

Snapshots Of WWII Across the Atlantic: Arrival in Wartime England(00:20)

Season 1, Episode 2 of 6

Snapshots: Before we start today's episode, want to let you in on the next phase of our journey.

Amanda (00:25)

Over the past two years we painstakingly restored and organized our grandfather's World War II photographs, images he captured as a combat medic in the 357th Infantry.

Snapshots Of WWII (00:35)

We've matched them to the dates, locations, and events we're sharing in each episode. And now we're ready for the next step.

Amanda (00:41)

We're preparing to travel to Europe, to walk the same roads, visit the same villages, and recreate our grandfather's photos nearly 80 years later.

Snapshots Of WWII (00:50)

This will become a published photo book, pairing his original wartime images with our modern recreations, showing how much has changed and how much memory still remains.

Amanda (01:00)

If this project resonates with you, we'd love for you to be part of it. You can support our journey and help preserve those stories by visiting rootsofdiscovery.me. Every contribution, big or small, brings us closer to walking in our grandfather's footsteps and sharing this legacy with the world.

Snapshots Of WWII (01:17)

Thank you for walking this road with us. We're just getting started. In episode one, we left the story on March 22nd, 1944. The 357th had finished preparations at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey and stepped aboard the HMS Dominion Monarch, a massive British troop ship setting sail for England and the unknown journey ahead.

Amanda (01:38)

This week, we followed them across the Atlantic from departure to arrival in Liverpool on April 3rd and their transfer the next day to a training camp near Kitterminster,

Snapshots Of WWII (01:49)

By early 1944, the Allied command was in full motion preparing for Operation Overlord, the daring invasion of Nazi-occupied Europe. Every day, troop convoys streamed out of the U.S. carrying thousands of soldiers.

Imagine the ship's leaving port, decks crowded with men bracing for the unknown, the hum of engines mingling with the quiet tension of anticipation, each convoy a rolling army moving towards history.

Amanda (02:17)

Over 1.5 million US troops would funnel through the UK before D-Day, a massive human tide preparing for one of history's most daring operations. The 90th Infantry Division was part of that buildup, and our grandfather, alongside the 357th Medics, was right in the thick of it, marching through crowded camps, learning the land, and bracing for the moment they would step onto foreign soil and into the unknown.

Snapshots Of WWII (02:42)

But first, they had to survive the crossing, an 11-day journey across U-boat infested waters. Amanda, what do the minute reports say about this time?

Amanda (02:51)

March 23, 1944, departed New York port of embarkation aboard HMS Dominion Monarch, Troup moral High, Atlantic Crossing uneventful Arrived Liverpool, England, April 3, 1944.

Snapshots Of WWII (03:06)

It's incredible how understated the phrase Atlantic crossing uneventful really is when day after day, German U-boats lurked beneath the waves and convoys had to weave and zigzag to stay out of the harm's way. On top of that, the men were constantly being drilled, practicing emergency procedures, manning lifeboats and running through fire and blackout drills, all while seasickness and cramped quarters tested their

Amanda (03:29)

The Dominion was originally a luxury liner, but wartime stripped all of that away. Bunks were stacked four high, long lines for meals, limited fresh water. Ships like Dominion weren't glamorous liners like the RMS Queen Mary. Most were converted passenger or cargo ships, crowded, uncomfortable, and honestly pretty vulnerable.

Snapshots Of WWII (03:48)

The ship sailed as part of a massive convoy of dozens of vessels stretching across the horizon, escorted by diligent destroyers and patrol boats. Most of the troops had no idea where they were headed, only that they were leaving everything familiar behind and venturing into the vast, unpredictable Atlantic. Many soldiers had never seen the ocean before. I mean, imagine growing up in a small town and suddenly you're on a huge ship heading straight into waters hunted by German U-boats.

Amanda (04:16)

Our grandfather's role in the crossing was both critical and grueling, tending to sea sick soldiers, patching minor injuries, and keeping infections at bay in cramped, chaotic quarters. Yet even as he handled the immediate needs, the mind, like the minds of all men aboard, was bracing for something far bigger, the uncertainty of war that lay beyond the horizon.

Snapshots Of WWII (04:38)

picture it. The Statue of Liberty is fading in the distance, the skyline of homes slipping away and not knowing if you'd even ever see US soil ever again. Fear, excitement press in from all sides.

Amanda (04:50)

And then silence takes over, just the waves, the wind, and the vast open ocean around you. That's when it hits, how far from home you really are, and how small you feel in the middle of it all. The rocking of the ship, the distant foghorns, the smell of salt and oil, it's all you have and it drives home the reality of the journey.

Snapshots Of WWII (05:10)

Another huge fear was water itself. Not just drowning, but freezing. The North Atlantic could be brutal, especially in the winter, and soldiers were warned survival time to be measured in minutes. One GI said he wasn't afraid of the torpedo, he was afraid of the cold. That says a lot.

Amanda (05:27)

Yeah, those days at sea weren't just about waiting around. The men were drilled constantly. Fire drills, lifeboat exercises, blackout protocols. Not every soldier sailed on a proper troop ship. Some, like Warren R. Kahler, were packed onto converted banana boats that rattled and swayed through the Atlantic. Here's a short excerpt from a 2008 interview where he (Warren R. Kahler) describes the rough crossing from Puke Alley to stalled engines.

Warren R. Kahler

World War II Oral History Interview

US Army, 8th Armored Division

Date: November 12, 2008

Interviewer: Carol Fowler

Summarizer: Carol Fowler

To watch the full interview please view here <https://njmilitiamuseum.gov/warren-kahler>

Veterans History Project. Warren R. Kahler passed away on September 12, 2012.

Carol: So now you're in the 8th arm division, in the 36th 10th Battalion. Um, and these units started to leave out of Camp Kilmer, New Jersey.

Kahler: Yes.

Carol: October ('19)44.

Kahler: Yes.

Carol: So that's where you went?

Kahler: Went to Camp Kilmer, which, of course, was pretty close to home, but I didn't get home. Cause I live in South Jersey.

Carol: Right. Then you took the ferry over to Staten Island?

Kahler:Y ep.

Carol: And you sailed to England in November of (19)44?

Kahler: Yes.

Carol: How did you get over there? What kind of boat?

Kahler: Well, actually, it was a converted banana boat from South America. It was very small, and uh...

Carol: Was it a convoy?

Kahler: Pardon?

Carol: A convoy?

Kahler: Oh, it's in a convoy, absolutely. We were in a convoy. And, uh, this boat, very small, and, uh, it just passed around like a cork, and everybody on board was seasick, and, uh, we're going along, and all of a sudden, the ship loses its engines, and the convoy, of course, had to keep going.

Carol: Okay.

Kahler: It was at that time when the sub German U boats were picking us off, and we just felt like we were sitting ducks for that. But fortunately, they got the engines started, and we caught up with a convoy, and uh we rejoined the convoy.

Carol: Took two weeks?

Kahler: Yes. Two long weeks.

Carol: Yeah, what were living conditions like that you remember on ship?

Kahler: On ship? Carol, they couldn't have been worse.

Carol: Oh.

Kahler: Everybody was so sick. Where we used to go to the mess hall, they finally named it Puke Alley. Everybody was sea sick. And being a small boat, it would rock and roll, and the trash cans that weren't tied down, they would pass from one side of the ship to the other. You could hear the noise. It was a very bad experience. We had this Samondo (sp?) twins, they were Italians, and they were our cooks. Well, they were so sick, they couldn't get up on deck. They couldn't get on deck to get the fresh air. We had to carry them up, so they would get the fresh air. But, uh, it was a hard time. It really was. It was the boat, I'm sure, or the ship, not the boat, the ship, because it was just so small.

Carol: It just got tossed around.

Kahler: It was a rough tide, yeah, the water made a rough. We just got tossed around. So I'll never forget that. I know what seasickness is, and you feel like you're right to be dead than there.

Carol: Were there any corpsmen on board to help you?

Kahler: Yes, but it didn't do much good, you know?

Carol: Yeah.

Kahler: If things would have been a little calmer, it would have been all right. They did whatever they could, and we were fed, well, we were cared for. But it was just sick, and of course, you had the bunks were in racks. When a fellow on top got sick...

Carol: That was the worst.

Kahler: It was just a messy situation, and they couldn't do anything about it.

Carol: That's horrible.

Kahler: It's part of Army life, I guess.

Amanda: That first-hand story really brings it to life. The cramped corridors, the swaying ship, and constant seasickness. Even on an uneventful crossing, these men were already tested long before reaching England.

Snapshots Of WWII (09:31)

We also asked our dad, Malcolm Neil Moersch our grandfather Malcolm's firstborn, if he remembered stories about those practice runs.

Interview taken 09/25/2025 Jenne interviewed M. Neil Moersch her father

Jenne: Hey, Dad.

M. Neil Moersch: Hey.

Jenne: So, you were the oldest son of Malcolm, your dad, and I asked if you had any memories or recollections that your dad might have told you about his travel over, going to England for the 1st time, leaving the States. and making his way. And, uh, as we know through research, he was on the monarch, which was a luxury liner, converted into a wartime ship, and you...

M. Neil Moersch: It's called a troop ship.

Jenne: Exactly. A troop ship. Thank you. And you said you did have one memory of a story he told you. What was that?

M. Neil Moersch: They always had submarine drills going over. And I believe they're on one of the lower decks, but when they had a submarine drill, they got all the way to the top deck with everything they're carrying. And then one guy, about the third or fourth time, he did that, he got to the top deck, he threw out the gun pack, web gear, helmet, and all. He spent the rest of the trip in the brig.

Jenne: In the brig. I didn't realize they had a brig. I guess they would have...

M. Neil Moersch: Yeah.

Jenne: Um, I wonder if he had to repay for a new pack.

M. Neil Moersch: Yes.

Jenne:Yes.

M. Neil Moersch: He paid for it, yes.

Jenne: Um, so you're trying to say that there's a gun and a bag of unused?

M. Neil Moersch: Yeah. Brand new, right in the box. Yeah. Yeah.

Jenne: Between here and England? M. Neil Moersch: Yeah.

Jenne: (sitting) At the bottom of the ocean.

M. Neil Moersch: Yeah

Jenne: Okay. Thank you for your story today.

M. Neil Moersch: You're welcome.

Amanda (11:17)

That story shows the strain of endless drills, how even the most disciplined men sometimes hit a breaking point. Let's see what the minute reports say next.

Snapshots Of WWII (11:27)

April 3, 1944, docked Liverpool, England, debarked in orderly fashion, received by British military transportation, overnight staging. The relief to see land must have been palpable. One soldier reportedly said he'd never been so happy to see fog in his life. And for many, the crossing marked the moment they stopped being civilians. They became soldiers in a real war.

Amanda (11:52)

Liverpool was still recovering from the Blitz, heavily bombed between 1940 and 1942. Entire blocks flattened, the skyline scarred with bombed out churches and warehouses. Food shortages and rationing were part of daily life. The port itself was industrial, gritty, and packed with activity. Ships coming and going, soldiers moving through, dock workers unloading supplies, and for American troops, Liverpool was both welcoming and overwhelming.

Snapshots Of WWII (12:19)

and cold. April in Northern England isn't forgiving, especially for men fresh from the Southern U.S. states. April 4th, transported by train to a temporary camp, 14 miles from Kitterminster, billeted in local structures, began orientation and acclimatization. Kitterminster Training Camp.

Amanda (12:38)

Kitterminster is a town in Worcestershire, central England. The surrounding countryside was dotted with rolling hills, farmland and villages, a stark contrast to Liverpool. The area was transformed to house and train thousands of American troops.

Snapshots Of WWII (12:54)

They likely stayed in Nissan huts, semi-circular corrugated metal structures or requisitioned homes, barns and farm buildings, Spartan accommodations, thin mattresses, drafty walls, and a constant hum of men coming and going. Officers moved through grand halls in Kinlet Hall, while troops hustled across muddy grounds completing drills, delivering messages, or fetching supplies. A vivid picture of wartime organization layered over the countryside.

Amanda (13:20)

For medics, the next weeks were intense. Learning British terrain, practicing evacuations, and preparing for combat medicine under fire. Preparation included calisthenics, gas mask drills, and long marches that started 15 miles at a normal pace but eventually increased to speed hikes of 5 miles per hour. Whoa, I'd have shin splints after the first day.

Snapshots Of WWII (13:43)

Yeah, I'd be faking a twisted ankle just to get out of that.

Amanda (13:46)

Yes. According to the history of the 90th Infantry Division, a period of intense training consisted of mine detection, village fighting, assault on fortified positions, hedgerow fighting, artillery firing problems, road marches, and obstacle courses. The rough edges were polished off and coordination between units became more than a word. It became an accomplished fact.

Snapshots Of WWII (14:10)

It's strange to think of grandpa walking through Liverpool in combat gear, probably carrying his aid bag and thinking, where are we going? And then stepping off the train in a small English town surrounded by sheep and hedgerows preparing for war.

Amanda (14:24)

He must have felt far from home, but he was with his unit, men he trained with and relied on. Together they shared the same worries, exhaustion, and unspoken understanding that whatever came next, they'd face it as a team.

Snapshots Of WWII (14:36)

In April 1944, the 90th Infantry Division was spread across southern and central England, scattered among training camps, temporary barracks, and drilling fields. Soldiers practiced constant exercises, equipment checks, and maneuvers, all preparing for a mission still shrouded in secrecy. D-Day.

Amanda (14:54)

Each regiment, including the 357th, underwent weeks of intense training, weapons familiarization, medical drills, map reading, and unit coordination. Every day tested endurance and focus, preparing them for the realities of combat. They also trained for amphibious landings. Even without knowing what was coming, every splash into cold, choppy water, and every practice assault on beaches built both skill and anticipation.

Snapshots Of WWII (15:21)

This part of the war is often overlooked, but it was vital. These were the in-between days of preparation.

Amanda (15:27)

And for medics, was the calm before the storm. Soon they'd be saving lives under machine gun fire and mortar attack. But in April 1944, they were still training, still waiting.

Snapshots Of WWII (15:39)

The next time, we'll explore the 357th Medical Training in England, battlefield triage, evacuations, and trauma care under fire. the final stretch before D-Day.

Amanda (15:49)

As we close episode two, we just want to say how grateful we are that you're here with us.

Snapshots Of WWII (15:54)

What started as a scrapbook of photographs and handwritten notes has become a journey we now share with all of you. Every time you listen, you help keep these stories alive.

Amanda (16:04)

We're retracing our grandfather's path. One town, one date, one photograph at a time. And there's so much more ahead.

Snapshots Of WWII (16:12)

If you're enjoying the journey, be sure to follow or subscribe so you don't miss the next chapter. And if this episode meant something to you, a five-star rating or a short review helps others discover the story. If you didn't enjoy it, don't worry about a rating. Just stick with us.

Amanda (16:27)

Sharing this episode with a friend, family member, or anyone who cares about World War II history is one of the greatest ways you can support us.

Snapshots Of WWII (16:35)

This project is about remembrance, connection, and honoring the footsteps that came before us, and we're honored you're walking beside us.

Amanda (16:43)

Thank you for listening and we'll see you in the next episode.

Snapshots Of WWII (16:47)

Thanks. Bye.

Amanda (16:49)

Bye!