

Eldon Abrahamsen
3rd Platoon
Item Company
502 Parachute Infantry Regiment
101st Airborne Division/World War II

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Eldon Abrahamsen is a native of Askov Minnesota and was born there in May 10, 1925. On Dec. 7th, 1941 Eldon was attending basketball practice that fateful Sunday afternoon. Upon hearing the news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Eldon remarked that this event "changed his life entirely." He finished his junior year of high school at Askov and helped with the fall harvest. Eldon wanted to run away from home to join the military and set his suitcase in a field near his home to aid his flight. He believed that his Father saw him hide the case and they spoke about his intentions. Eldon told his Father that he was going to Grand Rapids High School for his senior year and graduate early and then join the army. His Father was reluctant to let him sign-up, but told Eldon that it would be a good idea for him to finish high school at Grand Rapids and gave his permission.

In April of 1943 at age 17, Eldon joined the army and went to basic training at Camp Roberts CA. Boot Camp lasted 16 weeks and it was "hot, dry and miserable." Eldon was trained to use a variety of weapons and learned some valuable lessons about keeping close to the ground when being fired upon and the use of grenades. During boot camp, two fellow Minnesotans Smith from Cloquet and Finlayson from Minneapolis became acquainted with Eldon. Smith encouraged Eldon to sign up for the airborne or in other words, become a paratrooper and Finlayson tried to talk him out of the idea. Smith had been really pushing Eldon to sign up and then ironically Smith was not allowed to volunteer for jump school because he wore glasses. Eldon mused that because of their encouragement he was now on a train to Fort Benning GA and was still not sure what the paratroopers were although he had just volunteered to become one.

At Fort Benning Georgia, Eldon became familiar with the "Frying Pan." The first phase of jump school was heavy physical training. On his first day at Benning, Eldon watched an officer tell a trainee to do 50 pushups that he promptly did. The trooper then stood up to leave whereupon the officer said, do 50 more pushups for not saluting afterwards. Eldon became used to running and push-ups because he did them all the time. On one occasion, Eldon was told to do 50 pushups and then do 50 more. During a five mile run, Eldon spoke to another trooper running along side him and as a result was ordered to drop out and do 50 push-ups. He also remembers seeing an officer in jump school being forced to do push-ups in a sawdust pit. When the officer doing the pushups spit in the sawdust, the instructor made him run around continually saying, "I will not spit in the sawdust." On another occasion, the men were forced to hold their arms out and do small circles with their arms. Eldon's arms hurt so badly the next day that he had to use one arm to hold the other arm up to retrieve and light a cigarette.

The other aspect to jump school was actually learning how to jump from a plane with a parachute successfully. Although Eldon professed to being "scared of heights" here he was planning to jump out of airplanes. The first phase was learning to roll and tumble correctly in a variety of exercises. Eldon stated that he should have changed his last name as Abrahamsen was always called first to do the various stages of training. In preparation for jumping, trainees were hoisted up to 250-foot high towers with a buddy and dropped with a parachute attached to guide wires. Trainees also wore parachutes and were placed in front of large fans that blew them across the ground. This training was supposed to teach the men how to collapse their chutes. Instructors also had the trainees drop out of the towers in parachutes. They dropped pieces of paper to discern the wind direction so that the parachutists could steer their parachutes away from the towers. Also shacks were built on four, 40-foot high poles, which were to simulate the doors that paratroopers had to stand in on planes. Climbing rickety ladders to the shacks was intimidating to Eldon due to his fear of heights. From these poles, troopers were in their parachute harnesses, which were attached to lines, and they were to slide down the lines that led to sawdust piles.

One day Eldon was waiting to use the phone at Fort Benning. He overheard a conversation that the trooper ahead of him was having on the telephone. Eldon knew the story that the man on the phone was relating because it was originated from his area of Minnesota. The conversation was about a young Minnesotan that had mass-murdered his family and it became quite infamous tale in the Askov

area. When this trooper hung up the phone, Eldon approached him and soon found out that this man was from a town nearby Askov, Hinckley. The trooper's name was Pvt. Eugene Gaukel.

After the simulated parachute drops, trainees had to make five real parachute drops to earn the coveted airborne wings. Paratroopers were taught to pack their own parachutes and they had to use them on their jumps. Eldon believed this was a big incentive to pack the parachute correctly. One of these five parachute drops must be a night jump. Eldon remembers the first training drop was really easy yet the other four were not. His first words upon the opening of the parachute were "what the hell is there to being a paratrooper?" On the remaining four drops he felt the jarring effects of the propeller blast which violently opened the parachutes. On his first drop, the trooper behind Eldon was Eddie Albert. Eddie as a broad, Native-American from Washington State. Eldon asked Eddie what if I don't jump? Eddie smiled and told Eldon not worry because you will go out the door. During another practice jump, he looked up at his chute and noticed that another trooper from Texas was actually walking across the top of his parachute. Eldon began to move his parachute around and as a result a training officer on the ground was yelling at him to stop "slipping." Both Eldon and the "walker" landed unharmed although Eldon's body hurt all over. When they both hit the ground the lieutenant continued berating Eldon for slipping on the jump. Eldon was thankful that no bones were broken and asked the "parachute walker" who was named Anderson from Texas what he was doing? Anderson responded, "Hi Abe, guess we made it again." During a later practice jump in Alabama, Eldon's parachute was oscillating and he hit the ground backward on his heels and hit his head. He lay on the ground-watching overhead as the other paratrooper's parachutes violently opened due to the prop blast.

After Eldon earned his paratrooper's wings, he attended the parachute Rigger School at Fort Benning. Training centered-around working with parachutes and learning how to drop cargo chutes on targets from an airplane. During the last week of the school, he was asked by an officer to forgo his furlough home after completion of the school and go directly overseas. Eldon agreed to this idea, as he was eager to "get into the war." Later that same day, he was again ordered to the Rigger School office and was asked the same question again by the same officer. Eldon responded with the same answer as he had earlier in the day. He was curious why they asked him twice and the officer responded that he was the only one to voluntarily refuse his furlough and they just wanted to make sure that he really meant it. Eldon's friends were upset that he had done this and two of his Mexican-American friends actually cried. He is not sure whether these two survived the war.

As a result, Eldon went by train to Fort Meade MD and from there to New York City to await transfer by ship to Great Britain. He did one thing that he had always wanted to do in NYC and that was to go Jack Dempsey's Bar. The house bought Eldon and the parachute walker, Anderson a drink. Eldon and other airborne men shipped out of Brooklyn to Ireland. He was seasick the entire, long trip across the Atlantic and in Eldon's words it was, "the most miserable time of my life." Only when he lay flat on his back in his bunk was life tolerable. Eldon only went to the mess decks once and when the food was placed upon his tray, he barely made it to the bathroom before vomiting again. He believes that he only survived the voyage because friends brought candy bars to him in his bunk. Their troop ship was part of a large convoy escorted by destroyers. Depth charges were dropped daily and Eldon wondered if a German torpedo would sink the ship before they went into combat. One older fellow remarked that they would be lucky if they survived and if they did, they would not go home at least for two years. Eldon did not believe the 25-year-old trooper's predictions but the prediction proved accurate.

When the ship finally landed in Ireland, Eldon remarked that the "land looked good." Eldon ate his first real meal in 12-14 days and soon was "back on his feet." While in Ireland, Eldon had several passes to Belfast. During one of these leaves, Eldon and friends visited a castle with many stairs and high turrets, which impressed him. While touring the castle, Eldon and another friend met two beautiful "Irish lasses." One of the girls had lived in the US and as a result Eldon found her speech easier to understand. The two girls told the paratroopers that they had to make a short delivery and invited them along. The American girl left Eldon and her friend in a park while she made the delivery. He was shocked by how "strongly" the young woman "came onto him," especially since Eldon was supposed to be with her friend. He felt relieved when the American girl returned although Eldon had enjoyed the visit and thought that overseas duty might not be as dangerous as he previously believed.

After two to three weeks in Ireland, the paratroopers arrived in England. In February of 1944, he arrived in the small village of Chilton Foliat near Hungerford and lived in a Quonset hut. Eldon was then assigned to "I" Company of the 502 Parachute Infantry Regiment attached to the 101st Airborne

Division. The first day at the hut, Eldon met a man nicknamed "Ketch." This large man in the squad quickly announced to the rest that Eldon would be his assistant machine gunner. Eldon believed he was chosen because he was so "big and strong." Shortly thereafter, another man joined Eldon's squad and ironically it was Eugene Gaukel; the paratrooper that Eldon had overheard on the phone in the US.

Life in the Quonset huts was cramped and cold. Coal was used to warm, as the temperature was cold at night. Bunks were used to sleep on and mattresses were filled with straw. Toilets and showers were located in separate buildings and latrines were "honey buckets" that were collected and dumped on neighboring fields for fertilizer. Living in such cramped quarters required diplomacy on the part of all the inhabitants.

Eldon's bunkmate was Cornelius Owens who was a "very funny" man who would make faces beyond description. Owens was well respected and considered among the squad members to be kind and honest. Walter Kweicinski (Ketch) met Eldon many times throughout the exploits of the 101st. He was about 10 years older than Eldon and was physically large and strong. Ketch's sidekick was Tony Mastrolillo, they made an unusual pair according to Eldon; Ketch was over six feet tall and Mastrolillo was around five and ½ feet. Ed Smith was another friend of Eldon's; very quiet and in excellent physical shape. Bill Greene was from Georgia and Eldon considered him a "neat" person and "good trooper." He and Eldon were together in many difficult combat situations together. "I" Company's commander was Capt Ivan Hershner. He was physically large, fair complexion and Eldon considered him a "father figure." The 502 Third Battalion commander was LtCol. Robert Cole. Eldon admired and respected him as well. Eldon believes the reason he respected these men so much was that he was so young and they were older.

In May of 1944, the entire 101st Airborne did a practice jump at night. This was in preparation for the real thing the next month. According to Eldon, the practice went "fairly well." In England, Eldon discovered that another fellow Askov native, Werner Lunde was also in the 502 in "A" Company. While in Hungerford on some Sundays, Lunde came up to find Eldon and they would proceed into town to taste ale at the local pub. On one Sunday, Eldon and Werner proceeded back to camp at dusk and were throwing rocks at pheasants as they walked back. Werner was ahead of Eldon and a jeep pulled up and Eldon watched from behind. An officer in the jeep was playing games with Werner, asking him if he could see the star on his jeep? To which Werner replied, "yes sir!" The officer then queried Lunde whether he believed he could see a tank in combat? The officer in the jeep was none other than General Maxwell Taylor, the commanding officer of entire 101st Airborne Division. Interestingly enough in Holland, Lunde was walking around dusk with two attractive Dutch girls when again ironically General Taylor again drove up in a jeep. He asked Lunde what unit he was from and then drove off. Taylor drove a short way and then turned around and personally drove Lunde back to "A" company. The joke was that if the war had lasted any longer, Werner Lunde and General Taylor would have become great friends.

Eldon met with Lunde once more before D-Day and they wished each other well. Both laughed and joked about what would happen on D-Day and both Minnesotans put on, "false faces." Another Askov boy was in the 101st, Sven Christensen was with the 506th PIR in another area. He came to visit Eldon because he was unable to find Lunde. Eldon said that Sven was "down" and made many promises about what he would do for his parents after the war. Before Christensen left, he borrowed \$10 from Eldon and that was the last time Eldon saw him until after the war.

Just prior to D-Day, the entire 101st made a practice night jump and it went off quite well according to Eldon. The 101st was moved from Hungerford to the marshalling areas just prior to D-Day. The troopers were sectioned off from the English civilians for fear of intelligence leaks. Here they sharpened their jump knives, blackened their faces and Eldon cleaned his M-1 Garand rifle and prayed silently. General Dwight Eisenhower came out and met and shook hands with many of the paratroopers of the 101st on June 5th. He was aware that casualties were expected to be heavy on this night drop. Much to Eldon's surprise, Ike shook hands with him and inquired about his age, weight and finally wished him luck. Then Item's Company Commander, Captain Ivan Hershner spoke to his company. He told the men that everything will be fine and if you are wounded you will be taken care of. If you are killed, then your worries are over. The troopers helped each other with their large amounts of equipment for the drop and waddled onto the waiting C-47 planes for their rendezvous with destiny. Eldon's plane rumbled down the runway and touched down three times before it was able to lift-off and he felt a sense of relief when the plane finally went airborne.

Over the English Channel, Eldon thought it looked like a giant parking lot with hundreds of ships on it. Once over the Channel Islands, heavy flak began and Eldon felt like a "sitting duck" as the tracers were only a "fraction" of the bullets aimed at them. Eldon was anxious to jump, as he was sick of being a target. The jumpmaster finally told them to jump at 12:56 AM and although he believed the plane was only approximately 300-400 feet above French soil, the trip down "seemed like forever." Eldon was the target of many tracers during his descent and he wondered as he was hanging from his parachute, "how many holes he would have in him."

Eldon was not too far off from his intended drop zone and landed in the vicinity of the French town of St. Mere Eglise. He feared landing in water, as he could not swim very well. Ironically, Eldon did land in water and was scared although he stood up and it was only knee deep. One horse and six cows were in the field Eldon landed in. The field was approximately 5-6 acres with hedgerows bordering the field. Being a farm boy from Minnesota, Eldon could not help but think about his fate with these wild animals. He thought about the headlines in the Askov newspaper, 'Local Boy Trampled to Death in Normandy.' As he was struggling out of his harness and cutting himself out of his lines with his switchblade, a C-47 crashed across the next hedgerow. Once free of his harness, Eldon orientated himself to his surroundings and quickly found another trooper from his stick, Ed Smith from TX. Eldon found Ed to be a "bloody mess" as he had been hit in the chin and was stunned.

The two began to move across the field and they heard what was the "worst scream either of them had ever heard." What they discovered later was a paratrooper's parachute had been caught in a tree and he was swinging in his harness. The Germans had disemboweled the paratrooper with knives in his defenseless state, swinging in his harness.

Soon Ed and Eldon heard someone walking through water. Eldon snapped his cricket in hopes of hearing the correct friendly reply from the direction of the noise. What they found was Cornelius Owens AKA "Stinky" from Brooklyn walking out of the chest deep water holding his M1 over his head and "swearing."

The two continued their movement across the field, now joined by Owens they crossed a hedgerow and came onto a dirt road. As they stood by the edge of the road, the trio heard the sound of horses coming down the road towards them. Prior to the drop that night, the 101st troopers had been warned of possible German cavalry units amid the intended drop zones. As the galloping neared, the troopers shot the horse without a rider as its dead body slid down the road towards the three.

As night continued and other hedgerows were crossed, Owens was split up from the other two. As Eldon and Ed were nearing a town, they began to receive fire. After several rounds the pair perceived the shots originated from a nearby town's church spire. After the German had taken another shot, the pair both opened up on him and shot him. The two then crossed the hedgerow and walked towards the church and as they did, the priest came out of the church and gave them each a bottle of wine. The priest was overjoyed to see Americans as firing was heard in the distance. The two pointed the priest in the direction of the church and they moved out across another hedgerow.

The rest of early D-Day morning prior to dawn was spent evading larger groups of Germans and attacking smaller numbers. As the group moved on to their objective the causeway, Eldon's group continued to attack and drive back groups of Germans and many thoughts were in their minds. Especially that each step could be their last one. It was either kill or be killed. Many groups of Germans were caught between the paratroopers and the seaborne troops. Eldon vividly remembers the sight of the German and American dead and also the dead cattle.

When dawn finally arrived, Eldon was reunited with most of his company that survived the night. As dawn neared, Allied bombers continued to drop bombs inland on German positions. Eldon saw one B-17 at around 10-15 thousand feet hit by German flak and hit the ground. Only one parachute was seen from the crew of ten members.

Eldon remembers seeing his company commander, Capt. Ivan Hershner riding a horse as his leg was broken on the drop. He along with the regimental commander returned to England as Col. George van Horn Moseley had also broken his leg during the night jump.

The night of June 6th, Eldon and Eugene Gaukel were on a night outpost in a cemetery near the town of St. Come du Mont. By now, the two had not slept in almost 40 hours so the two of them took turns sleeping and as a dawn arrived, they found themselves surrounded by both living and dead cows. Several cows were bloated and on their backs with their feet sticking straight up in the air. A French farmer ventured out from his house and began to milk the living cows. Eldon asked the farmer if he could have some of the fresh milk and he filled his canteen cup. "What else could the farmer do, I had

a gun?" As the two remained in their cemetery outpost, no Germans approached but a rider on a draft horse did. The rider was a young French girl with her dress hiked high up her thigh. This was enough to energize Eldon's tired hormones. The girl motioned for him to follow her and Eldon refuses to detail what happened in this encounter.

The two were relieved shortly after this encounter and rejoined the platoon. The next day was spent advancing and engaging in several firefights and the platoon lost two men. The following night, June 7th was the "blackest night ever" according to Eldon. 1st Lt. John Painschab selected 6 men for a patrol the next morning, among the six were Eldon and Eugene. It was so black that the patrol decided that signals would be needed to maintain contact. The signal was light raps on the butts of their rifles. The night was uneventful and the patrol was glad as dawn arrived.

They were still near St. Come du Mont and as they crossed a field, the patrol noted an opening on the right side of the hedgerow the patrol was approaching. As they crossed the field, a German arose from the field and ran through the hole in the hedgerow and the patrol chased him into the next field. As the seven passed through the opening the Germans in the field opened fire on the patrol. The fire was heavy and Eldon and Eugene were on the left of the line the patrol formed to return fire. One German in particular was firing at the two and they both "nailed him."

Lt. Painschab asked for an orange smoke grenade to be thrown to indicate friendly troops. Eldon responded by throwing one but forgot to take the tape off it which had been put on grenades during the jump as a safety measure and the grenade failed to explode. He crouched and ran out into the field and retrieved it. During this firefight, a German mortar round exploded between Eugene and Eldon and luckily only blew their helmets off.

The patrol members then drew straws to decide who would run back through German fire to go through the hedgerow opening and get reinforcements. Bill Green was the winner and began towards the opening and would drop periodically. Although the situation was deadly serious, the patrol could not help but laugh at Bill's running because it reminded them of a cartoon. As Bill would run and then drop, machine gun bullets would hit behind him and spray dirt. Bill eventually made it and returned with a light tank to help the patrol out of their dire straits.

As the tank approached, they mistook the patrol for Germans and .50 caliber machine gun tracers from the tank went right between the Lieutenant's legs but Painschab was unharmed. The tank commander's hatch on the tank was open and a German mortar shell dropped right in the hatch, which killed the crew. Painschab's patrol retreated back towards St. Comte Dumont.

As "I" Company began its movement towards its objective Carentan, two of the 502's companies crossed paths at Dead Man's Corner. Aptly named according to Eldon as dead Germans were scattered around and bloated like the dead cows he had seen earlier. As "I" Company marched on one road intersecting the crossroads, "A" Company was approaching on the other road, as Eldon marched past the corner he noticed his friend from Askov, Werner Lunde among the "A" Company men. Eldon yelled at Werner, "Lunde, what the hell, are you still alive?" to which Werner responded, "yah, you too?" and gave Eldon his famous grin. That was the last time Eldon would see Lunde until after the war. Interestingly enough, Askov was the site of a Danish enclave and both Werner and Eldon are of Danish heritage. The Danes had originally moved to Askov from Ord Nebraska. In Ord, Eldon's parents had "stood up" for Werner's parents when they were married many years prior.

The Third Battalion of the 502 continued their advance towards Carentan. German mortar and artillery fired continued to rain down upon them. The Third Battalion of which "I" Company was one its three companies, was to move towards Carentan via a raised road or causeway flanked by swamps and water. Germans were placed throughout the swamp and on islands in the swamp that gave them an excellent advantage over the 502 troopers advancing along the causeway and in the ditches. There were five bridges that were part of the advance along the causeway. Eldon and his squad advanced to the first bridge and he found an already dug foxhole. Eldon and another "I" Company trooper jumped into the hole and soon found the bottom of the hole to be "squishy." Several dead Germans in the bottom of the foxhole caused the "squishy" feeling.

The next morning the Third Battalion began its advance toward Carentan along the causeway. Eldon described it as a "bitch of a day." Eldon advanced on the right side of the causeway in the ditch, he stated that he "crawled in that goddamn ditch all day long." Throughout the advance along the causeway, the men took rifle, machine gun and mortar fire. At one point during the advance, the battalion commander, LtCol. Robert Cole from San Antonio TX was right beside Eldon. He had removed his helmet and Cole tussled his hair and asked Eldon "how it was going?" Eldon responded

fine and Cole continued on his advance and fell into the ditch that was filled with water. Cole would win the Congressional Medal of Honor the next day for leading a bayonet charge that broke the back of the German defense outside of Carentan. He would be the only man from the 101st Airborne Division to win the CMOH during the Normandy campaign. Ironically, Cole never received the award as he was killed in action during the next major operation that the 101st Airborne was engaged in, the paratroop into Holland in Sept. of 1944.

The advance along the causeway was brutal for "I" Company, as half of the company became casualties. As Eldon continued crawling along the causeway, a trooper in front of him was hit in the thumb and the bullet traveled up his arm to his shoulder and out his back. The trooper behind Eldon was hit next and a medic crawled to provide first aid to him. As the medic was helping the wounded trooper, he was hit in the forehead by a bullet. Eldon attempted to move quickly as this position was vulnerable to German fire. Near Eldon, a Lt. was hit in the stomach and was stripped to the waist and due to loss of blood, he was pale white. Continuing his advance, Eldon crawled over many bodies of dead I company men. This enraged him and Eldon vowed to kill as many Germans as possible.

As the day wore on into nightfall, Eldon crossed what was left of the last bridge. The ground rose in this section of the causeway and German fire increased in intensity. As Eldon rounded another rise in the ground, a German about 6-7 feet in front confronted him with a machine-gun ready to fire. Eldon was preparing to "blast him" when he noticed that the German was dead as another paratrooper with a sense of humor had propped him up. Eldon was then was hit in the leg by machine-gun fire the same time a German Stuka dive-bomber was strafing and dropping anti-personnel bombs on the paratroopers along the causeway. Eldon felt for his legs and then stood up by he heard "bones crunching" and fell down the ditch into the water. Further down the ditch was another trooper hit in the stomach and was laying half in the water. A Sgt. passed by the two wounded troopers and gave Eldon a shot of morphine. As Eldon felt his legs he discovered that he had been hit with a burst of machine gun fire that hit him in the knee, calf and ankle. As the morphine began to take effect, Eldon felt hungry and opened a chocolate D rations and offered some to another wounded trooper who was lying partially in the swampy water. As Eldon lay there, he thought that he would bleed to death and then he saw Gaukel walking along the causeway from the direction of Carentan. Eldon yelled at him for help but he replied that he too was wounded and could not help him. Gaukel later died from his wounds.

Two stretcher-bearers to an aid station later evacuated Eldon to the rear. Eldon told the medics that he was not good but to take the other wounded trooper as he had a stomach wound. He dozed in and out of a deep sleep and was carried back two miles to the aid station. He was received by the 502nd regimental doctor, Blatt and gave Eldon some blackberry brandy and put splints on both of his legs. Eldon was then tied to the hood of a jeep and driven to the beach for evacuation to England. He was given a canteen of coffee and then taken to the hospital ship.

Eldon does not remember much about the voyage across the English Channel to England. He remembers a 82nd Airborne trooper telling him about jumping into Sicily and avoiding injury only to be stepped on by a cow in a Norman pasture. Eldon also remembers eating ice cream on the trip. He then awoke to find himself in a naval hospital in South Hampton England. The hospital Eldon was in was mostly inhabited by other wounded US airborne although there was one German paratrooper also in the ward. The German told Eldon that he was coerced into the paratroops to avoid discrimination to his family. The German showed Eldon a photograph of his family and himself in uniform. A projectile in his calf, which had separated the flesh from the bone, had hit the German. Eldon was incensed by the callous treatment the German received in the ward.

Eldon was scheduled for surgery in England. He remembers seeing the x-rays of his legs on the wall although Eldon does not remember having x-rays taken. A nurse was standing on Eldon's left and asked him to start counting as she inserted a needle. He could not remember which number came next as he passed out from the effects of the content of the needle. The next thing he remembers was being on a stretcher as a nurse brought Eldon a card for his Mother's birthday. Eldon's only explanation was that this nurse must have cared for him during surgery when "under the effects of truth serum."

Eldon was then transported on a medical train with bunks to a military hospital further inland England. The train was filled with wounded GIs and Eldon remembers one of those soldiers particular. This soldier thought that everyone around him in the bunk beds was the enemy and he wanted to kill everyone. He wondered what type of horror the GI must have seen to cause that type of reaction in him. Eldon was in no state to help and wondered what he might do unless the soldier was

restrained. He must have fell asleep as the next thing Eldon remembers is being in the 153 General Hospital.

Eldon remembers the hospital in detail, as it was a set of Quonset huts connected by hallways. The hut that he was in had approximately 18 beds on each side and Eldon was in the third bed on the left from the entrance. The wounded soldier in the first bed could maneuver himself around in a wheelchair and he and Eldon would "shoot the bull" regularly. The wounded soldier in the wheel chair told Eldon that being a paratrooper was "crazy" and he agreed. He asked Eldon what would happen if you landed among a group of Germans? Eldon responded that they had a cord on their parachute that they would pull to make them land somewhere else. Eldon states that he acted like he believed his false story.

Eldon felt that the daily routine in the hospital rapidly became very tiresome. He had several penicillin shots daily and he befriended a "ward boy." Actually the ward boy was a man approximately forty years old and was a fatherly figure to the men, very kind and caring. One day the ward boy told Eldon unless he went to the bathroom that day, he was going to give him an enema. Eldon was shocked when he realized that he had not been to the bathroom in nine days! With the other ward boys' encouragement, Eldon completed the mission and was very happy when "things were working again."

Eldon's legs were in wire splints, which was wrapped from his toes under his foot and heel and up past the knees. The doctors in the ward called this, "drop foot." An attractive physical therapist from Rochester came daily and worked on Eldon's feet. Eldon felt that she was "old" around 30 and very dedicated and pretty, he wishes that he had appreciated her more at the time. He remembers the day that the therapist was pleased by the fact that Eldon was able to move one of his big toes. Eldon was not concerned that he would never be able to move his toes again. He attributed this carefree attitude to youth.

Eldon had still not been able to get out of his bed since the time of him being wounded in Normandy. When the time came to take the bandages off his wounds and the openings caused by surgery, a doctor brought a nurse to help with this. Eldon states that the pain associated with childbirth has been described as "unbearable." He was in so much pain as the gauze packing and bandages were removed rapidly that Eldon would have "hit" the doctor if possible. When they finished cleaning the wound and putting new bandages on, they then cleaned the wounds on Eldon's right calve and ankle. The wound on his upper right leg was rated severe as it was 1 by 2 1/2 inches in size and the peroneal nerve was damaged. The right ankle wound was 2 1/2 by 1 inches and was left open but bandaged. The flesh on this wound had been blown away and that is why it was left open to grow back before closing.

When the physical therapist agreed, Eldon was able to get out of bed and use a wheelchair. He was then transferred to another hut that was the therapy unit. He was greeted by the physical therapist that he had worked with and she told him that she was glad he had improved. She pointed to another patient that was walking with a stiff leg and said that if Eldon wanted to, he too could walk like that. Eldon was committed to regain all physical abilities he had before his wound and therapy continued and he improved as well. He was able to regain the ability to walk after a period of time. As he regained his strength, the nurses asked to help with a variety of tasks. One night a GI with a head wound refused to stay in his bed, the nurses asked Eldon to help restrain him. The nurses needed to get some spinal fluid from him. After that, Eldon was asked to help the nurses regularly.

Eldon's progress continued and the doctors told him that if he had someplace to visit that he could go and try taking care of himself for a few days. While at the therapy hut, Eldon became acquainted with a young woman from Birmingham who volunteered at the hospital. Eventually she came on her days off to visit Eldon. She asked Eldon to come to her parent's house and stay as long as he liked.

Eldon rode the train to Birmingham and she met him at the train station. They went together to her parent's home and they treated Eldon very well. Her father made him a stainless steel cigarette lighter like a ronson. Eldon and his friend even had studio portraits taken in Birmingham. Eldon felt that their relationship was becoming too serious and he described it as "suffocating." The time came for Eldon to leave and he thanked them all for allowing him to stay but the entire family was sad.

Eldon returned to the hospital and was released and then transferred to the 10th replacement depot. From there Eldon was returned to camp at Chilton Foliat; to the exact hut he was in prior to D-Day. On Eldon's first day back, 3/502 Commander Colonel Robert Cole and the new/502 Company Commander visited with him about how his wounds. Cole told Eldon that he would remain on light duty until he felt

that he could "handle regular duty." Eldon was impressed by the interest shown by the two officers in his wounds. He only remained on light duty a few days as Eldon requested to return to regular duty.

In late August of 1944, the 101st was taken to marshalling areas in preparation for another parachute jump, this time at Tournai Belgium. Eldon's new platoon leader Lt. Tyree took him to see the doctors and had his legs inspected and bandaged. Tyree was mad at the doctors for making Eldon go on another jump before his wounds were healed but the commanding officer of the 101st Airborne, General Maxwell Taylor cancelled the drop due to changes in the front.

Eldon was picked up by ambulance and learned that he was going to be reclassified and assigned to non-jump status. He told the doctors that there were three options; either they could lock him up, send him home or go back to his unit. He was eventually given jump status again and rejoined the unit. Eldon sat out the next jump that the 101st made over Holland on Sept. 17, 1944. But returned to the unit as they went to Mourmelon France after being pulled out of Holland at the end of Nov. 1944.

Eldon was writing a letter to his sister on Dec. 18, 1944 when the 101st was told of the next mission. The Germans had attacked through thinly held American lines in the Ardennes forest of Belgium. The 101st did not parachute jump into this battle but were trucked in. The Screaming Eagles were to help stem the German tide and they traveled all day and into the night from France to Bastogne Belgium.

Eldon rode in the right, rear corner of one of these trucks and talked the entire time with Lt. Tyree. They both spoke of their homes and their lives prior to the war. Eldon felt that his new platoon leader was a nice person and believed that the Lt. came to respect him because he refused to quit and carried the .30 caliber light machine gun throughout the Ardennes campaign along with his M-1 rifle and gear. Once their column of trucks arrived in Belgium, they unloaded and walked several miles in the dark until they reached their positions. The weather was cloudy and cold and they were familiar with these positions when the fog dropped upon their area. There were firefights with the Germans constantly but I Company held their ground and without air support due to the weather. The Screaming Eagles were constantly under German mortar and 88-mm.-artillery fire. Eldon especially hated the mortar barrages because they were able to drop out of the air into any positions no matter how well "dug in" a person was. I/502 would remain in this same area until the American counterattack in Jan. 1945.

The fog finally lifted around Christmas and US P-47 Thunderbolt fighters strafed and bombed German positions in front of I Company. According to Eldon, "those planes saved us a lot of grief." Also, C-47 planes began to drop much needed supplies to the besieged men of the 101st Airborne. Among the many supply bundles dropped by parachutes from the planes were much needed overshoes. Eldon did not get a pair, as boots in his size were gone quickly.

The platoon's main line of resistance was behind the outpost which was on the far left and forward of the rest of I company. The outpost was series of approximately 6 foxholes that would be able to warn the rest further to the rear if a German attack occurred. The paratroopers had salvaged a heavy .50 cal. machine gun from a wrecked US half-track truck, which was positioned in the outpost to give those in this forward position a good field of fire. The outpost had a telephone line strung to it and twice when German 88 artillery shells were pounding the outpost, Eldon was able to call for US artillery support to silence the German cannons. Also, they called for "airbursts" from the US artillery, which were shells that exploded in the air spewing fragments on their hapless recipients. These silenced German snipers who were shooting at I Company troopers from the shelter of trees. Eldon spent many days in the outpost and was also sent on many patrols into the forest.

Eldon and one of his friends Bruno were on many of these 3-6 man patrols. On one patrol, they heard what sounded like a train overhead, looking up through a clearing in the trees, Eldon instead saw it was a German "Buzz Bomb" on its way to either London or Antwerp. The airborne bomb developed motor problems and probably never made it to its intended target. On another patrol, Bruno spotted a German in the distance and he swore at the German using the German language. The German responded by swearing at Bruno in English. On one patrol on Jan. 2, 1945, the patrol went straight north several miles behind German lines to try and get information about their intentions and returned a different route. The patrol spotted US trucks with German drivers. The patrol the next day missed a massed German attack being formed less than one 100 yards away. The returned a different route out of fear that the Germans would find their tracks and wait in ambush for them to return. As they returned to their lines, the patrol just missed a major German concentration that would attack their outpost in a few hours.

Eldon describes Bruno as a "great guy to have on outpost." One night during a German infiltration, three Germans were shot but they turned out to be Americans. Bruno was eventually killed in the

outpost; Eldon found this out as his corpse was brought back to the lines by stretcher. After that incident, Eldon described sitting in his foxhole thinking of his chronic cold feet and the "entire situation." Eldon realized that there was nothing he could do to remedy the problem. So he promised himself that he would survive no matter what lay ahead in the war.

On Jan. 3, 1945, a major German attack hit I/502 lines. Three German tanks and many infantry hit the lines. F/502 pulled back through I Company's lines in retreat during this attack and Eldon described them as "beat up." The outpost was hit first by the attack; one of the men in the outpost was suffering from shell shock and ran past the rest in the rear. Another paratrooper named Wilson ran from the outpost and the men called out for him to hit the ground and he fell. Eldon crawled out along a fence line to try to help him but he was already dead, shot in the back. He grabbed the corpse's M-1 carbine as Eldon could have shot several Germans in the outpost but the gun was empty. The dead trooper had expended all his ammunition and threw his grenades before he retreated from the outpost. Because Eldon had hoped to retrieve Wilson, he had not brought any weapons with him. As a result he returned to his position.

Eldon crawled back to his slit trench as three SS tanks came over the ridge to the left of his slit trench. The rest of the men in the position retreated leaving Eldon and his assistant machine gunner Woodson the sole remaining men. The German tanks were firing over the heads of the two men in the slit trench at the platoon's command post, which was a house. An American armored vehicle called a tank destroyer was speeding toward their position to intercept the German tank attack. Lt. Tyree received a direct hit from an 88 shell fired from one of the tanks. The tank destroyer was moving rapidly to a position where it could fire at the tanks. It maneuvered to a position behind a house where it fired knocking out one tank which burst into flames as the two remaining German tanks reversed back over the hill.

Very little physically was found of Tyree after the battle. A .50 caliber machine gun was operating in front of Eldon's position, the German attack proved to be overwhelming as the other troopers had left leaving only Eldon and Woodson with the machine gun so they dismantled the gun because the tripod was frozen and threw the pieces in some bushes in a field and retreated. Eldon too retreated in the face of the massive attack, he grabbed a .45 Thompson Submachine gun and ran along a road and quickly found himself among a large group of Germans. He fired and cleared an area and killed several of the Germans in the way of his retreat and those left had quickly moved out of Eldon's way. The group then quickly devised a temporary line of resistance and another officer, 2nd Lt. August arrived and demanded that the machine gun crew retrieve the .50 caliber pieces. Luckily the crew was able to and set up the gun to help stem the German tide of advance.

The 101st was part of the counterattack against the Germans after the siege of Bastogne was lifted. Eldon's platoon was part of an attack up a ridge in the Ardennes during the counterattack on Jan. 8, 1945. German artillery pounded them during their advance. Eldon describes it as one of the worst he had ever suffered during the entire war. Once the area was secured, Eldon and his assistant on the .30 caliber machine gun were to set up the weapon along the ridge among some trees. Unknown to Eldon and Woodson, a German machine gun crew was already in the same woods and fired over their heads as snow and branches fell upon them. Both of them hit the ground and Eldon returned fire with his M-1 carbine and shot both the Germans in the head.

On Jan. 10, 1945, Eldon went to a medical aid station. There he removed his boots and because his feet were so swollen with frostbite, he was unable to put his boots back on. He was evacuated to military hospital back in Luxembourg.

While Eldon was in Las Vegas in March of 1995, he had a dream about Bastogne. He was wandering among the trees as the fighting had ceased. Eldon was getting snow from the fir branches to quench his thirst. There was a mist in the air and he had "the most beautiful thing" in his hands although he did not know what it was. While in the woods, Eldon came across some troopers who were sitting on a log about two feet off the ground. Eldon did "not seem surprised to see Werner Lunde." He came up behind Werner and Eldon put his arm around his neck. Werner peered at Eldon over his right shoulder and gave him "his great smile" Werner then stated, "Abe you made it." Eldon then asked what was in his hands and then asked Werner if he had one? He responded, "yes we all have one and they are beautiful." Eldon's dream ended as all the paratroopers including Werner Lunde disappeared in the mist.

CO. I, 508 PARACHUTE



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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



*Happy
New
Year*

Dates to Remember:

February 1 - 5, 2006 - The Snowbird Reunion, at the Ramada Gateway Plaza Hotel, Kissimmee, FL. Company I/502 annual reunion.

August 2 -6, 2006 - 61st Annual Reunion 101st Airborne, Minneaolis, MN

September 15 -25, 2006 - Operation Torch - Tour of Operation Market Garden, Eindhoven, Holland's Liberation Celebration, and tour the Battle of the Bulge area at Bastogne.

This morning when the Lord opened a window to Heaven, He saw me, and asked: "My child, what is your greatest wish for today?" I responded: "Lord please, take care of the person who is reading this message, their family and their special friends. They deserve it and I love them very much."