

Written by Laurel Reed Berbach, August 2009, revised June 2019.

[The following information is taken from personal interviews with Howard F. Reed by Laurel Reed Berbach and Howard E. Reed, his children; from two small diaries now in the possession of Howard E. Reed; from a video interview on 18 April 1991 by Owen Billman, *Something For the Record*, The Mayfield Historical Society, a copy of said interview now in Laurel Reed Berbach's possession; and from the following book: Crowley, Major T. T. And Captain G. C. Burch, *Eight Stars to Victory: Operations of the First Combat Engineers Combat Battalion in World War II*. J. N. Waldstein, 1987. 2nd edition.]

**Howard F. Reed, PFC
#12079157 T42
1st Squad, 1st Platoon
C Company*,
1st Engineers Combat Battalion
1st Infantry Division****

Howard Francis Reed was born and raised in Amsterdam, New York and enlisted in the United States Army on 26 March 1942 in Albany, New York at the age of 23. When asked by his daughter why he chose to enlist, he answered, "I thought I was going to miss something. Which, I guess I didn't!"

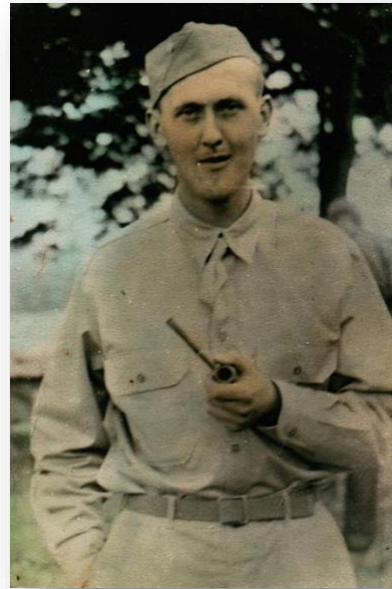


Image 1. Howard on leave, July 1942

Howard was in the Army for 42 consecutive months. He served outside the United States from 2 August 1942 to 15 September 1945 (37 months and 15 days with no leave home to the U.S.) He served with General Patton's Army in Africa and Sicily and with the First Army in Europe. He enlisted at age 23 and returned home at age 27.



*Image 2. Howard (center) "watching" the maneuver" before being sent overseas. (Image from *Eight Stars to Victory*, p15)*

After enlisting in March 1942, Howard was inducted into the Army at Fort Dix, New Jersey. He then received engineer training at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. He was assigned to the 1st Infantry Division at Fort Benning,

Georgia and was then sent to Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania to await assignment overseas. He always told his family that his original

assignment was to be sent to Alaska to build the Alaskan Railroad, but that fell through and he was then assigned to duty overseas. After a short leave and visit home to Amsterdam, NY, he shipped out of the U.S. on 2 August 1942 aboard the Queen Mary bound for Scotland and England. When first sent overseas, Howard was assigned to H and S Company for a very short time. He was also assigned to the experimental D Company for a short time in North Africa. He requested a re-assignment from H and S Company and was then reassigned to C Company for the remainder of the war. Howard said that if he had a choice he would rather be shot to death than worked to death! Up until that time, his unit planted mine fields and disarmed enemy mine fields, very labor intensive and physically demanding work. Howard served most of the time in the First Infantry Division, First Engineers Combat Battalion, C Company, which was usually attached to the 26th Infantry Regiment.

Howard described his job in the 1st Engineers as mostly sweeping for mines and booby traps. His battalion only built bridges in emergency situations. Bridge building was usually assigned to "Corps engineers." His job as an engineer attached to an infantry unit "was to do anything to remove an obstruction" and "keep the Company moving forward." He also said that if there was a counter attack and the infantry company was knocked out, it was the job of the engineers to go in as infantry until replacements arrived. As a combat engineer, Howard had to carry the same weapons as the infantry regiment. While the infantry soldier usually had to walk, engineers often rode in trucks because they had so much equipment. His outfit often had to conduct nighttime reconnaissance ahead of the US advance and behind enemy lines in order to determine soil type for landing heavy equipment in an advance. On one occasion, when reconnoitering across the Roer River ahead of the advance, their inflatable boat was destroyed by German machine gun fire. Most of the squad made it back, but Howard said that water was mighty cold!

From England, Howard was shipped to North Africa, where he took part in the Invasion of North Africa at the port of Arzew and the city of Oran, Algeria on 8 Nov 1942. After taking Oran, his unit moved steadily eastward to Tunisia and the successful conclusion of the North African campaign. Howard's D Company experience during the Battle of El Guettar, Tunisia is chronicled in the book *The Battle is the Pay off* by Ralph Ingersoll (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1943).

Following North Africa and a very short rest, Howard served throughout the Sicilian Campaign, taking part in the assault landing of Gala, Sicily on 10 July 1943.

After a long rest and training in England during the late fall, winter and spring of 1943-1944, Howard and the 1st Engineers were

part of the assault landing at Omaha Beach, Normandy, France (D-Day), June 6, 1944. The 1st Division was the first to land at Omaha. Howard's unit was scheduled to land that afternoon, but due to the heavy casualties taken by the first wave, he and his unit were sent in to "Easy Red" (E-1) much earlier, probably landing by 10:00 a.m. Looking out from his landing craft (LST 495) he said he saw the "most terrible sight in his entire life", continuous artillery and mortar fire from shore. He said that it was the usual 1st Division "bad luck" that a second German division had unexpectedly been assigned to take part in training maneuvers at Omaha Beach, resulting in a "mighty bloody day."

After seven or so days, his unit had to be held back at Caumont, France to await supplies and replacements, and to wait for the rest of the Allied troops to catch up. After the breakthrough at St. Lo, France, Howard and the 1st Engineers continued on,



Image 3. Phil or Robert H Nolan, Howard Reed and ? O'Connor. (Image from the Society of the First Division Reunion Newsletter, 1966)

participating in battles through Northern France. He and the 1st Engineers crossed into Belgium through Mons, breaching the Siegfried Line at the German border. After crossing the border, Howard and the 1st Engineers fought building-to-building for about ten days, finally capturing the city of Aachen, Germany. According to Howard, most of his advance in Aachen was underground. The

Engineers carried TNT

charges, using them to blast through cellar walls from cellar-to-cellar, through tunnels and sewers, continuing underground for entire city blocks while searching out and cutting wires until finally silencing a land line the Germans were using for communications.

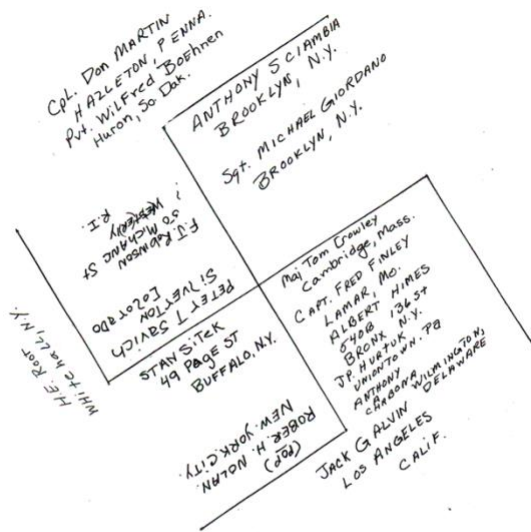
Aachen was where Howard was part of a group of soldiers that attempted to use a trolley car packed with explosives to knock out a fortified gun position. The incident was recorded in Charles Whiting's *Bloody Aachen* (New York: Stein and Day, 1976):

On the morning of 17 October a group of engineers, stationed on the heights above the city, decided they would take a hand in the task of reducing Aachen's defenses before the final assault. Two days before they had found an abandoned city tramcar in the city's Burtscheid suburb, bearing the line-number thirteen, and the idea of the "V-13" had been born. For a day they had worked on it like enthusiastic schoolboys. On both sides they had

painted its name 'V-13' in large letters. Next to it the tram now bore the words "Berlin" plus an arrow pointing forward, and 'Aachen-Express'. In the doorway they had wedged a looted portrait of Hitler with the words 'Heil Heel' scrawled in black paint beneath it. But that wasn't all. The whole interior of the tram had been filled to the roof with captured German flak ammunition, triggered to be set off by a time fuse once the V-13 hit its target.

That morning the engineers pushed their 'revenge weapon' into position. As they visualized it, the V-13 would roll down the hill following the tramlines, take a right curve, gathering speed all the time, and reach right into the centre of Burtscheid. When they were ready the sergeant in charge set the time-pencil and gave the signal to start and they began to push the tram along the rusty tramlines. Slowly the ancient vehicle gathered speed. They watched it rattling down the height towards the German positions, careering wildly from side to side, as if it would jump from the rusty rails at any moment. Seconds later it whizzed round the curve and disappeared from sight. The engineers' eyes flew to the dials of their looted wrist-watches, as they timed the weapon's progress into Burtscheid.

Suddenly there was a tremendous explosion. The engineers ducked. The blast wave hit them in the face. Automatically they opened their mouths to prevent their eardrums from being burst by the pressure. Then they saw a brown mushroom of smoke rising into the air far short of the target. The V-13 had exploded prematurely! Despondently they set off to look for new homemade 'secret weapons'. (p146-147)



Howard said that the German soldiers were surrendering in droves, so many that there were not enough men to guard them. One group of prisoners was left alone overnight in a cellar and told to stay there while the Americans went out on a mission. When Howard and his fellow soldiers returned the next morning, the prisoners were still there, but in the daylight the Americans discovered that an entire wall where the prisoners were left was gone. The prisoners could have left anytime during the night! The Germans said they were done with the war.

Copied from the Nazi flag that was captured by Howard F. Reed and his squad at Aachen - 1944. These were Howard's 'buddies'.

Aachen is also where Howard's squad captured a Nazi flag from a prominent city building (family story states city hall) and the squad signed it. The autographed flag is now in Laurel's possession.

After Aachen, Howard and the 1st Engineers participated in the horrific Battle of the Hurtgen Forest where his company sustained

heavy casualties, but were the first to break through the forest. Howard said the forest was so thick it was like "advancing into an invisible wall." In Merode, Germany on the east side of the forest, Howard narrowly avoided being captured when his lieutenant sent him back with three others to check on the progress of the tanks that hadn't shown up. The tanks had been delayed, mired in the mud. The Lieutenant and others of his squad who remained in Merode were captured.

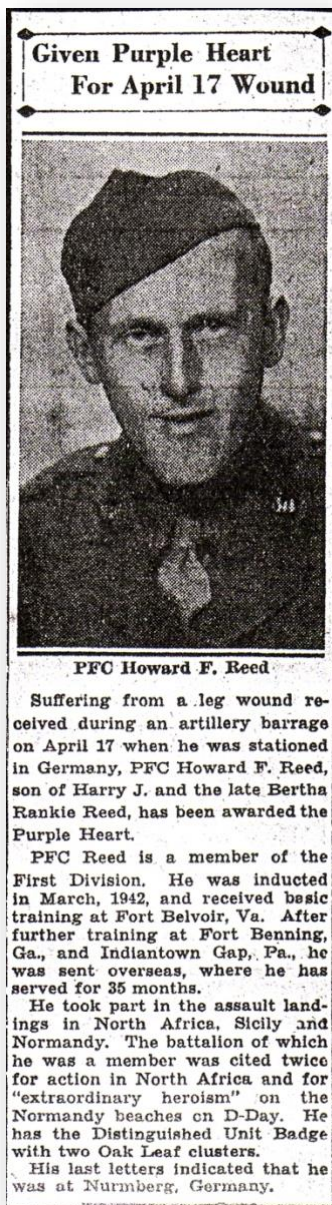


Image 4. From Amsterdam Evening Recorder, 14 July 1945, p2.

Howard's C Company (attached to the 26th Infantry) held Butenback, Germany during the Battle of the Bulge, They were so weak from loss during the Battle of Hurtgen Forest, they had been sent to Butenback prior to the "Bulge" to recuperate. Speaking of the Battle of the Bulge, Howard said, "Food was not a priority, only ammunition and the wounded had priority." He and his unit went without eating for three days. They dug frozen apples from under the snow and stewed them in a helmet. After being one of the first companies to cross the Remagen Bridge over the Rhine River, Howard and the 1st Engineers advanced to the heavily wooded areas of the Harz Mountains in Germany.

Combat finally ended for Howard at the Harz Mountains where he was wounded near the left knee by shrapnel on 17 April 1945. He was caught in an enemy artillery barrage near the end of the war. He was hospitalized in Paris for a month during which time the war ended. He was in Paris for VE Day. He said his type of wound was called the "million dollar wound" by combat soldiers. Although, the wound took him out of the fighting, it ended up delaying his return home. Other long-time soldiers in his unit were sent home before he was. He recuperated and was returned to duty on 8 May 1945 while he awaited discharge.

Howard was given an Honorable Discharge on 20 Sept 1945 as Private First Class in Headquarters and Service Company, 324th

Engineer Battalion, Fort Dix, NJ. He was reassigned to and discharged from this new battalion, along with other 1st Engineers that he had served with for so long, to await discharge. Meanwhile, his original unit, the 1st Engineers

(those who were not eligible for discharge) were sent elsewhere in Europe.

Howard arrived home on September 21 or 22, 1945. When Howard arrived home at the family farm outside Amsterdam, New York, his father was out working in one of the fields. Howard walked out to meet him. The first thing his father did was look at his leg and a look of relief passed over his face. Apparently, his family was convinced he had lost his leg when he was wounded. The reports sent home concerning his recovery were very brief. Howard and Annamarie Gifford, his long-time girlfriend and fiancé who had waited throughout the war for him, were married immediately on 6 October 1945. , (They became engaged through the mail. Howard proposed, then sent money to Annamarie, who bought her own engagement ring!) Colonel Gara tried to talk Howard into staying in the service after the war as a Master Sergeant. Howard declined.

Howard stated that in war "there's tough times, but in combat, there's good times, too. Sometimes there's hilarious times!" He often told the story of a friend he called "Father Donovan" that took place after Tunisia in May 1943 while they were back in Oran resting and awaiting shipment to Sicily. His unit was resting under date palms in a farmer's yard near Sidi-Chami. About 20 feet from his pup tent was a huge earthen, cement and stone vat of wine. The farmer told them they could drink all they wanted as long as they didn't waste it. His friend took the farmer up on the offer, had "quite a few," climbed up the vat to fill his pitcher again, and fell in! Howard let him "swim" awhile, laughing all the time, before he helped his friend out.

He told another story that took place in Caumont, France after the Normandy invasion. After they took the city, Howard left the squad to go back to his platoon. He stated it was odd how "like a homing pigeon, you could always find your platoon." He looked across a street and saw a "winery." He stated to himself, "That's where they are!" Sure enough, that's where they were. His friend saw him



Image 5. 1st Division, 1st Engineers, C Co, 1st Platoon, 1st Squad, WWII John Hurtuk in truck WIA, Hopper standing KIA, LtoR- Isenhower WIA and POW, Benton KIA, Peter Savich, Howard Reed WIA, Pedson WIA

coming and called "Come here, Senator, [Howard's nickname during the war was Senator] and have a drink! I haven't got a lady's slipper, but how about a combat boot?"

Still another story from Caumont concerned their discovery of a 55-gallon (approximately) wooden barrel of cognac. His squad decided to take the barrel back with them. Being engineers, they had access to a truck that carried their tools. As they were loading the barrel onto the truck their Battalion Commander came by. Howard said to himself, "We've had it now!" He said to the commander, "Spoils of war, Sir!" The Battalion Commander said, "Good, Good. Put it in the truck. We'll have a party later!"

A final story took place during the Battle of Aachen. While holed up in one of the thick-walled cellars of the city, a friend who was recently from Ireland just prior to the war, was quite a musician. He had discovered a violin in the building. When Howard was relieved to come down to the cellar for "chow", the soldier was playing "Old Soldiers Never Die." Howard never forgot that song.

Howard also spoke of several stories that illustrated the tough times of war. He observed that he never slept in a bed for a little over a year. In an attack on a hill, shrapnel cut his pack off his back. Another time, shrapnel hit Howard's "writing box" which he kept in his front left pocket. It broke a bottle of red ink, possibly saving his life. His family still has the pictures and notebook he carried in that pocket which are covered in red ink! In the city of Aachen, Germany, a bullet blew the front tire off his motorcycle. He said it was a "close call!" Another time, during a mortar barrage probably in the Hurtgen Forest, Howard jumped into a hole and three men jumped in on top of him. A shell hit the lip of the hole, killing the top two men and wounding the third. Howard was knocked out for about four hours of the battle. The third soldier was a friend, Johnny Hurtuk. Hurtuk woke up first and then



Image 6. Picture of Annamarie Gifford that Howard carried during the war. Note the red ink.

woke Howard up. The first two soldiers had been pulled out of the hole. Howard and Hurtuk surmised that Germans came through, pulled out the first two soldiers who were dead, assumed Hertzuk and Howard were dead also, and moved on. There was still another story he only told once to his daughter, Laurel. He spoke of an American soldier who was loading artillery and didn't get out of

the way in time. He was accidentally blown in half by his own men.

Although he suffered from nightmares on occasion for the rest of his life, Howard was extremely proud of the part he played in serving his country. While some veterans are reluctant to talk about the war, Howard was very willing. However, when he did talk of the war, he usually recounted his stories in a way that avoided the horror of war. His most memorable words were, "I wouldn't take all the money ever minted to go through another minute of it [the war]. I wouldn't take that same amount of money for my experience, either."

**C Company was usually attached to one of three Infantry Regiments, for the most part to the 26th Infantry Regiment.*

***There were about 15,000 men that actually served at any given time in the 1st Division during World War II. About 50,000 men served in the First Division over the course of World War II. Of those serving in the Division, 4,325 were killed in action. There were roughly a total of 21,000 casualties (killed, wounded, captured and missing in action) in the 1st Division during the duration of World War II.*

HONORS INCLUDE:

Eight Battle Stars ("Eight Stars to Victory") for: Algeria-French Morocco, Tunisia, Sicily, Normandy, Northern France, Ardennes, Central Europe, Rhineland [Arrowhead signifies Normandy], 1 Silver Star (equals 5 Bronze Stars) and 3 Bronze Stars

The First Engineer Combat Battalion had three Presidential Battle Citations: twice for North Africa and also for "extraordinary heroism" on the Normandy Beaches

Distinguished Unit Badge with two Oak Leaf Clusters

Purple Heart-wounded in action

European-African-Middle Eastern Service Medal with Bronze Service Star

Good Conduct Medal

Allowed to wear the French Croix de Guerre Fourragere

MAJOR BATTLES:

AFRICA: Oran, Arzew, Ousseltai, Kasserine, Gafsa, El Guettar, Beja, Mateur
SICILY: Gela, Barra Franco, Petralia, Nicosia, Toina, Randazzo, Mt. Etna
EUROPE: Omaha Beach (Normandy), Aachen, Hurtgen Forrest, Battle of the Bulge, Remagen, Hartz Mountains

TIMELINE:

26 March 1942	Enlisted in the Army. Inducted at Fort Dix, NJ
5 June 1942	Fort Belvoir, VA Engineer training Fort Benning, GA Joined the 1st Division Fort IndianTown Gap, PA Short leave home to Amsterdam, NY
2 August 1942	Left U.S. on the "Queen Mary"
7 August 1942	Landed in Scotland, Tidworth Barracks
8 August 1942	Train to England via Glasgow
September	Training back in Scotland - Inverary
22 October 1942	Left Scotland on the "Royal Ulsterman"
8 November 1942	Landed in Africa-Beachhead Oran, Algeria

15 January 1943	Tunisia
13 May 1943	Left Tunisia
15 May 1943	Oran, Algeria
20 June 1943	Algiers
8 July 1943	Left Africa on the "Acadia"
10 July 1943	Assault landing Gela, Sicily
23 October 1943	"Sterling Castle" to Algiers, Africa
27 October 1943	"Franconia" to England
6-7 November 1943	Landed Liverpool, England
Visited:	Salisbury, Andover, London, Southampton, Glasgow, Grenocke, Liverpool, Bournemouth, Blandford, Dorchester
1-2 June 1944	Left England on the LST-495
6 June 1944	Assault landing at Omaha Beach, Normandy, France
Jun-Sept 1944	France to Belgium
13-14 Sept 1944	Seigfried Line
12-21 Oct 1944	Aachen, Germany (C Company with 26th Infantry)
16 Nov-6 Dec 1944	Hurtgen Forest, Germany
16 Dec-Jan, 1944	Battle of the Bulge
2-5 Feb 1945	Seigfried Line again
26 Feb 1945	Roer River Crossing
Mar 15, 1945	Remagen Bridge (Rhine River Crossing)
17 April 1945	Wounded, Hartz Mountains, Germany (schrappel in knee)
27 April 1945	Awarded the Purple Heart
7 May 1945	VE Day in Paris
8 May 1945	Returned to duty
	?Nurnberg, Germany (guard duty)
1 September 1945	Left on the "S.S. William Floyd" for U.S.
15 September 1945	Fort Dix, NJ Discharged!