

# A little bit of luck: WWII veteran reminisces on serving in Normandy



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CANTON — Bernard Adams was 23 years old when he was drafted into the Army as an infantryman and sent to the European Theater of Operations, leaving behind his wife and daughter in Canton.

Shortly after landing in England, he was shipped to Normandy in northern France on June 7, 1944, the day after D-Day. It was an example of the luck that carried him throughout his 25-month stint overseas during World War II.

“I was lucky enough to be shipped there as a replacement,” the 97-year-old said. “I remember when I was on the boat to Normandy the day after D-Day, there was a sky full of aircraft still flying around, and when we landed on the beach, mostly everything was cleaned up.

“I heard that right after the battle on D-Day, the sea was filled with bodies,” he said, “but when my group landed, there were only two or three bodies left on the land. Still, there are some things I saw while over there that I'd just as soon not remember.”

Adams, who was a replacement in Company E of Regiment H, Fourth Division, said he was never directly involved in combat, but did find himself repeatedly in the line of fire.

“While I was in Normandy, I didn't see any combat, but I do remember bullets flying past me at times,” he said. “I was wounded in Normandy when a mortar shell was fired at the place I was staying. I don't think they were aiming directly for us. We were just in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

Adams said he doesn't remember much about the time before and after the mortar shell hit.

“I was just walking from one place to the other and didn't even hear it coming,” Adams said. “I just remember feeling the force of the blast after the shell hit.”

He received two Purple Heart medals during his 25 months in the Army, one for the injuries in the Normandy mortar blast and another for injuries in Germany several months later.

“I was lucky to walk away from those,” Adams said.

His luck continued in 1945 when, just before he was to leave for Japan to see combat, the war ended.

“While I was on the boat to go to Japan, we found out that Japan had surrendered, and that the war was over,” Adams said. “It was a relief to know that we were all going home.”

After being discharged as a private first class in 1945, Adams kept himself busy with his family and work.

“After I was out of the Army, I had a family to provide for, so I had to keep my nose to the grindstone,” he said with a laugh.

He worked on a farm for a few years after returning from the war, where he built a barn and bought dairy cows to make money.

“At a certain point, I had to either get a bigger farm or do something else, so I decided to do something else,” he said.

Over the next several decades, Adams said, he installed septic tanks in houses, worked on a tar crew for the state, operated a dump truck and ran his wood lot.

“I did a little bit of everything,” Adams said, “anything to keep me busy.”

He now lives at Victorian Villa Rehabilitation and Living Center in Canton, where his desk and mirror are covered with photographs of friends and family, including one picture of him dressed in his Army uniform 70 years earlier. He said his daughter, Joan Kneeland, calls him every day and visits every week to help him pay bills.

“At 97, it's not as easy to do the things I used to do,” Adams said. “She's really done a lot to help me.”

Nearly 70 years after serving in World War II, Adams said he sees pictures in magazines and newspapers from time to time about D-Day and Normandy, which reminds him of the streak of luck that saw him through his service.

“I was able to make it back home,” Adams said. “But I know others weren't as lucky.”

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