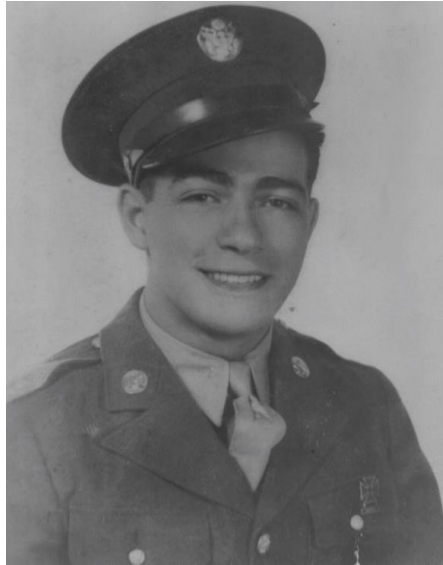


Sergeant First Class Patrick S. Macri, 101st Airborne Signal Company



Foreword



101st Signal Company "Faire Mon Devoir" To Do My Duty

Sergeant First Class Patrick S. Macri was initially selected for the Army's Specialized Training Program, ASTP. The program was designed to train and educate academically talented enlisted men at various Universities in order to build a specialized group of Army officers with needed technical specialties. Pat attended three universities before he was activated into the Signal Corps in 1943 and sent to Camp Crowder, Missouri for training. The ASTP would be further curtailed in 1944 by General Marshall, who was faced with a severe shortage of replacements for the Infantry Divisions and

additional requirements for the pending Operation Overlord. The program was reduced to 30,000 men, releasing 120,000 for the Army. Arriving near Newberry, England before D-Day, Pat was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division's Signal Company as a Gliderman. Unlike the volunteer paratroopers, Glidermen were assigned and initially did not receive any special pay, uniforms, or wings. Pat would make the combat jumps into Normandy and Holland, survive the battle of Bastogne and serve with the 101st Airborne Division until the end of the war. Pat Macri is an active and valued member of the Gulf Coast Chapter of the 101st Association. The following is his story.

-- **William Ball**

Normandy, Pigeons and Missing Codes

After my Basic and Technical training, I departed the United States on a Liberty ship in October of 1943. We assisted in loading the ship's cargo which we later learned consisted of Waco CG4A glider assemblies. Along with the other enlisted men, I pulled twenty-four hour guard duty with the Navy gunners in the gun emplacements on the ship. During our voyage, the food portions became smaller as the days went by. On one of my tours as Sergeant of the Guard, a GI was caught taking food from the ship's coolers. A Captain's Mast was held and he was placed on bread and water for three days, chained to the plumbing in a small head aft of the engine room. When our ship docked in Glasgow, members of the ship's quartermaster crew were taken off the ship under arrest for hoarding our food supply in order to trade it in Scotland. This was the reason our meals had become skimpy as the days went by. We were off-loaded and driven to Newberry, England where I found myself assigned to the Message Center Platoon for the 101st Airborne Division as a Gliderman. This was not a volunteer action!

After learning lashing and loading on a Waco CG4A Glider, and completing several flights with exciting landings, I decided I would rather not enter combat in this manner; I enrolled in the newly established Parachute Jump School in England. General Eisenhower needed more Paratroopers to carry out the Normandy invasion after he learned from the Army Statistician that the casualty rate of airborne troops could be as high as 70%!



Headquarters Company Personnel beside their glider before Normandy

When I returned to the Company area following Jump School, I found that I had been removed from the airborne component and was being assigned to the sea landing platoon. I shortly became aware of the meaning of the term "fickle finger of fate". When the airborne component Sergeant balked at the door of his C-47 on combat maneuvers, I was reinstated as the Sergeant of the Message Center Platoon, Jump Echelon. On the eve of June 5th 1944, we assembled at the airport for the Normandy jump, "OPERATION OVERLORD." The Signal Company personnel were loaded onto "short-stick" Headquarter planes, assigned to the Third Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, commanded by LTC Julian Ewell. Just prior to entering my plane, I was given a cylindrical cage containing two homing pigeons (based in southern England), which I placed between my musette bag and reserve chute resting on my chest.



101st Troopers move to their planes June 5th 1944.



Loading the C47s.

It was a pleasant flight, a spectacular sight, as around eight hundred planes crossed the Channel towards France. However, as the planes approached the coast of the Cherbourg Peninsula a cloudbank obscured the coastline, causing the planes to break formation and make their way through the cloudbank. Immediately, the ride became rough and bumpy, and more so as anti-aircraft fire began. My plane, with our Division G-2, Capt. Leo Schwieter as Jumpmaster, overran our Drop Zone (the green light, the signal to jump, did not appear). Capt. Schwieter motioned to the number-two man, COL Tom Sherburne, to stand at the door while he went to the pilot's area. As he looked down, he saw we were over water! He ordered the pilot to turn back towards land and drop his troopers as close to the intended drop-zone as possible. The pilot indicated that on the first pass his speed was too fast and his elevation was too low (to allow a jump). On the second attempt, the pilot was able to drop us within a few miles of our Drop Zone (DZ). We jumped at a low altitude. The time was 1:15 AM on June 6th, 1944.

I had a good landing in a small field edged with high, thick "hedge rows" in which I saw two frightened cows staring at me. I thought, "Good, there are probably no mines in this field!" First I placed a pre-written message into the leg capsule of the surviving pigeon (one escaped on landing). The message read that in my landing area the outlook, initially,



was good. As I began to shed myself of my parachute, I heard a cricket-type signal (carried by all Troopers) coming from the area of the lone gate of the field. After some anxious moments trying to free my cricket, I finally answered it. The trooper was from my stick, so we proceeded to find the others. We had moved through three or four fields when I noted my map case, with a 30-day supply of passwords and countersignals, was missing! I had removed the map case and failed to secure it when I heard the cricket signal. I told the trooper I had to try to return to my

landing field, without stating the reason. As I left him, I said a prayer. "Lord, help me find that field!" And I did, and retrieved the case. This was my secret until after the war.

By dawn the next day, I was part of a make-up patrol of mostly Headquarters Officers, combat support troops, and a few 501st PIR Riflemen. The many officers present led our patrol leader, none other than General Maxwell Taylor, our Division Commander, to state that "Never have so few been led by so many!" Our assembly point was east of the town of Hiesville where the Division Headquarters was to be located. This was west of the town of Pouppeville on the land-side of the southernmost exit, Exit One, from Utah Beach. The decision was made to go east and clear the Germans out of Pouppeville to assist the sea landing forces to move inland.



Major Larry Legere, the Assistant Division Operations Officer, was leading a squad of 501st Troopers and others to clean out the snipers in the town. The firing had caused most of the troopers into the roadside ditches, where they froze. To get them moving forward, Major Legere walked in the middle of the road and shouted, "Follow me!" Zwieg and I were on the road directly across from the Major when the sniper fire began again and the Major fell seriously wounded. The call for "Medic!" went down the line and Medic T/5 Edwin Hohl came up promptly, and as we straddled the Major, preparing to inject morphine, Medic Hohl was shot through the Red Cross emblem on his helmet. My buddy, Sergeant Milton Zwieg, made a lasso with some parachute cord we had retained, and pulled the Major from the line of fire. Our group did secure the area, and then we reversed direction and headed for the Headquarters location at Hiesville. Within 24 hours, all of the airborne objectives were secured, including the capture of the crucial town of Carentan.

In Normandy, my duties were to direct the message center operations at the Division Headquarters. I assisted in classifying, routing, encoding and decoding the messages. I also supervised a squad of very brave motorcycle messengers that had brought in a couple of German bikes. The Signal Company, thanks to the use of the gliders, had an array of signal equipment. The Radio Platoon had at its disposal several jeeps and trailers equipped with SCR299 and 499 radio sets. The seaborne element brought in 21/2 ton trucks and other heavy equipment. The Wire Platoon had wire-stringing jeeps and trailers with a good supply of W-110 signal wire. We often strung two lines for redundancy and occasionally used wire that we found in place. The wiremen were kept busy repairing the lines at all hours and our jeeps and motorcycles had a

metal guard rising vertically from the front bumper to cut wire strung across the road by the Germans. With this set up and equipment, the company was able to maintain radio and/or wire communications between the Division Headquarters, the three Parachute Regiments, the Glider Regiment, and the Division rear base in England.



Harley Davidson



Pat Macri in England after Normandy



Operation Market-Garden/The Holland Operation

On September 17, 1944 the greatest armada of airborne forces ever assembled went into the air. Paratroopers began to descend into their drop zones about noon on a beautiful day. Whereas the Normandy drop was at night (which added to the confusion and caused units to be wildly separated), the Holland day time parachute drops consisted of units landing on the prescribed drop zones. Jump casualties were few and units were fully assembled. Unlike the Paratroop drop, the later glider flights had intense fog, flooded fields and other hazards to contend with. Of the two Glider lifts for the Signal company five gliders with men and equipment were lost on one lift and one glider was forced to land in England from the other. Our gliders contained the radio jeeps, a message center trailer, motorcycles and other supplies. One of these missing gliders contained four attached British cipher clerks and radio operators. This forced us to communicate with the British forces using codes with which they were not familiar. The message center cleared this up by notifying all concerned of the codes we held and were using after which we were able to continue cipher traffic with the British. Our parachute echelon consisted of one officer and thirty enlisted men. We landed in the





Northwestern portion of Drop Zone B and quickly gathered all our bundles and moved to the nearby town of Son, just north of Eindhoven and the Wilhelmina Canal. The message center, along

with the Division Headquarters, was established in a schoolhouse. At about 1800Hrs on 19 September, the Command Post was attacked by several tanks and the installation was hit by several rounds knocking out our communications. Still under fire, the wire crew Sergeant worked to repair the damage and soon the switchboard was back in service and communications were reestablished. The tanks continued to fire at us at a distance of some 400 yards. The signal personnel and others formed a line of resistance, taking cover where it was available, be it in a foxhole or building. Units from the second glider lift assisted in repulsing the attacks. Our company had also posted five radio detachments with the advance elements of the British Guards Armored Division which contacted our headquarters as the tanks approached Eindhoven and Son.

As the battle area moved north towards Arnhem, the message Center assigned forward echelon teams for support. The Germans cut the highway at several points playing havoc with communications. Our wire and messenger motorcycle teams were kept busy



Hell's Highway 101st Medics tend to British wounded.

constantly re-doing the broken lines and finding routes around the blocked "Hell's Highway". The Germans cut the road in many places. Their method was to cripple the lead vehicle moving north and then to proceed to destroy the convoy. In many places the road was elevated, making easy targets of the vehicles. The Message Center was a constant beehive of activity as the battle situation changed. When off-duty, there was Guard Duty and Company Security that cut into sack-time. In the village at St. Oedenrode, the Germans hit the castle where the Signal Company was set up just as we were about to leave the area.



St. Oedenrode Castle

Then we moved north to the Nijmegen area where we were subjected to constant,



German 88MM gun at Eindhoven

accurate, shelling as the Germans held the high ground across the Waal and Rhine rivers. This was a very stressful time for us; rainy weather, constant shelling, and poor rations (provided by the British). The only bright spot was that they served two fingers of British rum with our evening meal! Finally, after 72 days we were relieved and sent to rest, recuperate, and build up our personnel and weapons at a former French Army Post in Mourmelon, near the city of Rheims.

We needed a bit of rest after enduring not only the accurate artillery fire, but also the constant rain. Evidence of stress was apparent by the suicides of three troopers within a few days time, among them was our Division Chief of Staff. On December 17 1944, I was touring WWI battle sites at Verdun and Chateau Thierry with a group of non-commissioned officers. We were to be guides for the 101st Airborne Division troopers which would follow as a part of the rest and relaxation (R&R) period of our stay at Camp Mourmelon, France. We received a message to return

immediately to our units and proceed by jeep or truck to a place called Bastogne in Belgium. The Germans had launched a major counter offensive with the object of closing the Port of Antwerp, the major port supplying the allied troops.

The Battle of the Bulge/The Siege of Bastogne



By the time I had arrived at the camp, the 101st Airborne Signal Company, my Unit, had left the area — leaving a couple of the trucks and jeeps for us to follow. I attached a trailer to a jeep, loaded our equipment and personal items, and then proceeded with the other troopers to the Ardennes Forest area in Belgium, arriving at Bastogne just before the roadway was closed by the Germans. We proceeded, directed by Military Police to the Division Headquarters area, a walled compound consisting of several barracks-like buildings, some with basements. The company bivouac area was just outside the compound and to the rear. It was obvious that the Germans had used it as well. The most popular place at "sack time" was a deep cave-like "foxhole" with timber and dirt covering it.



Bastogne

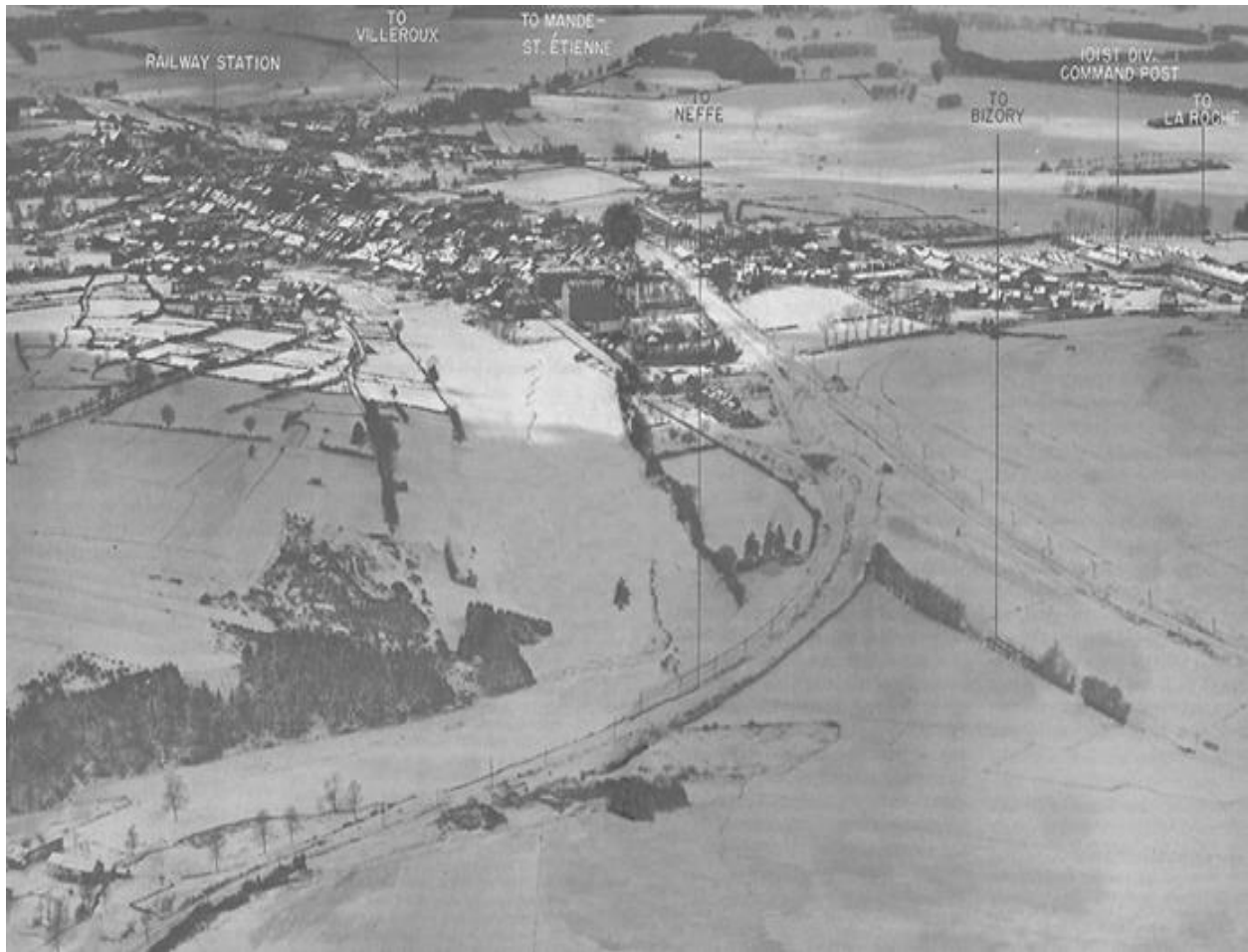
Shortly the Radio, Wire, and Message Center Platoons were in full operation. The fact that the division was surrounded by several German Panzer (tank) Divisions, did not adversely affect the troopers, during training it was always assumed that we would be surrounded by enemy troops when we jumped. The Message Center immediately noted the location of the Division's Fighting and Artillery Units, as well as combat support units such as Engineers and Medics. These were in a rough circle encompassing the general area of Bastogne. With us in the encircled town were the supporting units Combat Command "B" of the 10th Armored Division and the 705th Tank Destroyer Battalion. Also attached was the 463rd Parachute Artillery Battalion, veterans of battles in Italy and Southern France. Our Headquarters Area soon came under artillery and airplane attacks. The Mess Hall was hit, killing two Mess Cooks and injuring the Supply Sergeant.



Bastogne

On the 22nd there was a visit by a German officer under a flag of truce with a message for our Commander, General Anthony McAuliffe, in essence stating, "You are surrounded, so you are to give up Bastogne, if this is not done by 2PM, the town of Bastogne would be destroyed by artillery!" This was followed by our Commander stating the word "Nuts!" There followed constant tank with infantry attacks, preceded by a barrage of artillery and air bombardments, all along the perimeter of the 'donut.' The town of Bastogne was destroyed. The Germans erroneously believed the "weak" and "soft" Americans would have sought shelter in the buildings. However, the fighting units of the Airborne were dug in facing the Germans, reducing the enemy forces with counterattacks using bazookas, tank destroyers, and artillery. The Germans were surprised by the change in the opposing soldiers. Where earlier the Americans had retreated and many were taken prisoner, now we were not only fiercely resisting, but also destroying the Panzer tanks and the following infantry were being killed or captured by our riflemen and machine gunners! The intensive physical training of the Airborne Troopers was paying off.

On Christmas evening, December 25, 1944, an interesting situation developed with a radio transmission. Radio transmissions took second place to wire communications. The Germans were very active on the radio and did interfere with our frequencies. Our radio operator asked, in German, to allow him to operate on that frequency with some urgent messages, the German operator complied! After our transmission ended, the German played the hymn "Silent Night", words in German of course. On December 26th the weather cleared, allowing a resupply by C-47 planes and CG4A gliders with ammunition, medical, and other supplies. The gliders also brought us much needed volunteer surgeons and medical personnel. This medical assistance was critical because of



Re-supply on 26th December.



the loss to the Germans of most of the Division Hospital personnel on the first day of encirclement. That same day, elements of General Patton's 4th Armored Division broke through to the encircled town of Bastogne from the south. The 4th Armored Division sustained about 1,000 casualties on that drive. Upon the arrival of Commanding General Maxwell D. Taylor, the Division Command was divided into three sections at three different locations. This was to decrease the possibility of Division Headquarters being hit by the incessant bombing and artillery attacks. However, this also increased our work load for the communications platoons. It was made all the more difficult by the constant cold and snowy weather. Many of us had not been issued winter gear in the fast turn-around in Camp Mourmelon. The 101st was relieved on January 17, 1945, but to our surprise, the Division was then sent to the Alsace-Lorraine area to help stop a major German surge in that area which Adolph Hitler believed would relieve the pressure on his fighting units in the Ardennes. From the Alsace front, we pushed through the Rohr industrial area of Germany and then south through the Rhine area.



Pat at Berchtesgaden and the Eagles Nest



By the Eagle's Nest.



SFC Patrick Macri is awarded the Bronze Star Medal.

The war's end found the 101st Airborne occupying Hitler's "Eagles Nest" in Berchtesgaden, Bavaria. I left the European Theater of Operations, ETO, on November 28th. I arrived in the United States on a Liberty ship on 10 December, 1945 and was separated from active service. I remained in the Army Reserve and was recalled to active duty for twelve months during the Korean War. I then attended the Virginia Polytechnic Institute taking courses in Electrical Engineering and eventually retired as the Sales manager for Southern Alloy Steel Corporation in Tampa Florida.

In 2004, I was selected by the French Ambassador as part of a group of one-hundred D-Day veterans from all the Services. We were flown to Paris on a chartered jet for receptions held in our honor and then went by private train to Normandy. On June 6, we were awarded the French Legion of Honor in a special ceremony marking the 60th anniversary of the D-Day invasion.

