

Liberator Burriss: Jumping into War



Burriss (holding weapon)
and fellow paratroopers



9 July, 1943--Burriss boarded a plane for the coast of Sicily, but ran into extremely heavy antiaircraft fire. His plane banked eastward instead of westward, and the paratroopers became widely separated upon landing. Burriss could only find two other paratroopers. When they heard Italian spoken, they immediately attacked enemy soldiers with grenades. The three U.S. paratroopers had been mistakenly dropped 55 miles from the target area. Luckily, Burriss and his two comrades were able to find and join a British unit who wanted to know if they were “Yanks.” Burriss refused to be called a “Yank” and stated, “I’m a Rebel from South Carolina, and before I’d call myself a Yank, you’d have to shoot me!”

1 October, 1943--Entered Naples and met no resistance. Enjoyed a week of rest and then was assigned mountain fighting duty for months in the dead of winter.



Chiunzi Pass
near Naples, Italy



Beach at Anzio, Italy

22 January, 1944--Beach landing at Anzio, Italy. U.S. intelligence had failed to detect the presence of significant German troops in the area, and an “easy skirmish” became unprepared carnage. Although working side-by-side with the British, it was disturbing to see the “Brits” in disarray and retreating. Under heavy fire, the U.S. paratroopers held their ground and the beachhead was saved, but at a heavy price. Burriss’ company was reduced from eight officers and 119 men, to four officers and 13 men. For its action in stopping the German breakthrough at Anzio, the 3rd Battalion was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation, one of three the 3rd Battalion received during WWII.



Tower Bridge, London, England

April, 1944--Returning to England for rest from the brutal Anzio battle, Burriss is promoted to Captain and assigned to “I” Company as commander.

17 September, 1944--Operation Market-Garden in Holland was to be the largest airborne operation in history, and was developed by British Field Marshal Montgomery and strategist Lt. General Frederick M. Browning. Burriss and his men were to attack and take the Grave Bridge, the longest bridge in Europe and vital for the movement of Allied troops. The first objective of securing the north end of the bridge was accomplished by “I” Company in one hour.

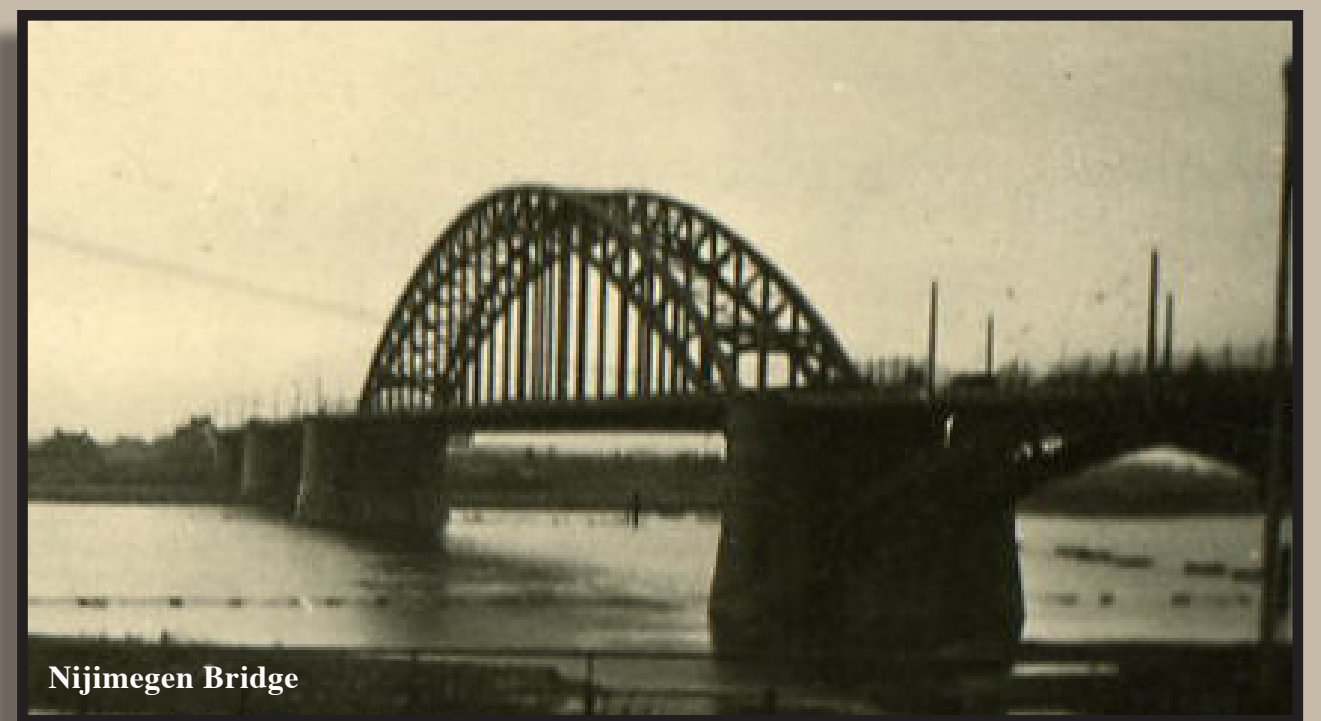


Operation Market-Garden, Holland



Grave Bridge

19 September, 1944--Two additional bridges, the Nijmegen Bridge and the Arnhem Bridge had to be captured. Captain Burriss was given the task to cross the Waal River and capture the north end of the Nijmegen Bridge. The Germans held the south end of this bridge. Burriss and his men had to cross the 300 yard wide Waal River in daylight in collapsible canvas boats where they were fully exposed to German fire during the crossing. Losing about half of his company in the carnage, Burriss and his remaining 17 men secured the north end of the bridge. They were eager to proceed to the Arnhem Bridge when one German shell hit the lead British tank. Captain Peter Carrington of the British Grenadier Guards refused to continue to go toward the Arnhem Bridge. The movie, “*A Bridge too Far*,” depicts this epic battle.



Nijmegen Bridge



Siegfried Line

17 December, 1944-- The Battle of the Bulge was a final all out German offensive which attacked a weak spot in the Allied lines along the Ardennes region of Belgium and northern Luxembourg. Significant casualties were suffered by Americans and Germans, but finally the last formidable German barrier, the Siegfried Line, was breached. This sealed the fate of Nazi Germany.