

William
O'BRIEN, Arthur
Pvt

Drop
+ anecdotes

10/16
Dag high

7. I was brought up in Dr. Barnardo's home for 14 years I never knew my mother or father or where I was born.

20. The morning of the 26th was very quiet and we were around the little church in Oosterbeek, a German tank came down the road, the German officer put his head out and said in perfect English "All right, lads, for you it is over," and then we were rounded up by German Infantry.

22. I remember being marched with others after being captured into Arnhem, the press photographers were trying to get some dejected photos of us, but we were singing and cherring and laughing in their cameras, although we felt anything but happy.

O'Brien figured the Arnhem operation would be a "piece of cake, a Sunday School treat." He knew it was "a long way into the bridge" but he was more concerned about foot-slogging. O'Brien played his mouth organ for the way over. Songs like "Nellie Deane," "Bess 'em All" and "Tipperary."

When he jumped, he went out of the door wrong and did a complete somersault in the air. His left leg caught in the rigging lines. "The chute didn't develop properly. It was not more than two-thirds open. The ground was coming up fast. The best thing I could think to do was put my other leg up and land on my back. I hit with a tremendous thud and felt the wind go out of me like popping a paper bag. I had a sharp jab of pain in the back and that was it. I laid on the ground for a couple of minutes and got up. I had nothing broken that I knew of."

They rallied, moved to the RV, began marching into Arnhem. O'Brien had no suspicions anything had gone wrong. The further he walked, however, the noisier it got. He wondered if the Germans might be there in more strength than they had been led to believe. It seemed from the sound that there was more than just German Volkstrum and beat-up guns up ahead."

Wednesday, Sept. 20: They were on the outskirts of Arnhem, where they had been for two days. There were no officers around. "It was chaotic. Nobody knew what to do. The Germans had brought up those nebelwerfer things and they were screaming all around us. I was scared out of my mind at the sound of them. I remember running into one house with some others. We tipped over a huge grand piano, put it up against the door and got down behind it. Out in the garden were two or three six-pounders, all of them knocked out. One of them had its muzzle split open. It looked just like a flower."

They began falling back. He remembers seeing all kinds of animals - cows, sheep and horses - lying dead in the fields, all blown up, their bellies horribly distended. "It seemed to me they had gotten us into something they had no business getting us in. It seemed they just forgot about us. I can't remember seeing an officer for the first two or three days. We got back around the church in Oosterbeek and there were hundreds of men who seemed to be just wandering around. I saw my first officers around there. They were trying to rally the men into order. I remember we had a supply drop. A few containers reached us and I remember opening one and finding berets. Every night an officer would come around and tell us to hang on, the 2nd Army would be there the next day. There was a helluva lot of apathy. Everyone was asking what the hell they were there for and where the hell was the goddam army."

O'Brien's back had begun to bother him. "We used the church to rest in. Nobody told us not to go in and nobody told us when to go out. When we felt we needed a rest, we walked in and stretched out on one of the pews. It had big thick walls. But the roof was gone. You could see daylight. The pews were all broken up and there were prayer books scattered all over. All the windows were long since gone, the place in general looked like someone had dropped a couple of hundred pound bombs right on top of it. I remember being stretched out there one day when a middle-aged Dutch lady crept in. There were wounded and dead lying all over the place. We'd had it. She walked around among the wounded and kept saying, 'Hav courage. God is with you.' I wondered if He really was. It made me embarrassed to be stretched out there while a woman walked around showing so much courage. I got up and went back outside."

O'Brien says he never heard about the evacuation. "I woked on the Tuesday

O'BRIEN, William A. BRITISH
Pvt. 4th Para Bde.,
11th Reg.

29 Sept
Sunday

Box #113
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morning, Sept. 26. I was with a few others in a cellar. It was quiet as hell outside. It didn't dawn on me that everyone had left. One of my mates said he was dry when I got back so I went back upstairs and out into the garden to a pump there. The next thing I knew, I felt a revolver in my back. I turned around and there was a bloody great German grinning at me. I had left my rifle in the cellar, but it wouldn't have made any difference anyway. I didn't have a single round left. I was prodded out toward the road and down it came a tank. There was a German officer, I think, standing in the turrent and in perfect English he said to me, 'For you the war is over.' I couldn't think of anything to say so I said, 'That's all right, I've been captured already.' The officer said they had gone the night before. I couldn't believe it at first. I was mad as hell. They had gotten us into this mess and then abandoned us. Worse, they had left without telling us."