

Bernard Clement Wehe

US Army World War II Service

10th Armored Division, 11th Tank Battalion

1941 to 1945



Bernard Clement Wehe was the 4th child of Boniface and Anna (Weber) Wehe. He was born on August 14th, 1918 in Loyal Wisconsin. Like everyone in his family, he worked on his parent's farm as he grew up. During the school year from 1927 to 1930 he lived with his Grandparents – John and Margaret Weber in Rozellville Wisconsin so he could attend St. Andrew's Catholic School. In 1938 one of his younger brothers Wilfred worked for the Sisters of Christian Charity in Wilmette Illinois and he was killed in an auto accident December 6th, 1938. Sometime in late 1938 or early 1939 Bernie as he was known replaced his brother Wilfred working for the Sisters of Christian Charity as a handyman / gardener / sometime driver.



It was there in 1941 that he was drafted into the US Army. On February 17th, 1941 he was inducted into the US Army at Camp Grant in Rockford Illinois. ¹ Bernie had basic Training at Camp Grant and with the 11th Cavalry at Ft. Locket temporary Tent Camp - Moreno Lake California. By Thanksgiving 1941 he was riding a horse and playing the bugle. His unit rode in the Thanksgiving Day Parade in La Jolla



California. In December 1941 the 11th

Calvary 2nd Squadron moved to permanent facilities at Fort Locket, Campo California. ² After the Japanese attacked at Pearl Harbor December 7th, 1941 his unit guarded the US / Mexican Border around Palm City California and Tecate Mexico on horseback.

In July 1942 Bernie transferred to 10th Armored Division, 11th Tank Battalion Fort Benning Georgia where he trained in tank warfare and learned how hot Georgia summers



can be. In September 1942 Bernie went on leave home to Wisconsin and

Illinois to visit family much to the delight of his cousins and nieces and nephews and



¹ Enlisted Record and Report of Separation Honorable Discharge

² <http://www.militarymuseum.org/CpLockett.html>

of course his parents. In 1943 was sent to Ft. Knox Kentucky to tank mechanic school and



then returned to Ft. Benning. While he was Ft. Benning his Grandfather John Weber died (December 8th 1943). Bernie went home on leave for the funeral.

September 3rd, 1944 – the Division moved to Camp Shanks New York³ in preparation to leave for Europe. September 12th, 1944 Bernie recalled “First we were on the USS Alexandria, which ran onto a sand bar in the Hudson River, we had to get off and get on the USS Brazil, a

former South American luxury liner. The Alexandria was the German ship Americus before the last war.”⁴



“For five days we were alone, without much escort. On the fifth day we caught up with the convoy. It took us 10 days to cross the (Atlantic) ocean. We landed directly in Cherbourg (France). There were still some sunken ships in the harbor, and we had to load onto small landing craft to go ashore...”⁵

September 24th, 1944 Bernie disembarked with the 10th Armored Division, 11th Tank Battalion at Cherbourg France. They were some of the first to disembark after the port at Cherbourg was reopened having been damaged by the retreating

German Army. Bernie recalled “We stayed in a small apple orchard in pup tents for about six

³ Battles of the 11th Tank Battalion World War II

⁴ Note from Tim Bode email dated 04.04.2014 The ship that ran aground in New York, that ship was the SS Edmund B Alexander, she was commissioned as a troop transport ship in 1940, before that 1921-1940 passenger liner SS America, prior to that 1919-1921 she was used as a troop transport during WWI, this is when her name was changed from SS Amerika to SS America, prior to that was when she was called the Amerika, used to transport immigrants from Europe to the United States, she was built in 1905 in Belfast, Northern Ireland for the German Transport Company which was called "Hamburg, America Lines".

⁵ The Loyal Tribune Homefront News June 28, 1945 – a letter to his parents from Bernard Wehe

weeks... While we were in this orchard, it rained practically every day ...⁶Then finally came the day when we started out across France. We were glad to leave, just to get away from the mud. As we got out of the peninsula, the rain stopped... We went through Paris and ended up near Metz..."⁷

On October 2nd, 1944 was the first fire fight Mars La Tour, France. ⁷ October 31st, 1944 to November 8th, 1944 (the 10th Armored Division) moved through Paris France to Metz.

November 9th, 1944 the Metz Offensive begins. Bernie recalled "We crossed the Moselle north of Metz. Many times I was near the front but didn't know I was so close. The only Germans I saw were either prisoners or dead ones... Then came Dec. 16 and we started out for Luxembourg... We went right into action as soon as we got to ... near Echternach."^{8 9}

"By Mid-December the 11th Tank Battalion, was making ready to join in General Patton's "March to the Rhine" a battle that never took place. On 16 December 1944 the German Army's surprise attack (Battle of the Bulge) in the Ardennes Region of Northern Luxembourg and Southern Belgium caught American forces off guard, leaving the City of Bastogne in Southern Belgium almost defenseless. Orders to move to the aid of the completely outnumbered American Troops was received at 0330 on the morning of the 17th and by 0600 the troops were packed, loaded and on their way to Northern Luxembourg. Bernie and his companions were ordered to hold off the Southern Flank (Hitler's Battle Plan referred to this area as the Southern



Shoulder) of the invasion which was already in progress near the Little Town of Berdorf in Northern Luxembourg. It is noteworthy that once the 11th Tank Battalion reached Northern Luxembourg they were not only able to stop Hitler's forces from getting to Bastogne, the Americans forced them back across the border into Germany denying them the opportunity to enter the main attack, this was a major factor in saving Bastogne from being completely destroyed. "¹⁰

December 16th, 1944 –The 10th Armored Division was the first United States Unit to be diverted from a mission to reinforce troops involved in "The Battle of the Bulge". This troop movement was done within 24 hours, when they arrived in the North it was a complete surprise to German recon teams, they appeared out nowhere and on the 18th of December joined the fighting in the battle known as "The Battle of the Bulge". The 10th Armored Division, because of its swift movement and seeming to appear out of nowhere, soon was being called "The Ghost Division" by the German High Command.¹¹

Bernie recalled "We stayed in the little town of Berdorf about three days. On the second day I had my tank knocked out. What hit us I don't know? It was very a foggy, dark day, and I never saw anyone around....

⁶ Note from Peggy Wehe; Bernie said that he attended Sunday Mass in the village church ⁷

Battles of the 11th Tank Battalion World War II

⁷ Battles of the 11th Tank Battalion World War II

⁸ The Loyal Tribune Homefront News June 28, 1945 – a letter to his parents from Bernard Wehe

⁹ Note from Peggy Wehe – it was at this time that Bernie told me that he tried to connect with a Weber cousin who lived there – in the village where his Great grandfather Jacob Weber was born – to let the family still left there know that Bernie's Grandpa John Weber had died in 1943. His unit was moving quite fast so Bernie was only able to ask a villager to give the cousin the message.

¹⁰ Notes from email sent by Tim Bode to Peggy Wehe April 8, 2014

¹¹ Battles of the 11th Tank Battalion World War II

Anyway, the tank was full of fire all of a sudden. After the explosion, I jumped out right away and ran into a building nearby..."¹²

"That night I learned.... That we were completely surrounded by Germans... The following day, however, some of our boys broke through the German lines... and we came back out of the town. You can imagine how happy I was..."¹³

December 26th, 1944 Somewhere in Luxembourg the 10th Armored Division was ordered to the 7th Army. The same day they were ordered to attack and clear "Little Switzerland". January 8th 1945 - Northern Luxembourg ordered to Metz, France. While in Metz, the 10th Armored Division removed any emblem or marking from their equipment that would identify them, their reputation as a fighting unit scared the German High Command so much that they tried to identify all of their movements and keep track of where they were. It was now known that the bulk of the German Army was gathering near Trier, Germany, and that they were strengthening their positions in the Saar-Moselle Triangle. Company C, 11th Tank Battalion was assigned to Task Force Richardson part of "Team Chamberlain", a part of Combat Command A. ¹⁴ Bernie recalls "Then we went to the Seventh Army near Saarbrücken, stayed there about three weeks and went back to the Third Army near Metz again. Then came the big spring drive, which started on Feb. 16. We crossed the Saar at Saarburg, went up and took Trier, which Patton said was one of the most daring operations of the war. I won't tell you now of the daringness of it. I'll do that when I get home. That was Mar. 1."¹⁵ February 16th to 28th 1945 Saar Moselle Triangle Spring Offensive.

February 20th, 1945 in Kirf, Germany beginning at 0500 there was a heavy fight on approach to the city, The 10th Armored encountered a minefield and heavy shelling, cleared minefield and machine gun positions. They quickly took the City of Kirf. On the same day in Kelsen Germany, Task Force Richardson captured the Command Post of the German 456th Infantry Regiment along with the 266th Volkgrenadier Division and 90 prisoners. Task Force Richardson's objective was to take Tawern Germany. From Tawern any movement along the confluence of the Saar and Moselle Rivers could be detected, it also provided a perfect location for command and control during the assault on Trier, Germany.¹⁶

February 22nd, 1945 Bernard Clement Wehe was in battle in Tawern, Germany for which he was award the Bronze Star GO 151 HQ 10th A Division for "braving hostile fire, remaining at his task of filling a shell crater until it was completed. His exemplary conduct reflected great credit upon himself and the military forces of the United States." ¹⁷

March 1st, 1945 Bernie's friend George Harris was killed in action in the battle for Trier Germany. Bernard for some reason was not a tank driver that day and George Harris took his place. The fact that George was killed while replacing him as tank driver had a profound effect on Bernard. It is thought by family and friends that knew him Bernie, that it might be one of the reasons he became a Franciscan Brother after being discharged from the Army. After the war Bernard visit George Harris's mother Arlene Dekker in Michigan.

¹² The Loyal Tribune Homefront News June28, 1945 – a letter to his parents from Bernard Wehe

¹³ The Loyal Tribune Homefront News June28, 1945 – a letter to his parents from Bernard Wehe

¹⁴ The Loyal Tribune Homefront News June28, 1945 – a letter to his parents from Bernard Wehe

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Battles of the 11th Tank Battalion World War II

¹⁷ The Loyal Tribune Homefront News August 30,1945

March 1945 Bernard was assigned to another tank crew as a driver. Bernie recalled "After we crossed the Rhone at Worms, we joined the Seventh Army and have been with it ever since. We came through Mannheim, Heidelberg and Heilbronn. It was near Heilbronn, at Frankenbach, where I was hurt – on Apr. 4."¹⁸



April 4th, 1945 Two miles east of Heilbronn, a small village of Frankenbach, German Infantry began shelling CCB, after a short skirmish, the German's realized that they were no match for the CCB and surrendered.²⁰ Bernard's tank crew had taken over a house in the town. They were cooking dinner when they heard an 88¹⁹ coming in. One of the tank crew and Bernie went to the door to look out. Bernie recalled "If you can visualize how a shell explodes, you will have an idea of how I was hurt. When a shell explodes the casing flies all to pieces, and it's these pieces of fragment that do the damage."



In my case, I was standing in a doorway when this shell landed out in the street. None of the pieces hit me, but when some of them hit the cement or stone door casing, the sand sprayed down and hit me on the chin. It felt like someone swatted me in the face with a broom. The explosion knocked me down, but I wasn't hurt from that. My face didn't bleed much.... So far as my face is concerned, there isn't even a scar, but the guy who was standing right next to me... is dead. That's why I say I was so lucky. ²⁰

April 5th, 1945 In the HQ 20th Convalescent Hospital was Bernard Wehe was awarded the Purple Heart.

April 21, 1945 Bernie was assigned to a Non-Combat Unit – driving a Jeep for General Patton's personal group. On May 7th 1945 Germany surrendered. Bernie spent his remaining time in Germany helping with the cleanup effort. In a letter home to his parents he reflected: "I'm inclined to think the Germans are more scared of the Russians than they are of Communism, for they shudder when you tell them we are moving out and the Russians are taking over.

"The Germans have been led or driven by fear – fear of Communism, fear of the Gestapo, fear of the SS, fear of their own families. Any thinking they did was kept to themselves."

¹⁸ The Loyal Tribune Homefront News June28, 1945 – a letter to his parents from Bernard Wehe ²⁰
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¹⁹ The 88 mm gun was used by the Germans as an anti-tank, anti-aircraft, and artillery gun during World War II. Although the 88mm gun was not the largest or most powerful of the German guns, it was more mobile, had a more rapid rate of fire, could be accurately aimed, and there were no Allied tanks that could withstand a direct hit from its shell.

²⁰ The Loyal Tribune Homefront News June28, 1945 – a letter to his parents from Bernard Wehe ²³
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“Meeting another person, he will likely ask you, ‘Why do the Russians occupy so much more of Germany than do Britain or the US?’ They are include to believe that Communism is out to get them in one way or another. Russia suffered much in run-over Territory, materials and factories destroyed”

“Another interesting thing I was told just lately by a railroad worker whose home was destroyed by bombs. He had tried to get living quarters for his family and, not being a Nazi party member, was denied living quarters. Had he been a member, he would have gotten them.”

“Another man said he had a clothing certificate, authorizing him to buy a suit, but was denied one by the store owner because he was not a party member. These things, if true, still exist today under Allied control.

.....The majority of younger people want to go to America. They have heard of freedom. They would like to see it work. The American soldier has been a diplomat in his own way. He has been on a good will tour, even in conquered Germany. They may not like us, but they admire us. “Right now the Germans are tired of war. If we can keep them that way, our mission has been accomplished. They have plenty to remind them of it. These ‘monuments’ will stand for many years to come indefinitely.”²³

October 4th, 1945 Tec-4 Bernard C Wehe departed for the United States of America.²¹ October 13th, 1945 Bernard Wehe arrived at Camp McCoy WI and was discharged a week later. He had a hard time finding his father – Boniface and his youngest brother Jerome Wehe because they had a new car. Jerome recalls, “While Bernie was in the Army his brother Jerome bought a 1936 Chevy from Tony Spangler. In 1945 Bernie got discharged from Camp McCoy. When Grandpa Wehe and Jerome went to Camp McCoy to pick up Bernie they had a hard time connecting because Bernie thought that Grandpa was coming in his 1940 Ford but they came in Jerome’s 1936 Chevy. “

In the fall of 1945 after a visit home after his discharge from the Army, Bernie went to Grant Michigan to meet Arlene Dekker, the mother of his friend George Harris who was killed driving the tank in Bernie’s place. Bernie stayed and worked in John Dekker’s Grocery Store. John Dekker was George’s step father. Bernard stayed until September 1947.

Bernie went to California in September of 1947 with Art Pagel and Joe Weber (a cousin) to Sunland (along foothill freeway close to Burbank). He worked at Lockheed as an aircraft shear operator. Joe Weber stayed and worked for a plumber until March 1948. Bernie entered the Franciscan Order at Sierra Retreat at Malibu in March 1948. He wanted to be a priest when he was 14 years old. People talking said that all the people in California were out to get your money and he thought one way he could beat them was to not have any. Sister Imelda (Louise Wehe his sister) told him that she had made a retreat to decide what to do. He looked in the Tidings - the Catholic newspaper and saw that there was a retreat at Sierra Retreat and he called the number in the ad and he made the retreat. By the end of the retreat he told Father Terrence that he wanted to join the Franciscan Order as a Brother. Father Terrence gave him an application and he joined in March 1948.²²

Bernard Clement Wehe became Brother Clement or “Brother Clem” as he was called when he joined the Franciscan Order because the name Bernard was already taken. He served at Malibu and in New Mexico and finally Santa Barbara California until June 4th, 1972 when he was dispensed from his Franciscan Vows to married a widow with thirteen children – Sheila Schirm Bohnett Wehe. He was a loving husband and father

²¹ Battles of the 11th Tank Battalion World War II

²² Notes from a conversation Bernie had with Peggy Wehe in Santa Barbara California August 1995

and grandfather and great grandfather. Sheila died October 5th, 2003 and "Clem" as he was always called in California died September 28th, 2008. Like most veterans of World War II it was only very late in his life that he spoke of his experiences and then only at the persistence of his niece Peggy. When the movie "Saving Private Ryan" came out, his wife Sheila was all excited to go and see it and Clem said "I don't need to go see a movie that shows the reality of World War II, I was in it!"



Note from compiler Peggy Wehe- I put together this story of Bernard Clement Wehe so that his part in World War II would not be forgotten. I have tried very hard to make it accurate and have noted the sources for information that I already had or was provided to me by Tim Bode who is the cousin of George Harris who was Bernie's friend and tank crew member who was killed in action. It was Tim's inquiry about Bernie that got me started on this project. George's death affected his friend Bernie Wehe in many ways.

I take responsibility for all that is written so if there are errors they are mine. It will long be on my mind that just after Al and I got married in 1963 Bernie visited us as he often did in San Diego. We wanted to do something special so we took him to the new and latest movie in Cinerama called "The Battle of the Bulge". We did not know that Bernie himself had been in the Battle of the Bulge. Much later when I found out, I felt bad. However just like most World War II Veterans he did not say anything at the time. 04.11.2014