



Leilyn Young. US Ranger. Letter and photos
provided by his niece Lisa McCollum to the
Commando Veterans Association (UK)
www.commandoveterans.org

None of this is for publication.
You may tell friends of
it until Oct 13, when I
boarded ships for Africa.



Taricana, Tunisia
March 22, 1943

Dear Mom & Dad,

When you will receive this letter I don't know, for I plan to have Roy Murray carry it to the USA (when & if he gets to come) and mail it to you from within the borders of the USA. In chronological order I shall try to give you what has happened during the past year.

I left Port Dix at 4 PM Feb 18, 1942, & went by N. Y. Central to the Brooklyn Port of Embarkation, arriving about 9:30 PM after waiting on sidings several hours. At 10:30 PM we began to load on our ship, the Canadian Pacific liner, Duchess of Atholl. At about 12:15 AM the 19th I was on board.

When I awoke at 7:45 AM we were on our way and by 10:30 AM land was out of sight. About 10 AM the 21st we pulled in to the harbor at Halifax, Nova Scotia. At 4:30 PM we headed for the open sea and Ireland.

The trip was routine. We had our

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submerges, etc, but all went well. The weather was good & bad, rain and snow; the sea was calm and rough; the nights were dark and very bright. I was never seasick; I have yet to be!

On Feb 27 at 5 PM half our troops and supply ships (there were about 20 in all) and all our USA convoy protection (one battleship, one cruiser, ten destroyers) turned north for Iceland. Three British corvettes began to convoy us. Needless to say we were glad the days were cloudy and rainy. Yet, in all the trip, I never saw a Nazi airplane.

At 7:30 AM March 2 I saw land - the coast of Ireland. A little later Ireland was to our right, Scotland to our left as we steamed down the ~~Irish~~ sea. Into Belfast Lough we went and at 12:30 PM we docked. (I have full de-



tails of trips in diary.)

It was 3 PM before we were ashore, where the Red Cross fed us and then on to a train. I saw little of Belfast that day, but it was wonderful to be on land again.

We had a 70-mile train ride to our destination, Castlerock, which was my station until May 8, 1942, when I left never to return. On the train ride we passed three towns like Antrim, Ballymena, Ballymoney, Coleraine (only we didn't know those names that night.)

Castlerock (Henry Kaufmann probably has told all about it so I'll be brief) was on the north coast, a resort village in peace time. It is west of Port Stewart.

I was in Limavady and Londonderry several times. We went the six miles to Coleraine on a few weekends, I spent



two weekends in Belfast where we could dance a little. I'm glad I left Ireland when I did, since the flood of Americans ruined the place, so I hear.

Our battalion maneuvered the last week in March, near the Blackwater river and Lough Treigh, inland lake in the south of Ulster. We were the first USA troops to maneuver with the British. I had been sick a week with the dyspharysia but got to go. Since then I've gained pounds of weight & had only colds.

By division order I was assigned to be one of two American officers to attend a four-week course at the Advanced Infantry Assault course at the Special Training Center (British) at Lockhart, Scotland. Two sergeants went, too. Lockhart is 25 miles west of Port William, Scotland, which you'll find on a map.

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On May 8 I left Castle Rock for Scotland. May 9 I spent in Belfast. At 5:50 PM May 9 I went by train to Larne, Northern Ireland, and crossed by channel boat to Stranraer, Scotland, arriving about 9:30 P. M. By train then arriving Glasgow at 1:30 AM the 10th. By bus at 1 PM to Perth, to see Isabel and Lewis from 4 to 8 PM, when I left by train for Glasgow.

At 5:50 AM the 11th I left Glasgow by train for Lockhart. During the 125-mile ride I passed along Loch Lomond's shores. At Port Williams at 11 AM and on thru the western highlands to Lockhart at 12:15 P. M.

At the 4-week school were British, Canadians, Belgian, Norwegians, and USA officers. There were 70 officers and 120 non-coms attending the course.

It was the toughest four-week I've

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ever known physically - tougher than any of our Ranger training. One week of conditioning, one of field craft, one of field firing and obstacle courses, and one of overnite maneuvers - two 48-hour and one 72-hour schemes.

One Sunday and Saturday afternoon free - halfway thru the course - and we visited Port Williams, where & where I bought the Tartans.

At 9 AM June 9, the course successfully completed, I left beautiful and wild and mountainous Lockhart, arriving Glasgow 3 P. M. Overnight in Glasgow and on my way to Ireland at 7 PM June 10. At noon June 11 in Belfast I found old outfit had moved to Tynan, N. I. On a train at 3:15 PM and into Tynan at 4:30 P. M. I was back to the 133rd Inf, 3rd Bn.

Ray Murray & Walt Nye were gone to



the Rangers. The leave I'd asked for hadn't come thru. On June ~~16~~¹⁶ the Rangers asked for more volunteers. Very dis-satisfied with the slow moving 133rd and full of new ideas in training, etc., from my 4-week school, I decided to volunteer even tho I had been given command of Co 2 (I'd be a captain now had I stayed, as would Walt, and Roy would be a colonel.)

So at 9:30 AM I was interviewed at 34th Div Hq at Maghera, N.I., by Major Darby, commanding officer of the Rangers. On June 18 at 3:15 PM my orders came to report to the 1st Ranger Bn (provisional) at Carrickfergus, Ireland, 15 miles northwest of Belfast along the shore of Belfast Lough. I arrived by truck at 7:15 PM.

Roy and Walt were there and I spent the night. The next day, June 19, the battalion was activated and was no longer pro-



visional. At 5 PM the 19th seven officers and 14 non-coms, Walt and myself included, left the Battalion and Carrickfergus. I was leaving North Ireland and for the second and last time. We that we were an advanced detail to go to Scotland where the Bn was to come to train at the Commando depot.

But just before we left Major Darby told us we were on a special, secret mission to join the Canadian 1st Div on the Isle of Wight, England. So off we went!

To Larne by truck convoy from Carrickfergus, by channel boat to Stranraer, by train to London, arriving about 9 A.M. We crossed the great city to another station, had a two-hour wait, but didn't get to see much of London.

On by train, arriving at Portsmouth, England, about 3 PM. Met there by a Canadian



captain, we boarded a ferry boat for the half-hour ride to the Tale of Wight.

On board the boat we heard the sirens whine, the ack-ack batteries open up, & I had been in my first air raid, but no bombs were dropped.

Landing at Ryde, I. of W., we were taken to 1st Canadian Div. HQ at Cowes, I. of W., where we were assigned units. I was attached to the Fusiliers Mount Royal of Quebec (a French-speaking regiment) cause I could speak a little French. Yeh?

Anyway I had a good time, tho they more often spoke French than English. And many of the enlisted men spoke only French or what English they'd picked up in two years in England.

June 22 at 3 PM we boarded boats - the P.M.R.'s on a R.N. destroyer - and carried out a maneuver called Yukow II. It



was more of the Canadian's special amphibious training which they'd been going thru for six weeks. It was the second time for this scheme and we landed at dawn June 23 on the south coast of England, on a beach with surrounding countryside very like Dieppe, France, as I was to learn later. Back to Ryde on June 24. Some ground training - speed marches, assault courses, and beach head work for the next ten days.

We Americans guessed something was up, as we had been sent just before our own battalions had been going to begin a special training and the Rangers were in that training now and still we stayed.

On the Sunday before July 4 the plan was put out to all officers. Yea, it was to be a raid - a huge reconnaissance in



force — at Dieppe, France. During the next few days the final plans were perfected. On the afternoon of July 2 the P.M.R. with ~~met~~ along crossed by ferry to the English mainland at Portsmouth, by train then, arriving after dark, at New Haven, England, where we immediately boarded a side-wheel which before the war had plied the Thames, but was now a troop transport for crossing the English channel.

The afternoon of July 3 the dope on the raid was given to all troops as we lay at anchor in New Haven harbor. So far security seemed good, altho that day a German division 6 hours from Dieppe had moved to within 2 hours distance.

Dubious security or coincidence? Bad security, I'm inclined to believe, because Canadian officers were very loose tongued, I'd say.



Dawn the morning of July 4 was to have seen the raid — but weather prevented. So out of New Haven harbor we steamed, skirting the English coast, until we anchored off Ryde. There we lay to two days. Still the weather was no good. We went ashore for exercise in the hills of the Dof W where no one could see us, it was hoped.

On board again we moved back to New Haven and finally the morning of July 8 we moved back to Ryde and dis-embarked that afternoon. We had been aboard six days and the weather had failed us. The delicate balance of correct tide on the Dieppe beach and hoped for clear weather so aircraft could operate in conjunction with navy and army would not be attained again until mid-August. But now the whole of the Canadian



1st Div knew about Dieppe and what was planned and all were to get leave. That some would talk seemed inevitable. But, of course, none knew if another try at Dieppe would be attempted!

So after one more night on the 2 of We Americans left for London at 1 AM July 9. In the great city at 4 PM, we had 36 hours there while we wrote our reports and ^{were} interviewed by USA combined operations section staff.

At 11:50 ^{PM} July 10 we left London by train for Scotland to join the Ranger Bn in training. In Glasgow at 4 PM July 11 and on at 5:10 PM by train to Crianlarrick, Scotland, where trucks picked us up. At 12:30 AM July 12 we reached Achnacarry, Scotland, 22 miles north and west of Fort William where we began Commando training that same



morning with a 12-mile speed march, doing the 12 miles in 2 hours 18 minutes - slow really, but fast for us who had missed the first ten days of conditioning at the Commando center! (Not fast for me, however, since I was only a month out of tougher dockailort and still in good condition. Nothing we Rangers have ever done was as tough as dockailort and nothing has been as tough as Achnacarry, so it all seems easy now, tho it generally is so tough others couldn't do it possibly.)

A week after we arrived at Achnacarry 10 officers and 50 enlisted men arrived straight from the USA to take the course and then return to the USA to teach Rangers. Needless to say we tho't some of us should go home to teach, so the "fresh" Rangers had a hell of a life.

(over)

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They were the ones of whom you saw photographs at street fighting school in London. He never attended a school in London.

At 9:30 AM Aug 1 Roy Murray and three other officers and 44 enlisted men left Achnacarry on special duty. Later we discovered they went to Dieppe on Aug 18-19. Whether the E-boats that intercepted ~~in~~ the invaded sea force were accidentally there won't ever be known, I suppose. The fact the Dieppe coast had been reinforced during the five weeks after "we" tried and when Dieppe finally came off leads me to believe at least the place, if not the time, was known to the Germans. It looks like a blundering waste of manpower, but, of course, certain theories of invasion tactics were proven & dis-proven — tactics which had to be tested before we used them in Africa.

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At 4 PM Aug 1 I left Achnacarry with Walt and Co. E & F of the Rangers Bn. We went to Glencripesdale, Scotland, 44 miles southwest of Port William.

Two other companies were at Glen Borrowdale, near us, and two others at Roshev, 7 miles west of Lochailort. We were 20 minutes by boat from a highway or road and 16 miles overland from a road and a way out to civilization.

I was in familiar country again — the rugged, desolate, lake-filled, western highlands of Scotland — country most of which I'd hiked thru in May & early June from Lochailort. But the country is beautiful!

We began another training program. Our stay, scheduled for 12-14 days, was lengthened as the real Dieppe was postponed. The Rangers were hidden from the world, so none really knew

how many were at Dieppe. The whole set-up was called Dorslin house, a British Navy & Army school to teach combined operations - advanced work in boat to land & return operations. Actually it is the second school for Commandos.

We did a 48-hour problems on the Isle of Mull, west of which is the North Atlantic. The town of Dervraig & the ^{very} small city of Tobermory were the two ^{inhabited} places we operated in. Then back to Glencrivesdale and our isolation.

The Friday after Dieppe we went by boat to the west-coast city of Oban, where we spent 24 hours. Then back to Glencrivesdale. It was from Oban I sent the cable saying I was safe and well in Scotland after Dieppe. By that you were to know I was not at Dieppe. The clipping you sent me & I returned was to show I had been in

southern England with the Canadians. As you can see, I celebrated my 25th birthday at isolated Glencrivesdale, which was nothing but an unused hunting lodge.

At 6 AM Sept ~~3~~⁴ we left Glencrivesdale by boat for ^{Oban} arriving at 11:30 AM, and just missed our train. At 4 PM we left Oban by train for an unknown destination. We hoped southern England & private billets.

At 11:30 PM that night we reached our destination, which was Dundee, Scotland, a good city of some 150,000 persons. We were to have our private billets.

From Sept 4 to Sept 24 we were at Dundee and lived in our private billets. I was 25 miles from Perth but could not get permission to go to see Isabel. So it was from Dundee I called her that Sunday.

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At Dundee we were attached to the British 1st Commando (a commando is a unit like our battalions.) We trained in conjunction with the 1st Commando and had street fighting, dock fighting, inspected coastal defense guns, and had cliff scaling and various night schemes.

Our pent up selves were free at night — there were dances and shows and ice skating. And we were once again the "first" Americans and we were liked and we liked Dundee. We had a socially good three weeks.

Here in Dundee it was that we Ranger officers learned of a big campaign to come off soon. It was on Sept 14 that Col Darby (promoted while we were at Cripesdale) told us and showed us of photographs of our objective. We, of course, were not told what geographical location. But we could deduce it was south and a chance remark about high & low

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tide being only 2 feet different placed it on the Mediterranean somewhere. By October 20 we were sure it was Africa, but we had not been told nor could we yet guess where on the coast.

Needless to say the 24 officers of the Ranger Bn were the first and only officers except staff officers who knew about the invasion — we did know we (or at least the force) was going to remain. Not many persons knew of the campaign when we were told.

We had been under the British Special Service Brigade since coming to Dundee. We had come to join the 1st Commando in training for a particular job (later revealed as reducing certain coastal batteries at Algiers, Algeria.) Now we began to train on our own, practicing for our mission in the coming invasion. By Sept 24 at 1 PM

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when we left Dundee to move to a staging area at Glasgow we had perfected our plan. We were ready!

We arrived at Cokerhill station, just outside Glasgow, at 4:30 P.M. Sept. 24. There we went into tents which were set up on a golf course. Before we left there the place was knee deep in the stickiest mud I've ever seen!

A staging area is a place like Port Dix where a unit goes for final processing and drawing of supplies before going overseas. In the staging area we were attached to the 1st Inf Division, U.S.A., for administration & supply and to the 18th Inf combat team for the coming operation.

We perhaps had our most free time at Glasgow. Once we had 60 hours off at once. During one 24-hour free period I went back to Dundee to get my new uniform which I had

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tailored there. That night I stopped at Perth and visited overnight with Isabel. I left to return to Glasgow the next morning.

At Glasgow we kept practicing for our operation, one time doing a 24-hour exercise with the 18th C.I. on an island in the lower reaches of the Clyde river!

At 1:30 P.M. Oct 13 we left Cokerhill and went by train to Gourock, Scotland, where we left the train and boarded ships. I was on the Royal Ulsterman, a small ship just large enough for ocean travel.

While on board we did a problem on the west coast between Ban and Port William, Scotland. It was a dress rehearsal of the future operation. From there we returned to Glasgow harbor, and re-fueled and filled up with water and provisions for at least six weeks at sea.

At about 2 AM Oct 26 our convoy left Glasgow for good. We had not been off the ship except for exercise periods since we boarded on Oct 13. We sailed west from Scotland, passing within sight of the north coast of Ireland. From aboard ship we saw our old home of Castle Rock.

On southwest we sailed, until we were half way to the USA. Then we turned south and moved to a spot east of Africa. Then we went northeast, arriving at Gibraltar at 11 PM Nov 6. Coming into Gibr we saw a lighted city - Tangiers in the international zone - which after nine months of black out was quite a sight. A few scattered lights ^{were} visible to the north on the coast of Spain.

We took on water & fuel at Gibr and left at 4 AM Nov 7. I had seen "the rock" - a dark hulk of a hill against a lighter, but moonless sky.

At 11:30 PM Nov 7 our ship lay to in the correct position for us to leave her. The convoy purposely had run past its position off the coast to fool the enemy and after dark turned around and came west to the right position.

By midnight we all were aboard assault landing craft and these small boats had been lowered to the sea. Our battalion, less two companies, which had another mission, began the 5-mile trip to shore.

It was an inky dark night and we had to hit a 200-yard long beach - only possible dry landing spot along a 10-mile coast.

At 1:30 all were ashore. I had landed at 1:15 AM Nov 8 after ~~xx~~ my boatload of 40 men had "beached" on a rock 30 yards from shore. Needless to say, I and 5 men had to swim

ashore. I landed beneath a 100-foot sandstone cliff which was more scale-able in the dark. So the six of us missed some of the show.

Once ashore the Ranger Bn had a five mile march to its objective - a four gun coastal battery on a high hill commanding the harbor and sea for 17,000 yards around Arzew, Algeria, F.N.A., 25 miles northeast of Oran. The guns were taken okay, as were two other guns in a position near the foot of the hill by the other two Ranger companies. All casualties in the Ranger Bn were very light.

By dawn we held the guns and our ships were free to move in close, waiting only for an infantry battalion to take the town of Arzew. This was accomplished by noon (8 hours behind schedule) and on

the afternoon of Nov 8 supplies and troops were pouring into Arzew, being unloaded at docks in the harbor and by lighters from ships anchored in the harbor.

I ran a prison for several days, holding French naval personnel. We lived for 5 days in a French fort we had captured, Port du Nord - North Port. Then we moved 2½ miles south of town to beach cottages. Until Christmas the bn policed the town of Arzew.

By Thanksgiving the food had improved. Once again we had settled into an extensive, but general training program. On Dec 6 we got 24 hours off and I spent a day in Oran. By then it had been drained dry of things to buy.

Something was a stir a week

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before Xmas. We were preparing to move, so Xmas dinner was early. Xmas eve we were alerted and spent the night confined to camp, as did all troops, because of the assassination of Darlan.

On Dec 26 at 4 PM we did move. We went to Arzew harbor where we boarded HMS Queen Emma, a ship used by commandoes for raids. We were aboard until 11 AM Jan 7, when we returned to our beach cottages.

On board ship we practiced and prepared for a raid on an enemy held island. Because we were in the rainy season then, the weather never was correct, so the raid never came off.

By ^{day & night} Feb Arzew we trained and prepared to be the teachers and demonstration unit at the Invasion Training Center

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where the V army of General Clark is to ready itself for the onslaught on the continent. Wednesday, Feb 3, was a Friday and we went to Mostaganem for a holiday.

On Sunday, Feb 7, after a rush order, we moved by airplane from Oran to Tébessa, Algeria, near the Tunisian front. On Feb 9 we moved to Gafsa, Tunisia, and from there pulled our first raid on the Tunisian front at 1 AM Feb. 13. We evacuated Gafsa Feb 15-16 as did all United Nations troops. We were at the front in defensive positions until March 1, when F Coy went to Le Kailf, Tunisia, to guard II Corps HQ in a rear area. As of today, March 26, we still are here, resting and guarding, tho the rest of the bn is near El Guettar, 10 miles southeast of Gafsa, raiding & fighting and have been since March 17 when the big push began.

April 2 - Coy left II Corps Feb 28 & we rejoined
Bn at Gafsa. Bn in rest bivouac since. Tonight
we go on, outpost 24 miles northeast of here. Bn
bivouac 24 miles for last four miles. Giving this
to Roy now. Still no word on his leaving.



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How long will be here with II Corps
— which moved to Mianara when the
big push started — I don't know.
We are eating good and resting, so
I'd just as leave remains indefinitely.

What will happen when the African
campaign is over I can only guess.
There is, I suppose, a slight chance
we (Ranger Bn) might return to the
USA for a rest and to let the public
see us. If, if we have public ap-
peal as we hear we do, might lift
public morale and so sell war
bonds. We do deserve a break, we
think. However, more likely we
will train troops for the invasion
of the continent and then spearhead
the operation ourselves.

For me the year ended Feb 19 has not
been good — I've lost Mary Kay, I've got

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30/ 505 ARCH ST
LEAVENWORTH KANSAS

myself stalemated as far as promotion.
Yet, I like the Ranger idea and wish
there could be more battalions. But
we hear from fairly good source
there never will.

I am ready now to come home,
get in a new division, do staff
work, and come to the C & G Slat
Port Leavenworth. How it can be
done with Darby against it, I don't
know, but I'm trying always.
Perhaps Roy Murray getting back
will be able to help us. Walt &
I, the Walt becomes a captain when
Roy leaves.

So here I am stymied as of March 26.
This is a fairly good account of my move-
ments and stations — Feb 19, 1942, to March
26, 1943 — so keep it so I may elaborate
on it when I return. This is all the
diary I have until Jan 1, 1943, so you
should keep it as such. Love, Leilyn