

GAYLORD ATKINSON’S MEMORIES OF WORLD WAR II

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INTRODUCTION

I was inducted into the army in June 1943 and discharged in January 1946. I did not start writing what I remembered of my army experiences until I retired from work in the mid-1990s, fifty years later. I went through several drafts and with encouragement from Dhyana, I planned to complete it by the end of 2012. I thought that I had letters that I had written while I was in the army that my mother had saved but hours of searching for them was not successful. The write-up was “finished” in November 2012, and then I found all of the letters that I had written home to members of my family. After reading some of the letters, I realized that 50 years had not been kind to my memory. There were many significant gaps and other items of creative memory; items that I remembered experiencing, that were actually experiences of others that were relayed to me and incorporated into my memory experiences.

The letters, written by an 18, 19 and 20 year old high school graduate is not skilled writing but they contain interesting detail that is long gone from my memory and not included in my 1990s writings.

I also found pictures that I took in 1945 after I obtained a German camera.

Considering the above, I have decided to include copies of the letters (typed by Dhyana) in a parallel section with what I remembered in the 1990s.

The organization is as follows:

SUMMARY A brief list of dates, places and events

SECTION I AS I REMEMBER

SECTION II LETTERS I WROTE

SECTION III PHOTOGRAPHS

APPENDIX Including the official history of the 26th Division and other related material.

SUMMARY: Section 1

This is a summary of my Army service. It includes dates of events and provides a general scope of events and times.

September 1, 1939: I started high school and WWII started with the invasion of Poland by Germany.

December 7, 1941: Japan attacks Pearl Harbor. I was a sophomore. The country was immediately in a total war.

April 2, 1943: Testing to qualify for ASTP. As a senior I took a test in an attempt to qualify for military college training. I indicated the army as my choice of service. I passed the test and was accepted as a candidate for the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP).

May 28, 1943: Graduation – June 11, 1943 Induction. I graduated from High School on May 28, 1943 and was drafted and inducted into the Army on June 11. I was inducted at Ft. Crook near Omaha.

June 25, 1943: started active duty at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas on

July to September 1943: Camp Fannin. I had Basic Infantry Training in Camp Fannin near Tyler Texas..

September 1943 to March 1944: ASTP. I was in ASTP at Hope College in Holland Michigan. After one semester it became very likely that the ASTP program would soon be terminated and I would be returned to the infantry. As an alternative, I applied to the Air Corp which I thought would be a better choice than the Infantry.

March and April 1944: Miami Beach. I was at Miami Beach along with about 2,000 others taking tests to qualify to be an Air Corp Cadet. About half qualified. I was one of a few who qualified for all three of pilot, navigator and bombardier. The day after I qualified, we learned that there was a backlog of Air Corp candidates and the ground forces needed us, and we were to be returned to our old units, which for me was the infantry.

April to September 1944: Fort Jackson. I was at Fort Jackson near Columbia South Carolina, training in the 87th Infantry Division. There I became friends with Charles Halverson of Evanston Illinois, Hartwig Hanson of Minnesota, and Bill Kaylor of Alabama. By September I was an acting squad leader and acting sergeant. However, before the promotion came through, all privates were sent overseas as replacements.

Charles and I went overseas together. Then he went to the 6th Armored Division and into combat. He was soon wounded, spent time in a hospital in England,

returned to combat and soon killed. Hartwig and Bill went overseas with the 87th division and into combat in December 1944. Hartwig received a very serious leg wound and was in a hospital near Chicago for nearly a year. Bill was hit by shrapnel in his spine which left him paralyzed from the waist down. What happened to my three friends had a considerable impact on me and makes me realize how fortunate I am for returning from the war without residual injury.

September 1944: To Europe I went from New York to England as an Infantry replacement. In October, I landed on Omaha Beach, saw the hundreds of crosses of the buried dead from the invasion 3 months earlier. In mid-October, I arrived at a large replacement depot near Toul, France. Toul is about 150 miles nearly straight east of Paris and near Nancy. We were 25 to 30 miles from the front lines.

November 8, 1944: Assigned to C Company, 26th Infantry Division, nearly continuous artillery firing was heard and it was apparent that a major offensive had started. That afternoon a large number of replacement assignments were received and I was assigned to the 26th Infantry division. I was placed in C Company of the 328 Regiment. A squad normally has 12 men. The squad to which I was assigned only had five after their previous battle. We were seven replacements.

November 11, 1944: Hit by shrapnel On the evening of November 11, we arrived about half a mile from the front and were told that we would attack at 3AM, and relieve the forces then on the front. That was to be my first battle. However just at dusk we received a very heavy incoming German artillery barrage, resulting in many injuries. I was hit in the right shoulder. While it did not seem so at the time, that injury was the luckiest thing that ever happened to me. In a series of many unlikely events, all going in my favor, I never returned to infantry combat.

November 22, 1944: the first "What ifs" After a few days I was discharged from the hospital and returned to the Division. On November 22, two others and I who had been wounded were assigned to guard a warehouse with Division Supplies in Nancy France. The assignment was for two weeks and then we were to return to our infantry units. Before the two weeks were over the Battle of the Bulge started and we were apparently forgotten. Other than the invasion at Omaha beach, the battle of the Bulge was the most intense of the European war, and temperatures at times were below zero. If I had returned to combat during the Bulge, it is likely would have been killed, or at least had frozen feet.

January 3, 1945: my 20th birthday, I become an MP The three of us were moved to Redange and were to be returned to our infantry units the next day. One, who was with me in Nancy ran into a Sergeant from Headquarter Company that he knew and found out that due to the large number of German Prisoners that were coming in they needed more MPs. Did we wish to be MPs? The answer was, vs the infantry, "Yes!"

End of January, 1944: The Battle of the Bulge was about over by the end of January and the 26th moved south along the Saar River. The Division was assigned to be on “aggressive defense” primarily in Saarlautern. From January 28 to March 05, 1945 I was in a little town about 1.5 miles from Saarlautern.

March 6 through May 8, 1945: On the move From March 6, until the end of the war in Europe on May 8, 1945, we were moving through Germany.

For the next month or so, I was a guard at one of two large POW camps while the German prisoners were being processed for discharge. The first camp was near Eigen Germany and the second near Freiburg Czechoslovakia.

From April to late October, 1945: Linz Austria I was in Linz Austria, primarily on traffic duty or as a guard at army facilities.

Shortly after the war in the Pacific was over, the 26th Division went home. There was a point system to determine who went. Points were based on time of service and several other factors. Everyone with 60 or more points went home with the Division. I had 59 points. All those with less than 60 points were transferred to the 84th Division. I was assigned to the 333 Regimental MP Platoon

November, 1945: Vacation in Nice France Three others and I were given a week vacation in Nice France.

In Late November, 1945: Mannheim Germany We moved to near Mannheim Germany.

On December 21, 1945: Tooth / Patton I went on “sick call” because of a tooth cavity and went the 130th Field Hospital in Heidelberg. On that day, my tooth was pulled and in the same hospital and day General Patton died.

In early January 1946: Port to go home We left Germany and moved to Le Havre France and waited for a ship.

January 22, 1945: Arrive in New York I arrive and travel by train to Leavenworth, arriving on the 24th.

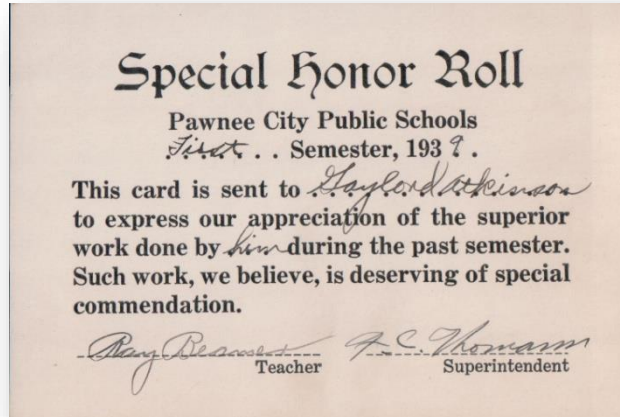
January 26, 1945: Discharged I was discharged on January 26th and hitch hiked home to Pawnee City, Nebraska.

SECTION I: AS I REMEMBER

PRELUDE TO MY ARMY INDUCTION

Two events happened on September 1, 1939. On that date I started my Freshman Year in High School, and Nazi Germany invaded Poland which started World War II.

The rapid German conquest of most of Europe was very much in the news and I followed it the way a high school kid would. The United States' position about the war was very mixed. Many Americans had isolationist feelings shared by Congress. I knew that there were tensions between the U.S. and Japan, but I did not understand why.



By the summer of 1941, I was 16 and had finished my sophomore year in high school. My Dad, Max Atkinson, had built a good repair and blacksmith shop business and it had become more than a one-person operation. Dad spent most of his time repairing broken or damaged farm equipment including a considerable amount of welding. I took over the sharpening of plowshares and cultivator shovels during the summers of 1941 and 1942.

Back then, fields were plowed before planting and the plow's cutting edge, which was generally known as a plowshare but which we called 'plow lays," eventually became dull and needed to be sharpened. The plowshare is the cutting edge of the plow. It is a hardened steel blade generally one fourth of an inch thick sharpened to a knife edge. As I remember, a new plowshare is 6 or 7 inches wide and varies in length depending on the size of the plow. Most of the plowshares that I sharpened were 14 or 16 inches long, but a few were 12 or 18 inches.

To sharpen a plowshare, it is placed in a forge and a portion of the edge is heated to a bright red or almost white heat. It is then positioned on an anvil and hammered to a tapered thin edge. I used a two-pound hammer, which I still have. After one portion is sharpened the plowshare is returned to the forge and reheated along the edge and again hammered thin. As I remember, four to six inches of the edge was sharpened with each heating. After the edge had been sharpened, it had to be heated and reshaped, and then the entire plowshare needed to be heated uniformly to a red heat and inserted into water or oil to quickly be cooled and hardened.

This blacksmith work was related to my army experience in two ways. First, two of the three members of the county draft board were customers of mine and by 1943, there were no other blacksmiths in the area and on the day my name was to be considered for the draft, those two members stopped at the shop to see if I didn't want a farm deferment. Second, working at the forge during the heat of the summer conditioned me for the heat I would later experience in basic training at Camp Fannin, Texas.

This is slightly out of order chronologically, but one Friday in the fall of 1942, I came home from school, and went to the shop to see Dad. It turned out that he had bought a new 200 pound anvil which had just been delivered. I decided to see if I could lift it. I bent over and picked it up and felt a slight pain in my lower back. That night I played football which increased the pain. That back injury became intense pain at various times in the army and throughout the remainder of my life. Bending over to pick up the anvil was one of my biggest mistakes of my life.

Sunday, December 7, 1941 was warm, I went to Sunday school and church, and after church a football game was organized to be played in a pasture at the edge of town at 2 PM. I do not remember when I learned that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. I think it was from the radio when we got home from church.

In the fall before Pearl Harbor, we had had a debate in English class with the subject being "Should We Enter the War?" I was on the "We Should Not Enter" team. Pat (I forget her last name. Her family only lived in PC for a short time) was on the "We Should Enter" team.

We had the football game and plenty of individuals showed up for two teams, and it was tackle football without pads or helmets. No one was seriously hurt but I'm sure there were many bruises. Numerous spectators also arrived, including Pat. The event that became burned into my memory was that she repeatedly said to me, "Ha ha ha, Gaylord, we are at war!" I often thought of Pat (safe at home) and her jeer when I was in danger during the war.

Almost immediately after Pearl Harbor, there was a general feeling it was a total war, and everything that you did or felt was related to the war. Soon there was rationing on many things, including sugar, gasoline, tires and various meats. Everyone saved the grease from bacon, beef and other fat to be turned in and hydrolyzed to obtain the glycerin. The glycerin was then turned into nitroglycerin.

During high school it was just understood that essentially all of the able-bodied males would enter one of the armed services after graduation. Two of my classmates dropped out of school to enlist. Calvin Jarvis lied about his age and joined the marines shortly after Pearl Harbor. He returned shortly before I graduated with a bayonet wound across his abdomen that he received in hand-to-hand fighting in the South Pacific. That really made an impression on me. James Robinson had three brothers in the navy and he

wanted to be in the navy so he dropped out of school during our senior year before being drafted to be certain he would get in the navy. He survived the war.

The time following Pearl Harbor, and before the invasion of Europe, was complex. For example, the army needed many trained soldiers ready to be used but until the invasion it did not need them to be active. Colleges and universities had low attendance because many young men were now in the service. To address these two conditions the army and the navy introduced a plan where young qualified individuals would take basic training and then be assigned to a college program until they were needed in the war. For the army, it was the Army Specialized Training Program or ASTP. As I remember the navy program was V12. A test was given on April 2, 1943 to high school seniors who had applied for the programs. I do not remember how many of our class took the test, but I believe only two of us qualified. I applied for the army ASTP program, Bill Mekemson applied for the navy V12 program.

I graduated from high school May 28, 1943, and my brother Dan and I went for a week's vacation in Estes Park. That was the first time that I saw mountains.

INDUCTION

On June 11, about ten others and I, who were drafted from Pawnee County, were taken by bus to Ft. Crook just south of Omaha for medical examination and induction into the Army. We were given two weeks off and then, on June 25th, I went by train to Ft. Leavenworth.

FT. LEAVENWORTH June 25 – July 3, 1944

I was in Leavenworth for a week. During that time I was issued uniforms, had several immunization shots and one day I was on KP. The significance of that day is that another kid and I were carrying a large garbage container which was full, and heavy. I was on one side and walking backward and stepped down a step that I did not see and again hurt my back as I had earlier when I picked up the anvil. That was the first of several times in the Army that I had intense back pain. That injury followed me through my army life and for the rest of my life, most of the time with only minor consequences, but at times with intense pain.

ABOUT CAMP FANNIN (adapted from Wikipedia):

Camp Fannin, Texas, was named for, Colonel James Walker Fannin, a hero of the Texas Revolution of 1835-36. It is located just northeast of Tyler, Texas. In March 1943 Camp Fannin was officially dedicated as the U.S. Army Infantry Replacement Training Center.

Camp Fannin is a place where more than 200,000 young American men became Army Infantry Replacements between May 1943 and December 1945. When they had finished their training, these soldiers were assigned to serve in both theaters of war, Europe and the Pacific.

Many of the fatalities in the Battle of the Bulge had trained at Camp Fannin and are memorialized there. (See appendix for 2013 Camp Fannin Memorial pictures.)

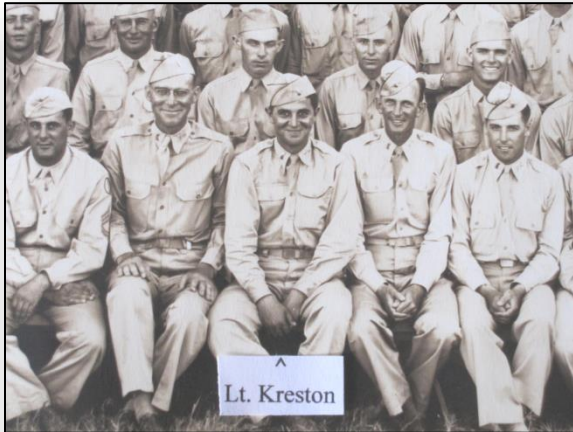
CAMP FANNIN July 3 – Mid September 1943

I arrived at Camp Fannin near Tyler TX for basic training on Saturday, the evening July third. Sunday July fourth was the only day in my life that I experience intense home sickness. There were no scheduled activities on Sunday. I went to church and a soloist sang "Going Home" and that did it.

At Camp Fannin, there were 4 platoons to a company, 4 companies to a battalion, 3 battalions per regiment. This is different from battle assignments which were and are 3, 3 and 3.

Basic training started Monday and I began to know the other 47 kids who were in the same training platoon and the same barracks. All of our battalion were ASTP candidates and many were from New England. Many were from Ivy League schools and already had one year of college.

The training staff consisted of a Lieutenant, a Sergeant, and a Corporal for each platoon plus a Captain for each company and, I think, a Major for the battalion. We had a Sergeant and Corporal in our barracks.



Lt. Kreston was our lieutenant. There was competition between the platoons and companies. Our platoon was creative in the competition. We were the only one with a song. We sang it often while marching. It went:

***"Oh - We are Kreston's troopers
Riders of the night
Fightin' sons-of-bitches
Who'd rather fuck than fight.
Ho hum god-damn
Who the hell are we?
We are Kreston's troopers
Of the infantry."***

Someone would start with "Ohhhhhhh" and we all joined in.

Lt Kreston was very impressed and proud.

In training we would spend a few days on a subject and then have a written test on the materials. Generally everyone got correct answers for all questions in our ASTP platoon. The battalion next to ours was made up of ordinary draftees and our officers told us that they often got only about half of the correct answers.

So we were a battalion of high IQ individuals and I remember one individual who was reported to the top the list with an IQ in the 160s. He was from Iowa and his name was Carlson. He may have had a high IQ but he had very little understanding of material things. For example one day we were on the firing range and I noticed him sitting on the ground with his rifle across his lap, with the bolt pulled back exposing a cartridge in the chamber. He was pounding on the cartridge with the "combination tool." He was hitting the cartridge on the detonation insert that is hit by the firing pin. The rifle was pointed at a group waiting to get on the line. I asked him what he was doing. He said his rifle had not fired and the cartridge was stuck in the chamber and he was trying to get it out. I said, "You are pointing it towards a group. What if the gun goes off?" His reply was, "It can't go off, I have the safety on." He didn't understand that the safety simply locked the trigger movement, and in no way would have prevented a discharge if he had hit the insert. Further, if the cartridge charge went off with the bolt open, most of the blast would have been backward, injuring him. It turned out that the cartridge apparently only had a small amount of powder. It had gone off, but only moved the bullet half way down the barrel. Lucky for all of us!

The New Englanders were not acclimated to the heat of Texas summers. A very memorable day was August 27th, 1943 – the last Friday of the month. I do not know what the temperature was but I think that it was well over 110° F. It was damned hot! For some reason we had missed one session of bayonet training so we had two consecutive hours of the very strenuous activity starting at 1:00 PM. Then at 3:00 PM we were taken into a hot building for a lecture. I do not remember if we had one or two hours of lectures, but I think two. During the lecture ten or more of the New England kids passed out. I was uncomfortable but was not in danger of passing out. That day became known as Black Friday.

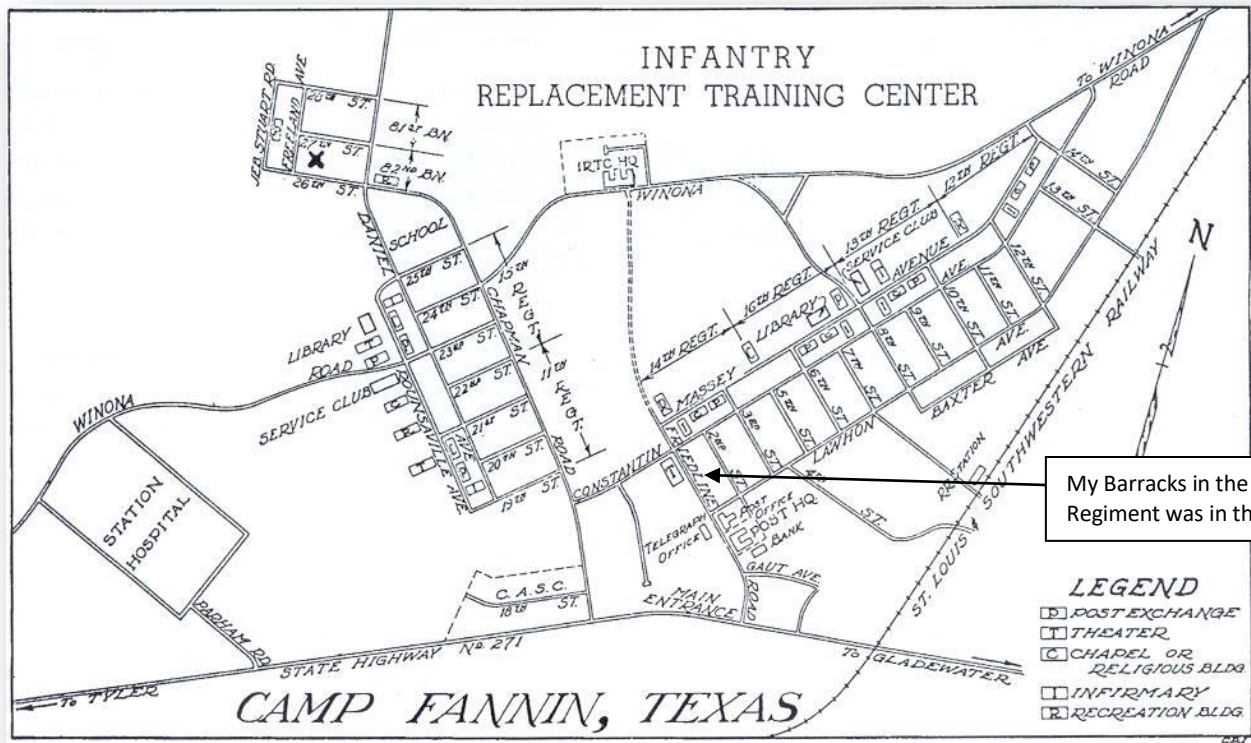
Basic training was fairly strenuous and you would not expect to gain weight, however I think that I was always hungry and the PX (Post Exchange, where you could buy nearly everything you needed as well as various food and drinks) was between my barracks and the mess hall. So every noon and evening on the way back from the mess hall I stopped at the PX and bought a pint of ice cream. As I remember a pint of ice cream cost 15 cents. I was eating a quart of ice cream each day in addition to the meals. I weighed 137 lb when I was inducted and weighed about 155 by the end of basic training.

We finished the thirteen weeks of basic training in September and then had about two weeks of tests and interviews to determine where we would be sent. The tests were primarily related to math, engineering, or science.

1. Many in the Battalion had had at least one year of college, and if they were strong in math, engineering, or science they were sent to Texas A&M.
2. 52 of us that passed the tests, but had only a High School education, were sent to Hope College

3. If someone was not selected for college, based on not being strong in math, science or engineering, they were sent to Fort Hood and into the Infantry. For example, my friend, Beckwith, who was in the lower bunk below mine, had three years at Oklahoma, but not in technical subjects. He went to Fort Hood and later became a Sergeant in Headquarter Company of the 26th Division where I was assigned in November 1944.

Camp Fannin Pictures:



Typical Barracks at Camp Fannin

Things we were issued upon arrival.

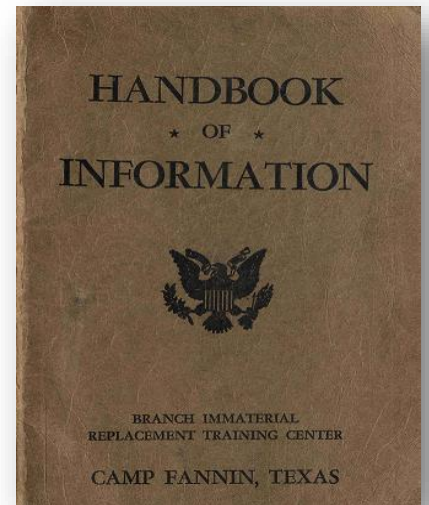
I sent the original handbook home and, unfortunately, it was lost.

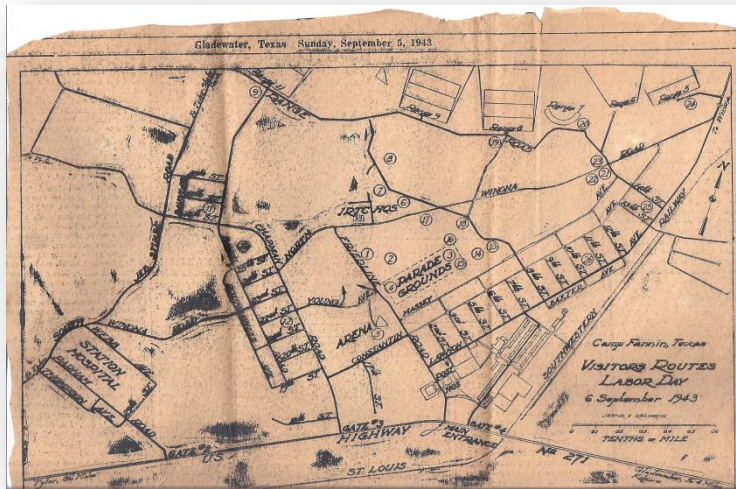
CONTENTS OF TOILET KIT ISSUED AS SHOWN ON FRONT SIDE OF THIS FORM

Handkerchiefs	4 ea.	Comb, Rubber	1 ea.
Neckties, Khaki, Cotton	2 ea.	Razor, Safety, w/blades	1 ea.
Brush, Shaving	1 ea.	Towel, Bath	1 ea.
Brush, Tooth	1 ea.	Towel, Huck	2 ea.

EQUIPMENT ISSUED TO TRAINEES

Can, Meat	1 ea.	Canteen	1 ea.
Cover, Canteen	1 ea.	Liner, Helmet	1 ea.
Cup, Canteen	1 ea.	Headband, Liner, Helmet	1 ea.
Fork	1 ea.	Neckband, Liner, Helmet	1 ea.
Knife	1 ea.	Soldier's Manual, FM21-100	1 ea.
Spoon	1 ea.	Pamphlet, sex hygiene and Venereal Diseases	1 ea.





Sept 6, 1943 Newspaper
Announcement of Labor Day
Demonstration – Open to the
Public

Gladewater, Texas
Sun. Sept 5, 1943

CAMP FANNIN LABOR DAY DEMONSTRATION SUBJECTS AND VISITORS' ROUTES—The above map shows routes for visitors to take when they visit the camp dedication events on Labor Day. The map also shows (by circled numbers) the sequence and sites of the various military demonstrations to be given, and it is suggested that readers clip this map and its explanatory text for use in guiding them on their journey through the camp.

In the camp area, from 4 to 4:30 p. m. the program will include addresses by United States Senator Tom Connally, Congressman Lindley Beckworth, and General Russell P. Hastie. Other participants will be Lt. Col. Charles P. Brammell and Chaplains Fred McCauley and Edgar J. Vanston. Music will be furnished by the camp's IRTC band.

The sequence of military demonstrations (numbers and sites of which are shown on the map are as follows:

1. Rifle grenades by Company D, 67th Battalion, from 1 to 3 p. m.
2. Hand grenades, Company A, 66th Battalion, 1 to 2 p. m.
3. Hand-to-hand combat, Company C and Company B, 68th Battalion, 2 to 3 p. m.
4. Hand-to-hand combat, Company B and Company D, 66th Battalion, 2 to 3 p. m.
5. Tactical training, Company B, 68th Battalion, 1 to 3 p. m.
6. Defense versus chemical attack, 14th regimental makeup, 1 to 3 p. m.
7. Mortar, 60-mm., Company D, 76th Battalion, 1 to 3 p. m.
8. Tactical training of soldier, Company A, 76th Battalion, 1 to 3 p. m.
9. Known distance rifle range, 62nd Battalion, 1 to 5 p. m.
10. Subjects to be selected by school area director of school, 2 to 4 p. m.
11. Open house and mess hall, 1 to 4 p. m.
12. Open house and mess hall, 1 to 4 p. m.
13. Dismounted drill, Company D, 77th Battalion, 1 to 2 p. m.; bayonet, Company D, 78th Battalion, 2 to 3 p. m.
14. Dismounted drill, Company D, 78th Battalion, 1 to 2 p. m.; dismounted drill by Company C, 78th Battalion, 2 to 3 p. m.
15. Hand-to-hand combat, Company B, 78th Battalion, 1 to 2 p. m.; dismounted drill, Company B, 78th Battalion, 2 to 3 p. m.
16. Defense versus chemical attack, Company A, 77th Battalion, 1 to 2 p. m.; interior guard, Company A, 78th Battalion, 2 to 3 p. m.
17. Equipment, clothing and tent pitching, Company A, 76th Battalion, 1 to 3 p. m.
18. Hand grenades, Company C, 78th Battalion, 1 to 2 p. m.; hand grenades, Company A, 77th Battalion, 2 to 3 p. m.
19. Known distance rifle firing, Range No. 8, 63rd Battalion, 1 to 5 p. m.
20. LMG 1000 feet firing range No. 7, Company A, 68th Battalion 1 to 3 p. m.
21. Rifle marksmanship review, 56th Battalion, 1 to 3 p. m.
22. Military sanitation and first aid Company A, 56th Battalion, 1 to 5 p. m.
23. Elementary map and aerial photograph reading, Company B, 56th Battalion, 1 to 5 p. m.
24. Known distance rifle firing, Range No. 5, 31st and 32nd Battalions, 1 to 5 p. m.
25. Open house, 58th Battalion, guides, 1 to 5 p. m.
26. Open house, 63rd Battalion, guides, 1 to 5 p. m.



These men were primarily in my platoon. Unfortunately, I was on KP that day and am not included in the picture.

My friend, Beckwith

ASTP, HOPE COLLEGE - HOLLAND, MICHIGAN September 1944 – February 1945

Hope College was a small religious school with about 500 students. As I remember, there were about 250 of us there in the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP). There was a Captain in charge of the ASTP program and an “old, regular army” Sergeant who did the Army part of our training.

I enjoyed my one semester at Hope. I remember that I took a math course, physics (which I enjoyed very much) and a very interesting history course. The instructor of the history course had a hobby of collecting sex-related events in history. He couldn't include his stories with the regular Hope students (as it was a religious school) so he told us his sex-stories for most of the semester. For example, he read a letter from George Washington to (I believe) Samuel Adams. Adams was coming for a visit and Washington wrote that while his wife would be welcome, if she did not



come with him, George had recently purchased two young attractive slaves girls and he was certain that Samuel would enjoy them. The Father of our Country!



Hope College

- Left, outside my dorm.
- Above: Left- fellow Nebraskan
Right - me

Another example of his stories is that the young King of England (possibly George III of England) was very jealous of the King of France and he had to get everything that the King of France had. He learned that the King of France had syphilis, so he arranged to get syphilis.

At Hope, I was in a student dormitory room with three others. They were all chain smokers and we were in a small room with little ventilation. The smoke was intense, and so, in self-defense, for the only time in my life, I also smoked. You wouldn't think that would make the situation better but somehow it did.

John Cheek, from Missouri, was the "character" of our group. He was always doing something that was not in line with what he should be doing. There was a 1940s type Coke machine on the campus which was unlike present day machines. It was about 40" tall and about 36 inches square. Inside was a round carousel with holes to hold Coke bottles. There was a lid on the top that could be opened to obtain a bottle. To get a Coke you inserted a nickel and pulled a lever to rotate the carousel to align a bottle with the opening.



Since the carousel was round and the machine was square there were spaces at each corner to place bottles to cool and then move to the carousel when the machine was reloaded. John found out that he could reach in and get a bottle from the corner without spending a nickel. One Saturday morning when we were scheduled to have inspection from an officer from Washington, John reached in to get a Coke and someone inserted a nickel, pulled the lever and locked John's wrist in the machine. The machine was serviced by the Coke distributor, not by the school. It was Saturday and the individual that had the key to the machine was not readily available. John was stuck for several hours, but was finally released shortly before the inspection team arrived.

A second story about John: The Army had furnished a staff car for the Captain and Sergeant. The story goes that John had used the staff car for a date and the Sergeant then told him, "I don't mind you using the car for your conquests but, please, don't leave your spent condoms behind. The Captain wouldn't like it!"

Near the end of the first semester, I realized that the ASTP program was probably not going to last much longer. Since I had had infantry basic training, I would soon be back in the Infantry which I didn't consider desirable. An Air Corp recruiter came to the college and I decided that the Air Corp would be better than the infantry. I applied and was accepted.

My last story at Hope: Six or eight of us were still at Hope for a few weeks during the second semester. We were assigned various tasks during that time. Some of the other ASTP students were housed in a fraternity house and we were assigned the task washing the walls in the building. The walls had a nice antique brown finish and we did a good job cleaning them with part of a cup of Lysol to a bucket of water. About the time we were finished, the sergeant who was a long time “regular army” came in and assumed that the antique brown was dirt and said that the walls were not clean and to wash them again. We had done a good job washing the walls and we were disgusted by the sergeant’s order. One guy put Lysol full strength on his sponge and made a pass on the wall, taking all of the finish off and leaving a white surface. We then took off all of the antique finish. That was great for the sergeant, but not for the fraternity. The Army then had to pay to have the walls redone.

THE AIR CORP – MIAMI BEACH: March – April 1944

I arrived in Miami Beach in March 1944 to take tests, hoping to become an Air Corp Cadet. At that time the Air Force had not been created and the Air Corp was part of the Army. About 4,000 thousand were there for testing. Tests included both written exams and physical testing. One test that I remember was related to the skills needed for a bombardier.

In the test you were looking down on a moving turntable about 12 inches in diameter. There was a metallic spot, about the size of a dime, moving back and forth along a radius in an erratic manner. The objective was to keep a pointer in contact with the flat spot by turning two cranks; one to move the pointer in the vertical direction and the other for the horizontal direction. With the combination of the spot going around and around, plus moving back and forth erratically, it was real tricky to maintain contact. But apparently I did not fail this test.

At the end of all the testing, results were posted on a bulletin board. The names were listed alphabetically with columns showing acceptance for pilot, navigator or bombardier training. About half qualified for one or more of the positions, and half were washed out. Of those who were accepted, I was one of only a few who qualified for all three. We had a hell of a party that night. But everything changed the next morning. That morning a telegram was read to us from General “Hap” Arnold, head of the Air Corp that stated that there was a big back log of Air Corp Cadets and we were needed in other branches of the service. He was sure that we wanted to be where we could best serve our country. We would be returned to our old outfit. I had had infantry basic so that was my old outfit. It was a very sad day.

Copy of actual telegram read to us follows on the next page. I sent this home with the added comment.

"Need I
say more?"

At least I
might get
home

HEADQUARTERS
ARMY AIR FORCES TRAINING CENTER NO 1
Miami Beach, Florida

835/eg

353 (Aircrew Training)

31 March 44

SUBJECT: TWX from Commanding General, AAF, Washington, D. C.

TO : AGF and ASF qualified and unclassified aircrew personnel
who are being returned to AGF and ASF.

1. The following is a true copy of a telegram sent to this headquarters by the Commanding General, Army Air Forces, Washington, D. C.:

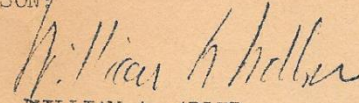
"AFPM 6122 YOU WILL RETURN TO THE GROUND AND SERVICE FORCES ALL MEN WHO HAVE VOLUNTEERED FROM THESE SOURCES AND HAVE BEEN FOUND FULLY QUALIFIED FOR THE AS PILOTS BOMBARDIERS AND NAVIGATORS BUT WHO HAVE NOT YET ENTERED PRE FLT SCH. THIS ACTION IS NECESSARY AS THE RESULT OF A CRITICAL AND IMMEDIATE NEED FOR YOUNG, VIGOROUS AND WELL TRAINED MEN WITH LEADERSHIP QUALIFICATIONS TO MEET THE NEED OF THE GROUND AND SERVICE FORCES. IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT EVERY ONE OF THESE SOLDIERS BE MADE AVAILABLE FOR PENDING OPERATIONS IN VIEW OF ACCUMULATED SHORTAGES THAT HAVE DEVELOPED SINCE LAST JULY IN SELECTIVE SERVICE. IT IS WITH PROFOUND REGRET THAT I CONSENT TO DROP FROM THE AAF TEAM THESE SPIRITED YOUNG MEN WHO HAVE ASPIRED TO JOIN OUR COMBAT CREWS WHICH ARE GAINING FOR US SUPERIORITY IN THE AIR IN EVERY THEATER OF WARFARE. IT IS HOWEVER THE VERY SUCCESS OF THE AAF TEAM NOW IN COMBAT WHICH MAKES THIS SHIFT OF FIGHTING POWER WISE AND PROPER. WE MUST PRESENT A BALANCED FRONT TO OUR ENEMIES. THE AAF TEAM HAS SUCCEEDED BETTER THAN WE DARED HOPE FOR WHEN OUR QUOTAS WERE SET AND IT NOW PERMITS A REDUCTION IN OUR TRAINING RATE. WE SHALL OF COURSE CONTINUE TO TRAIN COMBAT CREWS IN AS CLOSE A RATIO AS POSSIBLE TO OUR EXACT NEEDS. I AM SURE THAT THESE MEN WILL UNDERSTAND THAT IN A PROGRAM OF SUCH MAGNITUDE THERE WILL BE TIMES WHEN THE NUMBER OF MEN WHO QUALIFY IN ANY PARTICULAR PERIOD WILL EXCEED THE TRAINING QUOTA FOR THAT PERIOD. WHILE IT IS MY DUTY TO REGARD THIS MATTER IN A PRACTICAL LIGHT IT IS MY DESIRE THAT YOU HAND EACH OF THESE MEN AFFECTED A COPY OF THIS MESSAGE EXPLAINING THE REASON FOR HIS BEING OBLIGED TO FOREGO THIS TRAINING. WILL YOU ALSO CONVEY TO EACH MAN MY PERSONAL APPRECIATION AND THANKS FOR HIS INTEREST IN THE AAF AND WISH HIM GOOD LUCK AND GOOD HUNTING IN THE BRANCH TO WHICH HE RETURNS. I AM CONFIDENT THAT THESE FINE AMERICAN SOLDIERS WHO WANT TO DO THE GREATEST POSSIBLE DAMAGE TO THE ENEMY WILL PREFER THE OPPORTUNITY FOR AN EARLY ENGAGEMENT TO THE ALTERNATIVE OF WAITING FOR TRAINING WITH THE AAF AT SOME LATER DATE. ARNOLD"

sometime."

*Need to say more?
at least I might get home sometime.*

2. This headquarters has been further instructed to inform you that the following entry will be made in your service record (WD AGO Form 24): "Accepted for aircrew training, relieved without prejudice for the convenience of the Government."

By command of Brigadier General LATSON:



WILLIAM A. ADLER
Captain, Air Corps
Assistant Adjutant

FORT JACKSON SOUTH CAROLINA: April – September 1945

So in April 1944 I arrived at Ft. Jackson, South Carolina and was assigned to the 87th infantry division for additional training. I was there until about the first of September. I remember few details of that summer, but four of us became friends and spent much of our free time together. The group included Hartwig Hanson of Minnesota, Bill Kaylor of Alabama, and Charles Halverson of Evanston Illinois. Hartwig came from a farm and we had much in common. I do not remember Bill's background. Charles's father had been a swimmer in the Olympics and his sister was an outstanding swimmer. Charles was a good swimmer and more or less taught me to swim that summer, but his interest was drama and as a high school student had been in a play at the White House for President Roosevelt.

I was a naive farm kid from Nebraska. I knew little or nothing about homosexuality. I finally realized my friend Charles Halvorsen was homosexual. Some Saturday evenings, Charles would go out and get drunk and I would find him, Sunday morning, sleeping on the floor beside my bunk. When he told me that he wanted to be with me after the war, I didn't know how to deal with that. However, even though I knew it, he was still my best friend. He was a hell of a nice kid. He was killed during the war so the issue of being together never arose.

At the end of the summer we all were separated. Hanson and Kaylor remained in the 87th. Halvorsen and I went overseas, but were assigned to different units.

- Hartwig Hanson received a very serious leg wound that left a permanent disability.
- Bill Kaylor had been assigned our squad's BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) and had been promoted to corporal. He remained in the 87th division and was hit by shrapnel in his spine which left him paralyzed from the waist down.
- Charles Halvorsen was assigned to the 6th Tank Division. He was wounded very soon after arrival, spent time in England recovering, returned to battle and was killed. I was the only one of the four of us who did suffer significant injury or death.

One of the things that I remember about Ft. Jackson was that the water pipes were near the surface and the drinking water was hot. Training generally ended about 5:00 pm and the evening meal was about an hour later. So we all went to the PX for a cold drink. At the time I had not developed much of a taste for beer and my favorite drink was Pepsi Cola. One evening when I was very thirsty, the PX was out of soft drinks and I had a cold beer. It tasted very good on a hot day and I have liked beer from that day on. I remember that after I left the PX and was standing in the chow line, I wondered why I felt dizzy. Could it have been from the beer?

One of the things that was taught in the army was the various weapon characteristics including the muzzle velocity and range of the projectile. One day mortars were being discussed and the instructor had the projectile range, but not the muzzle velocity. An individual was sent back to the company headquarters to find the muzzle velocity. Since I had just had physics at Hope College, I picked up a stick and started calculating what it should be by writing in the dusty ground. One of the regular army sergeants was standing near watching me and looking very skeptical. I came up with an answer shortly before the individual returned. Much to the surprise of the sergeant (and me) my answer was exactly the same as the stated velocity.

One memorable day, we were on a multiple-day bivouac several miles from our camp doing various battle type exercises. At one time we dug foxholes. The experience is worth quoting from my letter home:

Fort Jackson, SC
August 8, 1944

Dear Folks,

Friday morning the Battalion got into defensive positions (digging foxholes). We were working away and just as I was finishing (I had my foxhole dug and almost camouflaged) when a sergeant came up. He looked at it and said it wasn't right and I would have to change it and make it bigger etc. About this time another sergeant comes up, looks at it and starts arguing with the first Sgt. about it. They call a Lieut. over and about 6 more sergeants and

they soon decide that it is a very good foxhole and start sending and bringing others over to see it. Then this Lieut. brings the Battalion Commander, a Lt. Col., over to see it and the colonel liked it and started telling the Lieut. all the good points about it, most of which I didn't even know I had done.

I just dug it in the way we were told at Camp Fannin. A few more officers and sergeants came up, all listening to the colonel talking about my nice little foxhole. They had me get in and get in all the positions you are supposed to be able to get into in a foxhole and since I could get in all of them, okay! – They liked it that much more! Of course by this time they had trampled all of my camouflage down so I had to build it up again.

We waited around for a while and then we were “attacked” by the enemy. After we wiped them out the Lieut. came around and told me not to fill my foxhole in when the rest did. The rest filled theirs in and the Battalion gathered around. They took us around to several foxholes and told us what was wrong with them – all of them were dug by sergeants – then they bring back the Battalion to mine and showed them how it should be done.

So what? So now when some sergeant wants a detail they all know my name and the detail I got Friday afternoon was Digging Post Holes!!!

Oh this army! – How I love it.

Sincerely, Gaylord

Near the end of my time at Ft. Jackson there was a Corporal there who had been wounded while fighting in Italy. He had not been awarded a Purple Heart at the time. The Commanding General decided to make the presentation of his Purple Heart a major event. The entire Division of nearly 4,000 were ordered to “pass in review” before the reviewing stand with the Corporal, the General, and other high ranking officers. The Purple Heart was then awarded. I remember this event because of its contrast to the presentation of my Purple Heart in November 1944. In my case, a sergeant came in the hospital room with a box of Purple Hearts, read names and handed them out to about a dozen individuals. He allowed us to look at them and then collected them to be sent home, all in about five minutes. There's a contrast!

The stolen rifle story:

In May, 1944, I lost my rifle. The continuing saga, which unfolded over several months, is best told in my letters which are excerpted below:

Fort Jackson - May 14, 1944

Oh yes, I did what no good soldier does – moreover it may cost me \$35 - I lost my rifle, or it was taken out of the rifle rack in the barracks but never-the-less it is gone and if it isn't found I won't be getting much pay for a while. At least it's a

good thing I didn't do it while I was at Fannin. They cost \$85 there. Oh well, maybe it is worthwhile not having a rifle to carry on our long marches or clean for inspection. They should find it somewhere anyway. I only hope it isn't too rusty when they do.

Fort Jackson - June 22, 1944

I still haven't gotten my rifle back and they are still trying to figure out whether I should pay for it or not. In the last week I have had 5 interviews with a Major about it. By now all the reports they have on it almost make up a volume. I'll send one of the reports that I had to write out.

If I do have to pay for it, it won't be so bad because I know that they have done everything they could both to find it and to keep me from having to pay for it. I think every officer in the Regiment has made a report on it – at least about a dozen have. And they all say that it wasn't at all my fault but it is up to Division to decide and they are different.

Thanks a lot for the cookies, they were very good.

Sincerely, Gaylord

Copy of written report included with letter:

37481661

On 12 May 1944, I, Gaylord R. Atkinson, was a member of the Post Guard, guarding prisoners from stockade number one.

Two prisoners were assigned to me in the morning at the usual time, about 0730, but were ordered back to the Stockade at approximately 1300.

At approximately 1300, I was assigned a prisoner to take to the hospital. After returning him to the Stockade at about 1400 I was told to wait in the guardhouse for further orders.

I went into the guardhouse, where there were about 50 other members of the guard, resting, reading, or sleeping.

For safety reasons (my rifle was loaded) and because it seemed to be the usual procedure, I placed my rifle (no. 1268847) in one of the racks provided, not thinking of the possibility of it being taken from the rack. As I remember, there were no locks on the racks. Rifles were being placed in and taken from the racks at any time as members of the guard came from guarding prisoners or went to guard prisoners.

I was in the guardhouse until approximately 1630 except for a few minutes that I was in the latrine.

The remainder of the time I was lying on a bunk near the rack in which I had placed my rifle.

I slept for a few minutes at which time someone could have taken my rifle. At 1630 I went to get my rifle from the rack and found another rifle in its place.

I and other members of the guard searched for it in the racks and throughout the guardhouse. I then reported the loss to the Sgt. of the guard and with him made a further search.

After not finding it in or around the guardhouse I went around to as many of the members of the guard still guarding prisoners as I could find. After this I searched the guard house again and then returned to my Company Area and reported the loss to the Company First Sgt.

I and another member of the guard returned to the guardhouse at 1800 the same day and at 1230 the following day but failed to find the rifle.

Fort Jackson – August 17, 1944

By the way, I have to pay for my rifle so if you need that money I borrowed now, you better cash in one of my bonds. I won't get any pay this month.

I eventually paid \$85 for the rifle. The story continues:

Later when I got to England, on my first payday, pay for two months was handed to me and I was told it was because I had 'not been paid the month before.' I told the lieutenant that I had been paid. He replied that I better take the double pay because the records indicated that I had not been paid the month before and if they corrected the error I might have to repay the extra amount – so I better have it just in case. So I took it.

The next month I was paid for three months since the records indicated that I hadn't been paid for the previous three months. This time I said nothing. So I was paid for three extra months that more than compensated me for having to pay for the stolen rifle.

The Army made me pay for a rifle that I did not "lose" so I didn't feel guilty about taking the extra money. And they never asked me for it back.

The day that I was guarding prisoners (and my rifle was taken) I learned something that disturbed me. While guarding prisoners I was near six or eight black tar-paper covered buildings. The buildings had dimensions of about 6 x 8 feet, with little or no ventilation. There was a door in the front with a narrow trap door at the bottom of the door where items could be inserted or removed. I was told that these buildings were for prisoners that could not be controlled and were "undesirable." These individuals, without their clothes, were placed naked in the building. The buildings would be very hot in the day and cold in the night. With these conditions the individuals would soon develop pneumonia and die. Thus, the Army got rid of these "undesirable" individuals and then reported that they had died of a natural cause. Unbelievable, but true.

By the end of August I was an acting sergeant squad leader and expected to soon become a sergeant. That actually never happened during my entire term of service. Before the promotion came through in Ft. Jackson, all privates and Pfc's (I was a Pfc – private first class) were removed from the division to be sent overseas as replacements. After that, I had no opportunity for a promotion. When I became an MP there was no chance because the division entered Germany and needed many more MPs to handle prisoners and do traffic duty. More MPs were obtained by requesting that each company in the division select two men to be transferred to the MPs. Most companies selected two individuals who had been in heavy fighting and deserved lighter duty. These included corporals and all levels of sergeants. (One company, fairly obviously, sent two brothers that they wanted to get rid of. They were a pain to be around). So with all these sergeants doing the same things that I was doing, where was no chance for a promotion. But... I was a private that came home alive.

DEPARTURE FOR EUROPE - September 1944

About the first of September 1944, a group of replacements including me were sent to Ft. Kilmer, NJ and then to New York. We sailed from New York on Sept. 18, 1944 and arrived in Liverpool on Sept. 25. We were on a British ship and one of the things I remember is that we were given two meals a day. The morning meal was always oatmeal, and whatever else we had for the second meal, it always included corned beef. I felt sea sick at various times but only once did I have to rush from the dining room to get up on deck for fresh air. I spent a lot of time on deck watching dolphins swimming right along side of the ship and flying fish (which I didn't even know existed until then.) We had pretty good waves at times. I liked to stand at the front of the ship and the ship would go down so that I could see nothing but water and then it would go way, way up.

When we got to England, we were in pup tents in a field near Liverpool for about a week with very little to do. I remember two things that happened during that week. The first was that I was helping take down a fairly large tent on a windy day and an unexpected wind gust caught the tent. I was jerked and again hurt my back which produced intense pain. That was the most intense pain I have had in my life. For example, during the night I had extreme difficulty in turning over or getting up. The next day I went on sick call and the Doctor obviously thought I was faking it to get out of combat and gave me some aspirins. Fortunately I recovered fairly quickly.

Second, we were a bunch of privates with no chain of command. Squad leaders were appointed but they had little respect. Each morning the appointed squad leaders came around to get everyone up, stand formation, and then eventually have breakfast. Many slept in and paid no attention to the squad leader. Because of that, one morning a Captain came with the squad leader and as he passed a tent he said something like, "Everybody out." The response from the tent next to mine was, "Fuck you." The

Captain's response was, "When you say that to me, say 'Fuck you, sir.'" It was effective, the tent was soon empty.

While I was in England I realized that I had the first tooth cavity of my life. I went on "sick call" and the Doctor confirmed that I had a cavity that needed to be filled. But they were not prepared to do dental work. Note that that was September 1944. After that I went on sick call three or four times and was always put off for one reason or another. This went on until December 1945 when it was too late to save the tooth. I will tell you about December 1945 later, but I'll tell you about one incredible put off now. It was probably in October 1944 when I was in at the replacement depot at Toul, France. The dentist again confirmed that the tooth had a cavity and then said "You are in the infantry. You will be dead in two weeks. I'm not going to waste my time on you". And he meant it!

After about a week, we went to Southampton by train and were put on a troop transport to go to France. A few hundred yards from shore we transferred to a troop landing craft. That was a memorable experience! We had to climb down about 30 feet on a rope ladder with a large back pack containing all of our belongings. I had never before been on a rope ladder and it was not easy. The ocean was rough with about 6 foot waves so the landing craft went down and then back up and pounded against the side of the troop ship. Timing was everything. We were told that unless you did it correctly the landing craft could come up and crush you between it and the troop ship. With all of your equipment you would fall off the ladder and sink. Obviously I made it.



*"When ya hit the water, swish yer feet around.
They kin use it."*

TRAIN ACROSS FRANCE Early October 1944



American Cemetery on the cliffs above Omaha Beach. 5000 American soldiers are buried there.



Omaha Beach – D-Day - June 14, 1944

We went on shore at Omaha Beach. This was about four months after the bloody invasion at Omaha Beach on June 14, 1944. We marched from the beach up a steep road to the top of the cliff. We saw the cemetery with thousands of crosses marking Americans killed in the invasion. We marched in a mile or two and camped for a few days.

We then took a very slow troop train across France. We were in “40 or 8” box cars, so named because each car could carry 40 troops or 8 horses. They were just box cars with nothing other than the bare floor. As I recall, it took a couple of days to go a few hundred miles. We would go for a while and then sit out in the countryside for hours. We would often wander some distance from the train. I remembered the whistle signals from my boyhood and knew that four long whistles meant the train was about to go forward. One of our long stops was next to an apple orchard and a lot of apples were eaten.



TOUL REPLACEMENT DEPOT Mid October – November 8, 1944

By mid-October, I was in a replacement depot near Toul, France. Toul is about 150 miles nearly straight east of Paris and near Nancy. We were about 30 miles from the front lines. Thousands of soldiers were in this camp and while most were like me, who had just arrived from the U.S., there were others that had been wounded, taken to hospitals, discharged and now were returning to their old units. Little did I know that in about two weeks I would be one of the wounded back at this camp.

By Monday, November 6, 1944, I had seen many American war planes and had heard occasional explosions in the distance. I had seen one German V-1 "buzz" bomb come nearly directly over us, cut its motor and dive out of sight. It hit the ground and exploded about a mile away. I imagine that we were its intended target. Tuesday, November 7th, was Election Day in the U.S. About mid-afternoon the distant explosions became continuous. It was apparent that a major offensive had started.

The next morning we were called out and names were called for individuals to be assigned to units that needed replacements. I was assigned to C Company of the 328th Regiment of the 26th Infantry Division of the Third Army. The 26th Division originally consisted of the Massachusetts National Guard. It was known as the "Yankee Division." Sergeant York of WWI fame was in the 328th regiment.

An Infantry Company has three Platoons and each Platoon has three Squads of 12 men. I was one of seven replacements for our Squad. Only five men remained from the original 12 after their last battle. We joined the Company on Wednesday evening (November 8th). I was surprised and impressed by how welcome we were. They all seemed like they were glad to have us join them. We slept in a barn that night. I don't remember much about Thursday, but we had orientation, and we were issued rifles. Friday afternoon we were loaded into trucks and driven for a considerable distance. The sounds of war became more and more intense as we drove. We obviously were approaching the front. It became even more apparent when we passed the body of a dead German soldier beside the road. A cheer went up. We had been trained that a good German was a dead German. I felt a moment of elation for about one second and then I saw him as a dead human being. Before the war was over, I saw hundreds of dead Germans (and Americans) and never again felt good about any of them.

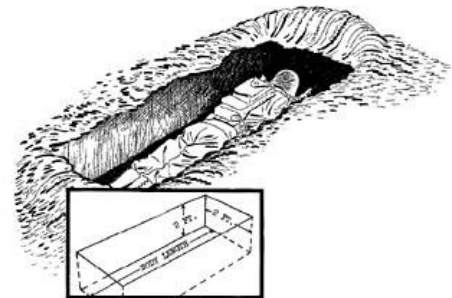
We drove on and evening came, and as it became almost dark the flash of explosions could be seen and an occasional flare lit the sky. We were finally unloaded in an orchard. Each of us replacements came with two blankets. The others had no blankets. Blankets



had been dropped and left behind in battle. As I remember, eight of us shared our blankets and slept together. I was on guard duty from 4:00 until 6:00 AM. It was cold and there was a light snow. By six it was beginning to get light. We ate breakfast and then sat waiting for most of the morning. About midmorning a rifle discharged a few yards from me. A soldier had shot his foot. He said that he had been cleaning his rifle and it discharged by accident. About an hour later another soldier did the same thing. The first shot was through the foot, the second was down through the ankle. Who knows, were they accidents or were they intentional to get out of the war? It was generally assumed that they were intentional and the men would probably be court-martialed and given dishonorable discharges.

About noon we started walking along a road in single file and spaced about 5 yards apart. A few miles later we were told to space ourselves ten yards apart and sometime later fifteen yards apart. We were now within German artillery range and possibly within their sight, and the spacing was to reduce the number of soldiers that would be hit if we were shelled. We were stopped several times for reasons that I did not know. I became thirsty and water was flowing in the ditch at the side of the road. It was partially covered with ice. My canteen was empty and I filled it from this flowing water and added a halogen tablet to purify it. A while later I drank from the canteen. We continued, a few hundred yards on, there was a dead American soldier lying in the ditch forming a dam with the water flowing over his body. I had drunk water that had flowed over his dead body. This was war and I now knew that I had become part of it.

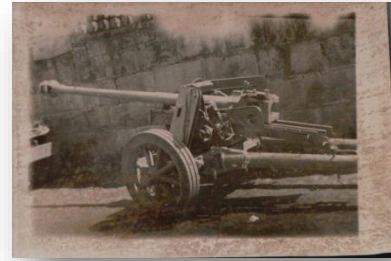
As evening came we turned into a wooded area and were told to pair up and dig a "slit trench" to sleep in for the night. A slit trench is about six feet long, three feet wide and a little more than a foot deep. This was intended to protect us from shrapnel from incoming artillery shells. We were told that we would be moving out at three o'clock the next morning, would go through our front line, replacing the units that had been fighting and to continue on attacking the Germans. We were issued ammunition. As I remember it, my ammunition belt was full and probably held ten or twelve clips of eight shells each and I was given two Bangalores of ammunition which probably had about ten more clips. I also had three hand grenades.



As we returned to our sleeping area, a small plane flew over just above the tree tops. I didn't realize that it was a German observation plane.

A few minutes later I heard my first incoming shell. Someone yelled, "Here they come, hit your holes." It was a German 88 mm artillery shell. They started as a high pitched whine and

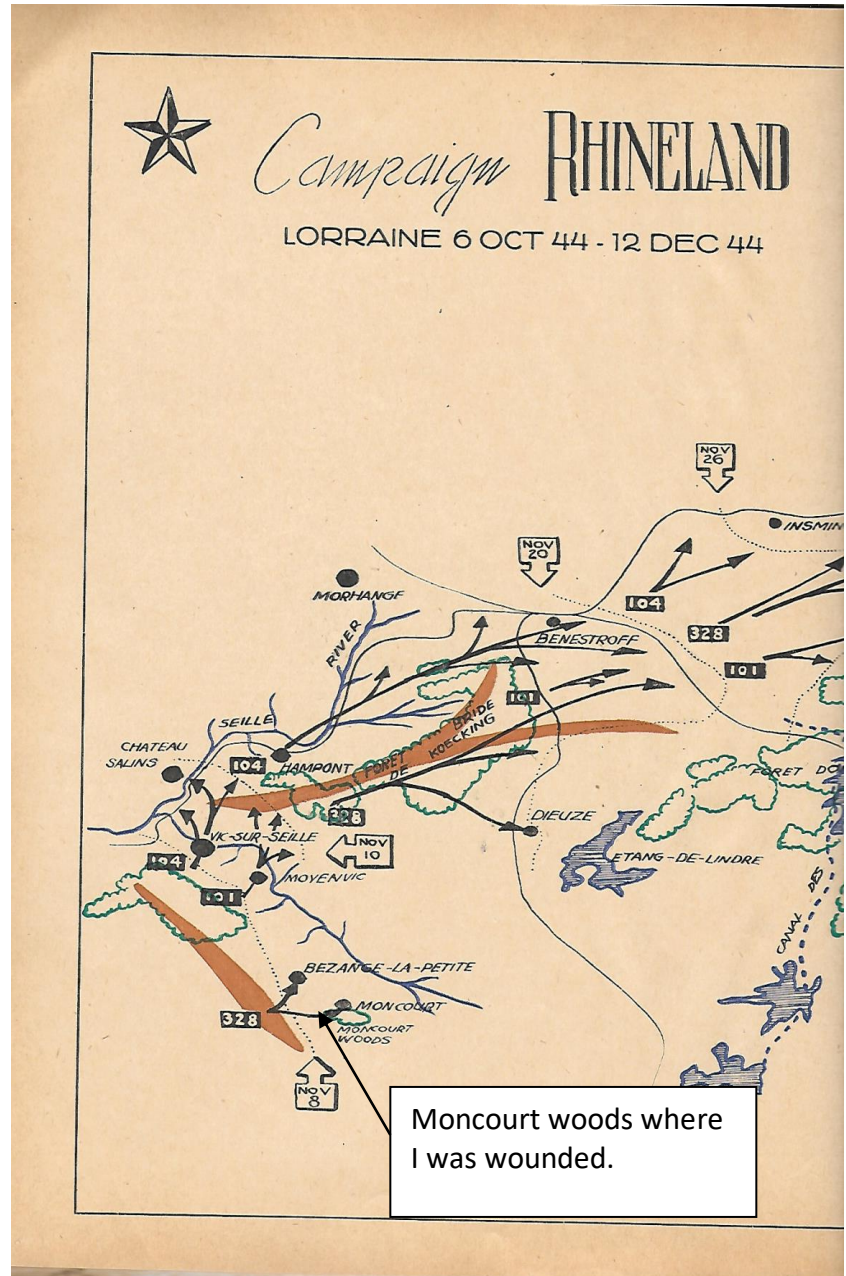
the pitch lowered as they approached. I dove in the slit trench from one direction and my partner, whose last name was Grable, dove in from the other direction. Shells were falling all around us. Then one shell was heard for about two seconds with an intense explosion right over us. Additional shells followed but none were as close as that one.



When they stopped I sat up and asked Gable if he was OK. He didn't answer or move. My heart sank. Was he dead? Finally he said, "I've been hit in my back." There was barely enough light to see a dark spot about two inches in diameter on the back of his coat a little above his waist. I touched the spot and it felt hot. I'll never forget how it felt. My fingers were cold and his fresh blood felt hot. The shell had hit a tree limb about ten feet above us, exploded and sprayed shrapnel down on us. The slit trench was of no protection for this "tree burst." All around were calls for medics. I called for a medic. A medic came and I got out of the trench to give the medic room to work on Gable.

I felt something on the back of my right shoulder. I reached around with my left hand and again felt hot blood. I, too, had been hit. Another bunch of German shells came in. I jumped back into a trench. It was somebody else's trench and I hesitated about jumping in but eventually I jumped in on top of the person already there.

Afterwards, I told the medic about my shoulder and he said to go to the first-aid station. All of us that could walk were taken to a first-aid tent not far away. One of the medics said that he had counted 33 German shells coming in. The shrapnel that hit



me grazed my shoulder and made a cut about five inches long and half an inch deep. My coat had two, about 3/4 inch holes. My shirt and sweater had cuts of several inches. The medic that examined me thought that the shrapnel was still in my shoulder and therefore made the decision that I should be sent back to a hospital.

'What If' Number One

This was the first of a series of "what ifs" that went in my favor – 'What If' Number One. What if he had realized that it was only a surface wound? He probably would have put a bandage on it and sent me back to my unit.

Apparently, if you were sent back to a hospital you were classified as "Seriously Injured" and a telegram was sent to your family. Therefore my parents received a telegram stating that I was seriously wounded which worried them considerably. *(See Appendix 1 for Gaylord's mother's side of this same story.)*

Our Company was part of the First Battalion of the Regiment and with the replacements that came on November 8th, the Battalion was at full strength of approximately 1,000 men. I was told that two weeks later it was down to a small fraction of 1000. I don't know how many were killed and how many were wounded. Of the seven of us replacements that joined our squad on November 8, five of us were evacuated in the same ambulance as walking wounded. In addition, Grable was more seriously wounded and was not with us. So at least six of us seven replacements were wounded in that first artillery barrage.

AMBULANCE TRIP TO NANCY HOSPITAL November 11, 1944



The ambulance had seats along each side and I guess about eight of us were in the ambulance. There was a driver and a medic in the front seat. It was dark and I could hear the conversation of the driver and medic. They came to a branch in the road and they were not sure which way to go. We started down one branch and about 100 yards down the road we came to an American tank stopped in the middle of the road.

The driver decided to go around the tank and when we were almost around it, we hit a mine that blew the front left wheel off of the ambulance. No doubt the tank had also hit a mine. No one was injured further. We walked back to the fork in the road and we were told to wait there while the driver and medic went in search for help. A few minutes later

there was the sound of a machine gun firing not very far away, coming from the direction that they had gone. We wondered if we would ever see them again. However, in about 30 minutes they returned with another ambulance. We were then taken a few miles back to a collection station.

Two ambulances were loaded at the collection station to take us back to a hospital. I was in the second ambulance. It was dark and we drove essentially without lights. There were lights on both the front and back of the ambulances about as bright as a cigarette. Again there was a driver and a medic in the front seat. I was right behind the driver. I heard the driver ask the medic, "Can you see them?" The medic said no. So the driver started to speed up to catch the first ambulance. We then hit a tree. The road had turned, we didn't. There was a bracket for a spare tire just in front of me and with the impact I hit the bracket on the side of my head and my left ear. The next thing that I knew was that I was lying on the floor of the ambulance with a soldier yelling for me to get off of his wounded foot. Seventy some years later the scar on my shoulder is almost gone but the scar on my ear is very evident and still sensitive to cold.

Not long after we hit the tree, an empty ambulance was coming back from the hospital and we were loaded into it and taken to a Hospital in Nancy. We were the first to be put in a large room. It was probably a gymnasium. By morning that room was nearly full of wounded. Many were very seriously wounded. The room became nearly full and those of us less seriously wounded were moved to another building. I was treated, and discharged the next day. But before the discharge I was given a Purple Heart which was then taken back and sent home. After I was discharged I was taken back to the replacement depot near Toul where I had been a few days earlier.



A SERIES OF "WHAT If's" November 1944

The next morning a truck arrived from the 26th Division to pick up more replacements and those of us returning after being wounded. We were taken to the Division Headquarters and reissued supplies and put back on the truck to be taken to our individual units. As the truck was leaving the area, a Sergeant came out of the building and yelled for the truck to stop. He asked that all those that had been wounded get off the truck. There were three of us and we were put on KP for three days - KP with good food and not too much work. "What if" Number Two. What if the Sergeant had been a few seconds later. I would have been returned to my company and battle and, as I said above, many in that battle did not survive.

After the three days, we were told to get ready to return to our units. Again we were on the truck ready to leave when again the three of us who had been wounded were asked to get off the truck. Division supplies were stored in a warehouse in Nancy and we were to guard it for two weeks. This was "what if" Number Three.

Three of us were assigned to the warehouse and we each were on guard for 8 hours a day. As it turned out the "Casualty Post Office" was also in this warehouse. The Casualty Post Office received all of the mail that had been sent to anyone that had been killed or wounded and were no longer in their original units. My mail came to this warehouse. This mail unit was understaffed and the three of us guards spent many hours each day helping to sort the mail. The head of the mail unit, Sergeant Moe, was very appreciative of our help. Also at times I played checkers with Sergeant Moe. I had played checkers at Ft. Jackson, and, in fact there was a Company tournament that I won. I thought that I was fairly good. When I played with Moe, I quickly learned that I was not all that good. A few of our games ended in draws, but I never won a game.

We were not picked up at the end of two weeks and soon after that, the Battle of the Bulge started and apparently we were forgotten. ("What If" Number Four) So instead of two weeks, we were in Nancy from probably November 22 until January 3rd, which was 6 weeks. During that time I wrote a letter to Dan describing my experiences. The letter was sent to Pawnee City and mother opened it, read it and then copied it to send to my sister Vivian. I now have that copy. That letter is as follows:

France
Dec. 13, 44

Dear Dan,

Again yesterday I received some more mail, this time I received 15 letters and the dates that they were written ranged from Oct 8 to Nov. 27. I would think that soon it should be coming direct so it would not be so long.

I suppose if you have seen any of the Boston papers you know quite a bit about the "YD". One of the fellows here has received clippings from the Boston Herald and it seems that we are the big factor over here. But as far as that goes, the 26th has done its share or more since it has been here.

I haven't written any of my combat experience to anyone mainly because I really have had none, but maybe you would be interested in what happened to me.

I'll start out with a little more than a (*censored*) when I was still in a replacement depot. Not only the green replacements, but also men who had been wounded, and were returning to the front were there so we learned a lot. We had talks by these men, some of which were very interesting.

Then one day hundreds if not thousands of bombers and fighters went over and we all guessed the big drive was near. A few days later we were awakened early by the sound and shaking of artillery, we were over (*censored*) from the front. The next day the lists came in for replacements.

We were taken to an area and stayed there over night. The next morning we were placed into groups to go to the different regiments. One of the noncoms in charge there was a kid that was next to me in our squad down at Camp Fannin (Beckwith). He didn't go to ASTP and has been in the YD for about a year. We were taken on a few miles and broken up as to companies and again taken on. By this time artillery was firing all around us but somehow it didn't seem at all real. We moved on in trucks to find our company. We went over a hill and were stopped by MPs. We were all green replacements and didn't know what it was all about. There was a gun position next to the road and we started talking to the crew. One of the guys asked if we were very near the front. The answer was, "You see that town down there (a few houses about ¼ mile down the road) the Germans held that this morning. They're just over the hill."

Somehow it still didn't seem real to me although I could see 105's and 155's and tanks firing away. We soon started moving again and it was then that I saw my first dead German. He was lying in the ditch beside the road. We went on and finally got to our company. They were taken off of the front line the day before after some very heavy fighting. That night had been their first night's sleep they had had for weeks.

The thing that impressed me was how glad they were to see us and how friendly they were. I hadn't expected that.

We had eaten a hot meal which was poor compared to what I had been having but to them it was near perfection. For weeks they had lived on K and C rations. The order came out to be ready to move out in half an hour. We got on trucks and moved out. The North Star was on the right side, and we were going away from the lines. Then a cloud covered the sky and we "lost" the North Star. Sometime later we saw it again, this time on the opposite side. Everyone was disappointed when we were placed outside, in an open field, for the night. I stood guard for two hours.

They got us up before it was light and we were told to be ready to move out in half an hour. We moved out in three hours. While we were waiting, we were in small groups talking, cleaning equipment, eating K rations etc. All at once there was a shot a few yards away and a call for a medic. A rifle had been fired while being cleaned and hit a kid in the leg. The medics came, treated him and took him away, almost no one else moved. It was then that things began to seem real.

We moved out in single file with five yards between men. We moved by more gun positions and tanks, all firing, and the sound of bullets hissed over our heads. We watched the "Cub" planes flying around and darting away from the ack-ack fire fired at them. They seemed so helpless but none were hit. We moved on, took up ten yards between men and then fifteen. We went by a dead American, not five yards away and, within the next mile or so, eight or ten Germans.

I had no water and was very thirsty. Water was running along the side of the road and I had tablets to purify the water so I was going to get some if we stopped. On up the road about 200 yards a dead soldier's body formed a dam in the little stream and the water ran over him. My thoughts turned from water. We moved on.

We passed a German that had been put up in a German salute position along a fence. We entered a town, few or any of the buildings undamaged, more and more bodies, mostly Germans. We met a group of German prisoners being brought back, about 200. Some were wounded and covered with blood. We soon moved off of the Road and into a wooded area, stopped and were told to dig in.

Again it seemed like a problem at Ft. Jackson. I dug a slit trench, didn't think I would have to use it and then ate supper. We were given more ammunition and then our squad leader called us together and told us we were to attack at dawn, gave us the situation and told us to get all the sleep we could. I wasn't to be on guard. I had my "bed" all made, everything placed so I could find it in the dark and protected from the snow that was falling and was just ready to go to bed when I heard the sound of a shell different from the ones that had been going over. I was about ten yards from my slit trench talking to another kid.

Someone called "Here they come; hit your holes." I had plenty of time to get to my hole; another kid that was nearby hit it too, his head to my feet. The shells started hitting all around. One went off and some dirt fell down on my shoulder and neck. For the first time in my life I was really scared. Several shells in a row seemed to be coming closer and closer. It was hell to hear them hissing in and a relief when they went off and to find that I was still alive, only to hear another coming. We were in a heavily wooded area and most of them were tree bursts. All at once they stopped and I tried to get up on my hands and knees. I couldn't, the breath had been knocked out of me. I tried again and made it.

I said, "Are you OK" to the kid that was with me and he didn't move or answer. It scared me. I heard another shell coming and hit the ground. A few more came and then they stopped. Again I got up and asked the kid if he was all right. I was very much relieved when he moved and said something. He said, "I don't know; something hit me in the back." I looked but it was getting dark. He had a sweater

on and I couldn't see any hole. Then I saw a dark spot about two inches across and touched it. It felt hot, very hot, to my cold fingers; it was blood. I told him and he said, "You better call for a medic."

By this time half a dozen others were calling "medic." One came soon and started work. I got out of the slit trench to let the medic in. There was some dirt that fell down my neck and reached back to get it out and ran my hand down over my shoulder. My jacket was torn. I put my finger in the tear and felt blood and a hole in the flesh. Just then I heard more shells coming. I ran for the nearest hole next to mine. These shells hit about a hundred yards away.

I told a medic about my shoulder, he looked at it and told me to come up to the battalion aid station. There they dressed it and sent me back in an ambulance. By the time we got to the hospital we had gone through a lot more. I was in two ambulance wrecks. The first one, they got on the wrong road and hit a mine. The second, they ran off the road and hit a tree. I hit my head against something in the ambulance and cut my ear fairly badly and/or worse than my shoulder; at least it hurt a lot more. Both are about OK now only my ear gets cold very easily and is going to leave quite a scar; maybe not as much as on my shoulder but it doesn't matter there.

Sincerely,
Gaylord.

You might notice that there are some things I did not include in the letter to my brother, for example that it was probably not an accident that two soldiers shot themselves in the foot or ankle just before battle or that a German observation plane flew just over the tree tops and spotted us as a target just before the artillery barrage.

The Battle of the Bulge involved some of the most intense fighting of the war. If I had been in the Battle of the Bulge, I certainly would have frozen my feet if I hadn't been killed. When I went in the army at Leavenworth, my shoe size was determined to be 8. My feet grew some, primarily widened, and I tried to get larger shoes but the army said my feet were size 8 and that was that. During the Battle of the Bulge the temperature reached below zero and you needed two or three layers of socks. With my shoes, one pair of socks was tight.



Trench foot due to long time wet feet and frozen feet were major problems during the War and were included in a couple of Bill Mauldin cartoons that appeared in the Army's newsletter Stars And Stripes, and later appeared in his book Up Front. The cartoons featured Joe and Willie, two infantry men.

One cartoon shows Willie soaking his feet in his helmet of water with the caption, "Tell th' old man I'm sitti' up wit two sick friends." The second shows Willie talking to Joe and says, "Joe, yestiddy ya saved my life an' I swore I'd pay ya back. Here' my last pair of dry socks".

Christmas morning 1944 was clear and fairly cold. About mid-morning planes of a thousand-plane raid went over in perfect formation. The weather was right for vapor trails and by the time that last planes were gone the sky was completely overcast. Hours later they returned. Now, they were not in formation and many planes were damaged, and I think far fewer than 1000 -- some with an engine missing or at least not running. Several were way behind, and I think just barely staying in the air. It was a very costly raid. I then realized that not getting into the air corps was not so bad.

On New Year's Eve, a French civilian brought the three of us guarding the warehouse three bottles of Champagne. That was my first Champagne and each of us consumed an entire bottle.



"Joe, yestiddy ya saved my life an' I swore I'd pay ya back. Here's my last pair of dry socks."

TO LUXEMBURG January 3, 1945

The casualty mail unit was moved from Nancy to Redange, Luxemburg sometime between Christmas and New Years. The division came after us on my birthday, January 3, 1945. I was now 20 years old. We also were taken to Redange and we looked up the casualty mail unit to get our mail. The amount of unsorted casualty mail that had accumulated was unbelievable and consisted of a pile of mail bags about six feet high and fifteen feet long. We asked Sergeant Moe if he couldn't get us to help him. He replied that he would very much like the help but that the fighting had been so intense and the casualties so high that they needed every one they could get at the front. The next morning we were again in the truck ready to be taken to our units. The engine was running and the driver was about ready to go when Sergeant Moe came and said that he had permission for our help for two days. "What If" Number Five.

Later that day one of the two that had been with me in Nancy ran across a Sergeant in Division Headquarters that he knew. He found out that because of the large number of German prisoners that were being taken, the MP's needed help and asked if we would be interested in joining the MP Platoon. We were. And that was "What If" Number Six. I spent the remainder of my army life as an MP.

MY LIFE AS AN MP January 4, 1945 to the end of being in the army.



My first assignment as an MP was to direct traffic and give information at a five road intersection in a small town in Luxemburg. We were close to the front as was evident by the sound of rifle fire. A new Infantry Division had just arrived from the states. As it became dark in the evening they were running around with flash lights. I was in the middle of the intersection with fairly deep ditches beside the roads. While I was there, two 81 mm mortars were set up, one in a ditch on one side of the road and the other on the opposite side. I was nearly between them. They soon started firing. This didn't really concern me until I realized that I could see where the shells were landing.

"An experienced field sojer will figure out a way to sleep warm an' dry. Lemme know when ya do."

In other words I could see the German line. If I could see the Germans, they could see where the mortar rounds were coming from, and return fire was very likely. I was very, very scared. Finally an individual came out to get me and told me that the sergeant in charge wanted me to come in, but was too scared to come get me. Shortly after I got inside of the house, German artillery shells started falling on the town. That was quite an experience for my first MP assignment.

Soon after that, I was assigned to controlling traffic over a single lane bridge over a small river. We were not very far from the front and there was a considerable number of trucks and other vehicles and some tanks crossing the bridge. Apparently it was an important road to get supplies to the front. The river was in a fairly narrow, mountainous valley running generally from north to south. The road came from the east and turned to the south along the river about 200 yards from the bridge. It then made a right turn to cross the bridge and again turned south and soon turned towards the west and went up a fairly steep mountain road. An MP was stationed at each end of the bridge to prevent a traffic jam on the bridge. I have several very clear memories related to this assignment.



As an indication of the importance of that bridge, there was an anti-aircraft unit positioned at the east end of the bridge. It consisted of four 50 caliber machine guns mounted on a turret with the gunner seated in the middle. It was manned 24 hours a day, but during the week that I was there, there were no German aircraft attacks on the bridge.

Another interesting fact about the location was that there were two houses at the east end of the bridge and they were used as collecting stations for the bodies of killed soldiers. The north house was for Americans, the south for Germans. One thing that made a strong impression on me was that several bodies were of American soldiers who had been wounded, placed sitting against a tree waiting to be attended, but they froze to death before anyone could attend to them.

One day I was at the west end of the bridge and could see the traffic coming from the east across the river but had very little vision of traffic coming from the west. At this particular time I could see a convoy coming from the east and saw nothing coming from the west. I waved to the MP on the other side of the bridge to allow the convoy to cross. He vigorously waved back, 'NO!' A jeep then appeared approaching towards me bearing a red plate with white stars, indicating the presence of a General. It was Patton. I later

talked to an MP who had been up on this mountain with a view of the battle line and Patton was there to assess the situation. He said that Patton was there with his usual swagger when a German artillery shell came in and hit some distance away. The MP said that then, Patten yelled at his driver "Let's get the fuck out of here." and ran for the jeep. That was my first Patton encounter.

One afternoon I was on duty at the east end of the bridge and noticed an individual some distance away up on the mountain side. I saw him and wondered what he was doing up there but paid little attention to him. I was replaced by another MP and shortly thereafter a rifle bullet hit the pavement right between his feet. The anti-air craft gunner realized what had happened and turned his four 50-caliber machine guns toward the sniper and fired a burst.

A few days later, two individuals from the body collection unit went up after the body. They had some sort of a harness attached to the body and were sliding it down through the snow. For at least part of the distance, one was pulling and the other was riding on the body. At the end of the slope, there was a 10 foot cliff next to the road. When they reached the cliff, they stood the German body up on the edge of the cliff, yelled "Heil Hitler" and pushed him over.

One day, two trucks came to take bodies away. There were far fewer Americans than Germans and the Americans were loaded in one truck and taken away. They piled the Germans about 4 feet deep in the second truck. The bodies were frozen in all sorts of positions. One of the loaders was on top of the pile, jumping up and down on them -- much as I had done when we were loading hay on a hayrack back on the farm. He had an axe and if an arm was a problem he chopped it so it could be moved. Such was war.

In contrast, some weeks later there was a truck driver that had an American body in his truck and he was going over a very rough road. A General came up behind the truck, saw the body bouncing, and stopped the truck. I believe the driver was Court Marshaled for disrespect for the dead. That got a lot of attention in the Stars and Stripes and as a result the driver may have gotten off.

While at the bridge, we were between large artillery guns and the front. These were probably 155 mm guns that fired projectiles a long distance at supersonic speeds. The sounds were interesting. We first heard the sharp sonic boom as the shell went over. We then simultaneously heard the projectile approaching and going away. We soon heard the gun discharge and sometime later the projectile's explosion.

Before I was drafted, I read that many Americans were killed in their sleep. I did not intend to be killed in my sleep and learned to be alert to any unexpected noise. For example, while at this bridge about fifteen of us MPs and an anti-aircraft crew slept in a room of a house. We were on duty for two hours and off for four. Thus someone would enter the room every two hours to waken their replacement. I never heard anything

when it was not for me, but was awake as soon as the door opened when it was time for me to go on duty. I have retained that ability for the remainder of my life. When Kathy and Janet were babies, I heard their first whimper during the night. But often when there was a very loud thunderstorm that woke everyone else up, I didn't know it.

I was next on traffic duty at an intersection on a road in northern Luxembourg east of Bastogne. The main road ran east/west with a road running north. Just to the north of this road were woods where the retreating Germans had attempted to return to Germany after the stand at Bastogne. American artillery had attacked them from the south and American and English artillery from the north. Few trees remained undamaged and I understand that thousands of Germans were killed in those woods. It was a clear sunny day following a six inch snow during the night. There were the remains of a German vehicle that must have taken a direct hit at the side of the road. There was considerable traffic that morning, including tanks. I noticed many red flecks in the compact snow on the road. I finally picked one up, turned it over, and the other side was human skin. (I was a 20 year old kid.) The tank traffic on the road had run over a frozen German body and had ground it into small pieces. There was a small mound of snow just off the path of the main traffic pattern. I brushed snow off and it was a boot - - with a foot in it.

A traffic assignment a day or two later was at an intersection in the same general region, east of Bastogne and close to the front. A Jeep with the two-star General, the Division Commander, came from the east, stopped and asked me what my assignment was. He then said, "That is a one way out. Do not allow any traffic to go down that road." About fifteen minutes later another jeep, with the Division Assistant General, came down that road, stopped and again ordered me to not allow any traffic to go down that road. That was the only time that I was in the army that a General ever spoke to me.

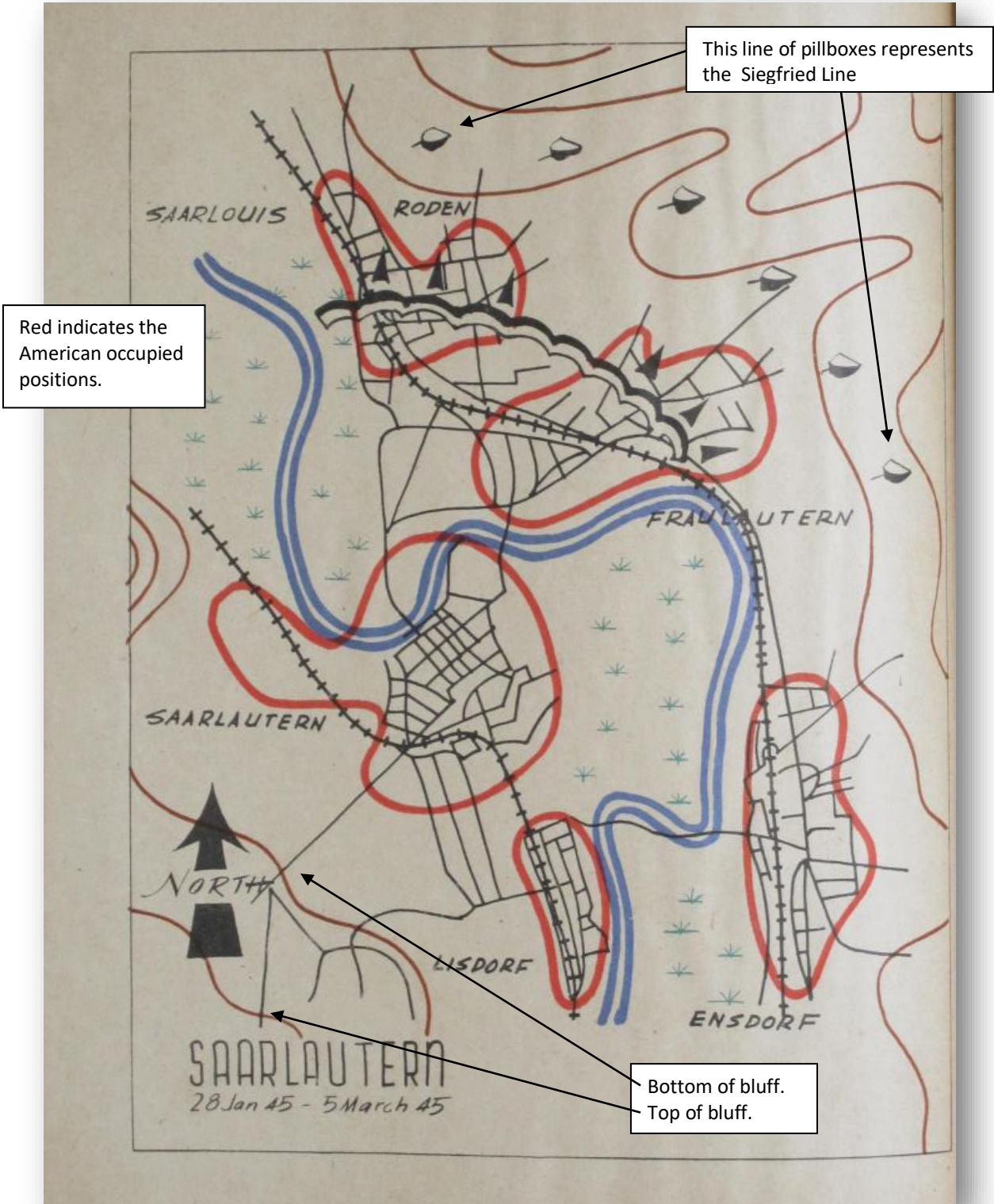
I now had received direct orders from two Generals to not let anything go down that road. Not long after that, a convoy of engineers came from the south and signaled to turn right down that road. I stopped the convoy and told the Lieutenant in charge that I had received direct orders from two Generals to not let any traffic go down that road. He said that they were on an urgent assignment to build a bridge across the river about half a mile down that road, and Major King, the head of the division MPs, my commanding officer, had sent them to go down that road. The convoy was stopped and we were within sight of the Germans. What a position I was in! Finally the lieutenant said he had no choice, they were going down that road. He wrote a statement and signed it, gave it to me and they went down the road. It left me extremely nervous but there were no repercussions. "What If" Number Seven.

SAARLAUTERN January 28 – March 5, 1945

The Battle of the Bulge was winding down by the end of January 1945 and the 26th Division moved from Luxembourg south to the Saar valley. We were in that region from January 28 until March 6 when the race through Germany started. During this time the Division was in “aggressive defense” primarily in the city of Saarlautern. During that time I was about 1.5 miles southwest of Saarlautern in a small community at the edge of the Saar valley with a bluff of about 200 feet. There were about twenty houses at the top of the bluff and about six at the bottom, with a switchback road between the two. The road then went on to Saarlautern. I was at the top of the bluff for a week or two and at the bottom for the remainder of the time.

See next page for map

Map of Saarlautern from the YD Official History Book - "26th Infantry Division History – World War II"



Here is how the official History of the Division describes the Battle:

“The 26th Division became the extreme right flank unit of the (Third) Army. XX Corp sector consisted principally of an aggressive defense of the west bank of the Saar River. Within the Corp sector, however, was one bridgehead, east of the Saar at Saarlautern. Here the 26th Division was ordered to relieve the 95th Infantry Division, facing for the first time the German Siegfried Line defenses.

“From 29 January to 6 March, in carrying out this mission, the 26th Infantry Division maintained an aggressive defense in the Saarlautern area and in the bridgehead area on the east bank of the river. The 104th Infantry, being the first regiment of the Division to arrive from the Ardennes Campaign, in the XX Corp sector, was the first to take control of the bridgehead. The relief of the elements of the 95th Infantry Division was conducted on 28 and 29 January. During the subsequent weeks in which the Division commanded this sector, the three regiments alternately occupied the defensive positions in the bridgehead and along the Saar River.

“The type of fighting encountered in the Fraulautern and Saarlouis-Roden was new to many Yankee Division Infantrymen. In parts of these two villages enemy troop frequently occupied houses or blocks of buildings directly across the street from elements of the 26th Division. During the hours of darkness any noise or movement would draw immediate fire from enemy automatic weapons and mortars. Numerous limited objective attacks were launched in which the progress of the Division was measured in pillboxes and houses. Elements of the German 347th and 719th Infantry Divisions likewise launched numerous counter-attacks in order to force the withdrawal of our troops or to regain blocks of buildings which had changed hands.

“During the operation in the Saarlautern bridgehead, the 26th Division utilized searchlights for the first time under battle conditions. By penetrating the overhanging mist on dark nights by this artificial moonlight infantry weapons crews were assisted in the adjustment of their fire.”

The two searchlights were located about 300 yards from our house at the bottom of the bluff. I expected the light to draw artillery fire, but they never did.

During the time that I was at the top of the bluff I was aware of many of the battle conditions. Jeeps often made runs from there to Saarlautern and the drivers came back with tales of their experiences. Also, from the top of the bluff there was a clear view of the valley and the German positions. Artillery fire and Air Force raids were directed from positions near where we were staying. As one artillery spotter said, “We are going to knock down another house today.” And often a house turned out to be simply

camouflaging a pillbox. Individual Germans could be easily seen with 20X tripod mounted binoculars.

During the time I was with the 26th there was a reporter, Andrew Tully, from the Boston Traveler newspaper, who was following our Division primarily because most of the men were from the Boston Area – thus the name “Yankee Division.” My parents subscribed to the paper so they could follow the movements of my Division and they saved a big box of the newspapers. I would like to share one of the articles describing life in Saarlautern during the time I was there.

[Boston Traveler - March 8, 1944 - “Mr. Rommel doesn’t live here anymore, but local GIs do nicely with the place.”](#)

by Andrew Tully
Traveler Staff Correspondent

SAARLAUTERN, Germany, March 8

The sign in large German script still proclaims the room as sanctum sanctorum of “General Field Marshal Rommel” but the Nazis’ “Desert Fox” would never recognize his old diggings if he could return from hell.

“WHITE MEN” TAKE OVER

When I walked into the room today with Col. Walter Scott of Washington, D.C., commander of the Yankee Division, 101st Regiment, a dozen unkempt Joes unwound themselves from the blankets of double-decker bunks to salute their commander in Rommel’s private office, now the living quarters for a bunch of hard fighting irreverent members of the battalion patrol.

Pvt. Joe Doucette of 39 White Street, East Boston, gestured toward his bunk. “This is where the old goat had his desk, they tell me,” he explained. “Tell the folks back home that a white man has moved into the joint.”

Certainly it doesn’t look like a general’s quarters. Our Joes are a clean, lot but they are not particularly tidy and most of them were catching a nap when we arrived. The bunks take up most of the room and the free floor space was liberally sprinkled with muddy boots, soiled socks, boxes of K rations and the fantastically assorted paraphernalia of fighting men. Rommel would not like it.

It is a fairly large room – about 20x20 – with high ceiling and conservative kalsomined walls of buff like the gray looking barracks building of which it is a part. It would have been as marshal’s office, scrupulously plain and scrupulously

business-like as befit a Spartan fighting man. You can imagine the marshal sitting at his massive walnut desk, his polished boots scuffing a very correct rug, a picture of Der Fuehrer at his back, the Nazi Swastika on one wall, a war map on the other. Okay if you like things that way.

Personally I like the GI touch. I liked the picture of Deanna Durbin which Pfc. Joe Gallo of 25 Washington Street, Revere, had tacked up over his mottled mirror. Der Fuehrer may have his points but he's not competing with Deanna in my league. "Besides" put in Gallo, "Durbin hasn't got any mustache."

But Rommel wouldn't like it. It would seem very unmilitary to the unfrocked fox. Still he wouldn't approve of a lot that goes on in Saarlautern these days after visiting the barracks and paying a little visit to Sgt. Gerald Daley of 242 Parker Street, Lowell, and Sgt Larry Mazzola of 34 Academy Hill Road, Brighton. I jeeped across the Saar river into the no-man's-land of the river's north bank to find the men of the 101st still giving the Jerries hell in the one-third of the city still enemy-held.

TANK JUST RAN AWAY

Tech. Sgt. Tommy Moore of 122 Bank Street, Attleboro, was full of news of what the boys had just done to a Kraut tank that stuck its snout into Yankee business. "This tank came along, see," he related, "Damned if it didn't come right up to within a block of us and knocked out one of our houses but then we gave it hell with a capital H and damned if he didn't run away."

It was just as hot as ever, however, over on this so-called "German side" of the city. Mortar shells were landing with their sickening "thwacks" all over the place and as we crossed the bridge over the Saar an .88 shell landed with a terrifying "wham" in a field about 50 yards away.

"They snipe with .88s here" Staff Sgt Bill Reddington of 177 Elliot Street, Milton, told me "they moved these damned things around all the time and you never know where they're going to hit."

The house I was visiting was only about five blocks from the Jerry lines and I went up onto the roof with Staff Sgt. Luther Hansen of Island Creek, Duxbury, and Sgt. Johnny Alex of 43 Fern Street, Lawrence to try to get a look at the enemy. We stayed up there about three minutes and that was too damned long because the Kraut machine guns opened up immediately and bullets were whining over our heads almost all the time we stood there and I didn't get a look at any Germans.

I suppose I could have gotten a look a little further up when I dropped in on some Joes in another house only two blocks from Jerry, but it wasn't the kind of place

where anybody wants to do any rubber-necking. Picture yourself in the Hotel Touraine with the Jerries throwing mortar, machine gun and rifle fire at you from the Metropolitan Theater and you'll get an idea of how the boys of the 101st Regiment are living in the front lines these days. You run like hell when you pass the open spaces between two buildings because if you don't these machine gun bullets whistling through the ozone will find a target moving slowly enough to hit.

At this second house, Sgt. Bruno Sepka of 888 Massachusetts Ave, Cambridge, was chuckling about Saarlautern's latest gag. "We got this company C.O.," he chortled, "name of Lt. Herman West of Florida, and he found a pair of ladies red under-drawers somewhere. Well they've got a flagpole on the house they're living in and every once in a while the lieutenant pulls the red drawers up on the flagpole. It draws fire every time and West just sits there and howls. Boy do we razz these Krauts."

LIKE FOURTH OF JULY

The boys had retreated to the cellar because as Lt. Col. Al Gramm of Worcester told me, "Cellars are just heavenly at this season, my dear." I stuck around for about a half an hour talking to some old pals like Capt. Dominic Prato of 48 Norman Street, Boston, Pfc Rosario Pistorio of 4631 Washington Street, Roslindale, and Sgt. Dick Glendye of 6 Grassmere Avenue, Lawrence, and all the time it sounded like an old fashioned Fourth of July in South Boston.

When we got ready to go we were in Co. Scott's jeep when Capt. Prato ran out of the house and rushed up to us. "The boys say you'd better hang around awhile, sir." He told the Colonel. "Jerry's dropping a few around the bridge." Well we were stuck around awhile feeling very naked indeed out there in the street. Then the Colonel and I looked at each other and he said, "Let's go" and we went. We couldn't stay there, all night.

For a while a truck with a radar unit was parked next to our house and used at night to target German tank movement. It was not there for long because they assumed that it would soon be a target for German artillery. In fact it probably did draw artillery fire. One day a fellow MP by the name of Quigley was on duty in the street outside of our house when an artillery shell came in near. I will never forget the expression of terror on his face as he ran for the house.

Most of the time, we were in the lower village. I don't remember how many MPs were there, there were probably six of us. I do not recall any other Americans in the town but there was, I believe, an engineering unit just east of the town. They had a tent set up with a kitchen and we ate there. One house/barn combination had, I believe, six cows and German civilians came twice a day to milk and feed the cows.

One day a group of French civilians came and got to the cows without our knowledge with the intent of killing a cow and taking the meat. They didn't know how to shoot a cow to kill it. They shot it from the side through the jaw. We ran them off but the cow's injury meant that it had to be killed. When the owners arrived we arranged for them to butcher it. I had shot cows on the farm when we butchered and I knew where to shoot. So I shot the cow and that was one of the few shots that I took in the war.

There was an apple orchard near the house we were in and we had a wood burning cook stove. I managed to get the needed ingredients and made several apple pies.

Often we watched the Air Corp planes pounding German positions. A group of planes would arrive and form a large circle. One plane after another would dive, strafe, and then the next one would drop a bomb. Some days this continued for hours. But one day an American ammunition truck had started down the road from the top of the bluff, but apparently stopped to watch the planes. A pilot of one of the planes that had been attacking the Germans apparently thought it was a German truck and strafed it, killing the driver and another of the three man crew. The truck and ammunition was set on fire. It was about half a mile from us and it burned with numerous explosions for a considerable length of time. Later I helped clear the road and then was stationed to direct traffic around the wreckage.

There was another incident related to the American planes that I remember well. I hadn't had a bath or shower for weeks, and one day a group of us were taken back several miles where a shower tent had been set up. I had a shower and was given a clean uniform. I was then taken back to the lower village and was on duty patrolling the street of the town. Very low clouds were overhead. I heard planes going over but they were above the clouds and were not seen. All at once I heard the whistling of a falling bomb and looked up and there was a falling bomb directly above me. I didn't assess the situation; I just dove into a very muddy ditch - so much for the shower and clean clothes.

While the bomb had been directly above me, it was going horizontally at probably over 100 mph so it landed and exploded nearly a quarter of a mile from me. There was a kitchen set up on the edge of town in a very muddy field much closer to where the bomb landed. The rest of the MPs, who had also had a shower and clean clothes, were there for lunch. They also came back covered with mud.

We burned wood to heat the house and for some cooking. So our house had smoke coming out of the chimney. Since we were in sight of the Germans, they could see the smoke and could identify our house. One night they shelled us with six rounds. Fortunately they missed us. The next morning we found six craters in the back yard. One was only about six feet from the house.

THE DRIVE THROUGH GERMANY

I remember many things that happened during the drive through Germany, but I do not remember many of the specific places where they happened. Officially the drive consisted of two battle zones: RHINELAND - March 6 to March 24, 1945 and CENTRAL EUROPE - March 24 to May 8, 1945

During the war we were not allowed to write home and say exactly where we were. Once the war ended I sent my parents an entire list. (See Below)

Places I've been since Ft. Jackson

Ft Meade, MD	Saarlautern - (Germany, oh those shells)
Ft Eilmore, NJ	Asarburg
New York	Trassem
Liverpool	Can't remember - (Bridge on the Saar)
Camp Delemere	Merzig - (we are on our way)
South Hampton	Lebach - (one day stand)
Omaha Beach	Illingen - (one day stand)
Le Manns	Ottweiler - (one day stand)
Neuchateau\Toul	Landstuhl - (one day stand)
Nancy – Joined YD	Kaiserlautern - (half a day)
Chateau Salins - (got hit)	Aluey - (8 miles from the Rhine – what ack ack)
Nancy - hospital, warehouse, etc.	Oppenhm - (The Rhine all under smoke screen)
Metz	Darmstadt - (nothing but ruins)
Longwy - (all ready to go to 328 again, we even had our stuff on the truck – then MPs)	Offenbach
Luxemburg	Hanau
Luxemhousen	Neider roden - (Prison)
Beveange - (My “hottest” MP post. The Germans tried to retake it two nights)	Fulda
Reodange	Suhl (Guhl?) - (I got those jackets here)
Luxemhousen	Sonnenberg
Beveange	Bayreuth -
Donncoles	Neustadt
Wiltz	Weiden
Can't remember!	Wernberg
Bouley - (back to France)	Schwandf
Creuztwald	Miltach
Felsberg	Regen
	Schanberg
	Tittling

Aufernbrunst
Aigen
Open Country

Friedberg
(Pilsen)

EVENTS

Rhine River Bridge



Aerial photograph of a damaged German town during Rhine River area fighting, 24 Mar 1945; taken by crew of B-24 Liberator bomber of 2nd Air Division, US 8th Air Force National Archives and Records Administration

My first very memorable event was when I was directing traffic just west of the bridge over the Rhine at Oppenheim. The Germans had failed to blow that bridge and its capture, undamaged, was a major victory in the drive into Germany. It was assumed that the Germans would try to bomb the bridge and a convoy of anti-aircraft unit was on their way to defend the bridge.

I was at an intersection about a mile west of the bridge and there was a fork in the road about a 100 yards to the east. The road to the left went down to the

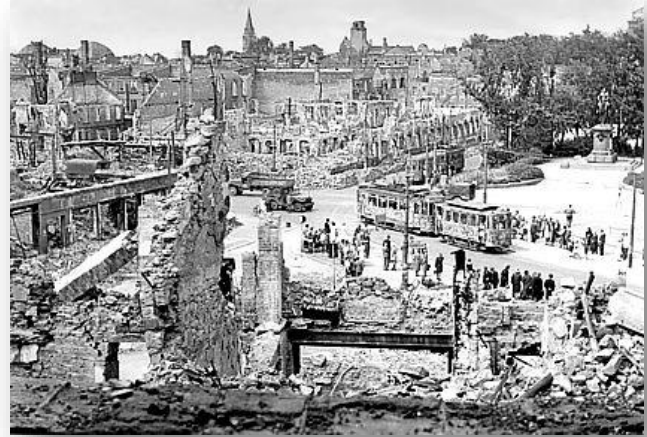
bridge. I made the worst mistake of army life when the driver of the lead vehicle of the convoy asked me, "Is the bridge to the left." I answered "That's right." He only heard the word "right." So the convoy took the wrong road. They returned several hours later after I was off duty and the MP gave them the correct answer.

I night or two later I was near that intersection where I could see the bridge, and that night, German planes did try to bomb the bridge. The anti-aircraft fire was intense and the planes were not successful. What if they had successfully bombed the bridge earlier because of my "That's right"? The implications are tremendous.



Darmstadt

I did not know it at the time that we drove through Darmstadt, but the allied intelligence learned that a conference of rocket scientists was being held in Darmstadt and it was fire-bombed in an attempt to kill the scientists. We drove for mile after mile without seeing an unburned building. We drove all the way through the city and saw one school in the center of a big lot that was not burned.



Frankfurt/Nieder Roden

Nieder Roden is a suburb of Frankfurt, the German prison camp is nearby. I searched Nieder Roden online and found that the prison was captured on March 28th by a unit of the 4th Armored Division and turned over to the 26th Division. Which were the MPs, including me. The camp had 1200 German political prisoners ranged from apparent good health to near death.

As I remember, the prison was approximately square and about 300 yards per side. It was surrounded by two tall fences about five feet apart which was divided in about 50 yard sections with vicious dogs in each section. There was a paved path around the prison and there was a motor bike for patrolling it.

The camp had several rows of buildings for the prisoners and a fairly large burial area in the NW corner. Obviously many prisoners had died at that prison.

The highlight of my time at the prison was that a Norwegian political prisoner, Karl V. Aggean, drew the following picture of me. It is remarkable and he did it in about 20 minutes.



On towards Berlin

The Division continued in the general direction of Berlin with the objective of reaching Berlin. But after about 60 miles, and about at the city, Fulda, the Division was ordered to turn southeast towards Austria. (From things that Patton had said, he wanted to be the first in Berlin, and I assume he was very disappointed to be ordered to turn south.)

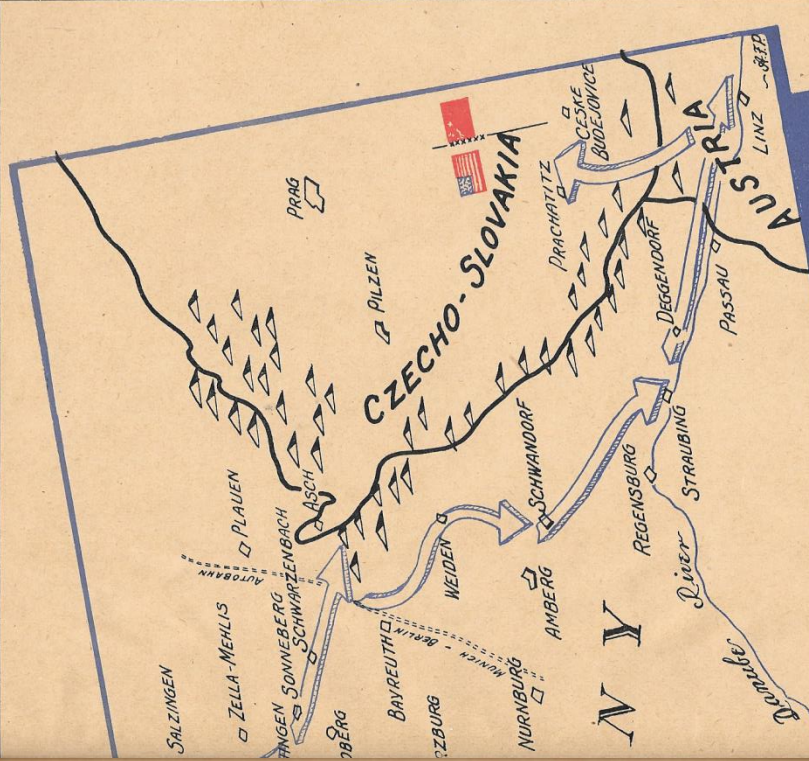
The map on the following page shows the route of the division which I followed. (*from: 26th Infantry Division History World War II, pages 38-39*)



Campanella

RHINELAND

SAAR 6 MAR 45 - 24 MAR 45



Campanella

CENTRAL EUROPE

24 MAR 45 - 8 MAY 45

One day, four of us were in a jeep on a narrow curved city street with a high wall on the outside of the curve. We met a tank coming at a fairly fast speed from the other direction. Both the jeep and the tank slammed on the brakes. We stopped OK but the tank slide, went over the sidewalk and slammed into the wall. The problem was that there was a civilian on the sidewalk. I can still see him. He put his hands out to stop the tank. The tank crushed him against the wall and bounced a foot or more from the wall. The man fell onto the top of the tank's track, was carried to the front and dumped in front of the track and was partially run over by the tank. His heart had been crushed and stopped so there was no blood lost. I remember his arm. The skin was totally stripped from one of his arms and every muscle was visible, without being bloody. I was sorry for the poor man but the alternative would have been the tank would have run over us.

One day Major King, the commander of the MPs and his driver got lost and wound up well into German territory. They came to a town with several hundred German soldiers. The Germans had had enough of war and were ready to surrender. So Major King, single handedly "captured" several hundred Germans and was awarded the Silver Star.

And another story involving Major King: While in Germany there were strict orders against fraternizing with the enemy. As I recall if you were caught, it was a \$300 fine (which was several months pay). In one city the chow line was outside of a German house with a couple of attractive young women. Each morning, while we were in line and it was still dark, the women arranged it so they got undressed and then dressed in front of a light with their silhouettes projected on a thin curtain.

The story goes that one night a private went to the house and soon there was a knock on the door and a sergeant was there. The private quickly slipped out the back door. Soon there was a knock on the door and a lieutenant was there. The sergeant quickly slipped out the back door, and again there was a knock on the door and Major King was there. -- Whether it is true or not, it's a damn good story.

The Germans knew the consequences for an American caught fraternizing and the women used it. They would seduce a soldier and then claim that they had been raped. This became important for me in that, at one time a women said that she had been raped by an MP.

We were then in line-ups in groups of about ten for her to pick out who had raped her. She was to pick out possible suspects. Unfortunately she picked me from my group. I was then placed in another line-up and she didn't pick me, she picked someone else. She finally picked out another individual who, fortunately, had not been in that town at the time of the alleged rape. So I guess that is another "What If".

The following story needs some background. Selected prisoners were interrogated by two individuals who were Jews who grew up in Germany and then moved to United States. So they knew German as well as English. They worked about the same distance from the

front as I did, so I saw them often. There was also a rather cocky Sergeant, who was a typical Italian, who I also saw frequently in the same general area. As I recall we often ate at the same kitchen. The Sergeant was in the infantry and every other night he went on patrols through the front and behind the German front line to collect information. He collected information such as gun positions, command post locations and anything else of value. He thought he was very good on patrols and avoided detection by the Germans. By going on patrols, he got two days off, had good food, and a good place to sleep. That was far better than fighting on the front and he was gathering valuable information. One day he walked into a room where a newly captured prisoner was being interrogated and the prisoner pointed at him. He saw it and asked the interrogators what the German had said. The answer was that the prisoner had seen the Sergeant last night, while he was on patrol, and he had been close enough that he could now recognize him. That really shook up the Sergeant. I do not know if he continued on patrols.



Interrogator

I was involved in both the handling of POWs and directing traffic. One day I was on traffic duty when a Jeep with a driver and a Colonel drove by. The thing that got my attention was that on the front of the jeep was painted "Pawnee City, Nebr." I later saw that jeep several times. One day I finally stopped it and it turned out that the driver was Eldon Blume. I knew who he was from High School but he was two or three years ahead of me. I wrote home that I had seen him and it made the local newspaper.

One day four of us were sent to a town that had not yet been occupied by Americans to check on a bridge to see if explosives had been placed on the bridge to destroy it. So we were the first Americans to enter that town. A few people were out and looked at us in amazement. I felt some tension but nothing happened. We found no explosives.

One afternoon I was on traffic duty at an intersection in a town that had been taken that morning. I was there primarily to give information as to what unit had gone in which direction. Signal Corp individuals were also in the town stringing communication wires. But my story is, soon a jeep entered the town and ordered everyone off the street and out of sight. Then a vehicle arrived with a movie camera running taking a movie of the

Great General Patton on a halftrack while he was manning a 50 caliber machine gun. No doubt that was the newsreel at the beginning of movies all across America.

Most of the small towns in central Germany that we went through displayed white flags or white sheets hanging from second floor windows and had no damage. Apparently the Americans had got the message out on German radio, to put out white surrender indications. But we entered one town that was heavily damaged, even though the white sheets were displayed. It turned out that, as the lead American tank entered the town, it was hit by a shell fired point blank by a German tank that was hidden behind a building at the first intersection. The members of the American tank crew were killed. The Americans following pulled back about half a mile and waited for lots of artillery guns to catch up. A very heavy artillery shelling then destroyed the town. I'm sure that every town further on got the message.

One night four of my fellow MPs were sleeping in a double bed on the second floor of a small house. The head board was against the north outside wall of the house. In the middle of the night a German plane came to attack the town but was hit with anti-aircraft fire and crashed into the house at about a 20 degree angle. It neatly sliced off the top of the house from east to west about four feet above the east edge of the bed and two feet at the west edge. The individuals experienced a tremendous crash and then a clear sky above them. Had the plane been just a few feet lower they would all have been killed. I saw it the next morning. At the time I was in the same town but at a different location.

As we advanced through Germany we took thousands of prisoners and it was difficult to get trucks to ship them back from Division to Corp. At one time we had several thousand prisoners in each of two towns and only trucks for one town. A division of SS troops had been bypassed and it was feared that they would attempt to recapture the German prisoners. The decision was to not let that happen. I was in one of the towns and for much of the day I had been carrying water for the very thirsty prisoners. The decision was made to use the trucks for the other town and I was told to go there to help load the prisoners. I had my things on the Jeep ready to go and for some reason I was told to stay in this town and another MP, Quigley, went in my place. Believe it or not, the plan was to ship the prisoners in the other town out and if the SS attacked the town I was in, the prisoners were to be killed to prevent capture. Several 50 caliber machine guns were placed on two sides of the building. And what happened?

In the other town they had all the prisoners in trucks and were about to leave. One of the MP Sergeants was talking to a German Lieutenant who spoke English, when a convoy of trucks loaded with German soldiers came by. The Lieutenant said, "Sergeant, those are not prisoners."

Half of the SS troops stayed on one side of the town and the other half went through the town and circled it. There were 10 or 12 MPs and about 20 signal corp troops in the town. They put up a good fight but were soon overwhelmed. Quigley, the man who

replaced me, was shot and killed. A few of the signal corps were killed but no other MP was injured.

There were several interesting events in the fighting and soon after. One of the MPs was in a shed firing away and one of the prisoners was behind him. The prisoner had gotten a stick, tied a white handkerchief to it and was poking the MP to get him to surrender.

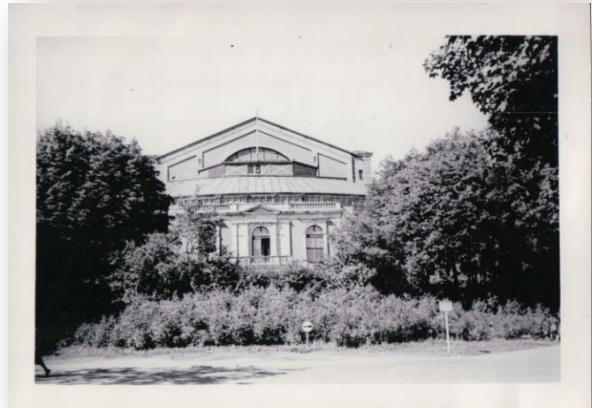
The truck drivers were all Black. After the fighting was over, the first thing that the SS did was take the Black drivers to a field and kill them.

Two of the MPs were hiding up in the hay loft of a barn. They heard the shots when the drivers were killed and assumed that all the Americans were killed. They heard a German climbing the ladder to the hay loft. One said, "At least I'm going to take one of them with me." When the German's head appeared he pulled the trigger and nothing happened. The round was a dud and did not go off. The German did not see or hear them and went back down the ladder.

It turned out that one of the SS was born and raised in Chicago, only a few blocks from one of the MP's home, and they had an extensive conversation.

We had two German nurses as prisoners for some time because Corp would not take them. The SS asked them how they had been treated. Fortunately they had been treated well and they said so. If they had not been treated well all of the MPs would have been shot. Then the SS placed all of the Americans in a basement, told them to stay there for some time and left and took the remaining German prisoners with them.

What if the SS had attacked the town I was in? The massacre of a thousand prisoners certainly would have been a war crime and the SS would not have treated us kindly.



Bayreuth

The city of Bayreuth was heavily damaged from air raids, but Wagner's opera house was completely undamaged. Apparently some American General directing the air raids was a Wagner fan. *(Right and above: pictures Gaylord took of the Wagner Opera House in Bayreuth after the war was over.)*



Nurnberg

Nurnberg was very damaged. I saw no undamaged building.

Passau and the Danube

I was impressed to see the Danube and somewhat surprised that it was dark and muddy. It was not a "beautiful stream so clear and blue."

The first large POW Camp near the end of the war was located near Eigen, Germany. In choosing a site for a POW Camp it is desirable that it be near a stream as a source of water. The site near Eigen, was a flat meadow within the curve of a river. The site seemed to be ideal. Then it started to rain and the meadow became a swamp. There was a fairly dense wood near one end of the meadow and we allowed the prisoners to go into the woods to get branches to put under their bedrolls so they wouldn't be on the soggy ground.

Eigen POW Camp



At one time, I was about 50 yards into the woods while branches were being gathered. Then one prisoner came into the woods carrying his pack, bent over, sneaking along. If he had been walking upright, I possibly would not have noticed him. Bent over and sneaking it was obvious that he was trying to escape. He walked by me without seeing me. I followed him for a little while and then yelled, "Halt!" I had my rifle pointed at him. He turned around, fell on his knees and begged for his life. With some English, he said that he had a wife and three children.

I told him to get up and started taking him back towards the meadow. At that point I realized that I didn't have a round in my rifle chamber. I pulled the bolt back, let it slam forward, placing the cartridge in the chamber. He again went on his knees and begged for his life.

I then took him to the Sgt in charge of the camp. From what happened to him next I wish that I had just taken him back to the meadow or even let him escape. As it turned out, the Sgt and a group of other MPs were fairly drunk and they decided to have fun with him. They assembled "court marshal judges" which found him "guilty" and sentenced him to death by firing squad. They blind-folded him and removed all of his clothes, stood him up and then gave marching orders to 'firing squad:' "Squad, halt! Right face. Ready. Aim. Fire."

There was no "fire" but the prisoner fell to the ground, followed by laughter of the drunken group. The prisoner was then returned to the meadow. Again, I wish I had just taken him back to the meadow.

At this same camp, another MP and I had a pup tent on a sloping area a short distance from the meadow. I very carefully dug a trench around the upper edge of the tent to divert water from our tent. However in the middle of the night our beds became soaked. It turned out that there was a mole hole that came up right under the middle of the tent and water was coming up through the hole. It continued to rain the next day and our beds were wet for two or three nights. At right is a picture of the tent.



POW CAMP IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA - May 6 to about mid-July 1945

I very clearly remember walking over the Danube Bridge at Passau, but I do not remember our route from Passau. I found the following in Wikipedia concerning the 26th Division:

“Moving southeast into Austria, the division assisted in the capture of Linz, 5 May. The division then changed the direction of its advance and was moving northeast into Czechoslovakia, across the Vlatava River, then the cease-fire order was received on May 8th, one day after the surrender was signed. One day later, the division overran the Gusen concentration camp in conjunction with the 11th Armored Division, liberating it from German forces. There, it discovered that the Germans had used forced labor to carve out an elaborate tunnel system with underground aircraft production facilities. SS officers at the camp allegedly planned to demolish the tunnels with the prisoners inside, but the movement of the 26th Infantry and the 11 Armored Divisions prevented this.”

I knew nothing about that camp, because at least many of the MPs, including me, had moved to a Prisoner of War (POW) camp that was being prepared for the thousands of expected surrendering Germans. “

The following is the opening paragraph of 26TH INFANTRY DIVISION HISTORY WORLD WAR II, which was written, printed and distributed by and to the division while we were in Linz, Austria. The book is 7.5 x 10 inches with 44 pages.

“The German General looked on stiffly as his men marched along the road that led to the Prisoner of War Cage. Once, these men had fought in Russia and in France. Once they had been nicknamed the "Ghost Division," because of their manner of appearing unexpectedly anywhere along the western front. Once they had earned the respect of men of war everywhere. Now, on 7 May 1945, the tattered remnants - 5,000 men of the 11th Panzer Division - were surrendering to the Yankee Division.

It was a strange and ironical coincidence. In its first engagement seven months ago, the 26th Infantry Division killed and captured soldiers of the 11th Panzer Division. Now almost a thousand miles east of the battlefield in Lorraine, the same enemy division was surrendering en masse to its now victorious opponents. "I am honored to surrender to a division famous throughout Germany," said the Commander, Lieutenant General Edgar Freiherr Treusch Von Buttlar-Brandenfeld.”

It is quite likely that it was shrapnel from a 11th Panzer 88 mm shell that hit me on November 11, 1944.

I found the entire book online with a note at the end stating the above mentioned German General was the assistant commander, not the commander of the 11th Panzer Division. Part of the Division, with the assistant commander, got separated from the main part of the Division. The larger part the 11th Panzer Division with 9,500 men surrendered to a unit of the American 90th Division. The separated group of 5000 surrendered to us. Nevertheless, we received thousands of 11th Panzer troops at our POW camp in Eigen, Germany.

Right: Gaylord in front of his tent.

Below: And a Self Portrait taken in Friedberg



The second camp at Friedberg was approximately square and about a quarter of a mile on each side. A tall fence was on the north and south edges and a good sized river on the west (which I assume was the Vlatava River,) and a road along the east edge. There was a small town about a mile northwest of the camp. It was probably Freidberg, in letters that I sent

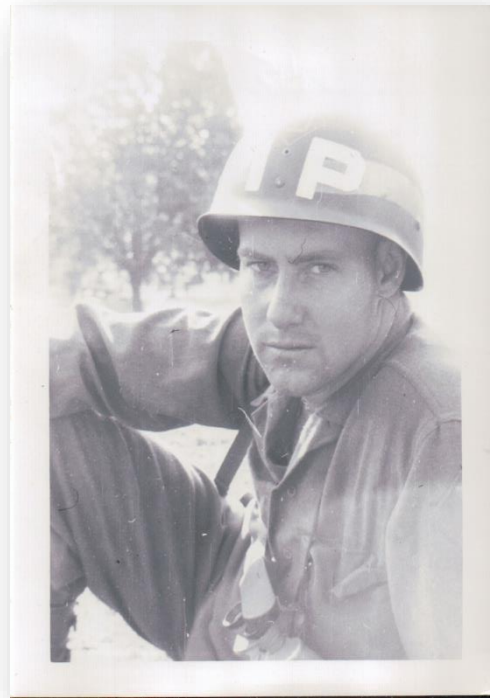
home, dated June 7 and 17 said I was at a POW camp in Freidberg.



There was a house on the east side of the road used for processing the prisoners. They were gradually released and walked from the camp to the town. Several had been wounded and left on crutches. It was a long trip to go on crutches.

We MPs and the processing personnel lived in a row of tents east of the road. As I remember there were 8 or ten tents.

Pictures of Gaylord in Friedberg



There is not a lot to write about related to the POW camp, but there are two things that I remember. There was an inter-fenced area with the fanatical SS prisoners. Most were officers. They were being held for possible war crime trials. The main thing I remember is that they sang the then popular American cowboy song, "Don't Fence Me In" (sung by, among others, Roy Rogers and Bing Crosby) If you are not familiar with song, it contains the following:

*Oh give me land lots of land
Under starry skies above.
Don't fence me in!
Let me ride
Through the wide
Open country that I love
Don't fence me in!
Let me be by myself
In the evening breeze
Listen to the murmur
Of the cottonwood trees
Send me off forever
But I ask you please
Don't fence me in!*

However, one of my letters indicated that I read this in "Stars and Stripes", so it could be that I do not actually remember that song being sung at our PW camp. But it is a good story.

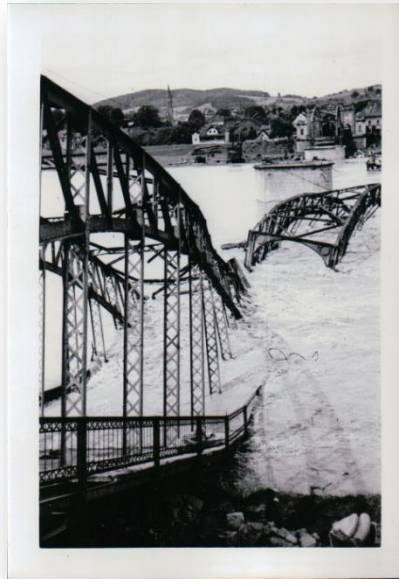
One thing I do remember well is that it turned out that two of the prisoners were swimming over the river every morning and going to a nearby farm house for breakfast, and swimming back before it got light. After that was discovered we had to patrol along the river at night.

The prisoners were being released in increasingly greater numbers and about the first of July another unit took over the camp and we went to Linz, Austria.

Linz Austria

The Danube ran through Linz and we were in the larger part of the city, and the Russians were on the other side of the river. There was one bridge across the river that survived the war (see picture of Gaylord at right with the one intact bridge in the distance) and many Americans, MPs and others, crossed that bridge to trade with the Russians. There were lots of stories about those encounters.

Right: Damaged bridges



One I remember well. It may or may not be true. An American and a Russian were trying to negotiate a trade and they got into an argument. A Russian officer arrived and engaged in a conversation with them. The Russian said something that angered the officer and he pulled out his pistol and shot and killed the Russian soldier. He then apologized to the American who quickly retreated to the American side of the river.

There was a lot of black market trading across the river and our MPs patrolled the river in boats in an attempt to catch the small boats crossing the river. I was never assigned to one of those patrols. One night a patrol intercepted a small row boat crossing the river with some Russian soldiers. They stopped the boat and those in the boat pointed to the shore on the Russian side. There they saw two machine guns pointed at them so no arrest was made.

I was only on the Russians side of the River once. We received information from the Russians that the body of an American soldier was found in the river. I was taken over to guard the body while arrangements were made to pick it up. I was there for about two hours. Several curious Russians came around to see what was going on, and I was fairly nervous. It turned out that the American had been on a Danube River cruise and apparently fell overboard without being noticed. His wallet had photographs of his wife and five kids at home.

Many times I was assigned as a guard at an officer's billet. One night I was on duty from 6 to 10 PM. About 8 PM a Captain arrived in a jeep along with a Lieutenant female nurse. For the next two hours while I was on duty, there was giggling and laughter coming from one room after another. At 10 PM my replacement arrived and I told him what was going on. He later told me that at about 11 PM the Captain and the Lieutenant came out. She was carrying a box full of candy bars. She walked up to the MP, poked him in the chest, and said, "MP, see these candy bars? I earned every one of them." (A candy bar was often the price of sex.)

I think I was in Linz on August 15, 1945 when the war in the Pacific ended. Shortly after that the 26th went home. There was a point system to determine who went home with the Division. Points were given depending on months of service, awards, family dependents and other things. For example I received 5 points each for my Purple Heart, my Combat Infantry Badge, and each of 3 Battle Stars. I had a total of 59 points. Everyone with 60 or more went home with the Division. What a disappointment. The rest of us were transferred to the 84th Infantry Division. I was assigned to the 333rd Regimental MP Platoon.

Things were considerably different than in the 26th. In the 26th, our commander was Major King, and his attitude was that we were there to serve the Infantry, not to make trouble for them. We were to make an arrest only if an individual was unreasonable and asking for it. I more or less made one arrest; a soldier had deserted and then found himself hungry with no place to go so he turned himself in to the first MP that he found, which happened to be me.

In the 84th, we were there to serve in traffic duty and routine guard duty but also to enforce uniform codes and the like. It never happened to me, but some, while on duty in a town were given a quota of arrests to be made.

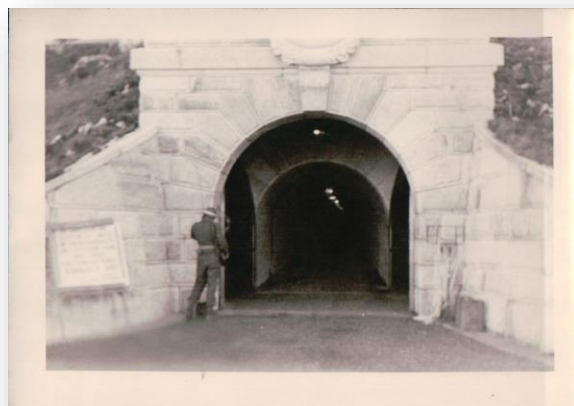
One day I was on town patrol in a Jeep with an Infantry driver. There were a large number of soldiers milling around with no problems. Then we came to the town square with a large fountain in the center. A soldier who had had too much to drink was asleep on a bench beside the fountain. He wasn't causing any trouble but it was not good. I woke him up, and he definitely had had too much to drink. I found out what outfit he belonged to and we got him in the jeep and took him home. I didn't arrest him or even get his name. That would have been fine in the 26th Division, but not in the 84th.

The next day the Regiment was moving from that town and I was directing traffic. A jeep stopped with a driver and a Lieutenant. The Lieutenant asked where was the Commanding Officer of the MPs. I told him that he was in the convoy well ahead, and could I help him. He said that the day before the Regimental Commander had seen an MP bring a soldier back to the area and he, the Lieutenant, had been sent to get the arrest dropped so it would not appear as a bad mark against the Regiment. I told him that I was that MP and that the soldier had caused no trouble, he simple had too much to drink and we took him back to his area. Maybe that was my last lucky "What If". I don't know what would have happened to me if my commanding officer learned that I had failed to make an arrest.

The 84th remained in Austria until late November. I think I was in Linz most of the time but I was in a small town of Ried for a while, which was west of Linz, and also in Braunau which is on the border with Germany. Hitler was born in Braunau. *Here is a picture of the house to the right.*



The war was over and we went on a couple of tourist trips. A group went to Pilsner, Czechoslovakia, and I had beer at the famous brewery. A fairly large group took a train to Berchtesgaden to see Hitler's vacation



retreat. We went into a long tunnel into the mountain and then up a considerable distance in an elevator. It was a very lavish place with an outstanding view of the surrounding mountains. Hitler's Retreat in the Mountains: The Eagles Nest (Birchesgarten)



*Clockwise from right:
Birchesgarten,
Standing on the
viewing porch,
looking out the
huge picture
window, the
living room
where Hitler, his
secretaries and
staff spent the
evening, Gaylord in the golden
elevator*

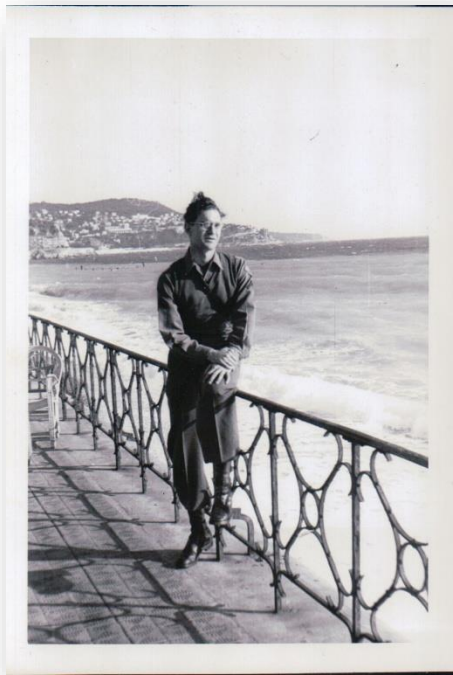
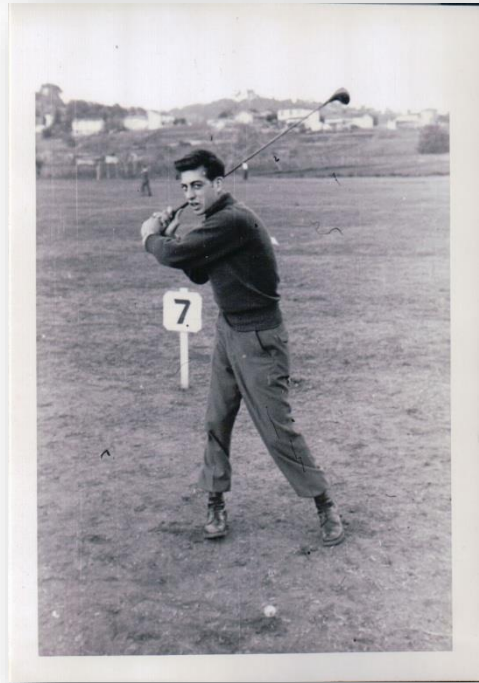
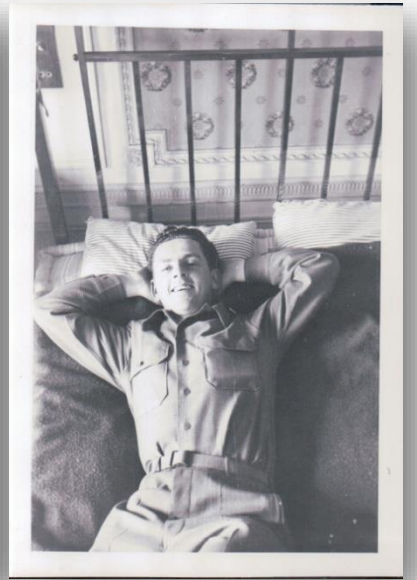
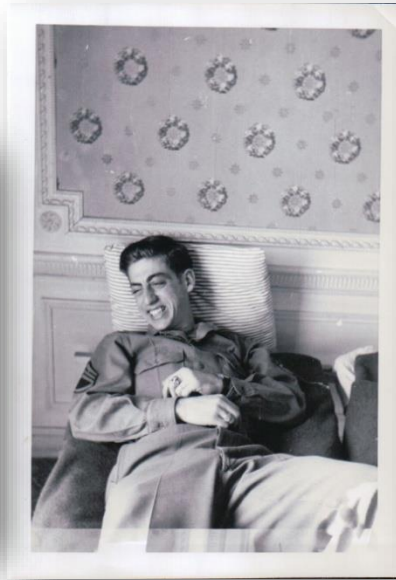


On the way back to Linz we were scheduled to stop in Salzburg, where we had reserved seats near the stage in a theater for a performance by the New York Rockettes. Unfortunately, we had a bunch of jokers on the train. There was rope overhead along the length of the passenger cars which was an emergency brake for the train. That rope was pulled several times in the short distance from Berchtesgaden to Salzburg and our reserved seats were long gone by the time we got there.

In mid-November four of us were give passes to go to the Riviera at Nice, France for a week. *(See pictures below)* We took a long train ride to Nice and had a very good time. We played on the beach, rented bicycles and went for long rides on the road along the Mediterranean. At nights, we along with hundreds of other soldiers milled around going from bar to bar. And everywhere there were prostitutes working the streets. We were



approached by ten or twelve for every block. It was unbelievable. They were crude, often drunk, and had little or no appeal. One night we were walking back to our hotel, and were, well away from the beach and bars, and nearly on an empty street. There was an attractive young woman standing at the bottom a flight of stairs, and as we approached she said, "Would you like to come up to my apartment?" Shortly thereafter, in some way, three of us got separated from Ellsworth, the fourth member of our group. We speculated that Ellsworth had decided to go up to her apartment. However, when we got back to our hotel room, Ellsworth was already there.





When we arrived back to our unit in Austria, the Division was ready to leave Austria and go to near Mannheim, Germany. I think we left the next day. Again we were in the same type of "40 or 8" box cars that we were in crossing France. Duty was light near Mannheim but on December 9, 1945, I was on traffic duty at an intersection south of the city when a convoy of siren-screaming vehicles, including an ambulance, went by at a very high speed. I soon learned that the ambulance was carrying General Patton. Patton was going on a one day hunting trip before returning to The States to be welcomed as a hero. Patton had been in the back right seat of a Cadillac when his driver made a left turn and was hit by an approaching army truck. Patton's condition was THE news in the army and in the US. The Army flew a specialist doctor along with Patton's wife over from the US. Patton's wife made a memorable statement when she arrived in Germany. She said, "George will be alright, he has been through these things before."

Shortly before we left Austria I again had gone on sick call because of my decayed tooth. It was now fourteen months since I first noticed the cavity. I was told that all of the dental equipment had been packed and I could not be treated. I again went on sick call on December 21, 1945. The dentist also said his equipment was packed, but he said that the tooth needed attention, **now**. He scheduled me to go to the 130th Army Field Hospital in Heidelberg, and told me not to let them put me off.

The ride to Heidelberg was memorable. There were about ten of us, I, because of my tooth, the others because of venereal disease. That was the first day that anyone with

venereal disease **COULD NOT** return home with the division. There were two or three young “one timers” who were scared to death about their families back home finding out why they were not coming home with the division, and there was one old regular army man telling everyone that it was no big deal. He had had syphilis back in '36, before penicillin, and described in detail what he had to go through.

We arrived at the Hospital and I was directed to the dental area where several others and I were seated in a hall waiting to be called in for treatment. I was examined by a Captain and for some reason sent back to the hall. Finally I was the only one left. The Captain came out and said “You’re still here? Come on in.” He gave me a shot of Novocain and started drilling. It was now past his quitting time and he obviously wanted to leave. He finally said that he could not save the tooth and prepared to pull it. I think he thought it would be faster to pull it than fill it. So he tried to pull it but he had drilled out most of the tooth and it broke off rather than coming out. He worked for a considerable time and his arm was getting very tired. Finally a Major came in and wanted to know what was going on. He then took over, got a chisel and hammer and spit the tooth and pulled the three roots one at a time.

I had had several shots of Novocain and possibly had a reaction from it. That night and the next day I had a high fever and shook uncontrollably. They allowed me to stay in bed all day. I soon learned that General Patton, also in the same hospital, died about the time that I lost my tooth. Finally, I felt good about someone who had died.

No doubt Patton was a good army tactician, but it was generally understood that he considered a soldier no different than other Government issued military items. We were expendable items that could be replaced. He always wanted to outdo other Generals at whatever the cost. That didn’t endear him to those of us in the Third army.

The following is one of his quotes, and another that it was believed he said.

“It is foolish and wrong to mourn the men who died. Rather we should thank god that such men lived.” That statement defines Patton. So, apparently, wives, parents and other family members should not mourn the death of a soldier.

True or not, it was generally believed that Patton also said “I will get to Berlin if it takes a truck load of dog tags.” (Each soldier wore a necklace with one dog tag on it, and with another dog tag on a short chain loop also on the necklace. If a soldier was killed, the dog tag on the necklace remained with the body and the one on the short loop would be removed and in this case put in “Patton’s truck.”)

Soon after that, we left Germany for Le Havre France to wait for a ship to take us home. While I was in Austria, I decided to go to the University of Nebraska on the GI Bill when I got out. Wilma was already at Nebraska and I learned from her that registration for the second semester would be during the last week of January. Would I make it in time? We

arrived in Le Havre about the first of January and I thought there was a good chance that I would. The days went by and I lost hope of getting home in time.

There was a bulletin board with information about when units would ship out. Several outfits that had arrived at Le Havre after we did were boarded on ships while we were still waiting. Finally our turn arrived on January 15th. We boarded the George Washington, a large Army troop ship.

Going Home: A Poignant Story in Black and White



Clockwise from upper left

40x8s loading up.

40x8 Gaylord traveled in

Gaylord, ready to go home!



Clockwise from top left:

Everyone waiting

Truck to the ship

Long line – see ship in distance

Closer!

Picture Gaylord took from the ship as others load up



There had been strong storms off the coast of Le Havre and many of the smaller ships that had left Le Havre earlier were still anchored in the harbor waiting for better weather.

We arrived in New York Sunday, January 20. Dan was now stationed in New York and he came on the ship and met me before we got off.

I was soon on a train to Leavenworth. I arrived in Leavenworth on January 23rd or 24th. I was interviewed for information for preparing my discharge by a person by the name of Flory from Pawnee City. His father owned and published the local newspaper. He was a couple of years behind me in school. He knew of my army experience. It was an interesting coincidence.

I was discharged mid-afternoon, Saturday January 26th. I was given money for a train trip which would take me to Omaha, where I would wait for a train to Lincoln then transfer to a train to Table Rock, 8 miles from Pawnee City. I decided that hitch hiking would be faster. I soon got a ride to the Leavenworth prison, but then there was no traffic for about an hour and I decided that maybe I had made a mistake. However I then got a ride for several miles. Because of the shortage of gasoline and tires, there was very little traffic. But from Leavenworth to Pawnee City, no car passed me without picking me up. Most rides were short. My last ride was with Jesse Korber, a local that I knew. He wanted to play a trick on my parents. He wanted to go to my house and tell my parents that a soldier had been stranded in the town for the night and didn't they have a room where he could spend the night? I wanted no part of it, so he took me to the house and I arrived to the surprise of my parents, Saturday night at about 10 PM.

I went to church the next morning, met a classmate, Dave Barker, who said that he was staying at a boarding house in Lincoln and there was room for one more. So I went with Dave to Lincoln Sunday afternoon, less than 24 hours after arriving home. I registered at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln on Monday and soon started classes.

Army of the United States



Honorable Discharge

This is to certify that

GAYLORD E. ATKINSON, 37 481 661, Private First Class

333d Infantry

Army of the United States

is hereby Honorably Discharged from the military service of the United States of America.

This certificate is awarded as a testimonial of Honest and Faithful Service to this country.

Given at SEPARATION CENTER
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

Date 26 January 1946

STATE OF NEBRASKA } Filed for record in the
Lancaster County } SS. Clerk's office at Lincoln
in said County, the 1st day of Feb., 1946.
at 2 o'clock P. M., and returned in World's War
Discharge Record No. 12 at Page 517.

J. Morgan
County Clerk Deputy

Charles A. Rogers

CHARLES A. ROGERS
Major, AC

The
End!