



Official State Historical Center of the Texas  
Rangers law enforcement agency.

**The Following Article was Originally Published in the  
*Texas Ranger Dispatch Magazine***

The *Texas Ranger Dispatch* was published by the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum from 2000 to 2011. It has been superseded by this online archive of Texas Ranger history.

Managing Editors

**Robert Nieman** 2000-2009; (b.1947-d.2009)

**Byron A. Johnson** 2009-2011

Publisher & Website Administrator

**Byron A. Johnson** 2000-2011

Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame

Technical Editor, Layout, and Design

**Pam S. Baird**



Funded in part by grants from  
the Texas Ranger Association Foundation

Copyright 2017, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, Waco, TX. All rights reserved. Non-profit personal and educational use only; commercial reprinting, redistribution, reposting or charge-for-access is prohibited. For further information contact: Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, PO Box 2570, Waco TX 76702-2570.



### *Before They Were Rangers*

It should come as no surprise that many Texas Rangers had exciting, even death-defying experiences before pinning on their badges. In coming issues of the *Texas Ranger Dispatch*, we will present some of these men “Before They Were Rangers.”

## Ed Gooding, Soldier

©2007 Robert Nieman

It is doubtful that there has ever been a better-liked or respected Texas Ranger than Ed Gooding. Known throughout the Ranger organization as a great storyteller, Ed could (and would) entertain with his Highway Patrol and Ranger stories, some serious and some funny. But there was one part of his life that he never joked about: his years as a combat veteran in World War II.

Ed was born on a ranch near Ingleside in San Patricio County, Texas, on July 10, 1924. He was the oldest of two boys and four girls born to Papa John and Mama Nellie Winslett Gooding. Ed spent most of his life on South Texas ranches before being drafted into the Army in 1943. He was fond of saying that he spent the better part of his life either chasing cows and outlaws or dodging bullets from Germans or some old thugs.

After completing basic training, he found himself onboard the *Queen Mary*, which was headed for Omaha, a sandy beach in Normandy, France. He, for one, was only too happy to see the battle-wracked Omaha Beach—or any land, for that matter. He had been violently seasick the entire voyage from New York.

The initial invasion had started four days before Ed’s arrival. Until the day he died, he never forgot his landing and going ashore at 2:00 p.m. on the afternoon of June 10, 1944. He remembered the bullets pinging off the tank traps, and for some reason he could not explain, he couldn’t forget the boots remaining on the dead GIs. Graves Registration, the group who handled the dead, had cleared most of the bodies off the beach by D+4 and were working frantically to get the rest cleared away. As hard as they tried, there were still a lot of dead GIs and pieces of their bodies scattered all over.

Fifty-four years after that fateful afternoon, Ed tried to watch *Saving Private Ryan*, but he could not get past the landing scenes. The movie brought back his vivid recollection of the helmets, rifles, and ammo belts strewn all over the beach. Ed found it so real that the emotions started welling up deep inside, and he had to leave the room. Another memory that the movie brought back was the sight of dead fish on the beach. All the shells hitting the water had killed fish by the thousands, and there was a row of them approximately three feet deep lying on the sand at the waterline as far as you could see.

As realistic as *Saving Private Ryan* or any war movie is, there are a two things that cannot be captured on film: the smell and the blood. The smell of death has an odor like no other. When Ed landed at Omaha Beach, some of the fallen men had been lying there for four days. Add the stench of thousands of dead fish, and awful doesn't begin to describe it. As for the blood, it was everywhere—all over the ground, all over the equipment, and all over the soldiers. Ed believed that unless someone had been there and seen it, no one could imagine the amount of blood on a battlefield. "I don't care if you live to be a hundred years old," Ed said, "you can never wash it all off, and you can't get it all out of your mind."



**The dead on Omaha Beach. Notice the bodies strapped to the stretchers.**

Ed's first encounter with war left a mark on him that he would carry for the rest of his life:

Until I saw all my dead and maimed comrades, even my enemies, it didn't really hit me just how real and brutal killing was. Not even when I was a little boy playing cowboys and Indians had I thought of war as anything but a game. Like most teenagers, then and now, I thought I was bulletproof—until that moment. Youth gives you a feeling of invincibility. I suppose that is why the military wants young boys to do the fighting. Older heads know just how non-bulletproof they are.

Before June 10, 1944, I had another great misconception (one shared by many): "It might happen to you, but not me." What a crock! Looking at that carnage and the destroyed bodies on that beach made me realize again just how wrong I was. Suddenly, like a bolt of lightning from God, I realized I was nothing but meat and bone, and there was a pretty good chance that before this war was over, I would be dead. Even worse, I might be shot to pieces and still be alive to exist—exist, not live—until merciful death could take me. Let me tell you, that'll wake you up. As I lay there in the sand looking at the dead and mangled bodies, I knew without a doubt that every one of those boys probably had thought they, too, were bulletproof. You learn real quick that bullets don't discriminate; they don't care who they kill or maim or if you are young or old, American or German. I don't mean to preach, but unless you've been there, unless you've



**Wounded children—a sight not often associated with Normandy.**



**After the Rangers secured the heights overlooking Omaha Beach, American soldiers moved up the cliffs and inland.**

seen it, unless you have smelled it, you just cannot truly imagine what combat is really like.

First assigned to a replacement depot, it was not long before Ed, who had been promoted to corporal, found himself on the back of truck heading for St. Lo, France and his new outfit, the 134th Regiment of the 35th Infantry Division. “All Hell Can’t Stop Us” was their motto—and it could not.

Just as they started moving, they heard the distant sound of gunfire and the not so distant sound of artillery. Except for the sergeant, the “old war horse,” to a man the green troops hunkered down as low

in the truck bed as they could get—as if the truck bed’s thin wooden sideboards would stop a bullet, let alone an artillery round. Only a few later these tenderfoot soldiers would be grizzled, combat veterans, and would join the old warhorse in laughing at such behavior.

They were not yet combat veterans, but raw recruits on their way to quickly becoming battle-hardened soldiers. Traveling only a few miles, the truck pulled to the side of the road and the soon to be combat soldiers piled off the trucks. The 29th Division had been cut to pieces trying to take St. Lo and didn’t have the strength to launch another attack. It was now the 35th Division’s job to take the German stronghold.

Ed and the other replacements had barely unloaded when an obviously battered sergeant came up to them and started calling off names to follow him. Ed’s name was one of the ones called. He led them to an area where dug-in soldiers who had clearly already seen too much combat were waiting. In a lifeless tone, the sergeant told Ed and his comrades if they followed the veterans lead exactly, they had a remote chance of living.

The 134th was an old National Guard unit from Nebraska, and almost everyone in the unit had known one another for years. They had trained together in the States,



**Motto of 134th: “All Hell Can’t Stop Us”**



shipped over together, and many had been friends their whole lives. Some were neighbors and others played football, basketball, or baseball with and against each another. Ed knew how hard it was on them every time one of them was killed. To them, every time a man went down it was like losing a blood brother. Of course, Ed was not from Nebraska, but they treated him like he was. Ed said that if he had not been from Texas, there was no place he would rather be from than Nebraska.

Ed said he would always remember that tough old sergeant. Looking at Ed and the others recruits, he started crying. One of the veterans told Ed he was crying for all the buddies he had lost in the fierce fighting, buddies he had trained and been with in the States. Most of them he had known for what must have seemed to him forever. Through tears, he said to me, “Corporal, I know you have your rank, but I’m going to put you to carrying ammunition. But don’t concern yourself with that. The way this war is going, you won’t be doing that long. You’ll be leading a gun squad soon enough.” He pointed up ahead to a light .30-caliber machine gun and said, “Corporal, there is your gun and back there is the ammo dump. Get you a couple of boxes and dig in.”

That sergeant was not wrong. Ed started moving up in rank fast—too fast. Within a week he was the assistant gunner. Almost as quickly, he was the gunner. A few days later, he was the squad leader.

The 134th’s first assault of St. Lo was on a place called Hill 122 on a military map. From the safety of their positions far in the rear, Army planners decided the best way to take the Hill 122 was by a night attack. With seasoned troops, a night attack is, at best, organized mayhem. With green troops who have never fired a shot in combat, there could only be one ending—slaughter. They would eventually take Hill 122, but many soldiers of the 134th would die doing it.



**Ed’s first major combat was at St Lo —  
what was left of it.**

As he looked out over the field of battle, all Ed could see were rows of trees; at least he thought they were trees. Getting closer, the trees turned out to be what would go down in the history of the Normandy Invasion as the infamous hedgerows.

The hedgerows in Normandy are ancient. Originally planted by the Normans hundreds of years before and they were fencing for the various fields they encircled. They had a dirt base anywhere from three to six feet high with hedges and other types of brush growing on top so thick you could



not see through them. Everywhere you looked, all you could see were hedgerows zigzagging all over the countryside. Of course they had no way of knowing it at the time, but it would take weeks to break through those hedgerows—and buckets of blood.

The 134th had been fighting and moving constantly, but there was finally a brief lull. Ed got a chance to talk with an ammo bearer in our gun squad, or at least he tried to, but he was not very talkative. Ed later learned the man he replaced had been a longtime friend of the ammo bearer. They had trained together in the States and had become very close. As Ed talked to the ammo bearer, tears began swelling in his eyes. “I shut up. I felt terrible.”

Many a soldier has been discharged because of a mental breakdown not caused by cowardice, but because they had lost to many brothers. “In combat, that’s what your fellow soldier is—your brother. I know this sounds hard, but I’m glad I didn’t get to know that ammo bearer. Later he was hit by a mortar fragment in the left side and leg. He was evacuated and I took his place as first ammo-bearer. I never learned his name or even if he lived or died.”

During the night Ed’s squad leader came to his foxhole and told that whatever he did to stay away from holes cut in the hedgerows. The Germans had cut the holes and had a machine gun trained on each one of them just waiting for some poor, unsuspecting GI to stick his head into the opening.

Despite their best efforts weeks passed and the American Army was still stuck in the hedgerows. High explosives and bulldozers did not make a dent in the hundreds of year old root system. That left only the Queen of Battle (infantry) to do it the old-fashioned way—slug it out.

Ed described the hedges as being so thick that they would climb over the top just like you would climb over a fence.

The only problem was that once on top, you were exposed to enemy fire. That was as far as a lot of men ever got. If you survived the top of the hedges and got on the other side, your troubles were just starting. You were in open ground, and no sooner would you hit the ground than a machine gun would open up on you. You wouldn’t believe how small an object you can crouch your body behind if it offers the least bit of cover from that murderous machine gun fire. If you moved a muscle, you could count on a burst of machine-gun fire ripping up the ground around you—around you and not through you, if you were lucky.

You wouldn’t be there long before the mortar shells would start dropping like rain. In a lot of ways the mortars were as bad, if not worse, than the machine guns. The Germans had zeroed in on every inch of those fields with their machine guns and mortars to the point that they could almost put a mortar shell in your hip pocket.

Occasionally, when I’m watching a football game on television and I hear an announcer say that a kicker is going to try a long fifty-yard field goal, my thoughts will sometimes go back to 1944. Let me tell you just how long fifty yards is—sometimes it’s an eternity. It was common for us to fight all day and all night to get across a fifty-yard stretch of open ground. Our reward wasn’t making three points; our reward was living.



Before combat, Ed did not see how anything or anybody could stand up before the blistering fire he could lay down with his 30-caliber light machine gun. Being a machine gunner was great—until he saw combat. Reflecting back to those days that seemed like and eternity ago, but in actuality was only a few days, he realized how naïve and foolish those had been.

Because of the scorching rate of fire, he could lay down made usually made Ed and his fellow machine gunners a primary target of the Germans. His enthusiasm for the machine gun decreased even more when he found the life expectancy of a machine gunner in combat was approximately two minutes.

Ed had been thinking of some way to beat those odds:

One day I told my gunner that I knew we had been trained to set up a position and stay there until we received an order to move, but I felt that one of the reasons the Germans killed so many of us was because we stayed in one place too long. Training or not, I wanted to do things a little differently. It seemed to me that by staying in one spot as the book said, it allowed the Germans to zero in on our position with the inevitable results. Those German mortar crews were so good that they could drop a mortar shell in a bushel basket at a thousand yards. I considered sitting in one place until ordered to move was pure suicide. I suggested that as soon as we got the gun set up and in firing position, we should immediately start looking for an alternate spot where we could still cover our assigned target and keep it under fire as per our orders. But instead of anchoring ourselves to that spot, after firing a few minutes, we should move to the new spot that we had picked out.

My gunner didn't see it that way. The book said we had to have permission from the squad leader to move. That was how my gunner had been trained and as far as he was concerned, that was how we were going to do it. Obviously, that wasn't what I wanted to hear. When I got a chance, I told our squad leader my idea. He, too, was out of the old school and vetoed my plan. He wanted us where he knew our exact location, not moving all over the front. That was all fine and dandy except for one thing: we had received no training for fighting in hedgerows. I don't guess anyone had ever thought of having to fight in them, even if those hedges had been there for hundreds of years. I decided right then and there that if I was able to survive until I made squad leader—rules or no rules—I would move my gun. But for now, I was the assistant gunner and my gunner said we would play by the book. Well, he followed the book and we stayed put. And he died.

Ed's quiet time of reminiscing did not last long—the hedgerows waited. He remembered how eerie the roads were. They were all sunken to a depth of five to six feet, the dirt thrown along the road's edge. The hedgerows themselves were an assortment of plants. Later, Ed said that whatever the growth, everything seemed to have thorns—big, long thorns that would cause you to swell up like a "poisoned pup." There were wild roses, black thorn locust, and some fruit trees. The fruit trees were mostly small apples, and there were some grapevines. As bad as it was on the roads, the fields were oftentimes



**If you got caught in the hedgerows, there was just nowhere to go.**

worse. Once you stepped out from behind the hedges, there was no cover. “Talk about feeling naked!”

One day we had gotten about halfway across one of those little fields when a machine gun opened up on us. We all hit the ground. We hadn't been there for more than a few seconds when, sure enough, just like clockwork, the mortar shells started coming in. We really started to sweat. Sweating was all we could do. If you moved, you died. Any movements would have gotten the immediate attention of one of the German machine gunners. We lay there, being as still as possible, and played dead. We were hoping the Germans believed they had done their job and killed us.

I was utterly terrified lying there in that field. You don't have to see but a couple of arms, legs, and bodies go flying up in the air or have what is left of what had been a brother seconds ago splattered all over you, and you get so scared you can't think. I've seen men in this situation crying, cussing, or praying—some all at once. I've seen men so scared that they wet their pants or worse. I never did, even though I was so scared I couldn't move. But I guarantee you one thing: if I had, I wouldn't be ashamed to admit it. We all had one thing in common—fear. I said earlier that I don't mean to preach, and I don't, but if you haven't been there, you can't imagine the fear. Death could be—is, probably—only a split second away. But scared or not, you can't just quit. If you do, you die for sure.

I have never known fear the way I did that day lying there in that field. As the bullets and the mortars slammed all around us, I was totally convinced that there were only two types of men in that field: the dead and those of us who would shortly be dead. We had





to do something and we had to do it quick. In the end, we really only had two options: lie there and be killed or make a run for it and maybe, just maybe, a few of us would make it. Given those options, there was really no choice. The sergeant went first. He and one of the ammo bearers jumped up and, to our amazement, they made it to safety. Once safely under cover, they sat up their machine gun and started laying down some cover fire for the next group. Again, to our amazement, this group also made it. With more cover fire, the odds were getting better. Hey, I might, just might, make it out of there.

The sergeant called out for me to make a run for it. I was so scared I couldn't think. I was shaking and I had my eyes closed so tightly that I'm surprised I didn't push them through to the back of my head. I was also grinding my teeth so hard it's amazing they weren't ground down to the gums. But scared or not, I jumped up and started running as hard as I could. I remember that run like it was yesterday. With every step, I expected to feel a bullet ripping through me. I don't remember, if I ever knew, if I was even being shot at or not. I assume I was. That run, even then, was just a fog in my mind. Like the other guys who made that run, I was almost blind with fear. All I know for sure is I ran harder than I've ever run in my life, and I made it!

The first thing I remember after the fog began to clear in my mind was hearing the sergeant yell for the last gunner to come on; we would cover him. But the gunner didn't move and my heart, along with everyone else's, sank. The sergeant yelled again, "Come on! We'll cover you." But the little guy still didn't move. We kept watching for the slightest movement but we saw none. We hoped and prayed against hope that he was playing possum, but I think we all knew the truth.

It was close to sunset and the sergeant said that as soon as it got dark, he was going to check on the gunner. Sarge had pushed Lady Luck to the brink of the grave getting out of that field once; to go back, even in the dark, was suicide. But, you know, it never entered any of our minds to try and stop him. How could we? And how could he not go? One of his men was down. Finally it was dark and, thank God, it was very dark. The sergeant pulled off his boots, dropped all his gear, and crawled out to where the little guy lay. He came back soon. After crawling back to us, he didn't say a word. He didn't have to.

One by one, all the original men of the 134th were being picked off and new men, like Ed had been, were replacing them. Considering the extreme short lifespan of a machine gunner Ed was advancing in rank real fast. In a matter of weeks, he gunner and a sergeant. The first thing he did was revise his "move the gun" plan. He told his assistant gunner that they would move their gun from position to position and not give the Germans time to zero in on them, but never would they forget their assigned target. Until the day he died, he honestly believed that moving his gun around is what got him through all those months of combat. Ed's sergeant never gave him permission to move around the way he did, but as long as he covered his assigned target, the sergeant did not say anything.

The days turned into weeks and still the bloodbath in the hedgerows continued, especially in the roads. They were death traps for anyone caught in them—American or German. If you got caught in the road, there was simply no place to go. If you tried to advance, more likely than not an enemy tank would suddenly appear from around a corner

with its cannon blazing and its machine guns spewing death. If you tried to retreat, you still had the German tanks to contend with. The hedges were so tight and thick that going through them to get away was next to impossible. Needless to say, this was extremely costly in both lives and equipment. But costly or not, the American GI's got the job done the old-fashioned way—with their blood.

It was in the small French town of Mortain that the 134th had one of the hardest fights in its history. A spotter plane advised Ed and his comrades the road they were moving down was clear for several miles. Tragically, for a lot of American soldiers, the spotter was wrong; he failed to a pocket of German Armored Infantry.

Suddenly the GI's were engulfed in the fires of Hades. Coming from behind them Ed could hear the squeak, squeak sound of a tank track. At first the Americans thought it was their own tanks moving up, but then they heard machine guns firing and the whine of an 88-mm cannon. Ed knew he and his buddies were definitely in serious trouble.

Worst of all, an 88-mm cannon on a tank meant only one thing—Tigers. The best tank the Germans had was the Panzer Tiger tank. It was bigger and better than anything we had. It was literally a moving pillbox. Its diesel engine gave it the power plant for its massive size but above all, it had that 88.

An 88 had the most spine-chilling sound you can imagine. It was originally designed as an anti-aircraft gun, but it became so versatile because of its flat trajectory. The Germans started mounting it on tanks and wheeled vehicles and also using it as stationary artillery emplacements as well as in any other way they could think to put one into action. It made a dreadful whining sound when fired from a long distance and an awful swish-bang when fired up close. I know I am safe in saying that if any soldier who lived through an 88 barrage heard an 88 today, he would immediately recognize it. That gun was bad, bad news and very powerful: an 88 could shoot a hole completely through the four-inch steel turret of our Sherman tanks like a hammer hitting a pane of glass. Once it pierced a tank's armor, it would leave a mess of shrapnel behind ricocheting around inside the tank, usually killing all of its four-man crew.



**An 88 had the most spine-chilling sound you could imagine.**

The Waffen SS Panzers were the best fighters the Germans had, and the 134th had run into a full battalion.

The Tigers were tough, but they could be knocked out. Every company runner was sent to the rear to request that tank destroyers be dispatched at once. Waiting the Americans hung on by their fingernails. Thankfully, help was coming in a hurry. Bazooka teams from every company in the area, followed shortly by tank destroyers and P-47 tank-busters, soon arrived and started pounding the Tigers. "What a joyful sound that was!"

It was not long before the Panzers started to pull back, but they left several of their Panzers and a host of infantrymen laying dead. 'ed says, "My little .30-caliber machine gun wasn't of any use against a Panzer's armor, but it was devastating against the cloth blouses of the infantrymen that moved with the Panzers."

Many brave GI's were also laying dead on the field. Ed lost a gunner, an assistant gunner, and one machine gun before "that dance was over."

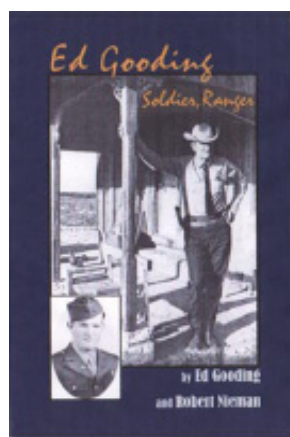
On the afternoon of August 12, 1944, the Allies finally broke out of the hedgerows. The Germans knew the battle was lost and started surrendering in droves. Most of them had run out of ammunition. They simply stood up as the Americans approached and started pleading, "Kameraden nicht schiessen." ("Friends, please don't shoot.")

In the next issue of the *Texas Ranger Dispatch*, we will follow Ed Gooding to the end of World War II.

**For further reading:**

**Ed Gooding** - *Texas Ranger Dispatch 3*  
**Ed Gooding Memorial** - *Texas Ranger Dispatch*

***Ed Gooding: Soldier, Texas Ranger***  
Available in **Texas Ranger Museum Bookstore**

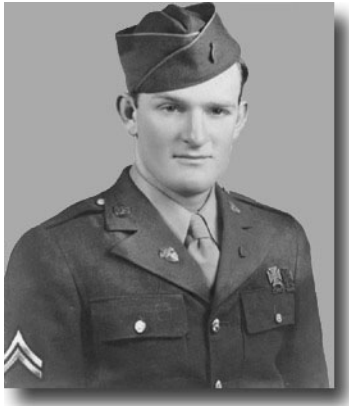


## *Before They Were Rangers*

It should come as no surprise that many Texas Rangers had exciting, even death-defying experiences before pinning on their badges. In coming issues of the *Texas Ranger Dispatch*, we will present some of these men "Before They Were Rangers."



For Part I of Ed Gooding, Soldier, see the *Texas Ranger Dispatch*, Issue 24.



# Ed Gooding, Soldier

## Part II

©2007 Robert Nieman

It is doubtful that there has ever been a better-liked or respected Texas Ranger than Ed Gooding. Known throughout the Ranger organization as a great storyteller, Ed could (and would) entertain with his Highway Patrol and Ranger stories, some serious and some funny. But there was one part of his life that he never joked about: his years as a combat veteran in World War II.

### PART II

After a short period of R & R (Rest and Relaxation) at Joigny, Ed found himself part of General George Patton's Third Army as it chased the shattered German Army across France after the breakout from the hedgerows. The headlong plunge, at least for Ed's unit, came to a screeching halt at the French city of Nancy. It was here that Ed learned that he was dead—at least officially.

There was a large canal running just east of Nancy. The bridge over the canal had been destroyed, and the Germans had the far bank covered. The Americans' orders were simple: force their way across the canal in assault boats and establish a beachhead.

The soldiers lined up along the road, and an engineering captain came down the line counting the GIs off in groups of five. Each boat held five men, plus two engineers who operated the boat. As soon as one group stepped out, another five men would move up. For the last fifty yards, there was no cover, so the men ran to the bank of the canal as hard as they were able. Five men, including Ed's section leader, were already there.



The engineering captain was pushing the soldiers over the bank and into the boats as fast as possible. He ordered the section leader to hit the boat. The sergeant, whom Ed had seen very little during the recent campaign, froze and started screaming and crying. Ed was next to him, and the captain kicked him and ordered him over the bank.

Ed's going instead of the section leader got the troops out of the five-count the engineering captain was barking. Ed learned later that the next boat, the one he was supposed to be on, was hit by tank fire from across the canal. Both engineers and all five infantrymen were killed. As for the section leader, Ed never found out if he survived the war or not—and did not care.

The Americans didn't waste any time on the far bank. They charged inland and were able to capture a nearby plane hangar. That ended their fighting for the day, and they bedded down inside the building. The next morning, the company runner crossed the canal and came to the hangar. When he saw Ed, Ed knew immediately that something was bad wrong. The runner's face turned ashy white, and he asked Ed how he had gotten across the river. In his cockiest tone, Ed told him, "In a boat." After giving Ed a dirty look, the runner told Ed that he had been reported as missing in action when the boat he was supposed to be in was hit by the tank fire.



**Launching an assault boat.**

*I'll never forget that company runner—Howard Spakes from Doyle, Tennessee. He carried messages from the company commander to and from the front when the messages were urgent. I told him to get a message back to the company clerk that I was not missing and to do it quick before it got sent to battalion. If that message had been sent to my home, it would have been devastating to my family. [Thankfully, the message stopped before it left battalion headquarters.]*

It was quickly breaking daylight when the soldiers saw a very high hill dead ahead. Ed was no military strategist, but even he knew that whoever controls the high ground usually wins the battle.

Unfortunately, the Germans also knew the importance of the high ground. The Americans had gone only a short distance when a heavy German artillery barrage from the hill started hitting them. The closest cover was a small village off to their right that was really no more than a group of farmhouses. Reaching the town, the GIs regrouped and started for the hill again. About halfway up, bullets from machine guns and small arms started hitting all around the attackers. Ed recalls that there was no artillery, thankfully, or none of them would have gotten off that hill alive. As it were, the American lines broke, and men started falling back. Ed was on the right flank:



*I never liked to pay for the same ground twice. I got out in front of the men and started cussing and shouting at the retreating line. The retreat slowed, and soon the men turned around. Back up the hill we went, this time all the way to the top. Once there, I set up my machine gun with a field of fire to cover all of the hill and the surrounding territory.*

Once he was sure that his men and guns were dug in and well placed, Ed picked out a spot and waited. Shelling and sporadic fire continued until dark. Then it got quiet—too quiet. About eight o'clock, mortar shells started falling on the Americans, and German soldiers suddenly started pouring into their position. The fighting became hand-to-hand and very desperate, and it looked like the Americans might be pushed off the hill. The carnage and confusion became unbelievable, but that hill commanded all the surrounding area, and it had to be held at all cost.

The situation was already past desperate; then it went from bad to worse. A mortar shell hit the company command post at the base of the hill, severely wounding the company commander and killing his radio operator and a couple of S-2 (intelligence) men. Besides blowing off part of the CO's hand, the force of the explosion totally addled him. He crawled over to the dead radioman, called battalion artillery, and told them to lay fire along the crest of the hill because it had been overrun by the Germans. Soon, 105 howitzers and mortars started exploding amid the battling soldiers. That was too much for the Germans: these crazy Americans were shelling themselves! They broke and retreated, but the shells didn't stop:

*I was in my foxhole just trying to stay alive, when all of a sudden I went flying into the air like I had been propelled from a slingshot. Of course I didn't know it then, but a shell had hit close by and burrowed itself into the ground until it was almost directly under my foxhole. When it detonated, I flew up and then came down—without my helmet, rifle, pack, or my hearing. I lay there for a while trying to get the cobwebs out of my head. My mind finally emerged from the fog enough to operate to a small degree. I stumbled over to my machine gun, but it was out of commission with a piece of shrapnel wedged in the breach. The Germans had not been the only ones who broke and ran. I saw men on both sides of me running down the hill, at least those who could still run. I don't know how many were dead, and to be honest with you, right then I was not worried about them. I yelled at my gunner and his assistant, "Let's get out of here!" We left everything we had and joined the race to the bottom of the hill.*

*Some of us stumbled onto a road and ran into a staff sergeant. He told us to dig in along with other members of Companies A and C. I had picked up an abandoned rifle on the way down the hill and that was all I had—no extra clips, nothing. I was stiff and almost totally deaf, I able to hear again but by noon the next day. That was as close as I ever came to buying the farm. Thankfully, I guess the Germans had all they wanted for that day. If they had counterattacked, I don't think there's any way in the world we could have held.*

The mad dash across the open fields and small towns of the French countryside was over. From now on, it would be a day-by-day existence in mud, snow, ice, tears, blood, and death in the highly industrialized heartland of Europe. The Allies had pushed the Germans back so fast that many of the GIs actually thought that, for once, the top brass actually knew what they were talking about: the war would soon be over and they would be home by Christmas! But the German



Army was a long way from being defeated, and being totally and completely beaten was the only way it would quit. It didn't take them long to dispel the Americans' false feeling of euphoria. Now the only thing Ed and his buddies cared about was just staying alive. To Ed, Texas seemed far, far away.

Crushing all German resistance before him, Patton moved across France so fast that he outran his supplies. For the first time since St. Lo, Ed and his comrades went into a defensive position in the Gremercy Forest. They had just settled in when it started raining—and raining and raining. The water came down for days, and as the mud got deeper and deeper, the soldiers didn't think it was ever going to stop.

There had been a call for volunteers to go to the rear for a special assignment. Ed recalled that he was so sick and tired of the rain and mud that he was ready for anything that would get him out of it. He talked to his best friend Ansalet Rumca about volunteering. They had not been told what this special assignment was, but it didn't matter. The way Ed figured it, anything had to be better than the mud. And, besides, the volunteers had been promised a bath, clean sheets, and clean clothes. What more could a soldier ask for? Ed didn't think Rumca was as sick of the mud as he was because Rumca didn't think much of volunteering for anything, especially something he didn't know anything about. But Ed finally persuaded him that he was right, and they volunteered—Ed with enthusiasm, Rumca with a ton of reservations.

*I guess everyone has heard that old Army saying: "Don't ever volunteer for anything." Trust me, that is good advice and I should have followed it. We did get the shower, the clean clothes, and a bed—for one whole night. Then we were told our mission: to take prisoners. When I heard that, my stomach did a flip-flop. And if looks could have killed, I'd be dead right now from the look Ansalet gave me. You see, there's only one place you could find prisoners: behind enemy lines. I was having enough problems staying alive with the Germans in front of me without going behind their lines looking for more trouble. Rumca never stopped cussing me. He called me every name you can imagine, not counting some new ones he invented. But he wasn't making a thing on me. I was already calling myself most of those same things.*

The volunteers went out in the dark of the night hunting prisoners. After stumbling into barbed-wire entanglements and making enough noise to wake the dead, they came back empty-handed.

*When we got back without any prisoners, our status with the brass dropped like a rock. Our clean sheets and nice warm beds became clean hay in a barn. That was still better than the mud on the front lines. Our days operating behind enemy lines were over. I guess they decided that no one so dumb as to walk into a barbed wire entanglement could be smart enough to capture prisoners. We were loaded up and sent back to the front line. And the mud.*

Ed's days of fighting were just beginning. Along with the rest of Patton's Army, he found himself moving north through snow, ice, and subzero weather at breakneck speed. The Battle of the Bulge was in full swing.

The Americans' worst enemy was not the German Army but the never-ending cold. Ed remembered losing men faster to frostbite than from combat. The 134th kept pushing forward



until it reached the little town of Lutrebois and sustained heavy casualties as they went. Ed, his squad, and several infantrymen commandeered a house to get in out of the cold. They had just settled in when the Germans launched a counterattack:

*We repelled the first attack, but the Germans soon regrouped and attacked again. Even though we mowed them down like a knife cutting through butter, they kept coming, and some finally got through.*

*I heard the door crash open and in came a squad of German SS troopers. These boys were bad news—very, very bad news. They were tough and they were mean. They ran down the hall, grabbed several of our boys, and hustled them back toward their lines. We heard them, but we were in a small room off the main part of the house, and the door leading into the room looked like an outside door. I suppose that is all that saved us that day.*

*None of us dared to breathe while the SS troops were in the house. I had picked up a little loot, and if we were captured, I sure didn't want to any of that on me. I was lying on the floor, and I started emptying my pockets and shoving my money under a dresser in the corner. I had an M1 carbine that I had grabbed and a hand grenade with the pin pulled, both ready and on full automatic. I had made up my mind that whether they captured me or killed me, I was going to take a bunch of them with me. But our luck held, and the SS left the building without trying our door.*

*There was no letup in the fighting. It was vicious, the resistance was brutal, and we suffered a lot of casualties. Two of those losses were ammo-bearers from my squad. With the fighting as heavy as it was, we were using up an incredible amount of ammo. I was the squad leader, but this was no time to stand on ceremony, and I started carrying ammo to help out.*

*By now, nearly half of C Company was down, but we dished it out better than we received. We killed so many Germans, they were stacked up like cord wood by the side of the road. The killing was unbelievable, but we got the job done. We cut the road to Bastogne, and the German supply route was severed.*

With their supply line cut, the Germans started retreating. Unfortunately, this didn't mean the end of the battle. There was still a lot of fighting to be done before the Battle of the Bulge was over. The Germans who managed to get out of the Bulge alive gathered in the Ruhr Valley, several miles to the northeast of the American position, and prepared to counterattack. When the assault came, Ed's squad did their part to help thin the ranks of the German troops. He said, "We did a very good job, I might add."

Entering a small village in the Lorraine area, Ed's section leader pointed to a house. He told the men to take a couple of infantrymen and set up their machine gun in it. Once inside, the men started looking for something to drink—vodka, schnapps, wine—it didn't matter, just so it poured.

One of the infantrymen who had come into the house with Ed's squad found a trapdoor in the corner of the big room where they were hiding. It led to a cellar—a wine cellar? He reached down, grabbed the handle, yanked the door up, and opened it. There was a blast from below, and he was hit full in the chest and face with fire from a German burp gun. A burp gun was a small, hand-held, fully automatic weapon with an extremely fast rate of fire. When you got hit with a burst from that weapon, you didn't get just one round. It fired so fast, you usually got hit with at least four or five.





Together, Ed and the two men hit the floor, which was made of heavy wooden planks. Because of that thick wood, they didn't have to worry about bullets ripping through. For what seemed an eternity (but was probably only a minute or two), they hugged the floor, not daring to move a muscle. After getting his thoughts together, Ed pulled a grenade and motioned for the other men to do the same.

*We crawled up to the trapdoor that had fallen open when the rifleman went down, and on the motion count of three, all of us tossed our grenades into the opening. Only seconds later—boom! boom! boom! All was silent, but I had played this game too long to take any chances. To be absolutely sure we had finished off the Germans, we lobbed three more grenades into the cellar—boom! boom! boom! When we went down the stairs, we found one of the ghastliest sights I've ever seen in my life. A man, a woman, two small kids, and two SS officers were literally dripping off the walls and ceiling. The only thing we could figure out was that the SS officers had apparently taken the family hostage and forced them into the basement when we entered the town.*

*That incident bore on my mind for weeks. I have asked myself countless times why one of the parents or one of the children didn't cry out when that SS man fired. If we had known the children were in the cellar, we wouldn't have tossed the grenades. But they didn't, and we did. The parents had lived some of their lives, but the children . . . that was something else.*

Ed says they didn't run into many SS troops until late in the war. When Hitler got desperate, however, he turned them loose. It's true that the special German forces were fanatics of the first order, but they were also the best fighting men Hitler had. Ed knew that when they ran into them, they were in for a hard fight. When the Allies crossed the Rhine River, they started running into SS troops regularly. Nearly every time, the Germans acted like they were drunk or on dope. Whether they were attacking or defending, they were suicidal in their fighting.

One day, a group of SS men, accompanied by a half-track, attacked the First Battalion's left flank. The Germans were outnumbered ten to one but they kept coming, yelling and screaming like crazy. Ed's squad was off to the left about one hundred yards when they heard the commotion.

*I told Rumca to swing our little .30-caliber machine gun around and start firing into their flank. They fell like mowed weeds, but they still kept coming. They got within twenty yards of our lines and were still advancing when the last one fell.*

When death is a constant companion, the human mind finds a way to adapt, or else. Ed was no different.

*When you have seen as much death as I have, you sometimes become indifferent to it. I remember one episode in particular that shows just how insensitive I had become. The Graves Registration people were gathering American bodies from the snow for burial. When they put this one poor little guy on a stretcher, I recognized him. I had seen so many men I knew killed that I had become hardened to the sight. What was so bad was that I knew this should bother me, but it didn't. I felt nothing. I didn't think any more about seeing him than I would have looking at a dead dog lying in the snow.*

*Men learn to cope with the stress of battle in different ways. One of the ways I*

*coped was never allowing myself to become close to anyone—it was just too hard to lose them. The exception was Ansalem Rumca. I didn't want to get close to him, but I did. Another thing you learn is that simple things become supremely important: a hot meal, a hot bath, a clean bed, a woman, or that letter from home.*

Ed certainly thought he was going to be one of those dead dogs lying in the snow. “Old boy, you ain't coming out of this war alive and that's a fact.”

The German Army may have been dying, but it still had a lot of fight before it drew a last breath. Ed's company was ordered to cross the Rohr River. Helplessness and hopelessness was all that Ed felt as the small boat he was in crossed the river with artillery exploding all around. All he and his comrades could do was keep their heads down and pray. Ed did not know land could feel so good as it did when his boat bumped the far shore of the Rohr.

Ed and his buddies hit the shore running and didn't stop until they reached the cover of one of the nearby houses. Looking back at the river, Ed saw a terrible sight. The water was a roaring mass of mud, debris, blood, and bodies.

About a hundred yards down from where they crossed was a blown-out bridge. Lodged firmly against what was left of the bridge were the remains of many boats “and the bodies of more men than I wanted to attempt to count.”



“I didn't think any more about seeing him than I would have looking at a dead dog lying in the snow.”

*I didn't have long to think about those dead men unless I wanted to join them. The men had barely secured their position and pointed their guns toward the enemy when the Germans counterattacked. Many a German soldier lost his life in that futile battle. They kept coming and we kept firing. The bodies began to stack up higher and higher. Looking back, it was almost like a bad dream; there were so many of them. But finally, their attack broke and they fell back. Later, when we moved forward, we saw the reason for the ferocity of their attack: SS.*

*With their terrible losses, more men poured in as replacements. It was hard to realize that I was younger than many of these men. It seemed like an eternity since I had been one of them, but it had actually been only a few short months.*

Shortly thereafter, Ed's unit crossed the Rhine River, and the war was all but over except for mopping up small pockets of resistance. It was now an all-out race to the Elbe River. Ed's regiment wiped out a group of Germans in Gelsenkirc, and riding tanks took off for the Elbe. Reaching the river, Ed set up his gun to point across the river. No orders came to do anything, however, so the men just sat.



Early the next morning, the men saw a German soldier on the other side of the river waving a big, white, bed sheet. Orders came down the line not to fire. The German walked down to the water, dropping off equipment as he came. He waded to the river and never stopped. The Elbe is wide, but not very deep. This soldier just walked across, and someone took him into custody. He was just the tip of the iceberg. After his appearance, the woods on the opposite side of the river came alive with surrendering German soldiers. In the next seven days, the Americans took thousands of prisoners before they received orders to sit and wait for the advancing Russian Army.

*May 8, 1945. The war is over! Unbelievably, the war is over! I looked at Rumca, and he looked back at me and said, "Tex, it looks like we made it." Then we both started crying.*

Ed and his best friend Ansalet Rumca, the only person he had allowed himself to get close to the whole time he was in the Army, had indeed survived the slaughter. It was not long before Ed was onboard the *Queen Elizabeth* heading for the United States. Landing in New York, he was sent almost immediately to Fort Meade, Maryland. He hardly had time to move his gear from the train at Fort Meade before he was aboard another locomotive headed for Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio—and home.

As soon as Ed arrived at Fort Sam Houston, he requested and received a thirty-day convalescence furlough. He had hardly started walking toward the Austin Highway when a cab stopped. A man in the backseat asked Ed where he was going, and Ed told him Austin. The man said, "Get in and I'll give you a ride." He was a pilot, and he directed the cab to take them to a local airport, where they flew to Austin. After landing, Ed thanked the pilot and quickly caught a ride to South Austin and his Aunt Edith's house.

*In those days, people could not do enough for men in uniform. If you were a soldier, your money was no good. You couldn't pay for a ride or a meal because everyone wanted to show appreciation. They sure didn't spit on you like they would at the next generation of military.*

*When I got out of the car, I saw the prettiest sight I have ever seen in my life. Sitting there in my aunt's yard were my dad's pickup truck and horse trailer. There was nobody home, but I heard what sounded like a rodeo going on across the road. This would be too good to be true. I walked over to the old roping arena and there it was—an honest-to-goodness rodeo.*

*I walked up to the gate, looking for a familiar face. I felt a gentle tug on my sleeve and looked down into the beaming face of Aunt Edith. Then I was swarmed by my family. I was home!*

*I was surrounded by my cousins, my brother, my sisters, my aunts and uncles, my friends, and by Momma Nellie. My dad was sitting in the arena on a beautiful sorrel mare. He let out a yell like a panther, and here he came around the back of the bucking chutes. He did a wild dismount and grabbed me around the half-dozen or more who already had a hold of me. Weeping, praying, and yelling were all going on at the same time.*

*When things settled down, my dad handed me the reins to his sorrel and said, "Here she is, boy. Her name's Kitten and she's all yours." I had to make a round in the arena*

*with everyone cheering and clapping. I don't know how many times I envisioned this while I was in Europe. It was a dream I didn't think would ever come true, but it did!*

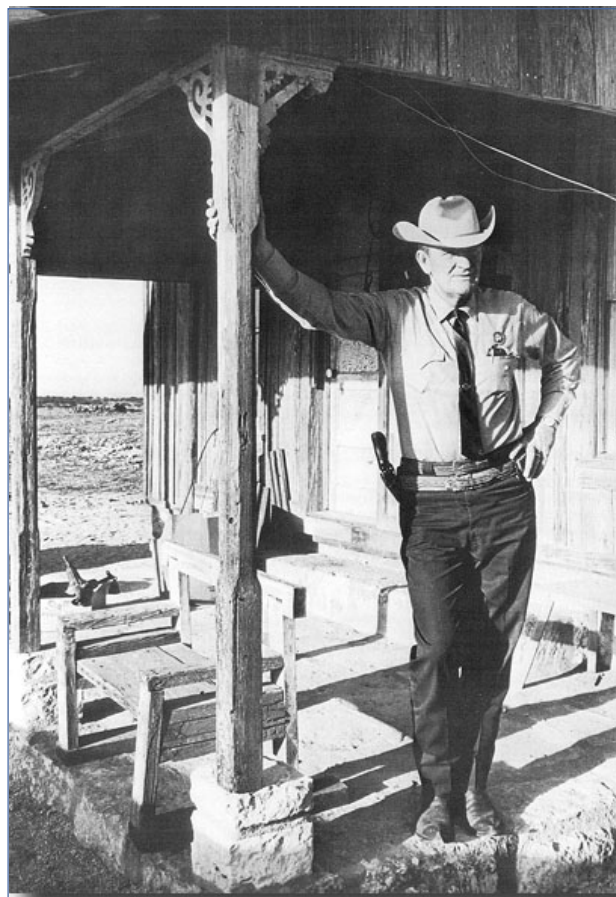
*After I dismounted, we went to Aunt Edith's house and visited until late in the night. We then loaded up and headed for Mom and Dad's house. Dad was working on a ranch about forty miles from Austin, but it didn't seem to take any time at all to get there.*

For two years, Ed worked in the peace and quiet of a ranch. He says that it was a period of time that saved his sanity. It gave him time to reflect and think of not only what he gone through, but also what he had to live for.

Ed married Lena Richardson in 1950. They remained lifelong partners until she died in 1995. They had no children.

In 1947, Ed became a Texas Highway Patrolman. In 1957, he became part of legendary Texas Ranger Captain Johnny Klevenhagen's Company A. Before 1983, when he retired, Ed served in Companies A, C, and F.

Ed passed away on July 3, 2004. He was truly one of America's Greatest Generation, and he left a record as one of the finest Texas Rangers to ever bless the state of Texas.



★ Texas Ranger Ed Gooding ★