PAPA'S WAR

For my Grandson Brenton

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This first hand account of some of my experiences in World War II was written for my grandson Brenton Colen Kelber who has shown a strong interest in history and World War II in particular, or, as he calls it, "Papa's War." During 1994, the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of France, there were so many television documentaries about the war in Europe that he inundated me with questions like: "Were you there?" and "Was it really like that?" There were many long discussions about the war and many memories were dredged up, some good, some bad. It finally seemed like the right thing to do to give him a written record. Memories fade with time so I hope I will be forgiven for occasional errors as to dates, and participants in the events chronicled.

ABOUT THE FORMAT

This narration is intended to present a series of personal snapshots taken over a period of time. Hopefully, there is a balance of the good times and the bad. Like a photo album, it does not purport to show or tell everything. In some places there are many snapshots closely spaced in time and in others there may be relatively long

periods of time that are unaccounted for. Like pictures in a photo album, some of the events described may have been very important to me and others of merely passing interest. I will leave it to the reader to decide which is which.

----- PREFACE -----

This first hand account of some of my experiences in World War II was written for my grandson Brenton Colen Kelber who has shown a strong interest in History and World War II in particular, or, as he calls it, "Papa's War." As this is written, he is only eleven years old and does not have even the major events of that war sorted out in his head. Brenton will grow up quickly so I have not written "down" to his age level. In time, he will come to understand the things that he may not understand now.

The big picture of the global events preceding and during that war are too complex and bewildering for a boy of his age, or, perhaps for any of us, to comprehend. If only a few of those events are mentioned in order to provide the necessary continuity for this story it does not mean that I am unaware of the efforts and sacrifices of other servicemen over and on the land and on and under the sea, but front line servicemen have a very myopic view of a war.

The average soldier has no grasp of the "big picture." He only sees his own private little corner of the war. If in this narration, it sometimes appears that the 103d Infantry Division, the 103d Infantry Division Signal Company, and the 411th Infantry Regiment, were the only participants in the war, that is only because that was the tiny corner of the war in which I was immersed.

Memories fade with time and while the events described really occurred, I have found it hard to remember names and place all of the events precisely on a calendar or on a map. I trust that I will be forgiven for minor errors as to time, place, and individuals involved.

I also pray that nations will eventually learn to get along with one another and that there will never be another war involving America's young men but, while some of the idealism of my youth remains, the cynic in me says that it may not happen in Brenton's lifetime.

Nuclear weapons have made global war too horrifying to contemplate but we probably stand a good chance of being drawn into an escalating brushfire conventional war, if, indeed, any war can now be characterized as conventional.

Even without nuclear engagements, wars are now fought with weapons so smart that there is no place to hide from them. They can be launched from highly mobile platforms hundreds of miles from their target and follow you right into the very room in which you have sought refuge.

Papa's War was an incredibly primitive war by today's standards but it was just as deadly. It just took longer to do the job.

Warfare is not a game.

It never was.

----- PROLOGUE -----

Brenton, there were millions of American soldiers, sailors, and marines who fought in World War II and some of them were incredibly brave. Some of those truly brave men were my friends and some of them did not survive the war. They are forever young. That is why I go to the Memorial Day and Veterans Day services every year, to honor the friends that I lost in that war.

I received no medals for heroism and was not wounded in action (except for a scratch from a mortar shell fragment that was too minor to report), although there were plenty of times when it seems nothing short of a miracle that I was not seriously injured. I was just an ordinary soldier but I thought that you might like to have a record of the small part that I had in World War II.

Brenton, you have always shown an interest in World War II, or as you call it, "Papa's War." We have spent many hours together while I explained what a really evil man the dictator of Germany, Adolf Hitler, was and how he conquered and enslaved almost all of Europe and eventually drew the entire world into a war so big that it involved hundreds of millions of people.

The United States managed to stay out of the war for a long time while at the same time providing a lot of aid to the countries that were our friends in Europe. However, when Japan hit Pearl Harbor, our naval base in the Hawaiian Islands, with a sneak air attack on Sunday, December 7, 1941, it was only a matter of a few days before we were drawn into the war with Germany. So it was that we found ourselves in two wars at the same time. The first one, against Japan, was fought by the Army, the Air Corps (which was then still part of the Army), and Marines on dozens of islands in the Pacific Ocean and by the Navy all over the Pacific and

Indian Oceans. The other, against Germany, was fought by the Army and Air Corps on the continents of Europe and Africa and by the Navy all over the Atlantic Ocean and in the Mediterranean Sea. We also helped our allies in such far away places as Russia, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, China, Burma, and India.

The United States was not prepared for war but recognized the danger and was already drafting men into the armed services through the Selective Service System when the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred.

Men started enlisting heavily right after the attack and enlisted in waves with every big news story about the war. It was difficult for the armed services to handle such an irregular flow of men joining up so it was decided that all men would have to go into service through the Selective Service System. Each branch of service determined how many men it needed each month and the Selective Service System called up the required number.

Some months, all of the needs could be met by men volunteering for immediate induction. In other months, men had to be drafted to meet the quotas.

When I was graduated from high school, I volunteered for immediate induction and was called up on June 28, 1943 but my story starts a lot earlier than that.

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PAPA'S WAR, PART 1

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For My Grandson, Brenton

The Impact of a Childhood Friend on my Military Service

I was ten years old and the world was a much simpler place then. My best friend, Morton Ross, and I were both in Miss Kessler's 5th Grade Class in Orange Street School. We were in friendly competition for grades. Morton lived only two blocks from the school but I had never been to his home because we had so much fun on the school grounds at recess and after school; --- football, softball, dodge ball, cork ball, red rover, and some games we just made up. --- We were still in the Great Depression when our parents were struggling to make enough money just to put food on the table. At Christmas we were lucky to get one inexpensive toy so we pretty much had to make our own toys and our own good times.

That changed in an important way on Morton's birthday when his dad gave him a Chemcraft chemistry set. It wasn't much as chemistry sets go. It was in a cardboard box, the smallest, least expensive, set they made, with one test tube, litmus paper, a few safe chemicals, and about a dozen experiments. Doing things with test tubes and chemicals excited Morton's imagination and he invited me over to join him in the experiments. I started dropping hints everywhere and, at Christmas, I got a Chemcraft set of my own, the next step up from Morton's.

Soon, Morton and I were doing odd jobs and spending whatever change we could get our hands on for test tube racks, clamps, alcohol burners, and chemicals. It was amazing how many "chemicals" could be found right around the house --- ammonia, bicarbonate of soda, acetic acid (vinegar), sodium chloride (table salt) --- everywhere we looked there were chemicals.

It did not happen overnight but bit by bit, over a fairly long period of time, we began to build rather formidable "laboratories." Morton's lab was in his garage and mine on our closed-in back porch.

As we grew older, some of our experiments were down right dangerous and we were lucky that no serious injuries resulted because, by then, we were well past the simple experiments in the Chemcraft instruction books.

By the time we got into high school, we were devising increasingly exotic experiments and in need of chemicals not usually found around the house, like sulfuric, hydrochloric, and nitric acids. These could be purchased from a pharmacist if one established a friendly

rapport, and that is how we got most of our chemicals, but it ate up all of our available funds and left nothing for dates, movies, or even an ice cream soda.

One day, I was having lunch at home and Morton arrived out of breath on his bike. "Quick, turn on the radio, WFOY." I did, just in time to hear a commercial spot for a pharmacy, Touchton's Drug Store, located near my home. The spot was called "The Touchton Tele Quiz" and the idea was simple. The radio station would play two bars of a "mystery tune" and the first person to arrive at Touchton's and tell the cashier the correct name of the tune got $5.00 worth of merchandise, free. That translated into $5.00 worth of chemicals.

Morton had immediately recognized the bonanza that was falling into our laps.

In those late-depression times, automobile radios were luxuries that few could afford and, with only one local radio station, even fewer would want, so my closeness to Touchton's gave us a decided edge. Every day at noon, Morton would come by and quite often we recognized the tune. A quick hop on our bikes, correct identification of the tune, a purchase of a few chemicals, a casual ice cream soda, and back to school for the afternoon classes became almost routine.

Then it all ended abruptly. Someone was consistently beating us there with the answers. We decided to check it out. There was a No Parking Zone on Touchton's side of the street but, there, parked directly across the street was a car with a chrome strip on stand-off insulators running down the center of the roof --- an antenna, ---- undoubtedly attached to the first automobile radio in town. Dirty pool. There was no way we could get here from my house ahead of him. Well, we figured that he couldn't know all of the tunes but he improved his chances by bringing several friends with him in the car and Morton and I had to pick up the crumbs on the few days when none of them knew the tune but we did. Those were not good times and our experiments suffered for lack of supplies.

Ever resourceful, Morton once again came through in the clutch. He found, in Popular Science Magazine, plans for a one-tube battery-powered radio built in a cigar box. He proposed that we build one, fasten it to one of our bikes and park on the sidewalk right at Touchton's door. We could separate the headset and each listen to one of the two headphones then quickly jump inside with the answer. The scheme worked beautifully and we were back in control.

But not for long. We still had to stay at our bike to listen while the guy with the car radio countered by sending someone to stand at and block the door. They would yell the answer over to him and he would jump inside ahead of us.

Undaunted, Morton proposed that we take our cigar box radio right into the drug store, drink a soda, listen for the "mystery tune" and be standing at the cashier's counter, paying our bill, when the tune played. This worked quite well and we had usually identified the tune before the others could relay the answer in from their car. The guy with the car radio

yelled, "Foul!" and demanded that the rules of the Tele Quiz be changed, making it illegal to have a radio inside the drug store.

The owner, fearing the inevitable altercation, was considering dropping the Tele Quiz altogether.

Again, resourceful Morton came to the rescue. He proposed to the guys with the car radio that we not kill the goose that was laying our golden eggs, but take alternate days. He even offered them the odd days. That gave them an extra day in most months so they accepted and both sides prospered because $5.00 was a lot of money in those days.

Spurred by the success of our cigar box radio, our activities soon became involved more with electronics than chemistry, much to the relief of our respective neighbors who were becoming restive over the colorful and sometimes noisy chemical happenings.

Unfortunately, Touchton's did not sell electronic parts and, since we could only use the $5.00 credit in that store, we usually splurged our winnings on ice cream sodas, sundaes, or boxes of chocolates for our dates --- and chemistry soon faded into memory.

I quickly moved on to building a one-tube regenerative short-wave radio receiver. The parts came partly from the trash bin of a local radio repair shop. I wound the coils on oatmeal boxes and toilet tissue tubes and ordered the type 30 tube, some Litz wire, and a few special parts from the Allied Radio catalog. A regenerative receiver had a remarkable characteristic. It could be made to oscillate if the feedback was increased beyond a critical point, but if you stopped just a hair short of that point, it had exceedingly high gain and would make extremely weak signals quite audible. With that single tube I could pick up short-wave broadcasts from all over the world.

I was fascinated by what was happening in Europe at the time and lost a lot of sleep listening, into the wee hours of the morning, to the BBC.

Sometimes I monitored a German short-wave station that carried Hitler's important speeches, with English translation. I would mock his tirades in something that sounded like German, but wasn't, and I got very good at it. Occasionally, at parties, I would wet my hair and comb it down over one eye, then hold a short section of my comb under my nose and go into the act. The other kids would answer with Nazi salutes and a chorus of "Seig Heil"s. It seemed like innocent fun at the time. We considered Hitler to be just a joke and a prime candidate for the booby hatch.

I was listening to the BBC when it aired the first report of Germany's invasion of Poland. Suddenly, Hitler did not seem so funny anymore.

In order to earn a little extra cash, I worked on Sundays, picking up remote broadcasts from the First Methodist and Grace Methodist Churches for radio station WFOY. These broadcasts aired precisely at 11:00 a.m. every Sunday. Time did not concern me very much in those days and I had no watch. WFOY had no cue lines to these two locations so

getting on the air on time presented a minor problem. I solved this by purchasing a cheap Ingersoll wrist watch. It set me back about $4.00 which, to me, was a lot of dough. It lost about three minutes a day but I would set it on WFOY's 10:00 a.m. time signal before I left home, then make a mental calculation of how much it lost in the next hour so we got on the air pretty much on time --- until the day I went to the beach and forget to take it off before going into the ocean. Goodbye Ingersoll. I never had very good luck with wrist watches. This was only the beginning.

In time, Morton's family moved to another house, somewhat closer to mine, and right next door to an amateur radio operator. Morton was intrigued and decided to get a "Ham" license of his own whereas, except for my regenerative short wave receiver, I was more interested in such things as making door openers controlled by electric eyes.

Morton was serious about getting a "Ham" license and bought a real short wave radio, a multi-band Hallicrafter receiver.

Part of the Ham license exam was copying and sending Morse code at a prescribed rate. I was not particularly interested in becoming a Ham, but Morton needed to practice his Morse code with someone and, once I recognized the benefit of tapping secret messages back and forth across a class room with our pencils, got into code practice with some degree of enthusiasm. One day, we had a substitute teacher who could also copy code. He quickly threw cold water on that activity.

Morton loaned me his Nilson and Hornung amateur radio license manual and I began studying for the technical part of the exam. He took the exam, got his Ham ticket, let me help him assemble his first one-tube transmitter using a type 6L6 tube, and together we raised his antenna. What an exciting event to work Australia the first night on the air with just a one-tube rig. Finally, I was hooked and was scheduled to take my license exam on a Monday, actually, Monday, December 8th, 1941.

The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on Sunday, Dec. 7th, so needless to say, no amateur radio license exams were given on December 8th and all amateur radio activities were shut down for the duration.

The Torpedoed Tanker

Several months had gone by since Pearl Harbor and the war still seemed a long way off. There were the usual Saturday night gatherings at the Surfside Casino on Vilano Beach and the Beach Hotel next to the pier on St. Augustine Beach. Both were hangouts for the teenage crowds. There was no "live" music, just the offerings of juke boxes but those

featured the records of Glenn Miller, Atie Shaw, Count Basie, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Woody Herman, Duke Ellington, Harry James, Lionel Hampton, and the rest of the big bands. One couldn't ask for better dance music and it blared away as loudly as the real thing, with the relentlessly pounding bass that was characteristic of both the big bands and the juke boxes of the time. The dance floor at Surfside was unsurpassed and much larger than that at the Beach Hotel but at the Beach Hotel, the tables were scrunched up closer together and the ambiance was more intimate.

My date and I had danced for a couple of hours at Surfside and then moved on to the Beach Hotel. Some friends made room for us at their table and we were discussing the newly imposed blackout regulations.

All outdoor illumination, street lights, and neon signs were banned for the duration. All windows that could be seen from the ocean had to be painted black or covered at night by light-proof shutters. The purpose of these regulations was to eliminate the possibility of an enemy submarine detecting the presence of the shore-hugging freighters and tankers that were so important to the war effort.

Automobile headlights were painted black except for a tiny open triangle at the bottom of each lens. This provided no help for the driver. Its main purpose was to make the vehicle visible to pedestrians. Obviously, the usual speed limits were no longer safe so they were generally reduced to ten miles per hour after dark and five miles per hour in the busy area around the Plaza.

It was April 10, 1942. As a gag, I had devised a belt on which was mounted a battery, a switch, and a red bicycle tail light to make me visible to those blind drivers and I was wearing it at the time. My date and I got up to dance and I turned on my tail light.

Suddenly, two flashes of light found their way through the blackout provisions and into the darkened club. They were followed, in about ten seconds, by two explosions, loud enough to be heard over the pounding bass of the juke box.

I clicked off my tail light and we rushed outside to find out what had happened. There we were faced with a horrifying spectacle. About two miles out was a tanker, the Gulf America. It had apparently taken two torpedoes and was ablaze over the entire bow area. Burning oil was pouring into the sea. We could see the crew scurrying about on the deck and as the flames approached them they dove into the burning oil on the surface. We ran down to the beach and even out into the water, filled with a feeling of utter desperation and helplessness. We were waist-deep, fully-clothed filled with rage and pounding the surf with our fists, wanting to help but unable to do anything. Many got violently ill.

We watched as the tanker's stern rose into the air and then slowly slipped beneath the sea. All that was left was a huge area of burning oil. Eventually it broke up into patches. Over the next few hours, these extinguished one by one until there was no visible trace, ---- no life boats, ---nothing.

Over the next few days, the beaches became covered with black sticky tar-like oil and debris. Framed pictures of loved ones and other personal items floated ashore, but worst of all were the horribly burned bodies of those helpless seamen who didn't have a chance.

Pearl Harbor seemed to be half way around the world, but this was happening right here. It was my first painful experience of the war.

A-12 or V-12, the Big Decision

While we were in high school, some officers from the Army and Navy came to the school and gave an exam to those who wanted to take it. Morton and I both recognized the fact that neither of us could afford college so we signed up for the exam. It was explained to us that there were two absolutely identical programs, the Army A-12 and the Navy V-12 programs. Those scoring high enough on the exam would qualify to be sent to college to study engineering because both services needed engineers.

We were told that, if we qualified, we would be permitted to select the college that we wished to attend. The application form had two boxes --- check one, Army or Navy. Mort and I had not conferred on this choice and it turned out that I checked Army and he checked Navy. Mine was a spur of the moment decision. At the time the choices seemed equal.

After a few months, Morton started getting all sorts of packets from the Navy, with more forms to fill out and eventually received notice that he had been accepted in the Navy V-12 program. Meanwhile, I received nothing and assumed that I had not scored well enough on the exam. Then one day, I received an envelope. There was no accompanying letter but the envelope contained a small yellow card stating that I had been selected for the A-12 Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP). Only one instruction was printed on the card, "Give this card to the interviewing officer when you are inducted into service."

As it would turn out, Morton's insistence that I learn Morse code would significantly affect my military career.

Civil Defense Activities

I soon got involved in Civil Defense activities, helping Mr. Crookshank, my high school chemistry teacher, who conducted gas defense classes, and joining the Aircraft Warning Service (AWS). In the AWS, I took several four-hour night shifts a week.

My spotting post, designated K-63, was located at the bridge tender's shack on a rickety old wooden draw bridge connecting the mainland to Vilano Beach. Initially, the bridge

tender and the AWS spotters were alone out there but we were soon joined by others intent on guarding the bridge against all possible intrusions. The number of guards on the bridge grew in number and they soon got in one another's way, checking out everyone who crossed the bridge in either direction. The situation might be described as overkill. There was a soldier, a sailor (Navy), a Coast Guardsman, a Marine, and a member of the U.S. Border Patrol. Luckily, the Air Corps was still part of the Army at that time or we probably would have had an Airman, as well.

If the night was chilly, the guards took turns sitting in the warmth of the bridge tender's shack, but I had to stay outside for my entire shift, except when I briefly called in reports of aircraft in the vicinity.

There was a special phone in the shack connected directly to the AWS plotting board operators. The location of that board was a well-kept secret. When aircraft were spotted, I would pick up the special phone and a female voice would say, "Report."

The report followed strict guidelines. A typical report might go something like this, "One, multi, high, seen, Kay-six-three, south, three, west." This told a lot. It translated into "One multi-engine aircraft at a high altitude, was seen from Post K-63; it was located south of the spotting post approximately three miles and headed west."

Most of the reports were routine but there was provision for reporting unusual events. For example, the sinking of the tanker off St.Augustine Beach could have been seen from this post and was probably reported by the spotter on duty that night. In a case like this, the spotter answered the "Report" command with, "Red Flash!" After a brief pause another voice came on the line, "This is the Red Flash operator. Authenticate." At that point we gave an authentication code that changed from time to time. If the code was correct, the next thing heard was, "Report." To the extent possible, we were supposed to follow the aircraft reporting procedure, substituting, for the aircraft description, the unusual thing seen or heard.

Red Flash!

It started out as a pretty routine night. A few planes were reported flying due south, probably commercial airliners.

The Coast Guard had recently taken over the world class Ponce de Leon Hotel for a boot camp training station (really tough duty). The Coast Guard had outfitted a deep sea fishing boat with a spotlight and converted it into a harbor patrol boat. I believe that this was the first night on which that boat patrolled the harbor.

Ever since the start of the war, the shrimp boats, in fact all boats, had to be back in port by sundown because their running lights might be eclipsed by a passing freighter or tanker, revealing the ship's presence to a German submarine lurking offshore. By this time many freighters and tankers had been sunk along the entire eastern seaboard so the threat was very real.

The patrol boat caught our attention as it churned up the bay toward the new harbor entrance channel. This was the first nighttime activity on the water that any of us had seen since we had been involved in our various duties, so we all stood at the rail watching it, only mildly curious.

When the patrol boat came abreast of the entrance channel, its searchlight suddenly came on. It struck us all that this action could be fatal to any passing ship and we became acutely alert. The searchlight swept across the channel slowly, then swung back, paused and then instantly extinguished. The patrol boat turned around sharply and then headed back into port at full speed.

In that brief moment of pause before the searchlight went out, we all saw it. The searchlight had illuminated the deck, deck gun and conning tower of a German submarine. Submarines of that day had to surface frequently to charge their batteries. This operation generated poisonous fumes so it was essential that this be done on the surface where the interior of the submarine could be ventilated. This was always a risky operation in hostile waters because a surfaced sub was very vulnerable to attack.

The commander of this submarine had apparently observed the inlet for some time and, noting that there was no traffic in or out after sundown, decided that it would be safer to surface right in the inlet channel than to surface on the open ocean.

The crew was scurrying about on the deck and we wondered if they might take a shot at the retreating patrol boat with the deck gun but the sub captain obviously decided that his presence was already known and that his best course of action was to get out to sea and submerge as quickly as possible.

The guards (Army, Navy, Coast Guard, Marine, and Border Patrol) all huddled to decide what they should do. It appeared that they had no instructions for incidents like this, no special phone line, and none of them had radios.

The AWS came to their rescue. I grabbed the special phone and upon hearing, "Report," shouted, "RED FLASH!"

The Red Flash operator asked for authentication, which I gave her, and then she said, "Report."

I probably stammered a bit but my report ran something like this, "One German submarine, low --- very low --- on the surface ---seen, Kay six three, southeast, one, stationary."

For a moment there was dead silence on the line, then she said, "A what?"

"A German submarine!"

After a pause she said, "Repeat report."

I did, pretty much the same as the first except eliminating the reference to its altitude which, with hindsight, seemed ludicrous.

Another pause. Then a stern male voice came on the line, "Is there anyone there who can verify this report."

I replied," Yes, I have personnel here from the Army, Navy, Coast Guard, Marines, and U.S. Border Patrol --- and the bridge tender. We all saw it."

The voice said, "Put on the Navy."

I put the petty officer on and, after a brief exchange in which he gave his name, rank and serial number, he verified my report and answered several questions concerning the details of what he saw. The conversation ended and the sailor hung up. That solved one mystery for me. It's just a guess, but they trusted the Navy guy so the secret plotting board was probably at some naval base in Jacksonville.

We all stared at the inlet trying to make out the outline of the sub but it was too dark and he was very likely backing out of there as fast as possible.

It took about a half an hour for it to start but eventually several flights of five or six planes each flew over the ocean near the inlet and dropped bombs. They didn't sound very loud. We all discussed it and decided that they were probably practice bombs with very light charges, not likely to blow a sub out of the water unless they scored a direct hit. I got so interested in the activities that I almost forgot to call in the reports on the flights of planes but I did call in another "Red Flash" when the planes dropped flares and the bombing started.

They didn't get the sub. It made a clean getaway.

Shortly after this incident a long time friend, Kenneth Beeson (later to become mayor of St.Augustine), was out in his boat and returned to port towing a German rubber raft. It later developed that it was one of the rafts used to land saboteurs at Ponte Vedra. These saboteurs were landed from the same sub that also landed a group of saboteurs on Long Island.

All of them were caught before they were able to do any damage thanks to the courage and intelligent actions of a Coast Guardsman on the beach on Long Island.

It is not clear whether the sub that surfaced in the entrance channel to the St.Augustine harbor was the one that dropped off the saboteurs or was one involved in sinking coastal shipping.

Whatever it was, it gave us all an exciting evening.

Incidentally, there was no mention of this event in the local papers. Presumably, some authority thought that this story was best untold. After all, we did not want the citizens of this sleepy city to know that a sub (or subs) had been surfacing, with impunity, right in our harbor entrance channel. That would surely have played havoc with local morale.

For more,see: ADDENDA , Submarine Update.

A Most Unusual "Educational" Opportunity

During my senior year in high school, I attended classes in the morning and, in the afternoon, worked as an electrician's apprentice, for Crutchfield Handly Electric Co., an electrical contractor.

The minimum wage at that time was 25 cents an hour. For this work, I received 12½ cents an hour (half the minimum wage) but I also received high school credits in the Diversified Cooperative Training (DCT) program.

I was about to get an education never envisioned by the educators who devised the DCT program.

Camp Blanding had opened up just a few miles away and was busily training infantry divisions for combat. These troops needed weekend recreation. St. Augustine with its world-class beaches was an ideal spot to relax after a hard week on the firing range and obstacle course. In addition, there were several Navy bases around Jacksonville so lots of sailors visited St.Augustine on the weekends, as well.

Convoys of five hundred (and sometimes more) army trucks, loaded with soldiers, came to town every weekend. A tent city was set up behind the Recreation Center to provide adequate, if Spartan, sleeping accommodations for them. The USO did its best to provide a good time, but some of the troops coming to town had more on their minds than the USO and the beaches.

One of the local madames, known only as "Billie" saw a potential bonanza in this situation and, as a patriotic citizen, she felt that it was her duty to help in the war effort by doing something for the boys in service. Her problem was that she had always run her business in a house in West Augustine that had several bedrooms, sufficient for her local customers, but totally inadequate to handle this enormous influx of servicemen every weekend.

Billie quickly grasped the situation and took pencil in hand to devise a facility that could handle this large volume of customers. By the time the electrical contractor for whom I worked got involved in her project, she had already leased a plot of land running all the way through the block, close to her house, and fronting on Travis Street.

Billie planned to be her own general contractor, subcontracting the electrical, plumbing, carpentry work, and painting, as needed. There would be no bids. She knew the reputations of the local trades and had already made up her mind as to who would do the work.

She called Crutchfield, discussed the general scope of her project with him, and asked him to come by to go over the plans. I was assembling some electrical fixtures when Crutchfield said, "Stop what you are doing and come with me. We have a job that ought to be very interesting."

Crutchfield did not elaborate on the nature of the job so what happened while we were there caught me pretty much by surprise.

Billie invited us into the kitchen where she unrolled a set of drawings on the kitchen table. She had made them herself and, while she would never qualify as an architect, the drawings conveyed the essence of her plan quite well.

It was not easy to keep my mind on the plans because from time to time, her "girls," as she called them, would wander in and out of the kitchen dressed only in filmy see-through sleeping attire with nothing underneath. My boss had difficulty paying attention, too.

Billie was a very practical woman who had some knowledge about lumber. She wanted this facility to go up quickly and cheaply. Her plan was designed around the ¾ inch four foot by eight foot plywood sheet. It was her intention that, wherever possible, there would be no time wasted sawing wood. The plywood sheets would be used as-is for almost all of the construction so everything was designed in 4 by 8 foot modules.

The facility, as she envisioned it, would be built like this. Running parallel to Travis Street, she planned an open shed 48 feet long, to keep the troops out of the sun and the usual Florida afternoon showers. Long before they showed up in such places as the World's Fair and Disney Land, she planned a series of swinging gates that could be used to ensure an orderly flow toward the main entrance. If the line was short, the gates could be arranged to allow for that but if there were many customers, the gates could be

arranged to organize a serpentine cue that flowed back and forth under the shed, eventually arriving at the entrance. At each end of the shed she planned to have a Coke machine, in case the troops got thirsty.

According to her plans, upon entering the main entrance, the customer faced the cash register. Off to his right was a sixteen foot square room which served a dual purpose, which I will get to later.

Looking beyond the cash register was a long spaciously wide entrance aisle. (She planned to mirror-image the interior facility if business conditions dictated. However, she planned to keep the shed and main entrance common to the entire facility). Along the right side of this aisle was a set of upper and lower berths similar to those in a Pullman car. Each berth had heavy draw curtains and a generous 4 by 8 foot interior. She planned to have a local mattress manufacturer make extra large mattress pads for the berths. Two sets of berths constituted what she called a "quad." On the opposite or exit aisle from each "quad" was a 16 by 16 foot room containing a real double bed, a partly concealed toilet in one corner, an inexpensive 5-drawer chest of drawers, a small table with two chairs, and a wash basin with mirror.

Down the main entrance aisle there were six "quads," each sixteen feet long, containing a total of 24 berths. Across the exit aisle from each "quad" was a 16 by 16 foot square bedroom like the one described above. There were six bed rooms in all.

Crutchfield asked Billie to explain how it would all work and, turning to me, said, "Pay attention. This is the part you will probably design."

Another one of the skimpily clad girls came into the kitchen for a glass of water and distracted me again.

After regaining our attention, Billie described how it would all work, "Lets say it's the weekend and a lot of soldiers are in town. They are all cued up under the shed and I am open for business. A soldier or sailor boy comes in and steps up to the cash register. If he looks to his right, he will see the 16 by 16 foot area where I am accommodating the Military Police (MPs) and Shore Patrol (SPs). The serviceman will know that no nonsense will be tolerated here. They will make sure that this is an orderly place."

"At the cash register he plunks down two bucks and gets a ticket. One ticket is good for three minutes or get finished, whichever comes first. The cashier looks at a panel of colored lights next to the cash register. Down the aisle, there is a small sign identifying each berth. Each sign also has three tally lights next to it. They are red, green, and yellow. Red means the girl is there and engaged. Green means she's is there and ready. Yellow means she is on her break. Those lights will be repeated on the cashiers tally-light panel. The girls will rotate, getting a 15 minute break each hour. During their break they can retire to the bedroom across the exit aisle to relax. On a regular weekend, each girl will have her own berth and one berth will always be empty in each quad, but on a really busy weekend I will call up the reserves, so to speak, and all of the berths will be in use at all

times. Then, there will be five girls for each quad. The girls will still get a break every hour but when a girl returns from her break, she will go to whatever berth is opening up. Each of the girls working a quad would be assigned a drawer in the chest of drawers in the room adjacent to her quad. She will keep her street cloths, makeup, personal items, and whatever in her drawer."

Crutchfield interrupted, "Wait a minute. You're going too fast. I've got a couple of questions."

Billie was impatient, "Whatever they are, I've probably already thought of them. Let me finish and if you still have questions, OK. Where was I? Oh yeah, I'll bet that you were going to ask when the guy gets a chance to look over the girls and pick one. Well, he doesn't. That's over for the duration. The cashier directs the guy to go to a berth with a green light, lets say, Four Upper, when he opens the curtain, what he sees is what he gets. She might be nice or she might be a dog but what can I do? You can't always get beauty queens for this business. OK, he climbs into Four Upper and there is a handle on the curtain like in a voting booth. When he grabs the handle and closes the curtain, the timer starts."

"What timer?"

"Oh, I forgot to tell you. When he climbs in, he will be looking at a large three-minute timer mounted over the girl's head."

She got out a timer she had purchased and showed us. It was about a foot in diameter. The face was divided into three equal pie-shaped one-minute segments. She started the clock and it ticked off the seconds quite audibly.

"God, what pressure. How can a guy ever expect to finish in three minutes, especially while staring at that clock?"

"I'm sure most of them will get done in time, but if they don't, out they go, Unless---."

"Unless what?"

"Unless they bought more than one ticket, as insurance, in which case, they give the girl another ticket; she restarts the timer and they keep going. If a guy isn't sure he can finish quickly, he should buy several tickets."

"But what if he doesn't use all of his tickets, does he get his money back?"

"No, but we treat him right. The ticket has no expiration date and can even be used by someone else. I don't care. A customer is a customer. The ticket can be used any time. We like satisfied return customers so we treat 'em right. Anyone with a previously purchased ticket doesn't have to wait in the long line. He can get in the --- didn't I tell you about it? --- the express line and will be the next one in."

"You probably noticed that there are two separate aisles, one ‘in' and one ‘out'. A guy rolls in one side of the berth and out the other. This avoids any possible traffic congestion problems. At the far end of both aisles there is a common restroom and clean-up area and across the street, I am going to put up a building that I plan to donate for a Pro Station. I already have a lease option on the lot. Neat, huh?"

"It doesn't seem very private. Everyone will hear what's going on in the adjacent berths."

"That's the whole idea. It will get them more aroused and speed up the process. The girls are paid on the basis of the number of tickets they turn in at the end of their shift. Also, this payment arrangement discourages the girls from giving a guy a little extra time when the clock runs out on him. No tickee no ---well, you know."

"But what about your regular customers, the local Johns? They aren't going to tolerate this two-dollar three-minute ticket business with no chance to mingle with the girls and pick out one for the night."

"Right, and this war won't last forever so I've got to treat them right, too. Here is how that will work. Remember though, they will pay a bit more than the special rate I'm giving our servicemen. Lets say it's a week night. You wouldn't believe the high class guys that come here --- doctors, --- judges, --- lawyers, --- you name it --- even some preachers. Hell, we even get cops --- no charge for them--- it avoids hassles --- part of the cost of doing business. If any of the town bums show up we won't take them. I chase them over to "Big Margaret's"down the road. I run a high class place and I plan to keep it that way.

"OK, lets say a local muckety muck arrives." Billie points to one of her drawings. "See this room by the entrance where the MPs and SPs stay on the weekend? Well, the girls will be in there to mingle and socialize before the local John picks out one that pleases him. Now, see the rooms where the girls take their breaks on the weekends? Well, the John takes his girl to one of those rooms. Its comfortable, its private, and he can spend as much time as he negotiated for, --- on whatever activity he negotiated for."

Billie smiled and boasted, with obvious pride, "It will be the most efficient cat house in the world."

She then asked, "How soon can you work up an estimate? I want to get started on this as soon as possible."

Crutchfield gave her a date by which he expected to give her the numbers, rolled up his set of drawings, and we left. He was sure he would get the job so he had me design and build the tally light system. After all, at 12½ cents an hour, the price was right.

He sent her the estimate but before she gave the OK to proceed, I was inducted into the army.

I cannot honestly say that the facility was actually ever built. I served my hitch in the army, went to college, got married and then lived in New York for my entire civilian career. It was nearly fifty years before I finally retired and returned to St.Augustine.

One day, curiosity got the best of me and I drove over to Travis Street to see if the building was still standing. There was no trace of it. It would have been as temporary as an army barracks. Perhaps it was torn down when it had outlived its usefulness. Maybe Billie finished the project, maybe not. She seemed very enthusiastic and determined at the time.

I somehow think that I helped design, and that she actually did build and operate, "the most efficient cat house in the world."

Camp Blanding, Florida, Induction Center, July 1943

I was inducted into service at Camp Blanding, Florida on June 28, 1943. Camp Blanding was probably like all other induction centers. A lot of things had to be done to process a bunch of civilians into something vaguely resembling soldiers and sailors. Physical exams were given and uniforms issued. I was given a set of stainless steel dog tags to wear at all times. They were embossed with my name, religious preference (P), blood type (B+), and my serial number, 34788981. The latter was to distinguish me from all of the other Anderson Pierce Evans Jr.(s) in the Army. Army inductees had to take the Army General Classification Test (AGCT) which was sort of an IQ test. A score of 110 or better was required to qualify for Officer Candidate School, and a score of 120 or better was needed to qualify for ASTP. The officers didn't tell us about this additional requirement when we took the initial test back in high school but I scored a 138 on the AGCT, so no problem.

We were issued uniforms (both "suntans" and fatigues), boots, socks, leggings, underwear, raincoats, mess kits, canteens, and a pile of other impedimenta, along with two barracks bags, an "A" bag and a "B" bag, to keep it all in. Specific things were supposed to go into each bag but no one could remember what went into which.

We were supposed to get two sets of green herringbone twill fatigue uniforms but they issued me only one set and said that I would get the other set later. We wore fatigues as our work uniform every day. With only one set, I had to wash them every night and put them on wet every morning. Well, I assumed that this would probably end in a few days when I would be issued another set. I was wrong.

At the induction center there were a few guys who had been in the Army for two or three days already. They had already been processed except for their shipping orders so they

were given black arm bands with corporal stripes on them and made "acting" corporals to prod us along through the processing. We called them "Hollywood" corporals.

Every morning, at reveille, a Hollywood corporal would show up and ask a question like, "Who would rather be a 'G-Man' than doing what you are doing right now?" Anyone dumb enough to raise his hand spent the day collecting garbage and in July that was a pretty rotten assignment.

The first lesson you learned in the Army was NEVER VOLUNTEER.

Hollywood corporal "Mess Police" stood at the garbage cans and if anyone did not have a clean tray after chow he was sent back to clean it up. One recruit got caught scraping food off his tray under his table. He was told that at evening mess he would have to eat his food off the floor. When he complained that the floor was dirty, they made him scrub it with GI soap and a brush until it was clean enough to eat off of. Then, after he ate off of it he had to scrub the mess hall floor again. The second lesson learned was TAKE ALL YOU WANT, BUT EAT ALL YOU TAKE.

At Camp Blanding, I learned about another kind of volunteer called a "GI volunteer." There is not much you can do to defend against it. A Hollywood corporal showed up after breakfast and said, "I need three volunteers, You, you, and you." The three "you's" were GI volunteers. He put us on a truck and took us to a muddy football field. He said, "Today you are going to be engineers. Drive this stake right here. Tie this string to it and follow me." We did it, unrolling the string for about a hundred and fifty yards and he said, "Drive another stake here and tie the string to it, pulling it tight. O.K., our problem is that this field doesn't get adequate runoff after a heavy rain. You are going to engineer a solution to that problem. Here is a shovel for each of you. Dig a ditch under that string, three feet wide and three feet deep. At chow time I will go to the mess hall and get you a baloney and cheese sandwich and refill your canteens. You can have a ten minute break every hour but we are going to stay here until that ditch is finished so get to it, and neatness counts."

After that, I tried to make myself scarce when Hollywood corporals were around.

After several days at the Induction Center, I was called into the office of a 1st Lieutenant. He had my orders on the desk in front of him and was just starting to give them to me when I remembered the small yellow card. Luckily, I had remembered to put it in my shirt pocket.

"Are you the interviewing officer?" I asked.

He nodded, "Yes."

"Then I think I'm supposed to give you this." I withdrew the card from the pocket of my still wet fatigues and handed it to him. It was damp but readable.

He took one look at it and then ripped my freshly-typed orders to shreds. After an unprintable epithet, he growled, "Why didn't you give this to me earlier?"

"Because, Sir, I have never seen you before in my entire life, Sir."

"O.K., O.K., Don't be a smart ass. Get out of here and come back in exactly one hour."

I went back in an hour and new orders had been cut. I was going to North Camp Hood, Texas for basic training along with a bunch of other inductees headed for a regiment to be composed, except for officers and cadre, of all ASTP candidates.

The Train Ride to Texas

On this trip, we would, for the first time, be out in public as soldiers so we had to put on our ill-fitting suntans and the wet fatigues went into one of my barracks bags. New army clothing was covered with tags inside and out. No matter how hard you tried to remove them all, when you first wore newly issued army clothing there was always at least one tag sticking out someplace where it was invisible to you but not to anyone else. We had not yet become expert at tag removal so we spent a lot of time picking tags off of one another like a colony of grooming monkeys.

The trip to Texas was going to take two days. First, one member of our group was given a manila envelope containing the orders, train tickets, and meal tickets for our group. Harrison D. Griffin from Deland was given our envelope and the task of guarding it with his life and the rest of us were ordered to stick to him like glue. Both Harrison and Bert F. "Rebel" Erwin (from Winter Haven) soon became good friends of mine.

Dragging our "A" and "B" bags, we were loaded onto a troop train with hundreds of other new recruits headed for bases all over the United States. That train took us only as far as Jacksonville where everyone detrained and each group found the train that would take it to its destination or, at least, start us in the right direction.

Actually, our train took us from Jacksonville to Memphis. We changed trains there and boarded another headed for New Orleans where we changed trains for the final time and boarded a train, destination Waco, Texas. All of these trains made many stops, sometimes for an hour or more. The most noteworthy of those stops was in Texarkana on the Texas-Arkansas border. We used one of our meal tickets in a track-side diner. All of us had chili. For the rest of the trip, all of us had diarrhea, or as the Army called it, "The GIs."

"Rebel" Erwin immediately went on a foraging expedition, took the packets of toilet paper from the toilets in all of the cars on the train, and gave each of us a packet to hide in our "B" Bag. By the time we got to Waco "the GIs" had pretty much run its course but

we were each down to the last few sheets in our packets --- and very thankful to "Rebel" for his resourcefulness.

The trains we rode in were quaint by even the standards of 1943. There were comfortable diesel air-conditioned streamliners on all lines (the East Coast Champion, The Silver Meteor, the Santa Fe Chief, just to mention a few), but the trains we rode on were all pulled by steam engines and were not air conditioned. The only way to cope with the summer heat was to open the windows. From years of operation with the windows open, the soot and cinders and black smoke from the engine was ground into the seat cushions and covered the floors so thickly that there was no way to tell if they had ever been any color other than black.

There were no lights in any of the cars so there was nothing to do after dark but talk or try to get some sleep on the floor. Each car had a potbelly stove and a box of wood at each end, which obviously served no function in July other than to make it difficult to move about. Each of the trains that we boarded had started its journey somewhere else so by the time we got on, all of the seats were taken. We had to sit in the aisle on our "A" and "B" bags, further hampering movement.

During one leg of the trip we rode in a unique car. It apparently had been a private car at some time in the distant past. Each window was set off by an intricately carved mahogany frame. Though dingy, there were superbly executed paintings on the narrow wood panels between the windows and on a pair of panels that seemed to have been a wall with a door, long since removed, enabling one end of the car to be closed off from the other end. The ceilings were covered with paintings on concave wood panels. There were also gas light chandeliers that probably were hooked up to gas mains whenever the private car was on a siding. That car must have been a real showplace in its day. Who could have owned such a car?

North Camp Hood, Texas, Basic Training

Several army trucks were waiting for us when we arrived in Waco, in the early hours of the morning. We climbed aboard and were soon in a casual area set aside for incoming recruits. We were marched to a supply room where we were issued a mattress and, struggling to handle our "A" and "B" bags and our mattresses, were marched to a barracks where the lights were off.

It was 4:00 a.m.

The sergeant said, "Find a spot to flop for the night and we will sort you out after reveille."

There were no bunks and the barracks was already pretty well filled with other recruits who had arrived earlier although it was so dark that we couldn't see them. We stumbled around in the dark, falling all over those guys, but, eventually finding open spots big enough for our mattresses, we hit the sack.

Then it was 4:30, reveille, and before we could even get our eyes shut the shrill sound of the sergeant's whistle jarred us back to life.

We immediately double timed to a medical building, without breakfast, although none of us were sure whether or not we could handle breakfast, anyway.

We stood at the entrance to the dispensary in an unmoving line for five hours until 9:45 when the line slowly started into the building. (Hurry-up-and-wait soon became a way of life in the army). Once inside, it was hard to believe the conditions. About two thirds of the recruits were sitting haphazardly all over the floor with their heads between their knees. They were as pale as ghosts. The other third was passed out cold on the floor. I found myself between two medics wearing white lab coats and holding long ugly hypodermic needles.

I received a shot in each arm.

One was a tetanus shot. In those days, this was made from a serum taken from horses. The human body did not like to be invaded by horse serum and it took a substantial amount of it to be effective. The guy giving that one had a big syringe with a large diameter needle.

In my case, the reaction was slightly delayed. I took several steps toward the exit and was half way through thinking, "Gee, that wasn't too bad," when it felt like someone had taken a full swing at my shoulder with a base ball bat. It literally knocked me across the room but I found myself still on my feet staggering out the exit. The problem with the guys on the floor was mostly psychological. The first two or three had really bad reactions and everyone who followed expected the same.

When the man behind me saw that I made it out the door on my own two feet (but just barely), he managed to do the same and after that, most but not all, of the guys made it without passing out.

I figured that there was a lesson there and for the rest of my army life I saw it work over and over again. It only takes one man to get up and get things moving even though he may not have the foggiest notion where he is going or why.

Later, during combat, a lot of the men who got things moving got medals (but there were no medals handed out in basic training for getting the line finally moving out of the dispensary).

Basic training was jam packed with new experiences for everyone.

There was a contingent of German prisoners of war on work details at North Camp Hood. They were from the Afrika Korps, some of General Rommel's best, and we saw first hand what we might be up against. They were blond with deep tans, muscular, in excellent physical condition. They marched with spirit and double timed whenever they passed a group of GIs on a break. They proudly sang German marching songs and behaved in every way like the victors rather than the vanquished. We looked pretty puny by comparison.

If they were representative of the entire German army, we were in for a long hard war.

Basic training was thirteen weeks of a hot sweaty blur of activity.

Close order drill, a combat conditioning course with machineguns firing overhead, hand-to-hand combat, double timing everywhere, field stripping and cleaning weapons, barracks scrub down with GI soap and brushes, lectures on everything from personal hygiene to military courtesy, KP, obstacle courses, especially one with an aptly-named final obstacle, "puke hill", guard duty, written exams,bayonet drill, orientation movies, fatigue detail, manual of arms, village fighting, KP, days on the firing range, firing for record with the rifle (a pre-World War I Enfield bolt-action rifle),light machine gun, 45 caliber automatic pistol, Thompson sub machine gun, hand grenade, and M-3 "grease gun" ("Rebel" Erwin was a crack shot and scored Expert on everything); written examinations; guard duty; gas mask drills; bivouacs; KP; digging foxholes; KP; inspections; night problems; attack and defense; ---(everything done **"in the following manner"** and ***"by the numbers"***); more guard duty; still more written exams; and dirty fighting and booby trap school (one of my favorites). ~~~and did I mention KP?

Our bayonet and dirty-fighting instructor was a cocky strutting 1st Lieutenant, who wore snug custom-tailored shirts, machine-stitched with sharp military creases, three down the back and two in front. He swaggered about waving a riding crop that he slapped against his riding breeches (there was no horse to be seen anywhere) when he wanted to emphasize a point. He wore leather cavalry boots and tight yellow pigskin riding gloves. He clenched his fists open and shut as he lectured. After a few dirty fighting classes he quickly earned the nickname "Blood and Gloves." He lectured from a raised platform about six feet off the ground with his audience seated on the ground looking up it him. He was an imposing authority figure, looking down at us like that, and this was his personal theater in the round.

In one dirty-fighting lecture, he asked a volunteer to show, in slow motion, how to poke his eyes out. The volunteer jabbed his separated first and middle fingers straight at the

instructor's eyes. The Lieutenant put his right hand in a position in which he appeared to be thumbing his nose at the volunteer. As the volunteer's separated fingers straddled his hand, he closed his hand around one finger and bent it upwards and backwards, bringing the volunteer to his knees. Blood and Gloves then came up with a knee that would have crushed the volunteer's face if this had been done at normal speed. As it was, the volunteer got a badly swollen lip.

"OK, We are not playing kids' games here," yelled Blood and Gloves. (He prefaced almost everything with, "OK.")

"OK, In a real combat situation he would have more than a fat lip. He would be dead. When you go for the enemy's eyes, go scratching and gouging with all fingers of both hands. When you get fingers into both eye sockets, hook them around the eyeballs, pull them out on the cords, twirl them around and around and then plop them back into their sockets. It will make them so dizzy that you can kill them any way you choose. Personally, I would gut them or slit their throats, but if you like some other way, use it."

"O.K. I want another volunteer. You!" He pointed his riding crop at a GI who was nodding off in the front row. "And bring your rifle and bayonet."

The "GI volunteer" apprehensively climbed up onto the platform. "OK, fix bayonet and try to stick me."

We practiced bayonet drills with our scabbards on the bayonets for safety so the GI volunteer fixed his bayonet but left the scabbard on.

"Bare that blade soldier, I want to see cold steel."

"But, sir ----."

"No buts soldier. Get that scabbard off and stick me."

Blood and Gloves pulled his leather gloves on tight and assumed a defensive posture.

"OK! Stick me! Don't take it easy on me! Stick me, damn it, stick me!"

The GI lunged, tentatively, at Blood and Gloves with a long thrust. The Lieutenant sidestepped and neatly parried the bayonet with his gloved hand. Quicker that the eye could see how he did it, the bayonet speared into the deck of the platform and the GI flipped high into the air coming down awkwardly. With a sickening snap his left leg broke midway between the knee and the ankle. He cried out in pain. The knife-sharp end of the bone penetrated the muscle of his calf and punched through his skin and the fabric of his fatigues and partially penetrated his thick canvas legging. His wound was bleeding profusely.

The rifle rocked slowly back and forth on the flexing bayonet blade imbedded deeply into the platform.

Blood and Gloves looked briefly at the GI's leg and shouted, "OK! Call the meat wagon --- and give me another volunteer!"

The dirty fighting course was not all lectures and demonstrations. We got a lot of hands-on training as well. During these sessions we would line up in two facing lines and pair off. At his signal we would charge at one another screaming, "Kick 'em in the balls!"

If it wasn't done to his satisfaction, he would come down from his platform and show you how to do it.

Blood and Gloves was a frightening opponent for raw recruits but we always wondered how he would have fared against a real enemy, like a Jap trained from birth in the martial arts.

It was a hot steamy day when we had a demolitions lecture and demonstration under a grove of trees. It was good to get out of the sun for a change. We learned how to safely handle and properly use dynamite, blocks of tri-nitro-toluene (TNT), Composition "C," primacord, blasting caps, fuses, and flashless fuse ignitors. Here we learned that dynamite, a very stable explosive if properly stored and handled, is nothing more than sawdust or a fine clay soaked with nitroglycerine (by itself, a very unstable explosive). Teams of us unwrapped dynamite sticks and stuffed GI socks with the raw dynamite and composition "C." Nitro, absorbed through our sweaty skin, gave us nasty headaches. We smeared the socks with heavy axle grease and jammed fused blasting caps into them.

The finished product was called a sticky grenade. GIs had two other names for it, a "blivit" (derivation unknown) and "two pounds of feces in a one pound bag." The idea was simple. A GI armed with a sticky grenade would crouch in his foxhole as an enemy tank approached, light the fuse with a flashless fuse ignitor, and throw the grenade against the body of the tank. If all went well, the grenade would stick to the body of the tank long enough to explode before it fell off the tank. If it stuck to the tank body, at the moment of explosion it would blast a hole in the tank and the occupants would be killed by shrapnel ricocheting around inside the tank. (No one explained how we would just happen to have a spare GI sock, several pounds of dynamite or composition "C," a blasting cap, a fuse, a fuse ignitor, and a big can of axle grease in our foxhole but the point was ---- improvise!)

The class ended with a practical demonstration. One person from each team got the honor of throwing his team's grenade at a crippled beat-up old half track, from the shelter of a previously prepared trench.

The one thing we worried about was the wisdom of staying in a foxhole as it was about to be run over by a tank. The next day we had an exercise designed to relieve our fears. We marched out to an area where foxholes had already been dug. Each of us was assigned to a hole and given a GI sock to fill with sand, simulating a sticky grenade. As we crouched in our holes, a light tank came straight at us. Someone yelled, "OK, let's see you nail that tank with your blivit."

Most of us threw prematurely and missed the tank completely but "Rebel" Erwin waited until the last second and threw his right at the narrow slit that the tank driver used to see where he was going. It hit the sharp edges of the slit; the bag ripped open; and the tank driver got a face full of sand.

The tank driver saw "Rebel" duck back into his foxhole and headed straight at him. The tanker ran one tread of the tank directly on top of "Rebel's" foxhole and idled for a few seconds then he spun the tank on that tread pouring dirt in on top of him. Bert had a lot of dirt down his collar but eventually emerged unharmed. The demonstration was probably much more effective than originally intended. It became clear to everyone. Stay in your foxhole and let the enemy tanks run over you. You'll be all right.

Every day was a new adventure. Events all ran together in the frantic attempt to make soldiers out of raw recruits and, through it all, I had only one pair of fatigues that got caked with salt and mud and had to be washed every night and put on wet the next day. The supply sergeant at North Camp Hood insisted that Camp Blanding should have issued them and refused to issue another pair.

Two of the most popular items in the Post Exchange (PX) were Chapstick (to protect against the merciless Texas sun) and Kotex. The latter was pinned inside fatigue jackets to protect delicate shoulders against the bruising kick of those Enfield rifles during the long days on the rifle range firing line.

Since our last names were, alphabetically, close together, John Donlan, "Rebel" Erwin, Bob Enterline, Gustav Enyedy, Harrison Griffin, and I often wound up in the same groups organized for one purpose or another. As a result, our friendships grew and we helped one another through the tough parts.

Weekend passes were rare but when they came, two or three of us usually went to "Big D" (Dallas) together and just hung out at Fair Park, a huge amusement park next to the Cotton Bowl. Rebel would wear his Expert marksmanship medal with bars hanging half way down to his waist to impress the girls. After breaking the ice, he even managed to line up a few dates for himself for the following weekend but usually gave someone else's name, rather than his own, because he knew his chances of getting passes two weekends in a row were nil.

During all of this we caught a lot of flack about the AGCT scores we had made. As noted earlier, an AGCT Test score of at least 110 was needed to qualify for Officer Candidate School (OCS) but a score of at least 120 was required for ASTP. We were called the "Hi I's" and must have heard at least a hundred times, "So you guys are supposed to be ten points smarter than an officer --- Well, we'll see about that."

Our Company commander, Capt. Broyles, once dressed us down after a badly performed night reconnaissance exercise, and ended his tirade with, "You are the smartest damn men but the dumbest damn soldiers I have ever encountered in my entire military career."

We were frequently brought in from the obstacle course caked with mud, seated at a desk in an oven-hot barracks, and given additional exams covering every conceivable subject.

At one of those exams I was given a form to pick the college that I wanted to attend.

I picked Duke University.

Our ranks started thinning out as guys were shipped out to parts unknown. Eventually, what started out as a full regiment had dwindled down to less than a battalion and we began to wonder if any of us would make it to ASTP.

After thirteen weeks of hell, basic training ended abruptly. We went on a three-day bivouac and at the end of it we all got our orders. A fairly large contingent including me, "Rebel" Erwin, Harrison Griffin, and some of my other buddies from the first day at Camp Blanding and some new ones from Camp Hood, including John Donlan, Bob Enterline, and Gus Enyedy were going to ASTU 3890 the ASTP Unit at North Texas StateTeachers College in Denton, Texas.

North Texas State Teachers College?????????????

What happened to Duke?

They said I could pick the college I wanted to attend and I had picked Duke University.

I should have read between the lines. They said that I would be permitted to pick the college I wanted to attend, --- but they didn't say that they would actually send me there.

ASTP, Denton, Texas, Winter '43 - Spring '44

Upon our arrival on campus, we were marched in formation to a house that served as headquarters for ASTU 3890. We stood at attention as a Captain, in sharply tailored dress "pinks", followed by a 1st Lieutenant in officer's "greens" stepped out onto the porch. The Captain's cap had an "Air Corps crush" and he wore it with the bill pulled way down over his eyes. He had a swagger stick tucked firmly under his left arm. The similarity to "Blood and Gloves" and his riding crop struck us all.

The Captain introduced himself, "I am Captain Connette. It rhymes with bonnet. I am the Commandant of ASTU 3890."

He said it in a tone that suggested Stalag 17 rather than a college campus.

"This is my adjutant, Lt. Mc Giver."

The 1st Lieutenant nodded.

Captain Connette then said, "If you think, Joe College, that this is going to be a soft assignment, you are wrong, dead wrong."

He then went into a half hour harrangue in which he told us how heavy the class load would be, how many hours we would have to spend each night to keep our heads above water. The little martinette strutted about the front porch occasionally flourishing his swagger stick and whacking his palm sharply for emphasis. He pounded on the point that most of us would flunk out in the first few weeks and would then be sent to the "real" army. He made it clear that this was a military garrison and he intended to run it like one. Captain Connette kept us standing at attention for the whole brow-beating speech. He finished by saying that we looked like a bunch of hoboes and bums and ordered us to have our uniforms custom tailored and pressed before the first formation Monday morning.

" Lt. Mc Giver will assign your quarters."

The captain did an "about face" clinched his swagger stick firmly under his arm and strutted back into the building.

Lt. Mc Giver said, "At ease", and gave us a rundown on the location of the mess hall and other facilities, briefed us on a our room assignments, and then told us that we would be free for the weekend to get our bearings, and explore the campus and Denton. We liked Mc Giver right away.

He then said, softly, "He means it about your uniforms. Get them done by Monday." He then handed out shoulder patches to be sewn on our uniforms. He explained that the patch symbolized the ‘"lamp of learning and the sword of valor", told us where the local tailor shops were located, and dismissed us. Lt. Mc Giver was both a gentleman and a gentle man.

Lt. McChesney, Lt. McGiver, T/5 McCAnn, S/Sgt.Molinaro

Standing next to me during this briefing was Tom Lutze, a fellow of great wit, and instantly likeable. He looked at the new patch and said, "Well, I guess that we are now in the "Gravy Boat and Butter Knife Corps".

Denton wasn't so bad after all. There were about 250 of us in the ASTP unit but there were three or four thousand female students on the North Texas State Teachers College (NTSTC) campus and more than double that number at the Texas State College for Women (TSCW) on the other side of town. Texas is noted for its beautiful women and it seemed like all of them had been assembled in a veritable smorgasbord in Denton.

Captain Connette had told us, in no uncertain terms, about our studies. We would be carrying 24 credit hours plus military instruction, close order drill, and physical ed.

How in the world would we be able to do it all ---- and still have time for those studies?

C'est Moi

The first night at evening mess I discovered that a friend from my hometown, Jack Steptoe, was already there. He immediately filled me in on the layouts of the town and the two campuses, the location of the USO, and other important matters.

We had only been on campus for a week or two when, at our evening retreat formation, Lieutenant McGiver stepped out onto the porch at headquarters and said, "Captain Connette has been assigned to another post. For the moment, at least, I am your new Commandant."

There was a roar of approval from the ranks.

The rumor quickly spread through the unit that Captain Connette had been put in charge of a Prisoner of War (POW) camp somewhere out on the desert. Perhaps a little wishful thinking was behind that rumor.

Major Menefee, Captain Connette's replacement, arrived in a few days. Lt. Mc Giver stayed on as his adjutant. They made a good team.

We were quartered, initially, in near-campus houses, available because the civilian student population had dwindled somewhat due to the war. Chilton Hall, a new men's dormitory, was temporarily occupied by Air Corps Cadets but when they shipped out our

new Commandant, Major Menefee, made a successful pitch to get ASTU 3890 into Chilton, a major improvement over our original quarters.

Chilton Hall

Chilton Hall was a U-shaped two-story dormitory with a quadrangle in the center that was well suited for military formations and close order drill.

Our room assignments in Chilton Hall were along alphabetical lines. My room mates were Bert Erwin, Bob Enterline, and Gustav Enyedy.

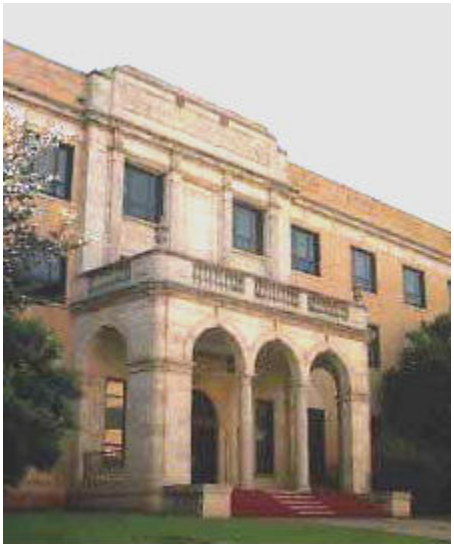
There was a great USO in Denton and we had dances in the North Texas State Gym every weekend. The ASTP unit contained some excellent musicians who organized a band (along the lines of the famous big bands of that era) and they had all of the latest arrangements of Glen Miller, the Dorseys, Benny Goodman, Harry James, Artie Shaw, --- the works ---, so the dances were outstanding.

At one of these dances I spotted an attractive young lady who lived right there in Denton. I thought she might be a good candidate for a Denton "steady" so I danced with her almost every dance. Then it turned out that Jack Steptoe already considered her his own private preserve. Who would have thought that with that many females in Denton, two guys from the same town would both be attracted to the same one?

There was no need for a confrontation over this. With thousands to pick from, I just found another girl, a lovely young lady from Dallas residing on campus in Terrill Hall.

Terrill Hall

There were many lovely young ladies residing on campus. Close to Terrill Hall was Marquis Hall.



Marquis Hall

Within these two halls resided the most marvelous collection of Texas pultritude ever assembled.

We all dreaded the days when our regular Physics professor, Dr. Carrico was absent. On those days, the Department Head, Dr. Black, would take his place. Most of Dr. Black's lectures were given, in a soft voice, while he was facing the blackboard. He held the chalk in his right hand, wrote the formulae chest-high on the board and holding the eraser in his left hand, carefully erased everything before it came into view. We sat there for an hour of his whispering, chalking, and erasing and learned absolutely nothing.

The studies were tough. Some nights there was just not enough time to read all of our assignments. In Physics we were studying heat transfer and one morning Dr. Carrico gave up a pop quiz. One of the questions was, "Define a perfect black body."

One student who obviously had not read the assignment wrote, "Lena Horne."

He got no points for originality.

When I was in high school, I did not realize it at the time but my teachers were excellent, too good, in fact. I found that if I just paid attention I would really learn the subjects being taught so I did not study at home at night and never learned good study habits. At NTSTC I spent many long hours in the library without learning as much as I should have because I had not learned to study efficiently or to take good notes. As a consequence, the courses were difficult for me.

It wasn't that the professors at North Texas State didn't know their subjects. They did, but they were not exceptionally good teachers so I had a hard time with some of the courses.

There was also the problem that some of them had absolutely no sense of humor. Professor Clifton, in particular, an English professor, epitomized this category. He had asked for a paper, any subject, and I had turned in what I thought was an especially witty one. However, he somehow supposed that since we were in uniform, we would write about "Army" things, like how to take apart a rifle. Mine had nothing to do with the Army and he gave me a "C" on the paper ----- no points for humor.

The ASTP program was national in scope. There were units at a large number of colleges and universities. The Army wanted to know not only how well each student was doing compared to all of the other students in the country but, also, how each professor ranked against all of the other professors teaching the same subjects at other colleges so, across the U.S.A., they gave all ASTP students periodic standardized exams.

After the standardized English exam, Professor Clifton was busting his buttons with pride. He announced that the entire class had done well, but two of his students had "set the point," that is, had gotten a 99.9 percentile score on the exam, the highest possible. He then said, "One of these students was Mr. Bingham who has always gotten straight ‘A's in class, and who has contributed prize winning articles to AVESTA, our literary journal, and who has helped the English department in its literary research project and blah, blah, blah, blah, ad nauseam," extolling the virtues of Mr. Bingham and then continued with, "---- and Mr. Evans. -------," He took off his glasses, held them up to the light, and, after spotting a speck or two, polished the lenses using the end of his neck tie.

Professor Clifton continued. "Frankly, Mr. Evans, your class work has given no indication of this level of proficiency in English ------- but, you were sitting on the

opposite side of the room from Mr. Bingham during the examination, so please satisfy my curiosity. How did you do it?"
I replied, "It was very simple, Professor Clifton. They just asked questions that I knew the answers to. If your tests were like that I would ace them, too."

The class had a chuckle at Clifton's expense but he apparently failed to see the humor.

I don't know whether setting the point on that exam had anything to do with it or not. Maybe Professor Clifton saw me in a new light, or maybe I tried a little harder to live up to that score. Whatever the reason, my grades in English ratcheted up from "C"s to "B"s.

In ASTP we marched to and from classes so there was never any possibility of being late to class (unless the entire section was late due to circumstances beyond my control). I didn't really need a watch, but while wandering around Denton I spotted an Omega in a jewelry store window. It was on sale, so, on the spur of the moment, I bought it. Several weeks later, I made the mistake of wearing it while playing intramural basketball. I went in for a layup (which I missed) and when I came down, my wrist slammed into the head of teammate Tom "Big Toe" Lutze. Tom had a huge knot on the top of his head and I had a sprained wrist. My new Omega was a sprinkling of broken crystal, springs, stem and gears all over the basketball court. It was totaled.

In every outfit there is always someone who seems to be just a natural target for everyone's humor. It doesn't take long for the other guys to start picking on him in a hundred subtle (and some not-so-subtle) ways. He either takes it in good humor without complaint or his life is hell. It is up to him.

In ASTU 3890 there was a book worm, a natural target. He was Art Manfredi. In this account Art Manfredi is a composite of several people. The name is fictitious; the events are not.

As previously noted, we had all been to booby trap school at Camp Hood and some of us had developed the fiendish way of thinking needed to be good at it. Bert and Harrison decided to have some fun with Art.

Bert came up with the first idea.

From Professor Spurlock's chemistry classes we knew that iron pyrites (iron sulfide) and sulfuric acid, when mixed, produced hydrogen sulfide, a gas smelling like rotten eggs. On the wooden crosspiece of Art's bunk a few inches below his mattress spring, Bert placed a small glass dish containing sulfuric acid. Then he suspended a chunk of iron pyrites under Art's bedspring with a short piece of fiberglass string so it did not quite touch the acid.

When Art got into his bunk for the night the pyrites dipped into the acid and started generating hydrogen sulfide, filling his room with the smell of rotten eggs. Naturally, his roommates blamed Art for the foul odor. Art got up and opened the windows and aired out the room and, of course, without his weight on the mattress the pyrites were lifted up out of the acid and stopped generating the gas.

He eventually closed the windows, got back in his bunk, the pyrites dipped down into the acid again, and the drama replayed. This happened over and over all night.

This kept Manfredi up all night but he eventually caught on that the awful stench started every time he got back into his bunk. He checked underneath and found the booby trap but had no idea who had done it to him so he could not retaliate.

Then it was Harrison Griffin's turn. He caught a tiny little dog that was in heat and being chased all over the quadrangle by about fifty other dogs of all shapes and sizes. Waiting until Manfredi was sound asleep. Harrison slid under the target's bunk and tied the dog way back in the corner. We then opened all of the dormitory doors leading to his room.

Manfredi woke up to find his room full of barking dogs and they were jumping all over him. As soon as he opened the door to push one dog out two more would wiggle in. His room mates, of course, were in on the gag so they did nothing to help him. They just yelled at him.

Eventually, he noticed that the dogs were only jumping all over his bunk and, remembering the rotten eggs, checked underneath. He didn't see her at first but eventually found the little bitch tied under there and managed to get her out of the dorm.

Manfredi was harassed in dozens of other ways. The Library was a favorite spot for these assaults on his dignity. One trick that worked several times was to stuff an embarrassing object (like a Kotex left over from our days on the rifle range) up the sleeve of his field jacket and tie it securely to the wrist strap. When, at the end of the Library session, he put on his jacket, the object dangled and flopped around and generally attracted attention to itself.The other sleeve had the wrist strap wrapped several times around and rebuttoned, sealing off the wrist and imprisoning his other hand making it virtually impossible to quickly remove the offending thing. Luckily, for Art, we soon turned our attention to other targets.

Gus Enyedy's pranks were directed at general rather than specific targets. One of them was an automatic "hot foot." He sealed some sulfuric acid in a bent piece of glass tubing, put it in an envelope along with some potassium chlorate and set it on a concrete surface where someone was likely to step on it before they saw it. When the unsuspecting victim stepped on the envelope the glass broke, the acid hit the potassium chlorate and large amounts of heat, light, and smoke were generated. It certainly made the recipient of the hot foot jump in alarm and at night it was quite spectacular.

Stuart Friedman was a man who liked his sleep so, one cold morning, he fell out at 06:00 for reveille with only his overcoat and boots on --- and nothing else, expecting to jump back in the sack until breakfast at 08:00. He was in the front rank. Before we were called to attention, the man on one side of him (It may have been Bob Enterline, my roommate) said, "Friedman's got nothing on under his coat, let's take it off."

I was standing behind Friedman in the second rank. Stuart locked his hands together and swung his elbow at the guy on his right. He missed him and his momentum carried him completely around and his elbow smashed my nose over onto the left side of my face. By this time, he was facing me and, reflexively, my left fist shot out and caught him squarely on his beak and dropped him. The whistle blew and we stood reveille with two profusely bleeding noses. After reveille we headed for the dispensary together apologizing to one another along the way. My nose was broken and is still a little lopsided on my face. I never told him this but if I had been one of the two GIs on either side of him I would have tried to take his coat off so I sort of deserved what I got. (No Purple Heart for that injury.)

It was not all fun and games at North Texas State. Twenty-four credit hours plus the military time was a heavy load to carry and some of the guys flunked out. Actually, they didn't all flunk out, some were victims of North Texas State's ignorance of how we got there and how the Army perceived our grades.

North Texas State had civilians taking the same subjects as we were taking and they were graded on the curve. However, what they did not realize was while the civilian students represented a normal (bell curve) distribution, the ASTP students had been through a rigorous selection process that eliminated the lower two thirds of a normal bell curve distribution so the Army expected us to make only "A"s and "B"s. When NTSTC tried to grade us on a curve it didn't work. Students doing a level of work that would normally have earned a "B" found themselves pushed down into the "C," "D," and "F" end of a badly skewed bell curve. Recognizing that something was wrong they tried to combine us with the civilian students for grading purposes, and we pushed most of the civilian student population down into the "D" and "F" end of the curve so they gave up on that.

Meanwhile, we got numerical grades that were scaled in a somewhat arbitrary manner. NTSTC considered 70 to be a low "C," a passing grade, but the Army considered 75 to be a "D" and they considered a "C" to be the lowest passing grade. A "D" wouldn't cut it. The bottom line was that a lot of guys busted out of ASTP when both they and the college administration thought that they were getting passing grades.

There came a day, in the Spring of 1944, when none of this really mattered anymore. All good things come to an end and the Army decided that it had an urgent need for more Infantry troops. The ASTP programs were summarily terminated at many colleges and most of us were shipped out to infantry divisions.

We Get The Bad News
15 March 1944, Chilton Hall Quadrangle, Denton,Texas,
Major Menefee, Lt. Forsee, Dr. Dickey-Registrar, NTSTC,
Lt.McGiver, Dr. McConnell-President NTSTC

At North Texas State Teachers College they had put our feet to the flames of the "Lamp of Knowledge" and we were about to find out about the "Sword of Valor". In the upcoming months, many of the young men of this unit would be severly tested in combat and decorated for valor.

We had a military ball in the NTSTC Gym and one bittersweet party in the dining room with just the ASTP candidates and the faculty. It was a good party, one that I will never forget. There were comedy skits, a great jam session by some of ASTP's finest musicians, singing of the oldies but goodies, and some new songs including "Pistol Packin' Mama" that we had converted into a fine marching song back at Camp Hood, and one or two maudlin speeches by faculty members that we did not let dampen the spirit of the party. We concluded by singing "Let's Give a Cheer for North Texas State" (the NTSTC fight song) and "The Eyes of Texas are Upon You," then "God Bless America," and the party was over.

Well, that was it; our ASTP unit was broken up. Because of my electronics knowledge and the fact that I could already copy Morse code at better than 15 words a minute, thanks to Morton Ross, I was shipped to nearby Camp Howze, Texas and assigned to the

103d Infantry Division Signal Company as a radio operator, without ever attending an Army radio school. John Donlan also went to the Signal Company as a radio operator because he had been in an Amateur Radio Club while in high school.

Most of the other men in ASTU 3890, including Tom Lutze, Bob Enterline, Gus Enyedy, Harrison Griffin, and "Rebel" Erwin, were also assigned to the 103d Division but ended up in infantry rifle companies. I did not know it at the time but our ride to Camp Howze was the last time I would see Bob, Gus, Rebel, and Harrison for the duration of the war. In fact, I would not see either Rebel or Harrison for more than thirty years. --- And I did not see Bob Enterline or Gus Enyedy for more than fifty.

Morton Ross, my grade school and high school friend, through his friendship, resourcefulness, and unbounded enthusiasm for new things had guided me unerringly from the 5th grade school ground, to chemistry, to the cigar box radio to support our chemical labs, thence to electronics, and finally to the Morse code practice table. Morton was the focal point of a multitude of little things that culminated in my being able to send and receive Morse code at 15 words per minute. This resulted in my assignment to the 103d Infantry Division Signal Company.

Had I not been able to copy Morse code, I hate to speculate as to what road I might have followed after ASTU 3890 was broken up. It could very well have been a short one. My friends Harrison Griffin, "Rebel" Erwin, Bob Enterline, and Gus Enyedy all ended up in rifle companies and managed to survive although "Rebel" was "wounded" by the severe winter weather. He spent months in a military hospital with frozen feet. He had what was called "trench foot." After recovery, Rebel became a successful dentist in Winter Haven, Florida. Harrison Griffin became an attorney and eventually a County Judge in Deland, Florida. John Donlan, Bob Enterline, Gus Enyedy, and I all enjoyed successful engineering careers. Stuart Friedman was severely wounded and lost a leg but survived. He became a professor. Other ASTPers, among them Tom Lutze and other class mates not mentioned elsewhere, Harold Class, Harold Burkhard, Bayard "BD" Dodge, Carl Christensen, Daniel Gasch, Al Lamb, Bill Lang, Ed Luebke, and John Seay, were not so lucky and did not make it back home.

I will forever be in Morton Ross' debt for the major role he played leading to my Signal Company assignment. It may have saved my life.

Morton's Time in Service

Morton had an interesting Naval career. He was sent to the college of his choice in the V-12 program, spent the entire war studying engineering and walked across a platform to receive his engineering degree, his commission in the Navy, and his Navy discharge, in that order.

He had obviously checked the right box.

PAPA'S WAR, PART 2

Camp Howze, Texas,
The 103d Infantry Division Signal Company

It was cold when we arrived at Camp Howze. We were put up in identical tar-paper shacks to those at Camp Hood, but unlike the searing heat of Camp Hood, these were like refrigerators. We spent a lot of time feeding the potbelly stoves at the ends of each barracks trying to get warm.

It hadn't mattered in ASTP because we wore either Class-B uniforms or our Class-A dress uniforms every day, but now, I had to drag my single pair of fatigues out of my barracks bags. The Signal Company supply sergeant refused to issue a second pair, insisting that I should have gotten them in Camp Blanding. It was miserable washing them every night and putting them on, not only wet but cold, every morning.

Otherwise, life at Camp Howze was much like basic training all over again except that we got weekend passes more often and I usually headed straight for "Little D"(Denton). The USO was still my home away from home and I knew a lot of the

college girls who came there on the weekends. That made Camp Howze a bit more bearable than Camp Hood.

Back at Howze, we endured much of the rigorous training that had typified life at Camp Hood. There was a difference, however. Every aspect of the training seemed much more serious --- and it was.

Clearly, the 103d Infantry Division, also known as the "Cactus Division" because of the circular patch worn on our shoulder showing a green cactus against a yellow sky, was headed for one of the theaters of war. It had already gone through intensive training at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana and had been through lengthy maneuvers involving many other units before coming to Camp Howze.

Of all of the buddies who survived the ASTP wars at North Camp Hood and North Texas State Teachers College, only John Donlan and I ended up in the 103d Signal Company, but we were joined by other ASTPers from colleges all over Texas and elsewhere. We were also joined by Air Corps cadets unceremoniously dumped into the infantry division.

We did not know whether we were going to fight against Japan or Germany but The 103d Infantry Division was getting ready to fight *someone*. Everyone paid a lot closer attention to instructions. What we learned now might someday save our lives.

The 103d "Cactus" Division was commanded by a spit-and-polish officer, Major General Charles C. Haffner, who was strong on discipline and military courtesy.

Major General Charles C. Haffner

The notorious Courtesy Patrols sent into nearby "Big D" (Dallas), "Little D" (Denton), and Ft.Worth hoping to catch a GI without a good shine on his shoes, or with a button unbuttoned, or failing to salute an officer, had slim pickings as far as the 103d was concerned.

Officers on these Courtesy Patrols often found it necessary to lurk deep in the recesses of darkened store fronts and then jump out and nail some hapless GI for failing to salute him as he passed by. Or, they would pop out from around a corner and lift a GI's pass for not saluting soon enough, "recognition distance" being, on a sunny day, one to two blocks.

Two could play the saluting game and many GIs from the 103d Division took great delight in playing it their way. The enlisted man's motto became,"Seek out officers and, when you find them, salute them."

A group of GIs on pass got a lot of pleasure from stringing out in a long line and forcing an officer to return each of their salutes, individually.

Those of us in the Signal Company who were designated as vehicle drivers were issued short coats instead of the long overcoats normally worn by enlisted men. Those short coats, resembling, in the dark, the short coats worn by officers, often drew salutes at "recognition distance," sometimes as much as a block away, even at night. 103d GIs were taking no chances. Those coats caused the men of the 103d to

have strong right arms from saluting not only officers, but every enlisted man encountered after dark who happened to be a driver.

One day we marched ten miles out into the desert to watch a demonstration of artillery in action. All of the 103d Division's artillery plus the regimental cannon companies aided by tanks and tank destroyers clobbered a hill with their firepower. It was good to know that we could do that but the realization that the enemy had the same capability was sobering.

After that, when we dug foxholes, we dug them a lot deeper than we did in basic training.

We were not an airborne division but we trained to be air and glider transportable. We loaded and unloaded C-47 cargo and troop carrying planes and CG-4A gliders. Everyone hoped that those skills would never have to be put to use.

C-47 Cargo/ Troop Carrier **CG-4A Glider**

One evening while we were standing in the chow line, a crow with a broken wing hobbled into the area. Some of the guys saved some bread crusts and threw them to him so he adopted us and hung around the company while his wing healed.

He liked bright things. Someone threw him a new penny and he grabbed it, fluttered away and hid it somewhere. Others followed suit and soon he was collecting pennies, nickels, and dimes at every chow line.

A couple of us in the Radio barracks found out where the crow was hiding his loot (behind a cement block supporting one of the barracks) so we "salted the mine," so to speak, by flipping a few coins to him to get things started while standing in the chow line. Others did the same and we picked up about a buck's worth of change every night. However, we never took his entire hoard for fear that he would find a new place to hide the money.

Inspections in the motor pool involved, among other things, the laying out of a canvas on which was stenciled the outline of each tool in the vehicle's tool kit. Warrant Officer Edwin St.Cin, Motor Pool Officer, hit several drivers with statements of charges for the loss of small tools until one Saturday when, during the inspection, the crow was seen by all struggling to drag a wrench about as long as he was (and probably twice as heavy) across the motor pool. They let him go to see what he did with the wrench and watched where he hid it. Upon checking the stash all of the missing wrenches were recovered, to the relief of all concerned.

The Radio Section reported to Master Sergeant Emil Boitos. We called him "The Buddha." There was a group of us who were not high on the Buddha's list of favorite people. He, aided and abetted by Tech Sergeant Arnold Schumacher, gave us all the dirty details, the coolie labor, so we started referring to ourselves as "The Coolies." We hung around together when there was nothing else to do (which wasn't often) and at times two or three "coolies" would go on passes together. We also pulled a lot of KP together.

One weekend, while on a pass in Little D, I went to the USO where a dance was in progress. While there, I was shooting the breeze with several former ASTPers from North Texas State. One of them recognized a coed and broke in to dance with her. In a few minutes he returned, splitting his sides with laughter.

He said, "You are not going to believe this one." ---- And then he explained, "I don't know if you knew this, but I didn't. After they shut down ASTP they turned Chilton Hall into a women's dorm. She now lives there. She said that they love the dorm except for their complaint that all of the ASTPers must have had athlete's foot really bad because every girl in the dorm now has it.

Then she told me that what they like most about Chilton Hall are the special basins in the lavatories for washing your hair. When she described them to me I said, 'You've been washing your HAIR in those? Sweetie, you are going to have more than athlete's foot. You are going to have athlete's HEAD. Those things are NOT for washing your hair; they are urinals.' I swear, I thought she was going to pee right on the dance floor. She took off and I think she is in the lady's rest room rinsing her hair out, right now."

One of the Radio Section GIs, Bob Rushing, had his weapon field stripped on his bunk and was diligently cleaning all of the parts. The crow flew into the barracks and landed on the foot of Rushing's bunk. He sat there with his head cocked watching every move but one small bright spring caught his eye and his attention kept coming back to it. He hopped off the end of the bunk and made a grab at the spring. At the same instant Rushing made a grab for the crow but missed. The crow flew straight for the door but did not have a good grip on the spring. Rushing took a swipe at him with a broom; the crow got out the door with Rushing in pursuit; the next swipe of the broom caught his tail feathers and he dropped the spring. Rushing came slowly back into the barracks carefully wiping off the spring only to find that the crow had flown to the other end of the barracks, in the door, straight to Rushing's bunk and crapped right on his pillow before escaping the way it had come in.

You cannot convince me that that crow was not every bit as smart as Bob Rushing.

Dalton R. Coffman also lived in the Radio Section barracks. He could not have had the slightest inkling that a few trivial actions on his part would have a profound impact on my life.

It probably started much earlier but the first time I noticed his somewhat unusual behavior was when he walked past my bunk as we were preparing for a barracks inspection one morning and bounced a quarter off my bunk. "Pretty good," he mumbled and, returning to his own bunk, bounced the quarter off of it. Apparently satisfied, he pocketed the quarter.

Eventually, I noticed that he was making other comparisons. The GI shoes (combat boots) that we wore at that time had the smooth side of the leather inside to make them more comfortable. The rough outside could not be polished so the prescribed treatment was to waterproof them with "dubbing," a Govt. Issue concoction made with goose grease and similar water repellent substances. When properly applied, it went into all of the stitching and creases to keep the insides of the shoes dry in all kinds of weather.

Now, I could understand someone comparing how well his shoes were polished relative to mine, but comparing the dubbing seemed a bit much.

At first, I surmised that he just wanted to be a good soldier and was making comparisons of one thing or another with everyone else in the barracks to make certain that he was measuring up. It soon became apparent, however, that he had singled me out and it began to get a little annoying, even though, I must admit, he never actually pointed out that he thought his was a little better than mine, whatever the comparison.

It even reached the point where he would bring his shirts and trousers on hangers and check to see if they were pressed as well as mine.

I could have understood all of this if I had been a Gung Ho "spit-and-polish" soldier but I was not. I was just an ordinary GI doing what I had to do to get by, so why me?

With hindsight, I suspect that his father told him that it was in his best interest, while in the Army, to aspire to mediocrity, to get lost in the middle of the pack and not be "the best that he could be" or the worst either. The worst get all of the dirty details and the best get shoved out in front to be reluctant heroes. Neither was an appealing prospect. I must have been the best example of mediocrity he could find.

Eventually, I decided to see just how far he would go with this. The opportunity came when we went on a 25-mile hike. I made certain he saw me pick up a large rock in each hand and carry them for the full 25 miles. At the outset, he asked why I was carrying the rocks and I answered, "endurance." Damned if Coffman didn't pick up two rocks just a little larger than mine and carry his for the full 25 miles, too. God, they were heavy. I thought that my arms would fall off before we finally got back to camp but I was not about to get rid of them and he carried his without complaint and never mentioned the incident to me.

I have no idea how far this would have gone if the 103d hadn't embarked for Europe. However, Dalton reappears and the story picks up again at the point where the war in Europe had ended and we have returned to the U.S.A. It is there that the Dalton R. Coffman saga reaches its climax.

The 103d Signal Company had among its complement one of the Army's legends. Everyone in the army has heard about the soldier who camouflaged his truck so well that he couldn't find it.

The story gets embellished somewhat in each retelling and usually the teller cannot give the soldier a name.

The truth is that it really happened; the soldier really has a name; and his name is Art Vernon.

The incident occurred before the 103d Division came to Camp Howze. It was during the maneuvers at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. Part of the military problem on this particular day was a camouflage exercise.

Art had paid close attention to the instructions regarding the camouflaging of trucks. He smeared mud on his headlights, covered his windshield with O.D. canvas, and cut large and small branches to hide his 2-1/2 ton truck. He was careful to place the branches topside up and smeared mud on the cut ends so the white freshly cut wood could not be readily spotted. Then he backed away from the truck sweeping the grass that had been pressed down by his wheels back into a vertical position. He did this all the way back to the rutted dirt road that he had turned off of to hide his vehicle and headed down the road to get chow.

After eating, he headed back toward his truck but couldn't find it. The longer he looked, the more panicky he became. What would the Company Commander do to him if he couldn't find it? Captain Bernard Beck was a strict disciplinarian, known for dealing out excessively harsh punishment for relatively minor infractions. "My God," he thought, "For losing a truck? What?"
He searched farther and farther from the rutted road with no luck and soon came out of the woods into a paved road where he flagged down a jeep containing a lieutenant and a T/5 driver. He explained that he could not find his truck and the lieutenant told him not to worry, the driver had probably moved it.

Art said, "No way. I am the driver."

The lieutenant offered to take him to the Division Command Post and he suggested that he contact the Company Commander from there, which Art did.

Captain Beck blew a fuse.

A detail was organized to go find the truck but they returned empty handed. Eventually, most of the Signal Company spent the better part of a day looking for the truck. Some had actually come within a few feet of it without finding it but finally, someone found it, much to Art Vernon's relief.

However, Captain Beck was not finished. Despite Art's pleading that he had done nothing wrong (after all, the purpose of the camouflage exercise was to make the vehicles hard to spot, and Art had done that to perfection) he was given company punishment consisting of digging six by six by six holes every night for a week, after the normal training day was over.

Another soldier on company punishment for a minor infraction was given the job of guarding Art and making certain that he kept digging all night.

Art dug one 6 by 6 by 6 on each of the first two nights. When Beck came out around midnight of the second night to make certain that his orders were being carried out, he almost fell into one of the holes so he ordered Art to fill them up before digging any new holes.

After that, Art just faked digging in one of his old holes and Beck never realized that the digging was being done at the same spot in the woods every night. Digging out the old hole was much easier than digging a new one so the guard, who thought that it was ridiculous to punish Art for doing everything right, suggested that Art get a little sleep down in the hole and he would wake him up if anyone came around, which he did. Beck never found out that Art only dug two holes in the Louisiana hardpan and the rest of the nights just shoveled some loose sand in and out of the same hole.

The radio operators all worried about the "carry-all" vehicles in which our SCR-193 radio sets were installed. They were like station wagons but had no side windows, no tail gate, and only one door on the passenger side. The SCR-193 was installed along the side behind the driver and the operator sat sideways facing the set. The passenger-side seat had to be pushed forward in order to get to the radio set in the back of the vehicle or to get out. We were concerned that if we got ourselves into an emergency, there was no easy way out of them. They were nicknamed the "Rolling Coffins."

The 103d Division was on maneuvers in the Red River Valley during the first week in June 1944, but our radio team stayed at Camp Howze and acted as the Division Headquarters radio in the Division Command Network.

We made up messages to send to the various stations in the network simulating administrative traffic. Then the news broke. It was June 6th, D-Day, and the troops in the field didn't know anything about it so instead of making up messages, I encoded news reports about the landings on Normandy, the number of ships, planes, troops, news about the progress being made inland. It was an exciting day but it brought the war suddenly right into our truck and we knew that it would not be long before we would be involved directly in it.

After D-Day our training intensified and all worn out clothing and equipment were replaced with new gear.

Finally, I was issued a second set of fatigues. What luxury, not having to put on wet fatigues every morning.

Civilians in Gainesville right outside the main gate of Camp Howze proclaimed that the Division was to be sent to Camp Shanks and the New York Port of Embarkation.

As it turned out, they were, as usual, well-informed. In early August the division was alerted for overseas duty and I got a short furlough home.

It was evident that it was now just a matter of weeks before we would say goodbye to Camp Howze. There was an excitement and a flurry of activity throughout the Division as all of the units and the officers and men started to follow the official instructions and procedures for the troop movement and each individual began putting his own personal affairs in order --- preparing wills, sending home excess clothes, personal gear, pictures, etc.

Tensions ran high. We had to let off a little steam.

One night, we had a company beer party in the mess hall. After a lot of singing and merrymaking, Joseph M. Patterson from the Message Center Section asked for a volunteer to be hypnotized. He explained that if you didn't want to be hypnotized that he couldn't do it but if you were willing to try, he might be able to hypnotize you because he had done it before. John "Andy" Anderson, a wiry little guy from the Radio Section, volunteered.

Patterson managed to get him under, told him to behave like an ape, and pretended to hand him a banana. Anderson went through the motions of peeling and eating the banana and scratching himself under his arms. He then sat on his haunches with his knuckles dragging on the ground and grimaced while making ape-like sounds. Patterson got him to do a number of ape-like things that were quite amusing. Everyone thought that Anderson was putting on an act. Suddenly Anderson leaped onto one of the tables then up to the rafters and swung from rafter to rafter up and down the mess hall. Patterson finally got him down, offered him his hand and headed for the latrine (by this time, the beer was applying a little pressure). Anderson grabbed a couple of fingers and followed Patterson, loping along with his other knuckle dragging on the ground. Patterson stopped at the latrine door and told him, "Wait here."

When Patterson came out of the latrine he was talking to someone and forgot all about Anderson. After a few more beers, Patterson headed back to his barracks and sacked out. Meanwhile, Anderson was still sitting on his haunches where Patterson had left him. Early in the morning someone spotted him still hunkered down outside

the latrine and, assuming that he'd had a couple of beers too many, tried to get him up and back to the Radio barracks. Anderson resisted and after help was obtained he resisted ferociously. Under hypnosis he had been told to wait there and he damned well was not going to move.

Six of us, thinking that he was drunk, carried him kicking, biting, and screaming into the shower and turned on the cold water, to no avail. There were three of us on each arm but he slammed us around that shower like rag dolls. Summoning extra help, we took him to the Radio barracks and put mattresses around the walls so he wouldn't hurt himself and forcefully confined him to that end of the barracks until the medics came in an ambulance and took him away. Meanwhile, Patterson was sound asleep, oblivious to everything that was going on.

It took several days for the medics to figure out what was wrong with Anderson and eventually they got him un-hypnotized, perhaps with Patterson's help, I don't know. When he got back, he acted like nothing had happened but there were several blank pages in his life and I don't know whether he ever figured out what happened during those days when he was still under hypnosis and susceptible to post hypnotic suggestion. I hope no one "suggested" anything untoward.

As a result of this event, we got one of the strangest notices ever to appear on the 103d Division Signal Company bulletin board. It ordered that effective that day and thereafter, amateur hypnotism was prohibited in the company area.

As departure time drew nearer, we became a highly disciplined machine.

Naturally, all noncoms were expected to know exactly how to report to an officer and to do so whenever the circumstances demanded it. When the ASTP troops arrived to fill out the ranks of the division, all of the slots above the rank of private were filled so we expected to remain privates for a while. Promotions were a long way off for most of us.

Earlier arrivals at the 103d Division had moved from private to PFC or from private to Technician 5th Grade (T/5). A T/5 was pretty far down the totem pole. T/5s rarely, if ever, had others reporting to him and most of us did not really considered T/5s to be noncoms.

However, --------- Let's set the scene.

At Camp Howze, The Signal Company Radio School was directly across the street from Division Headquarters. A code practice class was taking a ten minute break behind the school. The students were mainly privates from throughout the division including some from the Signal Company. The instructor noncoms were all inside the school setting up for the next session.

At this moment, Major General Charles C. Haffner, Jr., Division Commander, decided to stretch his legs and strolled across the street and behind the school. The students were all smoking and shooting the breeze. Having a major general suddenly appear in their midst was the last thing on anyone's mind. Someone finally noticed him and called "Ten-Hut!" The students all jumped to attention, many trying to figure out what to do with their half-smoked cigarettes. Everyone looked around to see who had to report.

Seated on the ground around the corner of the building, and out of sight, was one of the students, T/5 Fred Horne, Radio Section, 103d Signal Company. Upon hearing the commotion he got to his feet, strolled back to see what was going on, and came face to face with General Haffner. Haffner was fuming, waiting for someone to report to him. Horne looked around and saw that he was the highest ranking person there (other than the general) so he ran up and saluted. He managed to stutter his name, rank and serial number but then got tongue tied and just stammered some gibberish. The general finally got out of him that he was from the 103d Signal Company and incorrectly inferred that he was in charge. Horne didn't have the foggiest notion where to even start to explain who these GIs were and what they were doing there.

None of his buddies blamed T/5 Horne for what happened to us that night. He was just a victim of circumstances.

General Haffner dressed down the Division Signal Officer (DSO), Lt. Col. Carolus A. Brown, and Capt. Bernard Beck, Company Commander of the 103d Signal Company got severely braced by the DSO because of the poor discipline and lack of military courtesy in his company. Beck vowed that never again would any soldier in his company fail to report properly regardless of circumstances.

That night a formation was called after evening mess. We were marched out to the field where telephone poles were set in the ground for Signal Company linemen to practice on. A line of GIs was formed facing each of the poles and about a hundred feet away.

The order was given, "Squat!" --- We squatted. Then --- "Ten-Hut!" --- We jumped to attention. "Report!" The man at the head of each line ran to his designated telephone pole, saluted the pole, and reported to it, by the book, name, rank, serial number, exactly what we were doing there, and why. An officer was designated to observe at each pole. If anyone faltered, he returned to the front of his line and repeated the process until he got it right and then returned to the rear of the line.

This process was rough on the legs and continued until well past midnight but when it was over there was no one in the 103d Signal Company who did not know how to report to a telephone pole (unless he happened to be on KP, on Guard Duty, or on

leave that night). However, It is a matter of conjecture whether we became any more proficient reporting to officers as a result of that exercise.

Every day, we policed the area until we thought our backs would break. Anything that did not belong there was picked up and thrown into the trash bin.

The Sergeants would yell, "I don't want to see anything but your butts and your elbows! Now police up them cigarette shorts and match stumps!" ------- But they seldom said it that politely. If it was too big to pick up we painted it white and if it moved we saluted it.

Some ex-103d GIs have to reluctantly tell their grandchildren that they spent D-Day white washing the rocks in the company area.

As September rolled around, we started having showdown inspections, one right after the other. God help the GI who, after the first inspection was missing anything or had one more of anything than he was supposed to have.

We crated all of the heavy signal equipment. The barracks were scrubbed down with GI soap one last time and boarded up. Then we climbed into trucks for the trip to the troop trains, transferred, and the trains pulled out----destination Camp Shanks, N.Y.

The Troop Train to Camp Shanks

We did not share this train with any civilians. The cars had been designed and built for transporting troops. Every man had his own bunk. There were special mess cars for the sole purpose of feeding the troops. They were not meant to be aesthetic. They were sterile, functional, and efficient.

The food prepared on the trains was not bad. We had nothing much to do except eat, clean our weapons, and talk. We spent most of the trip speculating about whether we were bound for Europe or the Pacific. Camp Shanks favored Europe, but the Army sometimes tried to confuse the enemy by sending troops in a direction that seemed to suggest one theater of war and then actually send them to another.

To further confuse the enemy, we had to remove all identifying insignia from our uniforms. The Cactus shoulder patches came off our uniforms and would not be sewn back on until we reached our destination, wherever that might be.

Whether to confuse us or the enemy we could not be sure, but we were issued copies of French and German phrase books. That action seemed to favor Europe.

The troop trains bore relentlessly eastward and the longer we headed in that direction the more it looked like Europe.

The skeptics, however, pointed out that ships could leave New York and still go to the Pacific via the Panama Canal so we were not absolutely certain. We would just have to wait and see.

Camp Shanks, New York, Port of Embarkation

Camp Shanks was decidedly different from Camp Howze. The barracks were not all black tar paper shacks like Camp Howze. They were dull shades of brown, green, yellow and a number of other nondescript colors, as one GI put it, "Every known shade of fecal matter." Maybe they were color coded for a reason but none of us was able to crack the code.

Everything at Camp Shanks was done in a hurry. The war was not going to wait for us any longer.

We were double timed to a gymnasium. In the gym, tables were arranged in a rough oval. A doctor was seated at each table (some just had chairs) and each doctor checked only one thing. We stripped to our bare butts and double timed around the oval to each doctor. One looked at our eyes, another in our ears, another up our noses. We bent over in front of one and turned our heads and coughed in front of another. Each doctor checked a box on the paper that each of us carried around the oval. If you were still warm when you completed the cycle, you had passed the physical.

Eventually, we arrived at two pairs of tables. We were supposed to stop between two tables and get our overseas shots, one in each arm. While two medics were giving one set of shots, the two medics at the second pair of tables were reloading, getting ready for the next man.

One poor GI thought that he was going to get just one shot and was watching one arm when the second medic gave him the shot in his other arm. It took him by

surprise. He turned around and said, "Hey, What are you doing?" and backed up a step right between the second two tables. By this time, the two medics at these tables had reloaded and, seeing two fresh arms, hit him again with a second set of shots.

He was so ill that he spent the entire trip over in sick bay being fed intravenously. Compared to what some of us got to eat on the way over that doesn't sound too bad.

I got into New York City once before we embarked, ate at Jack Dempsey's Restaurant, saw Charlie Barnett's orchestra, and caught the show at Radio City Music Hall --- or was it the Roxie Theater? Rockettes or Roxiettes ---- all I remember is wall to wall legs.

The next morning, October 5th, 1944 is a blur but we would somehow get to the docks and loaded onto the troop transports that would take us to ------ where?

While at Camp Shanks, the men of the Signal Company rearranged some of the company equipment and records and re-packed them into a form better suited for transportation overseas.

There were constructed or re-constructed a number of portable record and equipment boxes or chests which were large and heavy. The installation of handles on almost any sized box supposedly made it "portable" as far as the Army was concerned.

All who saw these threatening burdens hoped never to be called upon to help with their lifting and transport, --- handles or not.

Each Signal Company soldier's personal equipment was formed into a backpack that looked like that of the French Foreign Legion troops. There was a horseshoe shaped blanket roll strapped around the G.I. musette bag with its supporting shoulder straps. This combination of unwieldy and unbalanced weight was very difficult to manage on the trip from the barracks, on and off the train, and then across a long pier and up and into a very crowded ship.

I don't remember whether it happened at Howze or Shanks, but somewhere along the way, our "A" and "B" barracks bags were replaced by a single large duffel bag. This made it easier (by an infinitesimal amount) to board our troop train.

In addition to his backpack, each soldier carried (or pulled) his fully loaded duffel bag, his rifle and a few miscellaneous pieces of field equipment.

CWO Howard Hopple, Assistant Supply Officer, and others from 103d Division Headquarters had gone ahead of the main troop train to New York. They were headquartered on Long Island and were told to get all of the company records in trucks down into the hold of the Queen Mary, the Cunard liner converted to a speedy troop ship. Hopple did as instructed. But a day or so later there was a change of orders. The party was now instructed to go back down into the Queen Mary and retrieve those records.

So, we are left with the thought that we were headed toward England, originally, and probably would have wound up in the 1st, 3d, or 9th Armies, instead of the 7th. Also, it would have been a very crowded, but speedy, and less choppy trip across the Atlantic, and, ultimately, a much different set of experiences for all of us --- but that was not to be.

It was Saturday. Loaded down, we marched off to the train at noon and struggled aboard. The train chugged down past little Hudson towns to the 42nd Street Ferry.

Some of the guys from the midwest had never seen anything bigger than a row boat and thought that we were going all the way to Europe or wherever on the ferry. They were apprehensive about its seaworthiness.

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The Atlantic Crossing Aboard the Henry T. Gibbons

Dripping sweat, we crowded onto the ferry for the short ride across the Hudson to the troop-loading piers. Those duffel bags were heavy!

We entered the North River Port of Embarkation (P.O.E.) Terminal Building and waited for what seemed like forever. Then, we trudged out onto an open dock, and up the gangplank of our ship, The USAT Henry T. Gibbons, sounding off our first names and middle initials when our last names were called.

The order of ascending the gangplank of the ship had been prearranged and printed on a very long list - each soldier had a definite place and number in the "Boarding Order". It was not alphabetical; it appeared to be arranged by operating sections of the Signal Company.

The men of the Construction Section were the last of the Signal Company to board.

This created two unusual situations for them. One concerned the baggage that they carried aboard and the other was their location during the voyage.

When all of us assembled in "boarding order" as shown by large letters and numbers chalked on our helmets, some of the men of the Construction Section found themselves standing next to the dreaded "portable boxes" at the beginning of the long trek down the dock. Those hapless soldiers became responsible for carrying the company records and equipment in addition to their own personal baggage.

The order to execute was simple, "You men, right here; drop your duffel bags and grab the handles of them boxes; and you men, cringing over there, pick up the extra duffel bags, and all of your own equipment, and all of you make your way, as best you can, down this here long dock, and up into that there ship!"

The whole miserable process of getting down the dock, up the gang-plank, and to the storage place for the boxes was a terrible ordeal for the Construction Section.

It was a time to be grateful for the fact that we were in the Radio Section.

But it got a little better for the intrepid Construction Section. When they finally did get on the ship, they learned that the only available space for them would be in cabins on one of the top decks of the ship. Yes, there is a God.

Somewhere between 20 and 40 men of the Construction Section were assigned to 3 or 4 cabins with built-in bunks with mattresses and all the comforts of a cruise ship. There were army cots placed on the open floor spaces and some rotation of the men between the cots and the mattresses, but it was absolute heaven compared to the condition of the lucky Radio Section men assigned to "the hole" below decks.

It was a hot, crowded walk, down to "H" deck, pushing, shoving, and stumbling around to find a bunk. I found a lower bunk and laid my aching back down to rest. The lower bunk seemed like a good idea at the time but later turned out to be a poor choice.

The Construction men with the extra duffel bags belonging to the box carriers got them as far as the upper deck of the ship and then started down the passageways into the bowels of the ship before they abandoned the bags.

This created chaos in finding the misplaced bags again. Some didn't locate their duffel bags for several days.

The USAT Henry T. Gibbons was a small US Army Transport Ship, so small, in fact, that it was completely overlooked in both of the 103d Division histories. Both histories list the Monticello, the General Brooks, and the Santa Maria as the ships that transported the 103d Division to Europe. The small size of the Santa Maria is mentioned several times in both histories but the Henry T. Gibbons was even smaller. One other ship, the tiny freighter Mormac Moon carried some of the 103d Division's impedimenta but no troops.

All of the troop ships had one thing in common. The enlisted sleeping accommodations consisted of a rectangular frame of steel tubing about two feet wide and six feet long with a taut canvas sheet laced to it. These were stacked four high and each soldier had to share this "bunk" with his weapon and his duffel bag packed with everything he would ever need, except his meals and a few expendable items, like toilet paper.

The USAT Henry T. Gibbons had a slightly perceptible rocking motion while still at the dock. This was enough to make some GIs sea sick. For them, it was going to be a long voyage.

Eventually, the engines started to throb with a deeper, more powerful, sound and it was obvious that we were under way.

We hurried up to the crowded enlisted men's deck for one last look at the USA. The last thing to drop out of sight over the horizon was the parachute drop tower at Coney Island. Then there was nothing but water. Our convoy had picked up several destroyer escorts ("tin cans") and a converted carrier that had once been a merchant ship and several other troop ships carrying the 100th Infantry Division.

The sky was blue and the breeze freshened as we cleared New York Harbor and made a definite turn to the south to avoid the submarine wolf packs that prowled the North Atlantic.

There was a lifeboat drill soon after we sailed, for the purpose of training and drilling the ship's crew members in the method of launching the lifeboats. While we watched, standing unobtrusively out of the way, along the starboard side of the ship, several lifeboats were prepared for lowering away. Three crew members got into a boat that was extended out over the rail on its davits and then the process of lowering was started.

It did not go well. For some reason, the holding hook on one end of the boat released and the boat was left suspended, swinging in the air at a rakish angle. The crew member in the center of the boat tumbled head over heels into the member at

the free swinging end. One of them almost fell into the sea. Both of them were injured to some degree. The swinging end of the boat was secured by using a boat-hook and the lifeboat and the badly frightened crew members were recovered.

Most of us were hoping that if there ever was a real reason to use the lifeboats, we would make a much better getaway.

As previously noted, some members of the Signal Company got accommodations in the First Class cabins, but I, like most other Signal Company men sailing on the Henry T. Gibbons, was way down on "H" deck, below the water line. We wondered what would happen if the ship was torpedoed. We found out in the first drill. All watertight hatches and doors were closed and latched shut. ----- So much for any notions of getting out of there in the event of an attack.

On the second day after leaving port, Capt. Beck decided that his First Three Grade Non-coms should have the cabins occupied by the men of the Construction Section and the men of the Construction Section would take their rightful place below decks with the rest of us peons. The rotation movement had just started when a lieutenant of the Transportation Corps interrupted it. He explained to Capt. Beck that as Officer-In-Charge of the Army Transport, he would put those being transported where he liked, and he just loved the existing arrangement. Capt. Beck was not happy to have his scheme interfered with, especially by a lieutenant, but there was nothing he could do about it.

Captain Beck, stung by this event, volunteered all of the Construction Section for special details such as sweeping down the decks fore and aft and emptying all GI cans over the fantail. As a result of this labor assignment, the Construction Section had special meal tickets for three meals a day (instead of the two meals a day allotted to the rest of us). They were also given permission to cut in at the head of the chow line so that they could go about their business in a timely manner. It is highly unlikely that Captain Beck issued the order for these privileges.

When we got down to the latitude of North Africa, the convoy turned to the east and soon ran into a storm. The sky darkened and the seas grew higher. As the USAT Henry T. Gibbons came through one of the monstrous waves it projected out of the wave and then crashed down into the trough. The deck dropped out from under our feet. It was fun at first but as the waves got bigger, the free-fall drop got bigger and bigger. After a few sprained ankles, we were all ordered below decks for the duration of the storm which turned out to be a hurricane.

By this time the "tin cans" were plowing right through the heavy waves which swept over and around the bridge. At times only their rotating radar antenna was all that was visible. Those "swabbies" should have gotten submarine pay.

Occasionally, a wave would even roll down the flight deck of the converted carrier. Clearly, this was not your everyday variety of storm.

Seasickness hit nearly everyone, some more than others. It seems to be a law of nature that the least seasick would be those in the lower bunks and the most seasick would be in the upper bunks where they would moan and groan for hours on end and puke all over those of us who had been smart enough to grab the lower bunks when we first boarded.

Some of us who were issued M-3 submachine guns ("grease guns") as our Table of Organization & Equipment (TO&E) weapons were assigned to guard the secret SEGABA cryptographic machines all the way to the Marseille staging area. The crates holding these machines were placed in the "D-Deck Square" on the USAT Henry T. Gibbons. They could not be lashed down due to concerns that they might fall into the hands of the enemy if our ship should be torpedoed and had to drop out of the convoy.

If capture seemed imminent, we were supposed to loosen the dogs, open the D-Deck hatch and shove the crypto crates into the ocean. The weighted crates would then sink straight to the bottom.

The daily routine of the guard detail was, in many ways better than that of most GIs on theUSAT Henry T. Gibbons. The downside was that storm. The heavy cryptographic machine crates skidded back and forth, banging off of the D-Deck hatches, and the bulkheads, and the guard detail did not get a second to breathe, dodging the sliding crates until the storm subsided.

The crypto-machine guard detail ate at odd hours, out of the regular rotation, and got only two meals a day. The meals were identical, one liverwurst sandwich and a canteen cup of lemonade twice a day for the whole two weeks trip over. ---- Not very good fare for a bunch of seasick landlubbers ----and just to rub it in, we had to get our meal tickets (that hung around our necks like dog tags) punched to get that.

When the storm was at its worst, the wurst was at its worst.

However, a few of us who grew up on the water had no trouble with the rolling and pitching. Two sandwiches a day were not enough for growing boys so, while standing in the chow line, we would start describing the liverwurst in graphic detail, --- its color, its texture, the fatty sliminess of it, and its liver taste. By then the guy next to us in line would turn green and lurch toward the companionway up to a

head. As they staggered away, we would yell, "Leave your meal ticket. We'll get it back to you in a couple of hours." (It took about that long to go through the line again).

We had, indeed, passed through a real hurricane that had crashed across the Caribbean Island area and Cuba. John Donlan came up with the following timetable of the storm edited from a New York Times story:

October 14, 1944 - Caribbean area ALERT/WARNING

October 18, 1944 - All crops on Cayman Islands destroyed,

Havana, Cuba; 5 deaths, 200 injured,
heavy wind and rain, harbor craft wrecked

October 20, 1944 - New York and New Jersey coast, heavy wind,
rain and hurricane damage.

Eventually the storm abated and we were finally permitted to go up on deck again. Sometime during the storm, the aircraft carrier had left the convoy for Casablanca. We passed a burning freighter and were told that we could mention it in letters home if we said it reached port safely. They told us that while it was still on fire and far from land ---- how could they be so sure?

Soon we turned northeasterly and the African coast came into view on the starboard side. We followed the African coastline on a northeasterly course, turned into the Mediterranean at Gibraltar and then hugged the North African coast seeing Tangiers, Tetuan, and Oran, while enjoying some of the best weather of the entire trip.

As we turned north toward Marseille, bad weather started all over again. It was not as bad as the Atlantic storm, but bad enough, as we once again had to dodge the skidding crypto equipment.

That trip across the ocean confirmed the correctness, however casually made, of my initial choice of the Army. No Navy duty for me!

Marseille Harbor - Oct.20, 1944, Marseille Staging Area

We entered the harbor at Marseille early in the afternoon of October 20, 1944, but did not disembark immediately. We were the first convoy to arrive there since the

invasion of Southern France. The city and harbor had been pounded by bombers and there were overturned hulks of ships all over the harbor that we had to maneuver around.

That night, we were welcomed by a German aircraft. As it flew high over the harbor area even the novices from the 103d Division could tell that it was German. The Krauts had never learned to synchronize the engines on twin and multi-engine aircraft and the distinct throbbing sound caused by the out-of-sync engines could not be missed.

Air raid warnings sounded and lights started blinking off all over the harbor area as Marseille blacked out. The large "D"Deck Square hatches were wide open on the USAT Henry T. Gibbons and the lights from D-Deck shown like a beacon across the harbor. We imagined that since this was the only visible target, the USAT Henry T. Gibbons would soon be under attack. The aircraft apparently was only on a reconnaissance mission and, after looking around, left the area. It was a good thing because when we searched high and low for a switch to turn off the lights we found nothing and were about to shoot out the lights when the all clear sounded.

The next morning the guard detail got the cryptographic gear loaded onto trucks and we drove to the Marseille Staging Area located on a high plateau above Marseille. There, we turned the crypto crates over to the cryptographic personnel and eventually found where the Radio Section was bivouacking.

At least we got to ride to the staging area while most of the GIs had to walk in what came to be known as "The Marseille Death March."

For those who had to march to the staging area, the roads were narrow and the passing convoy trucks seemed to be moving through the darkness with reckless abandon. When there was an opportunity to stop for a brief rest, it was difficult to get back and safely away from the passing traffic.

An amphibious truck, DUKW, roared by very close to the troops who sat on, or tried to lean back on a wall, along the road. One of our buddies had not pulled his M1 rifle far enough back out of the way. The DUKW ran over his rifle stock, breaking it off from the barrel assembly.

For any soldier who knew that his rifle was a sacred object, this was a traumatic experience. What to think? Who to tell? What kind of punishment would be waiting when daylight revealed his embarrassment?

All of these were future problems. The more immediate problem was, how do you carry a rifle "at slung arms" when the rifle sling is connecting two unsightly pieces.

The marchers continued to get up after each short rest period, but as the night began to grow longer, colder, and damper their strength and their resolve began to fade away.

Already there was murmuring, even bitching, and an occasional "discouraging word" as the proposed destination became a more and more distant and unobtainable end to their misery.

To just fall out and refuse to go on, was desertion! In spite of this imperative, men began to drop out and move out of the line of march singly, in pairs, or small groups, saying, "not another step."

Many just finally gave up and walked off the road, through a dewy field, to the shelter of something, anything, covered up some way, and waited for the dawn and strength to return. They were apprehensive about their fate for such a breach of military order and discipline.

At daybreak they started out. Along the road for the last two or three miles, other men were rejoining the hike, in front of them and behind, as far as they could see over the rolling hills.

When the marchers finally arrived at a disorganized camp on a dismal, rocky, barren site only about a quarter of the company was there.

Some officers and non-coms leading men, or pretending to, arrived later that morning or in the afternoon. The good news was that so many fell out of the march that it was not likely that there would be any disciplinary action for doing so.

At the rain-swept Marseille staging area, we slept on jagged rocks in pup tents that constantly fell down because the wooden tent pegs could not be driven into the rock. There was inspection after inspection to make certain that we had everything we were supposed to have and had nothing that we were not supposed to have. For these inspections, everything we owned had to be displayed on a shelter half (the one-half of a pup tent that was issued to each soldier). We did this in the unrelenting rain so everything we owned was soaked.

At mail call, I received a small package. It was a birthday present from my mother, an elegant wrist watch, a Vacheron. I wore it with much trepidation because I had not had a lot of luck with watches and we were working under terrible weather conditions preparing for our introduction to combat. It spent more time in my shirt pocket, protected by my new combat jacket, than on my wrist.

The Engineers blasted deep holes in the rock and covered them with wooden boxes having 10 holes cut in the top. A urinal trough was installed at one end, emptying into the common hole in the ground. These were king-sized outhouses --- except that there were no roofs and no privacy screens around them.

As was usual, these latrine areas were located as far as convenient from the living area of the company. In our case, they were lined up along an unimproved road at the rear of the company areas. The road continued to be used by the civilian population, male, female, and others. Most of the civilian traffic was on foot.

In spite of the occasional freezing rain and cold wind, there were no protective canvas walls around, or ceilings over, these rustic toilets. Privacy was not even considered. The civilians could be seen approaching some distance away by those seeking relief. In most cases, the women and girls could be identified, and would cause various reactions and responses by the men. Some would cut short their business and retreat quickly. Others would react in a number of ways.

In the group who remained behind to be exposed, there were those who chose to ignore the passersby, others would smile or speak, the really savoir-faire gentlemen would tip their hats and/or offer the ladies a seat.

It was nearly time for our first formation. George Bartlett a mild mannered bashful Midwesterner was using the 10-holer when a French girl, pedaling her bicycle along the road, noticed the facilities. Feeling the urge to relieve herself, she got off of her bike and plopped down on the hole right next to George. The whistle blew for the formation but he was not about to get up first and the girl was obviously in no hurry. I don't remember how it played out. For all I know George might have been sitting there for days.

Back at Camp Howze, the radio operators had all worried about the vehicles nicknamed the "Rolling Coffins" in which our radios were installed. Much to our relief, we got brand new, and quite different, vehicles at the Marseille staging area. They were ¾ ton weapons carriers. The driver and assistant driver could each get out of his own side and the radio operator(s) could get out the rear over the tail gate.

A 3/4 Ton Weapons Carrier

We went over our new vehicles with great care, making certain that all liquid levels were proper and there were no oil leaks or leaks in the brake lines or the transmission. We lubricated the wheel bearings and all grease fittings. We checked the electrical system, checked battery fluid levels, belt tensions, and tire pressures. We did not miss a thing because there would be no handy neighborhood garages on the battlefield.

After we finished, we checked everything again, just to be sure that we had not missed anything the first time.

We were installing the SCR-193 radio sets in our trucks. The arrangement was much better than the arrangement in the Rolling Coffins back at Camp Howze. The SCR-193 set was installed across the bed of the truck snugly up behind the driver and assistant driver seat. The benches along both sides of the truck bed had compartments for the heavy-duty truck battery, tire chains, extra antenna sections, etc. Initially, the operator had to sit on one of these hard benches but after a few weeks in the field we would find a solution to that problem.

Signal Corps Radio Set SCR-193

Upper left: BC-312 Receiver

Right: the SCR-191 Transmitter
The SCR-193 was housed in a box having a roll-down canvas cover to protect the components from the weather.

We were busily installing the radio sets when a serious thunderstorm hit the plateau. A lightning bolt hit one of the cables of the high voltage power line that ran over the staging area and forked into a half dozen or more branches, each of which found one of the whip antennas that we had physically installed but had not yet hooked up. The trucks were insulated from the ground by the rubber tires so, after the lightning strike, each still held a substantial electrical charge. Someone saw the lightning come down our antenna, I don't recall who, and ran toward our truck yelling, "Is everyone O.K. in there?" He couldn't see us because the canvas was rolled down to keep out the rain and we were working by flashlight.

I yelled back. "Stay away! Don't touch the truck!" Too late. He put his hand on the wet canvas and promptly got knocked flat on his butt. It would have been much worse if he had touched the metal truck body. As it was, only his dignity was damaged. We yelled to the guys in the other trucks to stay in them and not try to get down on the ground. I said, "Find a way to hook your tire chains to the body of the truck and then throw the free ends out where they will contact the ground and discharge your trucks." The tire chains made some sparks when they hit the wet ground but they did the trick.

We finally got all of our radio transmitters and receivers installed in our trucks and checked them out. We then stenciled our unit identifications and vehicle numbers on our bumpers.

It was November 1, 1944. There was nothing left to do. We were as ready as we would ever be.

The Move up the Rhone River Valley to the Front

The order came to leave the staging area. Each driver was given a strip map, essentially a single line map showing a wiggly line connecting the towns that we would be driving through, and giving the approximate distances between towns.

We formed up in a convoy turned on our headlights and moved out.

It seemed simple enough. Stay in line; keep the proper distance from the vehicle in front of you; keep the convoy closed up; and we would all arrive at the next assembly area together.

That was before other convoys started trying to pass us. They also had their headlights on. And there were individual army trucks that were not parts of convoys darting in and out of the column. Several other convoys merged with ours.

The "Red Ball Express" carrying supplies to the front got priority treatment. This further fragmented our convoy. Before long, we were hopelessly strung out along our route.

The war had been here just a short time before. There were many knocked out German vehicles and tanks alongside the road and the green troops from the 103d did a lot of rubbernecking further exacerbating the problem by stretching our column out even more.

Every time the column slowed, the French kids climbed all over our trucks.

"Bon bon ?" "Chocolat ?" "Cigarette pour ma ma ?" "Nice sister!"

We gave them K-Ration cigarettes and chocolate, whatever we had, but could not stop --- so no one had time to check out the kid's sister.

We drove on into the night feeling the commitment to battle drawing near and becoming concerned that there were no other vehicles from the 103d Division in sight. We noticed a glow in the sky up ahead but it was a complete surprise to drive into a town where there was a brightly lit traffic circle at the point of convergence of five or six roads.

In the center of the circle was an MP up on a platform brilliantly illuminated by a ring of floodlights. He was wearing a white helmet liner, white belt, white leggings, and white gloves. He checked the mud splattered bumpers of each vehicle entering the circle, noted the unit identification and unhesitatingly directed each vehicle

down one of the roads. He did this with so much flair, confidence, and authority that no one even slowed down going through the traffic circle. We assumed that he knew what he was doing. ---- We were wrong.

After we got clear of the town I asked the assistant driver, Mike Schindler, if he was sure we were on the right road. He pulled out the map board and said, "I don't know but if the next town is not on the strip map we are lost. This map only shows the towns we are supposed to go through. It doesn't show anything else."

After about an hour we had traveled far enough, per the strip map, to have seen another town and were getting concerned when an MP stepped into the road with a flashlight and waved us down. He shoved the flashlight into my face and bellowed, "Turn off those damned headlights and get your blackout lights on. Don't you know that you are in a combat zone?" He then waved us off the road into a large vehicle parking area for convoy stragglers.

We parked and then started looking around. We found a lot of 103d Division vehicles so we, and their drivers, nestled them all up together like sheep in a thunderstorm, and then got some sack time. At dawn, an officer who had a real map, not a strip map, consulted with an MP, and figured out what we had to do to get back onto our original path, so we did it.

Our 500-mile route took us up the Rhone River, ---- Avignon, Valence, Lyon, Dijon and finally to a staging area near Docelles. We arrived there in light snow.

It took several days for all of the stragglers to finally assemble at Docelles and then it took a few days more for everything to get sorted out.

3d Infantry Division

Upon arrival at Docelles, we talked to some of the "old timers" from the 3d Infantry Division who had already seen a lot of action. They had some interesting and frightening war stories. They warned us about touching or moving enemy dead. Some of the bodies had been booby trapped, apparently in the hope that a dead soldier would make someone pay for taking his life.

One of them asked me if I still had my mattress cover.

I did.

It had been issued to me all the way back at Camp Howze and I couldn't see any earthly use for it.

Then he told me. It was to be used as a body bag if I should be killed.

Well, mine wasn't going to be used for that. I was not about to carry my own coffin around with me.

We left everything we didn't absolutely need in storage at Docelles.

That included my mattress cover.

P A P A ' S W A R, P A R T 3

Near St. Diè, France, Nov. 11, 1944 - Baptism of Fire

As it moved into position for its baptism of fire, the 103d Infantry Division initially reported to VI Corps commanded by Major General Edward H. Brooks, which, in turn, reported to Seventh Army, commanded by Lieutenant General Alexander M. Patch, which was part of 6th Army Group, commanded by Lieutenant General Jacob L. Devers.

On Nov. 11, 1944, elements of the 103d Infantry Division relieved elements of the 3d Infantry Division in the vicinity of St. Diè, France. No more military exercises. --- This was the real thing.

The irony of this date, the 26th anniversary of the armistice of World War I, "The War to End All Wars", was not lost on us.

In typical Army fashion, the Cactus Division which had been trained in the steaming swamps of Louisiana and on the hot arid plains of Texas was going to get its first taste of battle in the snowy Vosges Mountains. It was no comfort whatsoever to learn that no army had ever successfully fought its way through the Vosges.

A quartermaster supply truck rolled into the area. When the driver left it unguarded, we scrambled inside for a look. It turned out to be filled, not with extra rations or ammo, as expected, but crate after crate of condoms. The obvious question was, "Where in the world would any of us get the opportunity to use those?" The veteran infantrymen from the 3d Division said, "Don't worry about it. You will get to use them. Grab a handful. You are going to need them," and stuffed their jacket pockets with them. The 103d Division Doughs did indeed find an immediate use for them. They rolled them over the muzzles of their M-1 rifles, their carbines and their machine guns to keep the rain out of the barrels. The first shot simply blew them away. A latex condom turned out to be the best available protection for one's weapon. It still is.

It did not take long for the 103d GIs to discover that condoms also made great waterproof containers for cigarettes, matches, a few sheets of toilet paper, and any other small items we had to protect.

In preparation for our sojourn overseas we had been lectured rather strenuously about German booby traps of all kinds. That first week, as we moved into the mountains, a few of us wandered around to appraise the area, and there, leaning against a tree was a German bed roll with a P-38 pistol on top, in a handsome leather holster. We all stood a respectful distance away from it, lusting for the P-38 but leery of a booby trap.

Among our little Radio group was a cocky Texan , Arby Curtis, who wore his helmet at a jaunty angle. Arby, with Alamo in his blood, finally sneered at our timidity, walked right up to the bedroll and took the P-38 --- AND NOTHING HAPPENED! --- except he now had a P-38, and he let everybody know it.

The radio teams were now official. T/3 Norval "Bud" Hennum, a former railroad telegrapher from Kennedy, Minnesota was our crew chief. The other member of the team was T/5 Seymour Fader from Brooklyn, N.Y. I, of course, was still a private as were most of the other "Coolies" assigned to other radio teams.

Other radio teams were assigned to Division Headquarters, the 409th Infantry Regiment, the 410th Infantry Regiment, and other units.

Our team were assigned, in the Division Command Net, to Headquarters, 411th Infantry Regiment.

Headquarters,---- that had a nice *safe* ring to it.

The 411th Infantry Regimental Commander was Colonel Donovan P. Yeuell, --- a soldier's soldier, regular army, a veteran of WW I and, as we were soon to learn, a rugged no-nonsense hands-on commander.

Colonel Donovan P. Yeuell

During the night of Nov. 15th the 411th Regimental Command Post (CP) was set up in a lumber mill near Rougeville. We parked our radio truck well out of the way of traffic in and out of the CP but as the sky began to lighten at dawn, it became obvious that the Germans, who had artillery dug in along the mountain ridges in front of us, would have a clear view of us when it got a little lighter.

Bud Hennum, our crew chief, went in search of a more sheltered location. He returned in a few minutes with word that he had found a good spot between two buildings, just room enough for our truck. I started the engine but before I could get in gear, there was a heavy explosion and pieces of a vehicle flew over the tops of the buildings that we were going to park between. Our first choice for a parking place had been anticipated by the Krauts and they had mined it. Someone else had beaten us to that "good spot" and had paid heavily for the privilege.

We couldn't stay where we were so Bud went in search of another spot and returned shortly with a second choice. It was not very well protected from enemy fire but the truck would be hard to see from the ridge occupied by the Germans. I stepped on the starter and experienced déjà vu. This time a wheel of a vehicle and a man were thrown up higher than the building by the thunderous explosion.

Bud said, "Maybe we had better stay right here," and the whole team agreed.

In about an hour, a column of tanks came down the road past the CP.

It was preceded by engineers with mine sweepers. They swung their mine detectors back and forth and moved cautiously into our area.

They pulled several mines out of the ground around our truck. The tracks of our wheels in the mud ran right between them. When we pulled off out of everybody's way, we apparently pulled too far off and got into an area that had not been cleared of mines. This was our first but it would not be our only close call with mines.

After some preliminary maneuvering to get into position for attack, the 103d went into action at 0900 (9:00 a.m.) Nov. 16, 1944.

The 103d Division's first objective was St. Diè, the city where cartographers first identified America on a map in honor of Amerrigo Vespucci, the Italian explorer.

A heavy artillery barrage preceded the attack across the Taintrux River. As the battle intensified around St. Diè we eventually got our truck out of sight behind a manure pile and that seemed to provide adequate concealment but the adjacent barn attracted an occasional mortar round and sustained a fair amount of damage.

The cannon company of one of the regiments had emplaced its howitzers part way up the mountain at the edge of the forest to our rear. They opened up with the characteristic "BLAT!" sound that 105mm howitzers made and fired two or three missions before the Germans found them. The answering artillery fire hit in the trees above and behind the cannon company positions. There was no escape from the tree burst shrapnel. It was frightening and there were casualties.

It became clear that the kind of foxhole we had dug on the rolling plains of Texas were worthless in the trees. Here, foxholes had to be covered with several layers of logs to provide adequate protection.

While we were parked behind the manure pile we noticed that the mortar fire had exposed a large supply of lumber in the barn. Some of the boards were just the right length to attach to the bows supporting the canvas on our truck. Between mortar rounds, we stripped off the canvas and nailed the boards to the bows and covered our new wooden roof back up with the canvas. This was the start of a continuing project to winterize the working area in the back of the truck and make it as comfortable as possible ---- our new home away from home.

Despite the occasional incoming mortar rounds, I was too grungy to go any longer without washing up. I removed the liner from my helmet, filled the steel "pot" with water from a nearby pump, and prepared to wash up as best I could with ice cold water. I took off my Vacheron watch, hung it from an overhead branch, and set

about the task at hand. I was squatting in front of my helmet, naked from the waist up. The next mortar round was close causing me to flatten on the ground, jamming my head into my helmet pot, forgetting that it was full of water that was now both icy and soapy. After wiping off the dirt and soapy water and drying myself, I looked around for my watch. It was still hanging from the branch where I had left it but a small fragment from the mortar shell had struck it and there were springs and badly damaged watch parts hanging out where the crystal had once been.

Obviously, I would never be able to tell my mother what really happened to that watch and was distracted for the rest of the day trying to come up with a plausible story to tell when I finally returned home, sans Vacheron.

Time was important to us as operators of a radio in the Division Command Net. We had to check into the net at specific times and each message bore a distinctive date-time group that was important in decoding the message so Bud requisitioned radium-dial military wrist watches for the entire team.

The dials of those watches had large numerals, hand-painted on with a glowing paint made from a radium salt. The hands were also large and similarly painted. Those watches not only glowed in the dark, they glowed visibly, even in daylight. At night while outside the truck, I always made certain that the sleeve of my combat jacket covered the watch. It could be seen at a considerable distance and I did not want a sniper to spot it.

Colonel Donovan P. Yeuell the 411th Regimental Commander was not a rear-echelon commander. He usually set up the regimental advance CP at the advance CP of one of his battalions. This in turn was usually with the CP of one of the infantry companies. Col. Yeuell liked to be close to the action in order to assess the situation and make prompt first-hand decisions so the place to look for him was the 411th Regimental Advance CP or some place forward of that.

Among the first German strong points attacked by the 411th Infantry Regiment was Saucy su Meurthe. It was 22 November 1944. Able Company was attacking across a field. Kraut machine guns had taken a deadly toll. Eight men from Able Company lay dead on the field and others were wounded. One of those killed, we would learn later, was Bayard "BD" Dodge, A well-liked ASTPer from our unit in Denton, Texas.

Two other ASTPers from Denton, Tom Kane (an ASTP phys-ed basketball teammate) and Bob Enterline, (one of my ASTP roommates), both in C (Charlie) Company, 1st Machine Gun Section, were called up to give covering fire. Tom was gunner and Bob was assistant gunner and ammo handler.

In a fierce machine gun battle, they expended three boxes of ammunition until the Kraut machine guns no longer answered their fire. Tom Kane was awarded the bronze star for bravery for his actions that day. However, it takes two men to operate a machine gun, and while only one medal was awarded, there is no doubt in my mind that Bob Enterline deserved one as well. Bob earned one later for action near Rothbach.

In ten days time, the 411th Infantry Regiment attacked through Saucy su Meurthe and Combrimont, passed quickly through the 409th's sector at Frapelle and Provencheres and, in a rapid advance, attacked Steige and Maisonsgoutte. During that time we saw our first dead German soldiers. The first one was on the first day of combat. He had been lying in the rain and all of the blood had been washed away. He was pale and waxy looking, like a figure in a museum, and was lying across the path between our truck and the Regimental CP. We had to step over him to get there but did not attempt to move him out of the path for fear that he had been booby trapped. In time we would see hundreds of dead Germans but got used to it.

Killing people is what warfare is all about.

It is an ugly business.

Roosevelt's Thanksgiving Day, November 23, 1944

Mail call was always a high point of any day in the Army, but when you are part of a three-man team isolated from your parent unit for weeks on end, your mail often piled up somewhere and you got very hungry for word from home. Eventually, someone would find us and deliver our mail in a big bundle. Bud Hennum's wife wrote to him faithfully every day and it seemed like he always got a bucket full. Seymour Fader spent a lot of time writing letters and received a lot, too, but nothing to match Bud's. I was not much of a letter writer so I did not expect much in return and my expectations were realized. I usually received just a few letters that I read over and over again, forgetting the war for a moment and savoring this contact with another reality.

President Roosevelt had, for some obscure reason, changed Thanksgiving Day to the Thursday preceeding the traditional holiday. Roosevelt's Thanksgiving had been hell and it had gone by without a hot meal. We had just finished off our tasty K-Ration dinner when a messenger arrived from the Signal Company carrying, among other things, our accumulated mail. It consisted of a handful of mail, mostly Bud's, and a package, about a foot square and eight inches deep, addressed to me.

Night fall was bearing down on us and since we had not yet installed lights in the back of our truck, I set the package on the bench inside and we stood outside in the

cold reading every word of our letters in the fast-fading light. Then we piled back into the truck to get warm. Bud turned his flashlight toward my package and he and Seymour asked, in unison, "Aren't you going to open it?"

I picked it up and slowly examined it. Usually, packages from the States arrived in terrible condition, looking like the losers in an argument with a steam roller or a Sherman tank. This package was clean and did not have a single ding or dent on it. The brown paper wrapping was not torn or scarred in any way.

"Not now."

"Not now?"

"No, not now. It's probably a Christmas present. I think I will save it 'til then."

They would not accept that and refused to let up until I opened the parcel.

I cut the string which had been wrapped around it several times in both directions. Bud held his flashlight on it. The batteries were dying but it was still light enough to see what I was doing. Eventually, I got the paper off revealing a sturdy corrugated cardboard box and inside, wrapped in waxed paper was one of my beloved Aunt Callie's devil's food cakes. Aunt Callie made the best devil's food cakes in the world, dark dark moist chocolate cake covered with her secret white icing, crusty on the outside and creamy on the inside. The crust of the icing did not have a single crack in it. We momentarily pondered the miracle that brought this to us unscathed. I sliced it down the middle with my combat knife and then divided the cake into six equal pieces.

Our Thanksgiving dinner was salvaged after all. We each grabbed a slice and bit off large chunks.

"YUK! PFFFFT!", We spit the cake all over one another.

Seymour got out his flashlight, which had fresher batteries, and we took a good look at the cake. Inside that pristine white icing was a solid mass of green mold. His light also picked up a card on the floor of the truck that must have fallen out when I unpacked the cake. It was a birthday card signed by the whole family.

A BIRTHDAY card?

My birthday was in July. This cake had, incredibly, been delayed more than a month in getting to Camp Howze and had then followed me to Camp Shanks, N.Y., from there to Marseille, and from there, eventually, to the front. It had been in transit for about five months without the icing even cracking.

We cleaned up the truck and tossed the cake into the ditch.

This disappointment was nothing compared to the delayed surprise this Thanksgiving still held in store for me.

Maisonsgoutte, France, November 25, 1944

By November 25th, the 411th Infantry Regiment had captured Maisonsgoutte. Col. Donovan P. Yeuell was personally credited with the capture of two prisoners as he accompanied the lead infantry platoon into the town.

In fast moving situations like this, our radio was Col. Yeuell's only contact with Division Headquarters. Wherever he went, we went, and it was becoming clear that he would spend a lot of time in dangerous places. --------- So much for the nice, comfortable, safe sound of assignment to 411th Regimental Headquarters.

Colonel Yeuell's 411th advance Command Post (CP) moved into a building facing the German positions. The building entrance was at street level, but the building was dug into the mountainside and extended out to the rear so the ground floor in front was the second story in the rear. The rear exit was a story lower. There was an outhouse behind the building.

The CP was at street level, and our radio crew had found a place to sleep in the rear of the same floor.

At dawn, 411th infantrymen who had slept in most of the other buildings in town had fallen out into the street and were preparing to move out against the Krauts. Then all hell broke loose. The CP came under heavy enemy artillery fire that threatened to destroy it. The very first round landed outside the CP building directly under the heavily shuttered downstairs windows in the rear of the building. Some shrapnel came up through the floor between our sleeping bags but no one was wounded thanks to the stone construction of the building and the heavy wood beams and floors.

Shrapnel also came up through the heavy shutters on our level and dropped a lot of ceiling plaster all over us.

A second and third round came in very close to the point of impact of the first and then rounds came in all up and down the street. The infantrymen were caught by surprise and there were more than fifty casualties within a few yards of the CP.

An emergency Battalion Aid Station was quickly set up in one room of the CP at street level.

Someone risked a look out through the shutters and shouted, " Hey, there are wounded down there." I ran down the stairs to the lower level at the rear of the building and saw an unconscious GI lying on the ground. I crawled out to him and dragged him back inside. There was no visible sign of a wound. As soon as I got him inside the building I got my shoulder under him and carried him up to street level where the aid station was being set up.

When I went out for him I thought that I heard someone else crying for help so I went back down to the rear exit. There was another infantryman crouched inside the door. He said that he was looking for his buddy who had brought a German prisoner down to the outhouse and had not returned with him. I told them that his buddy was wounded but that I had gotten him up to the battalion aid station.

The first artillery shell that had wounded his buddy had hit directly behind the outhouse and had blown the German prisoner out of it. He was sitting on the ground crying, "Mama, Mama." The infantryman and I ran out to get him. The other GI grabbed his shoulder and I grabbed his feet. He was seriously wounded and one of his legs pulled right out of his pants. We managed to get him into the building and up to the aid station but he didn't make it. He was too severely injured. The American soldier that I brought in did survive. His wounds were serious, too, but they got to them quickly enough to save his life.

A 411th infantryman, a private named Edward Holt, acted on his own initiative to locate the enemy artillery battery. He got so close that he had to call in fire from our artillery right on his own position in order to knock out the German artillery. For his heroic actions he received the Distinguished Service Cross.

After the artillery was neutralized, the 411th's attack continued toward the Rhine Plain but the fighting through the Vosges mountains was difficult with the Germans blocking the roads with mines, abatis (trees felled across the road in a chevron pattern), heavy logs sunk into the ground, and booby traps to discourage removal of the obstacles. Whenever a column was held up by one of the obstacles, an "88", Germany's most versatile artillery piece, was usually positioned to lay down harassing fire into the trees alongside the road. There was no place to hide from tree bursts.

In this situation, I invented a new kind of foxhole. Caught in the open without my entrenching tool, I clawed a horizontal foxhole straight into the side of the mountain using only my mess kit and my fingernails ----and I dug it in record time. The dirt that came out of the hole was piled up in front of the entrance to provide some protection but I doubt that it would have helped much. A few heavy logs would have been better but I did not have either the time or the inclination to cut down a tree using only my dull mess kit knife.

Le Howald, France -- Friendly Fire

The 411th slugged its way slowly through a succession of small villages ---- St.Martin, Le Howald, Andlau, and Eichoffen.

Again, Colonel Donovan P. Yeuell, the 411th Regimental commander, was right up there with them and wherever he went, we went. One night, his advance CP was set up in a building near Le Howald.

Every radio truck carried a reel of "Spiral-4 cable." We had no idea what it was intended for but we quickly found a good use for it. We rigged up a way to run this cable out to a safe place like the cellar of a building and used the several insulated conductors in the cable to listen to our receiver, turn the transmitter on and off, and key messages over the transmitter, all by remote control.

We had a heavy duty battery on the truck to handle the radio gear as well as the electrical equipment of the truck, lights, ignition, etc., but we had to be careful not to run the battery down. This meant that in situations where remote control was definitely called for, we still had to go out to the truck periodically and run the engine for a while to recharge the battery. The other side of the coin was that we could not just let our engine run indefinitely without risking running out of gas at an inopportune time or overheating the engine.

Even though it was a quiet night, we had arranged the remote control mode of operation. I checked my watch and noted that it was time to recharge the battery so I went outside and started the engine. I set it for a fast idle and was just jumping back down to the ground when an artillery shell landed in the field about a hundred yards away. Another round came in, much closer than the first, and I wasted no time getting back to the CP.

The building was like a fortress with massive stone walls and heavy wooden doors about four inches thick hanging from huge wrought iron strap hinges. The window shutters were similarly constructed. I hit the door going full speed expecting it to swing open, but at the sound of the first shell, someone had barred it from the inside, apparently thinking that it would provide better protection that way. The windows had also been barred.

I crawled around from door to door and window to window trying to get inside but everything was locked tight and the sound of my hammering at the doors and windows was apparently masked by the ever increasing sound of the incoming artillery barrage. There were no ditches --- no place to hide. I was out there all alone and that was the scariest part.

With my face in the mud, I crawled back to the truck and slithered underneath the engine block thinking that it might provide a small measure of protection from an air burst. The engine was still running and I got a scorched spot on the shoulder of my combat jacket from the exhaust pipe. At the time, I did not even think about the gasoline. With 20/20 hindsight, it does not seem like a very good idea to hide under a truck during a barrage.

It often happens that the first round of incoming fire knocks out wire communication but, luckily, in this case it did not. Col. Yeuell got on the phone and called for counter fire and the barrage abruptly ceased. It turned out that it was "friendly" fire.

One of the cannon companies was firing a mission by map coordinates and due to someone's goof had their 105mm howitzers aimed in exactly the opposite direction from their intended target.

In spite of the intensity of the barrage, most of the shells landed in an open field. There were no casualties although some trucks were damaged, but still serviceable. Our truck was not damaged at all.

Then the 411th took a small city, Barr.

What a wonderful night I had in Barr. I had a warm bath in a tub and slept in a clean feather bed. This would be the only time, for the duration of combat that I would have such luxurious accommodations.

A Potpourri of Ups and Downs

On November 29th, at Itterswiller, my ASTP reveille adversary, Stuart Friedman, was seriously wounded by an incoming 88 shell and lost a leg. ASTP classmate, Carl Christensen, was killed in the same action. The following day, Sid Kantor, another ASTPer who, as a medic, played a major role in getting Friedman back to an aid station was captured when the Germans overran the aid station in a counter attack.

As time went by we made our radio truck a more livable place, in one town we ripped the doors off of a tall wooden cabinet to eventually close in the rear of the truck. For now, though, we tossed them into the back of the truck for later installation. we also scrounged a seat from a German Kubelwagen (their equivalent to our jeep) for the on-duty operator's comfort.

We installed a set of shelves over the radio set for the Signal Operating Instructions (SOI), our M-209 Converter (the device used to encode messages sent back to Division HQ and decode incoming messages), message pads, and other miscellaneous stuff. Each shelf had a deep lip on it to keep the contents from slipping out while we were traveling.

Thermite grenades were taped over the radio set and over the shelf where we kept the SOI and M-209 converter. If capture was imminent, by pulling the pins on those incendiary grenades we could reduce it all to ashes in a matter of seconds.

There was also a thermite grenade taped to the steering column to disable the vehicle by melting the column. It made us sweat a bit to know that that grenade was right over the driver's crotch, specifically, my crotch, and I made certain that the halves of the cotter pin were spread wide open to prevent anyone from accidentally pulling that pin.

The NCO in charge of the Construction Section, Master Sergeant Lovell Collins, together with one of the Construction Section wire crews had taken over a basement of a three story building as their living space. It only had two doors and small windows at the street level so they assumed that it would provide adequate protection from German fire.

The only commode in the building was down there in the basement. Suddenly the crew heard a loud crash. Down the hall, past the stored potatoes and salted down fresh eggs, and going full speed ahead, was Marvin Ellis with his pants around his ankles. The Krauts had put an 88 through the window and shattered the commode he was sitting on. The shell did not explode, but the commode did, --- and Ellis thought he might!
Before anyone could ask him what happened, Ellis was tearing down the street as fast as he could go (considering the constraint imposed upon him by his pants).

Warfare seems to make it rain and there was lots of that, and lots of deep gooey mud to go with it. Tanks and trucks slid all over the muddy roads. Often there was white tape stretched along the shoulders and warning signs on stakes driven into the mud, "MINES SWEPT TO DITCHES." The German warning signs "MINEN!",

black with white lettering and a white skull and cross bones, also grabbed our attention.

There were numerous badly damaged vehicles upside down along side the road to emphasize the point and those was all the warning I needed to drive carefully.

Near Gundershaffen, Charles Struwe, a well liked Signal Company Message Center messenger, was carrying dispatches from one headquarters to another. His vehicle hit one of those mines.
He was blown up through the canvas over his head and clear of his vehicle, sustaining only minor injuries. Some nicknamed him "Lucky" but I don't think the nickname stuck for very long.

Between two of the small villages, we were following Col. Yeuell's jeep. Off to our right, about a hundred feet down a side road, we passed an American tank that had taken a direct hit from German artillery. There were many GIs, more than a dozen of them, lying very still all around the tank. They had all been killed by the shell. It was one of the saddest sights of my life --- so many young men who would never have a chance to live out their normal lives. We had already grown insensitive to the sight of dead Germans but never hardened to the sight of dead American comrades.

There were mortar rounds dropping in the field directly ahead of us as the 411th infantry attacked across the field toward the Germans dug in on the other side. We caught some machine gun fire but it was way off the mark.

Col. Yeuell had the top and windshield down on his jeep but we lumbered along behind him with our canvas in place, as it had to be to protect our radio set. Unfortunately, it made us a much better target.

The road made a sharp right hand turn and Yeuell's jeep dropped down behind a hedge row. His jeep was no longer in enemy view but our big rectangular canvas was quite visible. A German machine gunner made us his own personal target. Fortunately, he did not give us enough lead. The guys in the back had rolled up the rear canvas and dropped the tail gate to the level position so they could get out in a hurry. They were lying on their bellies on the bed of the truck, as low as they could get, as the machine gun chewed up the dirt in the side of the hill behind us. The gunner would fire a long burst tracking toward us from the rear but stopped just before any of the rounds hit the truck.

The Sniper

Eventually, the cut for the road got deeper and we were no longer visible to the enemy. We were about to enter a small village when Col. Yeuell's jeep stopped. There were several vehicles stopped ahead of him blocking the way. Col. Yeuell got out of his jeep and went up to see what was holding us up. Bud Hennum, our crew chief, also went for a look. He came back and reported that the Krauts had blown the bridge across a narrow but deep and swiftly flowing stream. It was impassable. Engineers were already working on it but we would be there for a while.

We were still down in the deep cut so I got out from behind the wheel and checked out my M-3 grease gun. I had two magazines taped back to back. I had never fired it in anger but, this close to the enemy, it did not seem like enough, especially if they counter attacked. I crawled into the back of the truck to get a canvas bag containing about twenty extra magazines.

I hung the bag's carrying strap around my neck and stepped out onto the tail gate of the truck. I accidentally tilted the bag so all of the magazines started slipping out and down into the mud. I dove for them trying to catch as many as possible and heard the loud "spang" of a ricochet off the wall behind me followed instantly by the crack of a rifle.

A sniper, in the attic of a building that had been bypassed by the infantry as they advanced across the field, had me in his sights, but when I dove for the magazines, his round had passed harmlessly over my head.
This particular sniper had given the infantry a lot of trouble. He had hit several GIs and no one knew where the shots were coming from. Snipers usually use "flashless" powder. This time, he goofed. Someone saw the flash and put a "bazooka" round into the attic. That was the last we heard from that sniper.

I surveyed the mess that I had on my hands. Every muddy magazine had to be disassembled and cleaned and every round of .45 caliber ammunition had to be carefully wiped off and reloaded into the magazines to prevent a jam at an inopportune time.

Ordinarily, I would have done a lot of bitching and moaning about a chore like that, but not this time. These M-3 submachine gun magazines were special. They had saved my life.

Struthof Concentration Camp

A bit northwest of Barr, elements of the 103d Division overran Struthof. To my knowledge, it was the only German Concentration Camp located in France.

Struthof was set up specifically to deal with the French resistance fighters who were very strong in this area. The Germans evacuated the camp just before our arrival and shipped all of the prisoners to Dachau so we had no idea, at that time, of the unspeakable horrors inflicted on those brave man and their families in this camp. We only found out later. Some of the prisoners were shipped from Dachau to its subsidiary camps located around the city of Landsberg where we would eventually learn first hand of the atrocities of which the Germans were capable.

Epfig and Ebersheim, France

After Barr, the 411th continued to attack. The Division objective was to capture the city of Selestat that straddled the main road from Strasbourg to Colmar. This road was the principal supply route of the German army to its troops in the Colmar Pocket, an area around the French city of Colmar. The presence of a large German force in this pocket on the west side of the Rhine posed a threat to the entire right flank of the American and French forces driving northward toward the German main line of defense, The Siegfried Line.

It was expected that the Germans would fight tenaciously to keep us from cutting this vital supply line to the Colmar Pocket.

The 411th fought through stubborn resistance at Epfig. During that battle we were in a cellar in Epfig when an infantry replacement in the same cellar started crying uncontrollably. I tried to comfort him. He was not a coward. It was clear that he was neither physically nor psychologically equipped to be a soldier. He was a little boy in a man's uniform and through some horrible mistake had slipped through the screening that should have determined that he could never be a combat soldier. Eventually, the Medics got him out of there and hopefully, he was not treated as a malingering gold brick. I ran into a few of those in the army but this guy wasn't one of them.

Just as Selestat straddled the main supply route from Strasbourg to Colmar, Ebersheim straddled the same road north of Selestat so its capture would shut the main supply route to Selestat as well. In bitter fighting, the 411th pushed the Krauts house by house out of Ebersheim and Col. Yeuell had us right in the middle of it again. The Germans mounted several counter attacks and all the while had Ebersheim under intense mortar fire. I was operating the radio and Bud Hennum was driving. He pulled the truck close up against an iron gate and said that he and Seymour Fader were going to locate the CP and try to find a safer spot for the truck, close enough to the CP to run in our remote control cable. While I was alone

in the back of the truck, some GI pulled up in a jeep right next to our truck and ran for cover as the mortar barrage intensified.

Another jeep pulled up behind us. Finding the road blocked, the driver started blowing his horn. I lifted the rear canvas and the driver yelled at me to move up a little so he could get through. He kept blowing his horn and yelling, "Hurry up! I'm gonna get killed out here!"

I jumped down, climbed into the driver's seat, pulled forward just enough for him to get through, and then climbed back into the rear of the truck. I had just settled back into the Kubelwagen seat when there was an ear shattering explosion. I looked at the rear canvas and it was riddled with holes. I shook my head to clear the cobwebs and saw a piece of shrapnel embedded in the wood of the shelf directly behind my head. For a moment it seemed like it could not have gotten there without passing right through my head so I yanked off my helmet and checked to see if there were holes through it. There were none. It was a totally irrational act to check my helmet like that but sometimes we do strange things. Obviously, I had heard something just before the mortar shell hit and had instinctively ducked but I have no recollection of doing that.

The mortar shell had smashed into the bottom of the iron gate and demolished it.

It had to have come from a direction that would have caused it to land right in my lap if I had not moved the truck. The gate was set back slightly from the corner of the building to which it was attached. The stone building absorbed most of the shrapnel coming in my direction.

About fifty yards to the rear of our truck, a jeep parked on the opposite side of the street had all four tires flattened and the radiator ruined by the shell. If I ever find the driver who blew his horn at me until I moved, I just might kiss him. There is no doubt that I owe him my life.

Fader came back and found me still shaken from the near miss. They had found the CP and there was a courtyard surrounded by a high stone wall behind it. He guided me into it and ducked back into the CP.

As usual, Col. Yeuell had his advance CP set up facing the Kraut positions, on the top floor of the building. We were in the room directly behind the main CP. Our roll of Spiral-4 cable would not reach so we would have to operate the radio while actually sitting in the truck. A mortar round came down right on the sill of one of the windows in the CP and bounced into the room. It was a dud. Someone in the CP picked it up carefully (it was hot) and dropped it out the window into the courtyard but it hit the ground without exploding.

Wire teams had gotten telephone lines into the CP but the heavy mortar fire had taken them out. As quickly as the wire teams repaired or replaced the lines they

were taken out again. It happened over and over so it was radio or nothing. Yeuell's message center gave us a long encoded message to send back to Division HQ.

In situations like this we took turns. This time, it was my turn to go to the truck. One mortar was zeroed in on the court yard. Luckily, the Germans were so methodical that if they were laying in one round every two minutes, you could set your watch by it and that was precisely what this mortar was doing.

I hid inside the door and waited watching my sweep second hand. A round came in and I started watching the time. Simultaneously, I raced for the truck, established communication and started sending the message. When it was one minute and fifty seconds since the last round, I sent "AS," the shortcut used by Morse code operators for "wait", and dove out the back of the truck. At two minutes, exactly, I was face down in the dirt and the next mortar round exploded.

I climbed back into the truck and continued sending the message. At three minutes and fifty seconds after the starting round, I sent "AS" again and dove out of the truck. Again the round came in right on time. I again scrambled back into the truck and continued sending the message but soon realized that I had lost track of my starting time. I quickly sent "AS" and grabbed the bow under the canvas and swung out. While hanging there exposed, the next round came in and I felt a sharp sting across the back of my left wrist. There were only a few more code groups to send so I swung back in and sent them, closed out the transmission, and hit the dirt again. After the next round, I ran back into the CP and it was someone else's turn. The "wound" from the mortar fragment was just a minor scratch. I put some sulfa powder and a small bandage from my first aid kit on it and in a couple of days it had healed. It was not worth reporting.

A German prisoner was brought into the CP for interrogation. He claimed to know nothing about the location of the mortars. After lengthy questioning, a guard took the prisoner out to the courtyard to think about it some more and found a safe place for himself. After the third or fourth mortar round came in, the prisoner was ready to tell us everything. He did and the mortars were soon neutralized.

Selestat was going to be difficult to capture but it would not take the entire division to do it. A special task force was organized for the job, but the 411th was not designated to take part. The 411th troops in Ebersheim were relieved by French troops, actually Senegalese, in red fezzes, from Africa, they all carried sharp curved dirks and had deep scar designs cut into their faces and must have been frightening to the Krauts who had to fight them. They frightened me ---- and they were on our side.

Redeployment for the Attack on the Siegfried Line,
December 5, 1944

There was a new task now for the 103d Division, so once on the Rhine Plain, on December 5th, we turned north toward the Siegfried line and the roads, through territory already cleared by other divisions, filled with long convoys of 103d Division vehicles.

At one point during this redeployment, it seemed like, in one thunderous explosion, the whole top blew off of one of the mountains. In Stars and Stripes, the Army newspaper, the explanation was that some Germans were buttoned up in a medieval castle that American forces had bypassed. The German troops had mortars set up in the central courtyard and were lobbing harassing rounds in all directions around the castle. The walls of the castle were twelve to fifteen feet thick and our artillery could not make a dent in it. A half track that had been badly damaged was loaded with as much explosive as it would hold and was directed, unmanned toward the castle. When it was snug up against the castle wall, it was detonated and blew a hole about ten feet in diameter in the wall. Stunned Krauts poured out of the hole and the mortars were neutralized.

We were among the first troops to arrive at the new 103d Division assembly area near Gougenheim, southwest of Haguenau. This gave us some extra time to change our stinking socks, to get cleaned up, to grease our truck, and do some more work on making the radio operating area of our truck more comfortable.

Our crew pulled out the wooden cabinet doors that we had scrounged earlier and installed them sloping down from the last canvas supporting bow of the truck to the rear edge of the leveled tail gate. In this mode of installation they were a perfect fit. These doors were arranged to open outward so we could exit in a hurry. We provided an overhead light in the operating area, interlocked with the doors to automatically go out when the doors were opened to maintain blackout conditions.

The benches along each side of the closed-in area were just wide enough to sit on but it was impossible to sleep on them. We soon fixed that. We found two heavy plywood boards about three inches wider than the benches and they made all the difference in the world. We could now sleep on them without rolling off onto the floor every time we tried to change position. It was tight but there was now room enough for two to sleep on the benches while the operator on duty sat in our scrounged Kubelwagen jeep seat.

We had a hot meal, pancakes, for a change, and some of our radio team and about a dozen other GIs were sitting around in a room on the second floor of a building drinking coffee and shooting the breeze.

It was a long room with a single window at one end and a door that opened into the room at the other. The last GI in had closed the door and was leaning back against it. Suddenly the window disintegrated and we all saw a Messerschmidt ME-109 flying straight at us with all guns blazing. Everyone rushed for the door but since it opened inward, we all just piled up against the guy leaning against it.

We collapsed in a heap on the floor and everyone was digging to get himself on the bottom of the pile. It only took two or three seconds for the plane to pass overhead. Only one round had come through the window and it had not hit anyone. After that first round, the rest apparently passed harmlessly over the top of the building.

We had hot coffee all over us. Someone started to laugh and we all joined in. One guy said "Boy, did you guys look silly, all trying to get down under the pile." Another answered, "How would you know? You were on the bottom the whole time and couldn't see anything." Finally, someone said, "Well, it was funny but how about getting that damned door open, and leaving it open, just in case that joker comes around again."

We did --- but he didn't.

That day a mess truck arrived with GI pots containing our Thanksgiving Dinner, chicken ala king. They had been trying to catch up with us ever since Thanksgiving (more than a week ago) and our dinner had been in those pots all that time -------- but they didn't tell us that.

Within minutes, I was hit with the "GIs" and they were not to end until late April, 1945.

About that time, I realized that the scratch that I had received from the mortar fragment was on my left wrist and I am left handed. What if it had been a more serious, but not necessarily life threatening, wound? Or, what if I simply sprained my left wrist or broke my arm? I might still have been able to function in all respects except my primary one, sending Morse code when the situation demanded.

I decided to provide us with some insurance in the event of an injury to my left hand or arm.

The telegraph key that we used for code transmissions was attached to a wide metal clip that clamped on the thigh just above the knee. By resting our wrists on our upper thigh we could transmit effectively even while in motion over bumpy terrain.

At every opportunity, I clamped the key on my right knee and practiced code with my right hand. After a month or so I was equally competent left or right handed. Thereafter, I used my right hand for transmission about as often as I used my left but the situation never arose in which I had to do it.

The Attack Toward the Siegfried Line

During the night of December 7-8th the 103d Division relieved elements of the 45th and 79th Divisions along the Zintzel River. An hour before dawn on December 9th, a coordinated barrage of field artillery, cannon company fire, 60mm mortars, 81mm mortars, tanks and tank destroyers opened up on the positions that we were about to attack. Many of the 81mm mortars were throwing in white phosphorous shells. They gave the barrage the look of a July 4th fireworks display but its purpose was deadly. It was a terrifying sight, far more frightening in the dark than the contrived firepower demonstration we had seen back at Camp Howze. It significantly softened up the defenses on the Kraut side of the Zintzel River but they still fought stubbornly for Griesbach. Movement was slow at first but then we advanced more rapidly through Eberbach and Woerth.

The Maginot Line

It was in this area that we ran into one of the most expensive mistakes ever made. Before the start of World War II, the French built a wall of underground fortresses along its border with Germany to defend against the Germans of they should ever attack France. At ground level there were heavy concrete bunkers, pillboxes protecting machine guns and artillery pieces. These were all exposed on hill tops to intimidate the Germans and had clear and overlapping fields of fire with barbed wire strung in front of them. These fortifications were all interconnected by tunnels with electric trains to permit rapid movement of troops from one place to another. There were underground sleeping quarters, bath rooms, kitchens, ---- everything needed to make life comfortable for the French soldiers and miserable for the Germans if they should be foolhardy enough to make a head-on attack against these fortifications called the Maginot Line.

The Germans were not that foolhardy. They simply attacked around the end of the line through Holland and Belgium and flew over the Maginot Line dropping thousands of paratroopers behind the line in France.

This new kind of warfare in which fast armored columns raced around the flanks of defenses and paratroops were dropped behind prepared defensive positions was called blitzkrieg, or "lightning war," it was invented and named by the Germans and significantly changed the way that wars on the ground would be fought.

The guns of the Maginot Line could not be turned around to fire the other way so the Maginot Line was useless. France had been easily defeated.

As the Cactus Division pressed forward, the Germans chose not to defend any of the Maginot Line fortifications for the same reason. Everything pointed the wrong way. They did however make good use of the fields of fire that the French had cleared in front of their bunkers. Our troops had to attack over open ground with no cover or concealment and it slowed our advance considerably when the attack had to carry across this kind of exposed terrain.

For a while, the Krauts seemed to be fighting just a holding action to permit them to fall back in an orderly fashion to previously prepared defensive positions along the border. On their side of the border lay the fortifications that Germany had built to protect against an attack from French soil. It was called the Siegfried Line and its concept was quite different from that of the Maginot Line.

We would soon find out that the Siegfried Line would be a tough nut to crack. The Siegfried Line consisted of groups of camouflaged machine gun emplacements concealed in the mountainsides. There were usually three or more of such strong points laid out to provide protective fire for one another. The attacking force had to advance through trees and there were strategically placed artillery pieces to fire devastating tree bursts over the attacking forces. Unlike the Maginot Line, there was not just one main defensive line but layer after layer of hidden defensive strong points. As the Germans pulled back from one strong point to another, the area given up was heavily mined and booby trapped. the idea behind the Siegfried Line was that the attacking forces would eventually take such heavy losses that they would simply have to give up the attack and fall back.

Climbach, France

It was now December 14, 1944. As we got closer to the German border, Jerry's defense began to stiffen. fighting on French soil was one thing but fighting on the soil of the Fatherland, Germany, was quite another.

The battle escalated in the 411th Infantry Regiment's zone in the area of Lembach and Wingen but one of the fiercest battles of the entire campaign, as far as the 103d Division was concerned, was about to take place in the last French town before the German border.

That town was Climbach.

We were in Wingen on the left flank of the 411th Infantry Regiment's zone as the battle for Climbach began. Col. Donovan Yeuell quickly moved his advance CP to a house on the side of a mountain looking straight up the valley toward Climbach where he could see the battle unfold and give prompt commands when the situation demanded it.

The attack on Climbach was a difficult problem. It was necessary to advance up open terrain. There was a road along one side of the path of advance but the Germans had zeroed in on every foot of the road and had done the same thing with the open terrain as well. They held all of the high ground and their artillery pieces were well protected and looking right down our throats.

A Negro tank destroyer (TD) outfit, the 614th Tank Destroyers was deployed in a relatively exposed position to keep the German artillery busy. It was a bloody battle in which the 411th took heavy casualties. Relatively speaking, the 614th TDs suffered even heavier casualties but they fought gallantly and earned a Presidential Unit Citation for their efforts that day.
The house that Col. Yeuell had picked for his advance CP was in such a strategically perfect location, with a view of the entire valley up to Climbach, that I felt certain that it would draw artillery fire the moment the battle started but there were so many other inviting targets on the field that day that we did not draw a single round. It did not always work out that well.

The battle lasted all day but in the end, the Germans were driven out of Climbach and back toward their own border.

Col. Yeuell moved the 411th advance CP to Climbach. Here we caught heavy but periodic mortar fire. As usual, the Krauts could be counted on to fire on a precise time schedule and everyone ducked under cover just before each round came in, so there were no casualties.

I was talking to some of the GIs in the CP. There was a lot of jittery conversation. Everything anyone said was funny, or appeared to be. It seemed that there was

almost continuous nervous laughter, but most of the laughter was just a release of pent-up tensions. A tanker told us about a Kraut who was out in the open, chasing a chicken with the obvious intention of cooking it for dinner. He was out of range of rifle and machine gun fire so the tanker decided to take a crack at him. He bore-sighted him, and quickly dropped in an HE round. It was close but the Kraut ignored it. The next round got him and the chicken, with feathers flying everywhere. It seemed funny at the time. When I relate, to people who have never been in combat, the occasional truly funny things that happened from time to time, they wonder how we could find anything funny about the war. I guess you had to be there.

Bobenthal, Germany

We were now right on the German border and they fought savagely for every foot of ground.

On December 15, 1944 at 1305 (1:05 p.m.) 411th Infantry, I (Item) Company crossed the German border followed about five minutes later by L (Love) Company. These were the first American soldiers in the Seventh Army, in fact, in the entire 6th Army Group, to enter Germany.

In just one month from its initiation into combat, The 103d Infantry Division had proven its mettle and was now spearheading the drive of the 6th Army Group into Germany. In that short time we had earned a reputation as crack mountain troops and that reputation was being tested again in the Hardt Mountains.

The Heinies defended bitterly. The first of the Siegfried Line strong points was encountered on December 16th and little progress was made all day but the 411th held onto its foothold inside Germany. They pushed forward bit by bit paying for every bit with casualties.

On about December 17, 1944, Bobenthal fell to the 411th and Col. Yeuell moved his advance CP into the town. Needless to say the Krauts were most unhappy about our presence in the Fatherland and let us know by pounding Bobenthal with artillery.

Bud Hennum, our crew chief, had his helmet "pot" full of water sitting on a stump. He was trying to wash his face and hands and shave. The several artillery pieces firing into the town were apparently scattered about and while each was probably firing on a precise and predictable time table, they were not coordinated so Bud could not time the arrival of the next round. They were 88s so we couldn't hear them coming, anyway. The saying was, "If you hear an 88 round don't bother to duck. It missed you."

However, that advice was not taken seriously by Bud. He hit the dirt every time a round came in ----- and so did the rest of us. I don't think that he ever got his face washed while we were in Bobenthal.

The 409th Infantry Regiment also entered Germany near Wissembourg and found it slow going. By December 21st, the 409th and 411th Regiments had ground out German territory inch by inch as the capture of one layer of Siegfried Line strong points only revealed another. It was like peeling an onion ----- take off one layer and there is still a whole onion underneath.

It was beginning to look like we would have to slug it out for every inch. There would not be a quick breakthrough anywhere along the line. The 103d Division would pay dearly for every square foot of German soil it captured.

Start of the Battle of the Bulge

Meanwhile, on December 16th, German Field Marshal von Rundstedt had launched, in the Ardennes Forest to our northwest, a carefully planned armored counterattack employing hundreds of tanks supported by infantry in what would soon be called the "Battle of the Bulge."

We were too busy with our own little corner of the war to read the Army newspaper, Stars and Stripes, but those behind the lines who saw the latest copies realized that this counterattack was becoming more serious by the minute. Troops were being moved northward to help contain and beat back the attack and others would have to be moved to take their places.

The 103d Division was to be withdrawn from the Siegfried Line and moved to the flank of the Bulge to fight a holding action while the Bulge was contained and reduced.

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P A P A ' S W A R, P A R T 3

Near St. Diè, France, Nov. 11, 1944 - Baptism of Fire

As it moved into position for its baptism of fire, the 103d Infantry Division initially reported to VI Corps commanded by Major General Edward H. Brooks, which, in turn, reported to Seventh Army, commanded by Lieutenant General Alexander M. Patch, which was part of 6th Army Group, commanded by Lieutenant General Jacob L. Devers.

On Nov. 11, 1944, elements of the 103d Infantry Division relieved elements of the 3d Infantry Division in the vicinity of St. Diè, France. No more military exercises. --- This was the real thing.

The irony of this date, the 26th anniversary of the armistice of World War I, "The War to End All Wars", was not lost on us.

In typical Army fashion, the Cactus Division which had been trained in the steaming swamps of Louisiana and on the hot arid plains of Texas was going to get its first taste of battle in the snowy Vosges Mountains. It was no comfort whatsoever to learn that no army had ever successfully fought its way through the Vosges.

A quartermaster supply truck rolled into the area. When the driver left it unguarded, we scrambled inside for a look. It turned out to be filled, not with extra rations or ammo, as expected, but crate after crate of condoms. The obvious question was, "Where in the world would any of us get the opportunity to use those?" The veteran infantrymen from the 3d Division said, "Don't worry about it. You will get to use them. Grab a handful. You are going to need them," and stuffed their jacket pockets with them. The 103d Division Doughs did indeed find an immediate use for them. They rolled them over the muzzles of their M-1 rifles, their carbines and their machine guns to keep the rain out of the barrels. The first shot simply blew them away. A latex condom turned out to be the best available protection for one's weapon. It still is.

It did not take long for the 103d GIs to discover that condoms also made great waterproof containers for cigarettes, matches, a few sheets of toilet paper, and any other small items we had to protect.

In preparation for our sojourn overseas we had been lectured rather strenuously about German booby traps of all kinds. That first week, as we moved into the mountains, a few of us wandered around to appraise the area, and there, leaning against a tree was a German bed roll with a P-38 pistol on top, in a handsome leather holster. We all stood a respectful distance away from it, lusting for the P-38 but leery of a booby trap.

Among our little Radio group was a cocky Texan , Arby Curtis, who wore his helmet at a jaunty angle. Arby, with Alamo in his blood, finally sneered at our timidity, walked right up to the bedroll and took the P-38 --- AND NOTHING HAPPENED! --- except he now had a P-38, and he let everybody know it.

The radio teams were now official. T/3 Norval "Bud" Hennum, a former railroad telegrapher from Kennedy, Minnesota was our crew chief. The other member of the team was T/5 Seymour Fader from Brooklyn, N.Y. I, of course, was still a private as were most of the other "Coolies" assigned to other radio teams.

Other radio teams were assigned to Division Headquarters, the 409th Infantry Regiment, the 410th Infantry Regiment, and other units.

Our team were assigned, in the Division Command Net, to Headquarters, 411th Infantry Regiment.

Headquarters,---- that had a nice *safe* ring to it.

The 411th Infantry Regimental Commander was Colonel Donovan P. Yeuell, --- a soldier's soldier, regular army, a veteran of WW I and, as we were soon to learn, a rugged no-nonsense hands-on commander.

Colonel Donovan P. Yeuell

During the night of Nov. 15th the 411th Regimental Command Post (CP) was set up in a lumber mill near Rougeville. We parked our radio truck well out of the way of traffic in and out of the CP but as the sky began to lighten at dawn, it became obvious that the Germans, who had artillery dug in along the mountain ridges in front of us, would have a clear view of us when it got a little lighter.

Bud Hennum, our crew chief, went in search of a more sheltered location. He returned in a few minutes with word that he had found a good spot between two buildings, just room enough for our truck. I started the engine but before I could get in gear, there was a heavy explosion and pieces of a vehicle flew over the tops of the buildings that we were going to park between. Our first choice for a parking place had been anticipated by the Krauts and they had mined it. Someone else had beaten us to that "good spot" and had paid heavily for the privilege.

We couldn't stay where we were so Bud went in search of another spot and returned shortly with a second choice. It was not very well protected from enemy fire but the truck would be hard to see from the ridge occupied by the Germans. I stepped on the starter and experienced déjà vu. This time a wheel of a vehicle and a man were thrown up higher than the building by the thunderous explosion.

Bud said, "Maybe we had better stay right here," and the whole team agreed.

In about an hour, a column of tanks came down the road past the CP.

It was preceded by engineers with mine sweepers. They swung their mine detectors back and forth and moved cautiously into our area.

They pulled several mines out of the ground around our truck. The tracks of our wheels in the mud ran right between them. When we pulled off out of everybody's way, we apparently pulled too far off and got into an area that had not been cleared of mines. This was our first but it would not be our only close call with mines.

After some preliminary maneuvering to get into position for attack, the 103d went into action at 0900 (9:00 a.m.) Nov. 16, 1944.

The 103d Division's first objective was St. Diè, the city where cartographers first identified America on a map in honor of Amerrigo Vespucci, the Italian explorer.

A heavy artillery barrage preceded the attack across the Taintrux River. As the battle intensified around St. Diè we eventually got our truck out of sight behind a manure pile and that seemed to provide adequate concealment but the adjacent barn attracted an occasional mortar round and sustained a fair amount of damage.

The cannon company of one of the regiments had emplaced its howitzers part way up the mountain at the edge of the forest to our rear. They opened up with the characteristic "BLAT!" sound that 105mm howitzers made and fired two or three missions before the Germans found them. The answering artillery fire hit in the trees above and behind the cannon company positions. There was no escape from the tree burst shrapnel. It was frightening and there were casualties.

It became clear that the kind of foxhole we had dug on the rolling plains of Texas were worthless in the trees. Here, foxholes had to be covered with several layers of logs to provide adequate protection.

While we were parked behind the manure pile we noticed that the mortar fire had exposed a large supply of lumber in the barn. Some of the boards were just the right length to attach to the bows supporting the canvas on our truck. Between mortar rounds, we stripped off the canvas and nailed the boards to the bows and covered our new wooden roof back up with the canvas. This was the start of a continuing project to winterize the working area in the back of the truck and make it as comfortable as possible ---- our new home away from home.

Despite the occasional incoming mortar rounds, I was too grungy to go any longer without washing up. I removed the liner from my helmet, filled the steel "pot" with water from a nearby pump, and prepared to wash up as best I could with ice cold water. I took off my Vacheron watch, hung it from an overhead branch, and set

about the task at hand. I was squatting in front of my helmet, naked from the waist up. The next mortar round was close causing me to flatten on the ground, jamming my head into my helmet pot, forgetting that it was full of water that was now both icy and soapy. After wiping off the dirt and soapy water and drying myself, I looked around for my watch. It was still hanging from the branch where I had left it but a small fragment from the mortar shell had struck it and there were springs and badly damaged watch parts hanging out where the crystal had once been.

Obviously, I would never be able to tell my mother what really happened to that watch and was distracted for the rest of the day trying to come up with a plausible story to tell when I finally returned home, sans Vacheron.

Time was important to us as operators of a radio in the Division Command Net. We had to check into the net at specific times and each message bore a distinctive date-time group that was important in decoding the message so Bud requisitioned radium-dial military wrist watches for the entire team.

The dials of those watches had large numerals, hand-painted on with a glowing paint made from a radium salt. The hands were also large and similarly painted. Those watches not only glowed in the dark, they glowed visibly, even in daylight. At night while outside the truck, I always made certain that the sleeve of my combat jacket covered the watch. It could be seen at a considerable distance and I did not want a sniper to spot it.

Colonel Donovan P. Yeuell the 411th Regimental Commander was not a rear-echelon commander. He usually set up the regimental advance CP at the advance CP of one of his battalions. This in turn was usually with the CP of one of the infantry companies. Col. Yeuell liked to be close to the action in order to assess the situation and make prompt first-hand decisions so the place to look for him was the 411th Regimental Advance CP or some place forward of that.

Among the first German strong points attacked by the 411th Infantry Regiment was Saucy su Meurthe. It was 22 November 1944. Able Company was attacking across a field. Kraut machine guns had taken a deadly toll. Eight men from Able Company lay dead on the field and others were wounded. One of those killed, we would learn later, was Bayard "BD" Dodge, A well-liked ASTPer from our unit in Denton, Texas.

Two other ASTPers from Denton, Tom Kane (an ASTP phys-ed basketball teammate) and Bob Enterline, (one of my ASTP roommates), both in C (Charlie) Company, 1st Machine Gun Section, were called up to give covering fire. Tom was gunner and Bob was assistant gunner and ammo handler.

In a fierce machine gun battle, they expended three boxes of ammunition until the Kraut machine guns no longer answered their fire. Tom Kane was awarded the bronze star for bravery for his actions that day. However, it takes two men to operate a machine gun, and while only one medal was awarded, there is no doubt in my mind that Bob Enterline deserved one as well. Bob earned one later for action near Rothbach.

In ten days time, the 411th Infantry Regiment attacked through Saucy su Meurthe and Combrimont, passed quickly through the 409th's sector at Frapelle and Provencheres and, in a rapid advance, attacked Steige and Maisonsgoutte. During that time we saw our first dead German soldiers. The first one was on the first day of combat. He had been lying in the rain and all of the blood had been washed away. He was pale and waxy looking, like a figure in a museum, and was lying across the path between our truck and the Regimental CP. We had to step over him to get there but did not attempt to move him out of the path for fear that he had been booby trapped. In time we would see hundreds of dead Germans but got used to it.

Killing people is what warfare is all about.

It is an ugly business.

Roosevelt's Thanksgiving Day, November 23, 1944

Mail call was always a high point of any day in the Army, but when you are part of a three-man team isolated from your parent unit for weeks on end, your mail often piled up somewhere and you got very hungry for word from home. Eventually, someone would find us and deliver our mail in a big bundle. Bud Hennum's wife wrote to him faithfully every day and it seemed like he always got a bucket full. Seymour Fader spent a lot of time writing letters and received a lot, too, but nothing to match Bud's. I was not much of a letter writer so I did not expect much in return and my expectations were realized. I usually received just a few letters that I read over and over again, forgetting the war for a moment and savoring this contact with another reality.

President Roosevelt had, for some obscure reason, changed Thanksgiving Day to the Thursday preceeding the traditional holiday. Roosevelt's Thanksgiving had been hell and it had gone by without a hot meal. We had just finished off our tasty K-Ration dinner when a messenger arrived from the Signal Company carrying, among other things, our accumulated mail. It consisted of a handful of mail, mostly Bud's, and a package, about a foot square and eight inches deep, addressed to me.

Night fall was bearing down on us and since we had not yet installed lights in the back of our truck, I set the package on the bench inside and we stood outside in the

cold reading every word of our letters in the fast-fading light. Then we piled back into the truck to get warm. Bud turned his flashlight toward my package and he and Seymour asked, in unison, "Aren't you going to open it?"

I picked it up and slowly examined it. Usually, packages from the States arrived in terrible condition, looking like the losers in an argument with a steam roller or a Sherman tank. This package was clean and did not have a single ding or dent on it. The brown paper wrapping was not torn or scarred in any way.

"Not now."

"Not now?"

"No, not now. It's probably a Christmas present. I think I will save it 'til then."

They would not accept that and refused to let up until I opened the parcel.

I cut the string which had been wrapped around it several times in both directions. Bud held his flashlight on it. The batteries were dying but it was still light enough to see what I was doing. Eventually, I got the paper off revealing a sturdy corrugated cardboard box and inside, wrapped in waxed paper was one of my beloved Aunt Callie's devil's food cakes. Aunt Callie made the best devil's food cakes in the world, dark dark moist chocolate cake covered with her secret white icing, crusty on the outside and creamy on the inside. The crust of the icing did not have a single crack in it. We momentarily pondered the miracle that brought this to us unscathed. I sliced it down the middle with my combat knife and then divided the cake into six equal pieces.

Our Thanksgiving dinner was salvaged after all. We each grabbed a slice and bit off large chunks.

"YUK! PFFFFT!", We spit the cake all over one another.

Seymour got out his flashlight, which had fresher batteries, and we took a good look at the cake. Inside that pristine white icing was a solid mass of green mold. His light also picked up a card on the floor of the truck that must have fallen out when I unpacked the cake. It was a birthday card signed by the whole family.

A BIRTHDAY card?

My birthday was in July. This cake had, incredibly, been delayed more than a month in getting to Camp Howze and had then followed me to Camp Shanks, N.Y., from there to Marseille, and from there, eventually, to the front. It had been in transit for about five months without the icing even cracking.

We cleaned up the truck and tossed the cake into the ditch.

This disappointment was nothing compared to the delayed surprise this Thanksgiving still held in store for me.

Maisonsgoutte, France, November 25, 1944

By November 25th, the 411th Infantry Regiment had captured Maisonsgoutte. Col. Donovan P. Yeuell was personally credited with the capture of two prisoners as he accompanied the lead infantry platoon into the town.

In fast moving situations like this, our radio was Col. Yeuell's only contact with Division Headquarters. Wherever he went, we went, and it was becoming clear that he would spend a lot of time in dangerous places. --------- So much for the nice, comfortable, safe sound of assignment to 411th Regimental Headquarters.

Colonel Yeuell's 411th advance Command Post (CP) moved into a building facing the German positions. The building entrance was at street level, but the building was dug into the mountainside and extended out to the rear so the ground floor in front was the second story in the rear. The rear exit was a story lower. There was an outhouse behind the building.

The CP was at street level, and our radio crew had found a place to sleep in the rear of the same floor.

At dawn, 411th infantrymen who had slept in most of the other buildings in town had fallen out into the street and were preparing to move out against the Krauts. Then all hell broke loose. The CP came under heavy enemy artillery fire that threatened to destroy it. The very first round landed outside the CP building directly under the heavily shuttered downstairs windows in the rear of the building. Some shrapnel came up through the floor between our sleeping bags but no one was wounded thanks to the stone construction of the building and the heavy wood beams and floors.

Shrapnel also came up through the heavy shutters on our level and dropped a lot of ceiling plaster all over us.

A second and third round came in very close to the point of impact of the first and then rounds came in all up and down the street. The infantrymen were caught by surprise and there were more than fifty casualties within a few yards of the CP.

An emergency Battalion Aid Station was quickly set up in one room of the CP at street level.

Someone risked a look out through the shutters and shouted, " Hey, there are wounded down there." I ran down the stairs to the lower level at the rear of the building and saw an unconscious GI lying on the ground. I crawled out to him and dragged him back inside. There was no visible sign of a wound. As soon as I got him inside the building I got my shoulder under him and carried him up to street level where the aid station was being set up.

When I went out for him I thought that I heard someone else crying for help so I went back down to the rear exit. There was another infantryman crouched inside the door. He said that he was looking for his buddy who had brought a German prisoner down to the outhouse and had not returned with him. I told them that his buddy was wounded but that I had gotten him up to the battalion aid station.

The first artillery shell that had wounded his buddy had hit directly behind the outhouse and had blown the German prisoner out of it. He was sitting on the ground crying, "Mama, Mama." The infantryman and I ran out to get him. The other GI grabbed his shoulder and I grabbed his feet. He was seriously wounded and one of his legs pulled right out of his pants. We managed to get him into the building and up to the aid station but he didn't make it. He was too severely injured. The American soldier that I brought in did survive. His wounds were serious, too, but they got to them quickly enough to save his life.

A 411th infantryman, a private named Edward Holt, acted on his own initiative to locate the enemy artillery battery. He got so close that he had to call in fire from our artillery right on his own position in order to knock out the German artillery. For his heroic actions he received the Distinguished Service Cross.

After the artillery was neutralized, the 411th's attack continued toward the Rhine Plain but the fighting through the Vosges mountains was difficult with the Germans blocking the roads with mines, abatis (trees felled across the road in a chevron pattern), heavy logs sunk into the ground, and booby traps to discourage removal of the obstacles. Whenever a column was held up by one of the obstacles, an "88", Germany's most versatile artillery piece, was usually positioned to lay down harassing fire into the trees alongside the road. There was no place to hide from tree bursts.

In this situation, I invented a new kind of foxhole. Caught in the open without my entrenching tool, I clawed a horizontal foxhole straight into the side of the mountain using only my mess kit and my fingernails ----and I dug it in record time. The dirt that came out of the hole was piled up in front of the entrance to provide some protection but I doubt that it would have helped much. A few heavy logs would have been better but I did not have either the time or the inclination to cut down a tree using only my dull mess kit knife.

Le Howald, France -- Friendly Fire

The 411th slugged its way slowly through a succession of small villages ---- St.Martin, Le Howald, Andlau, and Eichoffen.

Again, Colonel Donovan P. Yeuell, the 411th Regimental commander, was right up there with them and wherever he went, we went. One night, his advance CP was set up in a building near Le Howald.

Every radio truck carried a reel of "Spiral-4 cable." We had no idea what it was intended for but we quickly found a good use for it. We rigged up a way to run this cable out to a safe place like the cellar of a building and used the several insulated conductors in the cable to listen to our receiver, turn the transmitter on and off, and key messages over the transmitter, all by remote control.

We had a heavy duty battery on the truck to handle the radio gear as well as the electrical equipment of the truck, lights, ignition, etc., but we had to be careful not to run the battery down. This meant that in situations where remote control was definitely called for, we still had to go out to the truck periodically and run the engine for a while to recharge the battery. The other side of the coin was that we could not just let our engine run indefinitely without risking running out of gas at an inopportune time or overheating the engine.

Even though it was a quiet night, we had arranged the remote control mode of operation. I checked my watch and noted that it was time to recharge the battery so I went outside and started the engine. I set it for a fast idle and was just jumping back down to the ground when an artillery shell landed in the field about a hundred yards away. Another round came in, much closer than the first, and I wasted no time getting back to the CP.

The building was like a fortress with massive stone walls and heavy wooden doors about four inches thick hanging from huge wrought iron strap hinges. The window shutters were similarly constructed. I hit the door going full speed expecting it to swing open, but at the sound of the first shell, someone had barred it from the inside, apparently thinking that it would provide better protection that way. The windows had also been barred.

I crawled around from door to door and window to window trying to get inside but everything was locked tight and the sound of my hammering at the doors and windows was apparently masked by the ever increasing sound of the incoming artillery barrage. There were no ditches --- no place to hide. I was out there all alone and that was the scariest part.

With my face in the mud, I crawled back to the truck and slithered underneath the engine block thinking that it might provide a small measure of protection from an air burst. The engine was still running and I got a scorched spot on the shoulder of my combat jacket from the exhaust pipe. At the time, I did not even think about the gasoline. With 20/20 hindsight, it does not seem like a very good idea to hide under a truck during a barrage.

It often happens that the first round of incoming fire knocks out wire communication but, luckily, in this case it did not. Col. Yeuell got on the phone and called for counter fire and the barrage abruptly ceased. It turned out that it was "friendly" fire.

One of the cannon companies was firing a mission by map coordinates and due to someone's goof had their 105mm howitzers aimed in exactly the opposite direction from their intended target.

In spite of the intensity of the barrage, most of the shells landed in an open field. There were no casualties although some trucks were damaged, but still serviceable. Our truck was not damaged at all.

Then the 411th took a small city, Barr.

What a wonderful night I had in Barr. I had a warm bath in a tub and slept in a clean feather bed. This would be the only time, for the duration of combat that I would have such luxurious accommodations.

A Potpourri of Ups and Downs

On November 29th, at Itterswiller, my ASTP reveille adversary, Stuart Friedman, was seriously wounded by an incoming 88 shell and lost a leg. ASTP classmate, Carl Christensen, was killed in the same action. The following day, Sid Kantor, another ASTPer who, as a medic, played a major role in getting Friedman back to an aid station was captured when the Germans overran the aid station in a counter attack.

As time went by we made our radio truck a more livable place, in one town we ripped the doors off of a tall wooden cabinet to eventually close in the rear of the truck. For now, though, we tossed them into the back of the truck for later installation. we also scrounged a seat from a German Kubelwagen (their equivalent to our jeep) for the on-duty operator's comfort.

We installed a set of shelves over the radio set for the Signal Operating Instructions (SOI), our M-209 Converter (the device used to encode messages sent back to Division HQ and decode incoming messages), message pads, and other miscellaneous stuff. Each shelf had a deep lip on it to keep the contents from slipping out while we were traveling.

Thermite grenades were taped over the radio set and over the shelf where we kept the SOI and M-209 converter. If capture was imminent, by pulling the pins on those incendiary grenades we could reduce it all to ashes in a matter of seconds.

There was also a thermite grenade taped to the steering column to disable the vehicle by melting the column. It made us sweat a bit to know that that grenade was right over the driver's crotch, specifically, my crotch, and I made certain that the halves of the cotter pin were spread wide open to prevent anyone from accidentally pulling that pin.

The NCO in charge of the Construction Section, Master Sergeant Lovell Collins, together with one of the Construction Section wire crews had taken over a basement of a three story building as their living space. It only had two doors and small windows at the street level so they assumed that it would provide adequate protection from German fire.

The only commode in the building was down there in the basement. Suddenly the crew heard a loud crash. Down the hall, past the stored potatoes and salted down fresh eggs, and going full speed ahead, was Marvin Ellis with his pants around his ankles. The Krauts had put an 88 through the window and shattered the commode he was sitting on. The shell did not explode, but the commode did, --- and Ellis thought he might!
Before anyone could ask him what happened, Ellis was tearing down the street as fast as he could go (considering the constraint imposed upon him by his pants).

Warfare seems to make it rain and there was lots of that, and lots of deep gooey mud to go with it. Tanks and trucks slid all over the muddy roads. Often there was white tape stretched along the shoulders and warning signs on stakes driven into the mud, "MINES SWEPT TO DITCHES." The German warning signs "MINEN!",

black with white lettering and a white skull and cross bones, also grabbed our attention.

There were numerous badly damaged vehicles upside down along side the road to emphasize the point and those was all the warning I needed to drive carefully.

Near Gundershaffen, Charles Struwe, a well liked Signal Company Message Center messenger, was carrying dispatches from one headquarters to another. His vehicle hit one of those mines.
He was blown up through the canvas over his head and clear of his vehicle, sustaining only minor injuries. Some nicknamed him "Lucky" but I don't think the nickname stuck for very long.

Between two of the small villages, we were following Col. Yeuell's jeep. Off to our right, about a hundred feet down a side road, we passed an American tank that had taken a direct hit from German artillery. There were many GIs, more than a dozen of them, lying very still all around the tank. They had all been killed by the shell. It was one of the saddest sights of my life --- so many young men who would never have a chance to live out their normal lives. We had already grown insensitive to the sight of dead Germans but never hardened to the sight of dead American comrades.

There were mortar rounds dropping in the field directly ahead of us as the 411th infantry attacked across the field toward the Germans dug in on the other side. We caught some machine gun fire but it was way off the mark.

Col. Yeuell had the top and windshield down on his jeep but we lumbered along behind him with our canvas in place, as it had to be to protect our radio set. Unfortunately, it made us a much better target.

The road made a sharp right hand turn and Yeuell's jeep dropped down behind a hedge row. His jeep was no longer in enemy view but our big rectangular canvas was quite visible. A German machine gunner made us his own personal target. Fortunately, he did not give us enough lead. The guys in the back had rolled up the rear canvas and dropped the tail gate to the level position so they could get out in a hurry. They were lying on their bellies on the bed of the truck, as low as they could get, as the machine gun chewed up the dirt in the side of the hill behind us. The gunner would fire a long burst tracking toward us from the rear but stopped just before any of the rounds hit the truck.

The Sniper

Eventually, the cut for the road got deeper and we were no longer visible to the enemy. We were about to enter a small village when Col. Yeuell's jeep stopped. There were several vehicles stopped ahead of him blocking the way. Col. Yeuell got out of his jeep and went up to see what was holding us up. Bud Hennum, our crew chief, also went for a look. He came back and reported that the Krauts had blown the bridge across a narrow but deep and swiftly flowing stream. It was impassable. Engineers were already working on it but we would be there for a while.

We were still down in the deep cut so I got out from behind the wheel and checked out my M-3 grease gun. I had two magazines taped back to back. I had never fired it in anger but, this close to the enemy, it did not seem like enough, especially if they counter attacked. I crawled into the back of the truck to get a canvas bag containing about twenty extra magazines.

I hung the bag's carrying strap around my neck and stepped out onto the tail gate of the truck. I accidentally tilted the bag so all of the magazines started slipping out and down into the mud. I dove for them trying to catch as many as possible and heard the loud "spang" of a ricochet off the wall behind me followed instantly by the crack of a rifle.

A sniper, in the attic of a building that had been bypassed by the infantry as they advanced across the field, had me in his sights, but when I dove for the magazines, his round had passed harmlessly over my head.
This particular sniper had given the infantry a lot of trouble. He had hit several GIs and no one knew where the shots were coming from. Snipers usually use "flashless" powder. This time, he goofed. Someone saw the flash and put a "bazooka" round into the attic. That was the last we heard from that sniper.

I surveyed the mess that I had on my hands. Every muddy magazine had to be disassembled and cleaned and every round of .45 caliber ammunition had to be carefully wiped off and reloaded into the magazines to prevent a jam at an inopportune time.

Ordinarily, I would have done a lot of bitching and moaning about a chore like that, but not this time. These M-3 submachine gun magazines were special. They had saved my life.

Struthof Concentration Camp

A bit northwest of Barr, elements of the 103d Division overran Struthof. To my knowledge, it was the only German Concentration Camp located in France.

Struthof was set up specifically to deal with the French resistance fighters who were very strong in this area. The Germans evacuated the camp just before our arrival and shipped all of the prisoners to Dachau so we had no idea, at that time, of the unspeakable horrors inflicted on those brave man and their families in this camp. We only found out later. Some of the prisoners were shipped from Dachau to its subsidiary camps located around the city of Landsberg where we would eventually learn first hand of the atrocities of which the Germans were capable.

Epfig and Ebersheim, France

After Barr, the 411th continued to attack. The Division objective was to capture the city of Selestat that straddled the main road from Strasbourg to Colmar. This road was the principal supply route of the German army to its troops in the Colmar Pocket, an area around the French city of Colmar. The presence of a large German force in this pocket on the west side of the Rhine posed a threat to the entire right flank of the American and French forces driving northward toward the German main line of defense, The Siegfried Line.

It was expected that the Germans would fight tenaciously to keep us from cutting this vital supply line to the Colmar Pocket.

The 411th fought through stubborn resistance at Epfig. During that battle we were in a cellar in Epfig when an infantry replacement in the same cellar started crying uncontrollably. I tried to comfort him. He was not a coward. It was clear that he was neither physically nor psychologically equipped to be a soldier. He was a little boy in a man's uniform and through some horrible mistake had slipped through the screening that should have determined that he could never be a combat soldier. Eventually, the Medics got him out of there and hopefully, he was not treated as a malingering gold brick. I ran into a few of those in the army but this guy wasn't one of them.

Just as Selestat straddled the main supply route from Strasbourg to Colmar, Ebersheim straddled the same road north of Selestat so its capture would shut the main supply route to Selestat as well. In bitter fighting, the 411th pushed the Krauts house by house out of Ebersheim and Col. Yeuell had us right in the middle of it again. The Germans mounted several counter attacks and all the while had Ebersheim under intense mortar fire. I was operating the radio and Bud Hennum was driving. He pulled the truck close up against an iron gate and said that he and Seymour Fader were going to locate the CP and try to find a safer spot for the truck, close enough to the CP to run in our remote control cable. While I was alone

in the back of the truck, some GI pulled up in a jeep right next to our truck and ran for cover as the mortar barrage intensified.

Another jeep pulled up behind us. Finding the road blocked, the driver started blowing his horn. I lifted the rear canvas and the driver yelled at me to move up a little so he could get through. He kept blowing his horn and yelling, "Hurry up! I'm gonna get killed out here!"

I jumped down, climbed into the driver's seat, pulled forward just enough for him to get through, and then climbed back into the rear of the truck. I had just settled back into the Kubelwagen seat when there was an ear shattering explosion. I looked at the rear canvas and it was riddled with holes. I shook my head to clear the cobwebs and saw a piece of shrapnel embedded in the wood of the shelf directly behind my head. For a moment it seemed like it could not have gotten there without passing right through my head so I yanked off my helmet and checked to see if there were holes through it. There were none. It was a totally irrational act to check my helmet like that but sometimes we do strange things. Obviously, I had heard something just before the mortar shell hit and had instinctively ducked but I have no recollection of doing that.

The mortar shell had smashed into the bottom of the iron gate and demolished it.

It had to have come from a direction that would have caused it to land right in my lap if I had not moved the truck. The gate was set back slightly from the corner of the building to which it was attached. The stone building absorbed most of the shrapnel coming in my direction.

About fifty yards to the rear of our truck, a jeep parked on the opposite side of the street had all four tires flattened and the radiator ruined by the shell. If I ever find the driver who blew his horn at me until I moved, I just might kiss him. There is no doubt that I owe him my life.

Fader came back and found me still shaken from the near miss. They had found the CP and there was a courtyard surrounded by a high stone wall behind it. He guided me into it and ducked back into the CP.

As usual, Col. Yeuell had his advance CP set up facing the Kraut positions, on the top floor of the building. We were in the room directly behind the main CP. Our roll of Spiral-4 cable would not reach so we would have to operate the radio while actually sitting in the truck. A mortar round came down right on the sill of one of the windows in the CP and bounced into the room. It was a dud. Someone in the CP picked it up carefully (it was hot) and dropped it out the window into the courtyard but it hit the ground without exploding.

Wire teams had gotten telephone lines into the CP but the heavy mortar fire had taken them out. As quickly as the wire teams repaired or replaced the lines they

were taken out again. It happened over and over so it was radio or nothing. Yeuell's message center gave us a long encoded message to send back to Division HQ.

In situations like this we took turns. This time, it was my turn to go to the truck. One mortar was zeroed in on the court yard. Luckily, the Germans were so methodical that if they were laying in one round every two minutes, you could set your watch by it and that was precisely what this mortar was doing.

I hid inside the door and waited watching my sweep second hand. A round came in and I started watching the time. Simultaneously, I raced for the truck, established communication and started sending the message. When it was one minute and fifty seconds since the last round, I sent "AS," the shortcut used by Morse code operators for "wait", and dove out the back of the truck. At two minutes, exactly, I was face down in the dirt and the next mortar round exploded.

I climbed back into the truck and continued sending the message. At three minutes and fifty seconds after the starting round, I sent "AS" again and dove out of the truck. Again the round came in right on time. I again scrambled back into the truck and continued sending the message but soon realized that I had lost track of my starting time. I quickly sent "AS" and grabbed the bow under the canvas and swung out. While hanging there exposed, the next round came in and I felt a sharp sting across the back of my left wrist. There were only a few more code groups to send so I swung back in and sent them, closed out the transmission, and hit the dirt again. After the next round, I ran back into the CP and it was someone else's turn. The "wound" from the mortar fragment was just a minor scratch. I put some sulfa powder and a small bandage from my first aid kit on it and in a couple of days it had healed. It was not worth reporting.

A German prisoner was brought into the CP for interrogation. He claimed to know nothing about the location of the mortars. After lengthy questioning, a guard took the prisoner out to the courtyard to think about it some more and found a safe place for himself. After the third or fourth mortar round came in, the prisoner was ready to tell us everything. He did and the mortars were soon neutralized.

Selestat was going to be difficult to capture but it would not take the entire division to do it. A special task force was organized for the job, but the 411th was not designated to take part. The 411th troops in Ebersheim were relieved by French troops, actually Senegalese, in red fezzes, from Africa, they all carried sharp curved dirks and had deep scar designs cut into their faces and must have been frightening to the Krauts who had to fight them. They frightened me ---- and they were on our side.

Redeployment for the Attack on the Siegfried Line,
December 5, 1944

There was a new task now for the 103d Division, so once on the Rhine Plain, on December 5th, we turned north toward the Siegfried line and the roads, through territory already cleared by other divisions, filled with long convoys of 103d Division vehicles.

At one point during this redeployment, it seemed like, in one thunderous explosion, the whole top blew off of one of the mountains. In Stars and Stripes, the Army newspaper, the explanation was that some Germans were buttoned up in a medieval castle that American forces had bypassed. The German troops had mortars set up in the central courtyard and were lobbing harassing rounds in all directions around the castle. The walls of the castle were twelve to fifteen feet thick and our artillery could not make a dent in it. A half track that had been badly damaged was loaded with as much explosive as it would hold and was directed, unmanned toward the castle. When it was snug up against the castle wall, it was detonated and blew a hole about ten feet in diameter in the wall. Stunned Krauts poured out of the hole and the mortars were neutralized.

We were among the first troops to arrive at the new 103d Division assembly area near Gougenheim, southwest of Haguenau. This gave us some extra time to change our stinking socks, to get cleaned up, to grease our truck, and do some more work on making the radio operating area of our truck more comfortable.

Our crew pulled out the wooden cabinet doors that we had scrounged earlier and installed them sloping down from the last canvas supporting bow of the truck to the rear edge of the leveled tail gate. In this mode of installation they were a perfect fit. These doors were arranged to open outward so we could exit in a hurry. We provided an overhead light in the operating area, interlocked with the doors to automatically go out when the doors were opened to maintain blackout conditions.

The benches along each side of the closed-in area were just wide enough to sit on but it was impossible to sleep on them. We soon fixed that. We found two heavy plywood boards about three inches wider than the benches and they made all the difference in the world. We could now sleep on them without rolling off onto the floor every time we tried to change position. It was tight but there was now room enough for two to sleep on the benches while the operator on duty sat in our scrounged Kubelwagen jeep seat.

We had a hot meal, pancakes, for a change, and some of our radio team and about a dozen other GIs were sitting around in a room on the second floor of a building drinking coffee and shooting the breeze.

It was a long room with a single window at one end and a door that opened into the room at the other. The last GI in had closed the door and was leaning back against it. Suddenly the window disintegrated and we all saw a Messerschmidt ME-109 flying straight at us with all guns blazing. Everyone rushed for the door but since it opened inward, we all just piled up against the guy leaning against it.

We collapsed in a heap on the floor and everyone was digging to get himself on the bottom of the pile. It only took two or three seconds for the plane to pass overhead. Only one round had come through the window and it had not hit anyone. After that first round, the rest apparently passed harmlessly over the top of the building.

We had hot coffee all over us. Someone started to laugh and we all joined in. One guy said "Boy, did you guys look silly, all trying to get down under the pile." Another answered, "How would you know? You were on the bottom the whole time and couldn't see anything." Finally, someone said, "Well, it was funny but how about getting that damned door open, and leaving it open, just in case that joker comes around again."

We did --- but he didn't.

That day a mess truck arrived with GI pots containing our Thanksgiving Dinner, chicken ala king. They had been trying to catch up with us ever since Thanksgiving (more than a week ago) and our dinner had been in those pots all that time -------- but they didn't tell us that.

Within minutes, I was hit with the "GIs" and they were not to end until late April, 1945.

About that time, I realized that the scratch that I had received from the mortar fragment was on my left wrist and I am left handed. What if it had been a more serious, but not necessarily life threatening, wound? Or, what if I simply sprained my left wrist or broke my arm? I might still have been able to function in all respects except my primary one, sending Morse code when the situation demanded.

I decided to provide us with some insurance in the event of an injury to my left hand or arm.

The telegraph key that we used for code transmissions was attached to a wide metal clip that clamped on the thigh just above the knee. By resting our wrists on our upper thigh we could transmit effectively even while in motion over bumpy terrain.

At every opportunity, I clamped the key on my right knee and practiced code with my right hand. After a month or so I was equally competent left or right handed. Thereafter, I used my right hand for transmission about as often as I used my left but the situation never arose in which I had to do it.

The Attack Toward the Siegfried Line

During the night of December 7-8th the 103d Division relieved elements of the 45th and 79th Divisions along the Zintzel River. An hour before dawn on December 9th, a coordinated barrage of field artillery, cannon company fire, 60mm mortars, 81mm mortars, tanks and tank destroyers opened up on the positions that we were about to attack. Many of the 81mm mortars were throwing in white phosphorous shells. They gave the barrage the look of a July 4th fireworks display but its purpose was deadly. It was a terrifying sight, far more frightening in the dark than the contrived firepower demonstration we had seen back at Camp Howze. It significantly softened up the defenses on the Kraut side of the Zintzel River but they still fought stubbornly for Griesbach. Movement was slow at first but then we advanced more rapidly through Eberbach and Woerth.

The Maginot Line

It was in this area that we ran into one of the most expensive mistakes ever made. Before the start of World War II, the French built a wall of underground fortresses along its border with Germany to defend against the Germans of they should ever attack France. At ground level there were heavy concrete bunkers, pillboxes protecting machine guns and artillery pieces. These were all exposed on hill tops to intimidate the Germans and had clear and overlapping fields of fire with barbed wire strung in front of them. These fortifications were all interconnected by tunnels with electric trains to permit rapid movement of troops from one place to another. There were underground sleeping quarters, bath rooms, kitchens, ---- everything needed to make life comfortable for the French soldiers and miserable for the Germans if they should be foolhardy enough to make a head-on attack against these fortifications called the Maginot Line.

The Germans were not that foolhardy. They simply attacked around the end of the line through Holland and Belgium and flew over the Maginot Line dropping thousands of paratroopers behind the line in France.

This new kind of warfare in which fast armored columns raced around the flanks of defenses and paratroops were dropped behind prepared defensive positions was called blitzkrieg, or "lightning war," it was invented and named by the Germans and significantly changed the way that wars on the ground would be fought.

The guns of the Maginot Line could not be turned around to fire the other way so the Maginot Line was useless. France had been easily defeated.

As the Cactus Division pressed forward, the Germans chose not to defend any of the Maginot Line fortifications for the same reason. Everything pointed the wrong way. They did however make good use of the fields of fire that the French had cleared in front of their bunkers. Our troops had to attack over open ground with no cover or concealment and it slowed our advance considerably when the attack had to carry across this kind of exposed terrain.

For a while, the Krauts seemed to be fighting just a holding action to permit them to fall back in an orderly fashion to previously prepared defensive positions along the border. On their side of the border lay the fortifications that Germany had built to protect against an attack from French soil. It was called the Siegfried Line and its concept was quite different from that of the Maginot Line.

We would soon find out that the Siegfried Line would be a tough nut to crack. The Siegfried Line consisted of groups of camouflaged machine gun emplacements concealed in the mountainsides. There were usually three or more of such strong points laid out to provide protective fire for one another. The attacking force had to advance through trees and there were strategically placed artillery pieces to fire devastating tree bursts over the attacking forces. Unlike the Maginot Line, there was not just one main defensive line but layer after layer of hidden defensive strong points. As the Germans pulled back from one strong point to another, the area given up was heavily mined and booby trapped. the idea behind the Siegfried Line was that the attacking forces would eventually take such heavy losses that they would simply have to give up the attack and fall back.

Climbach, France

It was now December 14, 1944. As we got closer to the German border, Jerry's defense began to stiffen. fighting on French soil was one thing but fighting on the soil of the Fatherland, Germany, was quite another.

The battle escalated in the 411th Infantry Regiment's zone in the area of Lembach and Wingen but one of the fiercest battles of the entire campaign, as far as the 103d Division was concerned, was about to take place in the last French town before the German border.

That town was Climbach.

We were in Wingen on the left flank of the 411th Infantry Regiment's zone as the battle for Climbach began. Col. Donovan Yeuell quickly moved his advance CP to a house on the side of a mountain looking straight up the valley toward Climbach where he could see the battle unfold and give prompt commands when the situation demanded it.

The attack on Climbach was a difficult problem. It was necessary to advance up open terrain. There was a road along one side of the path of advance but the Germans had zeroed in on every foot of the road and had done the same thing with the open terrain as well. They held all of the high ground and their artillery pieces were well protected and looking right down our throats.

A Negro tank destroyer (TD) outfit, the 614th Tank Destroyers was deployed in a relatively exposed position to keep the German artillery busy. It was a bloody battle in which the 411th took heavy casualties. Relatively speaking, the 614th TDs suffered even heavier casualties but they fought gallantly and earned a Presidential Unit Citation for their efforts that day.
The house that Col. Yeuell had picked for his advance CP was in such a strategically perfect location, with a view of the entire valley up to Climbach, that I felt certain that it would draw artillery fire the moment the battle started but there were so many other inviting targets on the field that day that we did not draw a single round. It did not always work out that well.

The battle lasted all day but in the end, the Germans were driven out of Climbach and back toward their own border.

Col. Yeuell moved the 411th advance CP to Climbach. Here we caught heavy but periodic mortar fire. As usual, the Krauts could be counted on to fire on a precise time schedule and everyone ducked under cover just before each round came in, so there were no casualties.

I was talking to some of the GIs in the CP. There was a lot of jittery conversation. Everything anyone said was funny, or appeared to be. It seemed that there was

almost continuous nervous laughter, but most of the laughter was just a release of pent-up tensions. A tanker told us about a Kraut who was out in the open, chasing a chicken with the obvious intention of cooking it for dinner. He was out of range of rifle and machine gun fire so the tanker decided to take a crack at him. He bore-sighted him, and quickly dropped in an HE round. It was close but the Kraut ignored it. The next round got him and the chicken, with feathers flying everywhere. It seemed funny at the time. When I relate, to people who have never been in combat, the occasional truly funny things that happened from time to time, they wonder how we could find anything funny about the war. I guess you had to be there.

Bobenthal, Germany

We were now right on the German border and they fought savagely for every foot of ground.

On December 15, 1944 at 1305 (1:05 p.m.) 411th Infantry, I (Item) Company crossed the German border followed about five minutes later by L (Love) Company. These were the first American soldiers in the Seventh Army, in fact, in the entire 6th Army Group, to enter Germany.

In just one month from its initiation into combat, The 103d Infantry Division had proven its mettle and was now spearheading the drive of the 6th Army Group into Germany. In that short time we had earned a reputation as crack mountain troops and that reputation was being tested again in the Hardt Mountains.

The Heinies defended bitterly. The first of the Siegfried Line strong points was encountered on December 16th and little progress was made all day but the 411th held onto its foothold inside Germany. They pushed forward bit by bit paying for every bit with casualties.

On about December 17, 1944, Bobenthal fell to the 411th and Col. Yeuell moved his advance CP into the town. Needless to say the Krauts were most unhappy about our presence in the Fatherland and let us know by pounding Bobenthal with artillery.

Bud Hennum, our crew chief, had his helmet "pot" full of water sitting on a stump. He was trying to wash his face and hands and shave. The several artillery pieces firing into the town were apparently scattered about and while each was probably firing on a precise and predictable time table, they were not coordinated so Bud could not time the arrival of the next round. They were 88s so we couldn't hear them coming, anyway. The saying was, "If you hear an 88 round don't bother to duck. It missed you."

However, that advice was not taken seriously by Bud. He hit the dirt every time a round came in ----- and so did the rest of us. I don't think that he ever got his face washed while we were in Bobenthal.

The 409th Infantry Regiment also entered Germany near Wissembourg and found it slow going. By December 21st, the 409th and 411th Regiments had ground out German territory inch by inch as the capture of one layer of Siegfried Line strong points only revealed another. It was like peeling an onion ----- take off one layer and there is still a whole onion underneath.

It was beginning to look like we would have to slug it out for every inch. There would not be a quick breakthrough anywhere along the line. The 103d Division would pay dearly for every square foot of German soil it captured.

Start of the Battle of the Bulge

Meanwhile, on December 16th, German Field Marshal von Rundstedt had launched, in the Ardennes Forest to our northwest, a carefully planned armored counterattack employing hundreds of tanks supported by infantry in what would soon be called the "Battle of the Bulge."

We were too busy with our own little corner of the war to read the Army newspaper, Stars and Stripes, but those behind the lines who saw the latest copies realized that this counterattack was becoming more serious by the minute. Troops were being moved northward to help contain and beat back the attack and others would have to be moved to take their places.

The 103d Division was to be withdrawn from the Siegfried Line and moved to the flank of the Bulge to fight a holding action while the Bulge was contained and reduced.

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PAPA'S WAR, PART 4

Redeployment to the Flank of the Bulge

On December 21, 1944, The 411th Infantry Regiment was relieved by elements of the 45th Division. We fell back from Bobenthal to Climbach and were ordered to carry as many ground troops as we could squeeze into our already crowded radio truck. 103d Division transportation units, plus nearly 200 trucks loaned by Seventh Army, were used to move the entire division over icy roads to an area about 75 miles to our northwest. There we relieved the 6th Armored Division allowing it to move still further to the northwest toward the Ardennes.

By December 23, 1944, the relief of the 6th Armored Division was complete and the 103d was busy digging in for its new role, fighting a holding action. The Main Line of Resistance (MLR) was straightened out, one regiment (409th Infantry) was held in reserve and the two front line regiments, (410th and 411th Infantry) were thinly deployed along the Main Line of Resistance and Outpost Line of Resistance located along the Forbach-Saarguemines axis facing Saarbrucken.

Farebersviller, Lorraine

The 103d Division was placed, temporarily under the XV Corps. The 411th main CP and advance CP were in the same town, Farebersviller.

Two disturbing stories were filtering back from the Ardennes area. The first was that the Germans had made no provision for handling prisoners of war and had massacred a lot of American prisoners at a place called Malmedy. That made us mad.

The second was that the Germans had dropped agents behind our lines. They were highly trained in American slang, chewed American gum, smoked American cigarettes, wore American uniforms and dog tags and even drove American jeeps. These saboteurs were disrupting communications lines, blowing bridges, and setting mines and booby traps behind the lines and were considered more dangerous than the average German soldier because, if caught in American uniforms, could be shot as spies. In a confrontation, they had nothing to lose and would try to shoot their way out rather than surrender.

We were all very nervous about the German agents and no one ventured out of doors after dark without being absolutely certain that he knew the password. If you encountered someone you did not personally know, the password was not enough. We asked questions like, "What do you do with a shortstop?" or "What's the name of Roosevelt's dog?" or "What is Betty Boop?" ----- and you had better know the answer because trigger fingers were very itchy.

One of the GIs in the 411th Regiment Message Center had received a present from home. It was a red and white striped stocking cap that hung way down his back. It had white pompon on the end. He ran toward our radio truck from the Message Center with a request that a message that we had recently received be sent again. It was after midnight, the password had changed, and he had not bothered to get the new one. I was standing guard in the sub-zero cold outside the radio truck and challenged him. He should have answered with the first part of the several-part password. Instead he just yelled, "Damn it, Evans, It's me," and waggled his pompon at me.

I was not kind to him. "You stupid bone head! (Actually, I used a stronger expression than that.) What if you had run into someone who doesn't know you or your stupid hat? You could be dead by now!"

We went into the back of the truck and I gave him the password so he could get back safely.

He explained that the Regimental Message Center could not decode the last encoded message that I had delivered to them and wanted Division to retransmit it.

Unnecessary transmissions gave German direction finders time to locate our transmitter and call in an artillery strike so we tried to avoid them if possible. I asked him to wait, took my copy of the message and started running it through our decoding device, the M-209 Converter, and it started decoding perfectly. I said, "Look, the M-209 settings are supposed to be changed at midnight but sometimes a message sent before midnight (on yesterday's settings) does not arrive until after midnight. (I kept decoding as I talked.) We deliberately wait a couple of hours after midnight to change our settings because there might be traffic coming in just like this."

I finished decoding the message and gave it to him. "Now, if you can manage to get back to the Message Center alive, tell those dunderheads that just because the clock says that its past midnight does not mean that they should use the new settings on everything received. First, check the date-time group on the message. If its yesterday's date, use an M-209 converter with yesterday's settings. That's one of the reasons why the Message Center has more than one converter, --- so you can leave one on yesterday's settings for a while just to cover this kind of event. If I get killed some day because I was transmitting unnecessarily, I will come back to haunt all of you. Luckily, this is not an urgent message. Message Center is getting it much

quicker than they would have if I had asked for a new transmission because someone at the other end would have to check to be sure the message was properly encoded before it could be sent again, and that all takes time. If this happens with an urgent message and a lot of lives are at stake, I might personally toss a grenade in the goddamn Message Center. Tell them that."

I guess all the talk of saboteurs had rattled my nerves a bit but I don't think I was too hard on him.

The GI from Message Center double checked to be certain that he had the password right (It was Pi-an-iss-im-o) and took off. Pianissimo was a stupid password.

How can a bunch of farm boys be expected to remember a word that most of them had never heard before in their entire lives?

There was no action along the front on Christmas eve.

In fact, while the units defending on either side of the 103d Division were repeatedly and heavily attacked during our holding action, the 103d was inexplicably spared except for minor raids and skirmishes brought about mainly by our own forays.

Christmas day we finally got a good meal, hot turkey with cranberry sauce and all the trimmings --- except potatoes. Usually, field kitchens had tons of dried potatoes. If they ran out of everything else they still had potatoes, but not for Christmas. They ran out of potatoes --- so we got a potato substitute --- spaghetti.

It did not matter much to me one way or the other. I still had the "GIs" brought on by the bad chicken ala king, our Thanksgiving Dinner served more than a week after it was prepared. A meal hung around for, at most a half hour, and then it was gone. Christmas Dinner was no exception.

I had to stay close to a latrine at all times. We were sleeping in a building with no roof and only three corners but I slept next to the exit nearest the path to the latrine.

Then, they dug an officers' latrine directly across the path leading to the enlisted latrine. At night, the officers' latrine saw a lot of me, and maybe a lot of other GIs, too.

If the officers had to have their own latrine and wanted it to be exclusive and private, they should have found a better place for it.

The building in which we were billeted had been damaged rather badly by artillery fire at some earlier time but the one next to it had been completely demolished except for one corner and the parts of two walls that joined there. I was poking around in the demolished building when something caught my eye. A crack running diagonally down the wall made a strange rectangular detour. I started digging around the detour with my combat knife and eventually pried out a brick. Behind it was a small hiding place and in it was a small moldy leather pouch.

I emptied the pouch into my hand and was amazed to find that it contained around forty gold coins. One was an American 20 dollar gold piece. The rest were 10 and 20 mark German gold pieces. All of them bore dates prior to World War I. It looked like someone hoarded these in anticipation of, or during, WWI and perhaps died, carrying the secret of their hiding place to the grave. I already had a bunch of the Post-WWI inflation currency in denominations running into the millions and even trillions of marks so I mixed the 10 and 20 mark coins with them and sent them all home together as "old" coins and bills. In a later letter, I explained that I had misspelled an important word that should have started with a "G." My mother was smart enough to figure it out, sorted out the gold coins from the worthless ones and kept them in a safe place until I got home.

I kept the 20-dollar gold piece in my possession. It just felt good and had a beautifully sounding ring when dropped on a table top.

Every outfit has a clown and the Regimental Headquarters Company was no exception. This guy rigged an elaborate gag. He unscrewed the firing mechanism off of the top of a hand grenade and emptied all of the explosive out of the grenade. Then he found a spot between a thick barn wall and a manure pile, pulled the pin and tossed the firing mechanism over the manure pile. After the primer cap exploded, he recovered the grenade handle and the screw-in mechanism. He recocked the firing hammer, attached the grenade handle to hold the hammer in place, and reinserted the pin. Then he screwed the grenade back together and hung it by its ring from a button hole. The next time a bunch of Regimental Headquarters GIs were sitting around in a bull session, he sat there fondling and tugging at the grenade. Suddenly the pin pulled out and the handle went flying across the room. The hammer made a loud click as it snapped down in what would normally have been the start of the timing sequence and the grenade rolled out of his hands onto the floor.

Everyone saw it and everyone froze. There was no hero diving on the grenade to save his buddies. There were no cowards bowling others over to get to safety. They all just froze and stared at the grenade.

After what seemed an interminable time --- much longer than it would normally have taken for the grenade to explode --- the joker could not hold it in any longer and choked back a laugh.

No one else saw anything even remotely funny about it.

They damn near killed him but he laughed the whole time that they were beating on him.

What he didn't know was that some time earlier, some of the same GIs had tried to get warm in a house and found that there was a fire all ready to start in a pot-belly cast-iron stove. There was dry kindling arranged to properly light up the pile of charcoal briquettes. Apparently there was also a booby trap, the head of a German "potato masher" grenade hidden in the pile of briquettes.

They lit the kindling but before the fire really caught, they were called out of the room because the CP was moving elsewhere. They had just gotten clear of the building when the grenade exploded. They tried to look back inside to see what had happened but the grenade had powdered the briquettes and the building was full of impenetrable black dust. Booby traps came in all sizes and shapes.

After that earlier scare, the Headquarters Company clown was lucky that they did not disassemble him piece by piece.

During the holding action, the Jerries hit the Divisions on either side of the 103d with numerous attacks but, inexplicably, left the 103d alone. There were no enemy artillery or mortar barrages in areas where our wire communications lines were located so they stayed intact.

As a consequence, there was less and less radio traffic other than routine check in by all of the stations in the Division Command Net. Regimental and Division Command Posts stayed put for a change. This meant that there was time for field kitchens to set up and we would get some hot meals instead of K-Rations.

It also meant that there was some mysterious and unauthorized "ditting" going on around the Division Command Net every morning. No call signs were sent but at a predetermined time, the 409th, 410th, and 411th reported, in numerical order, what their field kitchen was having for breakfast. One dit meant pancakes, Two dits meant eggs (dehydrated and slightly greenish in color, but eggs none the less). Three dits meant S.O.S. Four dits meant hot cereal such as oatmeal or cream of wheat. Five dits meant none of the above, if you come you are taking your chances. All three Regimental CPs were within a short drive of one another. The 409th CP was in Hellimer, the 410th was in Guebenhaus and we (the 411th) were in Fareberville.

The report was transmitted very quickly --- dit,--- dit dit dit, --- dit. That translated into: the 409th is having pancakes, the 410th is having hot cereal, and the 411th is also having pancakes.

For us, that meant stay at home and have pancakes or run over to the 410th for hot cereal.

Once in a while there were three different choices and some times only one. At least those of us who were in on it had a choice most of the time.

The weather could only be described as lousy over a wide area ---- bitter cold, cloudy, and ground fog every day. This favored the Germans in their Ardennes counter attack, by now generally known as the Battle of the Bulge. Allied planes could not see targets so they were grounded and the German Panzers pressed the attack without fear of reprisal from the air. The battle was going well for them except for one snag. They were held up by the courageous men of the 101st Airborne "Screaming Eagle" Division at Bastogne, a small but strategically important town in Belgium.

Their Division Commander was in Washington when the counter offensive began and there was no way that he could get back to Bastogne so the 101st Airborne was being temporarily commanded by the Assistant Division Commander, Brigadier General Anthony Mc Auliffe. When the General commanding the German forces encircling the city sent in a representative with an ultimatum demanding the surrender of Bastogne, Mc Auliffe answered, "Nuts!" --and his men dug in for a continuing fight and took a horrendous pounding from the German tanks and artillery. They stood their ground and became known as "The Battered Bastards of Bastogne."

The 101st Airborne beat off attack after attack before tanks from General George S. Patton's Third Army broke through the German lines and reached Bastogne on December 26, 1944.

Within a few days the weather cleared and the Allied Air Forces struck with their full might. At first we heard the sound and within minutes the sky from horizon to horizon in every direction was filled with four engine bombers ---- B-24 Liberators, B-17 Flying Fortresses, along with British Wellingtons and Lancasters that usually took the night missions, --- and more. Each V-formation was tucked in behind the V preceding it and had another V tucked in behind it. The formations were wing-tip to wing-tip as far as the eye could see. Some of them were pounding Saarbrucken and we could see enormous shock waves radiating out from the bomb bursts. It was a most impressive sight, probably the most impressive sight of my life.

P-47s, P-51s, Hurricanes, Spitfires, and B-26s flew low level sorties against the panzers and ground troops of the Wehrmacht and they broke the back of the German columns.

General Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander, inexplicably opted to push the Germans back along the entire front instead of pinching off the salient and surrounding the enormous number of German troops who would have been trapped and cut off from supplies of food, fuel, and ammunition. This decision cost thousands of American lives, a loss that probably could have been avoided. Gradually, however, the bulge was reduced and the Germans suffered such heavy losses that they had to retreat back to Germany.

On January 6, 1945 Harold Class, one of our ASTP classmates and a life-long friend of John Donlan was shot and killed by a sniper.

On January 8th the 103d Division's Commander, Major General Charles Haffner had to give up his command and return to the United States due to poor health.

On January 9th, the 103d Division was placed temporarily, in the XXI Corps. By that time the Bulge had been significantly reduced and the situation stabilized. Major General Maxwell Taylor, The Division commander of the 101st Airborne was able to return to his troops and, on January 11th, Brigadier General Anthony Mc Auliffe, the hero of Bastogne, was given command of the 103d Infantry Division and quickly promoted to Major General.

General Anthony Mc Auliffe

The Division was soon to learn that whereas General Haffner had been a "map-room" commander, Mc Auliffe was a "hands-on" commander. He and Colonel Donovan Yeuell, commanding the 411th Infantry Regiment, were cut from the same cloth. Mc Auliffe immediately visited the troops in all areas. They saw at once that

he was no mirage --- he was the real thing and they would see more of him when the war heated up again. It was good for morale to have that kind of leader.

On January 12, 1945 the 103d Division went on the offensive for the first time since arriving in Lorraine. The 411th Infantry Regiment attempted to capture some high ground commanding the area in the vicinity of Sarreguemines. They encountered enemy forces in much greater strength than expected and were forced to withdraw to positions just slightly in advance of their initial line of departure.

Return to Alsace

On January 15, 1945, the first elements of the 103d Division was relieved by elements of the 70th Infantry Division and started the trip from Lorraine back to Alsace.

On January 16th, the 103d Division was reassigned to the VI Corps.

The 411th remained in its defensive position until it was relieved on January 17th and started the 75-mile trek back to Alsace. Once again, our radio truck was loaded with as many GIs as we could squeeze in and we were given a rather large trailer to tow. It was full of captured German signal equipment to take back for evaluation.

I had never towed a trailer of any kind although, back in Driver Training School, I had one practice session backing one up for a short distance. I had not done it too well.

I drew the driving assignment.

There had been a lot of light snow along our proposed route so we put on our tire chains but we had no chains for the trailer.

The roads were rutted in spots, icy, and treacherous, made even more so by the strips of white tape running down both sides and the ever present warning signs "MINES SWEPT TO DITCHES." It was slow going.

Two or three hours into the trip we came to a long and very steep grade. The road wasn't rutted but it was extremely icy. At the bottom of the hill, the road made a sharp left hand turn and immediately crossed a narrow wooden bridge over a deep ravine.

We paused at the top to think it through.

Bud Hennum was in the assistant driver seat. He asked, "What do you think?"

After a hard look I said, "I think I could handle it O.K. if we didn't have this damn trailer, --- but I don't know."

Behind us, drivers started honking their horns and yelling, "Come on, keep it moving."

I shrugged, put it in four-wheel drive, double-low gear and gently let up on the brake but did not feel good about it. About a third of the way down, I noticed the trailer swinging around to the left so I eased my steering wheel that way to get in front of it. Then it started to swing the other way and I eased my wheel to the right to get back in front of it again and all the while keeping an eye on those damned white tapes. As we came into the sharp left turn, the trailer was, luckily, now swinging again to the left. I slowed as much as I dared using the brake and that caused the trailer to try to pass me on the left. Now I was around the corner and rolling onto the bridge but in front of the trailer again. It swung back and overshot, hitting the rail on the right-hand side of the bridge. It then swung wildly back and hit the left side of the bridge. The trailer was now in control and was pushing the truck from side to side. We bounced off of both sides of the bridge two or three times before we cleared it. Then the trailer was headed straight down the center of the road but it had turned our truck sideways and we were skidding down the road in front of it. It was useless to try to use the brakes. All four wheels were still turning trying to get some traction and I started to try to steer in front of the trailer again but it never happened. All four wheels suddenly gripped the road and we lurched straight ahead, through the white tape, across the frozen ditch and about fifty feet out into the field before I stopped bouncing around enough to kill the ignition.

I was hyperventilating.

The GIs in the back had our makeshift doors shut to keep warm so they had not seen a thing. After they got untangled from one another, all of them started yelling at once, "What the hell happened?". Bud Hennum answered, "Stay still and do not try to get out of the truck. We are off the road and through the tapes in a field. We don't know if there are mines here or not. We had better wait until someone comes to get us out."

It was a long wait, several hours at least, and bladders could not hold out any longer. The snow all around the truck took on a decidedly yellow hue ------ and a couple of other colors, too, because I still had the "GIs" --- but none of our feet actually touched the snow.

Eventually, some Engineers stopped and gingerly worked their way toward us with their mine detectors. They pulled out about a half dozen in our general vicinity, all

anti-tank mines, --- no shu mines or "Bouncing Betty" antipersonnel mines were found. The shu mine, plastic explosive in a wooden box, was virtually impossible to detect with mine sweepers that, basically, responded to metal. The shu mines were bad enough, they could blow your foot off but everyone feared the "Bouncing Bettys." If you stepped on one of those, it popped up out of the ground attached to a 30-inch wire. When it reached the end of the wire, about groin high, it exploded blasting shrapnel horizontally in all directions. Luckily, the "Bouncing Bettys" could be detected with a mine sweeper.

When I tried to back out with the trailer, it went in every direction except the direction in which I was trying to go. It soon became clear that I was going to get outside of the swept area if we continued with that plan so the Engineers cleared a new path in front of the truck that circled back to the road. Meanwhile everyone got out of the back, walked along the Engineers' originally cleared lane and waited for me on the road. So did Bud Hennum. I called them all chicken but I probably would have done the same thing.

After a few more mines were swept from my path, I was able to drive forward so I got the truck and trailer back on the road safely. Everyone piled back into the truck and the rest of the trip back to Alsace was uneventful.

Upon arrival, the 411th CP was located in Bouxwiller and the 411th was designated Division Reserve, --- but names are deceiving. The 2nd Battalion was immediately detached to the 45th Infantry Division to attack a hill near Reipertswiller in an attempt to take some of the pressure off five companies of the 45th Division's 157th Regiment that were surrounded by elements of the German 6th SS Mountain Division "NORD," the 11th SS Regiment, and the 256th Volks Grenadier Division. In two attacks, one in a snowstorm, the 2nd Battalion took heavy losses and was repulsed by heavy artillery, mortar, and small arms fire.

Meanwhile, the five surrounded companies unsuccessfully attempted to break out and were overrun by the Germans and either killed or captured. Since the 45th Division no longer needed the 2nd Battalion it was returned to the control of the 411th in Bouxwiller. Meanwhile, the rest of the 411th Combat Team was attached to the 79th Infantry Division where it immediately went on the attack against strong enemy defenses at Sessenheim near Haguenau. There the attackers ran into devastating fire from dug-in tanks and larger concentrations of infantry than were expected. After heavy losses, the commanding general of the 79th Division, on January 19, 1945, called off the attack and returned the troops to the control of the 411th in Bouxwiller.

The 411th Regiment, returned to the control of the 103d Division, took up the position of Division Reserve at Bouxwiller, Alsace.

During the absence of the 103d Division from Alsace, the Ardennes was not the only area under attack by the Wehrmacht. They had attacked, in "Operation Nordwind," a number of points along the Seventh Army front. One of the consequences of this was that whereas we had left the area with a strong foothold in the Siegfried Line, the Germans had secured several salients in our lines and there had been a general withdrawal to straighten out the front.

Upon our arrival there was still a problem. The Divisions on either side of the 103d's new defensive position had been pushed back somewhat further leaving the 103d's sector as a narrow salient surrounded on three sides by the Germans. There was a very real danger that we might be caught in a pincer and become totally surrounded.

A strategic withdrawal was mandated by the higher echelons at VI Corps or Seventh Army headquarters. It took place on the night of Jan. 21st in a blinding snowstorm.

The GIs did not want to leave for two good reasons. The members of the resistance, Force Francaise Interieur (FFI), who had come out in the open and assisted us with intelligence about the German positions, had families in the towns that we would be vacating and feared for their lives. Also, we would just have to take the same ground all over again ---- but the brass prevailed. The withdrawal was a terrible ordeal for all concerned.

A military force is most vulnerable during a withdrawal. This one took place in a blinding snowstorm and, coincidentally, we were attacked by fanatical SS units hopped up on schnapps and ether and shouting epithets in English. They snapped at our heels throughout the entire withdrawal. We lost many vehicles that slipped off the roads and could not be recovered.

There were attacks and counter attacks throughout the remainder of January and then both sides just seemed too exhausted to continue the battle.

The situation quieted down and lines became static for the month of February and there was only occasional patrol activity.

Imbsheim, Alsace, February, 1945 , The Winter Doldrums

As was customary when things settled down, our radio team was relieved by another team and we returned to Division HQ for vehicular maintenance and other matters that could not be handled in the field. In particular, we welcomed the opportunity to get a bath and swap our stinking uniforms and socks for something a bit cleaner.

A Quartermaster Corps mobile shower unit, apparently designed for use in the tropics, was set up in an open field. A semi-tractor pulled the trailer containing the showers, plumbing, and heating elements of the unit. Next to the trailer was the undress area, enclosed by a canvas wall about three feet high and two feet off the ground that did little to stop the cold wind coming off the Hardt Mountains in early February. There were benches to sit on while undressing, a large and growing pile of dirty clothing, and a dirty duckboard walk leading into the elevated trailer bed.

After the hot shower, there was another board walk "protected" by a four-foot canvas to a tent where we drew clean clothes, then out into an open area to put them on. By that time you sure had a frozen butt.

Division HQ was in the small Alsatian town of Imbsheim. The Division radio in the Division Command Net was set up in a warm building. It was an operating environment far superior to our cramped truck, despite the modifications we had made to make it more comfortable. We shared the operation of the Division radio in the Division command net with members of several other crews so we had a little bit of time off.

We also monitored the "dits" every morning and thereby managed to get a pretty good variety in our breakfasts.

The local residents occasionally offered wine for sale. They charged an arm and a leg for it considering the quality of the wine. The main reason for the high cost was the bottle (le bouteille) which they could not replace. We were all familiar with bottle deposits back home on everything from milk, to soft drinks, to beer but here they were serious about it. The deposit was a lot more than the cost of the contents. Once we discovered that the wine was cheap if we just brought le bouteille back we did that and soon had wine with every meal.

Bouxwiller, where the 411th Infantry Regiment was in Division Reserve, became the focal point for a lot of leisure time activity.

We saw a few recent movies including "Gaslight" and "Song of Bernadette" and there was an occasional touring USO show, although we were probably the only place in the world that Bob Hope never visited.

We did have two visits, however, from Marlene Dietrich who appeared in a flesh-colored skin-tight full-length gown with a long seductive slit up the side, that titillated everyone's hormones. She seemed to have been sewn into that dress. At each show she sang several songs. I'm not sure which ones but "Lili Marlene" comes to mind. Then she enticed a GI volunteer up onto the stage with her. She snuggled close up against him and walked around him rubbing against him suggestively, titillating more than just his hormones. It drove him and the appreciative audience wild.

Marlene's shapely gam

She closed the show by exiting the stage and then extending her shapely leg from behind a flap in the tent, exposing a garter having one of our division shoulder patches attached. It brought down the house.

During the February doldrums I was sitting on a low stone fence, cleaning my "grease gun," and watching a small twin-engine German plane flying high over the front. I then spotted a flight of P-47 Thunderbolts coming at him right out of the sun. There were puffs of smoke along their wings as they cleared their guns and

peeled off after him. I figured that the German pilot was a dead duck but when the first tracers zipped past him, he turned that plane straight up and the Thunderbolts passed at least a thousand feet under him. Then he simply left them like they were standing still.

The German plane was a Messerschmidt ME-262, the first practical jet fighter. It's a good thing the Germans were unable to get many of those off the assembly line. From what I saw, the ME-262 could fly circles around our best propeller driven planes.

While in Imbsheim, Mike Shindler was, once again, temporarily assigned as the third member of our crew and Seymour Fader was detached for other duty.

Seymour was given a nasty assignment by Capt. Beck who "volunteered" him for the job. An infantry company had been pinned down in a mine field by mortar fire. A mortar round had killed the Company's radio operator and disabled his radio. An infantry radio set had been strapped on Fader's back and he and Bill Ballantine had been ordered by Beck to get it out to the infantry company. While crawling through the mine field, Ballantine was hit in the leg by shrapnel. Seymour crawled through the mortar fire to drag Bill to safety in an abandoned German bunker and eventually delivered the radio to the Company Commander. Meanwhile, the source of the mortar fire had been found and neutralized. Fader was recommended for the Bronze Star for his action but Capt. Beck killed it.

The scuttlebutt was that he did not intend for any of his enlisted men to get a medal until he had one.

Fader had a keen sense of humor. While we were having a bull session outside of the Division radio room, Fader was chatting with George Bartlett, the same George Bartlett who had the mademoiselle plunk down beside him on the "ten holer" on the Marseille plateau. Bartlett wanted to practice his typing so he asked Fader to dictate to him.

Fader, dictating slowly, and with pauses for thought, came up with the following, ala Ogden Nash.

How I love You La Belle France---(Or let Ogden N. Beware)

Whenever I looked at a travel poster
of France,
I wanted to go there the moster
Of any country in the world.

She was like a gal bejeweled and pearled
that gave me the come on,
But when I came, she went on
to show me her manure pile
Instead of the Isle
De France and Notre Dame.
I'm sorry I came.

Lots has been said about La Belle France,
But she's become a pain in my pance,
Because the wine that was supposed to flow in the streets
like water
And which I like to drink but hadn't awter
Tasted like said water highly diluted
Which instead of drunk,
makes you polluted.

What's more the prices they charge are exorbitant
Unless you got empty bottles,
Which reminds me of Coca Cola,
A much better drink than you knowla.

I had to find out by coming to France,
That's why I say she's a pain in my pance.

One afternoon I was seated on my favorite outdoor chair, a low stone fence, watching a one-sided dog fight between some American planes and badly outnumbered German planes. It was all going on at high altitude but a shell from a nose cannon on one of the planes hit a building and exploded just a few feet from me. Lesson learned. All of that stuff they are shooting around up there has to come down somewhere. Don't watch, get under cover.

Things were pretty "GI" at Division Headquarters. The "Willie and Joe" look, popularized in Bill Mauldin's "Up Front" cartoons was out. Everyone had to shave and look like a garrison soldier. It was getting to be a real chicken outfit again but it was quiet and reasonably safe. A lot of "chicken" can be tolerated under those circumstances.

We got occasional reminders that we were not completely safe, however. The Germans had a huge railway gun, nicknamed "Alsace Alice," that they used to lob

shells into Division Rear, in Saverne, nearly 20 miles behind us. The shells sounded like freight trains going overhead. Luckily, the gun, which backed up into a railroad tunnel to hide after firing a few rounds, was located. A tactical air strike sealed off both ends of the tunnel and that was the last we heard from Alice.

Back to the 411th

"The Buddha," M/Sgt. Emil Boitos, called Bud Hennum's team together (by now, Fader had rejoined us) and told us to be ready to move out in one hour. We were going back to the 411th Infantry Regiment. When things started heating up again, our crew was invariably sent back to the 411th so our truck was always ready to go on a moment's notice. We kept it that way. We had our gear loaded up in about 15 minutes and told him we were ready to go.

He said, "OK, Let's get moving. I'm going with you to show you where the CP is located."

I replied, "That's not necessary, Sarge. We have been to Bouxwiller before. I remember where the 411th CP is located. We'll find it."

However, he insisted. He said the CP was kind of hard to find because it down a side road and he wanted to make certain we got there ok. He indicated that he would return to the Division CP with the radio team that we were relieving.

Well, that was that. I got in behind the wheel; the Buddha got in the assistant driver's seat with his map board; Hennum and Seymour Fader who had replaced Mike Shindler piled in the back and we took off.

Instead of taking the main road from Imbsheim to Bouxwiller, Buddha put us on a narrow lane that showed little sign of travel. When I questioned the route, he told me to stick to the driving and he would do the navigating, so I shut up.

Before long we passed what appeared to be an infantry squad returning from a patrol. They gave us strange looks as we continued in the direction from which they had come.

As we started around a bend in the road, I spotted something that looked suspiciously like a machine gun emplacement, slammed on the brakes, and backed up to a position of concealment even though there was very little protective cover.

The Buddha studied his maps and decided that we probably should have turned at the last crossroad, but he wasn't too sure. It was clear to me that he was lost and

retracing our tracks seemed like a great idea. There seemed to be room enough to back off the road to the right and then get the hell out of there, head first, --- much preferred to backing up for several miles.

Everyone got out of the truck while I attempted to turn it around just in case the truck became visible to the machine gun emplacement during the maneuver.

I was backing slowly into the narrow space. The Buddha was waving me back with encouraging words, "Come on back. Come on back."

The other guys suddenly started shouting "NO! NO! STOP! STOP!" but the Buddha kept calmly waving me back, "Come on back. Come on back."

Somewhere in the synapses of my brain "NO! STOP!" seemed more pertinent than a calm "Come on back." I climbed out to see what was up. That was a good move. When I reached the back of the truck, Hennum and Fader excitedly pointed to an anti-tank mine less than a foot behind my right rear wheel. The Buddha, intent on turning around, was backing me right onto the mine. He still had not seen it. I don't think he ever saw it. Luckily there were no shu mines scattered about. We probed carefully for other anti-tank mines that might lie along our projected path out of that spot and finding none we got out as fast as we could.

We went all the way back to Imbsheim and started over. This time sticking to the direct main road.

It turned out that on another occasion, The Buddha had gone with Matt Kovats' team, which included Fred Horne and Frankie Applebaum, to take them to another regimental CP. In an almost identical scenario, he guided them right up to a machine gun bunker. The truck came under heavy machine gun fire and everyone hit the ditch and worked their way back to a safer spot. The truck contained the classified Signal Operating Instructions (SOI) , an M-209 converter set on the current day's settings, and a copy of the Armed Forces Code (AFCODE) for that day. It would have been a prize for German Intelligence.

An infantryman crawled up to the truck, got it turned around under heavy machine gun fire, and hauled tail back down the road with The Buddha, Kovats, Horne, and Applebaum scrambling to get aboard as he drove by because he was not about to slow down for them. Incredibly, no one was wounded in the event.

After those two episodes, the word got around and every radio team found good excuses for doing their own navigating and they were aided and abetted by the radio operators at Division HQ who contrived some emergency to keep Master Sergeant Boitos at Division long enough for the team to get away on their own.

Obviously, six stripes was no guarantee that the wearer was a competent map reader.

We rejoined the 411th at Bouxwiller around March 10th. The Regimental Headquarters had received no orders concerning the upcoming big push but as soon as we arrived, the word spread rapidly. Hennum's team is back. Something BIG is about to happen. I suppose that it was the same at the other Regimental HQs. The return of the "A" teams spelled trouble. And so it was to be this time.

Telephone calls between the Division and Regimental HQs increased in number. Colonel Yeuell and his key people were called back to Division for briefings. More and more hand-carried dispatches arrived. After all, we had been in a static situation for a long time and could not automatically assume that wire communication was secure.

There was a growing tension and one did not have to be a staff officer to know that we would soon be in the thick of it again.

Everyone knew.

"Operation Undertone"

The Big Push, Head 'Em Up and Roll 'Em Out, March 15, 1945

The artillery barrage that opened our offensive toward St. Diè on our very first day of combat was impressive but paled in comparison with the artillery display preceding the jump off of "Operation Undertone", the big Spring Offensive, on March 15, 1945.

For the previous six weeks the Germans had received harassing rounds all along the front but they were so sporadic that they probably did not realize that every cannon, howitzer, and mortar in the VI Corps was being carefully zeroed in on specific targets.

They all let go at once before dawn on March 15th.

The 411th, starting from positions along the Moder River, went on the attack toward Muhlhausen. It was the beginning of the final drive by the United States 7th Army and the 103d Infantry Division into the heart of Germany. There were miles

to go before the war in Europe would end, almost two months later, but this was to be a day of hard fighting to gain the first few yards and then a mile or less of that long journey.

The Germans had almost two months to prepare their defenses of the roads, fields, and forest through which we must attack. They had done their work exceedingly well having constructed defensive bunkers and machine-gun positions as well as destroying any terrain features that would give our advancing men cover from their fire.

As the barrage started, Colonel Yeuell's driver stuck his head in Message Center where we were waiting and said, "Lets go."

In the distance the sky was lit up and the flashes and rumble of artillery pieces behind us had the feel of a violent thunderstorm.

As we continued onward, the place where the sky was lit up, a bit to our left, turned into a town under an awesome bombardment. The distinctive KRUMP! of incoming shells grew louder.

I mumbled, "Jesus, I'm glad I'm not over there."

Bud Hennum was in the assistant driver seat checking his map with a blacked-out flashlight. "Well, You're going to be. That's Muhlhausen. There is a river that goes right through the middle of it. The Krauts are in the part of the town on the other side of the river. We are going into the part of the town on this side."

"How wide is that river?"

"About fifty feet!"

"Fifty feet? Jesus! No artillery can fire that accurately!"

The shells poured into Muhlhausen so rapidly that it now seemed like one continuous explosion. 81mm mortars were splattering white phosphorous all over the town. The white smoke streaming from particles of phosphorus arching through the air brought into focus the reality of our situation. Some of the rounds were falling short. If that stuff landed on our truck it would go up in flames.

KRUMP! That was another high explosive (HE) incoming round and it was close, too close. Forget about the phosphorous. One of those HE rounds could do us all in.

Now we were in the town and HE rounds were landing on the roofs of buildings all around us. Terra cotta tile fragments were flying everywhere. Were those ours

falling short or returning fire from the Krauts? It didn't much matter. We could be just as dead either way.

Colonel Yeuell seemed to know exactly where he was going. His driver turned into a very narrow passageway between two buildings and pulled up enough for us to follow. I hesitated, remembering the mines back in Rougeville our first day on the line, but several close incoming rounds helped me make up my mind. I turned in behind him, Hennum followed him into the building to verify that this would be the advance CP and then hollered, "Run in the Spiral-4 and get the hell out of that truck."

I did not have to be told twice.

The battle for Muhlhausen continued through the day.

Things did not start off well for the Construction section of the 103d Signal Company.

For example, March 15, 1945 is a day that Manuel Berman, will never forget.

Early that morning, a wire team led by Sgt. Paul Murray went to the "wirehead," the point in the Division Command Post where they would secure their telephone wire for connection into the communication control switchboard. Manuel Berman learned from Sgt. Murray that he had a special ad hoc assignment. He would be part of a two-man team to hand-carry a telephone line following the advancing infantry soldiers. Melvin Yuds would be his partner. They were a strange physical combination. Yuds was tall and well built, while Berman was smaller and not nearly as strong. They would carry a steel reel containing a half mile of telephone wire that was mounted on a pipe axle held on each end by somebody.

Yuds was the newest member of this four or five-man wire team which usually operated laying this same type of wire from the back of a truck using a rack which carried larger reels. Yuds had come from a Replacement Depot, a source of men who had newly arrived in Europe or who had been in action but had been wounded or withdrawn from an active assignment and were again ready for "front line" duty.

Berman and Yuds immediately started following the advancing riflemen and laying wire which was to be an important element in the communication with the division CP.

The American artillery barrage that had preceded the initial advance had been awesome, the heaviest in the war. Fog and smoke covered the countryside, a result of the phosphorous and high explosive shells we had thrown at the Germans.

Infantrymen were strung out all over, moving through the shell scarred terrain by rushes and evasive actions. German 88mm artillery and mortar fire was very heavy and explosions could be seen all around. Berman and Yuds were moving and dropping continually. The wire reel got heavier and heavier and since Berman was much shorter than Yuds, it leaned on him more. Yuds realized this and several times he carried the reel by himself 15 to 20 yards at a clip. They began to see casualties --- theirs and ours. Pretty grim stuff.

As they entered a woods, the German fire became more intense. They tried to phone back to wirehead over they line they were laying. It was a dead line. Perhaps the wire had been cut by a shell burst. This plan wasn't going to work. However, the two pushed on.

About 20 minutes into the woods it happened ---a tremendous explosion very close to them. Berman was thrown up and backward many feet. His M-1 rifle was slammed against a tree where the stock cracked and splintered. His helmet landed about 20 feet away. He was badly shaken and scared but, otherwise, seemed O.K.

Berman looked around and saw Yuds crumpled on the ground and not moving. He turned him over and saw that he was terribly wounded in the stomach, side, and arm. Yuds was unconscious. Berman shouted for a medic. An infantryman stopped to help and a medic arrived a minute or so later.

The medic said that there were abandoned German bunkers all over and that he needed some cover before Yuds could be treated. They found one about 30 yards away and carried Yuds there. The medic tried to stop the bleeding but it was too massive. He shook his head and said he didn't think Yuds would make it and that he had to help others.

At least Yuds was unconscious and perhaps not aware of the extent of his injuries.

The medic and the infantryman left and very soon an Infantry lieutenant appeared near the bunker looking for his men and he wanted Berman to accompany him. Just about then another wire-team member, Arthur Decker, appeared looking for Berman and Yuds to rejoin that group. That saved Berman from becoming an interim infantryman.

Berman and Decker headed back. The German shelling was not as heavy as before. Berman picked up a carbine to replace the M-1 rifle he had lost. It stayed with him until the end of the war.

Berman and Decker headed toward an engineer-built bridge leading into town. MPs near the bridge waved at them frantically to move faster. As they crossed the bridge, it became apparent why. Shells were coming in all around the bridge. The Germans had it zeroed in, having destroyed the original one.

Berman followed the MPs into a building and immediately fell headlong down some stairs. He was not hurt. He landed on some poor villagers using this cellar as a bomb shelter.

Sometime later, the shelling stopped. Berman moved out and found the rest of his wire team a few blocks away, where he reported Yuds' condition.

We would never learn more about Yuds' background. He didn't make it.

When our infantry moved out on the attack early this morning, they met a great deal of determined, deadly, defense. When the front had been pushed back a few miles and there was a need for longer wire communication lines, the wire team, controlled by Sgt. Eugene Jones, started forward to lay a Traffic Control line to send information back for the senior officers' information.

Traffic Control lines had always been a nuisance because usually no one wanted them after you put them in and the guy on the end was never around when you wanted him to be, but they were not too hard to lay so when Jones' men started out in the morning they didn't think of anything but the weather and trying to keep out of trouble with our army or theirs.

It was hot, dry, and dusty --- poor conditions for road work, but probably much better than the cold and ice our soldiers had seen when they were last fighting. In this area little towns and villages were sometimes less than a mile apart. Sgt. Jones' crew, which included Bill Barclay, Rudy Dortman and John Anania, moved up one town and heard rumors that the next town was running a little behind schedule as far as its liberation was concerned so the MPs were stopping some of the more cautious traffic. Jones' men moved out of the town with their lines.

Even this close to the action, Sgt. Jones wanted to put the line overhead or at least up off of the roadside. He left Dortman and Barclay to do it while the truck-team went on up the road with its wire. Across the rolling hills the "wire police-up" men could hear a machine gun chattering and a few other noises which meant the going was tough up ahead but they moved on up because as long as they were behind the truck they thought they would be reasonably safe.

It was almost impossible to hang wire on the small trees and poles that lined the road because of the many shu mines scattered about so they made good time on their approach to the scene of activity ahead. Those machine gun sounds and other disturbing noises were coming closer as they approached the now stopped truck. The discouraged, tired, faces and worried looks of the GIs already in the area told a story of rough going.

The wire truck was parked right in the center of the road and to the left of it the 614 Tank Destroyers had hastily set up their guns and the crews were taking cover in fox holes that had been dug by the Germans who had defended the position just a few minutes earlier. These Negro troops were excellent soldiers, very brave, fast, and accurate, --- (and had some of the best chow lines that we occasionally dropped in on when we were far afield and hungry).

The 614th had fought with distinction at Climbach and it was impressive to see them, once again, coming up the road and going into action with their guns without a lost motion. They were extremely effective.

A hundred yards ahead of the truck and over a slight rise and curve in the road were the remains of a bridge over a small stream. The Germans had destroyed the bridge and sown the area with tank and anti-personnel mines. Enemy artillery also had this position zeroed in.

The engineers were trying to clear the debris in order to put in another bridge to carry the traffic of the convoys waiting to move equipment and supplies up to the infantry men who had passed this point earlier that morning.

The first soldiers had been met by strong resistance and many of them were lying dead in the sun with their bodies and clothing torn to shreds. The combination of the artillery fire and the mine fields had been devastating.

To the left of the bridge site was a Sherman tank which had hit a mine. One of its tracks had been blown off and the tank was disabled. The tank men were close by. One was draped over the open turret where he had been shot as he came out. At least two of the others hit mines before they could get to cover.

Most of these casualties had occurred in earlier action. The wire team was interested in the current action. They found a spot where they could see from a position that was not exposed nearly as much as the engineers and others nearer the stream. Two members of the wire team, John Anania and Bill Barclay, had gone forward past their truck to check on the delay and the action taking place.

Occasionally an engineer using a mine detector would venture out in spite of the fire from a hidden machine gun. This bridge was urgently needed and had to be back put in operation. Anania and Barkley returned to the truck to report what they had seen.

While all were back at the truck, and as Sgt. Jones was calling back to Division HQ to tell them of the delaying situation, they heard an explosion at the bridge-site. Barkley and Anania hurried back to see what was happening.

One of the engineers had walked onto a wooden shu mine that his detector wouldn't detect and was lying there with a black cloud of smoke over him and his foot blown off.

The call for the medics went out and very shortly a medic jeep came up from the rear. They drove as close as they could to the group of men working, without getting into the open field.

A medic and an engineer with a mine-detector made their way with a stretcher out to the wounded man. With the victim on the stretcher they started back the 20 yards to the road and the waiting jeep.

The lead man (an engineer using his detector) was well aware of the danger and watched his every step, but, as Barkley and Anania watched he hit another shu mine and the three of them went tumbling.

The lead man, because of the extra weight of the man on the stretcher, had his leg badly injured. The man being carried on the stretcher caught lots of rock and debris in his back to add to his other injuries and the medic at the rear was also sprayed by debris and was down. This was more action and danger than the wire team was expecting. With a feeling of sorrow and helplessness they started back toward the truck.

The rest of the wire crew was milling around the truck and uneasy about all of the noise and confusion from around the bend at the site of the blown bridge.

They had all, for no apparent reason, started away from the truck when a barrage of 88mm German artillery shells began to fall almost on top of them.

The best cover they could find for protection from the shrapnel was the shallow ditches along the road edge, - about 8 inches of depression. The scream of the incoming shells gave them slight warning but, by the time the first or second one landed, they were making the best of this cover.

The shells came in at about five or six second intervals and from the start it was evident that the target was their truck and the large, iridescent red, friend-or-foe aircraft identification panel stretched across the top of the body.

Anania and Barclay were in the ditch on the side of the road closest to the German gun so that the shell fragments were splattering mostly away from them but it didn't seem that they had any extra safety at the time.

Rudy Dortman and some of the other fellows were on the side of the road getting most of the shrapnel. Rudy started wiggling away from the truck but the frequency of the shell bursts didn't allow for any long periods of movement. Rudy stopped with his heels in the face of a foot-soldier behind him. It was just as well because in

his crawling he was heading for less sheltered ground although he would have been further from the truck.

After the fourth or fifth explosion, the man behind Rudy began shrieking and calling for the medics and it was evident that he, or someone near him, had been hit.

Each shell sounded and felt like it was right under or on top of them, and threw shrapnel and pieces of the road and countryside on them. They thought they couldn't possibly escape injury of some kind.

Anania and Barclay were furthest forward and as they moved back, the fellow behind where Rudy had been was very panicky and screaming for the medics. The side of his head was covered with blood and it was running out between the fingers of the hand he was holding to his head. They tried to quiet and calm him by telling him that the medics were right there a few yards away when actually the medics were still loading the victims of the mine explosions

.

This fellow had been hit by a piece of shrapnel about the size of a half dollar that went through his helmet and liner. They had slowed it down, perhaps enough to save his life.

Very soon the medics and a jeep load of mine victims came up and a medic put the soldier's first aid pack on him (none of the wire team had thought of that), and they put him in the jeep.

The medics' jeep had a stretcher across the rear, along one side and across the hood ---- room for three and a passenger seat that was now occupied by a young engineering officer who had become emotionally disturbed by the recent action and injuries to his men.

A field grade officer, a Major or Lt. Colonel, had arrived to take charge of the situation and had put him there.

Those victims of the mine explosions were in shock. One fellow, with his foot broken off above the ankle and hanging by a few pieces of skin, flesh and cloth, was sitting up on the stretcher across the back of the jeep. His face was peaceful and glassy, dirty and tired, but almost without a sign of physical pain, the combination of shock and the morphine administered by a medic must have been very effective to put this man so at ease.

The wire truck was badly damaged; three flat tires, radiator blasted in many places, shrapnel holes in the body and windshield. They backed it down the road a little bit and tore the red panel off of it.

Sgt. Jones called in to the wire-head to inform them of the shelling. They sent out a larger truck to tow them in after helping to change the tires. The motor pool fixed the truck so it would run in about three hours.

Capt. Beck said he needed those wire trucks out there!

Sgt. Jones' wire crew returned to Division Headquarters, rested, and ate and thought that they had a pretty rough time. Returning from the mess hall they learned what had happened to Sgt. Jack Conn and his team.

Conn's crew had gone out to finish a line to an advance CP that another team had started. Conn's 2½ ton truck had taken the wrong road out of a little village up the way and they had run onto a string of road mines. Conn, who was riding in the passenger's seat, had been killed and Donald "Bunny" Rogers, the driver, had lost a leg. The other members of the wire team, riding in the back of the truck, were hospitalized with injuries.

Carl Wendell from the Telephone and Telegraph Section also lost a leg but I do not have the details of how it happened.

Sgt. Jones' crew worked the better part of the day (March 15) and that evening they started out to lay a division advance line to Gumbrechtshoffen, a small village in an area of rolling hills and green fields.

The plan was to go as far forward with the truck as the good roads and tactical situation would allow. The truck and part of the crew would return with two lines to the forward switch board in the burning village behind them.

Joe Aterno, the jeep driver for the Division Signal Officer, met them at that point and took Jones, Anania, and Barclay back toward the action area with some small reels of wire that could be laid by hand.

They didn't get far in the jeep before Lt. Colonel Brown stopped them and said it would not be possible for the jeep to go any further without drawing enemy fire.

They unloaded their equipment and Anania and Barclay took off laying a single wire circuit down a dirt country road through the hills and fields. Sgt. Jones was carrying the extra wire reels forward to a point where the wire being laid would run

out. Colonel Brown was right about the enemy fire. The Krauts must have seen the wire team from a distant observation point and directed occasional mortar fire their way. They were landing far enough away not to hurt anyone, but close enough to cause the wire layers to jump into a lot of muddy holes, delaying the operation a bit.

Half way to the mine field on the edge of the village, they passed through a gully. Some members of a mortar squad, who were lying or sitting there waiting for the medics to come and evacuate them, told Bill and John not to take any chances. The Kraut fire had been pretty rough and they had been victims of it.

Barclay and Anania went out, after a brief discussion convinced them that the mortar men were sincere, but probably still shaken from their experience.

They continued to lay wire and soon came to the place where the mortar squad had been hit. They apparently had been moving forward down the road and during the attack had abandoned a lot of their equipment before retreating to the gully.

Barclay picked up a carbine to replace his heavy M1 rifle (that he seldom carried, anyway). Of course, neither he nor Anania had carried rifles on this walk in the country.

The mortar shells had been less frequent, but began to become more of a threat. The road was now passing along a fence with German signs "MINEN!" on it. The edge of the village was still half a mile away so they continued a bit further before a decision to turn back was made. The partial wire reel was left for some future adventurers.

Coming back, the shelling was rougher. Occasional mortar shells kept them jumping. While Barclay policed the wire out of the road, Anania walked along with his helmet off the side of his head so he could hear the whine of the shells above the breeze whistling across the countryside.

With an almost uncanny fourth sense he would give the alarm and they would hit the ground in a pit or shell hole each had picked out with an eye to the future.

Passing the mortar squad equipment again, each of them picked up a combat jacket liner with fur on the inside. They turned them inside-out and wore them looking like a couple of apes. This was not the first or the last time that fatigue, stress, or danger had caused Construction Section personnel to act weirdly.

The 411th advance CP in Muhlhausen was split between two small buildings separated by about twenty feet and joined by a wall about four feet high and four feet thick. There seemed to be no good reason for this wall other than to make a defensive strong point of this cluster of buildings. Midmorning, I had to go from one building to the other. I was crouched down hugging the wall when machine gun tracers flashed over head. I looked up just in time to see an Me-109 roar overhead making a strafing pass followed by a Focke Wulf 190. The Focke Wulf dropped a single bomb well beyond the CP and then both of the planes banked to the left and headed down the valley. Sitting way up above, watching the whole affair, was the pilot of an American P-47 Thunderbolt.

P-47 Thunderbolt

As the two German planes clung to the deck, they encountered a multiple 50s ack-ack unit and the Focke Wulf was shot down. The pilot of the P-47, unmindful of the fact that he would be firing directly at American troops but seeing only a chance for an easy kill swooped down on the tail of the Messerschmidt just as it came around for a second pass. This time we were ready for him. He came down precisely the same line as on his first run. His bullets chewed up the other side of the wall and then the tracers were well overhead. I peeked over the wall and saw a cone of tracers converging on the cockpit. The canopy disintegrated but the pilot kept firing. I could see the pilots face clearly. He was going to pass directly over the wall and about fifty feet off the deck. I aimed my grease gun well out in front of him, panned slowly in the same direction as his line of flight, and fired a full magazine letting him pass directly through it. I was directly under the aircraft and figured that no one had a better shot at him than I did. Then I ducked as the wall got chewed up again by machine gun fire and I did not have time to eject and insert the magazine taped to the one I had just emptied. None of us in Muhlhausen had seen the Focke Wulf get shot down. A P-47 bears a very close resemblance to a Focke Wulf 190, especially if it is shooting at you.

Focke Wulf 190

On the first pass the Me-109 was followed by a Focke Wulf. It was logical to assume that the plane we saw following the Me-109 on the second pass was the same Focke Wulf so every one in town except me (and I would have if I could have) opened up on the P-47. As I looked back at the Messerschmidt a thick black plume of smoke trailed out of the engine compartment.

The P-47 did not seem to be in any trouble but I understand that it had to make a crash landing in a field down the valley and that the pilot came out fighting mad. Good! The selfish S.O.B. had shot up our positions just to get what he thought would be a sure kill. But he did not get credit for the Me-109. While the whole canopy had been shot away by ground fire, the pilot was unhurt and what brought him down was one 45 caliber slug from directly below that had hit an oil line. Although his canopy had been shattered, there was not another bullet hole in the entire plane.

It was against orders to fire any 45 caliber weapon at aircraft because the muzzle velocity was so low that the chance of hitting a fast moving plane was nil. I don't know for certain that one of my slugs hit that oil line ------ but nobody had a better shot at him than I did. The thing that amazed me was that there was only one hole in the plane. I would have been willing to bet a month's pay that I had hit him with at least half of the slugs from my 30 shot magazine. Well, someone's 45 caliber slug got him. It could have been mine. I like to think that it was.

That was the only time I actually fired my weapon at the enemy but I had no qualms about it. He was trying to kill me.

After the breakthrough at Muhlhausen, I was driving our radio truck right behind Colonel Yeuell's jeep in a column of trucks and tanks that was bogged down for some reason. An ME-109 strafed the column from the rear to the front. It was SOP at the time to throw a black smoke grenade under your vehicle to obscure the target

and to make the pilot think that he had destroyed more vehicles than he really had. As I dove for cover, I grabbed a smoke grenade and rolled it under the truck.

Messerschmidt ME-109

Unfortunately, the one I grabbed filled the air with high-visibility fluorescent-orange smoke. I called to Bud Hennum, our crew chief, "Sorry, I thought I had a black one."

Bud hollered back, "Great! ... I don't think you fooled *anyone* with *that* grenade."

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PAPA'S WAR , PART 5

The Second Siegfried Line Assault

The 103d Division was now getting into familiar territory again. Up ahead of the 411th Regiment lay Gumbrechtshoffen, Gundershoffen, Zinzwiller, Reichshoffen, Lembach, Wingen, Climbach, Bobenthal, and a route through the Siegfried Line, but the quality of the opposition was much lower than that encountered in our first assault on the Siegfried Line back in December. In addition, the German reserves had all been pulled from the Siegfried Line and sent elsewhere so each of these towns was easier to take, but still at a price in lives.

There were brisk fire fights for Lembach, Wingen, Climbach, all familiar to the 411th, and then into Germany at the same place where we went in back in December. Bobenthal was rough once more and then defenses stiffened in the Siegfried Line. The 411th bogged down in sharp fighting near Nieder Schlettenbach. Casualties were high.

One pillbox in that area was particularly troublesome. It was located where artillery could not get to it. It was so tough that a tactical air strike was called in. After it was softened up by bombs that did little physical damage but shook up the defenders, infantrymen were preparing to assault the pillbox with satchel charges.

General Mc Auliffe, and other officers including Col. Yeuell, had come up to see how the attack on this troublesome strong point was going. Mc Auliffe stepped out from behind a tree for a better look. Suddenly, about a dozen Wehrmacht soldiers ran out of the bunker waving white flags. They ran right up to Mc Auliffe and surrendered to him giving further credence to his reputation as a hands-on front-line commander. It was another boost for moral. Men are more willing to follow a leader who leads than a leader who stays behind and pushes, although there are many who would criticize Mc Auliffe for unnecessarily endangering himself in that manner.

Elsewhere, on the right flank of the 103d Division's sector, on March 22, 1945, the 409th Infantry, after four days of hard fighting around Reisdorf suddenly punched clear through the Siegfried Line. In that action, the 103d Division Artillery had a field day. They caught an enemy column of 500 German vehicles fleeing the Siegfried Line for the Rhine River and inflicted immense damage as accurate fire

was directed by liaison planes. They also smashed several smaller columns bringing the total to 600 vehicles. Doughs of the 409th piled on tanks and an ad hoc task force, "Task Force Rhine", was organized to exploit the breakthrough and push all the way to the Rhine River. This task force caught up with a retreating German column consisting entirely of horse drawn vehicles. The tanks brought all available guns to bear on the column. The Germans and their horses panicked and wagons and their contents were strewn all over the road. A tankdozer was brought up to clear up the mess and the advance continued.

The 411th Regiment that had been on the Division's left flank, moved through the 410th's zone and quickly caught up with the 409th.

As the 411th, now sandwiched between the 409th and the 410th pushed toward the Rhine Plain, Colonel Yeuell took a shortcut to his planned next advance CP. We moved over into the 409th's zone and followed Task Force Rhine into Klingenmunster. Between Silz and Klingenmunster we passed along the road where the horse drawn column was overtaken. There were piles of wrecked wagons, many dead German soldiers, and large numbers of dead horses shoved off the road by the tank dozer. There was a long grassy field parallel to the road and hundreds of horses grazed contentedly as though nothing had happened. A few GIs were trying to catch horses that still had bits and reins to ride instead of walking but not many succeeded. The horses were still too skittish for that.

While General Patch's Seventh Army, which included the 103d Division, was pounding through the Siegfried Line, General Patton's Third Army had swept down the Saar Basin and cut off any need for further attack to the North. Similarly, The Divisions of the Seventh Army between the 103d and the Rhine River had pushed along in parallel with us. After a brisk fight by the 409th for Klingenmunster, the 103d Division had been pinched off by friendly forces and there was no one left to fight.

Landau, Germany, SHAEF Reserve, Occupation Duty

The 103d Cactus Division now had another new role, It was placed in SHAEF reserve (technically, about as far back from the war as you can get but actually only about 30 miles from the front where bitter fighting was still in progress). We were charged with the occupation of a major part of the Palatinate also known as the Saar, Moselle, Rhine Triangle, a big chunk of Germany west of the Rhine. The units of the division were scattered over a large number of towns with Division Headquarters located in Landau. The infantry units occasionally had to mop up pockets of resistance that had been bypassed earlier but the routine became mainly

one of acting as guard for Allied Military Government, restoring power, water, phones, and other services and processing a never ending flow of POWs.

As usually happened when things calmed down, our radio team was relieved and we relocated to Division Headquarters in Landau for vehicle maintenance and a number of administrative matters. It was great not to worry about 88s, or mortars, or mines for a while. We had to bathe and shave, which we had not done for some time, and get into clean uniforms, and the inevitable "chicken" started up again, but we didn't mind too much.

For months, the only things female that we had seen were the klutzy, husky, rural French farm women clomping around in their wooden shoes and slinging manure with pitchforks.
Landau was a city with many lovely blond frauleins. They were nicely shaped, dressed, and coiffured and obviously knew that there were strict rules against fraternization with the enemy. However, they flaunted their femininity, committing a little hormonal sabotage ----- but the rules did not say that we couldn't look so we did and sometimes they looked back. Hubba! Hubba!, but no one I knew was willing to risk a court martial to carry it any further than that.

While we were occupying the Saar, Moselle, Rhine Triangle, Cactus GIs happened upon a cave near Schifferstadt containing tens of thousands of bottles of French Champagne that the Germans had taken from the French. General Mc Auliffe decreed that every man in the Division get one bottle (officers each got three). We drank all but one of the bottles allocated to our crew over a period of several evenings but I wanted to save mine for a really special occasion.

Checking out one public building in the area, I had found a large Nazi flag. I carefully wrapped my bottle of Champagne in the flag and put it in the tire chain compartment of our truck hoping that it would be safe until that special occasion.

While billeted in a home in Landau, I found a Haenel air pistol in a drawer. It resembled a Luger. The handle was pushed down and forward to cock it and the barrel unlatched and broke to permit the loading of the projectile. It shot lead pellets and that was the problem. A tin box stored with the pistol contained only a dozen or so pellets and I quickly used those up. Then I had an idea.

There were quite a few candles around the house so I lit one and poured hot wax down the barrel. When it cooled, I pushed out the thin wax cylinder, broke it into pieces about a half inch long, rounded one end of each piece with the warmth of my fingers and "voilà", --- wax bullets.

Having nothing else to do at the moment, I made a large batch of them. Looking out through the nearly drawn shutters of a second floor window, I spotted a German

kid with his hand under the tarp of one of our trucks stealing whatever he could reach. Taking careful aim at his rear end, I squeezed off a shot and he took off down the street rubbing his butt.

There being no more targets of opportunity, I sat down at a table and then noticed that there were many flies on one wall of the room. I steadied my arm on the table, aimed at one of them, and fired. To my surprise, the fly was pinned to the wall by my wax bullet.

Going up for a closer look, I discovered that the wax had splattered and while I had not actually hit it, the fly had been killed by the wax "shrapnel" from the near miss. Returning to my seat, I proceeded to dispatch all of the flies in the room.

About this time, in walked another GI billeted in the same building.
"What are you doing?"

"Shooting flies with this air pistol."

He walked over and examined the wall. "Out of the air?"

I looked around the room and seeing no moving flies, replied, "Sure. Of course I don't hit every one, but I get most of them." What the hell, he asked a dumb question. It deserved a dumb answer.

At that moment, a fly buzzed in the window. He said, "There's one now."

Without hesitation and obviously without thinking, I swung the pistol toward the fly and squeezed off a shot. It caught the fly in mid-air, carried it across the room, and nailed it to the wall.

In that instant, with that trillion-to-one shot, all the other flies splattered on the wall became totally believable.

The GI muttered, "My God! That's incredible," and ran out of the room shouting about my marksmanship. Before long he was back with a group of skeptics but he showed them the wall and swore that he had seen me do it.

Meanwhile, I had hidden all of the candles and the rest of my wax bullets because there was no way I would ever be able to repeat that performance. The GI brought parade after parade of other GIs through the room to show them the wall but I made certain that I was always "away" when others showed up.

I had always been a pretty good shot with air guns and small bore weapons but none of that rubbed off on me where the heavier caliber weapons were concerned. The first time I fired the 45 caliber pistol in basic training, the target looked as big as a barn door, and the bulls eye was huge. When I went to check the target after

firing, I thought all of my shots would be in the "X" ring so I was very embarrassed to discover that I had not even hit the paper. I never did qualify with the 45 automatic.

This discrepancy between my newly acquired reputation and the realities of firing for record with the 45 automatic would become a problem for me later.

Even though the Cactus GIs were enjoying the break from hostilities, the VI Corps continued its advance establishing a bridgehead across the Rhine near Worms on March 26th and then pressing east and southward along the eastern side of the Rhine.

On April 7th we moved across the Rhine at Ludwigshaffen- Mannheim. Mannheim was totally destroyed. Our bombers had flattened every building in the city. There was one curious thing about it, though. Virtually all of the chimneys were standing --- not the chimneys of homes but the tall round chimneys of the factories. From a distance it looked like the factories were all intact because there were those chimneys, but up close, that's all there was. Something about the structure of an industrial chimney seemed to make it impervious to bomb blasts.

Bensheim, Germany, 7th Army Reserve, More Occupation Duty.

After crossing the Rhine the 103d was put in 7th Army Reserve and continued occupation duty. Its area of responsibility was long and narrow running all the way from Darmstadt down through Heidelberg with Division HQ in Bensheim.

In Bensheim, like Landau, we were billeted in homes that were taken over from the Germans.

The house that our radio team occupied had an enclosed back yard with a well tended strawberry patch. One day while collecting strawberries, I noticed that one plant seemed to be sitting up on a small mound of earth. It occurred to me that there might be a mine hidden under the plant so I took out my combat knife and carefully probed around it, then poked gently underneath it.

It felt soft under the plant so I pulled it out of the ground and dug around with my knife. Underneath was a Nazi arm band unlike any that I had ever seen. The usual

arm band was red with a round white circle and a black swastika in the center of the circle.

Typical Nazi Armband

This **arm band was red but the circle was of what appeared to be beige silk embroidered with a gold wreath surrounding a gold embroidered swastika with an embroidered gold vertical Roman-style short sword superimposed. It was very elegant and gave the impression that the person who wore it was way up in the Nazi hierarchy.**

The Unusual Nazi Armband

The people who usually lived in the house were not extraordinarily well placed, politically, and they claimed to know nothing about the arm band or its owner. I suspect that they let a very important Nazi hide or change into civilian clothing in their home, found the arm band after he left and buried it. But that is just a guess.

I still have the arm band.

Fifty years later, and after watching hundreds of TV documentaries about Nazi Germany, I have still never seen an arm band like it.

Maybe it just belonged to a streetcar conductor. Who knows?

See "Addenda" for an update on this arm band.

On April 13th, word reached us that President Roosevelt had died. For most of us he was the only president we had ever really known. However we might feel about him now, we were all greatly saddened by his death. He left enormous shoes to fill and we wondered if Harry Truman would be able to fill them. I think that the ultimate verdict of history will be that he filled them quite capably. We lowered the flag at Division Headquarters to half mast, the beginning of a month of official mourning.

Since the 103d had been in 7th Army Reserve for a while the wire teams had time to get telephone circuits established among all of the headquarters of its regiments and attached units. This gave the radio teams a breather. Our routine consisted mainly of checking all stations in on the Division Command Net once an hour. This gave the on-duty radio operator a chance to do a little unauthorized listening via his radio receiver.

Seymour Fader was on duty but listening to a shortwave radio broadcast of the news. It was on one of the first warm days in April and he had the two makeshift doors on the rear of the radio truck open to get some fresh air. Some news-hungry citizens of Bensheim gathered around the rear of the truck and one who could speak English translated for the rest. It was at this moment that the news of FDR's death was announced. Seymour was stunned by the news but was equally stunned by the reaction of the German women gathered around the truck. They wept.

Military life in Bensheim was just as "chicken" as it had been in Landau, --- if possible, more so.

Some GIs started griping about it and said that they would rather be back in action (but deep inside, they didn't really mean it).

"Chicken" never killed anyone.

But chicken ala king can sure make you miserable if carried around for more than a week before consumption.

I still had the "GIs" from that late Thanksgiving dinner. I'd had them for over four months and they showed no sign of letting up. I had lost a lot of weight and did not have much to spare in the first place.

Around the 15th of April I had a minor change in mailing address. After nearly two years in the Army, someone made a monumental goof and I was promoted from Private to Technician Fifth Grade (T/5).

It would be a while before I would have time to sew on the stripes because things were starting to heat up again and we were about to return to the 411th.

The Return to Combat, April 16, 1945

On about April 16, 1945 our radio team was returned, once again, to the 411th CP and everyone there realized that the "First String" was back on the field and, to heap one cliche on another, the picnic was over.

On April 19th, the VI Corps achieved a major breakthrough southward, spearheaded by the 10th Armored Division. The 103d Cactus Division was committed just a few miles northeast of Stuttgart with a mounted attack, clearing pockets of resistance behind the 10th Armored and then catching up with the 10th Armored on April 20th near Kirchheim. The 103d relieved the 10th Armored on April 21st, enabling them to leap ahead again and close off major escape routes for a large German force retreating eastward through the Black forest.

Driving southward from the vicinity of Kirchheim, the 411th arrived at the Autobahn, Germany's super highway, and, since we did not have a grasp of the big picture, assumed that we would sail down the Autobahn to Munich, but that was not to be. We came up out of a field onto the Autobahn, crossed it into another field and continued southward through Metzingen and Munsingen. By this time, we were getting back into mountainous terrain in an area known as the Swabian Alps and headed toward Ulm, still in support of the 10th Armored Division that was leading the fast moving assault.

Ambush, April 24, 1945

On about April 24th, we were in a rapidly advancing column consisting of a tank, Col. Yeuell's jeep, and our truck, followed by a line of tanks with GIs hanging all over them. We were spread out, maintaining proper intervals, as the column headed down a valley with dense woods on both sides of the road. There were Krauts hidden in the trees. They allowed us and the next three or four tanks to pass through. Then they ambushed the column, opening up with machine gun and burp gun fire.

There was a large stone building ahead on the right with a walled-in courtyard. The lead tank turned into the courtyard and we and Col.Yeuell's jeep followed. We could tell from the sound that the tanks behind us had swung their turrets around and were firing at point blank range at the dug-in Krauts. The infantrymen riding on the tanks took substantial casualties. They could not hide behind the tanks because they were under fire from both sides.

The Krauts, apparently anticipating our turn into the courtyard had already zeroed it in and immediately brought it under mortar fire. The building was securely locked so Col.Yeuell, his driver, and our team just flattened ourselves into the ground and ate a lot of dirt. The ambush did not last very long. The point blank fire from our tanks quickly demolished the Kraut positions.

Meanwhile, since I was lying next to a four-wheeled wooden wagon I crawled under it for whatever meager protection it might offer.

Eventually, an infantry squad located and neutralized the mortars.

When the mortar fire finally stopped, I stood up and looked in the wagon. The bottom of it contained hundreds of long slender bayonets of the type used by the French in World War I and on top of the bayonets were several hundred German "potato masher" hand grenades. If a mortar round had landed in that wagon while I was under it, it would have made me into some kind of shish kabob.

We were moving so rapidly that we were bypassing dozens of isolated pockets, some with a lot of resistance left in them and ambushes were a fact of life for a few days.

Several other columns were ambushed in this general area and General Mc Auliffe narrowly escaped ambush by a German squad hidden along a road where he was observing.

Never Argue With a Tank

Eventually, we were out of the mountains again and into rolling hilly terrain. The road rose to the crest of a hill and then dropped away quickly on the other side. Somewhere, not too far ahead, was a German 88. Due to its location, it could not depress enough to come to bear on the far slope. The best it could do was grazing fire that could not quite hit the crest of the hill. However, it came close enough to hit a tank or truck coming over the crest. The road had two narrow lanes. White tape hugged both sides of the road indicating possible mines on either side.

An American observer had been placed where he could see whether a vehicle that had cleared the top was far enough down the far slope to permit another vehicle or rather a pair of vehicles to attempt the dash over the crest. When conditions permitted, the "GO" signal was given to the next pair of vehicles and, with a good running start they raced over the top of the hill. The 88 crew was apparently delayed while an observer got the message to them to fire another shot. That gave us a very narrow window for the attempt. The 88 rounds, so far, had skimmed across the crest too late and landed harmlessly far to the rear of the vehicles cued up for the dash.

Now it was our turn. We were paired up with a Sherman tank that took up far more than its share of the road. We tried to get the jump on the tank but it swerved over the center of the road pushing us toward that white tape. I couldn't yield any more. My left front wheel was just skimming the tape.

Seymour Fader, in the assistant driver seat, was watching those tank treads grinding away just inches from his elbow and, quit uncharacteristically, shouting a barrage of unprintable words at the tank driver who obviously could not hear him.

French and German roads frequently have low stone markers along the edge with inscriptions like "20 KM" (We never figured out, 20 KM to what?). We were unlucky enough for there to be one of those markers right at the crest of the hill. My left front wheel hit it a glancing blow and it threw us up against the tank treads. Fader watched in horror as the tread started grinding off the side of the truck right next to our battery. I eased away from the tank a couple of inches, accelerated past him and roared down the road on the far slope.

Again the 88 fired too late and there was no damage. Eventually, an infantry squad got to the 88 and silenced it but we were far down the road before that happened.

What To Do With a Crate of Eggs

There was one point in time when our radio team had not had a hot meal (or even cold "C" rations) for about three weeks straight. There were times when we only had one or two K ration meals a day and some days when we had no rations at all.

Remembering those days, when we came across a German warehouse containing hundreds of crates of fresh eggs we thought we were dreaming. By that time, we had encountered a quartermaster outfit in which every man had his own personal Coleman single-burner gasoline stove. That didn't seem fair. We were getting very good at moonlight requisitioning and duty demanded that we liberate one of the stoves for our crew, so we did. While we were at it we also liberated a pot and a frying pan so when we found these eggs we were ready.

We took a full crate of eggs for our truck. This was all we had room for though there was some joking talk of jettisoning Seymour Fader to make room for another crate -- at least I think we were joking. Time dims the memory.

We then proceeded to eat a dozen eggs apiece per meal until we chomped our way through the entire crate. We had eggs soft boiled, hard boiled, poached, fried, and scrambled. We chopped up cheese and that canned meat (often mistaken for Spam) from our K rations and made omelets. None of us knew it at the time but we probably consumed our whole lifetime quota of cholesterol in the short time it took us to finish off that entire crate of eggs.

Across the Danube and South Toward Austria

We crossed the Danube in the dark so I could not tell whether the water was blue or not. I was too busy watching the narrow treadways on the pontoon bridge to look anyway.

By daylight we could see the Alps in the distance. They looked rough. There were persistent rumors that Hitler had ordered a general fall back to heavily fortified positions in a Redoubt Center near his Berchtesgarten retreat and every soldier was expected to fight to the death in a massive Wagnerian twilight of the gods ending of the Third Reich. It was a scary thought but, for now, we had our own priorities.

General George S. Patton's Third Army tanks were rolling toward Munich, where Hitler and his Nazi bullies had started their rise to power, but slowed down because he had outrun his fuel supplies.

We felt that we had a good chance of beating Patton to Munich but did not know that the VI Corps plans for us were quite different.

I had not slept for more than two days. The 411th column had pushed forward more than 60 miles. I had not seen so many Krauts in my entire life. There were long columns of them pouring out of the hills waving white flags, so many in fact that we could not spare guards to march them back. We must have sent five or six thousand of them back to the Prisoner of War (PW) cages unguarded. We just showed them the way and they went.

We also freed thousands of slave laborers; Yugoslavs, Poles, French, Russians, and others. There are no words to describe their unbounded joy.

Best of all, my "GIs" finally cleared up, so there were no more delays due to that problem.

The speed of our advance and the nature of the terrain caused unanticipated difficulties.

The Signal Company wire teams did not have a prayer of keeping up.

They would no sooner start laying wire to some CP location when they received word that the CP had moved again. There was no time to recover the wire that they had just laid so they had to just leave it there, return to a wirehead and start laying wire toward the new CP location. Wire supplies were running low but there was nothing else that they could do.

They had not yet learned how to tap into existing German commercial telephone facilities to find lines to nearby cities and villages.

Our SCR-193 Radio Sets were not intended to operate over great distances because it was highly unusual for an infantry division to spread out over a very large area. The Army did not want more powerful radios employed than were needed to fulfill the mission because they would provide more opportunities for the enemy to bring direction finders into play with the resultant artillery fire. Also, they would cause interference with the communications of other units.

This made a significant problem for us in this phase of the campaign. Twenty five or thirty miles would ordinarily be the limiting range for reliable around-the-clock communications between SCR-193s in stationary positions. We were in highly mobile operations and with units leapfrogging over one another to maintain the initiative in the attack, we often had to communicate over distances of sixty or seventy miles while on the move. To further complicate the matter, we were in mountainous terrain where signals were often blocked from reaching their destinations.

It became necessary to set up relay stations on the tops of mountains in order to get the message through.

Ordinarily, attached units and units with which close coordination was required were provided with radio teams from the 103d Signal Company to operate in the 103d Division Command Net. Also, In these highly mobile circumstances there were often periods in which Division Headquarters operated a Main CP, a Division Rear CP, and two and sometimes three Division Advance CPs.

Clearly, the 103d Signal Company did not have enough SCR-193 radio sets, vehicles, or radio teams to handle all of these requirements so it became necessary for attached units to shift for themselves and provide their own communications to Division HQ. Their operators were often much slower at sending and receiving code and were unfamiliar with Division communication protocol and procedures.

In addition, teams sent to the tops of mountains to act as relays sometimes found that they, for unexplained reasons, could not establish contact with anyone.

Despite these obvious impediments to effective communications radio had to carry the ball and somehow, when it was really on the line, we got the message through.

Landsberg - The Concentration Camp

On April 27th, we rolled into Landsberg, the city where, before his rise to power, Adolf Hitler, had been imprisoned with Rudolph Hess, and Maurice Grebel after the abortive Munich beer hall putsch. While in prison here he wrote "Mein Kampf" the blueprint for his future attempt to conquer all of Europe. His cell had been made into a German national shrine.

A bronze plaque in Hitler's "cell" in the suite of rooms assigned to these three Nazis bore the following inscription: " Here a dishonorable system imprisoned Germany's greatest son from November 11, 1923 to December 20, 1924. During this period, Hitler wrote the book of the National Socialist Revolution, Mein Kampf."

There was a bridge across the swift waters of the Lech River and a few miles straight ahead was Munich. It looked to us like we would beat old "Blood and Guts" Patton to Munich for sure, then it blew up in our faces, --- literally.

The Germans blew the bridge and that ended any thoughts about Munich. Those of us near the head of the column walked up to the still smoking bridge for a look. It was a hopelessly crumpled mass of steel girders. As we started back, there was a rifle shot from one of the buildings across the river. No one was hit but a GI saw where the shot came from and answered with a few rounds of tracers from a machine gun. Then tracers started lacing back and forth across the river as it quickly developed into a brisk fire fight.

I dove down between some railroad tracks and flattened myself against the ties. I turned my head slightly and saw a tight mesh of tracer fire overhead and the realization that for every tracer there were four other bullets that left no visible path made me glad that we wore O.D. underwear.

There was a shout relayed back down the street, "Bring up the tanks!"

The tanks came, turned left along the river, swung their turrets toward the buildings on the other side and moved slowly down the road firing as fast as their 75 mm guns would permit. In less than five minutes, everything was quiet again.

I peeked up over the rails and then ran for cover but there was no need to run. The Kraut guns on the other side of the river had been thoroughly silenced.

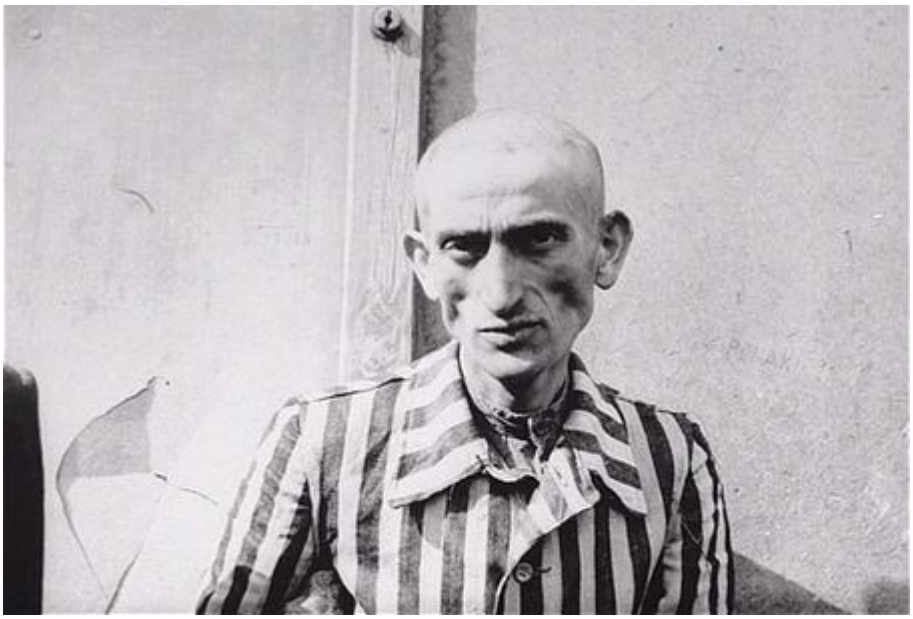
We had only been in Landsberg for a few hours when Fader told us he had discovered and opened the gates of two concentration camps and reported their presence to headquarters. The camps were organized along language lines to minimize communication difficulties. The first camp he opened was a French camp. He made the mistake of offering K-Ration food to a couple of the inmates. It was so

rich compared to the diet they were accustomed to that it made them extremely ill. The inmates told him that there were other camps down the road. He noticed smoke coming from the next camp and investigated. This was a Jewish camp, Lager #2, and he had difficulty describing the conditions that he had observed.

Fader reported that he spoke in Yiddish to some of the survivors of the Jewish camp. He told them that he was going to get help and have proper food brought to the camp. To his surprise, these starved creatures said that they did not want food right then but instead wanted guns. They wanted to hunt down their guards before they could get completely away.

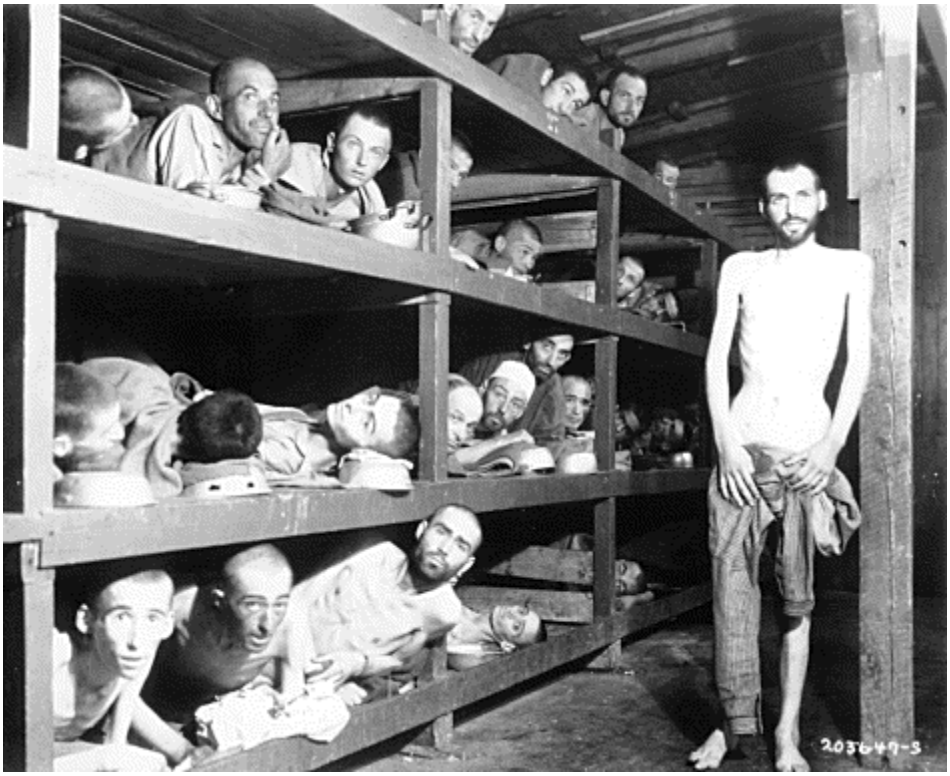
One even tried to pull Fader's weapon from his hands.

Fader came along to show us where Lager #2 was located as several of us drove out for a look.



All of the horror story writers in their most morbid states of mind could not describe what I saw in just a few minutes. --- Nor could photographers capture the scene with the best equipment.

Inside the electrically charged double fence were rows of huts built in the ground with only the roofs exposed. In these huts were crammed approximately 5,000 human beings although none could even be called beings, much less human, in the condition in which we found them. They were starved until there was nothing left but skeletons covered with skin. Their eyes stared out of deep dark caverns. Many had holes burned into their bodies by hot irons. These had been covered with adhesive tape but no medication had been given. Most of them could not possibly have been nourished back to life but the sadistic SS men who were in charge of the camp were not satisfied with that.



Upon the approach of our forces, they packed as many of the living ones as they could round up into the huts and set fire to them with flame throwers --- after removing all their clothing of course. Very methodical these Krauts. Many were roasted alive. Others escaped from the huts only to be stopped by the electrically charged double fence. Those who were too weak to move were clubbed and beaten to death on the ground. All over the grounds were broken and twisted corpses, many half clothed, most of them naked. Hundreds more were stacked like cord wood at one end of the enclosure and still more lay in a long deep pit.

Untold numbers lay under the charred ruins of the filthy holes they lived in.

Unspeakable experiments had been conducted here including burying some of the inmates up to their necks in concrete to see how long they could survive immobilized --- information needed for planning the missions of one-man submarines having tight coffin-like compartments for the crew men who controlled the subs using only their fingertips.

This was as much a death camp as Dachau and was, in fact, a satellite of Dachau. However, there were no facilities for gassing the inmates. The inmates of this camp were forced to work in nearby underground factories producing war materials but their deaths were handled in a similarly gruesome manner. The were fed a bowl of nameless tasteless brown fluid in the morning and a bowl of cabbage soup in the evening. A survivor reported that, on a good day, one might even find a small piece of cabbage leaf in one's bowl. Obviously, the inevitable consequence of this was death by starvation. The SS commandant of the camp kept meticulous records and

knew, to a high degree of accuracy, how many additional people he needed to requisition from Dachau to replace those who would starve to death each month.

When they died they were simply thrown into an open pit like so much garbage.

I had heard about concentration camps before but was always suspicious about the accuracy of the stories because everyone heard the story from someone who heard the story from someone else who read it somewhere or heard it from some other Joe.

This time it was not hearsay. I saw it myself and will never be able to forget it.

It turned out that there were five other camps just like this one situated in a ring around Landsberg.

Later that day we brought the citizens of Landsberg (the men only, because we Americans were too soft to ever think of showing the women anything like that) to the camps to bury the grisly remains of those poor creatures.

The American guards would not let them move the bodies with their shovels. They were forced to pick them up with their hands and carry them respectfully to the mass grave that had been dug and to lay them gently in it.

The people of Landsberg professed to know nothing about the camps but they knew. How could they not know?

It was impossible to put the finger on any one individual, except perhaps Adolf Hitler, and say that he was responsible for the whole thing. But it is too simplistic to lay it all on Hitler, The people of Landsberg, like the people of all of Germany, idolized Hitler and condoned whatever he did for the glory of the Third Reich. They were all responsible.

Within a few days, photographs of the these camps were published throughout the world but pictures speak only to the eyes. The senses of smell, sound, and touch magnified the horror a millionfold.

Corroboration of this account can be found in the May 4th issue of the 6th Corps Newspaper, " Beachhead News", in a delayed report filed by Beachhead News staff writer, PFC H.L. Welker.

Here is his story.

LANDSBERG'S HORROR IS GHASTLY

Life Is Ruled And Crushed By Nazi Hands

By PFC H.L. Welker

BHN Staff Writer

" Landsberg (Delayed)-- It snowed today at Lager No.2 of the Landsberg concentration camp -- where the inmates still die from planned starvation at the rate of 25 a day. The living -- they are technically alive -- shuffle aimlessly through the rubble-strewn ground inside the 15-foot double barbed wire fence. The gray and blue striped political prisoners' uniform hung on them in great empty folds. They did not seem to notice the snow, or feel the cold.

Their eyes are huge and round and look unseeingly from deep sockets. One crawled weakly form a hut. He wore no pants. You could circle his thigh with your thumb and forefinger. The skin was clammy yellow gray. They all have skin like that. You have seen it but only on the dead.

They were the Jews of all Europe.

Lieutenant J.M. Smith, Silver Springs Md., AMG officer in charge, said, 'Please don't show any food or cigarettes. It means a riot.'

He took us to the center of the camp. There was an enormous pile of clothing and debris smoldering [sic]. German PWs were dousing it with gasoline to make it burn. The stench was retch-making.

Clothing of Dead Burned

'This is the clothing of the dead,' he said. 'A little of it. I have 70 PWs working here. For two days, they've been hauling clothing here to be burned. They're not half through yet.'

Around the area where the fire was, were quarters of the prisoners -- Hitler's prisoners. They are long narrow hutments sunk in the ground to the eaves. One door at the end. No windows. About the length of your barracks back in the states, and half as wide. Smith opened the door of one.

There were at least a hundred of them. They lay on the bare boards, tightly packed together -- pipestem limbs and grotesquely-swollen joints dimly seen here and there. The air was thick, fetid.

The forms did not move.

'Are they alive?'

He said they were. They didn't look it. We turned away and he pointed out a pudgy, bald man about 50 who was helping the PWs push a cart laden with the stinking clothes of the dead.

‘There is the former commandant of this camp.' he said. ‘He was an SS officer who tried to get away in civilian clothes. Sometimes his former prisoners beat him -- those who still had the strength to raise their arms. At such times our eyesight and hearing seem to be awfully poor.'

Inoculation [sic] Used Too

He said there was a crematorium where they burned the dead -- and the not-quite-dead. The tough ones, who didn't die fast enough of malnutrition, were assisted with poison inoculations. There was another place where men were encased up to their necks in cement. Alive!

Smith would not take (me) to any of these places. He said he didn't want to be sick again, nor want us sick on his hands.
While he waits for hospital space for the inmates, the lieutenant has requisitioned food from the German civilians.

The things that were men and women are now receiving 1,000 quarts of milk, 1,000 eggs, 750 pounds of meat, 2,000 pounds of potatoes, and other rich food items daily. Since they've had only two bowls of watery soup a day for as long as they've been at Landsberg, the prisoners cannot eat much at a time. It would kill them. So the diet is carefully planned by a doctor. Someday they may almost be normal again. The newer ones.

‘Come to the hospital,' Smith said, ‘ You can see one who just died. You have to see it to believe it. Sometimes the corpses weigh less than 50 pounds.'

The air in the building thickened your throat and made your stomach heave protestingly. You fought to keep from vomiting on the floor. This was a hospital.

Skeletons With Skin

The doctor asked in German where the dead man was. A couple of croaks answered. No one had the strength to point. On a narrow pallet lay a heap of blankets. It seemed impossible that there could be a man under them, but when they were pulled aside there lay a skeleton with skin.

You could not make yourself believe that this had once been a man. A man who had once laughed grumbled and sang. This thing looked no more human than an exhibit at a carnival.

Four more died while we were there. PWs gingerly carried them out and stacked them on a two wheeled cart. They all looked the same.

‘Pitch it strong,' Smith said when we left. ‘Pitch it strong.'

You can't pitch it strong enough. The words don't exist."

In Landsberg we were quartered in a house that had a baked enamel address plate, "2- 1/3 Adolph Hitler Strasse." We unscrewed the address plate and fastened it to the door of our truck.

It became our rolling address for the duration.

Southward to Innsbruck

The final major objectives of the Cactus Division were the capture of Innsbruck, the sealing off of Brenner Pass, and the linkup with the Fifth Army pressing rapidly northward through Italy.

On April 29th, the 411th combat team reached Oberammergau and pushed forward to Garmich-Partenkirchen. It was still cold in the Alps so our radio team was pleased to find that the German owners of the very upper class home in which we were quartered in Garmich had left several full length fur coats in the closets. We cut up a couple of them and used them for elegant makeshift liners for our combat jackets and hoods.

I went exploring up into the snowy part of the closest mountain. My 20 dollar gold piece was in my pants pocket. I paused for a couple of minutes to rest and put my hands in my pockets to get them warm. When I withdrew them, I accidentally pulled out the gold piece and it fell edge-on into the snow which was quite deep at this particular spot. The gold piece left a narrow slit where it entered the snow. I dove for it and started carefully digging, at first just a few light handfuls of snow then bigger and bigger gobs of snow with no success. I carefully marked the spot, returned to the house and borrowed an entrenching tool, and got back to my excavation. Now I was digging in earnest. The hole got several feet deeper and wider as I dug and sifted but to no avail. It was getting dark. I had to face it, my "lucky" gold piece was lost. I don't know why I suddenly thought of it as "lucky" but now that I had lost it seemed that my luck had gone with it. When the warm summer days came, the snow would melt and some lousy Kraut wandering around up here would find my lucky gold piece. I did not believe it would work but before I left I put a curse on it, because I didn't want any Kraut to get any luck out of it, not after what we saw at Landsberg.

Far to the north on April 27th the American and Russian forces linked up on the Elbe River, cutting Germany in half and the Russians were pounding at the gates of Berlin.

On April 30th the Seventh Army took Munich. It gave us great satisfaction to know that even though the honor had not gone to the 103d, the Seventh Army still beat General Patton's vaunted Third Army to the birthplace of Naziism.

On May 1st, the German radio announced that Adolph Hitler was dead. The German radio said he died at his battle station but the truth was that he had taken his own life. His long time lover, Eva Braun, whom he had married just a day or so earlier, died with him.

The 409th Infantry Regiment led the way down the narrow pass to Innsbruck. There were brisk firefights at Mittenwald and Scharnitz, with the latter being cleared on May 1, 1945.

There were still obstacles to the capture of Innsbruck not the least of which was determining who had the authority to surrender the city and negotiating with them. This all took time.

On May 2nd, the 411th assembled in Mittenwald, Sharnitz and Farchant.

On May 3rd, the surrender of Innsbruck was finally negotiated but it still was not clear whether it would stick since the German negotiator had been stripped of his military authority by Field Marshal Albert Kesselring on May 2nd.

Nevertheless, on May 3rd the 409th mounted up for a triumphal entry into Innsbruck and was met by an overjoyed population who considered the American Army to be liberators, not conquerors, and who celebrated the entry of the 103d in much the same way as Paris had greeted its liberators. This would later turn out to be a sticky problem for Military Government to deal with because the Austrians

were still, technically, our enemies.

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PAPA'S WAR , PART 6

Brenner Pass

Late at night on May 3rd Colonel Donovan Yeuell's 411th Infantry Regiment motor marched more than 40 miles, through the 409th advance positions in Innsbruck and up toward Brenner Pass, one of only two routes through the Alps between Innsbruck and Italy. As was his style, Col. Yeuell rode in his jeep, the second vehicle in the convoy, behind the lead tank. Our radio truck was the third vehicle followed by the rest of Task Force Brenner. We traveled with our headlights ablaze for the first time since before we were committed to action at St. Diè. The weather was lowering and getting worse by the minute. The temperature dropped below freezing again and it began to snow.

Thousands of German soldiers, in awe of the glaring headlights of the 175 vehicle column, poured out of the forests and surrendered. They were directed to discard their weapons and were sent, disarmed and unguarded, back toward Innsbruck to our PW cages. We advanced at very high speed considering road conditions and weather and secured Brenner Pass at 040151 (May 4th, 1:51 a.m.), without opposition.

The task force stopped for the night and the CP was set up in a building right next to the Brenner Pass border check point gate.

Incident in Colle Isarco, Italy, May 4, 1945

Our radio team was sleeping in a nearby barn. Around 040600 (May 4, 6:00 a.m.) two radio operators from the regimental command net, who had been in the CP all night, shook me and Seymour Fader up from a sound sleep and told us that Field Marshal Kesselring had surrendered all of the German forces in Italy and that, during the night, the 103d Division had linked up with the 88th Division of the Fifth Army. They proposed an excursion down into Italy and suggested that this might be the last chance that we would have to "liberate" a Luger or a P-38 pistol.

Ever since we got into Alsace we all knew that Fader was a good guy to have around. He spoke a mishmash of Yiddish, "Hollywood German" (English schpoken mit eine cherman occent), and fractured German put together from a few phrases

from the Army's German Phrase Book. Somehow he managed to make himself understood so he frequently interpreted for us.

We were too sleepy to think clearly or we might not have gone. However, Seymour and I piled into their jeep with them and took off into Italy. There was a faint morning glow in the east as we set out.

Probably closer to the truth about the reported linkup was that after we had secured Brenner Pass, an M-8 Recon Car from Division Recon had dashed down into Italy in the dark of night and had met a recon team from the 88th Division somewhere in Italy. They shook hands and then both hightailed it back where they came from.

As we soon found out, the territory between our perimeter and theirs was still in the hands of the Germans who, because of deteriorating communications, had not received word that they had been surrendered and who had no idea that we were within a hundred miles of Brenner Pass. In the dark, they had probably mistaken our M-8 Recon Car for one of their own vehicles and had not challenged it.

Blissfully unaware of the situation, we drove south and entered the little town of Colle Isarco, about eight miles south of Brenner Pass. After rounding a bend in a narrow street, we ran into a company of armed German soldiers. The street was so narrow that the jeep driver could not turn around or back up so he floored it. Fader shouted something in passable German that sounded like, " Make way for the whole American Seventh Army." The Germans, who had their rifles and burp guns slung over their shoulders, flattened against the walls of the buildings on both sides of the street as we barreled right down the center. Their faces were just inches from ours as they struggled to unsling their weapons. It reminded me of riffling through a Pinochle deck. We got through the soldiers and out of sight around a bend in the road without a shot being fired.

We wasted no time heading out of town and continuing south in hopes of running into some element of the Fifth Army.

We stopped at one point to get our bearings and heard a vehicle approaching from the south so we hid the jeep and crouched in a ditch. It was a great relief to see that it was a major and an enlisted driver in a jeep from the 88th Division. We jumped from concealment and flagged them down. Before we could say a word, the major said, "Boy, are we glad to see you. We just came through a town full of armed Krauts who don't know the war is over and we were lucky to get out alive. Get us to your CP immediately so we can report the situation."

They had bullet holes in the jeep to punctuate their story.

The major was not too happy to hear about our experience. We discussed what to do and concurred that the first troops to arrive from either direction would be

German. Even so, the major opted to hide his jeep and stay there whereas we decided to try to get back to Brenner Pass.

We attempted to work our way through the opposite side of town from the place where we ran into the armed Germans but soon found ourselves driving into a large cul de sac facing a German Army Headquarters building of some sort. There was a single guard standing at the entrance. Our driver skidded sideways up to the guard kicking dirt and gravel all over his boots. After an angry look at his boots, he looked up into the barrels of our grease guns and gave up his rifle, quietly.

Fader told him that we were from the American Seventh Army and were there to take charge of all of their weapons. We made him take us to an armory, but while there were weapons of almost every description in the armory, there were no pistols. We insisted that there had to be pistols so he led us to the main building and up a flight of stairs but was reluctant to open the door at the head of the stairs.

One of us covered him and the rest barged into the room where there was about a dozen German officers looking at a large situation map. A high ranking officer was outlining his plan for getting the troops under his command back into Germany to the redoubt for the last stand.

Fader made it clear that they had been surrendered by Kesselring and that they were to turn over their pistols to us. The General or Colonel (or whatever he was) was reluctant to do so indicating that it was beneath his dignity to surrender to an enlisted man. He could not believe that we were from the 103d Division because, on his map, the 103d was still north of Ulm, more than a hundred miles to the north. Fader said something like, "You invented blitzkreig, but we perfected it. Brenner Pass is in our hands. You cannot get back to Germany." Fader then shocked them with the announcement that Hitler was dead. They had not gotten the word.

The officer seemed both resigned and relieved that it was over and started making plans for a formal surrender. Fader told him that there would not be one, that this was it, and that they would have to surrender their arms to us. Fader said, "Send your troops up to Brenner, unarmed and with their hands over their heads and they will be directed to PW cages." We insisted that the officers give us their weapons right then and there and they reluctantly complied.

The pickings were slim. Most of them had Schmeisser machine pistols which were lying on a table near the door. We didn't want them because there were plenty of those around, but we took them, just in case they had second thoughts. One of the GIs from the regimental radio team got the commanding officer's P-38. The other patted down one of the other senior officers and found in his side pocket a small flat black pearl-handled 25 caliber automatic. I got a Walther PK and that was about it. Fader, who had done all of the talking, came away empty handed.

The General wrote out a safe conduct pass for us and provided an enlisted man to ride on the hood of our jeep to show it at each roadblock. (It seems that after our

encounter with the armed troops, the Germans had concluded that we were escaped prisoners of war. They had no idea where we had escaped from, but were hastily setting up road blocks to try to catch us.)

When we got back to Brenner, the 103d Division band was loaded on several trucks and playing marches. The Commanding Generals of the 103d (Mc Auliffe) and VI Corps (Brooks), plus a host of other generals and colonels, reporters from BBC, Reuters, and various US news agencies, along with other VIPs, were loaded in trucks and jeeps for a festive jaunt into Italy to formalize the linkup that had occurred during the night. Luckily, our radio team was not to be part of the convoy. There was no need for us. After all, the Division and Corps commanders were right there with him. Who else did Yeuell need to communicate with?

It was going to be a splendid parade with flags waving and the band playing (as best they could, considering the fact that they were loaded into several 2-1/2 ton trucks).

No one was dressed for combat.

One thing was certain, we couldn't tell them what they might have run into because we were not supposed to have been there and were very close to being listed as AWOL. We forgot all about the fact that a similar "parade" was probably forming up in the 88th Division's area.

Hopefully, the 88th Division approached the formal linkup in a much more prudent manner. Or maybe the word filtered down to the Germans south of Colle Isarco in time to avoid a disaster.

At mid-morning on May 4th the column moved out with orders to link up with the Fifth Army if they had to go all the way to Rome to do it.

The formal linkup with the Fifth Army's 88th Division took place at Colle Isarco, without any snags, at 041051 (May 4th, 10:51 a.m.).

However, I have always wondered what might have happened if we hadn't gotten to Colle Isarco first.

Fulpmes, Gries am Brenner, VE Day, May 8th 1945

On May 4th 1945, we received word that the formal surrender of Innsbruck was accepted by Brigadier General John T. Pierce, Assistant Division Commander, 103d Infantry Division.

Rumor had it that each successive day would see the formal surrender of all German forces but several days passed with no proclamation. It just took time to line up the right German officers to effect a formal surrender and officially end the

war in Europe. Nevertheless, after the linkup with the Fifth Army, the heavy action was over and Hennum's radio team was relieved. We once again left Col.Yeuell's 411th Infantry Regiment and moved back for some much needed rest. We were sent to an Eidleweiss Mountain Troop School that the Germans had set up in Fulpmes, Gries am Brenner. The only way to get there from Brenner was down a very rough and bumpy unpaved road. We arrived there on May 8th 1945 just as VE (Victory in Europe) Day was officially proclaimed .

I had been saving my bottle of Champagne wrapped safely in my Nazi flag in the tire chain compartment ever since I got it, way back in Landau, on the other side of the Rhine. I was saving it for a special occasion and this seemed to be special enough. It was time to break it out and celebrate.

Unfortunately, the trip down that bumpy road and the change of temperature from near freezing at Brenner to a mild spring day all had detrimental effects on the Champagne. When I popped the cork, the Champagne spurted out toward the ceiling and everyone ran around like kids in the rain, trying to catch a few sips in their canteen cups. They all managed to catch a little and there was still a small amount left in the bottle for me. Its a good thing, because I had been too busy trying to direct the spurt to catch any for myself.

We toasted the end of the war with Germany but there was no wild celebration ------ it was a time for quiet meditation. Japan was still there and we would undoubtedly have to head for the Pacific, but hopefully not before a Rest and Rehabilitation (R&R) leave in the States.

Innsbruck Occupation, May & June 1945

In a day or so we were ordered to drive to Innsbruck where we would be assigned quarters in homes requisitioned from the citizens of Innsbruck. Our team was quartered in a home located at 4 Rilkestrasse near the eastern edge of the city. During the previous month we had "liberated" some photographic supplies and a couple of cameras. We quickly set up a darkroom and began developing and printing pictures that we had taken over the past several months. Letters home written weeks earlier asking for rolls of film and photographic paper began to bear fruit. Supplies started arriving and we were able to do a lot of photographic work although our products were pretty amateurish. We discovered that the house that we were occupying had an enlarger and that gave our work a whole new look ---- LARGELY amateurish.

4 Rilkestrasse Innsbruck

Life in Division Headquarters soon became very garrison-like. Once again, the "Willie and Joe" look was out. A GI haircut and a clean shave were the order of the day.

We had to demolish the "improvements" that we had made to our vehicle to make it livable. We felt bad about that. It was like tearing down our home.

The 103d Signal Company motor pool honcho, Warrant Officer Edwin St.Cin, jumped all over me about the way the truck body was all chewed up alongside the battery compartment. He was not at all understanding about my duel with the tank but finally accepted my argument that we really couldn't stop at the crest of that hill and fill out accident reports or there would have been no truck to discuss.

Inspections became a way of life again and we were forever having to find safe places to stash bits of "liberated" contraband that we hoped to get home but eventually had to leave behind.

Innsbruck, The Luftwaffe Airfield, Booby Trap

Rilkestrasse was only a block away from the last houses at the easterly end of Innsbruck. Beyond that, down the flat valley of the Inn River was a long meadow that had been used by the Luftwaffe as an airfield. Like many Luftwaffe airfields, there was no paved runway, the firm grass providing a very satisfactory landing strip.

Near one end of the airfield was a JU-87 Stuka dive bomber that had nosed over on landing. The nose was crumpled and the tail section had broken almost completely off and was dangling down one side of the plane. This plane had a rather remarkable story. Two German mechanics at an airfield about to be overrun by the Russians had deserted, stolen the plane, and somehow managed to get the plane into the air without having ever been up in a plane in their lives. Miraculously, they even managed to fly the plane to Innsbruck, in the American zone, and had survived the crash landing. They may have made the wise choice. Only about ten percent of the Germans captured by the Russians ever got back to Germany alive.

Also on the field was a disabled twin engine Messerschmidt ME-262, the first practical jet fighter. It was nicknamed the "Blow Job" by American troops who seem to have to give nicknames to everything. It was a beautifully styled little craft and had a very simple cockpit layout.

Mike Schindler and I walked over to get a closer look. He sat in it and I took his picture then I climbed into it and Mike took my picture. I fiddled with the controls and, remembering how the only one I had seen in the air turned straight up and left our planes in a cloud of smoke, I pulled the stick back and imagined what it must be like to climb straight up in one of these things. I got carried away and pushed, pulled, or turned just about every control in the plane.
Then I got out and we went back to our quarters.

I thought that I had manipulated every control in the cockpit but I must have missed one. The next day the ME-262 blew up with a GI in it. It was booby trapped. The hand of providence must have kept me away from that one fatal control.

Clearly, my "lucky" 20 dollar gold piece had nothing to do with it. I had lost that on the mountain above Garmich-Partenkirken.

I guess a lot of us tried our hands at poetry over there, including me:

VE Day, May 8, 1945

Silent we stood,
Like things of wood,
Watching bursts of orange in the snow,
Wond'ring if it was our time to go.

Death came so near,
That we could hear,
The tortured screams when He found his prey,
But we were spared for another day.

Our God was good,
He understood,
How little we had learned before this show,
How many things there were for us to know.

The smoke has cleared,
The Death we feared,
Has vanished, with the snow, in May,
To snare us in some *other* way.

Innsbruck, Recreation

We had time now to catch up on letters home and to do some sightseeing or to enjoy some of the recreational facilities.

There was a swimming pool at Bad Somezingorudder. It was fed by the melting snow of the Alps which flowed in one end and out the other. I went to the Bad with several of the "Coolies." We stripped to our OD undershorts to get some sun but on a mutual dare decided to take a dip in the pool. We lined up side by side at one end and dove in together. I have no idea what the world's record is for that length pool, but there is no doubt about it, we all broke it, that day, in the fastest heat (or was it cold?) ever raced. If that pool had been 25 feet longer, I am not sure we would have made it.

High above Innsbruck on Hafelekar Mountain on the north side of the Inn River valley was Seegrube Wintersportsplatz, a beautiful mountain resort with excellent skiing facilities. It could be reached by taking a cog railway part way up the mountain to Hungerburg and then transferring to a cable car for the remainder of the trip ---- or you could climb up.

My "GIs" had cleared up about the time we got to Landsberg. They had not let up since early in December. Now, I was trying to get myself back in shape after such a long and debilitating siege so I opted to make the climb.

Near the top, the Seegrube Hotel had been made into an Enlisted Man's Club, off limits to officers.

Skis could be checked out and there was an Austrian ski instructor to assist the novices. I checked out a pair. They were very primitive by today's standard. They were made of wood, bent up in front and were attached to your boots by leather straps.

I had never been on skis before but tried a few gentle slopes and after falling down several times finally negotiated the slope successfully. Looking further up the

mountain there were guys zigzagging down between sticks stuck in the snow. That looked like fun.

I didn't know how to turn on skis either but how hard could that be? Those guys just waggled their knees and shifted their bodies from side to side to side and the skis followed.

I decided to give it a try.

Another cable car went up to the starting point but again I opted for the climb. I couldn't cut it wearing the skis so I carried them and climbed the rocks along the side of the ski run. It was a tough climb.

Upon reaching the top I rested for a few minutes, put the skis back on and stepped into the starting gate. It looked a lot steeper from up there curving up in a slight rise at the bottom, then a sheer cliff and down below, --- Innsbruck.

From this vantage point I wasn't sure I wanted to do this, but what the hell, those other GIs were doing it, so could I. I pushed off and then realized it was even steeper than it looked. When the course took a swing to the left I waggled my knees and shifted my body to make the turn.

I turned, and I was aimed down the trail but my skis were still headed straight down the mountain and I was off the trail bouncing over some rough snow. Now if I shifted my body to the right I would be back on the trail again and it was coming up fast. I did that and zipped directly across the trail and off into some small moguls on the other side. There was something about turning that I obviously didn't know.

Realizing that I didn't know how to stop either, I began to panic. If I managed to get to the bottom at this speed, I would make the longest ski jump in history right into the heart of Innsbruck. The more scared I got, the lower I crouched and the lower I crouched, the faster I went and the scareder I got.

Then I hit a big mogul and was airborne. If I didn't know what to do with both skis on the ground I sure as hell didn't know what to do in the air. I hit and made a big hole in the snow. About 20 feet further down I bounced again. My skis and poles then made a series of horizontal lines on the snow as I cartwheeled for 50 feet or so. Then I left a deep furrow in the snow until enough of it piled up in front of me to bring everything to a halt. One leather ski strap had broken and my left ski was still sliding down the mountain.

After taking stock and finding nothing personal broken or even sprained, I sat on the ski still in my possession and paddled down to pick up the other one. With only one working ski, I had to take it off and struggled through waist deep snow to get back to the Seegrube Hotel where I turned them in.

When I returned the skis some of the GIs said, "We saw you up there. What were you doing? Are you crazy? Those aren't other GIs on that slope. They are Austrian experts who have been doing this all their lives".

Yes!! I had stupidly tried the slalom run. I didn't make it but I survived. I was elated as I scrambled pell mell back down the mountain but I have never been on skis again since that day.

Back in Innsbruck, I started reviewing all of the times when, by all rights, I should have been killed (several of which preceded my entry into service) but wasn't. They totaled up to many more lives than a cat is supposed to have.

After that sobering reflection, I did nothing more dangerous than sightseeing strolls down Maria Theresa Strasse, going to USO shows, and watching the latest movies.

But --- within a few days came a disquieting realization. I had actually enjoyed the war. At first I tried to deny it but could not. I did not enjoy it the way most people might assume. However, there is a thrill, an exhilaration, that comes when Death has been right in front of you, reaching for you and you beat him. You got away. The knowledge that you came that close and survived is a high like no other and I have been relieved to find out that I was not alone in experiencing this elation. It must fill a primal need. The last time I experienced anything even remotely like it was at the end of my shot at the slalom run, and that wasn't even close.

It is no wonder that when there are no wars, people do things like mountain climbing, bungee jumping, and sky diving, or even becoming astronauts, but I do not think that the high that they get is the same.

They know that their odds are very good.

That takes the edge off.

On May 29th there was a formal dismounted Division Review on the airfield. The new VI Corps Commander, Major General William H.H. Morris affixed battle streamers to the colors of the three infantry regiments. As all of the units of the 103d passed in review we looked sharp.

The VI Corps Commander sent General Mc Auliffe a very complimentary letter on the appearance of the division.

But when division reviews start, so does the chicken. As nice as Innsbruck was, it was going to become more and more GI every day.

As we settled down into a garrison routine competitions began to spring up everywhere. The Signal Company had a pretty good baseball team, high in the league standings. The same was true of softball.

Then the Division started looking for expert marksmen to represent it in the Seventh Army Rifle and Pistol Matches. That was BAD NEWS.

Word had spread throughout the division about the pistol marksman who could shoot flies out of the air. By now, there were hundreds of GIs who knew someone who purportedly had seen this extraordinary feat and several officers had heard the story. The search was on and I was lying low. When the search narrowed to the Signal Company I had to do something fast. I got a friend in the medics to help me out with some bandages.

When Capt. Beck called me in, my hand was heavily bandaged and my trigger finger stuck straight out bound snugly to a tongue depressor. He asked what happened and I told him that I had injured it when we tore our trucks apart to get rid of our winterizing innovations. I said that my knuckles were all banged up and my forefinger badly sprained.

Then he told me about the pistol matches and asked me about the flies. I told him that the story was greatly exaggerated. He persisted, pointing out that several people claimed to have seen me do it.

He thought that the medical officer, Major Burger, should look at my hand but, luckily, Burger was out of the area for several days.

I was running out of places to hide.

The Austrian Tyrol had been good duty, if only for a few weeks but, like all good things, it came to an end for me just in the nick of time. By the end of June, I was among the first to receive orders assigning me to the 5th Infantry Division Signal Company for quick return to the States. I was getting out just in time to keep me from making a fool of myself in the pistol matches. That was the good news.

The object of this exercise was to reassign us to the Pacific Theater of Operation after a short R&R leave. That was the bad news.

One of the last things that I had to turn in to the Supply Sergeant before departure was my radium-dial military wrist watch. Since I am left handed, I wore the watch on my right wrist and it had survived the entire war. When I took it off for the last time, I noticed that the skin on my wrist under the watch movement was red and peeling but did not think much more about it.

Now, fifty years later, the skin on my right wrist still gets frequently red and angry looking, taking on the appearance of a healing burn. When this happens, I am forced to wear my watch on my left wrist. Somewhere in the back of my mind is the nagging feeling that the radium-dial watch had something to do with this.

The last piece of good news I received in Innsbruck was that lightning had struck again. I was promoted from T/5 to T/4. It took a while, but apparently the Army finally recognized mediocrity as a virtue and I seemed well enough endowed with it to be rewarded with another stripe.

A Retrospective Look at the 103d Infantry Division

At this point in time, I have come to realize that this narrative has given a very narrow perspective on the 103d Infantry Division. It has focused sharply on the activities of Bud Hennum's radio team and the 411th Infantry Regiment to which it was attached for essentially all of the time when the 411th was engaged in combat with the enemy. However, the 103d Infantry Division was much more than just the 411th, the 103d Signal Company and the small part Bud Hennum's radio team played in the Division's success.

Here is a brief overview of the entire Division to put our small part into perspective.

We must never lose sight of the fact that the most important man in any army is the infantry soldier. It is he who must ultimately dig the enemy out of his defenses and force him to surrender. The Infantry is called the "Queen of Battle", apparently a reference to the most powerful piece on a chess board, the queen. An infantry division is structured to make the most effective use of the individual infantry soldier that it can.

The 103d Division was organized to improve upon the older awkward prewar "rectangular" divisions having four infantry regiments. The 103d was one of the newer, streamlined, "triangular" divisions having three infantry regiments. Each regiment, in turn, had three infantry battalions, and each battalion had three rifle companies.

This arrangement made for a very flexible operation. In an attack, two regiments would carry the thrust of the attack and the third would be held in reserve to guard against attacks by the enemy around the flanks of the forward regiments, or to attack through the forward regiments to take advantage of sudden breakthroughs or to dig in and provide covering fire for the forward regiments if they were forced to fall back. Each regiment arrayed its troops in the same manner with two battalions forward and one in reserve and each battalion did the same with its three rifle companies, and each rifle company did the same with its three platoons. This arrangement also permitted rapid changes of the direction of the main thrust with the resultant confusion of the enemy. It had worked well for us.

The infantry rifleman could not do it all by himself, however. He had to be fed, clothed appropriately for the weather conditions, and supplied with ammunition and other materials needed for the conduct of the war.

He had to be kept healthy, provided with prompt and appropriate medical assistance when wounded, and, if necessary, quickly transported to a field hospital for treatment of life-threatening injuries.

If killed in action his body had be retrieved and properly cared for.

The infantryman required close-up support from the heavier weapons such as 60mm mortars and 50 caliber machine guns carried by weapons companies.

He also needed combat support from tanks, artillery, and tactical aircraft.

He required transportation when sudden redeployment was necessary, and military police were employed to ensure the smooth flow of traffic in critical situations.

Mine fields had to be cleared, roads swept of mines, and bridges built or rebuilt, often under intense enemy fire.

Weapons, radios, telephones, vehicles, and other gear had to be maintained and repaired as needed.

A network of radio, wire, and messenger communications was provided to convey important information about his combat situation to field commanders who promptly transmitted orders via these communications channels to the troops actually fighting the battle and to those units supporting the effort.

These needs were all met by specialized units that were organic to the 103d Division or by specialized forces attached to the division or its regiments to meet specific needs that developed during combat.

These attached units typically included tanks, tank destroyers, and even such diverse units as electronic countermeasures, psychological warfare, searchlight battalions, and controllers for tactical air support.

Obviously, there is a lot more to an infantry division than just a lot of infantry soldiers carrying rifles. There were more than 20,000 men in the augmented 103d Infantry Division, only about half of whom were actually rifle-carrying infantrymen.

This is not to say that the rest were in plush rear-echelon jobs, out of harm's way, -- - far from it, as will be noted later.

Enumerated below are the organic units of the 103d Infantry Division.

The 103d Infantry Division basically consisted of the 409th, 410th, and 411th Infantry Regiments organized as discussed above but, in addition to its infantry battalions, each regiment had a Headquarters Company and a number of specialized units such as a Cannon Company equipped with 105 millimeter howitzers.

However, in order to command this infantry force, to provide combat support, and to provide the variety of services and supply noted above, the 103d Infantry Division consisted of much more than just these three infantry regiments.

Other organic units included a Division Headquarters group, a Headquarters Company, Headquarters Special Troops, the 103d Infantry Division Military Police Platoon, The 103d Infantry Division Signal Company*, The 103d Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop*, The 103d Quartermaster Company, The 803d Ordinance Company, the 103d Infantry Division Band, the 103d Counter Intelligence Corps Detachment*, the 103d Division Artillery*, The 382d Field Artillery Battalion (105 mm howitzers)*, the 383d Field Artillery Battalion (105 mm howitzers)*, the 384th Field Artillery Battalion (155 mm howitzers)*, the 928th Field Artillery Battalion (105 mm howitzers)*, the 328th Combat Engineers Battalion*, and the 328th Medical Battalion.

Those identified by an (*) were either combat units or units that had substantial numbers of their personnel attached to combat units.

For example, the 103d Infantry Division Signal Company furnished radio and wire communications crews to front line elements of the infantry regiments, to organic combat units such as field artillery battalions, and to tank battalions and other combat units attached to the division.

These attached combat units included, at various times, the 756th Tank Battalion, the 761st Tank Battalion, the 781st Tank Battalion, the 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion, the 824th Tank Destroyer Battalion, the 534th Anti-Aircraft Artillery

Auto-Weapons Battalion and the 991st Field Artillery Battalion (155 mm Gun, Self Propelled).

All together, the organic units of the 103d Infantry Division (including its three infantry regiments) suffered losses of 4,063 men killed, wounded, or missing in action in the short time that it was in combat. I had a lot of friends among those killed and wounded.

The casualties sustained by the combat units that were attached to the 103d Infantry Division are not known but some units such as the 614th Tank Destroyers sustained heavy losses.

However, to put the 103d Infantry Division's losses in perspective, in all of World War II, 58 million people were killed or missing and the wounded were at least 10 times this number and uncountable.

The 103d Infantry Division's losses seem trivial by comparison but we must never lose sight of the fact that each and every one of the killed or missing was an individual human being with relatives and friends, and whose loves and aspirations would never be fulfilled. It is easy to forget this and become numbed by the sheer weight of statistics that run into tens of millions.

One final word about the officers.

Major General Anthony Mc Auliffe was a genuine legend and his presence gave the entire 103d Division an esprit de corps that is hard to imagine. He got the best out of everyone. Colonel Donovan P. Yeuell, C.O. of the 411th Infantry Regiment was regular army, cut from the same cloth as Mc Auliffe, and a fearless leader who did not send anyone where he was not willing to go himself. I know of no one who was not proud to serve under these two men.

It must be kept in mind, however, that this narrative is told from the perspective of the enlisted man who must endure a lot of "chicken" and most of it comes from the officers closer to him, specifically his Company Commander, and his Platoon and Section officers.

The enlisted men view their officers in an entirely different light from that in which the officers view themselves. Having been both, I can speak authoritatively on this. If I appear to have been too hard on certain Signal Company officers, they probably deserved it, but something must be said to balance the ledger.

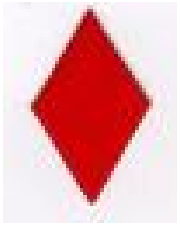
Signal Company wire and radio teams often operated independently for long periods of time. We saw the officers of the units to which we were attached but did not see a Signal Company officer for weeks on end.

Nevertheless, the enlisted men of the 103d Signal Company performed superbly. We always got the message through and it is unlikely that this would have happened without the excellent training required to function efficiently during the difficult and often terrifying conditions encountered in combat.

Clearly, we did not achieve this success entirely on our own. We owe a large debt to Captain Bernard Beck, CO of the 103d Signal Company, and all of the Signal Company officers responsible for instilling in us the skills, discipline, and confidence to make it happen.

They have earned a belated respect and a parting salute.

Goodbye Cactus, Hello Red Diamond



About the end of June, and after a flurry of shakedown inspections, those of us going to the 5th (Red Diamond) Infantry Division loaded onto trucks and said goodbye to a lot of good friends.

It was the last I would see of many of them.

There was one good thing about it. It was not a total goodbye. Several of the "Coolies" went to the 5th Division with me.

However, John Donlan, a "Coolie", and a friend starting in North Camp Hood, through ASTP in Denton, and into the 103d Signal Company, stayed behind. He was the last one left of my buddies from the beginning of basic training at North Camp Hood, Texas.

It was sad leaving the 103d "Cactus" Division and Innsbruck.

Our convoy headed east, eventually arriving at Vilschaffen, a town close to the Czechoslovakian border on the Danube River. I (along with other "Coolies" including Jimmy Carr, Don Benz, Frankie Applebaum, Maurice F. "Bud" Zink, and Frank Tullio), was assigned to the 5th Infantry Division Signal Company. We had a few more days to enjoy the beautiful scenery, during which, we liberated a

couple of outboard motor boats and spent a lot of time boating up and down the Danube.

We were just marking time while other GIs from other units were reassigned to the 5th Division. We took the Cactus shoulder patches off of our uniforms and replaced them with the Red Diamond of the 5th Infantry Division.

Eventually, the rosters were full; we had been through innumerable inspections; and we were ready for the trip back to the U.S.

We were crammed into trucks for a brief ride to a railway siding where we were loaded onto "40 and 8"s, the freight cars famous from World War I for carrying 40 men or eight horses. They only stuffed about 30 of us in each car but with our duffel bags it seemed like a lot more. We had to sleep in shifts. There was a pot in one corner of each car for bodily functions but most of the guys kept the doors open because of the heat and urinated out the side of the car onto the ground. The pot was dumped out the same way, usually during stops, to spare the GIs in the rear cars.

The trip across the full width of Germany and France took more than two days. Along the way we passed through the bombed out rail yard at Passau.

Another German city, Afschaffenberg, had a railroad marshaling yard. Our bombers had really done a number on the rail yard there. To top it off, the Seventh Army in its southward advance had pounded the rest of the city to rubble. We went through on the single track that had been restored since the end of hostilities. The rest was in shambles.

Arnold Schumacher, the 103d Signal Company Radio Section Tech Sergeant, bore a remarkable resemblance to Hermann Goering. Schumacher had, as he put it, a pot full of relatives living in Afschaffenberg. When he saw what the Air Corps and the Seventh Army had done to the place, he had a good laugh. When we asked him about his relatives, he answered, "Served 'em right." He obviously assumed that they had not survived the devastation.

We passed close enough to Reims to get a good view of the cathedral.
Eventually we reached our destination, Camp Lucky Strike, a tent city near Le Havre.

Several "Coolies", Don Benz, Frankie Applebaum, Jimmy Carr and I got passes and did some sightseeing together. We got as far north as Dieppe where the British had made a commando raid early in the war. We explored several German bunkers, part of their West Wall defenses against an invasion. We stopped in a cafe for some vin rouge and, while there, were propositioned by the bar maid who offered to take

us all on at once. We were not interested so she turned away. Seeing a driver from the "Red Ball Express," who obviously had been there before, she flashed a big smile and grabbed him by the arm. They disappeared up the stairs.

The tents at Camp Lucky Strike were stifling. We were there for twelve days that seemed like twelve years. The good old USA was tantalizingly close but we just had to sweat it out. Then everything fell together and we found ourselves cued up at the harbor in Le Havre to board our ship, the USS Le Juene. There was a Red Cross Canteen truck serving hot coffee and doughnuts that you could not miss. The Le Havre harbor area had been hammered, probably by both sides, until not one stone was left standing on another. As far as we could see, in any direction, there was a flat field of rubble that had been bulldozed smooth. The Canteen truck stood out like a beacon.

Homeward Bound On the USS Le Jeune

Quarters on the Le Jeune had standard troopship bunks, stacked four high.

The Le Jeune was a Navy troopship (probably intended for transporting Marines) so the chow was far better than on the Henry T. Gibbons, and there was some variety.

The only fault I found with the chow was that we once had grits for breakfast and before I could stop him, the server dumped on a large spoonful of sugar and poured milk all over the grits. He was a Yankee who had never heard of grits and thought it was cream of wheat.

We had to pass by the Navy crew mess on the way to our chow. It was far better, scrambled or fried eggs, sausage, bacon, grits, hash browned potatoes, hot and cold cereal --- the works, but we couldn't complain, not after what we had eaten for the past year.

The weather was much kinder to us on the way back so we were able to spend a lot of time on "C" Deck, the enlisted men's deck, getting some sun.

The trip was quicker, too --- no wide swings southward or zig zag courses to avoid submarines. It was like a pleasure cruise ---- sort of.

As we entered New York Harbor, fire boats, tugs, and other harbor vessels came out to meet us with displays of spraying water and bonking, honking horns.

As we passed the Statue of Liberty, a hush fell over the ship. We just looked at her -- and wept openly and without shame.

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PAPA'S WAR , PART 7

R & R Leave

After we disembarked, things happened so fast that I cannot remember how I got there but the next thing I remember is being home and the wonderful reception that I got from everyone. I was the very first GI to return to my home town, St. Augustine, Florida, from Europe and I was treated like a king. When I walked past any local tavern, the owner called me in and offered the first drink on the house with the emphasis on the word "first".

Well, that was a better offer than I had ever gotten before.

It was going to be a Rest and Rehabilitation leave but the round of parties left little time for rest.

I went to the beach. The Coast Guard's NO CAMERAS signs were still in place. I took a picture of one of the signs. The beach was very messy. Large black sticky globs of oil were everywhere, a reminder of the dozens of tankers that had been torpedoed within sight of shore. Unlike most of America, my hometown had not been completely shielded from the grim realities of war. It had seen tankers burning off shore. Many burned bodies of seamen had also washed ashore here. St.Augustine had had some first hand knowledge of what war was all about.

I had returned to the States earlier than many other GIs because I had not been overseas for very long and was destined to go to the Pacific to participate in the invasion of the Japanese home islands.

My R&R leave was marred by the radio news programs that carried daily reports of the Japanese kamikaze attacks on Allied ships and bases in the Pacific. How can you fight people who willingly go to their deaths on suicide missions for their Emperor? I felt that we would have to kill every single person in Japan to defeat them. The war in Europe was a piece of cake compared to what we would face. Millions of troops would be killed just trying to land on the home islands. I had already used up all of my luck. I was not confident of getting through that.

On August 6, 1945 the first nuclear bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan by a B-29 Superfortress, named "Enola Gay". The report that a single bomb had wiped out an entire city raised my hopes that things might not be as bad as they seemed.

On August 9th a second nuclear bomb was dropped, by another B-29, named "Bock's Car", on Nagasaki virtually destroying that city as well. My hopes for the future went up another notch.

Throughout the PacificTheater, during early August, isolated Japanese forces surrendered to forces of The United States, Great Britain, Australia, China, Russia and other Allies. In Japan there were still a few "hawks" unwilling to admit defeat but negotiations for unconditional surrender were moving along well. The last snag was Japanese insistence that Hirohito remain Emperor which was agreed to, providing he would no longer be considered a deity. The Japanese begrudgingly gave in on that one.

On August 15th, the Japanese agreed to the terms of surrender. The day was proclaimed V-J Day (victory against Japan) and there were celebrations all over the world.

On September 2, 1945 the armed forces of the Empire of Japan surrendered formally and unconditionally to General of the Armies Douglas MacArthur aboard the battleship Missouri at anchor in Tokyo Bay.

Thus ended World War II, the greatest conflict in history. It had lasted five years and had been fought in every corner of the earth. Fifty five million people had been killed with uncountable wounded and an additional three million were missing. Obviously, my participation in "Papa's War" had been a microscopically small part of it.

Camp Campbell, Kentucky

It did not end for me just like that. I was still in the Army and had to report to Camp Campbell, Kentucky at the end of my R&R leave. After a brief period of mainly physical training, I, together with other "Coolies" including Don Benz, Jimmy Carr, and Frankie Applebaum, had orders cut to be transferred to a unit destined for occupation duty in Japan.

Jimmy Carr was not known for a quick temper but he thought it was grossly unfair and drove his fist through the latrine wall. It made him feel better but did not change anything.

We went through several rounds of showdown inspections and then we were lined up with a bunch of other GIs and were loading our duffel bags on the trucks when our orders were canceled. We were going to stay at Camp Campbell after all.

You don't stay in one place very long without the conversation turning to the availability, or lack thereof, of female companionship. Camp Campbell had no "Little D." There were no nearby colleges. Clarksville, Tennessee and Hopkinsville, Kentucky (More commonly called "Hoptown") located outside the north and south gates of Camp Campbell had a reasonable number of attractive females but the ratio was terrible. At a USO dance in either town you were lucky to get your arm around a girl before you felt a hand on your shoulder as some one was cutting in. This situation made the subsequent period of marking time that much more difficult. Everyone just wanted to get it over with and get back home.

Don Benz Gets Even

For reasons known only to the Army, Don Benz, was not sent to a separation center close to his home but was discharged directly from Camp Campbell. As soon as he had his separation papers in hand and the "ruptured duck" securely fastened to his uniform jacket, he decided to get even with Tech Sgt. Arnold Schumacher for all of the dirty details that he and Master Sgt. Emil "The Buddha" Boitos together had heaped on the "Coolies".

Don got a demonic look on his face, drew the bayonet from some GI's scabbard and told Schumacher that he was going to get even for everything that he and Boitos had done to us. Schumacher, who closely resembled Hermann Goering in both countenance and build started running with Don in hot pursuit. Don could have caught him easily but he just chased him, brandishing the bayonet. He chased him across a field until Schumacher dropped from exhaustion, then Don pounced on him and screamed, "Now I am going to cut your heart out!"

Then he just got up and walked away leaving Schumacher cowering and begging for his life, not realizing that Don was gone. Don ran back to the barracks laughing, returned the bayonet, picked up his gear, headed for his transportation off the post, and departed for home.

Thereafter, whenever Schumacher was around, one of the "Coolies" would casually mention that he had seen Don Benz somewhere in the company area and Schumacher would disappear for the rest of the day.

At Camp Campbell, I was an instructor in the 5th Division Radio School but it was mostly a wasted effort. No one cared to learn anything now. What was the point?

GIs were flowing through the 5th Division Signal Company by the hundreds on their way to separation centers. Discipline was almost nonexistent. At a Division Review, most of the troops who were supposed to be standing at attention were sitting, smoking, talking, or just lying around on the parade grounds. What did they care. In a few days they would all be civilians again.

Dalton R. Coffman, --- At It Again

Other signalmen transferred from the 103d to the 5th Infantry Division included Dalton R. Coffman. We had both been in the Radio barracks back at Camp Howze, but, in combat, Coffman and I were on different radio teams and had essentially no contact with one another until the end of hostilities. At Camp Campbell we again found ourselves in the same barracks together. By this time I was a T/4 having been promoted shortly before transfer to the 5th Division.

Incredibly, in this environment, Coffman's comparisons started all over again. If he was truly aspiring to mediocrity I got ticked off enough to give him a reason to direct his attention elsewhere. The green herringbone twill fatigue uniforms were ordinarily worn just the way they looked after being washed except that the pockets were supposed to be buttoned and the trousers neatly tucked into and draped over the boot tops.

Without Coffman's knowledge, I did something not normally done. I pressed a set of fatigues with sharp military creases and buried them in my foot locker. When we fell out for Saturday morning inspection, nearly everyone's fatigues were sloppy, pockets unbuttoned, boots needed attention, and weapons were not properly cleaned.

Coffman, who fell out to my right, was very presentable, and everything about him was militarily correct, but he blanched when I showed up as no one had ever appeared in fatigues before, seemingly ready for a parade down Pennsylvania Ave. That day it was no contest. If I was his paragon of mediocrity he fell far short of the target. He was second best by a mile.

But that was only the beginning.

Unbeknownst to both of us, and to the Company Commander, as well, Maj Gen Albert E. Brown, the Commanding General of the 5th Division had decided to pull a surprise inspection on the Signal Company that morning.

Both Coffman and I had been issued new weapons by the 5th Signal Company. Our M-3 submachine guns had been replaced by carbines. The carbine is normally slung over the shoulder on its canvas strap. "Inspection arms" is a rather informal procedure with this weapon. The carbine is casually unslung and held in one hand and the bolt pushed back by the other hand followed by removal of the magazine and a quick look into the receiver to be certain that all is well.

Compared to the others in our section, Coffman performed "inspection arms" in a very creditable manner, but when General Brown stepped in front of me, I whipped the carbine off my shoulder with a sharp crack of the sort normally heard only when the leather strap of an M-1 rifle snaps against the stock and the bolt was slammed open with elan. The General snatched the carbine out of my hand the way he would normally handle an M-1 rifle, inspected it carefully and returned it to me in a much more military manner than was normally used with the carbine. If I was his Standard of Mediocrity, Coffman once again fell far short of his standard.

As they moved on to the man on my left, General Brown turned to Capt. Kohnstamm, the Company Commander and said, "That man is the only soldier in this outfit." The Company Commander nodded and said something to the First Sergeant, who made a note.

I doubt that Coffman had any idea why things went the way they did that morning. He probably did not guess that my actions were directed specifically at him and just as probably has no present recollection of the incident. Why should he?

A few days later I was surprised to be promoted from T/4 to T/3.

About a month later I would be discharged, never dreaming how important that promotion to T/3 would ultimately turn out to be.

Hi-Jinx at Camp Campbell

Meanwhile, our company clerk at Camp Campbell was an officious pompous little ass of a T/5, ordained by God to make everyone wait interminably and fill out forms by the book until they got them exactly right.

The "Coolies" decided to have some fun with him.

We invented a person, Private Joe Sanitary (Pronounced "San-tree").

He needed a place to stay.

There was a name tag attached to the foot of each bunk. When a married sergeant, who slept off the post, left for the evening, his name tag was removed and Pvt. Joe Sanitary's name tag was slipped into the holder and he now had a "place".

The first game was "The Telephone Call". One of the "Coolies" would call the Orderly Room from the Service Club and ask for Private San-tree and say he was in the Radio Section Barracks. He would add that it was very urgent.

When the company clerk dashed into the barracks looking for him another "Coolie" would say, "Gee, he sleeps right there," pointing to his name tag, "I think he just went to the Latrine." unlike Camps Hood and Howze, each barracks in Camp Campbell had its own latrine. The clerk hurried down to the latrine only to be told that Sanitary was just there but had gone to the Day Room. There he was told that Sanitary had gone to the T&T Section barracks. After a while every barracks was cued in to the game and sent the Company Clerk on another wild goose chase. After failing to catch up with him, the clerk eventually returned to the Orderly Room only to find that the caller had hung up.

The next gag was the "Movie Announcement." One of the "Coolies" would call the on-post movie theater, identify himself as the 5th Signal Co, Company Clerk and asked that an urgent message be flashed on the screen.

The message typically said, " PRIVATE JOE SANITARY, PLEASE CALL THE SIGNAL COMPANY ORDERLY ROOM, URGENT." The movie had to be interrupted to flash one of these messages on the screen. When the message was flashed, a "Coolie" would call the orderly room, identify himself as Private Joe Sanitary, and tell the company clerk that he was answering the message flashed on the screen. After assuring Private Sanitary that no such message had originated with him, he called the theater for an explanation only to be told that Private Sanitary had already complained about the error and complained that he had missed part of the movie because of it.

Private Joe Sanitary now had a voice, --- even a persona. There was no doubt that he was a real person. Or was there?

Leaving nothing to chance, an entire fake 201 file was made up (it took some ingenuity to "liberate" all of the forms) and at the first opportunity it was slipped into the Orderly Room file cabinet.

Meanwhile, "Private Joe Sanitary Was Here" started showing up more often than "Kilroy Was Here" over urinals all over the camp and in Clarksville, Tennessee and Hopkinsville, Kentucky, as well.

"The Telephone Call" was pulled on the company clerk several more times, each time with the explanation that the caller was sorry that he had to hang up the last time, but this time it was even more urgent.

When it was clear that we would all soon be discharged, we decided to leave an ongoing gag we called "Address Unknown". We slipped the required papers into his file to indicate that he had been sent to a separation center for discharge and put a home address in the file. It was a non-existent address in Sioux City, Iowa. Then, for a buck each we signed him up in Lonely Hearts Clubs that advertised in many magazines. The clubs each guaranteed at least a hundred letters from lonely women. We gave The 5th Signal Co., Camp Campbell as his address.

The letters started arriving before we were discharged. When he did not answer to his name at mail call, the company clerk checked his files and forwarded each letter to Sanitary's home. Eventually the letters were returned to someone marked address unknown. Since at least some of the letters initially arrived at Camp Campbell without external return addresses, those would have been returned to the company clerk. I wonder what he did with them. He would have been obligated to try to find Sanitary. Perhaps he forwarded them to the address we gave for Sanitary when he was inducted.

How many times could they come back marked "address unknown"?

We had no idea.

Out At Last

In February 1946, I was shipped to Camp Blanding, Florida where it all began. Camp Blanding was now a separation center and they duly separated me from the Army. I got my "ruptured duck" (the discharged veteran symbol), and a brand new set of ribbons, the Good Conduct Medal, the American Theater ribbon, the World War II Victory Medal, and the Europe Africa Middle East Theater of Operations (EAMETO) ribbon with three battle stars for the Ardennes-Alsace, Rhineland, and Central Europe campaigns.

It would appear that Papa's War was really over now, but ramifications of my military service would continue for several years.

University of Florida, February 1946

I enrolled immediately in college at the University of Florida under the GI Bill. I had only 31 months of eligibility and it would be nip and tuck whether I could get a degree in electrical engineering before my eligibility ran out. Why electrical engineering? Certainly, Morton Ross who had fostered my early interests, first in chemistry and then in things electrical and electronic, was the major determinant but my service in the Signal Corps also played a part.

I would have to carry a very heavy load. Well, ASTP had prepared me for that.

However, ASTP could not prepare me for the force of attraction between a male and a female. I was smitten, and in July of 1946 I got married.

That made an additional demand upon my time. We could not find housing in Gainesville so my new wife Sally had to stay at home in St.Augustine and the travel time ate into my study time.

By the Spring of 1947 we had our first child, Sandra.

Sandra made us eligible for an apartment in one of the veterans' housing projects. Two-story army barracks had been sliced like loaves of bread and reassembled on several large tracts of land owned by the university. Each of the projects had a name and number. We had to work our way up a list of applicants but were eventually assigned an apartment in Florida Veterans Housing Project III.

Its acronym was FLAVET III.

In Apartment 250T, FLAVET III, we were in the same boat with hundreds of other veterans with families. There was a lot of mutual support among the wives. We dug into the books and did whatever we had to do to keep our families on an even keel. Sometimes it seemed like the days should be a lot longer.

It was necessary to attend college right through the summer in order to keep our apartment. Sally, like most of the other wives, took a job, so we could have three square meals a day, and put our daughter Sandra in a day care center.

The University of Florida was in Alachua County. Alachua was dry. On the last night before our next GI Bill check was due each month, each group of four apartments (2 upper and 2 lower) would pool its resources. If we had enough among us, one of us would drive to "Ruby's", a package store in the next county, (but nestled so close up against the county line that you could not stand a post card on edge up against the building without it being in Alachua County) and purchase a fifth. Any surplus cash went for some potato chips.

We would then have as much of a party as a fifth of booze, divided eight ways, could produce.

Then, back to the books for another month.

While in college, I discovered that former enlisted men who met a long list of qualifications were eligible for direct commissions in the Army Reserve. The key requirement was having been discharged as a first-three-grader. All of the requirements fit me like a glove so I applied and was soon commissioned a Second Lieutenant. I have never met another officer who got his commission that way. West Point --- yes; OCS --- yes; ROTC --- yes; Direct Field Commission in combat; --- yes; --- but no one who did it my way.

Without the promotion to T/3 (thanks to Dalton Coffman and his aspirations to mediocrity) I could not have applied for the commission but I had no idea at the time that this commission would be very important to my future.

In June of 1949, the nation's colleges and universities dumped out the largest group of engineering graduates in history with less demand for them than at any time in the previous 20 years.

Typically, the number 1 and 2 student in each graduating class had as many as fifty job offers between them. The number 3 student had one or two. The number 4 student had none, and I was a lot further down the list than that.

The Final Chapter - and Dalton R. Coffman is Still Involved

Upon receiving my Bachelor of Electrical Engineering (BEE) degree, that June, I found myself married, with a small baby, flat broke, no job, no decent job offer, and I faced the prospect of having to take a low paying job locally and perhaps getting stuck there forever.

Prospects were not very bright.

To buy some time, I applied for a three months tour of duty as a Reserve Officer at the Signal School in Ft. Monmouth, N.J.

While there, I explored the N.Y. job market and found that it was as depressed, and depressing, as the one in Florida.

Then a one in a million chance occurred. I arrived at CBS on the very day that they had decided that, when an engineer who was on extended sick leave returned to work, they would find another job for him, and, in the meantime, hire someone to fill his present job.

I walked in with exactly the qualifications that they wanted and was hired on the spot. I started work at CBS the day after my tour of duty at Fort Monmouth ended.

I spent my entire professional career at CBS, to our mutual benefit, eventually becoming Director of Audio and Video Engineering, responsible for the design and installation of essentially all of CBS Television's fixed and mobile broadcasting facilities. After that, I became Director of Television Facilities Planning and was assigned to a "Think Tank" trying to "crystal ball" the future. It was an exciting and thoroughly enjoyable career but after 37 years I was ready to retire.

I retired in 1985 to my home town, St.Augustine and have a lot of time to spend with my grandson ----- provided he is not too busy.

Except for Dalton R. Coffman. and his annoying comparisons, I would never have been discharged a T/3, therefore, would not have qualified for a direct Reserve Commission, so would not have been eligible for the 3-month Reserve Officers' tour of duty at Ft. Monmouth, and would not have been in N.Y. City on the one day when the one key job at CBS opened up that blossomed into my lifetime career.

God only knows what career path I might have taken if Coffman's path had not crossed mine.

In my own mind, it would surely have been a much rockier road to a far less pleasant place.

Of course, two remarkable coincidences cannot be ignored. Who could have guessed that the 5th Division Commander would pull a spot inspection on the very day that I decided to go Coffman one better?

Without that there would have been no promotion to T/3 either.

And--it had to be karma that the CBS job appeared almost by magic on the very day that I visited them.

Nevertheless, I owe Dalton Coffman more than he could ever know. I have thought about him often, wonder about what road he took, where he is now, and wish him well.

I am also deeply indebted to Morton Ross, my grade school and high school friend for pointing the way.

EPILOGUE

In 1970 Sally and I took a vacation tour of a dozen countries in Europe. We got off a Rhine cruise at Bingen and I said to Sally, "Now I must visit a town called Nod, if there is such a place, so I can tell the kids that I have been in Wingen, Bingen, and Nod,"--- a play on words from a nursery rhyme. She got it, but asked, "Where is Wingen?" and I explained that it was a very small village in France, near the German border, that no one ever heard of, unless they had been there. After Bingen, we covered part of the route of the 103d Division, namely, the road down through Heidelberg, Ulm, Ober Ammergau (we saw the Passion Play), Garmish-Partenkirchen, and Innsbruck.

While in Innsbruck I tried to find the house in which we were quartered (Nr.4 Wilkestrasse) but was not having much success until I drew the cactus, our division patch, on a paper napkin hoping to get some glimmer of recognition as a starting point for a conversation. Most of the people in the little cafe were young, too young for the patch to mean anything to them, but a man about my age came over, pointed to the patch and said, "Haguenau". That did not immediately compute because at that point in time, 1970, Haganah was in the news as the name of an Israeli terrorist organization. However, he kept punching at the cactus patch and repeated, "Haguenau, Haguenau, Haguenau, - Francaise." Suddenly it rang a bell. He knew our patch from France. Well, he could not speak a word of English and I could remember only 5 or 6 German phrases that were totally useless for carrying on a conversation with a man.

Nevertheless, after establishing that he was Dieter and I was Pierce we managed to communicate by drawing maps and sketches, him speaking real German and me speaking a little "Hollywood German" (English schpoken mitt eine Cherman occent) and extracted the following story.

He was in an SS unit and first ran into the 103d near Haguenau. We pushed him up into the Siegfried Line and when the spring offensive started we pushed him all the way down to Innsbruck where he stayed and became a gymnasium instructor after the war. He was still proud to have been a member of the SS but had the greatest respect for the 103d because we had beaten his SS gang soundly in every encounter in which he was involved. In April 1944, when the 103d was in Army Reserve we were stationed in Bensheim. Coincidentally, he had been in a lazarette in Bensheim after being wounded in action.

Early in our "conversation," Dieter and I were alternately naming villages that we had been in (and we had both been in quite a few of the same villages) when he happened to mention Wingen. Sally said, "I thought that you said no one ever heard of Wingen." I replied, "Well, he has because he was there, too."

It turned out that Dieter had a lot better reason for remembering Wingen than I had. He had been an artillery observer in a steeple in Wingen. At one point he looked out at a sort of corridor of rolling hills that had woods on both sides and saw American tanks, Wald to Wald, so to speak, approaching Wingen. The tanks halted just short of the crest of one of the hills. When he checked the opposite direction, he saw the same thing only they were German Tiger tanks. They also stopped just short of a crest on their side of town. According to his story, a vehicle came out of the American column flying a white flag and stopped midway between the two forces. It was soon joined by a vehicle from the German tank force also flying a white flag. After a brief discussion, both vehicles came into Wingen.

Again, according to Dieter's story, they stayed in Wingen for about a half hour. He had no idea what was discussed but one can imagine that it went something like this. The Americans stalled for time to get our artillery zeroed in on the German tank positions and to call in tactical air support. The Germans probably demanded surrender pointing out that our Shermans were no match for their Tigers (there was more truth than poetry to that). The parley probably ended in a stalemate.

Dieter's story continued. The vehicles returned to their respective columns and the tanks on both sides started revving up their engines and leveling their guns. He suddenly realized that he was looking right into the muzzles of the guns of both sides. It was obviously time to get the hell out of the steeple so he retreated to the cellar of the church.

The battle was joined and we won. Obviously, by parleying with them we bought enough time to get adequate air and artillery support to neutralize the superiority of their Tiger tanks. That night, American infantrymen slept in the pews of the church.

Dieter crept up out of the cellar and stole an American uniform from someone's pack, put it on over his German uniform, and just walked out of Wingen. Once clear of our lines, he got out of the American uniform and escaped.

Sally was amazed that she could understand this story when Dieter did not speak English and neither of us speak German.

The bottom line is that I finally got across to him what we wanted to do. He got his VW and drove us around Innsbruck until we found the house. The woman who owned it when we requisitioned it back in '45 was still living there. I have a picture taken when we were quartered there, standing at the gate with my M-3 "grease gun" hanging over my shoulder. I wanted to get essentially the same picture but with my movie camera hanging over my shoulder. However, every time we got set to take the picture, our ex-SS-man would jump into the field of view, pretend like he was shooting at me, and yell, " Boom, Boom!".

We wasted half a dozen exposures but couldn't get the idea across that I wanted one picture without him in it. I thought that we would never get the picture I wanted so we got back in his car and when he started to move, I jumped out, ran to the gate and Sally stuck the camera out the window and snapped the picture. God only knows how, but she got it --- not exactly what we wanted but close enough.

Dieter drove us back to the cafe and we thanked him. He said something that loosely translates into, "I am here and you are here and das is gute." I guess he was trying to say that it was good that we both survived. I shook hands with him and we both said, "Comrade" but I really felt no comradeship with him after what the SS did at that concentration camp at Landsberg.

POSTSCRIPT
1993 Update

I had been curious about the destinies of most of the individuals mentioned in this story. I recently had the opportunity to find out about some of them.

In January of 1993 I received a totally unexpected phone call from Harold Rorem, formerly of the 103d Signal Company, T&T Section, who was trying to round up other veterans of the Signal Company to attend a reunion in Chicago in August, 1993. Through him, I obtained addresses and phone numbers of many former comrades.

I got busy making plans to attend the 1993 reunion and reestablishing communications.

First, Our Radio Team:

Norval Hennum: Our radio crew chief is retired and residing in Golden Valley, Minnesota. Have talked to him a number of times by phone.

Seymour Fader: Came to the Signal Company from ASTP, Oklahoma A and M. He is a college professor (what else?), still active, and lives in Paramus, N.J. He takes a group of students to England every year. He and his wife, an author of note, are both listed in "Who's Who." Have communicated with him frequently by mail and by phone.Update. Seymour passed away in 1999, in England, while doing what he most loved to do, teaching.

Michael Schindler: Passed away in 1982.

103d Division Signal Company Commander:

Capt. Bernard "Bernie" Beck: I ran into him while in the Army Reserve in the early 1950's. We were both in Mobilization Designation Unit # 23. At that time he was a Major (still as pompous as ever) and I was a Captain. He lived on Long Island at the time. I was recently called by his son, Andy Beck, who said that he passed away in 1985. Andy is a WWII buff and now attends all 103d Reunions as a proxy of a sort for his father.

103d Div. Signal Company Motor Pool Officer:

W/O Edwin St.Cin: Do not know of anyone who has had any contact with him. Last known address Webster Grove, MO.

Radio Section Master Sergeant:

Emil "The Buddha" Boitos: Passed away in 1980.

Radio Section Tech Sergeant:

Arnold Schumacher: Deceased, date of death unknown.

Radio Section, The "Coolies":

Don Benz: Became an engineer and owns his own business in Portland, Oregon. He is still active running his business. We have talked several times on the phone and corresponded by mail. We both attended the 1993 Reunion of the 103d Infantry Division in Schaumberg, Illinois. Swapped "war stories" and had a very enjoyable personal reunion.

John Donlan: Had a successful engineering career with 3-M. Is now retired, living in West St.Paul, Minnesota. We have had several long phone conversations and an ongoing exchange of letters. We both attended the 1993 Reunion of the 103d Infantry Division and had a most enjoyable personal reunion not only with one another but with other Signal Company Radio Section comrades, as well as others from other sections of the Signal Company and also with buddies from ASTP in Denton. These included Stuart Friedman and Sid Kantor.

Frank "Frankie"Applebaum: Is retired, residing in Pikesville, Maryland. Talked to him by phone.

Maurice F. "Bud" Zink: Is retired from the insurance business and lives in Canton, Ohio. Talked to him by phone.

John "Jack" Phillips: Lives in Blue Island, Illinois. Talked to him twice on the phone and talked him into attending the 1993 reunion. He doesn't see very well and had to be driven to the reunion. Matt Kovats brought him but they both arrived after Don Benz and John Donlan had departed so the "Coolies" who attended were not all there at the same time.

James "Jimmy" Carr: Originally from Philadelphia PA. Has dropped completely out of sight. No one has a clue as to his whereabouts.

Frank Tullio: Is also among the missing. Matt Kovats had several contacts with him. He worked for Armour (meat packers) but Matt has lost track of him. Last reported in Chicago area.

William "Bill" Ballantine: Wounded in action when he and Seymour Fader were sent through a mine field that was under mortar fire with a back pack radio to restore communications with a beleaguered infantry outfit. Was seen by several GIs

at various "Repple Depples" (Replacement Depots) but as far as I know never returned to the 103d Signal Co.

George Bartlett: Whereabouts unknown, last reported in Stockton, Cal. Update: In 1998. George, who had gotten my e-mail address from my website, contacted me. We have, since, been in contact by phone and are in frequent contact via e-mail. George lives in Scotts Valley, CA.
George was in contact with Bill Ballantine for a few years but eventually lost contact with him.

Other Signal Company Enlisted Men:

Dalton R. Coffman, Radio Section: After all these years, I finally found out what happened to him. He had a successful teaching career and a parallel career in the National Guard. He is now retired and residing in Cocoa, Florida. Spoke to him by phone and, as expected, he has only vague recollections of me. After all, one does not tend to remember the mediocre. I did not mention his comparisons of his gear to mine or how important they turned out to be. I'm not sure he would understand.

Bill Ambrose, Cook: Whereabouts unknown, last known location Chicago, Ill.

John Anderson, Radio Section: Whereabouts unknown, last known location, Providence, R.I.

Joseph M. Patterson, Message Center Section: Deceased. Date of death unknown.

Robert Rushing, Radio Section: Originally from Big Sandy, Tennessee, now living in Royal Oak, Minnesota. Did not make it to the 1993 reunion.

Matthew "Matt" Kovats, Radio Section: Not a "Coolie", but one of the "good guys" in the Radio Section. He was a T/4 at Camp Howze and a T/3 radio crew chief during the war. An "Honorary Coolie." Spoke to him by phone and helped talk him into coming to the 1993 103d Division Reunion. He looked like he had been trapped in a time warp. Still had dark hair, had gained no weight, had no wrinkles, age spots, or noticeable infirmities. He was instantly recognizable. He, obviously, has been doing something right. We had a good time swapping war stories.

William F. Barclay, Construction Section: Fought the ASTP wars at Texas A and M before being impressed into the Wire Construction Section of the 103d Signal Company. Now retired and living in Roseville, CA. Editor of 103D INFANTRY DIVISION SIGNAL COMPANY REMEMBRANCES. Also author of the continuity of that book. Makes all of the 103d Division Reunions.

John Anania, Construction Section: Now living in St.Clair Shores, MI. John makes it to many reunions.

Manual Berman, Construction Section: Another ASTPer. He came to the 103d via The University of Nebraska and the University of Oklahoma. Now resides in Bellmore, NY.

Sgt. Eugene Jones, Construction Section: Last known address, Fort Worth, TX.

Marvin Ellis, Construction Section: Deceased. Date of death unknown.

Arthur K. Vernon: Attended the 1993 Reunion and regaled us with his anecdotes. Now residing in Livonia, MI.

ASTP Buddies:

John Donlan: Reported above. See "Coolies".

Bert F. "Rebel" Erwin, ASTP roommate: Feet frozen in France (trenchfoot). After many months in hospitals and rehab, he became a dentist in Winter Haven, Florida. We had occasional contact after college. I visited him once in Winter Haven. He owned two Dobermans. Both dogs had gold caps on some of their teeth. He has dropped out of sight and is no longer listed in the Winter Haven phone book. Have been unable to contact him since I retired to Florida in 1985.

Bob Enterline, ASTP roommate in Chilton Hall: Ended up in Charlie Company, 411th along with Tom Kane. Awarded the Bronze Star. Out of touch for 50 years but as a result of the '93 103d Division Reunion found out his address and phone number and determined that he had a successful career in engineering. Have had several telephone conversations with him and have started an exchange of letters. He attended the '93 103d Div. Reunion but we missed contact there.

Gustav "Gus" Enyedy, ASTP roommate in Chilton Hall: Ended up in I Company 409th. Out of touch for 50 years but, after noting his name in "Who's Who In Engineering," assumed it had to be him and initiated a dialogue by mail. He called back and we are now in close contact. Successful career in Chemical Engineering. President of own company.

Harrison Griffin: Ended up in I Company 409th (with Gus Enyedy). Became an attorney and eventually County Judge in Deland, Florida. We keep in touch.

Stuart Friedman: Until the 1993 reunion of the 103d Division, had not seen or heard a word about him since ASTP broke up. He was assigned to a 103d Infantry

Division rifle company, 410th, B Company, 2d Platoon, and was seriously wounded by a shell from an "88." He was not found until late in the day when the reserve (B Company, 3d Platoon) was called up. Mahlon Waller, another ASTPer from ASTU 3890 found Stu lying there and went for help. He found Sid Kantor, an infantry medic and also an ASTPer from ASTU 3890. Sid already had a wounded GI on his litter but he gave Stu a shot of morphine and promised to send the next available litter team to him. Stu was picked up and carried back to an aid station and was quickly moved to a field hospital. What Stu learned from Sid, 50 years later, was that that litter team was the last litter team sent out that night. Stuart lost a leg and spent many months in hospitals and in rehabilitation. Stuart attended the 1993 103d Division Reunion and together with John Donlan, Sid Kantor, Mahlon Waller, Wally Wessa, Calvin Bibens and other ASTPers from Denton we had a few mini-reunions of our own.

Sid Kantor: Was an infantry medic. Shortly after helping to save Stuart's life, he was captured and not freed until the end of the war. He had some interesting stories about life as a prisoner of war.

For example, as a medic, he could not be made to do manual labor but was assigned to assist in the treatment of wounded soldiers from both sides. The commandant of the POW camp decided to stretch the rules a bit. He sent the medic POWs out into the fields to dig potatoes on the grounds that this was humanitarian work because the potatoes would feed the POWs who otherwise might starve.

The medic POWs were all Jews who spoke Yiddish which is very "Germanic" so they also understood the orders of the German officer who was in charge of the potato-digging detail. When they were unloaded at the potato field, all of the medics sat down and pretended not to understand what they were being told to do. The officer angrily ordered them to dig but couldn't seem to make them understand. He just kept getting a shrug and "nicht verstehen" from each of them.

When he saw that he was getting nowhere, he finally told one of the German noncoms to load the stupid Amerikanische dumbkopfs on the trucks and take them back to the camp.

It was like a "Hogan's Heroes" script. The words were no sooner out of his mouth than, to a man, the medics all jumped to their feet and started toward the trucks.

They had outsmarted themselves.

"AH! HA!" yelled the officer, as he suddenly realized that they understood everything.

He quickly made them understand that they WOULD dig potatoes, --- or else ---, and they did.

Thomas "Tom" Kane: A member of a physical education basketball team along with me: Rebel Erwin, Tom Lutze and a couple of others. Our claim to fame was that we lost every game. Tom Kane was awarded a bronze star with "V" for valor for action near Saulcy su Meurthe, France, November 22, 1944. I saw his name in the new 103d Division history and got an address and phone number from Bob Enterline. Have opened up a communication channel after 50 years. PhD in Chemistry. Successful career with Du Pont.

Bayard ("BD") Dodge: Killed in action at Saulcy su Meurthe, France, November 22, 1944.

Harold Class: A high school and ASTP friend of John Donlan and an ASTP friend of mine. Killed in action by a sniper January 6, 1945.

Thomas "Big Toe" Lutze: A really nice guy and good friend of mine in ASTP. He was on our hopeless basketball team. Tom was killed in action, on December 15, 1944, by a mortar round that exploded in his foxhole.

John " Jack" Steptoe: See Below.

High School Friends:

Jack Steptoe: After ASTP, he went to the 99th Infantry Division. Lost contact until 40th and 45th high school reunions. Jack worked in several states for General Electric Credit Corp. Around 1970, in face of another interstate transfer, left GECC, took position with postal service and stayed there until retirement in 1986. We had good personal reunions at both 40th and 45th high school reunions but could not contact him for the 50th.

Morton Ross: We kept in touch over the years. He had his own general contracting business in Philadelphia, PA. Saw him at our 40th and 45th high school reunions and had good get togethers both times. He passed away suddenly in 1989. It is hard to think of him as gone.

Unidentified Major and T/5, 88th Division, 5th Army

Recently the 88th Division had a reunion in my home town, St.Augustine, FL. My connection with that division (from our excursion into Colle Isarco, before the official linkup with the 5th Army) didn't click in my mind until their convention was over, otherwise, I would have tried to locate the major and/or his driver.

I am sorry about that missed opportunity. I hope they got out safely. The war in Italy was, technically, over and that would have been a terrible time to get killed.

ASTP -- Lt. John McGiver

Lt. McGiver became a professional actor, John I. McGiver. The name may ring a bell. He was in roughly 20 movies including The Manchurian Candidate and Love in the Afternoon. He also had bit roles in a whole slew of 1960s TV series, and had a few of his own short-lived series (Many Happy Returns, Mr. Terrific) plus many appearances on Broadway and in dinner theaters.

He and his wife had 10 kids so he had to work a *LOT* .

He once did a voice over on a Keebler commercial. When the Keebler people found out he had ten kids, they sent them several cases of cookies. Their mom doled them out one a day for months.

John I. McGiver died of a heart attack in Sept 1975 at age 61.

Acknowledgments

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the fact that while I had bits and pieces of this book in my computer, I was procrastinating about finishing it, when a former member of the 103d Division Signal Company, who, incidentally, was not even mentioned in the narrative, lit a fire under me to get it done.

He was Harold Rorem, a member of the 103d Signal Company Telephone and Telegraph Section who called me out of the blue in January of 1993. Harold was comparing the Company Roster to the names in a set of CD ROMs listing everyone in the United States having a telephone. I was the only Anderson Pierce Evans in the USA with a telephone. When he found that match he figured it had to be me and called. (Lucky for me that my name is not Bill Smith.) He provided me with names and addresses of many former Signal Company buddies and encouraged me to attend the reunion of the 103d Division in Schaumburg, Illinois in August of 1993. I did not wait for the reunion but telephoned a number of friends including my Crew Chief, Norval Hennum and many of the Coolies. This resulted in the dredging up of a lot of dormant memories and before they could get away again, I plugged them into the appropriate spots in the narrative. Thanks are also due specifically to Don Benz, Matt Kovats, Art Vernon, and Bob Gill for refreshing my memory about some events that I had nearly forgotten.

Through some of these contacts, I found out that William F. Barclay, a member of a wire team in the Signal Company Construction Section was writing a book about the 103d Signal Company and was looking for diaries, notes, letters, anecdotes, etc,

with which to "personalize" his book. I offered him some of the parts that I had finished to see if he wanted any of it and indeed he did. After several exchanges of letters, computer disks, and phone calls, I was writing frantically to finish my first draft so I could show it to him when we met at the Schaumburg reunion. He was ecstatic over the fact that, of all of his sources, mine was the only one available on a computer disk. As a result he has, with my permission, borrowed quite a few portions of the narrative that, I modestly believe, have substantially improved his book, --- and, with his permission, I have shamelessly purloined a few anecdotes from his book, 103D INFANTRY DIVISION SIGNAL COMPANY REMEMBRANCES, so we have both benefitted. Thanks, Bill, for permission to use a number of anecdotes from your book.

I have had a ball putting this book together. Thanks, Harold and Bill, for getting me off the dime.

Stuart and Ginger Friedman spotted a large number of typographical errors and outright mistakes in the text and were gracious enough to bring them to my attention in a tactful manner. Thanks Stu and Ginger. I'm not sure we caught them all but the book is much better than it would have been without your eagle eyes.

Peder Knudson, a former associate at CBS, spotted a few major goofs and helped me over a lot of bumps regarding the eccentricities of WordPerfect 5.0, 5.1, and 6.1 for Windows. Thanks Peder for saving me from many restless nights.

And, finally, I must not forget my grandson Brenton Colen Kelber. Without his intense interest in World War II (or, "Papa's War," as he calls it to differentiate it from other wars), this book would never have happened.

T H E E N D ?
Certainly not.

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A compilation of recollections of Signal Company veterans edited by William F. Barclay.
Limited publication, 1995. Full text (Sorry, no pictures) of original book is now available on this website.

ABOUT THE FONT

The font face selected for this book is Times New Roman, a scalable font having graceful lines and unexaggerated serifs. It is a very comfortable font that does not tire the eye. The font size chosen for the body of the text is 14 Point, Bold. This font size is larger than is generally found in published books, however, while the book was written primarily for my grandson, who has excellent vision, I expected that it would be read by many of the individuals mentioned herein whose eyes, like mine, are well past their prime. So, buddies, this font and type size is for you.

COMPUTER GRAPHICS

The computer graphics in this book were drawn by Pierce Evans.

Finis

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ADDENDA

A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

THE 103d INFANTRY DIVISION REUNION IN ALSACE, FRANCE, MAY 1994

CELEBRATING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIBERATION

The liberation of Europe is generally considered to have started with the landings on Normandy, D-Day, June 6, 1944. However, for many, their personal liberation started when the Allied forces actually drove the Nazis from their villages and towns.

In rural France and especially in the region of Alsace, there are strong recollections of the way things were under the heel of Naziism and a people truly grateful for their deliverance from its horrors.

Three generations have kept alive the memory of what life was like under the Nazis and have instilled in their children a deep appreciation of what freedom is all about. The people of this region do not measure their freedom from the storming of the Bastille, but from the appearance of the first American troops in their villages in 1944. For them, Liberty is only 50 years old and they are celebrating its 50th birthday this year.

Many have vowed never to forget the sacrifices of American lives 50 years ago. It is still hard for them to comprehend the fact that so many thousands of young men were willing to leave their far away country and spill their blood for the people of Alsace, and they are making their children and grandchildren aware in a very personal way.

It is not unusual for a 9 or 10 year old child to know, as was the case in Urwiller, that "Two young American men from Company I, 410th Infantry Regiment, 103d Infantry Division, died here, on this street, in front of this house, for my freedom." In the Alsatian village of Pfaffenhoffen resides a young man, about thirty years old who vowed to his father that he would never forget the sacrifices that Americans made for him before he was born. His name is Pierre Marmillod. Pierre is the president of an association, "Les Amis de la Liberation," dedicated to the preservation of that memory. While he is a pleasant man with a broad smile, he takes the job of preserving memories very seriously and did a

remarkable job of organizing a 50th Anniversary Celebration, the details of which ran from obtaining a marching band from Estonia, a country that still measures its freedom in days, to organizing an all-day Texas-style barbecue complete with a country-and-western band and square dancers.

The liberation of this part of France, by the American 103d Infantry Division, occurred in the winter of 1944 but the winter in Alsace is cold and snowy, not a good time for a celebration. Pierre and his committee decided that since freedom arrived a bit at the time, village by village, there was no specific date from which their freedom could be measured so the 50th year would be the important thing and what nicer time for a celebration than in the Spring. In the Alsace region of France, the last two weeks in May are ideal. The weather is pleasant, the trees and fields are green and flowers are in full bloom and there would be minimal interference, insofar as transportation arrangements were concerned, with the D-Day ceremonies in Normandy. The decision was made. The celebration would be held in the last week of May, 1994.

Contingents of veterans from the 103d Division arrived in Alsace by various routes.

In 1944, the 103d Infantry Division first arrived in France via the Mediterranean port of Marseille after training at Camp Howze, Texas, staging briefly at Camp Shanks, New York and enduring a 15-day Trans-Atlantic crossing aboard a convoy that surged through a hurricane en route.

My wife, Sally, and I joined one group of 103d Division veterans who opted to retrace our original five hundred mile route from Marseille up the valley of the Rhone River to the front. Our arrival seemed fraught with difficulties --- a late arrival in Orley, --- a hassle getting our luggage which did not reach the carousel for nearly an hour after our arrival-----a missed flight from Paris to Marseille-----a missing tour guide at the Marseille airport----another hassle with Marseille taxi drivers----but we eventually arrived at our hotel, the Pullman Beauvau, weary to our very marrow. The hotel was Louis XVI vintage with antique furniture in all of the rooms and the flavor of another era, altogether quite charming.

The travails of our trip were nothing compared to the battering and mal de mare endured during the 103d Division's first Atlantic crossing on the General Brooks, the Monticello, the Santa Maria, and my ship, the Henry T. Gibbons, a tiny Liberty ship, --- but Sally had no such yardstick for

comparison. It may have something to do with age but while this trip was far less rigorous, I also found it to be equally exhausting.

In what is regarded as one of the great understatements of the war, the troops of the 103d were told, after debarking in Marseille, that they would have to march two and a half miles to a staging area carrying full field pack, rifle, and duffel bag. It turned out to be a 20 mile uphill climb to the staging area atop a rocky, wind-and-rain-swept plateau. For veterans of the 103d who made the hike, this has been forever recalled as the "Marseille Death March." (I was lucky to be picked to guard our secret cryptographic machines all the way from Camp Howze to the Marseille staging area so, in 1944, I got to ride to the plateau.)

This time, however, everyone had a ride to the plateau. We got there by Mercedes bus, an infinitely better way to travel. The plateau had changed somewhat. During our original brief stay in this desolate spot, only a barren, wet, rocky surface had extended in all directions. Today, it is a hunting preserve carefully guarded by wardens. In 1944, we had slept on the rocky surface, but the landscape was now spotted here and there with concrete foundations and slabs. These had been hastily installed for headquarters tents of units occupying the area in the months after we departed and just as hastily abandoned after they had served their purpose. Sometime in the last 50 years, a lot of scrub growth of one kind or another has taken hold on the plateau, providing cover for the game birds, mainly pheasant and grouse, that now occupy this desolate landscape.

In 1944, a high voltage power line cut across the plateau. It is still there and served as a marker for our attempt to locate roughly where our units had bivouacked. Most of us were satisfied that we had found the approximate locations of our units.

The plateau lived up to everyone's recollections regarding its surface, --- rocks, rocks, rocks, everywhere ---- sharp jagged rocks one to three inches across. We remembered the hopelessness of trying to drive tent pegs into that surface and worse, we again relived the fact that we once slept on it with nothing between us and those jagged edges save our uniforms and a layer of wet blanket. I brought back a handful of the rocks as a reminder -- -- whenever I think a hotel bed is uncomfortable, for example.

In 1944, 103d Division Headquarters had been located in the village of Carry le Rouet, now a quiet, well-to-do, Mediterranean resort and a far more luxurious habitat than our barren plateau. This time, we visited that

delightful village, had an audience with the Mayor and other city officials, and enjoyed a reception and luncheon that was to be repeated many times in the days to come. The wines of the Rhone valley were superb and the paine (bread) was the equal of the best to be found anywhere --- and nothing like the long loaves that we commonly call French bread.

Marseille and environs had sidewalk cafes and restaurants that whetted the palate even before we saw the menus. Most Marseille restaurants featured bouillabaisse. We did not try it but the cuisine we did try, on our "free time" exceeded expectations. Unfortunately, the present disadvantageous exchange rate of the American dollar versus most European currencies nearly caused us to have heart attacks whenever the bills were presented.

Forgetting restaurant prices, a Coca Cola, for example, typically costs 10 Francs ($2.00) almost anywhere. The cost is even more, 20 to 30 Francs ($4.00 to $6.00) in places like airports, and other prices are comparable. Obviously, there were no bargains to be had so even purchases of souvenirs for the folks back home were kept to the minimum. We brought back a lot of unused traveler's checks. Luckily most of our meals were included in the tour package.

The U.S. consulate in Marseille arranged for a visit to the missile frigate USS Carr. The crew of the Carr were courteous, intelligent, articulate, and knew their jobs. They are a credit to the U.S.A.

We paid a sightseeing visit to Chateau d'If, the island fortress from which the Count of Monte Cristo escaped, and to Marseille's most sacred spot, an enormous church, Notre Dame de la Garde, topped by a gold figure of the Virgin Mary. The church stands on the highest spot in Marseille and the panoramic view of Marseille harbor from that location is spectacular.

Notre Dame de la Garde

Marseille is now a major port accommodating huge cargo ships. the "old" harbor where we landed in 1944 is too shallow to handle them so it has diminished in importance. We visited the general area of the old port where we had debarked in 1944 but there were no familiar landmarks. The harbor had been littered with sunken ships in 1944, their superstructures protruding out of the water but they, of course, are no longer there. Our guide told us that some of the older cranes, still standing, had been in use in 1944 but, when the Germans were driven from Marseille, they dumped rocks and sand into the gear boxes and then operated the cranes. This completely disabled them so they were of no use to us in our landing there. All of our impedimenta had to be offloaded using the cranes of our own ships. The sabotaged cranes were subsequently repaired and some are still in use today.

In 1944 the 103d Division departed Marseille on a three-day 500 mile motor march to the front. This time, our brief visit to Marseille ended with a bus ride to the Gare (railroad station) where we boarded a train for the trip to Dijon. We shared a compartment with some other 103d veterans and their spouses and, in the process, developed some new friendships.

Our hotel in Dijon (the Mercure Chateau Bourgogne) was first class although ours was the only room not made up yet and Sally and I had to cool our heels in the lobby for an hour or so after we arrived.

After getting settled in our room we explored Dijon with newfound friends, Lee Fox and his wife Jan from Virginia, Illinois. There is a French lingerie manufacturer that uses life size photos of beautiful and shapely girls wearing their most appealing (and revealing) underwear. These photos adorn phone kiosks and bus stop shelters everywhere. We got some

video footage of Lee Fox snuggling up to one of these beauties to send to the church ladies back home in Illinois.

Dijon is a beautiful city, modern around the perimeter but having retained its old world charm in the center. As in most old French cities one can follow the arrows pointing to the "centre de ville" to find the heart of the "old" city but the streets are laid out in a haphazard manner so it is not quite so easy to find your way back to your starting point unless you drop pieces of bread along the way to keep track of your route. In the older section of Dijon lie the buildings that once housed the craft guilds, the streets in this section are festooned with the colorful banners of the guilds.

We only spent one night in Dijon but we bought the obligatory jar of mustard and visited a Cassis factory before departing by bus for our ultimate destination, Pfaffenhoffen (one of the few words I know having five "f"s). We were scheduled to get there via Colmar where the Germans had tenaciously held on, posing a threat to our right flank as we advanced northward toward Germany in 1944.

Our guide up to this point was Patrick Hinchley, a typical learned articulate Brit with a dry subtle sense of humor. Patrick was fluent in French, and knowledgeable about everything. Once in our hotels in Pfaffenhoffen his job would be ended because the calendar of events from there on was to be in the hands of Les Amis de la Liberation.

En route to Pfaffenhoffen we stopped at a rest stop having a restaurant named L'Arche. The arches were not golden and the menu was much more extensive (and expensive) than Mc Donalds. While at this stop, one of our 103d veterans, John Shea from Merrick, Long Island, had a heart attack and died. On board our bus was Harley Richardson, the American coordinator for the part of our reunion centering in Pfaffenhoffen. It was quickly decided that since Patrick spoke fluent French, he would stay with the distraught wife to take care of the myriad of details involved in the return of the body from France, and Harley would see us through to Pfaffenhoffen where he was scheduled to take over anyway.

Whatever you do, don't die in Europe. The red tape is incredible. It takes about two weeks to get a body back to the U.S.A. We left Patrick to look after things and continued on to Pfaffenhoffen, skipping Colmar due to the delay caused by the unforseen death, the entire party much subdued.

It turned out that a plane seat back to the U.S.A. could not be arranged on such short notice so Helen Shea, the wife of the deceased rejoined us in Pfaffenhoffen for a day or two. She held up very well.

There are not enough hotel rooms in Pfaffenhoffen to accommodate so many, so some 103d veterans, who wished to do so, were welcomed into the homes of local residents and some of us were put up in hotels in nearby villages.

One couple, expecting to stay with a local resident, arrived at their doorstep, suitcases in hand, to be greeted by two confused, elderly homeowners who obviously were not expecting them and who had a house full of visiting relatives who had come for the festivities.

It seemed that their son (who lived at home at the time but subsequently moved out) had signed them up to take in a visiting couple but had neglected to tell his parents. It was an awkward moment all around made more so by the fact that neither couple spoke the other's language. The homeowners graciously invited them in and gave up their own bed room for the night (and slept who knows where). In the morning, they extended an invitation to stay for the entire celebration, but it was an uncomfortable situation, resolved later in the morning when "Les Amis" found them accommodations elsewhere.

Sally and I were put up in the Hotel Lindberg in Haguenau and were assured, by Harley Richardson, that it was located "in the heart of the city within walking distance of shops and restaurants." The Lindberg turned out to be way outside the city limits at a small general aviation airport. The only thing of interest was a flock of sheep being tended by some well-trained sheep dogs.

John Donlan and I had know each other and been friends through basic training at Camp Hood, Texas, through ASTP at Denton, Texas and through the war as radio operators in the 103d Signal Company. We had hoped to be in the same hotel because we had only recently renewed our friendship and had a lot of catching up to do --- but we ended up not only in different hotels but in different villages.

John raised some noise on our behalf and got us transferred to the Hotel Gare in Obermodern where he and his two sons were billeted. Gare means railroad station and the hotel was, indeed, directly across the street from

the railroad station but the French trains are so quiet we did not know they were there unless we chanced to see them.

This hotel was far superior to the Lindberg and had a world class chef. Our room was "quaint" as are the rooms in most rural hotels in Europe. For example, our room had a massive diagonal beam that came out of the floor about a third of the way across the room and disappeared into the ceiling about half way across. It took a few lumps on the head before I learned to duck going past it. On the other hand, the continental breakfasts at this hotel were anything but the simple croissant and coffee that we had come to expect. We had cereals, fresh fruit, orange juice, yogurt, and a hot dish every day, such as crepes, or French toast, or scrambled eggs with bacon or ham and there were patés of all sorts at every breakfast. One evening when we were on our own for dinner we tried the restaurant in the hotel. We both decided upon steak au poive verte. It was almost worth the price of the meal just to see how it was presented. It was a work of art, looking too good to eat, but, considering the price tag, we forced ourselves to eat it and it lived up to its appearance in every way. Scrumptious !

On our first day in Alsace, busses took most of our group on a sortieinto Saverne. We experienced another of those wonderful receptions, this time, in the magnificent Chateau des Rohan with the maire (mayor) of Saverne. There was beaucoup Alsatian wine and the wonderful assortment of breads for which the French are famous. This event was repeated almost daily with the maires of the "villages du jour."

Our next village du jour was Strasbourg.

The invitation from the lady mayor read as follows:

Madame Catherine TRAUTMANN
Maire de la Ville de Strasbourg

a le plaisir de vous convier à la reception qui sera donnée
le vendredi 27 mai 1994 à 16 heures 30
dans les salons de l'Hotel de Ville, Place Broglie
a l'occasion de la visite d'une delegation
d'Anciens Combattants americains de la "103d US Infantry Division"
organiseé par l'Association Culturelle du Val de Moder
Les Amis de la Liberation

Even without a working knowledge of French, it is not hard to decipher the essence of the invitation i.e. that Madame Catherine Trautmann, the lady mayor of Strasbourg, was inviting us to a reception at 4:30 PM at the City Hall on Friday, May 27, 1994 on the occasion of the visit of a delegation of ----- what? Some of the ex-GIs interpreted it to mean what it appeared to say --- Ancient Combatants of the American 103d Infantry Division.

Ancient Combatants? Indeed! We didn't feel that old. Well, some concluded, she was trying to say "Old Soldiers" but even that didn't fit too well.

Wars start over lesser misunderstandings.

Actually, the word "anciens" means "former" so a loose translation is former soldiers, i.e. veterans, of the 103d Division. By the time we figured it all out we were too pooped to care.

The reception lived up to the formal invitation, again featuring excellent Alsatian wine, this time, Gewertz Traminer.

In Strasbourg we visited the Headquarters of the Council of Europe, The European Union, and the European Parliament.

The European Parliament is long on talk. The delegates, as one of them confided in us, just talk, talk, talk, talk, --- but, he noted, talking is better than fighting and Western Europe has had its longest period without a war in modern history.

There is much to talk about what with the differences in language, culture, monetary and legal systems, systems of government etc. One of their notable achievements is that the national boundaries have, for all practical purposes, disappeared. One can now go from country to country (on the continent) without visas or encountering check points. --- And they are working toward a common currency which may be a reality by the turn of the century, --- if they can agree on what the unit of currency will be called. It will have to be an artificial word devoid of any hint of a language tie to any of the countries in the European Union. It will take years of talk just to pick a name for it. If you have a good suggestion, they would be glad to hear it.

A frightening aspect of their confidence in talk as a solution to everything is that they thought that the "ethnic cleansing" now going on in Bosnia is something that could never again happen in Europe. --- And they don't have the foggiest notion of what to do about it except talk --- and, in this case, talk doesn't seem to help at all.

An even more frightening aspect of the European Union is that its delegates are deeply indoctrinated in the "One World" philosophy, --- but WHOSE world? --- Again, they haven't the foggiest but they are all for it, whatever "IT" is.

France, for example, has already subordinated itself to the European Union to the extent that the flag of the European Union (interestingly, a "U.N.-blue" flag with a circle of gold stars) is flown above the French tricolor on all occasions in which both flags are displayed.--- And if that isn't scary enough, we have a pot full of "One World" idealists currently in control of the US government.(I won't inject any further political thoughts. I promise.)

BUT, It will be a cold day in the nether regions when I fly any "One World" flag above MY Stars and Stripes.

A feature of each of these meetings with the village "maires", that soon got pretty tiresome, was the exchange of keys to the city and other gifts by the mayor of Bethany, Oklahoma and the maire of the "village du jour," often accompanied by long boring speeches and which had nothing to do with our visit. The mayor of Bethany was not a veteran of the 103d Division nor was he a veteran of anything as far as we could tell. He was a friend of, and a member of the same church as Harley Richardson, the American organizer of the tour. For every ten or so people he signs up for a tour like this, Harley gets a "freebie" and he elected to use his freebies to make some points at home rather than benefit the 103d Veterans who, one way or another, footed the bill for the mayor and his wife and that did not sit too well with the rest of us. The mayor of Bethany brought a few "keys to the city" to dispense to give some rationale for his presence and it was not long before the general impression given to the locals was that the entire 103d Division was from Oklahoma and that this was strictly an Oklahoma affair.

We had two parades in Pfaffenhoffen and they were emotional events. The veterans of the 103d Infantry Division marched right up at the front preceded, of course, by a U.S. color guard (stationed in Strasbourg). We

were followed by a contingent of bemedaled French veterans of WW II, Indo China (Viet Nam), and the Algerian war, followed by the marching band from Estonia, and the rest of the parade. Many of the oldsters of the area cried as we marched by and some of the children seemed in awe of us. They were so impressed that we were the actual soldiers who had liberated their land so long ago that they just wanted to touch us and many of them did.

I had been asked to bring a 3 by 5 foot Florida flag. I attempted to obtain an "official" state flag from Jim Smith the Secretary of State of Florida who is official keeper of the flags but his office had already sent a flag to Pierre Marmillod for the event. To be on the safe side, I purchased a flag as well and took it with me. It turned out that the flags were carried in the parade by the children of Pfaffenhoffen. Pierre Marmillod had an extra flag staff which he used for my flag so Florida was the only state represented by two flags. The kids all wore tee shirts having "HAPPY BIRTHDAY LIBERTY, 50 YEARS, 1944-1994" colorfully printed on them.

Alaska sent Pierre a 3 by 5 flag (3 inches by 5 inches). Pierre was nonplussed by the prospect of our largest state being represented by the smallest flag but someone got them an Alaska flag of the proper size in time for the parades.

One of these parades took us to the 103d Division Memorial Monument in the Place de la Liberation where there were several ceremonies. This was the occasion on which I was to present the greetings from Lawton Chiles, the Governor of Florida, on behalf of the people of Florida, to the 103d Infantry Division and to the citizens of Pfaffenhoffen, and Alsace, and France on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of their liberation.

By then, I had my craw full of Oklahoma, so, before I read the greetings, I pointed out that contrary to the impression that might have been given in numerous earlier ceremonies, the 103d Infantry Division had been made up of soldiers from every state in the U.S.A., not just Oklahoma. I indicated that I was from the State of Florida and that I wished to extend greetings from the Governor and the people of that state. There was a loud cheer and applause from most of the 103d Vets and their wives who apparently also had their fill of Oklahoma.

One of John Donlan's sons brought along a tape player. He usually listened to it using headphones but it had a good output level when he used

the loudspeakers. One of the tapes he brought along was, ironically, the score of "Oklahoma". On one bus ride, he cued it up to the title song but was reluctant to do more so I turned the volume full on, pushed the "play" button and our gang at the back of the bus sang a raucous and not too complimentary rendition of "Oklahoma."

I think that the Oklahoma contingent got the idea.

At another of the ceremonies in the Place de la Liberation, wreaths were laid at the 103d Division Memorial Monument and a French decoration, the "Freedom Medal" was pinned on the 103d Division Flag. I assume that the lapel-pin version of this decoration can be worn by members of the 103d when we find out where to get them.

Using Pfaffenhoffen as a base of operations, we went to a number of the sites of battles in which elements of the 103d Division were engaged. St. Diè, Rougeville, Taintrux, Saulcy su Meurthe, Uhrwiller, Ingwiller, Schillersdorf, Engwiller, Mulhausen, Gundershoffen, Gumbrectschaffen, Niefern, Niederbronn, Bitschoffen, Zutzendorf, Rothbach, Lichtenberg, etc. We didn't get to the sites of some of the battles about which I have very strong personal recollections. These included Maisonsgoutte, Woerth, Epfig, Ebersheim, Wingen, Climbach, and Bobenthal. Those will have to wait for another trip.

During the war, these names all just ran together. I am amazed that I can still remember any of them, but I must confess to some help from my Michelin map of the Vosge Alsace region.

Most of the villages in Alsace have German-sounding names. There is a good reason for this. Alsace has changed hands between Germany and France a number of times. On one of the occasions when the Germans were in control, they decreed that all towns and villages under their domination must have German names. You can almost draw a line on the map to distinguish the boundary. Apparently, St. Diè, Rougeville, Taintrux, and Saulcy su Meurthe were on the French side of the line and the rest of the towns just mentioned were under German domination. The inhabitants of these villages, apparently got tired of having their village renamed every 25 years or so, and just kept the last names assigned to them but the inhabitants are "French." There is no doubt about that. The language, however, while mostly French, is an interesting blend of French and German.

We had our noon and evening meals in several of these villages. The wine (and fine wine at that) flowed in abundance at every meal. Some of the meals were real Alsatian country cooking --- wonderful taste, aroma, and undoubtedly high in calories, --- but who cared. The name of one of the most tasty stews roughly translates as "washday pot," so named because it was put in the oven in a large covered crock early in the morning and allowed to simmer all day while the women went down to the stream to do the laundry. When they returned home at supper time it was done --- and delicious.

John Donlan and I were both interested in the battlefield at Saulcy su Meurthe. Several of our ASTP buddies were involved in that battle. Bayard Dodge Jr., a well-liked ASTPer known more familiarly as "BD", was one of the 103d Division's earliest casualties, he was one of eight GIs from Company A, 1st Battalion, 411th Infantry Regiment, lying dead on the battlefield. My ASTP room mate Bob Enterline and Tom Kane (a member of the ASTP intramural basketball team on which I played, and which, incidentally, never won a game), were machine gunners of C Company's 1st Machine gun Section. They were called up to give covering fire. There were several German machine nests dug in on the high ground overlooking the terraced field. Tom was gunner and Bob was ammo carrier and feeder. Tom and Bob engaged the enemy in a fierce machine gun battle. They exhausted three boxes of ammo before knocking out all of the German machine guns. Tom, the gunner, received the Bronze star for that day's action.

On the bus with us was Bill Palangi who, also, was in A Company, 1st Battalion, 411th Infantry, and who was wounded in the same battle. When John Donlan and I realized that Palangi was from A Company, we asked him if he knew "BD". He did know him very well and provided some details regarding that fateful day.

"BD" was out on point. He had the wire cutters and had just started cutting his way through the barbed wire when a German officer rose up and hit him with a burst from his burp gun, killing "BD" instantly. Bill Palangi immediately shot and killed the German officer who killed "BD." Shortly after, Palangi was, himself, seriously wounded by mortar fire. Two of his buddies carried him, sitting on one of their rifles with arms draped across another rifle and their shoulders. They somehow managed to carry him down a steep incline (so steep that none of us could climb up it) to a house where he received first aid. Palangi found the house and spoke to the occupants, one of whom was quite young at the time but still had clear

recollections of the event. It took Palangi over 50 days before he had recovered enough to get out of bed and take a few steps, and he spent many more months in hospitals, because his wounds kept reopening. He then spent a lot of additional time in hospitals being rehabilitated.

At the Saulcy su Meurthe battle site is a cemetery for French soldiers killed in WWI. Some of the fighting took place in that cemetery. At the foot of the steps leading up to the French Cemetery is a monument erected by Company A comrades to the memory of the eight who were killed there.

We had an emotional visit to the US Cemetery at Epinal. Thousands of white grave markers perfectly lined up in every direction indicated the final resting places of many fallen comrades and we wandered along the rows seeking friends. John Donlan and I located the crosses marking the graves of "BD" Dodge and another ASTP friend, Harold Class. Harold had been a friend of John Donlan from grade school on through basic training, through ASTP and into the 103d Division. Harold was killed by a sniper in January, 1945.

Enroute from Epinal to Saulcy su Meurthe, we passed through Rougeville where I had several close calls with land mines during our first day of combat. On that occasion, I had parked our radio truck near the 411th Regimental Command Post (CP) which was located in an old saw mill. As daylight crept up on us, it became obvious that I had parked in an exposed position. Our crew chief reconnoitered the area and located a succession of good parking places, screened from German artillery.

However, each time, before we could move, some other vehicle got to each of them and was blown up by a land mine. We opted to stay where we were, exposed or not, and, eventually, engineers with mine sweepers pulled out several mines from right around our truck.

This time, our bus passed an intersection in Rougeville that looked familiar. There was a modern lumber mill right at the corner. In 1944, the 411th CP had been located in an old lumber mill just a short distance up the side road. It was no longer there but the presence of the new mill just a few yards from the expected location convinced me that I had found the right spot. This had been the site of the first "most scary day of my life." There were many more to follow.

In some instances, when we visited battle sites, local residents who had witnessed and recorded the events on paper were able to give lucid

accounts of the battles. The most vivid was by a man who had observed the battle of Reipertswiller in the zone assigned to the 45th Division but involving the 103d Division's 411th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Battalion.

The 45th Division's 157th Infantry Regiment had been battered for several days and Companies Charlie, George, Item, King, and Love were surrounded on a saddle between hills 420 on the left and 390 on the right by elements of the German 6th SS Mountain Division "NORD", 11th SS Regiment, and the 256th Volks Grenadier Division.

Upon our return to Alsace from the flank of the bulge, the Second Battalion, 411th Infantry Regiment, was detached to the 45th Division to attack hill 363, a little southeast of hill 390, in an effort to relieve the pressure on the surrounded companies. As the interpreter translated the account, we looked at the saddle and visualized the battle unfolding.

Easy, Fox, and George Companies of the 411th attacked twice, the first time in broad daylight, the second time in a snowstorm, but were repulsed both times by heavy artillery, mortar, and small arms fire suffering substantial casualties without reaching Hill 363. Meanwhile, the beleaguered companies of the 45th Division's 157th Regiment attempted unsuccessfully to break out. Eventually, all radio contact was lost as their positions were overrun and the radios of the five surrounded companies were never heard from again. The men of these five companies were all either killed or captured. One 103d Division veteran of this battle was critical of the suicidal daylight attack when they could have earlier infiltrated at night with better chance of success.

The 2nd Battalion 411th Infantry could no longer perform the function for which it had been attached to the 45th Division so it was returned to the control of the 103d Division, 411th Regiment, in Bouxwiller. The eight-day action by the 157th Regiment of the 45th Division was totally unsuccessful and took an enormous toll in American lives including some from the 2nd Battalion, 411th.

We also visited Struthof the site of the only German Concentration Camp in France. This one was placed here to deal with the heavy activity of the resistance forces (Force Francaise Interieur, or F.F.I.) in this area. This trip, we had a long conversation with Gilbert May, the last known survivor of Struthof.

In 1944, as the 103d Division pressed northeastward through the Vosges Mountains, this camp, located a little northwest of Barr, was in our path. The Germans abandoned it before we got there and shipped all of the prisoners to Dachau from which this survivor was shipped to the "French" Lager at Landsberg. Because the Struthof Concentration Camp was empty when we encountered it in 1944, we did not, at that time, realize its significance. The 103d Division liberated the last known survivor of Struthof from the French Concentration Lager at Landsberg, Germany in April of 1945, starved almost to death. One of the members of our three-man radio team, Seymour Fader, actually unlocked the gates at the French Lager at Landsberg.

May told of the unspeakable atrocities that occurred in this camp and it had the strong ring of truth because we had seen with our own eyes the horrors of the Landsberg concentration camps and the things that happened here were essentially the same. The French have preserved the camp as a constant reminder of the price that they paid for their freedom.

Just one example of the brutality of the SS guards at Struthof should suffice. A hangman's scaffold still stands in one corner of the camp on the highest ground in the prisoner compound. People were hanged for minor infractions at the minimum rate of one hanging per day. All prisoners were required to witness the daily hangings, intended as examples of what would happen if anyone got out of line --- but even without any infractions, the daily hanging occurred anyway, the victims being picked at random, just to set an example.

We visited a number of points of general interest, e.g. Mont St. Odile, an abbey northwest of Barr with a an incredible view of the Vosges Mountains. We also visited the double walled city of Obernai and the village of Lichtenberg where we were entertained by a group playing those long Alpine horns seen in the Ricola cough drop adds on TV. This group had played at the opening of the Winter Olympics at Albertville.

One afternoon, a small group of us, accompanied by a TV news team from French Channel 2, went out in search of the houses that we had stayed in, in Alsace, during the two winter months in which we prepared for the upcoming big offensive. Simon Dargol was one of our small group. He was a Frenchman who had escaped from Marseille, to North Africa, to Portugal, to Havana and eventually to the USA where he enlisted and was assigned to the 103d Division, with which he returned to France. He had a twofold mission. One was to locate the home of a lady, "Georgette," who

was a ten year old child when we were there in 1945. Harold Rorem, a member of the Signal Company had stayed with the young girl's family in 1945, in Imbsheim. Harold had sort of "adopted" the girl and corresponded with her over the years but could not attend this reunion in Alsace. Harold had asked Simon to deliver a present to her, which he did. Simon's second objective was to find the home where he had stayed in 1944. He had no trouble locating it and was welcomed with open arms although it is unclear to me whether the current occupants were the same family as in 1945.

Bob Powers, with some help from Simon, located the house where he had stayed in Bouxwiller. Here, members of the same family that lived in the house in 1945 welcomed all of us, (Bob, Simon, John Donlan, the French television team, and me), and even though our visit was totally unexpected, they broke out their best wine and breads and we had a delightful visit. While at this home, John Donlan and I had a long conversation with another survivor of Landsberg Concentration Camp, Charles Baron. At the time of his liberation, this survivor of Landsberg weighed only 60 pounds. In the year and a half following his liberation, he grew 10 inches in height and more than doubled his weight to 140 pounds. His body was not ready for such rapid growth and he has suffered from it ever since.

In 1945, the Division Radio Teams in Imbsheim had stayed in a large structure, It was very barn-like but it had rooms. It was not anyone's home, however, so John Donlan and I were not looking for people, just a building. That made it harder. We found two candidates but both have had some alterations and we are not absolutely certain of either of them. One seemed a bit more likely because we both recollected a fountain, actually, just a horse trough, nearby and there was one close to one of the two buildings. However, the other candidate had a section of low stone wall like one I remember sitting on while watching a one-sided dog fight between some American planes and badly outnumbered German planes. (It was all going on at high altitude but a shell from a nose cannon on one of the planes hit a building and exploded just a few feet from me, a reminder that all of that stuff they are shooting around up there has to come down somewhere, so don't watch, get under cover).

Our primary candidate also appeared to have had such a wall at one time but it is not there now. We consider our search reasonably, but not 100%, successful.

We couldn't leave without purchasing a few bottles of Beaujolais in special bottles commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the D-Day landings at Normandy. The bottles have permanent labels (not the usual paper) depicting the Normandy Landings. They will be collector's items but Beaujolais should be drunk while it is young. --- A dilemma. My guess is that the bottle itself will be as desirable to collectors as the contents so we plan to enjoy the Beaujolais within the next few months and just keep the empty bottles as souvenirs.

The final night, we had a party, for our French hosts, in nearby Gundershoffen. The military band from Estonia doffed their uniforms and entertained with music from the '40s, starting with "The St.Louis Blues March", the first number in a long Glen Miller medley. Sally and I couldn't sit still and we got up and started "jitterbugging" in the wide aisle between the two rows of banquet tables. The applause encouraged a number of other couples up and I must say that we all did pretty well. The orchestra also played a long medley of Sinatra songs including "My Way" and "New York, New York", and a string of hits from the '40s including "Sentimental Journey" --- hardly a dry eye in the house on that one.

I took what I thought would be an adequate supply of video tape but supposed that compact VHS-C cassettes would be readily available if I ran out but that was not the case. Unfortunately, I wasted far too much of our video tape on relatively unimportant things early in our trip and had to ration it severely when we got to the events that we really wanted to preserve, This last night party for example. I didn't get any of it on tape but John Donlan took copies of the footage that he and I and one other person shot and his son combined the highlights into a reasonably good representation of the entire experience.

The next morning we had to have our bags ready to load on the bus by 4:45 a.m. By around 5:00 a.m. we were loaded on the bus which picked up, in Pfaffenhoffen, the rest of the departees having to make early flights from Frankfurt.

The security in the Frankfurt Airport is very strict and a little unnerving to realize that a couple of guys with assault rifles did not have them slung on their shoulders but actually had them leveled at us, fingers on the triggers, while we were going through the metal detectors at the security check point.

A few parting thoughts. "Cleanliness" and "friendliness" come immediately to mind. One had to be impressed by the neatness and cleanliness of all of the homes and gardens in all of the villages in Alsace --- and by the cleanliness of the business districts as well. They are going through some tough economic times in Alsace but it has not affected the way they care for their property.

As many of us have found out, Parisians dislike Americans and are very rude, undoubtedly due in no small part to the "ugly Americans" who have disgraced our country by their rude behavior.

The people of Alsace, however, were warm and exceedingly friendly. They truly appreciated what we did there in 1944 and made their gratitude known in every possible way. They were gracious hosts, planned numerous events, --- some stirring, some nostalgic, some tearful, and some entertaining. They made us feel very welcome. They were incredibly generous with their wine and wonderful breads and their cuisine was without parallel. We didn't want to leave.

And the children, - We just wanted to sit and look at them, --- so beautiful, so innocent, a constant smile on every face, --- fully enjoying life without benefit of any of the offerings of TOYS "R" US. --- Something to be wished for in our own communities.

The return flight from Frankfurt to Orlando was uneventful but tiring even though the Delta Airline crew did everything they could to make it as pleasant as possible. The flight from Orlando to Daytona was on a tiny commuter plane ---- and I mean tiny --- it only carried a few people, a single line of seats on each side of the aisle --- and insufficient head room for anyone to stand in the aisle --- we had to practically crawl to our seats ---- very claustrophobic. We landed in a light shower but, as much as we loved Alsace, we were so tired that we were truly glad to be back home and didn't care how wet we got.

CEREMONY COMMEMORATING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIBERATION OF THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS

CAPITOL ROTUNDA
WASHINGTON, DC

APRIL 27, 1995

When the 103d Division liberated Landsberg Concentration Camp on April 27, 1945, I was among the first soldiers to enter the camp. What we saw there was horrible beyond description.

At the time, I had three dirty sheets of paper and a dull pencil in the pocket of my combat jacket. Words failed me but I drew three sketches of the camp and wrote, as best I could, a description of it around the sketches. I sent the sheets to my friend Morton Ross and he later forwarded them to my mother who put them away for safekeeping.

In 1993, I had occasion to send them to Bob Powers to help him prepare a response, on behalf of the 103d Division, to the history revisionists who claim that the Holocaust never happened. Eventually, Bob's document found its way into the Library of Congress where it came to the attention of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council.

This led to an invitation to participate as a candle lighter in a ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camps.

The ceremony was dignified and solemn. The United States Army Band, "Pershing's Own", provided the music.

The standards of all divisions that participated in the liberation of the numerous camps that we encountered in southern Germany were presented by a sharp contingent of standard bearers from the 3d Infantry Division.

The entry of the Division Standards was followed by the presentation of the Colors. The Color Guard was also from the 3d Infantry Division.

There were several moving speeches, mainly by survivors of the camps, and a principal address by Senator Strom Thurmond, who took part in the liberation of Buchenwald.

Participating in the candle lighting ceremony were eighteen people, three for each of six candles on a large brass menorah. In the center of each

group of three was a survivor flanked by a liberator and a prominent person (two senators and one representative participated).

It was an honor to be invited to take part in this moving ceremony.

Discussions with some of the survivors brought back strong recollections of the Landsberg camps and the monstrous things that happened there. Dreams of those terrible sights and smells have recurred a few times since the ceremony but I suppose that they will eventually go away as they did before.

REUNION OF THE 103D INFANTRY DIVISION WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA, AUGUST 16 - 20, 1995

Wednesday August 16, 1995 did not bode well for the 103d. Hurricane Felix, after veering away from Florida had drawn a bead on the southeast corner of Virginia and had Williamsburg in the center of his sights. My two-hop flight from Jacksonville to Charlotte to Newport News-Williamsburg (or, as the pilots call it, "New Willie") did not go well.

Departure from Jax was an hour late. I raced through the airport at Charlotte, just making the connection. Unfortunately, my luggage missed the connecting flight. Not wanting to leave anything to chance, I put a tracer on it as soon as we landed at "New Willie" and was assured that it had been located and was already in the air on the next flight. USAir also promised that it would be delivered directly to my hotel. I took every bit of that with a grain of salt but it all worked out exactly as promised.

Hurricane Felix, meanwhile, discovered exactly who he was dealing with, specifically, the vaunted 103d Infantry Division. We held him a bay for several days before he begrudgingly withdrew and retreated into the Atlantic dropping hardly a sprinkle in Williamsburg.

The reunion was held in the Fort Magruder Inn which was filled to overflowing requiring some 103d Veterans to stay in other nearby accommodations.

This was a double reunion for me. First, of course, was my reunion with comrades from the 103d Division Signal Company. The ones I was closest to were those from the Radio Section. John Donlan, Bob Gill, and Paul

Henson. I had not seen Paul in over 50 years but had a good reason to remember him. He is the person who worked out the scheme for using "Spiral Four" cable to remote control our radio transmitting and receiving facilities. As mentioned in the main text, this innovation was used many times by our radio team and probably saved my life on several occasions.

Bill Barclay finished his book, "103D INFANTRY DIVISION SIGNAL COMPANY REMEMBRANCES". It is a compilation of recollections of a number of Signal Company personnel. It includes many exerpts from this book, "PAPA'S WAR", so I obtained copies for Brenton and myself.

Many of the "regulars" were there, including Bill Barclay, John Anania, Harold Rorem, Bill Becks, Ray Vanderby, et al, and some others whom I had not seen in 50 or so years, like Bill Boyers.

Many hours were spent sharing stories of events of the "Big One". Many close calls were related but the most harrowing adventure of one of our intrepid Signal troops occurred when an 88 shell came through a low window, shattered the commode on which he was sitting, and went out the opposite wall without exploding. It was a dud but he did not hang around more than a millisecond to find out for sure.

Andy Beck, the son of our Company Commander, Captain Bernard "Bernie" Beck was there. He is a WWII buff and has collected many photographs and other memorabilia. He intends to edit a second edition of Barclay's book, expanding it to around 500 pages with many more photos than the 320-page first edition. We had several conversations about the rather amazing differences between his dad's recollections of events as reflected in his letters home, and our (various Signal Company GIs') recollections of the same events.

Andy brought a very professional set of equipment for copying photographs and made good use of it in copying wartime pictures brought by many of our ex-GIs.

The second reunion, for me, was with buddies from ASTP in Denton, Texas. These included two of my roommates from Chilton Hall, Bob Enterline and Gus Enyedy. I had not seen them for over 50 years so we had much to talk about.

Harrison Griffin, from Deland, Florida, was a friend from the day we were both inducted at Camp Blanding, through basic training at North Camp Hood, Texas and through the ASTP wars in Denton. Harrison and Gus were in the same squad in the 103d Division. I played a major role in getting both of them to come to the reunion. Gus carried a "Brownie" camera with him during the war and took many combat pictures. He later "liberated" a Leica but the pictures taken with the "Brownie" are quite comparable. Gus had a picture that shows his squad moving out one wet cold morning. A grungier bunch of troops would be very hard to find anywhere. He mounted a blowup of that picture over his computer in his office to remind him that no matter how bad things get, they can never get as bad as that. Gus has an incredible collection of combat photos. Anyone who got his hands on them could not put them down.

Stuart Friedman, who lost a leg in combat, was there. Our recollections regarding ASTP are different, but Stu denies that he was the target of any of the pranks played by Harrison, Gus, Bob, and me.

We shared wonderful recollections of our "best times" in the Army while stationed in Denton.

At the business meeting, the Presentation of the Colors was accompanied by a fife and drum group from Colonial Williamsburg. It was very impressive.

As is customary, a list of names of comrades who passed on since the last reunion was read. The names of a former ASTP buddy, Sanford Flink, and Willard Springborn (who was with us on the trip to Alsace in 1994) were on the list. Roughly 80 names were read and the list seems to grow longer each year. It makes one acutely aware of his mortality.

Sanford Flink had planned to attend this reunion. He had made reservations and mailed in his dues but fate intervened.

Willard had brought his grandson with him to Alsace to handle his wheelchair but the grandson fell, broke his leg, and ended up in the wheelchair himself with Willard hobbling around on crutches. "The Old Sarge" was a true hero, one of the most decorated men in the 103d Division.

REUNION OF THE 103D INFANTRY DIVISION
COLUMBUS, OHIO, SEPTEMBER 11-15, 1996

The 103d Division gathered at the Worthington Convention Center, Columbus,OH, September 11th through 15th. This was a multipurpose mission for me.

There are two events mentioned in PAPA'S WAR in which I would very much like to identify all of the participants.

The first concerns a man from 411th Regiment HQ Company Message Center who had a long red and white striped stocking cap who had failed to obtain the password before venturing out at night at a time when German saboteurs dressed in American uniforms had been parachuted into our area. The cap may have saved him from getting shot by me and I would like to identify him in the narrative.

The second event is described in "Incident at Colle Isarco". I would like to identify the two radio operators from 411th HQ Company who prodded Seymour Fader and me into joining them in their Jeep for what turned out to be a wild adventure in Colle Isarco, Italy.

The 411th Regiment was, by far, the largest group present at the reunion but there was not a single person from 411th Headquarters Company in attendance at the convention so I drew a blank on that one.

I had a little better luck reopening friendships with some vets who were fellow classmates in ASTP at North Texas State in Denton, Texas in 1943-44. Some former ASTPers in attendance were Bob Enterline and Gustav Enyedy (both roommates of miýÿÿÿ,

The 103d Signal Company was well represented with Bob Gill, Bill Barclay, Jerry Waldref, Bill Becks, John Anania, Harold Rorem, Ray Vanderby, Paul Grant, Bill Boyer, Bernie Beck's son Andrew, and others.

Sid Sedinsky, a regular at the 103d reunions passed away in 1996, before the reunion.

Andrew Beck brought his photocopying gear with him and copied many photos brought by various Signal Company people including me. He intends to rewrite Bill Barclay's book 103D INFANTRY DIVISION SIGNAL COMPANY REMEMBRANCES, expanding it to nearly double it original size and including many more photographs than the original edition.

In attendance at the reunion was Charles Baron a survivor of Landsberg Concentration Camp, liberated by the 103d. During our 1994 103d Division trip to Alsace several of us searched for the buildings in which we had stayed during the winter doldrums of late January through early March 1945. We located the building in which Bob Powers stayed. While Bob was chatting with the owners of the house, John Donlan and I had a long talk with Baron.

It was good to see him again at the reunion.

One of the highlights of the reunion was a side trip to the Air Force Museum at Wright Patterson field.

88TH DIVISION UPDATE

Shortly after my return to Florida, the 88th Division had a reunion in Daytona Beach. I visited them there hoping to get some clue as to the identities of the Major and T/5 from the 88th who were involved in the "Incident at Colle Isarco".

I had several interesting discussions.

One was with a vet named Dante Salamone who was in the lead infantry unit in the 88th's drive toward Brenner Pass. He could shed no light regarding anyone foolhardy enough to be out in front of his unit but of course they were so what they were doing there and how they got there in still a mystery.

I also had a long conversation with Montsaul (Monty) Brown who brought with him a hard cover history of the 88th Division. He told me

that after the formal linkup, the 88th was responsible for the part of Brenner Pass south of the border checkpoint at Brennero. This included the village of Colle Isarco. He described a cul de sac having in it a German SS Headquarters building. This appears to have been the building that was central to the Colle Isarco incident described in PAPA'S WAR, PART 6. Some of Monty's unit (including himself) occupied the building.

Seymour and I and the two 411th GIs were too intent on obtaining pistols to pay much attention to the uniforms of the officers and failed to note the SS insignias on their collars. We probably should have taken the officers prisoner and taken them with us when we left but we had no means of transporting them.

That was most unfortunate. One of them apparently rigged a time delay bomb (there was certainly enough ammo in the Armory in the building to do that). Several days after VE Day the bomb went off. Monty was on the street outside of the building at the time and was blown across the cul de sac. He was bruised but otherwise OK. However, he had many buddies killed or wounded in the blast.

The building was, as I recall, three stories high above ground but the stories were very tall with ceiling heights of twelve feet or more. The whole building was ablaze and one of Monty's buddies was trapped on a top floor balcony. Monty had alpine training and found a rope which he threw up to the GI on the balcony. An SS POW who had been policing up the area ran over and pulled the rope down before it could be secured. A bunch of Monty's buddies grabbed the POW and beat the living hell out of him (he didn't say if they killed him).

Monty tried again with the rope and got his friend down. Monty lost several friends and all of his possessions in the blast (which, ironically, included a Luger, a P-38, and a Beretta, precisely the kinds of highly prized military booty we were seeking in Colle Isarco). Monty showed me, in his book, a picture of the building after the explosion. He later sent me copies of the pages telling the story of the blast.

I don't know what Seymour or I might have done to prevent that tragedy but it hurts to know that there must have been something.

It is not too farfetched to consider the possibility that the Major and T/5 were in the building at the time of the blast. I hope not.

SUBMARINE UPDATE

Michael V. Gannon, (an historian who has done impressive research on the German submarine activities off the east coast of the United States during WWII) recently appeared on a Discovery Channel series on Submarine Warfare in the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico in World War II. During this series, he identified the ship that was sunk off St. Augustine as the GULF AMERICA. Gannon, two men who, at the moment of the attack, were, with their dates, right at the top of the Ferris wheel at Pablo Beach, and the submarine commander, Reinhard Hardegen the captain of Unterseeboote #123 (U-Boat 123), all described what happened in considerable detail. This attack is described in "PAPA'S WAR, PART 1".

Kapitänleutnant Reinhard Hardegen
One of Germany's Top U-Boat Aces
Sank 23 ships for a total of 119,014 tons
5 ships damaged for a total of 46,500 tons
Awarded Knights Cross with Oak Leaves
(One of Germany's highest Awards)

Apparently, St. Augustine was quicker to implement the new blackout regulations than Pablo Beach (now Jacksonville Beach).The sub

commander described his amazement that the entire east coast of the United States was lit up as though there were no war in progress. He described automobile traffic along the beach roads and the brightly lit boardwalk at Pablo Beach and mentioned what sitting ducks the coastal freighters and tankers were, outlined against these lights.

However, he specifically mentioned that he sank the GULF AMERICA off St. Augustine , (which had blackout regulations strictly in force at the time). In the course of the story of the GULF AMERICA, it was mentioned by someone (I think it was Gannon) that roughly half the crew of the GULF AMERICA was lost in this sinking.

I always thought that all hands were lost. From what I saw from the beach, it is hard to imagine how anyone could have survived the sinking and the burning oil on the surface of the sea. No mention was made of who picked up the survivors but it certainly was not the submarine. There was no room for survivors aboard a sub. The program also failed to mention the submarine that surfaced in the entrance channel to St. Augustine harbor to charge its batteries. This incident is also mentioned in "PAPA'S WAR, PART 1". I would like to find out if it was Reinhard Hardegen's sub or some other.

The program did mention the fact that in many coastal communities, fishing boats were manned by Coast Guard Auxiliaries to patrol the harbors and the inland waterway at night. It is quite possible that it was a crew of Coast Guard Auxiliaries (not regular Coast Guard personnel) who discovered the sub while patrolling the bay. If true, they were most likely "local" men. However, it does not seem logical that they would have kept quiet about it all this time, even if they were cautioned not to mention the incident.

I would certainly like to talk to whoever was on that patrol boat and get their version of what happened that night.

Through further study, I learned that the submarine that landed the saboteurs on Long Island was not the same submarine that landed the saboteurs at Ponte Vedre. The long Island saboteurs were landed from U-202 and the Florida saboteurs were landed from U-584 so U-584 joins Hardegen's sub U-123 as a possible candidate for the sub that surfaced in the St. Augustine inlet.

ASTP MEMORIAL PLAQUE DEDICATION

One of my ASTP room mates, Bob Enterline, suggested that it might be a fitting gesture for living survivors to place a plaque at North Texas State Teachers College (now the University of North Texas), honoring members of our ASTP Unit (ASTU 3890) who subsequently lost their lives serving with the 103d Infantry Division.

Dr. Andrew Setliff and I spent the better part of a year attempting to identify the men who were in that unit. It was a daunting task. Nevertheless, we identified nearly two hundred of those who had been in our unit, and succeeded in obtaining addresses and phone numbers of thirty six survivors. We also determined that another dozen or so survived the war but had subsequently passed away. It is probable that many others are now deceased, ... one of the reasons we ran into so many dead ends in our search.

We determined that ten of our classmates had been killed in action and while we cannot be certain that we have identified all who made the ultimate sacrifice, we are now reasonably confident that we have identified all of those who died serving in the 103d Infantry Division. Those killed in action were Tom Lutze, Harold Class, Harold Burkhard, Bayard "BD" Dodge, Carl Christensen, Daniel Gasch, Al Lamb, Bill Lang, Ed Luebke, and John Seay.

Meanwhile Bob Enterline explored the cost and availability of an appropriate memorial, made a trip to Denton to discuss our project with the Chancellor of the University and worked out a schedule for the installation, dedication, and unveiling of the memorial plaque. The plaque was paid for by surviving classmates of these men.

The dedication ceremony, took place at 11:00 A.M. on June 30, 1997, around the flagpole in front of the University Union Building on the campus of the University of North Texas. Participating in the ceremony preceding the unveiling were Robert Enterline, Pierce Evans, John Donlan, Dr. Andrew Setliffe, all former members of ASTU 3890. Other participants were Alfred F. Hurley, PhD, Chancellor of the University of North Texas and the University of North Texas Health Science Center at

Fort Worth and President of the University of North Texas. Many individuals were involved in the planning, including Blaine A. Brownell, PhD, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, David Shrader, DMA, Interim Vice President for Development, other University officials, and the officers of the ROTC Unit.

At the end of the outdoor ceremony, Dr. Setliffe gave the Invocation.

The ROTC Color Guard then lowered the flag to half mast while a trumpeter played Taps.

The assembled people then moved into the University Union Building where the plaque was unveiled by Bob Enterline. It is in Memorial Hall beside a much larger plaque containing names of many individuals who were killed in action in several wars after attending UNT. Some of the names on our plaque were missing from the larger plaque so they are now properly honored in Memorial Hall.

The caption on the plaque is:

IN MEMORY OF THE FOLLOWING FRIENDS
WHO DIED DURING WORLD WAR II
SERVING IN THE 103D INFANTRY DIVISION

HAROLD L. BURKHEAD	**ALBERT F. LAMB**
HAROLD C. CLASS	**WILLIAM J. LANG**
CARL E. CHRISTENSEN	**EDWARD A. LUEBKE**
BAYARD DODGE, JR	**THOMAS W. LUTZE**
DANIEL R. GASCH	**JOHN H. SEAY**

FOREVER YOUNG, THEY STAND PROUDLY WITH GOD

PRESENTED BY FORMER CLASSMATES IN
ARMY SPECIALIZED TRAINING UNIT 3890
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

PAPA'S WAR UPDATE

PAPA'S WAR has been formally copyrighted but it does not have either a Library of Congress Publication in Progress card number or an ISBN number because, technically, it had already been "published" by virtue of the numerous copies distributed to friends and others via disk and printed pages and is therefore, for some reason, beyond my feeble reasoning capacity, ineligible for these.

The copyright procedure required two copies of the book so these are archived somewhere in the Library of Congress but probably unavailable to the public.

However, copies of PAPA'S WAR are currently available at the St. Johns County, FL, Public Library.

Mike Grogan, a reporter for the St. Augustine Record had done a story on my trip to Washington for the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camps. During our discussion of that event, I showed him the manuscript. He asked to read it, so, when it was finished, I loaned him a copy. Next thing I knew, he was at my door with a photographer for a photo to accompany an article that he had written about the book. The local library had so many requests for the book following publication of the article that they had more copies printed. Much to my surprise, some of these have been loaned to other out-of-state libraries in response to requests from readers in those cities.

Two copies are in the Library of The United States Army Military History Institute, a department of the U.S. Army War College. It is the U.S. Army's central repository for historical materials and is located at 22 Ashburn Drive, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, PA 17013-5008. It has a mission to collect, preserve, and make available to researchers, source materials on Military History, especially American military history.

While at the University of North Texas for the plaque dedication, I presented to the Chancellor, Dr. Hurley, two copies of PAPA'S WAR for

the University of North Texas Library. These copies reside in Willis Library, call nunber D811 .E925 1996.

There are two copies in the Smathers Library of the University of Florida.

Two copies also reside in the Library of Florida State University in the World War II and the Human Experience collection.

UNUSUAL ARMBAND UPDATE, JULY 4, 2001

I received the following E-Mail concerning the unusual Nazi armband described in Papa's War Part 5.

Hi,
I enjoyed reading "Papa's War". I am glad all these wonderful memories were not lost! People like these have kept our country free for two and a quarter centuries, today.

[From Papa's War, Part 5]

"The Unusual Nazi Armband"

This arm band was red but the circle was of what appeared to be beige silk embroidered with a gold wreath surrounding a gold embroidered swastika with an embroidered gold vertical Roman-style short sword superimposed. It was very elegant and gave the impression that the person who wore it was way up in the Nazi hierarchy.
Fifty years later, and after watching hundreds of TV documentaries about Nazi Germany, I have still never seen an arm band like it.
Maybe it just belonged to a streetcar conductor. Who knows? "

Someone has probably identified this for you by now, but in case they haven't, it is thearmband of the Sports Badge Assocation of the SA, the Nazi "Brownshirts". It was worn bySA officials at the sport meets where SA men were tested to receive the badge. The Badge itself is shown on the armband.

My guess was that it probably DID belong to someone in the household.

They probably forgot about it when they threw away all the other Nazi stuff.

At this point in the war, the SA was sort of an Auxillary wartime organization, sort of likethe British Home Guard.

Happy Independance Day!

Lee Russell

Thanks, Lee for putting me on the right track. For those who are unfamiliar with the SA, they were NOT a group of gentlemen interested in sports.

SA is an abbreviation of STURMABTEILUNG (GERMAN: "ASSAULT DIVISION"), byname STORM TROOPERS, OR BROWNSHIRTS, German STURMTRUPPEN, OR BRAUNHEMDEN, in the German Nazi Party, a paramilitary organization whose methods of violent intimidation played a key role in Adolf Hitler's rise to power.

The SA was founded in Munich by Hitler in 1921 out of various roughneck elements that had attached themselves to the fledgling Nazi movement. It drew its early membership

largely from the Freikorps (Free Corps), armed freebooter groups, made up largely of ex-soldiers, that battled leftists in the streets in the early days of the Weimar Republic. Outfitted in brown uniforms after the fashion of Mussolini's Fascist Blackshirts in Italy, the SA men protected Party meetings, marched in Nazi rallies, and physically assaulted political opponents.

Temporarily in disarray after the failure of Hitler's Munich Putsch in 1923, the SA was reorganized in 1925 and soon resumed its violent ways, intimidating voters in national and local elections. From January 1931, it was headed by Ernst Röhm, who harboured radical anticapitalist notions and dreamed of building the SA into Germany's main military force. Under Röhm SA membership, swelled from the ranks of the Great Depression's unemployed, grew to 400,000 by 1932 and to perhaps 2,000,000--20 times the size of the regular army--by the time that Hitler came to power in 1933.

During the early days of the Nazi regime, the SA carried out unchecked street violence against Jews and Nazi opponents. But it was eyed with suspicion by the regular army and by the wealthy industrialists, two groups whose support Hitler was trying to secure. Against Hitler's expressed wishes, Röhm continued to press for a "second Nazi revolution" of a socialist character, and he hoped to merge the regular army with the SA under his own leadership. On June 30, 1934, the Night of the Long Knives (die Nacht der langen Messer), Hitler, using SS forces, carried out a "Blood Purge" of the SA leadership. Röhm and dozens of SA leaders were summarily executed. Thereafter the SA, reduced in strength, continued to exist but ceased to play a major political role in Nazi affairs. From 1939 it was in charge of training all able-bodied men for Home Guard units.

This is the text of Hilter's decree establishing the SA Sports Badge on Feb 15, 1935 and what significance he felt it had:

'SA.-Sportabzeichen' (SA Sports Badge)

"The new state demands a resistant, hard generation. Next to the ideological schooling of the mind a pugnacious training of the body, due to simple, useful and natural physical training has to be supported.To give more incitement and direction to the effort of the youth, I renew for the whole SA and all its former detachments the institution of the SA Sports Badge which can be earned upon passing an achievement test after a conscientious executed training period.
To give a more conscious meaning to the cultivation of the pugnacious mind of all parts of the German people I further decide that this SA Sports Badge might be acquired and worn by non-members of the movement too, as far as they are in accordance with the racial and
ideological ideas of National Socialism. Manufacturer determination will be made by the Chief of Staff of the SA.

Berlin 15.2.1935

The SA Chief Commander
Adolf Hitler

Six conditions were part of this decree:

a) The program was to be conducted within National Socialist racial and ideological guidelines.
b) Participants had to be German citizens, neither foreigners nor Jews.
c) All candidates must be at least 18 years of age.
d) Their prior fitness had to be medically certified.
e) They had to have completed a required period of training within a National Socialist
(NAZI) organization.
f) Candidates had to pass the test successfully in front of competent SA testers.

The importance of the SA in the Nazi plan for the utilization of the people of Germany is shown
in Hitler's pronouncement "The Course for the German Person," which appears in the issue of
"Der SA-Mann" for 5 September 1936, Hitler's statement reads as follows:

"The boy, will enter the *Jungvolk*, and the lad, will enter the *Hitler Youth*, the young man will go into the *SA*, in the *SS*, and in other units, and the *SA* and *SS* men will one day enter the *Labor Service* and from there go to the *Army*, and the soldier of the *People* will return again into the *Organization* of the *Movement*, the *Party* , in the *SA* and *SS*, and never again will our *People* decay as they once decayed".

To qualify for the SA Sports Badge a young Nazi went through a purification and sanctification ritual that included a tortuous and exhausting physical regimen which only the best could endure.
The wearer of the SA Sports Badge was the embodiment of the ideal Nazi Youth . . . blond, blue-eyed, brainwashed, and physically superior in every respect.

The SA Sports Badge

Clearly, the SA Sports Badge Association was not a group of nice guys out for an afternoon of fun and games. The SA was a gang of street thugs. A wearer of the SA Sportsbadge represented the quintessential Nazi in both mind and body. You would not want to meet one of them in a dark alley.

As to the owner of the unusual armband, he was well placed in the SA but not necessarily one of Hitler's inner circle . . . . and certainly NOT just a streetcar conductor.

This goes a long way toward explaining the truncheon and brass knuckles we found when we searched the house.

PERSONAL UPDATE

I now have an internet website:

http://www.pierce-evans.org/index.shtml

It has the full text of PAPA'S WAR, and the full text of William F. Barclay's 103D INFANTRY DIVISION SIGNAL COMPANY REMEMBRANCES, also Web Pages devoted to the 103d Infantry Division, the 103d Signal Company, as well as links to several other websites devoted exclusively to the 103d Infantry Division, or to units that were closely related to the 103d during combat.

It also contains a number of Web Pages devoted to Patriot themes and Holidays and is under continuous construction.

My e-mail addresses are : apeman@pierce-evans.org webmaster@pierce-evans.org

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