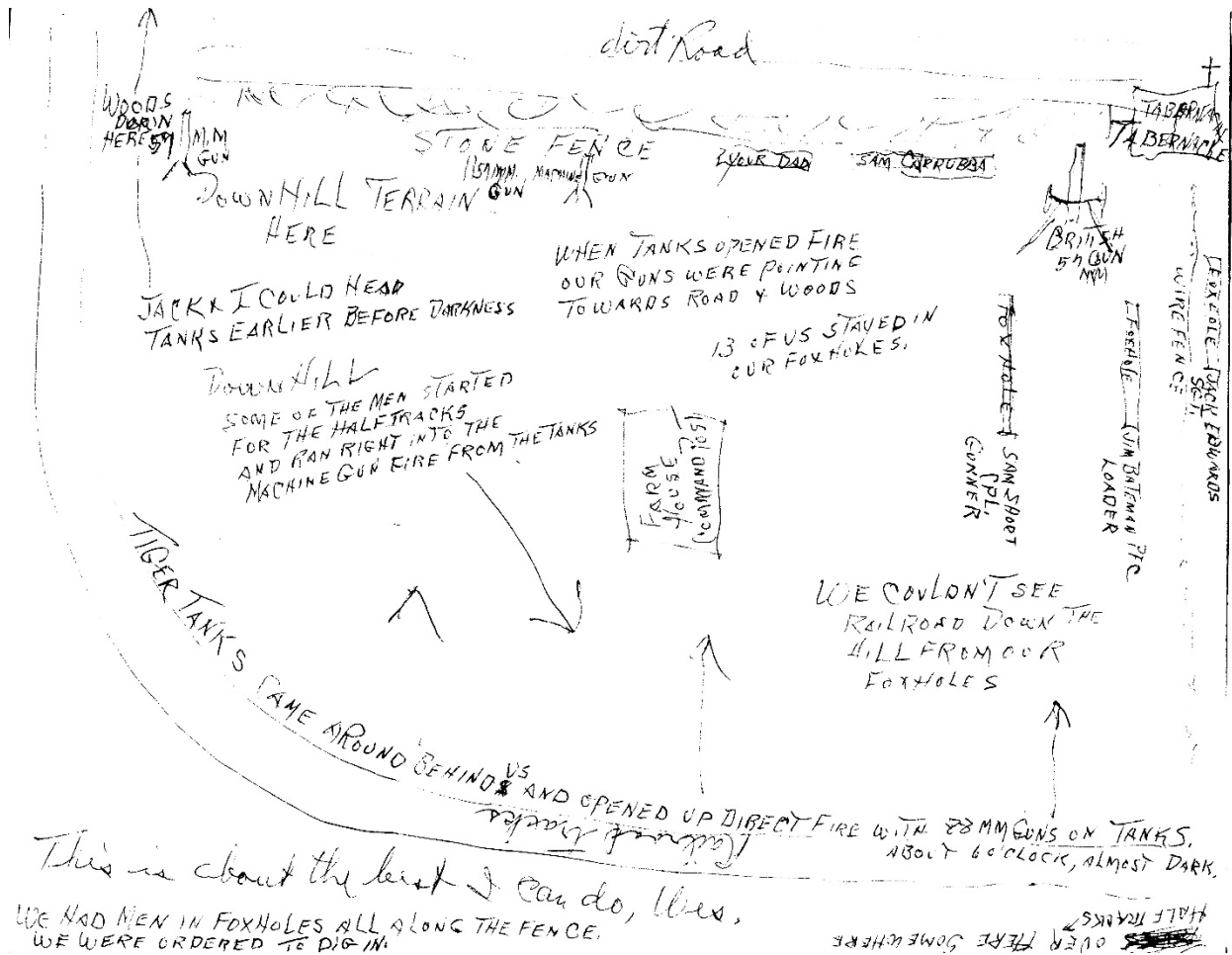
Sam must have recovered and been assigned to some unit in 1945. He makes it clear (at 14:56) that his combat ended in December 1944.

He remained in Germany after the war and, although he does not mention it in the interview, I believe he once told me that he was a guard during the Nuremberg war crimes trials. So he spent a lot of time in Germany in 1945 but not with 7AD.

7:48 “There’s one town near the town of St. Vith ...” (story of the oxen and the barn with a stone part at the base)

The town was Crombach, Belgium. In late May and early June 2007, Sam and his son Pete and C/38 veteran Ed Burke and five other veterans and their family members and I all stayed at the Golden Tulip Hotel in Weert, Netherlands, for the dedication of the monument at Ospel, Netherlands and other WWII-related site seeing. Based on what Sam had told me, as well as a hand-drawn map of their positions that squad member Jim Bateman had sent to me, I had concluded on earlier visits that their position was on a farm east of Crombach, about halfway to Neundorf. So when I drove Sam and Pete and Ed down to find the places where Sam and Ed had been, Sam confirmed that my conclusion was correct. We went to the spot where they had been, and Sam pointed out where the fox holes and the 57 mm gun had been. Their positions extended in a line behind the fence west of the road (Zum Kreuz) from about 50.266283, 6.078566 to the north end of the property along the intersecting road (Zum Bock). The barn is no longer there. When my grandson, George El Zakhem, and I visited in 2011, a new bench had been placed facing the road just outside the fence, near where the 57mm gun was positioned in December 1944.

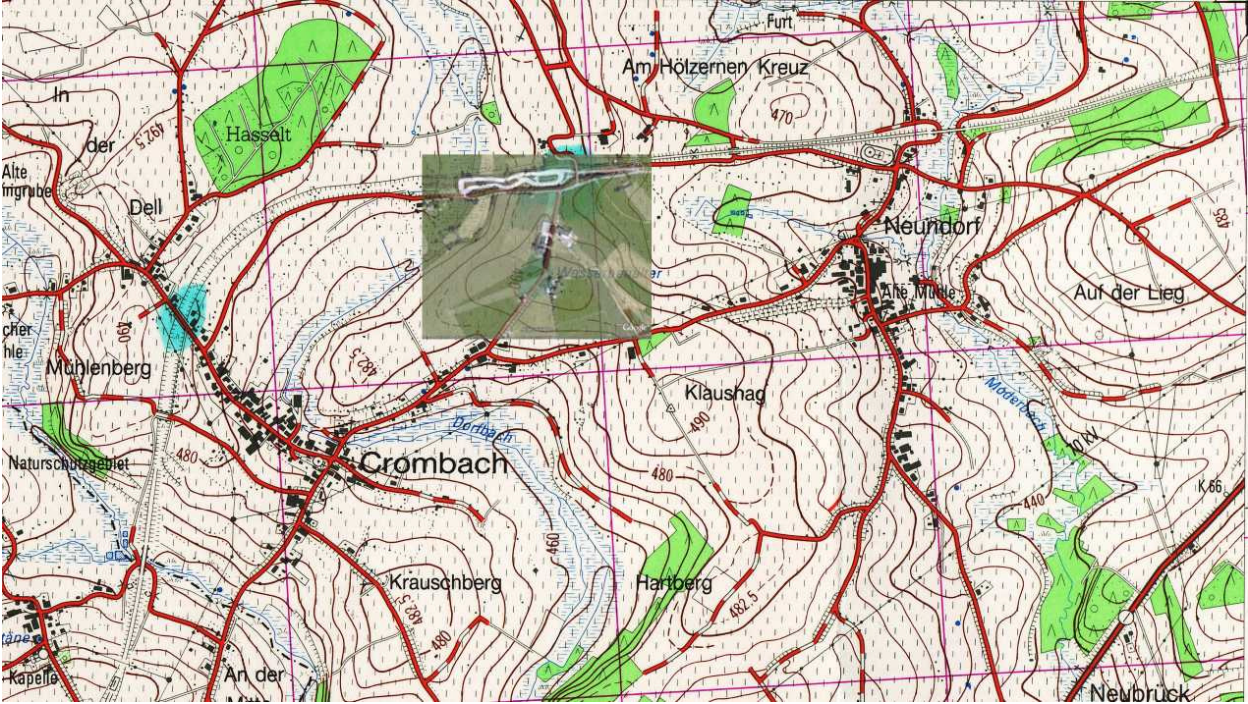
Here is Jim Bateman’s map. North is to the left. The dirt road is Zum Kreuz.



And here is an Army artist's January 1945 artwork of the view, in which the north end of their positions is at the bottom right.



And here is my failed attempt to overlay Jim Bateman's map on a modern topographical map of the area. Jim's map is not to scale, so that it cannot really be overlaid properly on the actual map.



9:47 “There was one incident in Holland ...” (jeep driver accidentally killed)

This was Richard Knott, from Tennessee. They called him Tennessee Knott. He drove the jeep for one of the officers. When their squad was quartered in a home in Ransdaal, Netherlands, Knott came into the house first thing in the morning (some of the guys were still laying down) with a large can of peaches that he had taken from the mess truck. He said he would share the peaches with everyone – except, in jest, acting squad leader Walter Gapinski. Gapinski, also in jest, told Knott that if he did not give him some peaches then Gapinski would shoot Knott. Gapinski was a combat veteran, and he knew to always put the safety on his rifle when not preparing to use it. But he picked up Sam’s rifle instead, and Sam was brand new to a combat unit and had trained as a machine gunner and radio man and not as a rifleman. And Sam had not put the safety on. So when Gapinski pulled the trigger, he shot Knott, with the bullet going in under one armpit and coming out the other.

The brass tried to get the guys in the squad to say that Gapinski did this on purpose, but none of them thought it was and would not say it was. So there was no court martial, and Gapinski was transferred to 23rd Armored Infantry Battalion, one of the other two AIBs of 7AD. Knott was buried at the temporary U. S. military cemetery at Margraten, Netherlands, and his next of kin opted to have him buried overseas, so that he is now buried at the permanent U. S. military at Margraten (plot F, row 20, grave 13).

The house, then owned by the Bruul family, where Knott was accidentally killed at Ransdaal is at 50.863257, 5.890575, on the south side of Ransdaalerstraat, just west of the T intersection with Doctor Huntjensstraat. The marker commemorating Knott, erected thank to Niek Hendrix of Ospel (whose father erected the Ospel monument in 2007) is at the north end of the buildings across the street from the house. (The house has now been subdivided and used for rentals but retains most of its original exterior.)

11:03 “I landed in Scotland, actually in Glasgow.”

Actually, the ships landed at Grenoch, on the Firth of Clyde, just west of Glasgow. I had intended to visit Grenoch in 2013, with my second grandson Anthony El Zakhem. But two days earlier, I hit a pot hole on a rural Scottish road that popped the tire and led to a great deal of trouble and loss of time, so that when we flew out of Glasgow Airport to Belfast that was as close as we came to Grenoch.

11:15 “We were in this little town ... in England ... “

If Sam was with 7AD at this point, which is in doubt, then 7AD was at Tidwoth in Wiltshire, nor far from Stonehenge. Anthony and I did visit Tidworth in 2013, where the British Army still has a huge base, but all of the WWII buildings have been torn down.

12:43 “This here fellow ... there was one fellow in my outfit. He had taken photos of us ...”

Sam is referring here to my Dad, Walter Johnston. My Dad was always a camera buff, and he and his cousin Jack Cunnea developed their own photos together. Sam goes on to tell about me, calling him up in 1994 and visiting him in Tucson in 1995 and giving him the copies of the 66 photos that my Dad had. I

am not really sure that the photos that my Dad had were taken by him. Some of them were definitely not by him, since he is in them.

14:56 [Interviewer: “How much combat did you see?] “ ... from August til December 44”

The B/38 Morning Reports (see above at 4:20) show Sam leaving 7AD 28 December 1944. I have no records for him prior to 13 November 1944 but hope to have some by the end of 2018.

17:36 “One of my lieutenants in my outfit ... was captured in the Battle of the Bulge ...”

He is referring to 1st Lt. Jack Higgins, who was the Executive Officer of Company B. When they first arrived at St. Vith late in the day on 17 December, it was dark, and B/38 commander Capt. William Greene was not able to see his men’s positions as they dug in on the ridge line east of St. Vith (the ridge line is called the Prümerberg). So at first light on 18 December, Capt. Greene went forward to inspect his company’s position. He heard rifle fire coming from one foxhole and went over to it to tell the guys to knock it off, since they would be giving away their position, and it turned out to be a German foxhole – so close to his own men’s foxholes. And he was taken prisoner. So Jack Higgins assumed command of B/38 during the defense of St. Vith. But he too was captured when the Germans overran the position with greatly larger forces three days later.

Jack Higgins lived in Phoenix – actually in the suburb of Peoria – and passed away in 1995. His wife Bea remained in Peoria and passed away several years later. I cannot recall when she died, but Sam clearly thought in 2004 that she was still living.

21:19 “the day my friend was killed ... it was raining ...”

I don’t think I ever realized that it was raining when Richard Knott was killed inside the house where they were quartered at Ransdaal, Netherlands.

The story that he then tells of using sugar from the mess truck for a woman to bake a civilian woman to bake an apple pie is the same story that I have heard when they were quartered in January 1945 in a home in Lambermont, Belgium. Sam at one point says that his time in combat ended in December, and as noted above, the Morning Reports show him leaving B/38 on 28 December 1944. So there were apparently at least two occasions when local women baked a pie for the squad.

24:52 “Camp Lucky Strike”

I have visited the site where Camp Lucky Strike used to be. It is now the non-commercial airfield (aerodrome) on the flat high ground just southwest of St. Valery-en-Caux, France (49.834827, 0.652828).

25:55 “His name was Schultz.”

I have never been able to identify who “Schultz” was. There was no one in B/38 named Schultz. In fact, in all of the records that I have thus far transcribed for the entire 38th Armored Infantry Battalion, there was no Schultz. So it was apparently a nickname, but I do not know who “Schultz” was. Sam also told me that Schultz had been in prison in New York state and was let out to join the Army.

I don't recall if Sam showed me the card trick. If anyone knows the trick, we should write it down, since it was clearly important to Sam.

27:10 "After the war was over ... Switzerland ... furlough ..."

I have seen postcards of some other men who had the furlough in Switzerland. Since Sam was apparently no longer with 7th Armored Division after 28 December 1944, I do not know what unit he was with nor where he was at the end of the war.

27:33 "I was reassigned to an ordnance outfit. I was discharged from them."

It is not clear when this happened. He is talking about after the war was over, but it is unclear whether he was assigned to the ordnance outfit before then or at that time. His discharge paper may show what unit he was in. It will certainly show one of the units he was in. The men were told that under no circumstances would a replacement ever be provided for their discharge papers. So they were advised to have them legally recorded at the office of their County Recorder, the same one who records property deeds. So the County Recorder of the county to which he returned may have a copy of his discharge. If he ever applied for Veterans Administration benefits, he would have had to provide them with a copy of his discharge, which they will have in their files. A call to the 800 number of the VA may be the easiest and fastest way to obtain a copy of his discharge paper.

30:19 "We left out of Antwerp, Belgium. ... 12 days across the Atlantic ... We ended up in Camp Kilmer, [New Jersey] and I was discharged from there."

This is important. The description that Sam gives fits exactly with the sailing of the *Brandon Victory*, which sailed from Antwerp to New York, 1-11 Dec 1944. Former Battalion Headquarters/38 AIB soldier Charles Dennis was on this voyage, and I have four photos he allowed me to scan from this voyage. This makes it all the more significant to obtain Sam's discharge paper, since it will give the dates of his sailing and arrival, as well as his date of discharge. It will also give his ASR score, which is the "points" system used after the war to determine which men were sent to train for the invasion of Japan and which men were shipped home and discharged first. Sam apparently had enough points to not be headed for Japan. This means he must have had a fairly long time in service and overseas, since these were two of the bases for the points.

If he did come home on the same ship as Charles Dennis, then it is more likely that he did return to 7th Armored Division after leaving B/38 on 28 December 1944, possibly in a service unit as he had been before injuring his ankle in 1944, after which he was assigned to AT/B/38. I do not have all the Morning Reports but plan to have them by 2018, after making two week-long intensive working trips to St. Louis to obtain them.

35:25 "... the camps ... I saw the camps ... the smell was overcoming."

If he was with 7th Armored Division in April 1945, the Division was near the Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp a few weeks after the British liberated the survivors – and probably about 6 weeks after Anne

Frank and her sister Margot died there. I do know that some members of 31st Tank Battalion visited the camp, and some took photos, of which I have copies. So it is very possible that this is the camp that Sam saw.

36:58 “... I have some photos [of the voyage home] on the ship.”

We could compare these two Charles Dennis' shipboard photographs. But his only have some parts of the ship, which was a victory ship so that the structure was the same as the other victory ships. The discharge paper is what could confirm his departure and arrival dates coinciding with those of Charles Dennis.