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World War II vet recalls parachuting into France during Normandy invasion

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By **ROGER LANSE**

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In 1942, when Dan McBride was 18, he joined the United States Army and was stationed at Fort Bragg, N.C. When he was 20, he parachuted into France, behind German lines, on June 6, 1944, at the onset of the Normandy invasion.

McBride, originally from Ohio, was a member of the 101st Airborne Division, 502nd Parachute Infantry, Company F. “ We left England about 10 p. m. on June 5 and jumped about midnight,” McBride said. “ The planes carrying the paratroopers were all in line— in a formation. But when we flew over Normandy, the German anti- aircraft fire began, and we could hear bullets from machine guns and shrapnel from the 20millimeter shells hitting our plane.

“I was loaded down with eight grenades, two antitank mines, ammunition, a full field pack, four blocks of TNT, an entrenching tool, a bayonet and a carbine. Shoot,” McBride said, “I weighed 300 to 400 pounds. We had to have someone help us climb into the plane.

“ The formation began to break apart as pilots tried to avoid the AA fire. They were banking and diving and turning,” McBride remembered. “ Well, on one particularly steep banking turn, being closest to the open door waiting to get the signal to jump, I fell out the door.

“My foot became entangled in the chute lines and when I landed I hit pretty hard,” McBride said. “I was knocked unconscious and when I woke up I didn’t know if I had been there 10 seconds or 10 minutes. I was in pain. Even my hair hurt. But when I checked all my arms and legs, everything seemed to work OK, so I got out of the harness and started walking to find someone who could tell me where I was.

“I heard shooting coming from different directions, then a machine gun burst clipped the top of the hedgerow above my head. I snuck down the hedgerow to where I thought the gunner was on the other side and pulled the pin from one of my grenades, released the spoon and counted ‘one thousand, two thousand, three thousand’ and lobbed the thing over the hedgerow. After the explosion, I peeked around the end of the hedgerow, carbine at the ready, but the grenade had killed the German.

“The first thing I did was wrap that .30 M1 carbine around a tree trunk and take the dead German’s MP (machine pistol) 44. It was a much better weapon.

“As I continued walking, I heard voices nearby and activated my ‘cricket clicker,’ ‘click, click.’ From the voices came ‘click, click, click, click.’ So I joined up with the Americans.

“I asked an officer where we were. He said, ‘Well, as near as I can figure from studying the maps, we’re somewhere in Europe.’ “As we continued walking down the road in the dark, we saw a ’36 Ford car driving toward us and we could make out the silhouette of a German helmet in the driver’s seat. We ambushed him and the car went into a ditch. An officer came out of the rear door and when he reached for the pistol he was wearing, I shot him and took his pistol belt and wrapped it around my own waist. Later on, I traded the Luger pistol to a glider pilot for a low serial number Colt .45 ACP pistol.

“ In a little French town a while later, I was standing on a corner when I heard the sound of German hobnail boots coming from around the corner. I waited with my M1 Garand rifle that I had taken off a dead American pointed at the sound. Well, this German paratrooper came around the corner eating an apple. He had a submachine gun slung around his neck and across his chest. When he saw me he reached for his weapon and I shot him.

“ He just stood there with blood starting to well up in the corners of his mouth. He stared at me as if to say, ‘Why did you do that for?’ And then he fell.’

McBride said there were 119 men in his company when the war started, and when the war ended there were nine. “I’m one of that nine,’ he said.

McBride said that he really liked the “tommy gun’ (Thompson submachine gun, .45 ACP caliber) as a weapon, but didn’t care for the .30 M1 carbine.

“ When we first jumped into France, the French didn’t like us that much,’ McBride said. “They weren’t too friendly. They didn’t know if it was just a raid or if we were going to stay.’

McBride has attended many Normandy commemorations and remembrances over the years and has been the recipient of medals, certificates of appreciation, and gifts from those he and others defended in Europe. “ This is how a lot of people over there feel about us now,’ he stated. “ We are really appreciated.’

McBride was in four major battles in Europe — Normandy, Holland, Bastogne and southern Germany — and was wounded three times.

He jumped as a private first class. He left the Army on Sept. 22, 1945, as a sergeant.

“ They tried to get me to re- enlist by offering me a promotion. I said, ‘ You could offer me a promotion to general — I’m still going home.’” Now 89 years old, McBride outlived his first wife of 55 years and lives with Alivia, his second wife of seven years, and two dogs, Angel and Tinkerbelle, off Rosedale Road.