

## The combat stories of **CLAUDE WOODRING**

**Dates of Service:** 1943 - 1945

**Branch of Service:** Army

**Unit:** 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, First Infantry Division

**Locations:** England; Omaha Beach, Normandy, France; Belgium; Aachen, Germany

**Battle/Campaigns:** D-Day Normandy Invasion, Battle of the Bulge

**Highest Rank:** Sergeant

**Wounded:** Yes

Claude Woodring recalls the D-Day invasion in which he was in charge of a Bangalore torpedo.

These stories were compiled by an interviewer, who prefers to remain anonymous, and goes by the nickname 'Kilroy Was Here.' These stories are posted through a partnership between 'Kilroy Was Here' and the Witness to War Foundation. Permission to use any of these materials must be granted by 'Kilroy Was Here,' which can be obtained through the Witness to War Foundation.



On the morning of June the sixth, I landed on Omaha Beach with the First Infantry Division in company L, third squad as one of the Bangalore torpedo men.

We arrived off Omaha just before daybreak and as our LCVP made its way towards the beach, 80% of us were seasick, which I was part of, and we were throwing up all over the place. The other 20% were just scared to death and we all just wanted to get our feet back on dry land. Shells from the Navy ships passed over our heads the entire time we made our way to the beach and we were advised it was to soften up the Germans, but it did anything but that with most of them falling short of their targets.

About two hundred yards from the shore our landing craft hit a submerged mine. The explosion sent a number of guys over the side, one of which was my buddy and I saw him go over. I rushed to the side of the craft and lowered my rifle down for him to grab hold of, but he weighed a good 200 pounds and I only weighed 125 and was unable to help him and lost my rifle too.

It didn't take long for the craft to start filling with water and like everyone else, I too jumped over the side into water over my head. Not able to touch the bottom, I fought for the longest five minutes of my life trying to keep my head above the water until I could touch the bottom with my feet. With all the bullets hitting around



me and seeing guys falling all around, it didn't take long for me to find cover in a small shell hole. After getting my wits back together, I moved the gear I didn't need at the time and made my way to the first roll of barbed wire. I placed my first Bangalore under the wire, pulled the pin and ducked in the nearest hole just as it went off. I would like to note at this time, plan A was for me to blow the wire and if I was unsuccessful, plan B was to be put into place, which was to toss as many bodies of dead soldiers on the wire as it took to make a bridge. Luckily I was successful, and within 20 minutes, I had made it to the second roll of wire and had blown it too. The only reason I think I wasn't hit on the beach that day was by the grace of God and that the Germans were firing at the massive groups of guys behind me. No sooner had the wire blown, than a wave of men passed me and as soon as I found a rifle, I followed them up the hill.

On one morning I had woken and stuck my head through the hedgerow to see if there were any Germans. About 20 feet from me I saw this German taking a crap in his hole. They did this so we couldn't use their holes. Seeing me peeking through the bushes he panicked, grabbing and pulling up his pants with one hand and his rifle with his other and he took off running across the field. He would run five or six steps and turn around to take a shot at me, having to let go of his pants in the process, thus causing him to fall backwards. He did this



a number of times before getting out of sight. It was so funny I couldn't get off a shot from laughing so hard. I hope that poor guy made it.

One day while my six-man squad and I were out on a reconnaissance patrol in Belgium, we came upon what I first thought to be some American tanks. My orders that day were to check out a small town for Germans. As we neared the town, I saw what I thought to be five Sherman tanks with camouflage netting over them sitting in a small orchard. Knowing tankers always carried something good to eat or had something to drink, if you know what I mean, we made our way towards them. As we got within about five hundred yards we waved and no sooner had we done so then I saw that the tanks had swastikas. Luckily they thought we were Germans too and waved back at us. After doing a quick loop and moving out of sight of them, I got on the radio and within minutes, P-38's came roaring over and made quick work of the tanks.