

Joie Knut Gjernes

Born October 29, 1920

Entered Military Service November 9, 1942 Fort Snelling, Minnesota

Discharged December 18, 1945 Camp McCoy, Wisconsin

I left Fort Snelling and was sent to Camp Polk, Louisiana to the 7th Armored Division, a new armored division activated March 1, 1942. The group I was with was brought in to bring the division up to full strength. We arrived on a cool night, there was frost on the tents. We were issued our personnel equipment and sent to seven weeks of basic training. From there we went to where maneuvers were going on. My first experience with a pup tent was when I had 1/2 tent and another fellow had a 1/2 tent, together we had a full tent. There I had my first ride in a tank.

In the spring of 1943 the 7th arrived in Camp Coxcomb, California. After five months of training we moved to Fort Benning, Georgia for more training. Then I moved to Fort Miles Standish for a short time, then to Camp Shanks, New York for a short time before embarking on the Queen Mary. We sailed on the Queen Mary for Scotland, June 6th "D" day. The Queen Mary arrived in Grennock, Scotland, disembarked on the 15th of June.

After a train ride to Sidworth Barracks at Wiltshire, England on the 7th of August we left for Southampton and Portsmouth. From there we loaded up our tanks on landing craft tanks and drove off on Omaha Beach. Driving from the beach to shore land the first thing we saw were the crosses of those that didn't make through "D" day. It made a guy think about what was ahead!!!

Starting in combat at Chartres, France, we entered the outskirts of town after dark. What a mess- we backed out and tried to get in the next day. Our tanks we traveled in, shocked wheat fields just like back home! Seeing little puffs of black smoke in the air, we didn't know what it was- found out later it was air bursts of artillery. It was raining steel! That was bad for the infantry. By the 20th of August, Chartres, was our 7th armored first city we went through- then on to Melun, Chateau-Thierry, Reine Verdun- then Mets where we ran out of gas. We were stopped until supplies could be brought up. While there we parked the tanks under some Italian Plum trees. The fruit was ripe, I think we picked it clean. The above cities were World War I battle grounds.

September 24th the 7th Armored was sent to Holland to help the British Army. The 29th of October I experienced one of the worst days of my life ( my 44th Birthday). We lost our platoon commanding officer and 3 of our tanks. That evening reinforcements from the Brits relieved us. We left the British army on the 9th of Sept. We went for a rest period, the first since August 14, when we came to France.

On December 16th the 7th Armored was sent to St. Vith- The Bulge. There we held the line for four days plus and we were instrumental in stopping the Breakthrough. Later in January of '45, our division recaptured St. Vith.

March '45, the 7th Armored Division crossed the Rhine River. We captured the Eder Sea Dam. We had a rather interesting happening. Our tank was parked on an approach on the earth work of the Dam, everything was calm. Next morning about a dozen German soldiers came out of a building about 10'x12' and surrendered. No one had checked the little building the night before!

On the 26th of March, the Division took off through Germany for 148 miles then were

ordered to halt. Here we came upon the famous Autobahn Highway- several prison camps were opened up. People from all over Europe plus seven 7th Armored boys were freed. 13,000 prisoners were taken during this time.

About this time Lt. Knowland with parts of his 87th Recon Squadron drove 24 hours in Germany territory to meet Russians for the British Army without a shot being fired. Some of our 7th Armored continued to Lubeck and the Baltic. The war was over!!! I made it!!! Without a scratch.

Three of our tank crew were still together that left Fort Benning, Georgia.

Joie K. Gjernes            Corporal  
                                 Tank Gunner

Co. A 31st Tank Battalion  
7th Armored Divison