

NCO History Brief

Band Of Brothers

By

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Good morning SGM Spade and fellow classmates of R05, I am MSG Barnes and over the course of the next several minutes I will be giving you an unclassified information brief on E. Company 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, or perhaps better known as the Band of Brothers. The purpose of this brief is to give you a better insight on what these courageous men accomplished from the time they were formed as a unit through the end of WW II. I will talk about when they were formed, the type of Soldiers these men were, their campaign in Europe, and talk about several of the Noncommissioned Officers that led this company. The book, Band of Brothers, by Stephen A. Ambrose was turned into a 10 part miniseries by HBO and directed by Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks. This miniseries documents the formation of Easy Company through the end of WW II and has been hailed as one of the most accurately depicted and portrayed miniseries of WWII to date.

Easy Company 2nd Battalion 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment was formed at Camp Toccoa, Georgia in the early months of 1942. The 506th was born as part of a new concept, which was Parachute Infantry. The first commander of Easy Company was 1LT Herbert Soebel, a man of conviction for what was right, he was more about standards than he was about caring for his Soldiers. During routine in ranks inspections he was proud of how he could find the most the most minute of infractions, such as rust on a hinge plate of a weapon or a dirty bayonet to threads protruding from a newly sewn rank on a uniform. When finding these infractions 1LT Soebel was noted for pulling a weekend pass or making the men run up Curahee mountain. He had his men on Friday nights conduct a 12 mile roadmarch in full gear when other companies were going on pass. One item to note was the level of respect amongst Lieutenants that is depicted in

this film and book. During the 1940's and into the 50's, it was not uncommon for a 2nd LT to call a 1st LT Sir.

Throughout the time at Toccoa, the training was both hard and difficult. Many Soldiers would just quit as others would suck it up and drive on. The biggest motivator behind this was those that had made it through the training wanted to be there and they wanted to be with the best. Through their training the Soldiers gained trust and respect for each other. This mutual respect and trust for each other would prove paramount in the years to come. Once their initial training was completed, the men of Easy Company moved on to their next phase of training, Jump Training. The actual jump portion of the training only took one day as the men jumped 5 times in one day. Unlike now a days as you conduct your jumps throughout an entire week of training. The Troopers made their jumps from C-47 aircraft at an altitude of 1000 feet AGL.

Upon completion of jump training the troopers of E. CO were sent to Camp McCall, N.C. for further training in tactic and procedures. On September 6, 1943 the 506th PIR departed the United States from Brooklyn shipyard en route to England for further preparation for the eventual invasion of France. In England the paratroopers continued their training and honing their skills on basic Soldier tasks such as map reading, bayonet training, basic Soldier skill that would be needed in combat and weapons ranges that included all types of weapons systems from the M-1 Grand to the Thompson sub machine gun to the .30 caliber machine gun. While in England, CPT Soebel, tried to give his XO, 1LT Dick Winters what would equate to a company grade ART 15, Winters, who felt as if he had done no wrong opted for a court martial. This act caused a serious rift within the ranks and many of the NCO's within the company endorsed a letter to the BDE

Commander, COL Sink, that said they no longer wished to serve as a NCO in Easy Company under the command of CPT Soebel. COL Sink had all the NCO's in his office, busted 1 to PVT and sent him out of the RGT, busted another to PVT and allowed him to stay with Easy while all the others got off with an oral reprimand. Realizing that there was a rift amongst the men of Easy and knowing that the court martial with Winters by Soebel was the root of the problem, Sink assigned CPT Soebel to Chilton Foley to take command of a jump training school for non combat arms Soldiers that would be needed during the invasion of France. With this act the court martial proceeding went away.

On May 31st, 1944 elements of the 101st ABN, that included the 506th PIR were moved to Uppotery, England for final preparations for Operation Overlord. The mission of the 101st was to take Carantan in order to link the roads between the Omaha and Utah beachheads. The two leaders that stood out during this entire time frame was the XO, Dick Winters and SGT Carwood Lipton.

On the night of June 5th, 1944, the paratroopers loaded C-47 aircraft enroute to Normandy for the invasion of France. As has been documented numerous times through history, the initial jumps onto the Normandy coastline was an absolute disaster.

Paratroopers from the 101st, 82nd and British airborne were spread throughout the peninsula. Throughout the night paratroopers from various divisions and units linked up on the ground to carry out missions. Once E. CO was assembled or at least resembled a fighting force, they were given the mission to take out a German Artillery Battery that was firing onto the Utah beachhead. 1LT Dick Winters personally lead this mission with two other lieutenants, three NCO's and a handful of Soldiers. Having been an overwhelming success, eight Bronze Stars and three Silver Stars were awarded to the

men of E. CO. For his part, 1LT Winters received the Distinguished Service Cross. Easy Company's capture of the German guns became a textbook case of an assault on a fixed position and is still demonstrated at the United States Military Academy at West Point.

On June 8th, 1944 E. Company finally had moved into position to assault and take Carantan. The fight for Carantan was a street by street, block by block and building by building fight. Carantan fell relatively easy as it was held by roughly on a company sized German element. Once Carantan was taken, Easy moved out to set up defensive positions south of town to repel a counter attack. The following morning a full on assault by the Germans that began with sporadic mortar and machine gun fire and was followed by tanks. E. Company was able to hold the line for a while and just as it seemed the line would break, tank crews from the 2nd Armor Division showed up and assisted E.

Company. With overwhelming fire power by the Sherman's and the fierce fighting of Easy, the German attack was successfully repelled. On D-day plus 25, Easy was pulled from the line and sent back to England. By the time Easy had pulled off the line on June 29th, 1944 they had lost 65 men.

Upon arrival back in England, the troopers were given passes and then began preparations for Market Garden which was to be an assault on Holland. For this operation the allied mission was to drop behind enemy lines and secure the road between Eindhoven and Ahrnem so that the British Armor Division lead by General Montgomery could move into position and take Ahrnem. Easy Company along with the 506th was to liberate Eindhoven, set up positions and wait for tanks. On September 17th, 1944 operation Market Garden kicked off. There was little resistance on the DZ and Easy was able to move in and liberate Eindhoven. After liberating Eindhoven, Easy moved to take

a town called Nuenen. In this town they were met by a fierce German resistance.

(briefly discuss ROE as pertained to British tanks not firing on German tank) During the battle for this town, SGT Bull Randleman was separated from the unit and was able to hide in a cul de sac and barn as the town was full of Germans. Later that night, SGT Randleman's training paid off as he had to use hand to hand and bayonet fighting techniques to kill an enemy Soldier. The following morning with the town cleared of Germans, SGT Randleman was able to link back up with Easy. Prior to Market Garden Dick Winters had been promoted to Captain and Carwood Lipton had been promoted to First Sergeant.

Market Garden was a high risk operation that failed. The allies plan to end the war by Christmas was not to succeed. During this operation, the 506th PIR lost 180 men while 560 were wounded. Of the entire 101st ABN division, 750 were killed and 2100 wounded. At Arnhem, the British 1st ABN lost nearly 8000 men.

Dick Winters stated that if you are a leader, you lead all the way all the time. Not just on easy missions and when it suits you. On October 5th, 1944 CPT Dick Winters lead his last mission as Commander of Easy Company. During the beginning of this mission, Winters personally emplaced his Soldiers, mortar crews as well as designated sectors of fire for each of the troopers. After initial contact that knocked out a German machine gun nest, Winters and his men withdrew to supplementary positions that was a mere ditch in the middle of a field. Should the Germans had realized this, Winters and his men could have been flanked and been desimated. Realizing this Winters chose to take the fight straight to the enemy. He carefully positioned his men, gave the order to fix bayonets and led the charge into what turned out to be two full company's of SS troopers.

Winters, the first to reach the enemy opened fire with his M-1 Grand as he and his company were supported by artillery. As I mentioned that had caught two company's off SS troopers in the open and basically annihilated the enemy. After the fight one platoon leader referred to the fight as a turkey shoot. During this battle Easy suffered 22 wounded and one KIA. During the course of the fight, 2nd Battalions, 506th PIR CP was attacked in force by a German Volksgrenadier company and the BN XO was killed as he was organizing the defense. Shortly after the fight with the SS company's COL Sink, moved CPT Winters from command of Easy to BN XO. This was done due largely in part to Winters being a solid tactician and his leadership abilities. Easy company was now to be commanded by 1LT Moose Heileger. 1LT Heileger soon got his feet wet as commander of Easy as he had to lead a patrol during Operation Pegasus. This operation was conducted to rescue the Red Devils of the 1st British Airborne that had been trapped on the far side of the Rhine River during Operation Market Garden. Shortly after Pegasus' success CPT Winters was coaching and mentoring 1LT Heileger when he was shot by a nervous sentry on guard duty. Moose Heileger had only been in command for 26 days. Now the new commander was a 1LT by the name of Norman Dyke. Not since the days of CPT Soebel in command of Easy had Easy been or felt as if they were mishandled.

Easy was now trucked into Belgium to be part of the defense of Bastogne. As the company and battalion were ready to move into positions the BN Commander had been on leave. 1LT Dyke had been more worried about where the BC was and not to the fact that his unit was short of ammo, food and proper clothing. When Easy company moved

into the woods around Bastogne, it was without artillery or air support. They were also short of ammunition, food and lacked winter clothing.

Battle of Bastogne as seen through the eyes of CPL Eugene Roe. (head medic) The weather was bitter cold, and in listening to the vets of Easy that are still alive today, they say that being in Bastogne in December of 1944 is still the coldest they have ever been. Throughout the defense of Bastogne Doc Roe continually assisted in reinforcing the line, checking the troopers and scrounging supplies. 1SG Lipton guided the defensive perimeter and continually re-enforced the line where needed. 1SG Lipton also set up and established the CCP as there was no BN aid station. The Soldiers wounded on the line were sent directly to a make shift hospital in Bastogne and were transported by the company. Bastogne had been completely surrounded by the Germans and on December 24th the German high commander had sent a message to the 101st ABN divisions acting CG, McCaulliffe ordering his complete and total surrender. His reply, Nuts! On the 26th of December, General Patton's 3rd Army broke through the German lines allowing supplies to flow in and the wounded to finally be evacuated.

The story of the battle of the Bulge as told today, is one of Patton coming to the rescue of the 101st ABN Division. To this day, not one member of the 101st that fought in Bastogne has ever agreed that the division needed to be rescued.

Throughout the series, each part focused on a particular or soldier or soldiers. Part 7 focused on 1SG Lipton and the role that he played in Jan of 1945.

1SG Lipton displayed LOYALTY on numerous occasions, both to his commander and his soldiers. During this time frame E. CO had a commander by the name of 1LT Dyke. LT. Dyke had been given command of E. CO to gain combat experience before moving

up the chain. The men of Easy Company believed that the company was more of a burden on Dyke than anything. One afternoon, a PL approached the 1SG and asked where the commander was, the 1SG not knowing, relayed this information to the PL. Several of the soldiers overheard this conversation and made comments to the effect of, wherever he is, he may as well stay. Hearing this, the 1SG put an immediate stop to it. Later that night in talking with squad leaders around a foxhole, he explained that it had to be tough for a replacement officer to come in and command a group of soldiers who have been together for the better part of 3 years and have already seen combat. 1SG Lipton later said, he didn't know how much of that HE believed, but as Company 1SG he viewed his most important job as not protecting the commander, but protecting the integrity of the company.

On Jan 3, 1945 E. Company moved into a patch of woods that overlooked the town of Foy. Over the course of the next 6 days, Easy Company was repeatedly shelled suffering numerous casualties. During this time frame 1SG Lipton displayed the Army value of DUTY. During a "huddle" and the commander "absent" several of the PL's suggested that the company pull the line back to get out of the range of the Artillery. 1SG Lipton's reply was NO. It was their job to hold the line where they were told to hold it.

Throughout numerous shelling, 1SG Lipton was the first out of a foxhole checking on the soldiers and re-enforcing the line.

1SG Lipton also showed that he was a caring and compassionate leader towards officer and soldiers alike. After a hellish barrage of artillery that wounded SSG's Joe Toye and Bill Guarnere, 1SG Lipton was the 1st to console their PL, Buck Compton who was very close to the Squad Leaders. He knew that as the 1SG, he had to be the strong one and

support his soldiers in any way possible. Even if this meant having a seasoned veteran pulled from the line for a couple of hours as he did for a PSG, Don Malarky after he lost two of his Squad Leaders.

Prior to and during the assault on Foy, 1SG Lipton continuously displayed personal courage, both moral and physical. The night prior to the attack, 1SG Lipton took it upon himself to talk to the Battalion Commander about the reservations that he had concerning his commander 1LT. Dyke. He felt as if the commander was an empty uniform and not ready to lead the assault the following morning. He knew that there was little or nothing that the BC could do, but felt compelled to discuss this with the safety of his soldiers in mind. As the assault on Foy drew to a close, E. company began to draw sniper fire and soldiers were being hit. Without being told and for total disregard of his own personal safety, 1SG Lipton ran into the open to draw the sniper fire so that his own sniper could destroy the enemy.

1SG Lipton was viewed as a leader that soldiers and officers could count on, keep their spirits up, keep them focused on the task or mission at hand and provide them the direction that the company needed to go. Basically for doing all the things that a great leader does. Shortly after the battle of Foy, 1SG Lipton received a battlefield commission to 2nd Lieutenant.

During the battle of Foy, 1LT Dyke had frozen costing several men their lives. CPT Winters relieved Dyke in the heat of battle and Dyke was replaced by 1LT Ronald Spears. On February 9th, 1945 in Hagenau and the war drawing to a close, the men of Easy were all about not taking any unnecessary risks. However, regiment wanted a prisoner snatch to gain further intelligence. CPT Spears had chosen 15 men led by SSG

John Martin to conduct this mission that would take place behind enemy lines. The mission was a success that resulted in two prisoners being captured and 1 man from Easy that died of his wounds. The mission was such a resounding success that the BDE Commander, COL Sink wanted a follow on mission the following night. The patrol never happened as CPT Winters duped the mission and eventually filed a false report stating the mission had occurred but were unable to secure any prisoners. He did this because the following day, Easy was to be moved off the line. (Winters promoted to Major)

By the time Easy company left Hagenau, their European Campaign had taken them from England to France, Holland and Belgium, and soon, they would enter Germany.

In April 1945 the men of Easy Company found themselves in Sturzelburg, Germany where they were resting and refitting. From Sturzelburg they moved to Landsburg, in Bavaria where they found and liberated a German concentration camp. During this period, the allied forces were finding these types of camps all throughout the theater. General Maxwell Taylor, (101st Airborne Division Commander) declared martial law and ordered all able bodied Germans between the ages of 14 and 80 to assist in cleaning the camps and helping the survivors of these camps.

Upon liberating the camp outside of Landsburg, E. Company was ordered to Bertesgaden to defeat any remnants of the German Army as Hitler had ordered that Bertesgaden would be the Nazi's last stand. By the time E. Company reached Bertesgaden there were little to no enemy within the town or surrounding area. Within hours of their arrival, E. Company had secured one of Adolf Hitler's most prized

possessions, the mountain retreat called the Eagles Nest. While in Bertchesgaden, the German Army had surrendered and on May 8th, 1945 VE Day was proclaimed.

After the surrender of the German Army, the United States became an occupation force and E. Company moved to Austria. While in Austria, the 506th PIR and E. Company over watched and processed German soldiers. On D-day plus 434 days, the men of E. Company were notified that the war in the pacific had been won and that all of the 101st Airborne Division would be returning home.

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