

**MEMOIRS OF RAYMOND E. KITCHELL  
DURING WORLD WAR II**

FAMILY EDITION



**December 2000**

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## MEMOIRS OF A YOUNG PRIVATE

A personal history of World War II

Written at age 76 by

**Raymond E. Kitchell**

**September 2000**

### [Prelude]

Of the almost 40 months I spent in the US Army during World War II, only a bit more than two months was spent in actual combat in the ETO. This fact and the divine intervention of fate prevented me from becoming the hero I dreamed to be when I volunteered for duty in 1942, and perhaps being killed or maimed in the process. While I saw enough to earn two combat stars, this is not a story of personal combat and bravery. Rather it is a tale, typical or otherwise I do not profess to know, of the trials and tribulations, hardships and achievements, challenges and mistakes, good times and bad, that one young soldier experienced during his service during the tumultuous period of the Second World War and its end.

Years ago, I prepared a much smaller version of this story for my grandchildren in the hope that it would help them remember their heritage and their grandfather. Recently I have been involved almost full time in designing and preparing, with the assistance of my son Mark, a website for my old outfit, the 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.<sup>1</sup> This caused me to review our history in detail, which brought back many memories. With that work now completed, it seemed appropriate and timely for me to write this story. While I hope my wife, children and grandchildren will value this story, at this stage of the twilight of surviving veterans it is also prepared to be of some interest to a wider audience. I hope such readers may find it of value or interest.

### Pearl Harbor

It was a nice Sunday day, December 7, 1941. I was in my room in our apartment at 6 South Park Ave. in Rockville Centre, NY, listening to the *Make Believe Ballroom*, a NYC station specializing in swing and jazz music. A typical activity for a 17-year-old senior in high school. My mother and grandparents were talking in the living room. Suddenly, the music was interrupted by a special announcement—**The Japanese have just bombed Pearl Harbor.** The excitement and rampant rumors over the next few days was contagious, e.g., the Germans were going to bomb New York, Japanese invasion of Hawaii was underway, sabotage by Japanese-Americans was eminent, etc. We poured into one of our buddy's car to go out to Mitchell Field and watch the action. Of course,

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<sup>1</sup> This site may be viewed using our URL address of [www.89infdivww2.org](http://www.89infdivww2.org) to go online. I encourage you to take a look.

we didn't get any nearer than the entrance. Thus began one of the most important phases of my life and, indeed, determined almost everything that followed. My purpose here is to record my experience for the benefit of my children and their children, and anyone else interested in a personal description of this most exciting, dramatic, destructive and disruptive period in 20<sup>th</sup> century history. For the past year and a half, I have been collecting, summarizing, editing, scanning and writing material for use in the website of the 89th Infantry Division, an inspiration of my son, which has awakened many old memories which I wish to record before my memory also fades. So here goes.

### Pre-enlistment

In the spring, along with my best buddy Emil Eilertsen and other friends, I signed on for an after-class course offered by Oceanside High School (nearby) and sponsored by Sperry Gyroscope<sup>2</sup>. We learned basic shop operations and, if we passed, would be offered an apprenticeship job by Sperry at their new factory in Lake Success<sup>3</sup> when we graduated. Most of us, at least Emil and I, didn't think we would end up in Sperry because we planned to enlist as soon as we graduated from Southside High School in June, both of us by then having reached the age of 18. We decided to enlist together in the Marines and in May, just prior to graduation, visited the recruiting center in New York and took a physical. Emil passed and signed-up but I was rejected because of near-sightedness. The Recruiting Sargent, seriously, told me to go home and eat a lot of carrots and come back in three months and take another eye examination. Subsequent attempts by me to enlist in the Navy, Army Air Corp and the Army itself met a similar fate and I was distraught. The Army told me that the *only way* I could get in the service was to volunteer for the draft but they were only drafting 19-year-olds at the time.

Well, we graduated with all the fun, ceremony, proms, etc., and waited. Within a month, the guys in my shop group all started to work at Sperry, mostly on the graveyard and swing shifts, of course. We learned how to operate and eventually setup lathes and other machines and soon gained the basic skills necessary to produce gyroscope and Norton bombsight parts. As a volunteer fireman, in the daytime I waited for the alarm to ring for some excitement. In a month or so Emil got his orders and when he and his Dad came over to our place to say goodbye, I choked with emotion and couldn't hold back the tears. It was the first inclination I had that war wouldn't be all fun and games.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> After my Grandfather McIntosh died one year before I was born in 1924, my Grandmother soon found herself without funds and needing to work. Her first job was as a practical nurse, or "nanny" as she was called, to the children of the Sperry family living in New Jersey. It also explains while for all her life, I referred to her lovingly as "Nanny".

<sup>3</sup> Another coincidence: The very factory I worked in between graduation and induction became the first location of the United Nations Secretariat pending construction of their headquarters in NYC.

<sup>4</sup> Emil was a tail gunner in the VMF, Marines Air, and had a rough time in the Pacific. I think his experience dogged him throughout his adult life.



**Emil Eilertsen, Faith Austin, me, and Artie Mendelsohn  
My Best Buddies and first date  
On Graduation Day**

In November 1942, Congress lowered the draft age to 18 and I immediately “volunteered”. In what I soon learned was typical military style, my draft board and the Army collaborated so they could get me drafted just before Christmas, which they did. First, I was called by the Army for an entry physical examination, which took place in the vast expanse of the Grand Central Railroad Station in NYC. What a sight, thousands of half naked men going to various examination stations up and down aisles like cattle. One aisle had a series of little cubicles for privacy during a psychiatric examination. After hitting my knee with a hammer and observing that I wasn’t a complete idiot, the examining psychiatrist asked me if I like boys? I said sure. Then he asked if I like girls and if I had sexual relations to which I answered yes and no, respectively. With a somewhat startled look, he checked my form, noted my age and gave me a big smile while patting my knee. I was, of course, one of the first 18 year-old “draftees” to go through Grand Central and, presumably, one of the few celibates he had seen. I always wished I could have had my army exit exam from the same guy. Needless to say, I passed but for “limited service” and received my “greetings” and orders to report about five days before Christmas, much to my mother’s dismay but I was anxious to get in and be a soldier.

Camp Upton

On December 22, with my weeping and family to see me off, my fellow draft board selectees and I boarded a Long Island RR train for the Camp Upton Induction Center located in Yaphank near the end of the Island. There we were given uniforms, shots, assigned to barracks and, of course, which became one of my favorite occupations, to KP (kitchen police) duty in a mess hall that fed thousands at a time. I can vividly remember on Christmas Eve singing “Silent Night” and “I’ll Be Home for Christmas” into the two-way barrack speaker (I had a

pretty good voice in those days) as we tried to entertain ourselves. I was homesick already but the excitement of it all overcame everything, not like future holidays away from home wondering if you would ever get there again. We got the usual processing including: issuance of uniforms (anything close to your size was a bonanza); films on "Why We Fight" and the horrors of venereal diseases; some rudimentary basic instruction in military courtesy (meaning how and when to salute officers); intelligence and aptitude tests (usually given when you were exhausted); injections; and what have you. Usually a new draftee was out of Camp Upton in a few days and off for basic training as part of preparation for a pre-determined branch (infantry, artillery, etc.) or a unit assignment. However, those of us freaks classified as "limited service" stayed almost two weeks while they collected a sufficient number for "branch immaterial" basic training. We were given an MOS (I think that stood for Military Occupation Status code) of basic/generalist. This implied that one could do low-level, routine and manual work and little more (this designation as a non-entity was to haunt me for the rest of my military days because someone was too lazy to change it and I didn't understand then the importance of career codes). Then, again in typical Army style, we were assigned for branch immaterial basis training *clear across the country* in California.

### Camp Roberts

We boarded the train in Camp Upton and were loaded aboard ancient passenger cars but any discomfort was allayed by the excitement and anticipation. For some of us, it was to be our first opportunity to see a wide swath of the United States and to begin the adventure that we envisioned awaiting us. For others, it meant being away from home, family and even wives for the first time so the excitement that was running through me was not necessarily universally shared, to say the least. There were many, older and mature businessmen, husbands, workers, etc., and perhaps even some unlucky fathers, who were not in any happy mood but bearing up nevertheless. I remember, as we chugged away west of Chicago, seeing the Utah desert, going along the Royal George, passing by Boulder and Pueblo, Colorado and the home of the (then unknown to me) 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and on into northern California – beautiful country. We were headed for Camp Roberts, an artillery-training base located near the Pacific Coast midway between Santa Barbara and San Francisco near Lompoc and Paso Robles. If my memory is correct, we arrived in the middle of the night and were immediately given a short arm inspection (this refers to the process of requiring a soldier to expose himself and strip his penis while an officer watches to see if there is any secretion due to a venereal disease). This became a routine drill in the army, usually performed at the most inconvenient times and inhospitable places but then, boys will be boys, especially when pent up for weeks and months at a time. I had yet to experience this type of desperation.

Basic training was normally for three months but it was only two months for us misfits, and that's what most of us soon began to feel like. Essentially, it was a slightly truncated artillery basic course covering almost everything: i.e., learning



the manual of arms; how to march and hike; salute; shoot a rifle, strip and care for it; use a bayonet and throw a hand grenade; roll a backpack; do guard duty; learn the Articles of War; and, above all, memorize your Army Serial Number (ASN) which was more important than your name (I can still remember it—32684995). All in all, to me it was fun; including one or two visits to town. [It should be noted that my Private's monthly salary of \$50 was reduced by one-third when I selected a matching allotment for my mother. This severely limited my recreational activities while in the States.] One interesting note: At that time, there was very popular movie star named Van Heflin (can't remember his first name). He had taken ROTC in college and found himself at Camp Roberts with us as our platoon leader. He was very nice guy and you don't say that much about 2<sup>nd</sup> Louies. During our training his latest picture came out which was highly acclaimed. He played President Johnson who succeeded Lincoln after his assassination and was almost impeached by a hostile Congress. He had a special showing of it arranged at the base theater and took the whole Battery. It was strange watching him on screen as he sat just in front of me. After the show, we retired to the mess hall for a raucous beer party. I didn't yet drink/like beer.

While our basic training wasn't far from the normal training given, our make-up was. Under the sweep of "limited service" were guys with short arms, a mangled hand, a defective foot, poor eyesight and, I'm sure, tiny brainpower. Most were nice guys and capable of carrying out normal functions; others were frustrated, nasty and downright mean. Some of them were undoubtedly malingerers. At least, the Army thought so and as we neared the end of basic, new and complete physical exams were required for everybody to screen them out. At this moment I



decided to try and take things into my own hands. I wanted to be a SOLDIER and in the fight! While waiting my turn, I memorized the eye chart. At the end of my physical, the examining medical officer commented on the remarkable improvement in my eyesight. I explained my desire to fight for my country and not be in an outfit with a bunch of misfits. He obviously admired my spirit as I was promptly reclassified 1-A.



**Now, A Real Soldier**

### The Mohave Dessert and Tank Destroyers

When basic training was completed, I got what I asked for and was assigned to the 775th Tank Destroyer Bn., on maneuvers in the Mohave Dessert. I left the train at Needles and was trucked out to Camp Ibis, a tent camp in the desert, to join my combat outfit. The TD patch was a tiger crunching a tank in its mouth, very dramatic and gung ho. The battalion was in training for desert warfare. The desert, particularly at sunrise and sunset, was beautiful but during the day it was extremely hot and dusty but bitter cold at night when you were on guard duty. It got so hot you couldn't touch the tanks, which is why we had two hours off every midday except when on field exercises. The Battalion had a Reconnaissance Company composed primarily of Harley-Davidson motorcycles and jeeps. For weeks, I worked in the motor pool with a promise I could learn to ride a bike, a boyhood dream. On my first maneuver, they gave me one and I quickly learned differently. The desert is full of potholes, stones, etc., making steering and balance very difficult, not to mention exhausting. When I returned, that career was abruptly scuttled. For the remainder of the two or three months we were in

the Mohave desert, I was assigned as a gunner on a destroyer and, glasses and all, was pretty good at it. It was fun, even when the dust from the tanks ahead of you made breathing almost impossible. I'll never forget how good even an ice-cold shower felt after being out on the desert for long periods.

While it had its discomforts, life wasn't that bad. My tank crew and Sergeant were tough but good guys, some of them from the coal-mining area of Pennsylvania, and there was a definite camaraderie in the group, which I enjoyed when accepted into the squad. One day I received a box or tin of marshmallow Easter chickies from my Aunt, which I always loved and still do, and shared them with my amused but nevertheless grateful comrades. I think I went into Needles once and that was enough. We did take a trip into Arizona on a weekend for a welcomed swim and, except of a very occasional movie in the field, but that was about it.



At the same time, the American invasion and deployment in North Africa was going on and superior German tanks were creating murderous havoc with our antiquated tank destroyers. At that time, our tank destroyers were halftrack vehicles with an old (World War I) 3 inch naval gun, mounted in the complete open, behind a shield of only a quarter inch of armor and with a gun traverse of only 90 degrees. They were, in effect death traps as was being proven in North Africa. After hearing stories and rumors of their devastation, I began having second thoughts about committing *outright suicide* for my country, but fate took a hand. I broke my only pair of GI eyeglasses and went to the Battalion MD to obtain a new pair. To my surprise, he checked my eyes but this time repeated what I actually saw which, without my glasses, is not much. He sent me off to the Army Hospital in Needles for an eye test, new glasses and reclassification back to "limited service". When I protested, although my conscious forbids me from describing it as vehement, he explained that as a gunner the life of my crew and others might well depend upon my eyesight. I must admit a sense of relief but combined with some shame.

After my exam at the base hospital, a Board was convened, chaired by a full Colonel, a Major and a Captain of the Medical Corp. I was asked to explain the

suspicious difference in my eye test taken at Camp Roberts and the one they just gave me. Nervously, I explained that I memorized the eye chart and why. When I was finished, the Captain said to the Colonel that this was ground for fraudulent enlistment and my heart fell to my stomach. After a pause that seemed like an eternity to me, the Colonel replied something like this: "Yes, technically you are correct but I wish we had thousands of more fraudulent enlistments like this." So, I was reclassified and returned to my unit for transfer. Any guilt I may have felt at the time was erased when, first, no transfer out of the 775<sup>th</sup> was arranged or planned in the time I remained with them and, a few months later as manpower needs in both the Pacific and European theaters of war increased, "Limited Service" was abolished.

### Camp Cooke

About May, the Battalion was transported by rail to Camp Cook (now Vandenberg Air Base), on the California coast near Lompoc. There, brand-new, latest issue, tank destroyers were waiting for us. We all were pleased; these were real tanks with a completely revolving turret (although for some reason I never understood, there was no hatch to close on the turret when enemy fire got hot), sufficient armor, a good gun and a fully tracked, high-speed vehicle. We fell eagerly into the new training program and morale was definitely higher. Nothing about a transfer out for me was ever mentioned so, becoming wiser in the ways of the army, I settled in trying to learn the new TDs and earn a corporal's stripes as a gunner.

We went into Lompoc occasionally for diversion. I remember once there was a carnival in town and my tank commander and crew went into to see a "girly side show", my first experience of anything like this. Admission was low (although not for poor me), 50 cents I think, and the dancers exposed just enough to entice the audience. Then the hawker would announce another act, for only a dollar, where everything would be exposed. We grudgingly paid it and it was an eye popper for me. Then the hawker overreached, for tank destroyer men at least, and asked for an additional two dollars to see an erotic dance between the two strippers. All five or six of us advanced on him and threatened dire consequences if the show didn't proceed promptly and without addition cost to us. He could see we meant business and the few civilian spectators didn't object, so the show went on promptly. I don't know which impressed me more, what I saw for the first time or what I did with my now buddies for the first time.

**At Camp Cooke, an event happened that changed my army career and, indeed, affected my return to civilian life like nothing else could.** I read in *The Stars and Stripes* (a newspaper published by the Army and distributed free to all troops) that eligible enlisted men could apply for participation in the recently created Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) for education and training in engineering, medicine, foreign language and area specialization, military

government and other fields important to the Army's wartime and occupation/post-war duties. I had attended a very good high school in Rockville



Centre, Long Island, New York and, consequently, my Army IQ score (I forget what they called it) was higher than that required for Officer Candidates School (OCS) and entry into ASTP, even though it was taken at Camp Upton under the *least optimum* conditions possible. My Mother had insisted that I take the non-vocational track in high school even though going to college at that time seemed like an impossible financial barrier to overcome and therefore only a dream to me. I was called into the Orderly Room one morning after breakfast and informed that I had been accepted in the program. I had orders and train tickets, along with a Corporal in my Company, to report to Stanford University near Palo Alto, for refresher courses further examination.

Before proceeding with that stage, it is interesting to note what happened to the 775<sup>th</sup> TD Battalion. They continued training vigorously on the use of their new tanks and proper tactics. But then, in the inimitable way of the army, they suddenly took all their tanks from them, shipped the outfit to the Pacific and issued them armed amphibious landing craft to use in upcoming major Pacific landings. The "tiger" was sunk, so to speak. Certainly, it never caused me to regret leaving for other pastures.

Stanford University/STAR Unit

Coming in from the Palo Alto train station to the Stanford campus for the first time was quite a thrill. I'd never seen any campus like it. It was a beautiful place with palm trees and gardens all about. We were billeted in Encinia Hall, a former freshman dorm I believe. Every morning we had roll call but military formations ended with that. Besides being a part of the nationwide ASTP program, Stanford was what was called a STAR unit. I can't recall what the exact letters meant but it had two functions: first, to provide refresher courses in selected basic courses depending on the field you were seeking to enter; and, second, when this was completed, to give examinations to determine eligibility and area of specialization for assignment to a cooperating college or university in the geographic area covered. If accepted, all rank was lost and while in the ASTP all soldiers would be of equal rank, viz., buck private, but the prospect of eventual commissioning was implied, at least most of us thought so. In any event, as a "private" to begin with, this posed no problem to me.



**Encina Hall**

We were there about six weeks and I struggled with the math courses. It had taken me three years to complete a two-year course of algebra and geometry in high school. Math was definitely not my strong suit but I was headed for "basic engineering" where apparently we were automatically assigned if we had no previous college record in other fields the Army was interested in, e.g., language, medicine. I studied hard; one weekend trip to San Francisco (which I promptly fell in love with) was the only time off I had. Then came the final exams. As soon as possible after they were done, an officer interviewed each of us separately regarding the result. My interview did not start off auspiciously because, as expected, my test grades in math were far from outstanding but I tried earnestly and desperately to explain the reasons for the poor math base I had from high school and my conviction that I was now mature enough to do better, given the opportunity. I remember the officer said to me something like "We expect about two percent of those selected to flunk out the first semester and of that two percent, you would be at the bottom of the list". Evidently, my pleading has some effect for I was soon assigned to the ASTP unit in Oregon Sate College in Corvallis, Oregon. It is interesting to note, that the failure rate for first termers was actually closer to 40 percent than two. Whatever, I owe that officer a debt to this very day for taking a chance on me.

Oregon State College/ASTP

On the train from Palo Alto to Corvallis, Oregon, we passed through some beautiful country and we arrived in good spirits with the prospects of earning a degree and, at least, a break from Army life. My group was first assigned to Snell Hall, a former women's dorm but in the second term we moved to the Men's Dorm. The course curriculum had been designed for an accelerated program, i.e., to complete a full semester in three months, and complete the basic course in nine months, the equivalent of two college years. This acceleration was my downfall as the course work utilized math not yet mastered even though I got an A in algebra the first term, a B in geometry the second term, and a C in calculus in the third.



**First a Women's then the Men's Dorms**

Whatever, we were divided into sections (there was a small Army detachment assigned to OSC to oversee our activities) and marched to and forth classes together but that's about the extent of military formations and exercises except for special occasions involving joint OSC events. Everyone had to work hard under this rushed-up approach to education, which distinguished our program from others, including the Navy V-12, which followed conventional lines and time. Of course, our curriculum was heavy in the sciences including mathematics, physics and the like. We did have a few courses, however, that particularly appealed to me such as geopolitics and speech.



Some of my buddies

Despite the pressure, we all (or most of us) enjoyed it. We soon made friends with our new classmates and had lots in common. We were also practically the only, at least able-bodied, men on campus and our presence was obviously welcome to the young ladies. Mixer dances were held and dating and romances soon bloomed. Others brought their fiancé's from home, got married, and took a place just off campus and some of those already married were soon joined by their wives. During the week, however, all soldiers were required to sleep in the dorm. One young Oregonian lassie picked me out at a dance and, on a canoe ride way up a small stream in a forested but remote city park area, practically took my virginity from me. A few weeks later, she told me she was "late" but that pronouncement was premature. Nevertheless, it scared the hell out of me and I preserved my semi-celibacy until after the war was over in Europe. I did, however, meet some lovely girls both on campus and elsewhere in Oregon.



**My Campus Sweetheart**



**Friends**

One weekend in the summer, a group of about four or five us hitchhiked to Newport on the coast. En route, you pass through some of the famous Oregon forest areas. Newport is a resort town perched high over the coastline with beautiful views. We quickly discovered why only a few or no one was in the water as we waded into the surf and felt our feet freezing into ice blocks. Man, it was cold! However, we lucked out. There were four lovely and sweet girls our age from Salem also visiting for the weekend. We hooked up had had a great time



**"PRESENT ARMS"**

**ASTP Unit 3900**





dancing and innocent flirtations. As it turned out, several of us saw them often in Salem on weekends and in Portland when two of them moved there to work. I was dating a beautiful brunette (Virginia Resnik, I think) and I pined for her months after we left Oregon.



**Off to Portland**



**Virginia-the reason**

During this period, my mother's long-term relationship with a married man hit a big snag. After constantly promising to marry her when his children became of age, he was now obviously stalling. Probably more in an attempt to push his hand, my mother decided to leave him and come stay near me in Oregon for an indefinite period. While I loved my mother very much, I wasn't exactly anxious to have her here with me at OSC, or anywhere else for that matter. I was never really seriously consulted and out she came. She rented a room in a nearby off-campus home and started working in a campus sorority kitchen. It was nice to see her but, frankly, I was embarrassed and, so to speak, she cramped my style. I didn't want to hurt her, she had had enough of that in her lifetime, but I was uncomfortable. The problem was solved for me, however drastically, as described by the events that happened next.



In the third term, things started getting tough for me. While I was doing OK in math, the course work was often based on a level of math I had not yet studied or mastered, e.g., in physics, and consequently it was affecting my grades in non-math but related courses. In retrospect, I did much better than the average in holding on through the third term but I knew the end was in sight for me. During this term, however, we began to hear rumors that ASTP was in jeopardy and all sorts of rumors flew about. But as the term neared its end, the bomb burst. Because of unexpectedly high casualty rates in the Sicily campaign and the impending European invasion, there was an “emergency” need for additional, front-line manpower. It wasn’t difficult to find. *There were about 300,000 young army soldiers in ASTP and the Army Air Cadets training programs—which were virtually eliminated and most of the student and cadets transferred directly to infantry divisions awaiting overseas deployment.*

The ending was worth a Hollywood movie. After many, prolonged goodbyes at dances, walks in the park, etc., the fatal day arrived. We assembled outside our dorms with everything we owned in one duffle bag and marched down to the Railroad Station where the troop train was waiting for us and the OSC band was playing. OSC students, friends and faculty were there to give us a resounding sendoff. Wives and sweethearts were being separated for who knows how long, maybe forever, and the spirit grabbed the crowd. A girl that I had dated a few times but was no big thing to me, apparently didn’t have anyone to kiss goodbye so, caught in the moment, she sought me out and overwhelmed me with hugs and kisses. That didn’t help a thing. So, it was bye bye OSC and all the “beavers”

left behind (but OSC would hear from me again)<sup>5</sup>.

## The Sad Day



**Preparing to march to Corvallis train station**

## The 89<sup>th</sup> Light Division

Again, a train ride through lovely country but it was back to Camp Roberts for me. We detrained, had our short-arm inspection, and were placed in empty barracks until all those arriving for the 89<sup>th</sup> Division could be collected and trucked up to the Hunter-Liggett Military Reservation in the nearby rugged coastal mountains near Salinas which, among other things, was known as the location of Randolph Hearst's fabulous mansion hideout. We grumbled when we saw army barracks again but we didn't realize that in just a few days we would be wishing we had them.

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<sup>5</sup> In the 70's, I returned to the campus of the now Oregon State *University* as a senior official of the Agency for International Development to negotiate and eventually award a \$5 million grant for institutional development in dryland agriculture in developing countries.

The 89<sup>th</sup> was still on maneuvers with another light division, the 71<sup>st</sup>, up in these rugged mountains. Let me explain what a light division was supposed to be. A regular, triangular, heavy infantry division is composed of approximately 15,000 men including three infantry regiments, an artillery brigade, and assorted combat and service units such as engineers, medics, etc. About a year before, the Army undertook an experiment with light divisions. Foremost, they would be reduced in size to 9,000 men (that's when a lot of 89ers had previously been *transferred out* to other divisions preparing for overseas movement) and would use much lighter weaponry and equipment, e.g., jeeps or mules as the prime movers for pack artillery and equipment. The 89<sup>th</sup> used jeeps and the 71<sup>st</sup> used mules as prime movers for weapons and supplies, augmented by human power in both cases, and the maneuver was to test the efficacy of one versus the other. In the end, it was concluded that light divisions in general were feasible only in very special and limited conditions. The 10th Mountain Division was the only light division in the experiment to be retained and was soon sent to Italy. *This meant that approximately 6,000 soldiers would have to be transferred into each of the two reorganized heavy divisions to bring them up to strength.* These transfers into the 89<sup>th</sup>, including we ASTPers from OSC, began at Camp Roberts and Hunter-Liggett and continued when we arrived at Camp Butner as described below.





We did not realize it at the time, but this new and sometime jolting new assignment for most of us former ASTPers and Air Cadets was really a break of immeasurable proportions because it delayed our departure for combat by six months while we were expanded, re-equipped and trained. Most other ASTPers and Air Cadets were sent as replacements *directly to infantry divisions ready to be deployed*. One of my brothers-in-law had this experience and was wounded twice in France and Germany. My best friend in college and long after was sent to the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry and became a machine gunner. This was the green division spread thin on the 100-mile front directly facing where the Germans broke through at the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge. He was wounded, captured and remained in a prison camp until the end of the war and suffered from trench foot for the rest of his life. In retrospect, while we had our losses, it was a lucky break for most of us who survived the war.

Within a couple of days, we were assembled, loaded on 2X4 trucks and began the trek up to the mountains. I can remember the scene vividly. In a large, reasonably flat field, 2x4 trucks were arranged in a large circle with their fronts facing outward. On the tailgate of each truck, arranged in a large circle, were one or more officers and non-coms representing each Infantry Regiment, Artillery Battalion and other major units. We were all dumped in the middle of the field

and then, in order, each officer read out the names and serial numbers of the soldiers assigned to his unit(s) and those selected were assembled and trucked to where the units were bivouacked.

Each time the "Ks" were reached by an *infantry* officer, I would hold my breath in hopes that I didn't hear my name. The opposite was true when *artillery* selections were made. Gradually, the number of us waiting the call was diminished. Finally, they were done but there still were a fairly large number of us left. Some how or other, I missed (or they missed) my name and on rechecking the list, it was ascertained that I had been assigned to the 340<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion. As a form tank destroyer gunner, this made sense and I was much relieved.

Off we went to the 340<sup>th</sup> bivouac area further up the mountains where I was assigned to Battery B. Old timers were housed in pyramidal tents, which held approximately 6 to 12 soldiers, but there were none left for the new arrivals. We were issued pup tents (two shelter halves are combined to make a low, two-man tent) with some straw for bedding. Army life was changing back to normal about as fast and as brutal as possible. As the exercises with the 71<sup>st</sup> continued, probably just to keep us all busy before we could be shipped out, we got a little taste of what warfare in the mountains could be like, such as that experienced by our troops in Southern Italy. It was tough but as I recall there was no more than the usual bitching and, we took the fortunes of war in good stride and buckled down to prepare ourselves for what lay ahead. In an interview which the Battery Commander, Capt Lightbaum had with each new arrival, I expressed my desire to be a gunner again which seemed to meet with his approval. Soon, I was backing up one of the gunners and was happy with the prospect of being assigned as a gunner when the battery was eventually expanded and equipped with 105mm guns.



SHAVE



ED ROBERTS



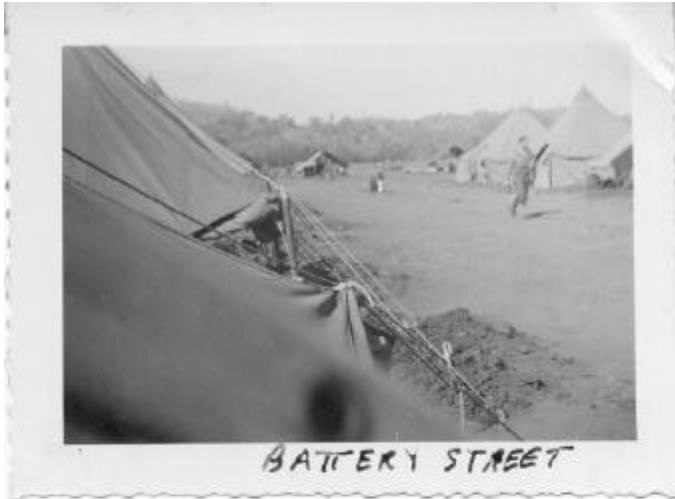
UP WE GO!



The Necessities of Life



Settling In



Johnny Debs

JOHNNY ME GEORGE



PACKING OUR BARRACK BAGS

HUNTER LIGGETT MILITARY RESERVATION,  
CALIF.



SCRUBBING THE GROUND



"G.I. GRAVEYARD"



WASH DAY



### **This Ain't Oregon State**

I had one amusing diversion. Some loony brass in the Battalion or Brigade thought it would be nice to have a "pass in review" parade, maybe to see who would be the first to break a leg on the uneven and potholed field. My Battery Commander, Captain Lightbaum (a fearsome man), also wanted a bugler to play taps at night and I volunteered (it was easy duty) having messed around a bit with a bugle when I was in camp as a youngster. I was terrible and not improving. Whoever thought the parade was a great idea also thought they should have a band playing. Of course, there was no band so they assembled the available buglers. Because I was so bad, I was made the band marching leader and didn't have to play. Ah, the triumphs of life.

### Camp Butner, North Carolina-89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division

The day finally arrived when we packed up our tents, were trucked back down to Camp Roberts and were soon loaded on troops trains (after a short arm check, of course) for the long trip to North Carolina. We went down the coastline and then across the Mohave desert, stopping at the familiar Needles for exercise outside the train cars, all the way to New Orleans and then up the east coast right into Camp Butner located between Hendersonville and Raleigh North Carolina. Something happened of interest on that trip that later on had significant ramifications for me. When at B Btry in Hunter Liggett I became friends with an

ex-ASTPer who we called "Red" for obvious reasons but, unfortunately, I can't remember his name at all. He was very cultured gentleman whom I respected immensely. Again, we passed through breathtaking and interesting country giving me an even larger prospective of the makeup of our large and beautiful nation. In a long and continuous letter to my mother, I was inspired to describe in great detail what I saw and how and why it impressed me. At one point Red asked what I was doing and I let him read it. He told me he was impressed with my writing capability and should think about becoming a writer, a journalist, or something of that nature. Because of my respect for his education and maturity, this impressed and stayed with me, as we shall see if you stay with my story.



**Ready to GO**



INDIANS AT CLOVIS, N.M.



NEEDLES, CALIF.



TROOP TRAIN



FORT WORTH, TEXAS

Butner was a huge, sprawling army base typical of the times with rows upon row of barracks, mess halls, and offices supplemented by a hospital, space for artillery and vehicles, movie houses, USO, recreation hall, chapels and what have you. It was relatively flat with plenty of space for maneuvers and firing exercises. It was located fairly close to Raleigh and Durham, which proved to be good "liberty" towns and we quickly learned to covet those lovely southern belles.



### Two Samples

Shortly after we settled in I got my first jolt. While there were three artillery battalions in a light division, which would be converted and expanded to handle the new 105 mm guns being supplied, a brand new battalion needed to be created to handle the medium 155mm artillery guns that were standard with a heavy infantry division. Transfers from existing artillery battalions and new replacements arriving in Camp Butner formed this battalion, the 563<sup>rd</sup>. I was one of those "selected out" of the 340<sup>th</sup> and assigned to the Service Battery of the 563<sup>rd</sup>. I was not happy. I didn't want to leave my newfound buddies in Battery B and I certainly didn't want to be in a service battery, which handles rations, ammunition and supplies. But, as usual, no one asked me or gave a dam what I wanted. I haven't got a clue as to why I was picked for the 563<sup>rd</sup> and assigned to its Service Battery and would rather not dwell on it.

Then we all settled down and began our training. I was assigned as a clerk (again my MOS seemed to haunt me) in the section responsible for food rations, gasoline, miscellaneous supplies for the battalion. The section and was assigned one 2x6 truck for pickup and delivery of food and supplies throughout the battalion. A Warrant Officer assisted by a three-rocker sergeant commanded it, a

total of six or seven men. Another guy (I can't remember his name exactly but I believe his last name was Wilkie) and I were assigned to pick up the daily food rations each day, divide them up for each battery according to their roster size for the day, and delivering them. The assigned truck driver with T/5 rank was a Pacific combat veteran and it was obvious his stay with us would be temporary. Loving to drive and looking for some rank, I became his understudy helping to maintain and clean the truck with occasional driving assignments, mostly to the depot. Dividing the rations was the biggest challenge. How do you divide one cow carcass for five Batterys, some larger than others? Even after working out the math, how did you carve it up into pieces a mess sergeant could use or would seem fair to him? The seriousness of this problem was compounded because neither us know a damn thing about butchering. With the help of disgusted mess sergeants and cooks, and trial and error techniques, we finally worked it out somehow.



### **The Crew**

One day, while I was unloading some 105mm shells from our truck, the tail gate chain gave way and down I fell with several shells right behind me, both hitting the ground at the same time. First I was taken to the Battalion aid station and then to the base hospital where I remained several days for observation. I had nothing more than a bruised back, or so it seemed at the time, but shortly after I was discharged in 1946 and before heading off for college, I was digging up the weeds in a neighbor's yard when my back suddenly gave away and I fell to the ground in severe pain due to a degenerated disc. This was to be my wartime



disability, for sure, and it's only gotten worse as time goes by. I never bothered to submit a claim and wouldn't let a VA hospital near my back.

Sometime shortly after our arrival in Butner I was given my first and only furlough and had a week at home. I can't really remember many particulars but have some pictures of myself with all the family. Of course, none of my buddies were at home and I had no girlfriend so it was pretty routine, especially since I had seen so much of Mom in Oregon. Nevertheless, It was sure nice to be home again and the center of attention. Went into NYC and saw the musical "Oklahoma" on a free ticket and also blew my wad on taking an old family friend, Maurine, out to a swanky Park Ave café. I was the only non-officer in the place. Then, back to reality.

Old booming Capt. Lightbaum was also transferred to the 563<sup>rd</sup>, with a promotion to major, and our paths crossed once again. We were on a field firing exercise simulating an action problem and I was driving our truck full of shells and rations to an appointed spot. It was hilly and the truck was heavily loaded so I shifted into four-wheel drive, which is quite noisy. Unbeknownst to me, Lightbaum was in the middle of communicating firing instructions to the various Batterys, or vice versa, and the noise of my truck was making it difficult for him to hear or be heard. At any rate, after much flagging down and shouting, his booming voice came finally through..."Shut down that goddamn truck". I have a feeling that that incident was a contributing factor to my remaining a Private until, and only by an Act Congress; I was promoted to Private First Class while in combat. I also can't help wonder how, during actual combat firing, Major Lightbaum was able to maintain command if the comparatively slight noise I had been causing so throw him out of control. I'll never know and he's not around to tell me.

First Furlough at Home



Otherwise life at Butner wasn't too bad. North Carolina has many virtues and amongst its highest are the beautiful women with lovely accents who live there. Many who worked in Raleigh, Durham and Henderson, came to dances on base or at USOs in town. Also met lovely girls at Duke and Randolph Macon; what a change from what an enlisted man usually runs into.



### **Duke University**

Also dated several others but the last was the best or worst, depending on how you look at it. Edna and I fell in love, or thought we did, but she did have a boyfriend from high school who was still in the picture. I would come in whenever I could get a pass and had the bus fare. She was undemanding and sweet and loved to neck. In fact, one night as our departure approached, we decided to get the bus to South Carolina and get married immediately. There was a long line at the bus station, a common event in those days, and after about three hours waiting we called it quits. Later events proved how lucky I was.

### Christmas at Home

The day of departure grew closer and closer and preparations were being made for packing and shipping all our guns (except personal arms), vehicles, equipment; everything conceivable. It was also the time for the last weekend passes and I wanted desperately to get home for Christmas. The hitch was that the passes were limited to two days and within a radius of 250 miles, as we had been officially alerted for overseas movement. The second hitch was transportation. When I arrived at the Henderson RR station, there were hundreds of us waiting to get on the next train which, when it finally arrived late from the south, was already teeming with GIs and it was impossible to get on. Next, we hit the highway to hitchhike but every car that passed was already filled to the brim. Somehow, we got a lift to St. Petersburg and then took a bus to Richmond and I was feeling a little better but that didn't last long. Someone gave us a lift from the bus station to just north of town where Route One continued on to DC. There were hundreds, maybe thousands (or at least it seemed so) of GIs, Sailors and Marines trying to get a lift. To add to our anxiety, it began to snow. Finally, a big, open trailer truck stopped. It barely had a floor and only ropes for guide rails. The driver said it would be rough but he would take all who wished to pile on and a bunch of us were on our way. Others, I think, thought we were committing suicide.

There were several bottles of liquor abroad and we all shared it, literally to keep from freezing. When we were about 40 miles outside DC and still in the countryside, the truck broke down and I thought that would finish it as nobody could or would stop where so many stranded and desperate soldiers were assembled. However, I soon noticed a cab going in the other direction heading towards Richmond. It slowed, turned about, and came back to us offering to take all that could fit in his cab to Washington for \$40 total. I was one of the first, most of us were numb, to recognize that this was a pretty good deal and was the first to run for the cab, closely followed by the most of the rest—must have been at least 20 to 30 of us. Crowded as the six or seven of us who got in were, it helped warm and thaw us out and we were happy as we approached DC and headed for the Union Station. When it came into sight, a majestic building, it was about 11 p.m. and dark. I pushed hurriedly through the doors, through the rotunda, purchased a ticket to New York, and went into the station where the various track entrances were. There another shock awaited me. From one end of the station to the other, it was absolutely packed with people, mostly servicemen. The train to New York, which was to leave soon, was at Track 17 and I stood in front of it but way, way back and to get on seemed impossible. But then, in one of those unexplained mysteries of life, the gates opened, there was a rush forward of those near the gate. This created an unintentional vacuum or pathway that I immediately saw, rushed ahead, and not only got on the train but even got a seat. The Lord was with me.

There were MPs on the train and if they started looking at our passes I would have been sunk since I was now exceeding the 250 mile limit, but it was crowded and I guess it was impossible, or the MPs were just in a good mood. I think the train left about midnight but my memory of the exact time is not clear. When I got

to NY, I got on the good old Long Island RR and headed for Baldwin where my mother and aunt were spending Christmas with my grandmother and awaiting for me for Christmas Eve. My dearest Aunt Ada, the world's best Christmas tree decorator, was already hard at work and I was happy to pitch in. It was a joyous and at the same time sad time for all of us. Worst still, while I risked exceeding the maximum mileage limit, I could not risk getting back to Camp Butner after the deadline for we were on "overseas shipping alert". Therefore, on Christmas day I was back on the LIRR headed for New York City. The train to North Carolina and points south, as you might imagine, was almost empty. There were a pair of MPs on duty and I was terrified that having nothing to do they would surely ask for my pass. I guess they thought that no one but a fool would be traveling on Christmas Day if they didn't have to and I was never bothered.

### Moving Overseas<sup>6</sup>

When I got back to camp, preparing, packing, crating and everything else involved in moving overseas was a frenzy of action and excitement was mounting fast. On December 15, the Division advance units had already left Camp Butner and, after a brief stay at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, left for England. On December 28, the rest of us left by train for our staging area, Camp Miles Standish near Boston. It was a huge, sprawling collection of long, low, one-story tar-papered and snow covered barracks, organized like an immense assembly line. We marched from lectures to movies, to infirmary, to mess hall, etc. Inspection teams went through the barracks, checking equipment and issuing missing items. Rifles were checked. Each man received a sweater, wool socks, towels, and new lightweight gas masks. Next was a round of lectures on poison gas, abandon ship drills, and War Bond allotments, followed by immunization shots against typhus, tetanus and typhoid. After the day's processing, there was more training. We ate in giant mess halls, which fed more than 1,500 men three times a day. The movies, phone booths and service clubs were packed. Some went into Boston on a 12-hour pass but most of us stayed put with our own memories, feelings and near a warm stove. I had a buddy, Bill Richardson, who was in my Battalion and we had both dated girls in Raleigh who lived in the same boarding house. On the bus rides in and back we had become good friends and we met again.

On the clear, zero cold morning of January 10 we packed up, struggled into forty-pound packs, and marched down icy roads to the trains. Thousands of men quickly loaded into day coaches, to the strains of a blaring loudspeaker system. In a little over an hour, we pulled into Boston Harbor. As we piled out, Red Cross volunteers passed out hot coffee and doughnuts and chocolate bars. One lady asked me why we weren't singing like others did and I replied something like

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<sup>6</sup> In this instance and others throughout my story, I have refreshed my memory and/or borrowed liberally from other sources, particularly (1) "The Eighty-Ninth Division, 1942-1945" history, (2) the website of "The Eighty-Ninth Infantry Division WWII" at <[www.89infdivww2.org](http://www.89infdivww2.org)>, and (3) stories published in *The Rolling W*, the official magazine of "The Society of the Eighty-Ninth Division WWII".

“Lady, what in the world is there to sing about?” The entire division, on board five ships, moved out late that day and proceeded south to join its convoy. Bill Richardson and I stayed on the stern until the last glimmer of Boston and the States faded away. I can still vividly picture that moment in my mind. The thoughts, good and bad, must have been racing through our minds.

My group, all 5,400 of us, were packed aboard the *Edmund B. Alexander* a German ship confiscated during World War I. Life on aboard, to say the least, was severely cramped. There was room for every man but none to spare. Canvas iron bunks were stacked five and six high, with just enough room for each man between, with his pack, blanket roll, duffel bag, helmet, gas mask and rifle. Routine was strict: troops were allowed on deck only at certain times, and after dark, smoking was permitted only in latrines. Because of the huge number of men using limited facilities, only two meals were served daily. Amusements were generally limited to reading, card playing and craps.

### Not A Pleasant Memory

*This voyage was not an auspicious one for me.* First, there was the horrible seasickness, which, as a boy who had grown up near the ocean, came as a shocking surprise to me. Our crossing in early January was far from smooth and, twice a day, you waited in long lines before you reached where they were ladling out the chow. Placed just before where you arrived at the serving area was a large garbage-like can full of hot water and a very strong disinfectant. If you were at all queasy to begin with, the smell and sight of that can was sure to set you off. Many a time I was starved while in line but could never get past that can. When I did, I could not hold it for long.

Among the things the Army relies on to keep idle soldiers busy is senseless guard duty, no matter where you are, and we had it onboard. The worst post by far was on the top, a completely exposed deck where the smokestacks were placed. Of course, with my luck, one bitter cold night I was assigned this bitter and useless post. I soon discovered, however, that one of the two huge smokestacks was actually a dummy with a door on it. Inside was a grate floor covering a large air vent, which went all the way down to the engine room and provided welcomed warmth. With the door closed, it was also a perfect place to smoke a quick cigarette, a high school habit that the Army did nothing but encourage. Just below my open deck was an enclosed deck with a door and stairway leading up to my post. At this doorway, the soldier on guard, a corporal in my battery, would occasionally come out to talk and complain about his need for a cigarette. I told him about the hideaway I had and *he left his post* to have for a smoke. While he was smoking in our safe enclosure, he thought he heard someone moving outside (he was obviously not at his post) and this jerk opened the door, looked out, saw someone and then crushed out his cigarette on the door. Of course, his burning ashes were sucked out and were clearly visible—at least on deck. That was when the proverbial sh— hit the fan as a guard officer who was checking posts was outside looking for his missing guard.

What followed was humiliating and perhaps typical. We were far from the European coast and any likelihood that a U-Boat would spot such a small and momentary light was really stretching it. Nevertheless, “deserting one’s post” and “smoking on guard” were serious charges under any circumstances so it was decided to conduct a special court martial for both of us. In retrospect, the trial was a miscarriage of justice with a pre-determined result aimed to serve as an example to the troops. Since I was neither smoking at the time or off my post, a good defense counsel should have been able to get me off and that *should have been his goal*. But my companion (who, incidentally, was not a buddy), with two charges, i.e., smoking on duty and desertion of post, could face a heavy penalty, maybe even a general court-martial. The trial, of course, was seen not only as a good example to others aboard and about to go into combat, but something, dare I suggest, to keep the officers busy. My counsel was a Captain who knew as much about law as I did--but he knew how to follow the scent. It was his suggestion or observation that if I pleaded guilty only to smoking on guard and my so-called friend pleaded guilty only to being off post, *the ramifications would be limited for both*. If I pleaded innocent on all counts concerning the specific incident, which I was, and the Corporal was found guilty of both counts, which he was, the penalty for him was likely to be severe. In my fear and confusion, I pulled one of the biggest bonehead goofs of my life. RESULT: I agreed and we were both found guilty and sentenced to six months confinement and a two-third reduction in pay, including reduction in rank to Private, which affected only the corporal since I had none to begin with. After review by the Battalion or Regiment Commander, our sentence was *mitigated* to three months extra duty at reduced pay. Of course, for those who had passed me over for promotion, this only proved how correct they were.

This meant three months of the dirtiest jobs available but none exceeded what we had on the ship. Apparently it is a part of good naval tradition to paint everything in sight and we joined all other goof-offs in painting latrines way below deck. It was like the Chinese torture for me because I have some mild claustrophobia and being cramped seven decks down, painfully brushing to fully coat the rough and hard to reach pipe, absorbing the smell of paint, etc., had me running topside and back constantly. Added to my seasickness and lack of nourishment, I was getting weaker and weaker.

As we approached the English and French coasts, a new thrill was added. Nazi subs were in the area and the Allied navies were looking for them. Sitting in our bunks we could hear and even feel the distant depth charge explosions and a few were so close that they boomeranged off our hull with a terrifying blast as if they were right next to us. They didn’t mention this in the guidebooks.

### Landing In France

In the very early morning, in pitch-black darkness, when our ship anchored outside LeHarve, we were assembled on deck with all our equipment, rifles and duffel bags. It was freezing cold and the sea, at least by our standards, was

anything but calm. Of course, there was a long wait (there is an old Army phrase "Hurry up and Wait" which was demonstrated repeatedly throughout my army career) before the LSTs (landing ship tanks or troops) arrived and we began to disembark via rope web ladders thrown over the side. This was a precarious task under any conditions but given the rolling sea, our heavy loads and the weakened condition of many of us due to severe and long seasickness, even more so. But in retrospect, as most of us recalled it in later life, it was nothing compared to the original storming of the Normandy beaches six months before. Comparatively speaking, we were damn lucky but that thought never occurred to us at the time.

The port of LeHarve, of course, had been devastated by prior bombings, which was why our ships couldn't dock and had to use the LSTs to tie up at the small wharves remaining. We were off-loaded, it must have been about two or three in the morning, and told to wait for the trucks to come and transport us to where the division was being assembled. It was a miserable, freezing long wait. Most of us who had been seasick had not eaten for days and were suddenly hit by an all-consuming hunger, at least I was. As we had left the ship, each soldier was issued one day's K-rations (three crackerjack size cartons containing a small can of "something", candy, a drink powder and crackers) and told not to eat them under any circumstances until given permission. Of course, I couldn't wait thereby earning my First Sergeant's additional commendations. Some more enterprising souls built small fires on the wharf for a little warmth. Soon, in the pitch dark, we attracted our first meeting with French citizens. They were ill-clothed, bedraggled, skinny kids with red faces and knees, begging for food and cigarettes (to sell or barter). We had our first experience with the soon to be ubiquitous pimp selling the sexual services of his sister but there were no takers. It was a sad welcome.

Finally, many hours later, our transportation arrived. They were open, 10-ton semi-trailer trucks providing no protection from the wind and cold but off we went heading, we knew not where, to a slop hole called Camp Lucky Strike. As we drove through the city in the morning, huddled together for warmth, many French people welcomed us with smiles and waved at us although by this time Yanks were not a unique sight. We enjoyed throwing gum and candies to the kids but the inescapable and visible hardship that these people obviously had to endure was disheartening to all of us. Lucky Strike, a former Nazi airfield and farming area now strewn with German mines, was the assembly point for the Division. All units would wait at this "camp" until all the heavy equipment, supplies and artillery were unloaded from the ships of our convoy, uncrated and/or assembled and sent on to the various Normandy towns nearby where we would regroup into company and battery units.

At first sight of Lucky Strike, we knew we were in for it. The huge field was covered by deep snow and under it were the unassembled tents for our use but no stoves or anything to deal with the cold. The first job was to find the tents,



pass them out by squads, and assemble and raise them - not an easy job under the conditions. The first few days, there was no straw for the bare ground "floors", very few stoves and no food except the K-rations (ha). Gradually, and I emphasize the work "gradually", things improved. Of course, still being under the penalty of "extra duty", all the dirty jobs first fell to me. As we tried to settle into tent life, the biggest problem was food. It was in such limited supply that unit messes were never setup. Rather, only two meals a day were served in regiment-size mess tents. This, of course, resulted in very long lines to wait in the cold for insufficient food and the seemingly interminable wait for supper. Grumbling increased.

To add to our misery, and probably one of the dumbest ideas to emerge on how to keep us busy, some bright officer bucking for a Bronze Star got the idea that we should build trench ditches around each tent to provide protection against air raids. Even when our boys hit the beach six months before, the Luftwaffe was barely seen and wasting their dwindling resources on us would have been preposterous. That would have bad enough but what happened next took the cake. There was an unseasonably early thaw. The company and battery streets at Lucky Strike became an unbelievable quagmire of mud reminiscent of scenes from World War I. We had earlier been issued "combat boots", an example of how badly designed some of our equipment was. There were buckles above the ankle with a rubber sole and moisture absorbing leather. In the snow, to which we were soon again to be immersed in Germany, they proved that they were almost useless and a leading cause of trench feet. GI goulashes were not much better. The streets were laborious to walk on and avoided when possible. An incident can clearly demonstrate the discomfort of mud, mud and mud. The insides of our tents were *relatively* dry, i.e., very damp with the wetness penetrating our thin sleeping bags, another Quartermaster supply debacle, and the straw underneath. About 50 yards from our tent was the Battery latrine, just in front of a marked landmine area. Like many others of my comrades, I was suffering from diarrhea and one night it hit me with a vengeance. I unentangled myself from my bedroll as quickly as possible, jumped into my boots and, in my long johns, started rushing towards the latrine. Three or four steps out of the tent, my right boot got stuck firmly in the mud but I was forced to rush on without it, slowed only when the same thing happening to my left boot a few steps later. By the time I reached the latrine, irreparable damage had been done. An hour later, I struggled back to my tent, pulled my only other pair of LJs out of my duffel bag and tried to get back to sleep. To complete the agony of this story, it took me all the next day boiling the soiled LJs over and over again in a tin bucket over an open fire until I could manage to wear them again (the stood by themselves) but I got rid of them as soon as I could.

**[insert photo]**

It seemed like ages but finally we all left Lucky Strike and headed out to our individual unit locations, ours being on the outskirts of Neufchatel-en-Bray. My

buddies and I ended up in a cow barn, not fancy but dry and comparatively comfortable. The biggest joy to us all was that we again had our own mess. Naturally, I was the first soldier "selected" for KP (Kitchen Police) but this time it was welcomed. I remember that day clearly. We had pancakes and I gobbled them down so quickly, our mess sergeant told me to eat all I want. He was one of the five mess sergeants we distributed rations to daily, so they were usually pretty nice to my partner, Wilkie, and me. I believe I ate 20 flapjacks. Funny, when I got back to civilian life my passion for pancakes was considerably reduced but over the years it has returned.

Neufchatel-en-Bray was a small town in fairly good shape but there wasn't much to buy or do but walk about a bit. One night, with some of my Service Battery buddies and a (very) few French occupation francs in my pocket, we took the stroll and ended up (surprise) in our first French bar, a very typical one I'm sure. We all ordered a "Calvados"; a very famous apple brandy produced in Normandy, which except for some weak beer was probably all they had. Bear in mind that I was no drinker, I didn't even like beer, and when I took my first taste at this bar it almost blew off my head. 'Till this day, I always claim it gave me an ingrown toenail. The stuff must have been made within the past three to six months and it was raw! [In 1983, during the summer before we returned to the States from eight years in Vienna with the UN, my wife, son and I took a long-planned two-week gastronomic tour through France by car. I had spent a year planning it. We drove through Neufchatel-en-Bray but I couldn't recognize it. It now is a small city. In 1999, during the 89<sup>th</sup>s "Tour of Remembrance" through Europe, my son and I visited a very similar bar in a very similar small town nearby, and drank some Calvados together. *We all had aged very well.*] My Battalion, the 563<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery (medium, 155mm guns) was assembled with all its equipment and we were ready to roll.

### On To The Front

The "Front" is a term more attached to World War I but that's what we were soon off to, wherever it was. The "Battle of the Bulge" was winding down and the Division received orders to move into the area around Mersch, Luxembourg, in preparation for going into the line, and assigned to the XII Corps of General Patton's Third Army. On March 3, infantry and artillery battalions loaded into ancient "40-and-8" freight cars for the long, tedious journey across France. Other units, like ours, moved out into convoy. The trip averaged over three hundred miles with blown bridges, ruined roads and detours causing frequent delays. There was much to see if you were driving or sitting in the front seat of a truck, particularly when we went through Reims and similar places. Even if you were fortunate enough to be sitting on the bench at the very rear of the truck, your view was very limited. But being the assistant or backup driver, I did get to sit in the front seat. Of course, my turn was in the middle of the night in a complete I blackout and all I got out of it was a neck ache and sore eyes. The head of our little supply group was a Warrant Officer not often seen back in the States--he

was busy trying to make like an officer and was lazy to boot. It was cold out and the driver's cabin was buttoned up. The gastronomic turmoil my stomach had been through beginning with the seasickness and ending with the pancakes could no longer be contained. I let (I really had no control) some depth charges go and was at first horrified but then happy to see Epstein cringe with disgust. Sweet revenge but it ruined any future chances or promotion, which by now were almost non-existent anyway. In fact, it took an Act of Congress to get me promoted to PFC.

We assembled in a small village north of the Luxembourg Capitol and near Echternach, ready for our first combat mission. It was here that I had my first chance to try out my high school German with the friendly Luxembourgers. In 1939, when in high school, I concluded we would soon be in a war with Germany and took German classes for two years. As it turned out, it didn't help me with the war effort but after the war, with all those pretty and lonely fraulines, well that's another story.

### First Mission - Moselle Crossing

Our first battleground was in the forested Eifel highland as the 89<sup>th</sup> was committed on March 12. [NOTE: It is not my intention to repeat here the history of the 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in combat. This is available in it's official history published in 1948, as summarized and highlighted in the division website [www.89infdivww2.org/](http://www.89infdivww2.org/) created by my son Mark and myself with the backing of the 89<sup>th</sup> Division Society, and in publications of *The Rolling W*, the Society magazine. Rather, it is just my personal remembrances and experiences related in as much detail and accuracy as time and memory permit.] As we were the Service Battery for an artillery battalion, we were not usually in the forefront of things. Normally, we brought up food and shells for our 563<sup>rd</sup> Batteries. When there was a major obstacle to overcome and a massing of infantry was necessary, such as in major river crossings, our trucks would be pressed into service to move the troops and ammunition to the riverbanks.

### **[Insert Supply Unit Photo]**

Our first call soon came to provide transportation to the infantry for the assault I across the Moselle at three points. We approached the assigned sectors under heavy fog on the morning of March 15, watching our "passengers" jump down off our truck, assemble, and take their positions before climbing into boats and silently paddling across the river. In my heart was admiration for their courage and probably some relief that I was not amongst them. By the 16<sup>th</sup>, the Engineers had completed the Moselle span between Alf and Bullay and troops, armor and artillery poured across. I vividly remember walking down the heavily shelled front street and looking into ground floor of a battered storefront where a dead GI lay, his head laid wide opened by a bullet or shell. By this time, I had seen many

dead Germans but this was the first American and it really shook me. That could be me. Instantly, the war changed from being something removed to something very real and close. It was the beginning of a rough but rapid maturity for this soldier.

I don't remember much detail of what happened in these days as the Germans were scrambling to get back to the Rhine for the next, and last it turned out, organized attempt at defense. On March 20 the 89<sup>th</sup> took its largest bag of prisoners to date, capturing 354 and entered Worms on the Rhine the following day.

**[Insert Photo]**

**March 1945 Supporting Armor of the 89th Infantry Division. On the West Bank of the Rhine River outside the town of Kaub, Germany**

### **The Rhine Crossing**

**(Our Biggest Battle)**

March 24 marked the beginning of the Division's second and most impressive combat phase. The excitement, intensity, movement and anxiety increased, at least for me. New units were attached to the Division for the crossing such as mobile anti-craft guns, heavy artillery, combat engineers, etc. Equipment was arriving, such as pontoons and treadways and even the US Navy showed up with assault boats. We were part of a major campaign involving the last major impediment to capture of the heartland of Germany. Service Battery of the 563<sup>rd</sup> was only a small unit in the impressive logistical support mounted for crossing the mighty Rhine but it gave us great satisfaction to be involved. The history of this crossing is amply described in the Division's official history and its website.

For me, as with previous river crossings, it began by transporting infantrymen and their equipment to their embarkation assembly points. In addition to our own four artillery battalions, 15 additional battalions from *Corps* were supplied, a formidable array of firepower. Unfortunately, it seems some bright staff or higher command officer decided our attack would be a surprise one, taken at night and without forewarning, meaning no artillery support. It was another case of digging trench ditches at Lucky Strike after the fly was out of the coup. Many 89ers that were wounded or lost buddies crossing the Rhine and climbing the hills on the other side remain bitter to this day over what seemed to them to be a tactical blunder.

We crossed from Oberwesel, just below St. Goar where the main crossing took

place. St. Goarshausen was the main objective. It is a muddle of confusion in my memory. Of course, with our artillery and trucks we had to wait until the Engineers built a pontoon bridge across the Rhine, which wasn't long coming.

### **Insert Bridge Picture**

As we crossed, I remember how much the houses in the small villages on the Rhine reminded me of scenes from Walt Disney cartoons. By the end of the month, we had cleared the whole area. Our battalion then traveled down river going through Wiesbaden, which, unlike other cities we had seen, was still largely intact because of its status as a hospital center. We came to a halt in the country outside the city about April 1 and spent the night in a field mostly surrounded by thick woods. Since we were halted for the night, some of more enterprising truck drivers removed the thick tarpaulin from their trucks to make a tent-like structure that was lightproof, permitting one to read and write letters. When going on guard that night, we had been warned to watch out for armed German stragglers seeking to return to their units through under cover of the woods and darkness.

In the late afternoon, a supply truck stopped at our encampment with an unexpected and pleasant surprise. It seems our Division had liberated a supply of French champagne, which the Germans had previously looted from France, and every man was "issued" a bottle. Wilkie and I were scheduled to go on guard duty at about 10:00 p.m. After supper, we retired to our truck and each proceeded to drink his bottle in its entirety. Neither of us was seasoned drinkers or use to the strange feelings the "bubbly" liquid could cause. It is no surprise then that when we jumped off our truck's tailgate to go on guard, we were feeling no pain. *With what happened next, I was probably as close or closer to death than anytime in combat.* There was a first-generation Italian boy from New York in our Battery, a real nice guy, but who fit the stereotype of a Brooklynite, accent, looks and all, to a "T". As such, even I, a Brooklynite myself, often teased him. Unfortunately, I forget his name. In 1939, when in high school, it seemed very clear to me that the United States would eventually go to war with Nazi Germany so I elected to study German for two years on the sound, it turned out, theory that I would be there too. My German-speaking capabilities were obviously not great, and it never made any contribution to the war effort, but when your buddies speak none, it gave you significant advantages with certain parties, which I will elucidate a bit later. Anyway, as we patrolled the perimeter I could see candlelight coming from a fold in his tarp. I said to Wilkie "Watch me scare the pants off him" and shouted out in German for him to come out with his hands up. Well this "buddy" didn't speak any German but recognized when it was being spoken and his reaction was immediate and completely unexpected, to say the least. Without a moment's hesitation, he picked up his carbine and fired blindly at the direction of my voice. While I don't recommend it, it is the fastest sobering up technique imaginable. He was not a happy man. The next worry was that, having certainly awakened the First Sergeant and Corporal of the Guard, we would

shortly get chewed out or worse. Strangely, not a single person moved to investigate. After all, those bad Germans were out in them there woods minding their own business. Whatever, I learned a good lesson there.

### Racing Eastward

Soon we were racing down the *Autobahn*, a super highway like we never saw in the States, at 40 and 50 miles an hour. The 89<sup>th</sup> (assigned now to Patton's Third Army) was the easternmost United States Infantry Division and one of the closest to the Soviets. We were subject to both unit and air attacks. I can't remember whether it was then or later but I vividly remember our column being attacked by a German jet fighter. The noise and speed of the plane scared the hell out of us and there wasn't time to do anything but watch it fly away. Thank the Lord they didn't have many of them. As we penetrated deeper into Eastern Germany we drove through column upon column of German infantry and tanks that had been obliterated by air attacks. My division fought some major battles at Eisenach and Gotha as we pushed through to Zwickau and the Czech border but this story is not intended to be a military history, just the memories of one soldier which are related below, but not necessarily in strict chronological or geographical order.

### **[Insert photo]**

We were on the road somewhere in the province of Thuringia when we stopped for lunch. I remember it was a beautiful day and someone had turned the generator on so we could hear some music on the Army radio station when a bulletin was announced that President Franklin D. Roosevelt had just died. The entire battery was shocked into a deep and moving silence. Very soon we were in a small city called Ohrdruf. We were to stay there a few days so we kicked the German civilians out of their apartments and enjoyed the comforts of home. Outside this apartment complex was a large field where we gathered to eat. Again, it was a beautiful spring day and I was relaxing for a few moments reading the just distributed "*The Stars and Stripes*". The headline read "EISENHOWER SAYS LUFTWAFFE KAPUT". Comforting news and I did not look up immediately at the familiar sound of high flying planes but when I did it seemed to be just another flight of Allied fighters. After all, we just read they were totally destroyed. However, they began to circle and lose altitude rapidly and then peel off into a dive and heading towards us. Something was wrong, including all those training sessions we had the past six months on enemy aircraft identification. They were Messerschmitts and went after some of our gun positions causing some casualties, damage and considerable commotion before running off for another "back from the dead" attack.

It was also in this area as explained just above where we were billeted for several days in an apartment complex after having ejected the civilian owners/occupants and enjoying their comparative luxurious accommodations. The Frau of our apartment was particularly worried about her china and glasses.

We had no intention of damaging anything but soon grew tired of her interference and kicked her out. The kitchen was in the rear facing a field where our artillery was set up. I was writing a letter home on the kitchen table when I heard a roar and some firing. A German fighter plane was strafing the field *directly* in front of me and seemed headed right for me. Automatically, I fell to the floor seeking protection under the flimsy table, an automatic but futile reaction, and when he was gone, re-emerged to see that he had also dropped a bomb, killing a GI in his fox hole. After a few minutes, I returned to my letter writing but was shocked to discover that my hand was shaking so badly it was impossible for me to continue. It took over an hour before I returned to normal.

### The Horror of Ohrdruf's Camp

I soon had another shock but of a different type. My division was the first Allied Unit to liberate a Nazi concentration camp. It was located outside of Ohrdruf, and was a subunit of Buchenwald. The discovery of the camp is depicted in the entrance to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, exhibited on the third floor. As you exit the elevator, you first see a life-size photo of a GI in a jeep talking to his headquarters in disbelief having discovered the Ohrdruf Concentration camp. General Finley, our Division Commander, insisted that every man in the division see this horrible sight, along with the town's people of Ohrdruf. Although a labor not an extermination camp, it was difficult to note any difference. Most died from being overworked. As we approached, however, there was wholesale slaughter by the panicking guards. Bodies were everywhere, some half buried or simply thrown in pits; others still in the furnaces.

**[insert photo]**

We made this a major chapter in our division website, pictures, stories and all, least we forget what man can do to man. Mark and I visited it together 54 years later during our Remembrance Tour but all traces of the camp have completely disappeared. The town Burgomeister, claiming he knew nothing of the camp, committed suicide after being forced to view it. General Finley then made a statement, which was read to all the troops, highlighted by the phrase "Go forward and kill Germans". Sounds corny today but not then. When we returned to our apartment I am proud to say we restrained ourselves. Some wanted to destroy everything in the apartment and I was sorely tempted but we did not lower ourselves to the level of the Nazi beasts.

### Combat Vignettes

It is impossible to predict one's reaction to combat. For example, we had a young Swede whom, back in the States, had been given the assignment to handle our one anti-aircraft gun, a 50mm machine gun. In training, by constant repetition and dedication, he learned how to fieldstrip the gun and reassemble it almost blindfolded. When permitted, he practiced firing and was very proud of his

responsible assignment. One day we were in a small town for a long enough time to set up the machine gun for defense in a pit with some sandbags around to protect him and the gun. A low flying, German fighter plane came so close that I could actually see the pilot's face as he attacked us. Heroically, I unslung my carbine and emptied my clip certain I must have hit him or the plane but, of course, it had no effect except to make me feel better. On the other hand, the poor Suede didn't fire a round off; his hands had frozen on the trigger. How do you explain those things?

Not being either in the infantry or even on the line with a battery except when making deliveries, for me combat was a series of unrelated circumstances, some already mentioned, limited to aerial attacks, occasional battery counter fire and, rarely for us, small arms fire. In fact, I never saw the enemy except from a considerable distance or when he was dead or surrendering. We had seen the V-2s high in the sky on their way to England and knew the war was still killing innocent civilians. Sometimes I wished I were with the infantry (my old enthusiasm returning) and one time, after getting angry over something I can't even remember now, I asked the First Sergeant for an immediate transfer to an infantry outfit. He calmed me down and told me to forget it. While I must have given him fits at times, he was a real man.

I did have one experience that made me realize the type of anxiety and fear our infantrymen experienced on a regular basis. For some reason I have long ago forgotten, one evening I was ordered to take a truck with two of our Sergeants to a unit some distance from us but located on our map. However, despite the extensive mapping knowledge of my fearless leaders, we soon got lost and it was rapidly getting dark. To make matters dicicier, we were in an area where enemy infantry was likely to be close by, an unusual experience for Service Battery soldiers. Close to midnight, as we approached a small town in the pitch black, we ran into one of our tank destroyers guarding the entrance, much relieved to discover it wasn't a German tank. Other 89ers, I don't know from what unit, were holed up for the night in the village and we were advised to do the same. I don't believe any of us slept well that night and were relieved when day broke and we could carefully find our way back to our unit. During my combat experience, we had been shelled by 88s and strafed and bombed by the Luftwaffe, no picnic I assure you, but I never had the experience and fear of dealing face-to-face with enemy. This was as close as I got and it was not pleasant.

**[insert photo of unit]**

In combat and moving so fast, food was always a problem but some of us became very skilled at feeding off the land. We arrived one night in a small farming village and stayed there overnight. The next morning I was elected to scrounge around the several hen houses in view and get some eggs for breakfast. I was delighted to find about a half dozen eggs still in their nets, placed



them carefully in my helmet liner, and rushed back to proudly display my catch. Something was wrong as my buddies started to laugh. Only two of the eggs were real, the rest were porcelain eggs used to encourage the hen to lay. Needless to say, I was highly embarrassed but what could you expect from someone born in Brooklyn?

Another peculiarity of this time was the nightly visits of "Bed Check Charley" which is what we called the single fighters which flew only at night, flying very low, firing at any light they saw. They were mainly a nuisance but could be deadly. They were particularly interested in convoys moving towards the "front". This is what the once vaunted Luftwaffe now finally reduced to.

### The End Approaches

As we drove through the cities of Werdau and Zwickau, we knew it would soon be over. We had a little song we used to sing as we passed German refugees on the road. It went something like this: " Was ist los? The hund ist los. The Burgomeister is tot. Alles ist kaput." Our principal preoccupation was to keep our batteries supplied with food (c-rations) and ammunition. One night, I joined a convoy going westward for a resupply of artillery shells. We, including me, drove all night, under blackout conditions of course, to the distant supply depot and returned exhausted well after midnight. As a reward for my attention to duty, I was put on guard duty immediately. You have to wonder sometimes what went through the heads of these junior officers and pray it wasn't repeated at higher levels of command. There was plenty of cut-off Germans in the area requiring one to stay alert. I had to constantly fight the overwhelming urge to close my eyes, awaking quickly in a state of alarm. Fortunately, no kraut was prowling about.

We were holed up in a small town outside and east of Zwickau, near the Czech border. We had stockpiled a supply of 105mm shells near our makeshift motor pool area. It had been raining steady and the ground was a mass of mud. Of course, I was selected for guard duty that night. I was no longer on "extra duty" but was still the lowest ranking soldier in the Battery even though Congress had passed an Act which promoted me to PFC. To keep my feet as dry as possible and avoid killer trench feet, I would take a break from walking in the mud and climb up and sit on top of a pile of shells for a moments rest. When I did this one time, I noticed distant flashing in the sky that kept coming nearer to us. About two or three hundred yards directly in front of me was a highway used by our Redball Express trucking units to get supplies to the front. Even though they were traveling with blackout lights, the pilot spotted them and started to fire his tracer-loaded machine guns. Being in a direct line with both the fighter and the trucks, the tracers began to arch their way to what seemed the very pile I was sitting on. Without a moment's thought, I dived for the ground thereby immersing myself deeply in the mud. Another heroic but unsung event in my Army career.

## Pre Non-fraternization and The End

It was, I believe, at this same spot that an event happened which made me think that maybe war wasn't going to be all hell and/or that's its ending would soon bring newly discovered pleasures. Near our encampment was a small, multi-unit apartment building and several homes. While-off duty, several of us made the acquaintance of some young and rather pretty German madchens. For the first time, my laborious efforts in high school German began to pay off.

We were soon sneaking into their place at night with goodies. While they appreciated and needed them, they were obviously more interested in we vigorous young men. They were in their teens or early 20s and had had very little male "companionship", most of them their age being either already dead, POWs, severely wounded, or otherwise unavailable. And here were us Yanks. It had been a long time since my initial and sole experience in the pleasures of the opposite sex in Oregon and an uncertain and dangerous future in Japan lay ahead. Need I say more?

It was here, I think near a town named Werdau that the war ended for us. The Germans were trapped in the mountains on the boarder with Czechoslovakia between us and the Soviets, waiting for the official cease fire which, when it came, would signal their mass exodus and surrender to us, thereby avoiding the tender mercies of the Soviets. During this lull, I had an interesting or at least memorable experience. A recent replacement Technical Sergeant and I were detailed to take a truckload of empty jerry cans to Zwickau after lunch and return with filled cans of gasoline. We were just finishing chow before taking off on a lovely spring day. The sergeant was a real jerk from an anti-aircraft unit and of no use to Service Battery except for keep-out-of-the way tasks like *commanding* the gasoline truck driver, which is why he was given to me. While relaxing before taking off, we got into some kind of oral argument over politics and raised our voices a bit. Along came a Second Louie trying to impress us (or the Captain) with his importance asking why we were talking so loud and relaxing when we should be working or doing something else constructive, I guess. When we explained that we were about to take off for Werdau as scheduled and why, he was taken back a bit but recovered (read: saved face) by telling me (not the Sergeant, of course) to report to him when I returned and before dinner. Nothing said to the Sergeant, just me.

Well, that's the kind of things you can expect in a Service Battery so off we go to Zwickau. When we pulled on to the main road we got quite a shock. There, along side us on the road, we were passing an entire Panzer Division slowly coming into the Zwickau collecting area to surrender. We passed tank after tank and trucks filled with armed soldiers. Somehow, my little carbine and the Sergeant's pistol gave me little solace. Well, we made it into the depot safely missing my last chance to earn a medal. It's not so bad offloading 240-250 *empty* gas cans but it's no picnic loading an equal amount when they are full and I, having done most of the work and all of the driving, was tired. We had to wait our turn and also

because of the heavy traffic didn't get back to our unit until diner time and the chow line was already forming. So I said to myself, "The hell with it. I'm beat and he knows he was just being chicken". But of course, military discipline had to be maintained, especially in the face of the enemy, and about 15 minutes after chow I got a call to come to Captain Fallow's tent, our Battery Commander. There he was with this little pretty-boy Lieutenant at his side. He asked me why I hadn't reported to the Lt. (by the grace of God, I've forgotten his name) as ordered. I told him respectfully but straight forward that I was bushed when I returned and the Lt. knew he was just being chicken-shit (I don't think I use that exact phrasing but that was the gist of it.) The Captain's reply (he wasn't a bad guy, really, a former bank teller I think) was something like "Kitchell, when am I ever going to be able to make a soldier out of you?" I thought but didn't say, not while we are both in a Service Battery". For the next week, when not on duty, I dug one of the deepest and largest sump pits you've ever seen. It didn't bother me one bit. Military discipline is one thing. Taking crap is another.

### Occupation

Well, it was finally over - the European part, that is - and we knew it wouldn't be long before most of us would be heading to Japan. Meanwhile, the Division was reassigned to the occupation of the province of Thuringia, which would eventually end up in the Soviet zone thereby freeing us for other duties and eventual reassignment, either as a division or as replacements. My battery was first located in the town of Reinsdorf and comfortably ensconced in some sort of a garden club (but I may have this confused with Waltershausen, discussed just below). One late night on guard duty under a railroad trestle, I heard the unmistakable sound of German spiked boots and watched from my hidden position as the figure came closer. The war was just over and you didn't know what kind of nuts or fanatics were still roaming out there. When within accurate range of my carbine, I loudly called out "HALT" which is the same in German as English. The figure, now an obvious German soldier, came to an immediate halt maintaining a rigid posture while I called for the Corporal-of-the-Guard. He said he had been released from a POW camp and showed us his papers (which none of us could understand) and told us that this was his home town where his wife and family lived. The MPs or someone took him into custody but his papers proved to be valid and the next day he joined his family and profusely thanked me for not shooting him when he came in. That event remains vividly in my memory to this very day. Reinsdorf is also where I learned, for the first time, to like beer. Germans did everything but cook the food, and they did that sometimes, and suddenly life for a PFC became much easier.

### Displaced Persons

To some extent we retraced our steps and the 563<sup>rd</sup> was eventually assigned to Waltershausen, near Eisenach where we had a lively battle with the SS troops. Waltershausen was a nice town not too damaged by the war. It had been know

for its doll-making, not industry, which might explain why war damage was slight. Our 'barracks', which I may have confused with the one in Reinsdorf, was located next to the railroad station near the edge of town. I think it was here that I had my first encounter with displaced persons, or DPs as they were called. They were located in enclosed camps near the factory or fields where they worked. These camps were not concentration or termination camps in the Nazi mode but were filled with forced, that is slave, laborers from conquered territories, mostly from the Ukraine, Poland and Russia. They were men, women and children of all ages. The camps were, in some respects, similar to our own camps for Japanese-Americans in the west with the only mitigating difference for this shameful act in our history being that our ill-treated citizens were not forced to work. While not, in most cases, purposely maltreated by the German civilians they worked for, they suffered greatly particularly as the war drew to a close and food became scarce. It was to take, in most cases, months after the war's end before these unfortunate people could be transported back to their homes. In the meantime, most remained in their now open camps and subsisted on food they scrounged from the landscape or was eventually supplied by the Allies. Some, however, took to the road in caravans, which didn't help the logistical problems facing the Allied Forces.

**[insert photo pf Tina]**

Even so, they were a happy group, at least the people in the camp outside of the town we were quartered. Often, during the day, using a commandeered flat bed truck, they would come racing through town playing their balalaikas, singing loudly and dancing in the famous Russian style of crouching and lifting each foot alternatively in time with the music. How they stayed on the truck I'll never understand. One night a few of us visited their camp. It was probably forbidden but we didn't give a damn, after all, they weren't the former enemy. Of course, we brought some goodies with us. Around a large bonfire, they were dancing and singing and I met a sweet young girl named Tina who was from Kiev in the Ukraine. She was cute, a bit short and built solidly in more ways than one. We couldn't communicate orally a bit but just had a lot of fun together like two kids, dancing, singing and stealing an occasional kiss. Somewhere I think I still have her picture. I like to think that she will also have a pleasant memory of that innocent night.

### Non-Fraternization In Action

As the war was reaching its end in Europe, General Eisenhower issued his famous fraternization ban of American and Allied forces with the enemy, present or former. While the political and psychological reasoning for such act are understandable, as was soon proved it was a naive and unenforceable fiat, which ran against the course of human nature. A good example is a personal experience I had in Waltershausen. One of our guard posts was at the railroad station. About 100 yards from the station, just off the tracks, was a small cubicle-

like office where a clerk was stationed to record freight movements of some sort. The clerk happened to be very attractive young women and, of course, the soldiers on guard frequently gravitated to this spot but they couldn't get even a nod. This was the time when my high school German really paid off. I can't remember her name but believe I have it somewhere on a picture. She responded to my limited German and after a few such tours of guard duty she suggested that when she got off work in the afternoon that I follow her, but not too closely, to find where she lived and then return when the curfew was on and she would let me in for a "visit". As part of our terrifying and draconian post-war rule (?), all German civilians were under a 7:00pm to 6:00am curfew during which time they were forbidden to be on the streets (the curfew also applied to us). I did as instructed and she started walking down the main street with me a discrete 50 to 100 yards behind. All went well until she turned off the main street into a residential area full of what we would describe as row houses. As she turned down the street where her home was located, she unfortunately stepped through her doorway before I could get an exact fix on which one it was, they were all so similar. This presented a problem but my rigid military training and youthful needs for female companionship would overcome all obstacles.

Just before the curfew, I strolled down the main street, more carefully as 7 pm witching hour approached. Then I cut over to her street but there was no indication, which was her house. As I said the houses were in a row and in the rear, each house had it's own, fenced in, garden space. There was a walkway or alley there, which separated the area from a duplicate row of gardens and houses. This was repeated through the whole neighborhood. As I walked down the alley in full uniform, of course, and with my carbine, many people were working in their gardens. As I approached the approximate area of where I figured she must live, a rather old women (it turned out to be her grandmother) was working in her garden and nodded to me that this was the place but told me not to come in until all her neighbors were in their homes. It was now past the curfew and it soon became obvious that the local people were not going to go indoors without some persuasion. I shouted at them in English and German and waved my gun at them but they weren't fooled. They knew what was up. Then, suddenly and scaring the hell out of me, a military police patrol jeep with an officer in it drove rapidly by an intersection of our alley with another about 50 or 100 yards away. You could hear the jeep come to a screeching halt and turn around. With that, Grandma opened the garden gate and rushed me in the rear door. At the same, all the Germans rapidly disappeared into their homes. That jeep must have circled the area for hours before giving up in frustration and I enjoyed every minute of it. Of course, when returning to my quarters late at night, I was very careful feeling like a crook as I sneaked from doorway to doorway.

**[insert photo]**

Now you might think I am about to describe a scene of lust and, honestly, I wouldn't have necessarily resisted such an outcome but that's not what

happened. At first, I was a little uncomfortable in a German home with my carbine slung on a coat hook and her father's picture as a Luftwaffe Colonel proudly displayed on the mantle. But we quickly we entered into a most interesting if puzzling dialogue. It was said, and not without irony, that there were no Nazis in Germany-at least when we got there. As we started to get acquainted I asked her how she and others like her father could have supported a beast like Hitler. To my surprise, she did not deny her feelings and listed the many great things she though Hitler has done for Germany after their great depression following their defeat in World War. She listed the events we are all familiar with, e.g., ending unemployment, providing new hope and direction for the German people, regaining lost provinces and territory, building new schools, the autobahn, etc., etc., and had rejected as propaganda all the terrible things said about him. As I recounted the evil and terrible things the Nazis had done under the leadership of Hitler, she was clearly taken back and unbelieving but when describing what I had actually seen at Ohrdruf she was clearly shaken to the core. We continued our conversations over several visits, accompanied with what we called necking in my day but she neither encouraged nor did I press for anything further which, in retrospect, I am very proud of. It is comforting to think that I helped her begin to understand and accept what had actually happened and that we both took giant steps in learning how to move on in peace and strive for a better world for all mankind. I hope she fared well.

The story of my occupation duty and Waltershausen ends, appropriately, with a doll. The day we were to leave for France, our trucks and cannons were lined up in the road next to the railroad station waiting, as usual, for the word to move out. Suddenly, from her little office cubicle she emerged and walked towards my truck with the whole Battery looking on. She had a doll in her hand, which she presented to me as she kissed me goodbye. The troops went wild and, for the moment at least, I was the most envied soldier around. I am happy to conclude with the observation that no officer made any inquiry. The doll is long-gone, I think I gave it to my mother, but not the memory.

### Back to France

By train and truck, back we went to where we started, Normandy France. The grand concept was, I believe, to have the 89<sup>th</sup> run or at least start up the old cigarette camps which would process the freed up divisions to return to the States, provide their soldiers with 30 days leave while the outfit was refitted, and then send them on to the Pacific theater as reorganized divisions or as individual replacements. At first we believed the 89<sup>th</sup> would then follow itself but it turned out that this was not in the High Command's plans but this information was withheld from the troops to prevent demoralizing them, or some screwy idea like that. The 563<sup>rd</sup>, or at least my Battery, ended up in one of the smaller camps near Rouen (I think it was camp Old Gold) and close to our old "friend", Camp Luck Strike. *I didn't realize it at the time, but this marked the beginning of some*

*good and memorable times for me.*

Not long after we settled in, one morning I picked up the latest *Stars and Stripes* newspaper and most of the front page was filled with a drawing of what appeared to be a large and puzzling mushroom. This accompanied the startling news of the original atomic bomb being dropped on Japan, the first knowledge any of us ever had about such a miraculous weapon and our first inkling that World War II might soon be over. Welcome as the news was, most of us could not make ourselves believe it. After all, "Golden Gate in '48" had been our motto and hope for so long.

I don't remember having much to do in Old Gold. I might have been working in our camp PX, but in a short while I get very sick with a chest cold and high fever. I stayed in the sack in my tent for several days and asked our cook to supply me with my mother's favorite treatment for the grippe, a mustard plaster application. It never failed in the past but it did this time. Finally, a medical officer came to see me and diagnosed me, correctly, as having pneumonia. It turned out to be atypical pneumonia, whatever that meant. I was immediately transported to the Army Hospital in Rouen, located in an old but spacious French hospital building but completely staffed by Americans. Penicillin was in scarce supply in those days and the usual treatment was some sulfa concoction (sulfamethoxazole, my MD son-in-law tells me) . It was a slow process and, as I improved with treatment, not an unpleasant process as the nurses and others were very kind and occasionally took us outdoors on little outings, but in two weeks or so, I was ready to go back to my outfit. Upon return, I received a very pleasant surprise. I was given an R&R (rest and recreation) furlough of seven days in Nice. I sold my watch and every carton of cigarettes I could buy at the PX to get some spending money for the trip.

### VJ Day/Paris and Nice

Soon, about four of us, were on our way. We boarded a civilian train for Paris with Army tickets and our adventure began. A conductor came down the aisle announcing that lunch was being served in the dinning car. I guess we had been told not to eat in non-military places but, ever the pusher of boundaries, I asked him if we could eat there. He replied "Mais oui, Mousier" and personally escorted us to the car and seated us, making us feel very good. The lunch was great, at least for us, and we started off on a high note, little realizing that tomorrow would be *the day of century*. When we arrived in Paris, we were assigned to an Army billet for transients and scheduled to leave for Nice in the morning. The next day the Japanese surrender was announced, it was VJ day and Paris, like other cities in the free world, went mad. **What a place to be on this momentous day!!!**

That night we went to huge dance hall that was regularly used for GI entertainment. It was filled to the gills with hilariously happy GIs and their French

friends, mostly female of course. While food was available, cases of champagne were constantly being delivered; in some cases donated by grateful Frenchmen, I'm sure. Dancing was almost impossible and just an excuse to hold and kiss a girl, and the noise almost ear splitting. I would be happy to describe this unique experience in more detail but, for some reason, I can't seem to remember the details.

After very little sleep, somehow we dragged ourselves out of bed and went down to the train station the next day (I think but wouldn't swear on it) for our transportation to Nice and, ah, what a beautiful sight that was for our sore eyes. This time I have to give the Army credit. They really did it right. Upon arrival, we were given hot showers and new clothing and then off to one of the plush pre-war hotels taken over temporarily for us. We were assigned to the Negressco, a famous old and stately hotel right on the beach. All the hotels maintained their own staff, including chefs, but the Army supplied the food and oh, what the French could do with it as we soon learned to our delight and which made me a lover of French food and wine for life. There was, of course, no charge for room and meals. However, there was also a plentiful supply of bars, cafes, bistros and the like. Both as a guide for GIs and to prevent them from being exploited, all such establishments were placed in one of four categories with prices controlled accordingly. This was very helpful.

Besides enjoying the beach and sightseeing, I had two memorable and pleasant experiences there. My high school buddy was a Christian Scientist and I had become interested in their teachings (the old slogan that their were no atheists in war was pretty accurate). While in Nice, I visited a Christian Science practitioner and after a pleasant and helpful talk she invited me to join her on a bus trip to Grasse (famous for its perfumes) up in the mountains with a glorious view of the Riviera. She also mentioned bringing along a young lady for my company, which seemed fine to me. Away we went the next day and the Mademoiselle was indeed very attractive, young and graciously. How did I get so lucky? After a perilous but beautiful bus ride, we reached our destination, a café with an outdoor patio overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. Madame had brought some sandwiches in a bag for lunch and ordered some soft drinks. Out came several fresh tomato sandwiches, a gracious gesture as tomatoes were in very short supply and only available on the expensive black market. Unfortunately for me, I simple can't eat raw tomatoes – never could and still, to my wife's consternation, never will. But, of course, I couldn't refuse to accept her gift. So with a smile on my face and a groan in my gut, I ate a sandwich smiling all the way. She was so pleased that she insisted I have another one. What can you do? (Reminds me of many years later when I was a Foreign Service Officer in Jordan, as guest of honor at a Sheik's feast in the desert I was obliged to eat the eyes of a camel whose meat we were eating. I got through that ordeal by envisioning the American flag being run up a flagpole.)

**[insert photo]**



Well, good deeds sometimes pay off. I asked the young lady out the next night but was careful where we went because my finances were very limited. We danced a bit and enjoyed ourselves. She mentioned having a friend who was dating a Sergeant who worked in a ritzy hotel with a great band up on a hill over the city. She suggested we go there with her girl friend to dance while waiting for her boyfriend until he got off duty when the outdoor dance floor closed down and the soldiers and others departed. It was one of the most romantic evenings of my life. The orchestra and patrons left and the lights went out. The dance floor, however, was flooded with the light of a full moon and we are completely alone. I invited her to continue dancing and sung softly into her ear, primarily to provide us with some rhythm and it worked superbly. I had a pretty good voice in those days. When it was time to go, I escorted them both to the place they were living. We sat on the stairs and talked and kissed occasional until almost sunrise. I never saw or heard from her again, but it is still a sweet, lovely and innocent memory. She wrote on a picture she gave me "To my American friend". Nice.

### Rouen

Soon after I got back to camp, the 563<sup>rd</sup> was sent to Rouen to act as military police in the city. What a ball. We patrolled the streets and sometime guarded so-called strategic sites like major gas lines. As combat GIs and not real MPs, we also provided "unauthorized" taxi service for soldiers too drunk to walk back to their trucks for return to their camp. We were comfortably billeted in a fair sized building with our own mess hall. Early on, I believe it was at a street celebration for Bastille Day or something similar, I met a French family in the crowd watching the fireworks and struck up a conversation with the father and, of course, attractive daughter. They kindly invited me their home for coffee when it was over. They were a middle-class, educated family and it was very interesting to hear their prospective about the war. Of course, the citizens of Rouen, like all French people, were grateful for the role we had taken in liberating their country from the Germans but the citizenry had suffered terribly in both the invasion *and* liberation of France. Rouen, for example, located on the Seine River and a major transportation artery and port, had been heavily bombed in preparation for the invasion. The allied bombers were aiming at the wharfs and ships docked there but unfortunately a great many of our bombs wiped out almost the entire northern bank up to and severely damaging its famous cathedral near the center of the city. It was one vast wasteland (Fifty-four years later, when I returned to Rouen with my son and saw the size of the area where restoration had long ago been completed, I couldn't believe its magnitude because now I could only see cathedral spires.) My French host was trying delicately to explain why many people in Rouen were unhappy or even bitter about the Allies. I am certain he was correct but I never encountered any animosity personally.

Most of time I patrolled the streets in the daytime, which was easy work, although sometimes a bit more challenging in the evening. It was easy to meet and chat

with the pretty girls walking but, unless you spoke French, not so easy to follow-up on. In a bar/café we frequented, I did make an interesting female acquaintance. She was a very pretty blonde woman who hung out with a girlfriend in the bar as a prostitute. We often chatted with them and she explained that she had a child and her husband had been killed in the war. Sometimes I would give her some candy and food for the child and cigarettes for her to sell. She felt obligated to explain that she and her friend wanted to buy a village café they had their eye on outside Rouen and would quit what they were doing as soon as they had accumulated enough money. One day when we stopped by, she and her friend were gone—they had obviously achieved their goal. I thought that was the last I would see of Jacqueline. However, a few weeks later as I was on street patrol in town, there she was sprightly walking with her full shopping basket. We talked and she was radiant in her happiness. She invited me to come visit her and see her new place. It was located at least 20 km out of town off the main road and would be a difficult journey but I promised to try and get out there as soon as I had some free time. I soon found the time, but on a Saturday when there was no bus transportation and little local travel because of the gas shortages. I easily caught a ride out of Rouen to the intersection with the road going to her town but not a single vehicle came along it and I must have walked at least 10 miles to reach it. They had a lovely little country café and I see why they would love it. After a welcoming drink, I could see they were busy and I was bushed so she took me up to her room to rest and I promptly fell asleep. As I awoke in the early afternoon, there she was looking fondly at me as she undressed, climbed into bed beside me and showed me her appreciation in the best way she knew. I am sure she went on to a happy, prosperous and normal life. Hey, we all have to do tough things in perilous times.

Aug 31, 2000

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