James Laubheimer, 83, art teacher, served in 'Ghost Army' during WWII

By FREDERICK N. RASMUSSEN
SUN STAFF

James Bennett Laubheimer, retired coordinator of art for Baltimore County public schools who drew lighthearted and topical caricatures that were cherished by those who knew him, died of pneumonia Feb. 27 at Good Samaritan Hospital. The Baynesville resident was 83.

Mr. Laubheimer was born at home in Govans and raised in Towson and Lutherville. He was a 1938 graduate of Towson High School. While working at Maryland Casualty Co., he attended night law school at the University of Baltimore.

His interest in art began early. — "He was the youngest child, and to keep him quiet his parents gave him paper and pencils so he could draw," said his daughter, Jo W. Asher, also an artist, of White Hall.

After leaving law school in 1942, Mr. Laubheimer enlisted in the Army's 603rd Engineer Camouflage Battalion — part of the "Ghost Army of World War II" — whose role was to deceive German troops with rubber and wooden airplanes, artillery, tanks and jeeps. He served with a number of noted artists, including Ray Harford, who drew the comic strip *Captain Marvel*, and Bill Blass, who later became a popular clothing designer.

Mr. Laubheimer's reminiscences about his unit were included in Philip Gerard's 2002 book, *Secret Soldiers: How a Troupe of American Artists, Designers, and Sonic Wizards Won World War II's Battles of Deception Against the Germans.*

Mr. Laubheimer, who earned five Bronze Stars and attained the rank of sergeant, was injured in an artillery attack that partially blinded him in one eye.

After the war, he returned to Baltimore and resumed his law school career while working as a courier during the day, delivering large envelopes with legal documents to judges' chambers.

"The blank envelopes and long rides on the streetcar proved irresistible, as he sketched scenes along the way directly on the envelopes," his daughter said. "Seeing the drawings, one judge asked him, 'Son, why are you in law school?' He immediately called the Maryland Institute College of Art, where his talents were quickly realized."

James B. Laubheimer, shown in 1991, was coordinator of art for Baltimore County schools.

While attending the institute, he met and fell in love with a fellow art student, the former Suzanne Coffman, whom he married in 1947.

After earning his bachelor's degree in art in 1950, he began his teaching career at Dundalk High School, where he remained until being promoted to supervisor of secondary art in 1965.

"He was a low-keyed, extremely modest individual with excellent rapport with everyone, especially the students in his art classes," said James B. Shock Jr., a former colleague and retired principal. "The latter was so great that on several occasions he volunteered to carry a teaching load of seven periods instead of the normal five to accommodate the student registration for his art classes."

In addition to his regular work, he taught summer and Saturday classes at MICA, where he earned a master's degree and headed its evening school from 1959 to 1964.

In 1968, he was promoted to coordinator of art for Baltimore County public schools, a position he held until retiring in 1984.

"Jim's curriculum which he implemented became nationally acclaimed," said James Iams, a retired Baltimore County art teacher and friend of 55 years. "He was a very talented man. He played the piano, wrote well, and was proficient in many different mediums. He painted in oil, watercolor, pastels, and did drawings and carvings."

Mary Ellen Saterlie, who was associate superintendent of instruction when Mr. Laubheimer was coordinator of art, said, "He was a model for what he believed. The programs he developed flowed from his own persona. He raised art to a starring role in the curriculum, and by so doing opened doors for thousands of children whose lives became enriched as they found talents they didn't know they had."

No person or institution was immune from Mr. Laubheimer's caricatures, which sprang from a fast eye and hand that were propelled by an easygoing, yet quick, wit.

"Everyone, from the superintendent to the freshmen in his art classes, were eligible subjects, and it was an honor to be selected as one," Mr. Shock said. "If there was a conflict at school, Jim would do one of his cartoons, hang it on the wall, and it suddenly melted away."

Bruno Baron, chairman of the art department at Chesapeake High School, said he has been guided by a piece of advice given by Mr. Laubheimer years ago.

"He said, 'A practicing artist makes the best teacher.' Many art teachers in Baltimore County are practicing artists, who continue to hone their skills not only as teachers but artists in their own right," Mr. Baron said.

Mr. Laubheimer's own artwork, rendered in watercolors, embraced Baltimore rowhouses and busy street scenes, the Chesapeake Bay and its boats, as well as the barns and rolling countryside of rural Maryland.

He also was an accomplished jazz band pianist and continued playing until his death. He also liked introducing children to the joys of music.

He was a lifelong communicant of Trinity Episcopal Church in Towson, where services were held yesterday.

Surviving, in addition to his wife and daughter, are two grandsons.

TRO

the Baltimore region

BARBARA HADDOCK TAYLOR : SUN STAFF

ys' Latin middle school, teaches a Latin limbing, fly fishing and outdoors life.

Latin leader utd ors life

for the course and Boys' Latin agreed to finance the trip. After submitting a 25-page application detailing every rock, ice block and mountain he'd ever climbed, including Mount Kilimanjaro and peaks in the Grand Tetons and the Adirondacks, Paternotte was accepted and sent to the wilderness of Wyoming.

"It was basically a 35-day job interview," he said of the month spent carrying an 85-pound backpack, subsisting on meager rations and living without electricity, heat or clean clothes.

When it came time for evaluations, Paternotte earned a patrol leader certification, a position one level above instructor.

Back at Boys' Latin, Paternotte further combined his love of teaching and love of the outdoors by starting a climbing club.

Every weekday morning, the bespectacled graduate of Colgate University and Loyola College teaches eighth-graders Latin. Dressed in a navy suit, a white shirt and a red-and-white diagonal-striped bow tie, Paternotte looks nothing like the rug-

CARROLL COUNTY

Car carrying 4 teens hits tree, killing girl, 15

A 17-year-old boy lost control of the sedan he was driving on Springdale Road near Westminster and struck a tree early yesterday, killing a 15-year-old female passenger, state police said.

Sarah Phillips of New Windsor died while riding in the front passenger seat. The two back-seat passengers, Nichole Carbert, 15, of Hampstead and Sammuel Phillips, 17, of New Windsor, were taken to Carroll Hospital Center with minor injuries and released.

The driver of the 1996 Ford Contour was flown with serious injuries to Maryland Shock Trauma Center. The name of driver was being withheld pending an investigation, police said.

The vehicle was heading north on Springdale Road, north of Jasontown Road, about 2:45 a.m. when it went off the right shoulder, police said.

PERRY HALL

Armed man robs bank; no arrests made, police say

An armed thief robbed the 1st Mariner Bank, in the 8800 block of Belair Road, shortly after 10:30 a.m. yesterday, Baltimore County police said.

The vehicle used in the robbery was recovered in the afternoon, but no one has been arrested, police said.

A police spokesman said he did not know how many people were involved in the crime.

NEWS MAKER

Martha A. Smith

Occupation: President, Anne Arundel Community College

In the news: Smith welcomed President Bush to the Arnold campus Wednesday as he gave a speech on job training and praised the college as a model for preparing workers.

Career highlights: Since Smith arrived as AACC president in 1994, she has overseen the

Some corrections made

Pop Pop Went to War

by

James B. Laubheimer

(unedited version)

TO

Andrew Livesay
and
William Livesay

Pop Pop Went to War

FOREWARD

The following is a chronological series of events that I experienced as a soldier during World War II. My ability to recall so many details has been enhanced by the fact that my sister saved many of the letters I wrote during this three-year period. These were given to me many years ago, but it wasn't until my retirement that I bothered to review them, nearly forty years later. It may seem strange, but almost every letter brought back memories of incidents and characters that I thought I had long forgotten. By arranging these letters in order (by the postmark), I have been able to trace my life in the army from induction to discharge.

In addition to the letters, I was fortunate to locate a map, created by one of the artists in the outfit, that graphically laid out our operations and headquarters locations throughout Europe. Therefore, names of places through which we traveled, as well as dates we were there, became available to me. Obviously, such valuable resources did much to sharpen my recall.

This account of my brief three years as a soldier is dedicated to my grandsons, Andrew and William Livesay. One of the legacies that I would like to leave them is the understanding that one can accomplish almost anything when the need arises. It is not my intent to glorify war or to paint myself as some kind of hero. To the contrary, war is one heluva scary experience and the fact that I, as a not-very-aggressive young man, met each new challenge without faltering too much is meant to prove my point.

In addition to my thoughtful map-drawing friend and the foresight of my sister, I would like to acknowledge the support that I received from all members of my family and friends during the entire duration of my enlistment. My mother, who died while I was in the service, wrote many "chatty" letters even though she was quite ill, and she kept me constantly updated as to conditions "on the home front". After her death, my sister took up this task, and hardly a day passed that I missed hearing from home. At the same time, my brother kept me well apprised of the way things were going with his little family in New York. My father, who worried about me but never "showed it", expressed a pride that encouraged me to always strive to do better. Friends, most of whom were scattered by the war, shared their experiences so I knew that mine were not unique. For any soldier, the knowledge that others "care" provides the strength that carries him over the roughest spots.

Most of the following episodes are intended to be amusing which is the way things always seem in retrospect. I'm sure that not all were amusing at the time of occurrence, and many episodes not included here were downright sorrowful. Nevertheless, a keen sense of humor is vital to survival in almost every aspect of life. This is another legacy I would like to leave my grandsons.

Chapter I

"Why you wearin' a black tie, soldier? You out of uniform!"

Such was my introduction to the man who was to be my first Sergeant for the duration of the war. I should say at the outset that he seldom indicated the tense of his statements by utilizing silly little qualifiers such as "are", "is", "was", or "were". A case could be made that this abbreviation was in the interest of simplifying military communications, but most of us who served with him came to interpret it as a lack of understanding the English language. Needless to say, no one ever offered corrections in view of two facts; the six bars with the little diamond in the middle that were neatly sewed on each arm of his shirt, and the sheer size of the man. Neither condition in any way merited scholarly pursuits on the part of his underlings.

The black tie to which the sergeant referred had been issued to me, along with all my other itchy olive drab uniform parts, at the Reception Center only a few hours earlier. It seemed that in the few hours that had elapsed, the army in all its wisdom, had changed regulations so that all ties were to be tan. The fact that I had no way of knowing this made no difference, so I said nothing. After only one week in the army at the Reception Center, I had already learned not to ask questions and never to volunteer. Consequently, the sergeant mumbled something about his lot in having to deal with "foul-ups", and instructed me to sit on a foot locker until the rest of the company returned from some kind of "field operation".

For what seemed to be an interminable time, I sat exactly where he placed me, while he disappeared into the Orderly Room. I soon became aware of a sad soul dressed in dirty civilian clothes who was half-heartedly sweeping the floor. At first, we ignored each other, probably convinced that to speak would result in the emergence of the "apparition" from the Orderly Room, leading to dire consequences for both of us. Gradually, however, he managed to sweep the floor under my feet so that we could exchange very quietly spoken words. He was, he whispered, Private Ray Harford and, unlike me, he had been sent directly to this outfit without going through a Reception Center. Therefore, he had no uniform (not even a black tie), and until one could be procured for him, he was to sweep floors, even if this condition lasted for the duration of the war. It was obvious that such "foul-ups" were inexcusable in the eyes of the 1st Sergeant. At any rate, he managed to tell me that he was a cartoonist, and the author of "Captain Marvel", which was a popular comic book of the time. This meant that he was an artist of national repute and probably from New York, all of which turned out to be true. However, in his present state he was, along with me, the "lowest of the low" - a Private in the Army of the United States.

I should mention that just about everyone in this outfit was an artist or, at least, a fellow traveler. While many had enjoyed success, notoriety, and fame, some of us were merely beginning "students of art". The reason for assigning people with art ability in one unit was to establish a Camouflage Battalion as a branch of the Corps of Engineers. The rationale was that folks with a talent for "fooling the eye" with brush and paint might best be utilized to fool the enemy into believing that a factory was a small shopping center or that a tank was a clump of trees. In reflection, I also suspect that they were desperately searching for

something to do with all of the "odd-balls" (as artists are often classified) and keep them off the backs of people with more serious military assignments. Whatever the reason, the 603rd Engineer Camouflage Battalion became operational at Fort Meade, Maryland, in 1942. The officers and non-coms at the outset were not artists and one must sympathize with their charge to shape a coordinated unit from a group of people whose main characteristic is to be individualistic. Let us hope that this partially explains the ongoing frustration of the poor first sergeant, who had joined the army to drive a truck, build bridges or, at least, deal with "normal" human beings, none of which he was going to get to do for the next three years.

My introduction to this whole business had come about one month prior to my enlistment. As the only one in the crowd who did such weird things as draw and paint, my friends were understandably concerned. One heard about the formation of the camouflage unit and hastened to arrange an appointment for me. Since I was about to be drafted, where I served, or in what capacity, was not of much interest. Nevertheless, it seemed like a fairly good deal at the time. I went to the appointment with a handful of drawings as advised and, to my surprise, I was accepted. Again, in retrospect, they were probably short-handed and as long as I made it to the meeting without collapsing, I was in.

The next step was the physical examination which goes down in my memory as the day that any vestiges of privacy or personal dignity flew away. I arrived at the Armory along with hundreds of other men, and was promptly stripped of my clothes and given a shipping tag to tie around my neck. Thus, we had an armory full to the brim with naked men of every conceivable shape and size and just about every age. As we progressed from examination to examination, some were so emaciated that I doubted whether or not they would make the next station. Some were obviously drunk to near oblivion and had to be supported along the way. Somehow, the really very thorough physical of every man continued without interruption.

In my particular case, it was determined at one point that I had some kind of spinal malfunction. I was given a red tag and placed in an anteroom along with other red taggers and a more physically ragged looking group could not be found anywhere. Some were obviously handicapped, some had nasty sores all over their bodies, and one was blind in one eye. The pleasant thought that I might not have to serve after all was offset by the disquieting thought that I was in the same unfortunate category as my red-tagged friends. At one point, we of the bedraggled corp were given boxed lunches. If I had been hungry, I could not have comfortably enjoyed lunch sitting naked on the floor while the fellow beside me drooled all over himself. In addition, decor that is made up of naked men of every size and shape does little for one's appetite.

One by one we were summoned from this anteroom to go before a review panel of doctors. When my turn came, it was announced that, since I was enlisting (and not a draftee), I would be accepted. I did not know whether to blame the friend who had gotten me into this mess or thank my lucky stars that I was out of the category of the handicapped. At any rate, within the hour, I had my hand raised to swear allegiance to my country as a Private in the Army. I noted with some concern that the drooler was standing beside me, and both were ordered to report for duty one week later on October 5, 1942. To be late or absent could lead to a firing squad . . . an auspicious start, to say the least.

I reported to the assembly point on time as ordered, dressed, as I recall in a gabardine suit, a new blue shirt, and sporting a black knit tie. Because of my appearance, I suspect, I was given the assignment (and orders) of shepherding five less well attired fellows to the train station where we embarked for Fort Meade - about fifteen miles away. I might say that this was my last position of leadership for some time to come, though the fact that two of the five never made it had nothing to do with my loss of authority. I presented the papers for all of us to the people at the Reception Center, and was not questioned at all about the missing soldiers. In all probability, this was a frequent occurrence, and I guess four out of six was a pretty good haul.

Upon arrival I was examined again by another panel of doctors and, again, was informed that, if drafted, I would have been rejected. Since it was lunch time, I was instructed to get in a chow line and report back to headquarters immediately after lunch. When I went outside, there must have been ten long lines of soldiers standing patiently awaiting entrance to what I assumed must be a mess hall. Not knowing which one to fall in behind, I grabbed the arm of a man who was standing around watching the whole procedure to ask which line I was supposed to join. The look of horror on his face quickly turned to one of resignation and he put his arm around my shoulders. "Son," he said, "See these funny round things on my shoulders? Well, they designate me as a Major in the United States Army. One simply does not clutch the sleeve of an officer and address him in an informal way. To be proper, you should stand at attention, salute, say "sir", and then state your question. In this case, since you obviously just arrived, I shall not take any action." He smiled weakly and led me to one of the lines. There I stood meekly until the line moved into the mess hall.

Two things I learned from that first encounter with military conduct; (1) salute everybody just in case he might be some kind of officer and, (2) that my life during that first week was to be spent mostly in lines and, in fact, lines were to be totally part of my entire military career. I stood in lines to get clothing, to get shots, to get fed, and even to take aptitude and intelligence tests. This was especially true during that week in the Reception Center where I quickly became enured to standing in lines to the pint where I never thought about it. In fact, long after my discharge, I had an uncontrollable desire to join any line I came across, which included those at the movies, ball parks, restaurants, etc. Even today I get a faint tinge of conscience whenever I see people lined up for whatever reason.

The Reception Center was the place where draftees and enlisted personnel were assembled for the issuing of clothing, testing, and deciding upon assignments. This usually required a week or so before soldiers were given orders and sent off to basic training camps throughout the country. The testing was especially important since emerging aptitudes had much to do with where each person was assigned, or so it was claimed. In my case, I had already enlisted in a specific branch of the service, but I nevertheless got to stand in line to be tested along with everyone else. My only memory of that event was being seated at a long bench and having the guy on one side ask me to write his name on the top of the test, and the one on the other side wanted to know how to spell "October". It was a time in my life when I appreciated my education.

At the end of the week at the Reception Center, about one hundred of us were escorted to the base train station to await shipment to our next assignment. There I sat on my barracks bag while each group of men were called to entrain for

some distant point. Finally, I was the only soldier on the platform, clutching my orders and shiny new in my uniform. A jeep pulled up, my name was called, and I was motored about ten blocks away to join the 603rd Engineer Camouflage Battalion, which just happened to be stationed at Fort Meade. It was there that I had my first experience with the 1st Sergeant.

Chapter II

I suppose I had sat on the foot locker (as directed) for about 45 minutes when the door to the barracks opened to admit what to me seemed to be a thundering herd. Actually, it was the return of the rest of the company from some kind of training activity, and their entrance was noisy to say the least. Each man rushed to a foot locker with an enthusiasm which escaped me, and I noticed that each one had a note pad in hand. Suddenly, someone hollered "Ten-Hut!" and everyone jumped up like puppets on a string (including me). In strutted a young man, certainly no older than I, but the shiny gold bar on his collar indicated a station in life that placed him legions above the rest of us, along with the President of the United States. "As you were", he shouted, and all of us "puppets" returned to a seated position on our respective foot lockers in complete unison. A chalkboard was magically produced and I was about to experience my first military training session. As I recall, the "class" had to do with map reading, and though I probably knew as much as anyone there - having been a Boy Scout - I was confused by the terminology and, of course, I had no note pad. When this deficiency was called to my attention by the Lieutenant, I foolishly announced that "I just got here." Under normal conditions, I might have been court martialed, since the standard answer to any query was "No excuse, sir!", but the young Lieutenant smiled tolerantly and waited patiently until some kind soul tore a page from his notebook and gave it to me and another man gave me a stub of a pencil. This whole incident could not have consumed more than one minute, but with about sixty pairs of eyes staring at me with obvious disapproval, I felt that I had been tried and convicted of a major breach of competence. I was convinced that my military career was hopelessly set back from that time forward. I was equally convinced that it would take some major feat on my part to erase this sad impression from the minds of my new companions.

I learned early in my army career that everything operated very much by the clock. I do not believe that any event could have transpired unless all watches were synchronized. This included battles, feeding of the troops, reveille, taps, and so on. And so it was that when time ran out for this particular training class a whistle blew, the Lieutenant stopped in the middle of a sentence, and somebody shouted "Ten-Hut!". The puppets arose as one, the lieutenant strutted out, somebody shouted "Fall out for chow!" and there was a mad scramble as the troops raced from the barracks to line up on the "company street" (the muddy area directly in front of the barracks). Not wishing to be crushed, I followed with as much dignity as I could muster, and found myself last in line behind the bedraggled, civilian-clad Ray Harford. By the way, that was the last time I permitted dignity to stand in the way of achieving a place near the head of the chow line. To be sixty-first behind sixty hungry men was to definitely limit the narrow choices available even to the first in line.

We returned to the barracks following lunch and before the next muster in the company street, I was assigned a bunk and a foot locker of my very own. I even met the soldier who was to sleep over my bunk and learned that he, too, was an art student (from New York, of course) and that his name was totally unpronounceable. He was an "old timer" having arrived at least two weeks earlier, and promised to look out for me until I learned the ropes. Having found another friend to go along with Harford, it was with more confidence that I joined the mad rush to "fall out" with the rest of the troops. I did my best to imitate a

soldier as I stood as stiffly as possible while the 1st Sergeant surveyed us as though he was inspecting the Queen's Guard. To my surprise, I heard him call my name (or try to, since anything more complicated than Smith or Jones was beyond him). Along with the hapless Harford and another fellow, I was informed that I had COAL DETAIL for the afternoon. We reported on the double to the motorpool where a truck laden with coal awaited us. Thus, my first afternoon assigned to the 603rd Engineer Camouflage Battalion was spent filling coal bins throughout Fort Meade. Actually, it wasn't too bad since nobody yelled at us, and we engaged in pleasant conversation while we worked. By this time, Harford's already dirty clothes were becoming even blacker from the coal dust, and the third person was busy telling us about the important job he held as an art director for a big ad agency in Chicago. It was obvious that he was completely at a loss as to why he was shoveling coal when he should be directing the operation of the war in a much more meaningful way. Such is fate, however, and none of us were really any the worse for wear for this assignment. In fact, it was probably one of the more useful things we would do for months to come. As to the art director - to the best of my knowledge, the ARMY never did recognize his skills in leadership, though other talents were uncovered. He became a company cook.

The 1st Sergeant's difficulty with names became clear to me within a few days. One morning as we stood information awaiting the day's assignment, he looked at me and ordered me to report to the motorpool as a truck driver. The fact that I had only recently learned to drive a car was not worth bringing up, so off I trotted to report to the motorpool sergeant, figuring that this person was obviously a mechanic who would not want his precious trucks in the hands of a complete novice. My mistake. Upon hearing my explanation about not knowing anything about driving trucks, he glanced at a paper on his desk and without looking up said "It says here that you are a truck driver. Go on the line and get #11. You and #11 have garbage detail today. The handlers will be waiting for you at the gate. I could only suppose that something was written on the paper that could not be questioned, and there was no use in further explanations. I shrugged, went in search of #11, climbed aboard, and studied the situation.

Fortunately the ignition key was in its little slot, and there was a diagram on the dash that sort of explained the gear shift. Without difficulty, I got it started and into low gear. I released the brake and carefully maneuvered the monstrous vehicle to the gate of the motorpool. Three husky soldiers climbed in the back and off we went to fulfill orders to pick up garbage at mess halls over Fort Meade. Frankly, I had a wonderful time since I did not emerge from the cab at any time, had little contact with my laboring crew (who had no idea of my incompetence), and even made it back to the motorpool with my smelly cargo. The fact that I never shifted gears except to go forward (in first gear) or backward (which I figured out from the diagram) did not seem to bother anyone, and I was ordered to report the next morning and await another driving assignment. I decided that I was set for the rest of the war!

For the next two weeks I reported to the motorpool every morning with great enthusiasm. #11 and I traveled about delivering coal, collecting trash, and even transporting unsuspecting troops to and from different sections of the Post. When no details were assigned, I faithfully cleaned the old girl, added grease as though I knew what I was doing, and even tried to fathom out the gears. Once, I even stood inspection with #11 and, believe it or not, I was commended upon her spotless appearance. I obtained a little manual and learned all sorts of useless facts about the nomenclature of trucks and related parts and, to this day, I know

what a "zirt fitting" is, although I'm not sure where one could be found on my present car. At any rate, I was delighted with this assignment so, you can imagine my disappointment when the 1st sergeant discovered the error resulting from his mix-up of "long" names.

On the first morning of the third week, as I started to happily trot off to the motorpool, the 1st sergeant called me back. "Where you going?" He had his hands on his hips, which was a certain sign that the one addressed had goofed up. "To the motorpool, of course" I responded, reminding him that he had assigned me to report there every morning for the past two weeks. "What you name?" He still was not sure. When I gave my name, he glanced at a paper and announced with considerable irritation, "You not supposed to be in the motorpool. You supposed to training as a camouflage soldier. You go with the second platoon. Get back in line." He looked again at his paper and then at the men in formation. "Who Nardiello?" he wanted to know. "What you doing in the camouflage platoon? You supposed to be a truck driver!" Poor Nardiello! All 200 pounds of him had been protesting this mix-up for two weeks and he was about resigned to spending the war playing the role of an artist - an assignment that he did not relish and for which he was not prepared. Needless to say, it was with great relief that he trotted off to the motorpool. All of this happened because the illustrious sergeant apparently made assignments based on the <u>length</u> of a name, so those of us with long names were destined to have many problems.

In retrospect, we didn't really suffer much, but the 1st sergeant's confusion certainly was hard on the equipment. Several weeks later I summoned courage to ask Nardiello about the fate of my old friend #11. "Incredible!" he said. "When I first got to the motorpool I was assigned to #11, and guess what? The whole transmission was completely burned out!" Oh well, I told them I didn't know anything about trucks.

Chapter III

My initial experiences in basic training probably lived up to my expectations primarily because I did not think I was cutout to be a soldier. Consequently, with a "can't do it" attitude, I tended to look upon each aspect of the training as impossible before I even knew what I was getting into. In retrospect, I probably was as well prepared mentally and physically as well if not better than most of the men in my unit. For example, I found that I enjoyed long hikes and had no trouble getting through obstacle courses. When I listened, I could easily understand the lectures on map reading, military courtesy, personal hygiene, the Articles of War, and the art of camouflage. Close order drill was boring but not a problem. I really drew no more duties such as guard, K.P., or service on clean-up details than anyone else, but I complained bitterly in letters home or to anyone who I thought might sympathize with me. I was never late for muster, and never went A.W.O.L., and I never failed to pass inspection. Nevertheless, I had convinced myself that I would never make it as a soldier, and I'm sure I conveyed this attitude to the non-coms and officers who were responsible for my training.

Consider my relationship with the rifle. Almost immediately after reporting for duty, I was issued a 1903 Springfield which was instantly an enigma. Taking it apart and cleaning it seemed an impossible task and I frequently sought the advice of others whenever this chore was required. I had no trouble in learning to drill with the thing, and I never failed to get it clean enough for the inspecting officer but, at the time, I was certain that it would somehow fall apart due to my neglect. Personally I didn't care, but I was always concerned that this would lead to court martial and, in the least, complete disgrace for my company. Then we were informed that we were going on the firing range with the damn things!

Remember that I had projected my lack of confidence to one and all, and this was carried over doing the many sessions we had that were called "dry runs". "Get that arm up! Flatten your feet! SQUEEZE that trigger!" These admonitions were directed at me, it seemed, more than to anyone else. I EXPECTED to fail miserably on the firing range, and I'm sure I communicated this to everyone. On the night before we actually went on the range, the company commander reminded us that there was a competition between companies and he proceeded to give us a "game plan" as to who would make EXPERT, who would make SHARPSHOOTER, and most of the rest were expected to qualify as MARKSMEN. Out of a streak of kindness, I'm sure, he reminded the one or two of us who were expected to BOLO (fail to qualify) that we'd get another chance at some time in the future. He even suggested that we be sure to keep the rifle pointed down range so that no one would get shot!

The morning we reported to the range just happened to be very cold, rainy, and windy. We were a miserable troop that marched to the firing range and the officers tried to keep enthusiasm high although with little success. One after the other, the guys who were expected to make Expert or Sharpshooter barely qualified (or "boloed"). The enthusiasm of the poor officers went from high to down right gloom, for I'm sure they were conscious that some higher ranking people were going to have some searching questions. My turn finally came.

It was a totally resigned officer who led me to the line. "Keep the God

damned thing pointed down range" he reminded me as he withdrew to a safe place in the rear. Now, I should say that I did have one small physical problem which I never mentioned -- and that is a blind spot in my right eye. Therefore, when I squinted to aim at the target, the bull's eye (and most of the rest of the rings) completely disappeared. So it was that I stood on the firing line in the wind and rain, made none of the allowances that I had learned about, and simply blasted away just to get the whole business behind me. I did the same thing in the "kneeling" and "prone" positions. As I was turning to make my way off the line, I was grabbed by the officer, clapped on the back, and escorted to the company commander.

"He made SHARPSHOOTER and only missed EXPERT by one point!" The young officer was obviously ecstatic and the C.O. shook my hand with unusual warmth. At that point, in all honesty, I was only anticipating the return to the warm barracks and chow, and I certainly didn't tell them that the whole thing was plain luck. I joined my platoon and slogged through the mud and rain to the company area We hadn't been in the barracks for ten minutes when someone yelled "Ten Hut!". In walked the Company Commander. "Men", he said, "I thought we were going to disgrace ourselves today, and was ready to blame the weather on our poor showing. Then, one of our fine boys did exactly as he was trained and allowed for windage and didn't let a little weather keep him from his task. You will be interested to learn that he got the highest score in the entire Battalion and, with a little luck, would have made EXPERT.

"This is the mark of a good soldier and he shall be rewarded." He motioned me to follow him to the Orderly Room where the 1st Sergeant was busily preparing a three-day pass with my name on it. Bedraggled as I was in wet, muddy clothes, I drew myself up to my most military erectness, saluted the C.O., did a perfect about face, and returned to quarters. I should have been less cocky, but I really enjoyed the admiration in the sixty pairs of eyes. It was with calculated leisureliness that I showered, put on my clean O.D.'s, and left for three joyous days. Remember, following my initial impression on the members of my company, I knew that it would take a major event to become a worthy soldier in their eyes. This was it! The army was never to be the same for me. One week later my rank was elevated to P.F.C. I was definitely on my way to the top.

Chapter IV

Basic training was an aspect of military life that really never ended. Once the troops completed a cycle of experiences that did more to build physical stamina than anything else, there would be a brief respite and then the whole process would be more or less repeated. This could be likened to training a fighter or a football team to reach a peak again and again until this was no longer necessary. At any rate, such was the case with our outfit, and it seemed that we kept building these physical peaks until we were introduced to combat conditions. I suspect that the rigors of existing under such conditions either forced one to maintain strength and endurance, or one would be sure to fall by the wayside. In our case, most of us managed to hold up very well, which meant that somebody did a good job in planning the training schedule.

I mention this because I think back on basic training as those first weeks or months prior to my successes on the rifle range. After that, the obstacle courses, the hikes, the forced marches, the weapons drills, and even duties such as K.P. and guard were just routine. I did these things over and over without actually thinking. In fact, I was much more concerned about what to do on my next weekend pass, what was to be served for chow, or even what I was going to do when the war was over than I was about my ability to overcome any task assigned. Obviously, once I overcame the rifle business (even if by pure luck) my confidence was restored and I even learned to enjoy, if not the army, at least LIFE IN THE ARMY.

The aforementioned duties were ongoing, especially in a unit as small as ours. One would just be relieved from K.P. only to find an assignment on guard duty. One also quickly learned certain tricks to make even the most unpleasant ones palatable. For example, the smart soldier arrived early to K.P. duty to volunteer for "pots and pans". Though these were scrubbed by hand, there were seldom very many of them, and one had lots of free time in between meals to write letters or prepare special treats on the stove. No one bothered you as long as you finished your particular job. Guys who washed dishes invariably had their hands in hot water right up to the time the next meal was to be served. After supper, these poor souls worked long into the night while the "pots and pans" man was through in about one half hour. The worst job of all, though, was having to clean the grease traps - a task that usually fell to the last to arrive in the mess hall or to the newest recruit. Not only was it a messy job, but it took weeks of scrubbing to remove the odors and to be accepted in the company of other human beings.

During our training in the States, we spent most of our days "in the field" - a remote part of the Post where we "played" soldier. This meant digging fox holes (which had to be filled in at the end of each day), crawling around on our bellies hiding from one another, or simply sitting on the damp ground while some officer recited the Articles of War. Since the "field" area was some distance from the mess hall, lunch was usually trucked to the site and we were fed by a "field kitchen" unit. This led to one of my strangest experiences in the army.

This particular day, I was assigned K.P. and reported to the mess hall as usual. After serving breakfast, I was ordered by the mess sergeant to place all knives, forks, and spoons on a large tray and insert them into the oven to dry. No sooner had I placed the silverware in that oven when in walked the 1st Sergeant to

announce that I was to go with the "field kitchen" to serve the guys in the field. I had long since learned not to question the wisdom of this man, so I left the mess hall, helped load the truck, climbed in the back, and was off to woods. I remember spending a most pleasant day watching the others crawl around, dig holes, and generally appear uncomfortable. I think that all I did was serve coffee in the chow line and clean the pot at the end of the day. Back we trucked to the mess hall and proceeded to unload our gear. I did not linger long, however, since a large group of men, including the mess sergeant and the officer in charge of the mess were busily trying to clean the blackest silverware I have ever seen. Luckily for me, the sergeant did not remember who put the stuff in the oven and I certainly did not remind him! Hindsight tells me that it really was not my fault, but I still feel a little guilty and sorry for those poor souls who spent most of the night scrubbing well-cooked knives, forks, and spoons.

As mentioned, the digging of fox holes was another never ending phase of training. Until one is in combat, this activity makes little sense - especially when the ground is winter-hardened clay and the digging tool is little more than a large, dull tablespoon. Nevertheless, we scratched these things out day after day, but we seldom went deeper than a few inches. Generally, the platoon sergeant in charge would grow tires, order us to fill them in, and we would all head back to the barracks. It was obvious that he had plans for the evening and had no intention staying out past the time for the last bus to town. One morning this condition changed in a hurry.

It was extremely cold and the ground was frozen solid. We were marched to a new section of the camp and led into a small valley, where we were directed to dig foxholes. Mention was made that we were to be attacked by tanks and armored vehicles, so we had better prepare to dig deep. All of us began to scratch the earth half-heartedly, convinced that this was just another "dry run". Suddenly, on the brink of the hill above our heads, we heard motors - big motors - grinding into position. Sure enough, it did not take a genius to realize that somebody meant business on that day! The tank commander hollered down to us that we had one half hour to complete our holes and then they were coming, ready or not. I have never dug as fast as I did on that cold morning, nor did I ever go so far below the earth! Apparently this was true of all members of my company, for dirt literally flew in all directions. When the tanks rolled over us, I felt as though I was in a well. This was the day I learned I could do a lot of things when I had to - a bit of philosophy I have carried over to the present.

Chapter V

The 603rd Engineer Camouflage Battalion was stationed at Fort Meade for about one year. During that time, the cycle of training was constant though occasionally we actually were sent on missions involving use of our training as camoufleurs. Once we spent a couple of cold days and nights repairing the camouflage nets at the Glenn L. Martin plant near Baltimore, and we were often called upon to demonstrate camouflage techniques to various troops in training at Fort Meade. This latter experience turned out to be fun for us and very sobering for the infantrymen who thought that this was a real joke. We would march a company of these unsuspecting soldiers into a field where we had previously concealed very well armed camoufleurs. We would warn them that they were completely surrounded and when they scoffed at the idea, the hidden camoufleurs would emerge practically under their noses, all bearing very nasty weapons such as machine pistols, automatic rifles, and even anti-tank guns. We got a lot of satisfaction out of our deception and I'm sure that the infantrymen who were exposed to this training were considerably more alert in the future.

On rare occasions, small platoons were sent on missions away from the base and my platoon got a really neat assignment during the summer of 1943. We were sent to the tip of Long Island to plan the camouflage of the Coastal Artillery unit that was in place to protect much of New York. As "specialists" on assignment, we drew no duties such as guard or K.P., and were free after supper to go on leave to the nearby resort towns. Chow was better than we were accustomed to, and we even had opportunities to swim in the surf. We would run along the beach with mattress covers until they filled with air, quickly tie one end, and use these as floats to ride the waves. A war was in progress and we were enjoying life at one of the premier resort areas on the east coast.

While I was delighted with this duty, many of the men in my platoon were from the New York area, and being close to home brought about the urge to visit family and friends. Yet, we were at least four hours (by train) from the "Big Apple", which was frustrating for them. One weekend, a couple of us decided to hitch-hike into New York to avoid the very slow "local" that served the entire island. There we stood on the lonely highway with thumbs extended hoping that someone would pick us up. Soon, I spotted a police vehicle slowing down near by, so I increased the thumb action with real enthusiasm. The police stopped and I looked around to see if my friend shared my delight. He was nowhere in sight! It seemed that hitch-hiking was very illegal in that state, and my companion had hidden in a ditch when he recognized the emblem on the police car. Nevertheless, he emerged sheepishly when the officers kindly agreed to take us to the first bus stop. He never was successful in explaining his abandonment of his buddy in the face of adversity, though he tried to do so until the day we were discharged. You can bet, also, that I never gave up ribbing him about it!

It is an absolute truth that no one every volunteers in the army. I knew this from the start, but still managed to get caught on occasion because, sometimes, a good duty would result. Once we were asked if anyone knew how to fly kites and I raised my hand along with two other men. Believe it or not, we spent about two weeks building and trying to fly kites because one of our higher ranking officers had the brilliant idea that a camera could be affixed to a kite for the purpose of photographing behind enemy lines. We ruined about three

cameras before someone of even higher rank found out about it and suggested that the project be abandoned.

Another time I volunteered when we were asked if anyone would like to paint some signs. Thinking that this would be in line with my civilian training, I again happily raised my hand, and subsequently spent the weekend painting the words "edible" and "non-edible" on trash cans. My dumbest stint as a volunteer, however, had to do with every soldier's desire to "get away" from military duty if only for a brief time. Along with six others in my company, I volunteered to work on a farm to assist in reaping the harvest for a period of one week. Visions of great food, wide open spaces, and a total absence of chicken duties danced in my head.

As it turned out, I have never worked harder in my life. The "harvest" turned out to be field after field of very heavy hay, all of which had to be wrestled up onto very high wagons, and there were absolutely no breaks. We worked from sun-up to sun-down without respite and collapsed into not such comfortable cots at the end of each day. I suppose the chow was good, but I was too tired to notice or care. At the end of the week, we returned to the post almost joyfully, even though the duty officer, who assumed we had enjoyed a week of rest and relaxation, had assigned us all to weekend chores. Still, we were happy to be "home and resolved never to volunteer again!

While we stationed at Fort Meade, I was "close to home", and though many would consider this a break, I found myself always concerned about getting there. Once we received "permanent passes", every evening that I was off duty, I found myself racing to get to Baltimore. Since I had to be back by revelle, this limited my ability to get much sleep except on bumpy buses or the crowded local train. Therefore, when we were told that the unit was going to a post somewhere in the deep south, I had mixed emotions. On one hand, I liked the chance to see my family frequently, but I think I realized that this constant late night escapade was as difficult for them as it was for me. There wasn't much I could do about it, anyway. And so we entrained for Camp Forrest, Tennessee

Chapter VI

As the war progressed, it became evident that the need for camouflaging American factories became less critical than planning for offense. Since camouflage is basically a defensive tactic, there was concern about what could be done with troops such as us, who had been trained to conceal factories and gun emplacements in this country when there was apparently little likelihood of attack. Not that there was no need for concealment under combat conditions, but an entire battalion of such troops seemed a waste of manpower. Fortunately for us, before we would be disbanded and scattered among the other branches of service, some bright high ranking soul decided to use us for a highly secret counter intelligence mission.

The concept was simple. Since we were "experts" in concealment, it was logical to assume that we could be just as adept at making ourselves obvious to the enemy. Since we were "artists", we should be able to design "dummy" equipment such as tanks, trucks, and guns, that could be placed to convince the enemy that the real thing was on hand. Thus, our mission for the remainder of the war was conceived, so we were off to Tennessee to design this dummy equipment and to receive training in its deployment. Actually, the operation became much more complex, but these additional nuances were introduced at a later time.

The train ride south was long but interesting. It so happened that we were supposed to ride in "cattle cars" while officers were to be accommodated in sleepers with rather luxurious compartments. The colonel in charge, however, deemed this inappropriate. By his order, most of us enlisted types were assigned to the compartments, while the officers got to ride in the "cattle cars". I'm sure this went over with these junior officers like a sack of went potatoes, but there was nothing they could do about it. At any rate, the train roamed all over the country, it seemed, (going as far west as Indianapolis before heading south) and there I was in very comfortable quarters. We finally arrived in fine shape though the poor officers were so stiff that we had two days of no training at Camp Forrest while they recovered.

The first thing I noticed upon arrival at our new station was the remarkable mud. If one stepped off the wooden walkways, one's shoes were permanently painted. It was really a very nice shade of burnt sienna, but removal from the shoes in order to pass inspection became a full-time occupation until we realized that the officers suffered the same problem. After that, shoes were simply ignored by inspecting officers (who probably hoped that no one looked down at <u>their</u> feet!

Camp Forrest, at that time, was the training base for some ninety thousand soldiers. The nearest town was Tullahoma, a sleepy hamlet that normally housed about two thousand people. After five o'clock, it seemed that at least eighty-nine thousand soldiers descended on Tullahoma, so that the predominance of olive drab made the town appear to be an extension of the base. Needless to say, there was no place to go where soldiers were not very much in evidence, so the fellows in my unit tended to stay on the base. The trip to town was easy, however, since just about every resident of Tullahoma operated a "taxi", so for 25 cents the delights of that fine town were at our disposal. When we did to into town, we headed straight for a little restaurant where steak dinners could be had

for $1.25. We would then head back to camp where we had a choice of movie theaters or we could enjoy life in the good old P.X. Needless to say, we got lots of rest while we were in Tennessee.

One weekend, four of us set out for Chattanooga which was about seventy miles away. The bus required four long hours over mountains and valleys to make the trip and, when we arrived, we found that WACS from nearby Fort Oglethorpe had come to town and signed up for every accommodation in the city. The idea was to move in with one of them if you wanted a place to sleep. Not being that desperate, we wondered around awhile, had a nice dinner, and boarded a bus back to Tullahoma. Another four hour ride and we were back "home". I must admit, no army post ever looked better! It was at this point that I made the determination that the only good thing about the south was the train going north (a misconception which I have long since corrected).

Our stay at Camp Forrest was relatively brief, but we did work hard to design this "dummy" equipment and we received considerable training in anticipated ways to use it. Actually we were assigned to an abandoned factory where we worked on shifts to design collapsible tanks, trucks, and guns. When we came off a shift, we were given a few hours rest before going on with a regular training program. Needless to say, when we learned that we were "secretly" slated to go "overseas", some of us could see some relief down the road. This was a mistake, but at least we were well prepared for whatever was to come.

The area of Tennessee where Camp Forrest was located did not seem to have recovered from the Civil War. The soil was comprised mostly of orange, red, and purple clay and, although I have never seen more beautiful colors anywhere, one wondered how the local farmers ever managed to coax their crops to grow. Judging from the apparent standard of living, the most ambitious did not seem successful. A paint salesman should have made out well, since homes and out-buildings were seldom painted and many were in dire need of new roofs or other major repairs. Folks seen walking down the country roads often lacked shoes and their clothes were patched and ill-fitting. Nevertheless, most were friendly and apparently carefree. It was interesting to note that just about every woman wore the latest fashion in hair styles. This said much about where they placed their values.

On Saturday afternoons, the population seemed to migrate to town most likely to sell produce and to stock up on staples. It was also a time for social gatherings (hence the fancy hair-do's) and to stand around on the corners gossiping. "White lightening" was readily available, so peddling this home-brewed (and illegal) booze to the soldiers was another major occupation. More than one poor soldier ended up in the hospital from over indulgence of this not-too-well-distilled spirit. As a matter of fact, some pretty mean fights used to break out as the evening wore on since the inexperienced young soldiers were actually crazed by the stuff. This was another good reason for not staying in town much past dinner time.

The skies over Tennessee (at least where we were) were clear and blue, and the sunsets were spectacular. I suppose the lack of industrial smoke had much to do with this pleasant condition. Every artist in our outfit was impressed enough to try to capture not only the skies, but the interesting weathered old buildings and the multi-colored soil. This place was a landscape artist's dream, and hardly a day went by that serious critiques of someone's paintings did not occur.

Chapter VII

My recollections of our last days at Camp Forrest are limited. I do remember being issued new gear and having to ship all personal items home. We were given more shots and physicals and lots of warnings not to mention the fact that we were "shipping out". How they managed to keep the movement of about 300 noisy troops a secret escaped me, since there was much hammering and sawing as crates were constructed, packed, and toted off to the camp depot. It wasn't long before we were marched to the station and loaded on a train. The trip to New York was reasonably uneventful and much faster than the trip south. As we traveled north and passed the metropolitan areas of Richmond, Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and cities in New Jersey, men whose homes were near those places were understandably melancholy, but only until their particular town was behind us. We realized that we were all in the "same boat" and having been together for a year and a half, we were determined to stay together. This sense of "family" permeates army life, and one might suspect it is the dominate reason why people from many walks of life functioned as a unit quite well, even in this face of great danger.

We had been checked in at the Port of Embarkation. Those of us who lived within a 200 mile range were given a 24-hour pass, so several guys in our unit headed home for a brief respite. Not much was said at the time, but the folks at home told us later that we seemed "taut as strings" but in excellent physical and mental condition to face whatever the future might hold. I know there was no extra fat on me and muscles I didn't even know I had were developed. I remember only consuming large quantities of food, and those at home who were severely rationed were only too happy to share with me. No mention was made as to where we were headed, but I'm sure everyone knew. Nevertheless, conversations were kept on the "light" side so it was a fast and pleasant twelve hours or so.

I arrived back at the temporary camp and within hours found myself filing aboard a large to merchant ship that was to be "home" for the next 11 days. We boarded at night and were assigned immediately to bunks below decks. Surprisingly, even though the ship was moored up at the docks, some of the guys got seasick before they reached their bunks. These same poor souls were miserable from the time they placed a foot on the gang plank until they got off in England. In my case, I thought the whole boat ride was great and couldn't understand such "actions" until one day in the not-too-distant future. More about that later.

Our first morning at sea was unique. We were issued passes to have chow at certain times so that the entire body of troop passengers were fed in shifts. Lines were long and we ate standing up at long chest-high benches. I was fascinated by the color of the eggs (green) and, also, by the lack of quantity of food. I guess we had been spoiled "state-side", but it seemed that we were always hungry and always seemed to be in line for the next meal. This was a merchant ship and there were about 5,000 soldiers aboard, so apparently everything had to be rationed. This included space on deck.

After that first so-called breakfast, we made our way topside and discovered that a spot to sit was not easy to find. First of all, the legions of sea sick soldiers

had skipped chow and gone directly to places close to the rail. Fast eaters had been next so that by the time I arrived, one could either stand against the bulkhead or climb onto one of the hatches. It was from this latter vantage point that I had my first glimpse of the great Atlantic Ocean. As far as one could see in any direction, ships similar to ours dotted the horizon. In between the troop carriers and freighters, smaller destroyers and other fast ships darted about. Sirens blared, whistles blew, and lights flashed signals constantly. We learned later that this convoy was comprised of 700 ships and, while we couldn't see them, a pack of submarines was on hand to protect our hulls. It was one of the most impressive sights I had ever witnessed.

As indicated by the quantity and quality of the chow, procurement of food became a major occupation. Along with three others, I forked out $17.00 for a loaf of bread - purchased from a none-too-honest merchant mess worker. About three days out, candy became available through the shipboard P.X., but you could only buy it by the case of 24 bars. I bought a case of Baby Ruths and ate them all at one sitting. I should mention that I haven't eaten one of them since!

Other than the food, however, I really enjoyed the trip. To get a better view, I volunteered for "gun watch", which afforded me an excellent seat in a stern turret for four hours each day. The most exciting part of this came as we went around the northern coast of Ireland, and from my seat in the turret, at times the sea was 40 feet below and then it would be 40 feet over my head. You can imagine that such a rough sea was not appreciated by queasy stomachs so the quantity of food, at least, increased for the rest of us.

We later learned that our convoy zig-zagged all over the ocean en route to Europe. This involved a course to the coast of Africa and north along the coast of Portugal and France and, eventually, around the northern tip of Ireland. We passed the Isle of Man and dropped anchor one night somewhere off the coast of Wales while we awaited clearance to land in England. As we approached the northern most leg of this long journey, we were treated to an alarming attack from some German subs which increased the activities of the convoy guard boats to the point of frenzy. From our bunks below deck, we could hear the thud of depth charges against the sides of our ship as the destroyers let the enemy know that he was not welcome. Since this was our first "combat" experience, everyone became quiet as though the enemy would be able to detect talking through the hulls of the ship. It was a sober (but relieved) hold full of passengers when the "whoop-whoop" of the sirens announced the end of the raid. Once again, while we were anchored off the coast of Wales, there was a bombing raid on a nearby city. We could watch the searchlights and hear the booming of the anti-aircraft guns, feeling trapped on our little "island of steel" and became anxious to get off so that we could find more space to hide. The ability to dig one's own foxhole began to make a lot of sense.

The following morning the ship moved onto Bristol where we prepared to disembark. This was the first time we had seen barrage balloons, and it was evident that we had arrived in a war zone. Carrying our worldly possessions, which included a duffel bag, rifle, and gas mask, we boarded a train for our new station in England. This was also a new experience, for compartments were on one side of the car, and each was decorated with a small watercolor painting of the countryside. Having a unit made up mostly of artists, this made the trip much more interesting as discussions about the merits of each painting were often lively. Our reasons for being here were, at least, temporarily forgotten.

Chapter VIII

We got off the train at a little town named Leamington and immediately boarded trucks. Shortly thereafter, we were deposited at a "tent city" - an obviously temporary camp located on a spacious and beautiful country estate, which turned out to be the grounds of Walton Hall. Each platoon was assigned to one of the tents and being (by that time) corporal, I had a choice of cots, which was of no significance since one was as uncomfortable as the next. Nevertheless, one had to live up to expectations, so I made much of my opportunity to test all of the bunks before pretending I had found the best one. I don't think anyone in my squad was fooled, but they had the good sense to humor me. Besides, all we were really interested in was where and when chow would be served.

It must seem that all we were interested in by this stage of our military careers was food. An army "travels on its stomach" as the saying goes, and I'm convinced that this is quite accurate. Being "full" became as much of an obsession as being safe, and in England we found the former condition difficult to achieve. During my entire time in the army, this was the only place where nothing went into the garbage can. Everything was consumed whether it was a favorite food or not - we simply did not receive the quantity to be selective! A search for additional chow became an obsession and whenever we got to a nearby town on pass, we looked for a place that sold any kind of food. Not surprisingly, there weren't many such places since the entire British population was severely rationed - so whatever they had, they held onto. Once we stood for two hours to purchase a very small bun, and we happened to be in Stratford-on-Avon where we should have been much more interested in the historical sights. We were, in retrospect, really not starving but had been spoiled both at home and in the army (state-side) to the point where waste had become a way of life. Being frugal was the lesson that we all had to learn.

Other than not being able to gorge ourselves, our brief stay in England was almost pleasant. This was the most beautiful country I had ever seen and we had a light enough training schedule so that opportunities to travel about near tent city were plentiful. We went into Stratford to see the Shakespear plays and visited such interesting spots such as the "Old Curiosity Shop". The countryside between towns was magnificent, and I actually expected Robin Hood to be hiding behind the huge oak trees that lined the roadways.

By the time we arrived, the English people had become disenchanted with the hordes of American soldiers that swarmed over their beautiful land. They were polite enough, but one could sense that they would be happy to see us leave. Considering the rudeness of some of the Americans I saw, it was easy to understand this attitude, but at the time, this was difficult to accept. We discovered that they planted vegetables and flowers over every inch of their small properties obviously because of food shortages, and yet acres of the "King's land" were maintained as spacious lawns so that the "King's deer" would have a proper place to gambol. As Americans, we had trouble relating to this kind of subservience to the "ruling" classes, as we saw it, but it never occurred to us that the lawn of the White House was not planted in corn.

Coming as we did from a huge continent, we had to learn from when many people are crowded onto a small island, each one's property is a sacred place, and

one is not too anxious to have it trampled by the muddy boots of outsiders. At first, we expected to be welcomed warmly as saviors of democracy, so it took awhile to learn that this was a joint venture. As it turned out, we were not in England long enough to get into - or cause - trouble, and we certainly did not have time to fret over relationships between ourselves and the British. Early in June, we left the joys of Walton Hall and headed for an assembly point that embarked us to France and the great "invasion".

Chapter IX

Our port for embarkation to France was somewhere near Exeter. There were acres and acres of tents, and supplies of every description were neatly lined up for shipment. Companies of soldiers either marched about en route to heaven knows where or milled about taking care of personal items. Trucks were constantly coming and going and airplanes were always overhead. Fields were the parking places for the huge gliders that were later to be used in the invasion and the soldiers that were to occupy them sat around sharpening knives and otherwise making themselves look fierce. To be honest, we avoided going near them since we weren't sure they knew who the enemy was! At any rate, the atmosphere throughout the assembly area was almost electric and there was no doubt that the "big day" was close at hand.

Our particular group, now known as the 23rd Headquarters, Special Troops, was separated into two groups. Some (of which I was one) were to go with the trucks and our secret "dummy" equipment and the rest would go as "foot" soldiers. As it turned out, we were loaded on different ships, so we did not see our walking buddies for several days.

The vehicles consisted of 2-1/2 ton trucks and a jeep for each company. There was a driver and a non-com in each truck and a driver and an officer with the jeep. The back of each truck contained several deflated rubber dummy trucks, tanks, and howitzers - all classified as "top secret" and it was our job to see that they remained undiscovered. Just before we drove the trucks up the ramp of the imposing LST, somebody came around to collect those gas masks that we had carried everywhere for nearly two years. They did let us keep the carrying case, however, so we had a handy place for paper, pencils, or other personal items. One could only assume that the waring parties had gotten together at some point and agreed not to indulge in chemical warfare. I hated wearing the thing, so I was glad to see it go and equally happy to have the additional space to carry my drawing supplies. Anyhow, we were finally aboard the ship, parked the truck in the hold, and went topside where we were assigned a bunk. Since this was a navy vessel, and mostly occupied with equipment, there was plenty of room for the men and sufficient rations for all hands. We would have been delighted to spend the rest of the war on board that LST.

On the night of June 5, which was D-Day minus one, we were aware that many ships in the harbor were taking off and there was a constant roar from the planes overhead. The invasion was underway! Nevertheless, our ship remained in port for a few days while we wrote letters, played cards, or simply loafed. Among the troops on board was a full colonel that we would not ordinarily have gotten to know. However, it seems that he had several cans of strawberries stashed in his command vehicle and, when he dispatched his orderly to retrieve some for his afternoon snack, it was discovered that every last can was missing. Since there is no fury like the fury of a colonel whose pilfered fruit has been swiped, we thought that the whole war was going to be cancelled until the criminal was brought to justice. All troops were assembled on deck and a full-field inspection was held so that we had to display everything in our possession. He ordered the thorough inspection of the stowed trucks and other vehicles, but imagine his frustration when he was quietly informed that the trucks of our particular unit contained top secret equipment and could not be opened for any

reason! I thought he was going to have apoplexy, but he finally stormed off to his quarters with a very red face and with threats about holding a major investigation in the near future which, of course, never took place. We never found out what happened to the strawberries but often drew comfort in the thought that some hungry G.I.'s were enjoying this condiment to supplement their K-rations.

On the evening of June 10, we pulled away from the docks and were off to France along with several other ships. We later learned that the captain had goofed and that we had left too soon. As it turned out, we bobbed about off the coast of Normandy for a whole day before we suddenly ran up to the beach and were told to "move out". I'll never forget the sailors waving happily to us as we drove up the beach, and I couldn't help wishing that the anchor they dropped to winch them back out to sea would suddenly snap - but, as they say, "C'est la guerre"!

I hate to keep mentioning food, but when we left England, we were advised that rations would be very limited. As we drove slowly up the beach, a small French boy jumped onto our running board and offered to trade a basket of eggs for some chocolate. The driver and I (who had not seen a fresh egg since leaving the States) searched our pockets to find one of those chocolate bars known as D -bars and had completed the trade before we got out of the sand!

Fortunately for us, the area where we went ashore had been secured, although there was plenty of evidence of the recent battle. It was late afternoon, very quiet, and the beach was fairly clear. If one did not look too closely, it was like coming in from a swim in the ocean and heading for the sand dunes that often rim the beach. The crest of the dunes, however, bore the silhouettes of soldiers at a gun emplacement. A closer inspection of the beach also revealed small groups of soldiers pulling things from the ocean, so we knew that these were burial details about the gruesome task of recovering bodies that had washed out to sea. It was a small but solemn convoy that crested the dunes and drove over a newly laid road which crossed swamps behind the dunes. We finally came out to a crossroad where an M.P. told us to pull off the road and stay put until darkness set in.

Remember, we were only a small detachment of our unit who had been put ashore ahead of schedule. Along with the "secret" equipment in the four trucks and the jeep, we were comprised of a total of nine enlisted men and one 1st lieutenant - hardly a force to defend anything. We had a vague idea as to where we were to join the rest of the troops, but we did not know that they were still aboard ships in Exeter. We also learned from the M.P. that the area where we were headed had not yet been captured, so we were in a quandary. Finally, a colonel who had misplaced his own unit agreed to take us to his idea of a safe place, so we fell in line behind his jeep and slowly set out. Our only lights were "cat's eyes" which were two tiny lights where tail lights are normally located. The idea was to keep them always in view, but if you could see both lights at once, it meant you were following too close.

It was very dark along the road, but the sky was illuminated by a real fourth of July display. Tracer bullets were everywhere and the constant flash of shells lit up the horizon. Needless to say, the "boom-boom-boom" of exploding shells added much to the effect, and when a flash lit up the countryside, every building gave evidence of being blown apart. Surprisingly, we were not frightened - probably because we were too excited. Soon we came upon a partially knocked down sign that indicated an approach to the town of St. Lo. Now small arms fire could be heard as a "rat-tat-tat" and we proceeded right down the main street. We

later learned that St. Lo had not yet fallen but, somehow, we got through unscathed. At one point on the other side of the town, we came upon a sign that read "ACHTUNG MINEN" which brought us to an immediate halt. By this time we had lost faith in the colonel and suggested that he turn around in his jeep, which he did. Following his tracks, we turned each of our truck with great care and headed back through St. Lo, where the defending Germans must have thought it was time to clear out, for it was quiet on this return trip. We finally came to a small field that was surrounded by a hedge row, turned off the motors of the trucks, and promptly went to sleep in the front seat.

We awoke the next morning to a beautifully sunny day. Everything would have been fine except that there was a strange and very irate colonel chewing out our poor lieutenant for parking these trucks within plain view of the enemy. Nobody told him that we had been trained in camouflage, so we sheepishly moved the trucks close to the hedgerow and did out best to make our presence less obvious. Since we had no kitchen unit with us, we set about the task of deciding how to obtain breakfast. We walked along the road and soon discovered that there were several outfits camped and completely equipped with field kitchens. Naturally, we simply got in line, and no one seemed to notice that we were not members of the company being fed. In fact, the whole time we stayed in that area, we sampled the kitchen of every outfit along the road until we decided which one had the best fare. Naturally, again, we returned to that one for most of our meals!

It seemed as though every field in Normandy was surrounded by hedgerows and these were fascinating to us. Since we had little to do until the rest of our unit arrived, we spent a lot of time wandering around these hedge rows and discovered that the largest, sweetest blackberries we had every seen grew in abundance among the brambles. One afternoon, two of us followed a particularly abundant source and went about collecting blackberries using our helmets as containers. After awhile, we came upon an infantryman who was peering through the hedgerow and we naturally stopped to pass the time of day. We offered him some berries which he accepted happily and, after exchanging small talk about where he was from in the States, we asked him what he was doing. Imagine our consternation when he announced that he was the forward observer for his company keeping an eye on the Germans who just happened to be on the other side of the field. He invited us to peek through his "hole in the hedge", and low and behold, there was a fellow wearing a very German looking helmet looking directly at us! It did not take us long to bid adieu to our observer friend and retreat to our own little area. I'm not sure what we did with the blackberries, but you can be sure that those helmets went back on our heads in a hurry!

It was D-day +18 before the rest of the unit joined us. During that time, the beach head was only a few kilometers deep so that it seemed that we were wall-to wall with soldiers and every kind of howitzer and anti-aircraft gun imaginable. We got used to the constant "boom" of the large artillery during the day,a nd even the "swoosh" of the shells as they passed overhead. It was kind of amusing to hear artillerymen shout "Firing in the hole!" to warn the cooks to remove cakes from the oven, and it was equally interesting to hear the language of the cooks who were not so alerted. Once again, the importance of good chow becomes evident. When the sun set, however, things got a bit scary. All night long, artillery blasted and anti-aircraft guns filled the sky with "ack-ack", and it was this latter metal that gave us the most trouble, for what goes straight up must come straight down. The first night, in our ignorance, we slept under shelter halves on the ground. When we realized the "rain" falling all about was quite

metallic, we crawled under the truck. The second night prudence overcame valor, so we had scooped out fox holes which turned out to be no better protection from the danger from above. By the third night, we had grown much wiser and dug our foxholes in the bottom of a ditch and completely covered the whole thing with very thick fence posts. Thereafter, when "bed-check Charlie" (Germany's lonely observation plane) stimulated a barrage, we felt reasonably comfortable. When it rained, we were flooded out and forced to crawl under the truck again, but we always had the next day to dry out.

As advertised, D-Day +18 brought the unit together. Obviously, they looked upon us as experienced combat veterans and we did little to dispel this perception. We couldn't help but feel sorry for them when they recounted tales of marching along the sandy beach for miles carrying full field packs and all kinds of extra equipment. In addition, their long stay aboard a crowded ship was not exactly pleasant, and apparently many arguments had broken out to the point where it was sometime before some relationships were back to normal. They still thought we had it rough and were actually surprised to find us in one piece. Naturally, we fanned this flame of sympathy by recounting many tales of horror, even if these were slightly exaggerated. We even let them take some of our extra duties so that we would have some time to recuperate. When they finally realized that we were pulling their collective legs, we were all too busy for them to get revenge.

Chapter X

Now that the 603rd Engineer Camouflage Battalion, 23rd Headquarters, Special Troops was assembled, we could begin to perform our very unusual mission to confuse the enemy with our dummy tanks and guns. The method of our operation involved several phases. First of all, we would move into an area to replace a "real" unit so that, while we put our dummies in place, they would move out to take up new positions. The dummy equipment was made of rubber and inflatable - like a balloon. Each truck had a compressor so that when the "package" was in place, we attached a hose and inflated it. This procedure made it "magically" grow to resemble either a tank or gun, or whatever we were intending to simulate. Since these were full size dummies, it was strange to see four men pick up a 40 ton tank and move it about the area. Also, since we invariably inflated these things at night, it was stranger still to note the effect of warm sunlight as it shone on the barrel of a tank gun or howitzer. The warm air tended to deflate those parts that projected, so we often had to hustle to make a limp barrel straight again!

In addition to blowing up the dummies, another aspect of our job was to pretend that a lot of soldiers were still in the area. Remember that we were replacing units that not only had heavy equipment, but also three to four hundreds men. To accomplish this ruse, the dozen or so of us who were doing the replacing ran around building fires, making noise, and generally trying to create the impression that the original unit was still around. We also moved a sound truck as close to the enemy as possible and played records that broadcast the sound of trucks and tanks moving about. This was especially effective in masking the movement of the real vehicles as they moved out.

Once we were in place with our dummy equipment, fires, and record players, we strived to reinforce the deception by lettering or stenciling our few trucks with the bumper markers of the replaced outfit and driving back and forth through the nearby towns (where we knew collaborators existed). After a couple of "passes" through a particular town, we would pull off the road into a wooded area and change the markings so that it seemed that many different vehicles were on hand. We also had many different shoulder patches to coincide with the units that we were mimicking. We would occasionally stop in a local bistro and make certain that our bogus patches were noted by the local populace. Pretending to be particularly dumb G.I.'s, we would "inadvertently" give out false information.

While we were engaged in one of these missions one can imagine that we were busy to say the least. Fortunately for us, we must have been successful with this deception, since the Germans never launched a direct attack against our position, but we did draw our share of artillery shells. We got pretty good at digging foxholes, however, and had very few casualties while performing our crazy missions. If they had attacked, instead of a well-armed infantry, tank, or artillery battalion, they would have confronted twelve or so nervous fellows armed with not-too-accurate carbines! It's crazy, but we never gave this possibility a thought, probably because we were too busy "play acting" or too interested in keeping warm, dry, and well-fed. As noted previously, these latter concerns were all consuming.

I should mention that we worked as a team when on these missions. Each platoon would have one of these assignments so that we never operated at company or battalion strength until the final days of the war in Europe. In other words, platoons would be assigned to different missions but were reassembled on occasion to compare notes or repair equipment. When we operated on the missions, our team included two signalmen who took care of the recordings and communications, two squads of camofleurs who handles the dummy equipment, fires, and in-town deceptions, and one man who was trained in intelligence work. This very important individual could speak and understand several languages, so he was the one who spotted the places where we "leaked" our false information. All told, we were about twenty soldiers at full strength . . . not a very imposing combat unit!

I certainly cannot remember all of the missions that we were called upon to perform, but the first made quite an impression. It was twilight when we arrived to replace a armored unit that was dug in along a main highway. I think I was more impressed by the silence, other than the constant "booming" of artillery, that permeated the so-called "front". I guess I expected to hear bullets whizzing overhead or at least hear people shouting, screaming, crying, or something. As we sat waiting for darkness, soldiers moved silently along the road in single file, silhouetted against a sky lit by the fires of burning buildings. Occasional shells fell nearby, but the infantrymen did not seem to notice and kept plodding right along. In the distance we could detect squeaking movement of a tank and we weren't sure as to which side it belonged. All of this made us increasingly more nervous since we were obviously very close to real combat conditions. The old army cliche' "This is carrying a rumor too far" passed through everyone's mind as we longed for the peace and quiet of stateside duty. Perhaps the sight of a young woman leading a cow along the road immediately behind the column of soldiers somewhat dispelled my fears. (In fact, I always found the local citizens going about their daily chores, no matter how close I was to the "front".) I guess we all decided that, if that lady could be blase' in the face of such danger, we should try to do likewise.

When darkness fell, we set about our tasks of inflating the dummy tanks, playing our records, building fires, and otherwise covering the noise of the departing armored outfit. Once in awhile, a shell would pass overhead or explode somewhere nearby. This was our first real experience under direct bombardment so we had to work to keep the image of the brave young lady in mind. After a few "dives in the mud" to avoid being hit, however, we learned that if we <u>heard</u> anything, it had missed. Thereafter, we went about our tasks with more confidence and ceased ducking at every loud sound. I remember staying up all night and it was in the morning that we first discovered the problem of the "sagging gun barrels". A great deal of scurrying about to pump up those embarrassingly deflated units took place before we felt comfortable enough to break out our K-rations and eat some breakfast.

During that first morning we watched our dummy equipment and wondered whether or not the enemy was fooled. We also wondered what they might do if this foolishness were discovered! Nevertheless, as the morning passed, someone discovered that the field across the road was full of potatoes. Immediately thereafter, the field became covered with members of our team who were busily digging those potatoes. Our problem became complicated when we realized we had no pot or pan in which to cook our succulent plunder, since our kitchen unit was somewhere to our rear. Finally, a brighter member of the team

produced his little shovel, sliced the potato, and proceded to use the shovel as a frying pan. Each of us quickly followed suit and we all enjoyed our first "french fries" since leaving America. From that time on, we had the blackest shovels in the army!

Chapter XI

Life in the army, especially in a combat zone, tended to make one resourceful. In addition to learning to fry potatoes in our shovels, we discovered that the helmet served beautifully as a pot to boil water. Hence, we had a handy container to cook the eggs which we "liberated" from abandoned barn yards or to heat water for shaving. This practice continued until one of our officers began to object to the "black-headed" troops under his command, forcing us to resort to using our mess cups for these important purposes. It wasn't long before the mess cups became black and twisted from the heat, so the supply sergeant was constantly besieged for new ones. Finally, we "found" a small pot that had been designed for boiling water which we shared among the members of our squad.

Such resourcefulness was also evidenced by the company cooks. Most of our food rations were canned or dehydrated but we suddenly began to be served fresh steaks with a degree of regularity. Nobody ever complained, but we all knew that cows in the area which had been victims of the war did not go entirely to waste. Unfortunately, once we got away from the confined beach head in Normandy, there were less dead cows and, thus, fewer "gourmet" dinners.

In spite of the concerns that rations would be limited, we were able to supplement our fare quite well at times. In addition to the eggs and potatoes and steaks, an occasional chicken wandered by and there were plenty of apples available throughout Normandy. The natives used the apples to make "Calvados" which turned out to be one of the hardest liquors distilled anywhere. This made the "White Lightning" of Tennessee seem like orange juice, so the serious imbibers among us remained in a state of bliss for the entire time we were in France. I hasten to add that I was not one of them and spent a lot of time retrieving them from ditches into which they had fallen in a stupor, and trying to get the ones under my jurisdiction sober enough to perform routine duties. This was important since we had to pull extra duties whenever any one of us was incapacitated...a state of affairs that none of us more sensible fellows cared about.

Our unit was constantly on the move, so we saw much of the countryside. The difference between France and England became immediately apparent, especially in terms of architecture and styles of living. While we noticed farms dotting the areas between the cities and towns in England, the French farmers seemed to cluster in towns with houses and barns connected. Consequently the spaces between the towns contained wide open fields to which the farmers herded their livestock each morning, tended crops, and then returned with the cows and sheep each evening. Having the livestock in town meant that horses, cows, chickens, and sheep, as well as everything that goes with them, were very much in evidence. We never quite got used to piles of manure in the streets - especially on rainy days when the effluence was washed along the ditches. We quickly learned to walk down the center of the road!

The climate in France was much warmer than it had been in England. Our uniforms were heavy wool and summer attire was not permitted, which made us very uncomfortable most of the time. We tried to keep clean but did not have frequent access to showers or baths. Whenever we found a stream or river (and had the time) we took baths and attempted to wash our clothes. This was complicated by the fact that most of these water sources were supplied by

mountain springs so that no matter how hot the sun, we nearly froze! Periodically, however, we were herded into rear area depots where field showers were set up. There, in addition to the showers, we were "deloused" and given clean (but not new) uniforms. Most of the time these new duds fit, but occasionally, shirts or pants were either a bit too large or small. Unless you could swap with another misfitted guy, you were doomed to being somewhat uncomfortable until the next "wash" day.

Chapter XII

Since we were not in Europe to enjoy a "grand tour", our missions of deception continued. The 603rd was comprised of four line companies and one smaller headquarters unit. My assignment was with Company B which had four platoons and I was a squad leader in the 2nd. Therefore, most of my "missions" were with that small group of men who functioned as outlined before, although we soon began to "specialize" with artillery units. We inflated our dummy guns in the emplacements abandoned by the real battery, and our signalmen would tie us in with a battery H.Q. In addition to our "rubber imitations", we had small detonators that resembled fire crackers which we placed in empty shell cases. When orders were telephoned to "fire three rounds", we would set off these little explosives. Since they were designed to create the same "flash" as the real McCoy, the enemy was expected to believe that the original battery was in place. We often wondered what they thought when no missile arrived!

When the allies broke out of the Normandy beach head, things moved pretty fast for awhile. Once when we were convoying to a new location, we passed through a town that had obviously only recently suffered a heavy bombardment, for fires still smoldered and engineers were still clearing the highway of debris. Now I have mentioned my interest in art, but it should also be known that I was learning to become a jazz piano player when I entered the service. Obviously, opportunities to play a piano (especially since arriving overseas) were extremely limited. At this particular time, we were very near the "front", so it was unusually quiet. Columns of infantry slowly moved along the sides of the road and there was not a sound to be hear from anyone. Suddenly, I spied what had evidently been a music shop. Although the front of the building had been blown away, several beautiful pianos stood unharmed in the show room. With great excitement I yelled "Look!. There's a whole store full of 'em!". I'm afraid that everyone thought I had spotted some Germans about to bushwhack us, for the infantrymen hit the dirt and our convoy came to a sudden halt while soldiers tumbled out to hide in ditches. Thus, I found myself along in a jeep looking very sheepish when I realized that I had been the cause of this false alarm. When they saw me sitting there gazing at the pianos, everyone climbed back on the trucks or to their feet and resumed the trek through town. While no one said anything, I did notice that everyone seemed more relaxed and even the infantrymen began to talk and laugh with each other. It happens that one of my platoon sent an accounting of this event to the New York Times where it was published, I suppose, under a category such as "Weird Stories from the Western Front".

On another occasion, we performed our deceptive ploys in a wooded area that bordered along a river. When the mission was completed, we crossed the river where the Germans had been only to find several wooden tanks placed strategically directly opposite our position! To the best of my knowledge this was the only time such "counter deception" ever took place, but it was interesting to note that they had found something for their artists to do!

When we left Normandy, one of our routes took us to Paris. I still believe this was the most beautiful city I had ever seen, with its magnificent buildings, wide streets, and tremendous cathedrals. We visited Notre Dame, for instance, and I was awed by the enormity of the columns that still managed to seem as graceful as tall pine trees in a forest. To be young artists and have the chance to

visit the Louvre was an opportunity that few of us ever expected to enjoy, and although the whole time in Paris only lasted one day, we crowded in as many sights as possible. At the time, we had been brought together as a battalion and were stationed on the grounds of the Palace of Versailles. If we had never gotten anywhere else, there was enough to see to last a lifetime! It was there, incidentally, that I had an opportunity to play a piano that had to be the most magnificent instrument ever built. Even my crude poundings sounded plausible, or so my friends told me.

After Paris, we headed through the area of Verdun toward the Duchy of Luxembourg. As we crossed the plains by Verdun, even the most callous person was impressed by this place as a memorial to the "folly of war". Since the entire plain was not "defendable" by current standards, the men and machines of W.W.II completely passed it by. There it stood, stark white, partially destroyed walls serving as tombstones against the horizon. The scars created by miles of trenches and countless shells were overgrown with grass to give the impression of a green lunar surface. Huge cemeteries covered acres with tiny white crosses all along the highway. The frugality of the farmers was abundantly evident, since they had used the barbed wire to fence in their cattle and sheep. Though there was no evidence of an "active" war, no placed that I had visited, and no mission which I was involved, made more of an impression than the "monument" the Verdun area had become.

Chapter XIII

Prior to arriving in the St. Germaine/Paris area, we had bivouacked and taken part in operations throughout Normandy and Brittany, and went as far as the outskirts of Brest, before heading east toward Luxembourg. These operations took place in June, July, August, and into September of 1944. The details of these places and events have become "blurred" in my memory other than such things as the business of the "piano spotting", which occurred as we passed through Coutance. I also remember purchasing a beautiful costumed doll at St. Malo for 20 francs (which was about $2.00 in American currency). This had been made in Mont St. Michel and was prized by everyone as a real work of art. I suppose I intended to ship it home, but I never got around to it, and finally gave it to one of the guys who had a small daughter. Imagine my chagrin when I learned that these dolls were values in excess of $500.00 in the States - even back in 1944!

At any rate, we arrived for our first operation in Luxembourg on the 14th of September. This took place in a forest near the town of Battembourg. I say that this was a "forest" but, actually, it was more like a park since there were no brambles, and hardly a stick of wood could be found on the ground. I soon discovered that unusual neatness was due to the shortage of any kind of firewood throughout the area. Consequently, certain villagers made a business by gathering every stick or branch that fell to the ground, tying them into huge bundles, and carrying them on their backs to the villages. There the sticks were sold. This was one of my first lessons in conservation, and I remember being shocked by the waste of forest land when I returned to the United States and wanted to warn everyone that such resources were not inexhaustible, as the people of Europe had long since discovered.

While in the forest near Battembourg, the weather turned into fall, and it rained constantly. Nevertheless, it was reasonable quiet and we had learned to join our shelter halves to make large tarpaulins which kept the whole squad fairly dry. Thus ignoring the usual practice of "spreading out" we found more comfort in bunking together to share warmth from our bodies, since we could not have any kind of campfire. By this time, we had also learned to wear all of our extra clothing, so it was not unusual to have two sets of long underwear covered by two pairs of O.D. trousers and two wool shirts. In addition, if one had a sweater, this was torn under the shirts since they could not be worn on the outside. Add a field jacket, raincoat, a wool hat under a helmet, and gloves to this ensemble, and one can see that we looked like fat teddy bears waddling about the woods!

As experienced bivouackers, we naturally dug separate latrine and garbage trenches on the fringes of our camp, and surrounded the whole place with trip wires to alert us in case of a "sneak attack". One night, one of the largest and clumsiest members of my squad awoke to the sounds of cans rattling on the trip wire. Assuming that the enemy was on hand, he crawled from under the tarp to investigate. As fate would have it, he promptly fell into the garbage pit and made so much noise with his loud cursing that, if the enemy had been around, they would have run for their lives. He was so over-loaded with extra clothes that some of us had to pull him out of the slop, and you can bet that no one laughed as he laboriously scraped his clothing. In fact, there was no mention of the incident in the future, for he was grumpy for some time to come. No one every told him that he had been alerted by one of the squad who had gotten up to relieve himself

and accidently tripped the wire. I'm convinced that if he had discovered what had really happened, we would have had at least one casualty.

A day or so later, a couple of us were standing by the side of the gravel road that served as our "highway" through the forest when we saw a group of people approaching on bicycles. We became somewhat alarmed when we noticed that they were wearing German uniforms but, as it turned out, they were merely attempting to surrender, and we were the first Americans in their path. Since we had no way to deal with prisoners, we simply directed them (through sign language) to keep going down the road where we knew that an infantry company was bivouacked. I'm sure they thought this to be a strange army, and probably wondered if they were giving up too soon.

On the 25th of September, the entire battalion assembled in Luxembourg City where we were quartered in a huge, abandoned Catholic Seminary. This was to be our headquarters to which we would return between field operations until mid April. Accommodations were excellent as far as we were concerned. We could sleep indoors for the first time in months (even if we didn't have bunks) and, of course, we had no heat. Just after arrival, however, we looked out of the window that overlooked a parking lot sized courtyard, and saw one of the other companies unloading mattresses, stoves, and other comfort items from the rear of a large truck. We noted that one guy stayed on the truck to push stuff to the tailgate while his buddies, one at a time, carried it to wherever they were being quartered. We quickly joined the line of "bearers", but obviously carried our plunder to our own place. It wasn't long before we were brewing coffee on a nice little pot-bellied stove and had enough mattresses to keep most of our weary bones off the cold, hard floor. We later learned that the company from which we had taken the bounty never discovered our "theft" and, in fact, assumed that the stuff had fallen from the truck as they passed over rough terrain.

Chapter XIV

Headquarters remained in the city of Luxembourg through the middle of December. This is where we returned between field operations and it became "home" to us for this period of time. Luxembourg was a lovely town that we got to know well as we wandered about the quaint streets. I remember that we discovered an ice cream store very similar to the ones we had known in the States, but the "ice cream" tended to be softer than we were used to. The people were friendly and a perfect blend between the French and the Germans in that they lived clustered with their barns and livestock, but seemed to keep everything quite clean. The language was also a mixture between the two countries and one could detect the "softness" of French pronounciations when very "German" words were spoken.

Being a "border" city, Luxembourg had many refugees. Somebody in my platoon located and befriended a Dutch family living in a small apartment, and since they had a piano, I was invited to visit. The family consisted of a mother and father with two small children, and it happened that Pop" was a jazz clarinetist. We had a marvelous time playing all the tunes we could remember to the point where all of us forgot the war for awhile. On a sadder note, the family had dinner while we were there and were anxious that we join them. We quickly noted that their rations were meager to say the least, so we declined as politely as possible. There wasn't enough for the four of them and the quality was poor. We managed to convince them that they should accept some bosses of "K-rations" that we had with us, and I remember donating a pouch of tobacco to my clarinet-playing friend. Whenever possible while we were in the area, someone would drop off whatever rations we could find - all of which were gratefully received. We realized that, no matter how "rough" we had it, the conditions for people trying to survive in a war zone were much worse.

On rare occasions, the entire battalion would return to headquarters for new orders. Once, the battalion commander assembled everyone in the courtyard of the place and reminded us (over a well-amplified sound system) that we were a "top secret unit" and that we should be very cautious about fraternizing with the local populace. Since the area surrounding us was crowded with the "local populace" going about their daily business, this whole episode was very amusing. From that day forward, "Can you hear me, Luxembourg?" became our byword!

On a later October day, a few of us took a truck back to Verdun to pick up some supplies. On the way back, one of the sergeants suddenly announced that his wallet was missing, resulting in a frantic search of the truck (which continued to bounce along the highway). We had just about given up when I chanced to look from under the tarp to the narrow ledge that was located on the outer rim of the truck bed. Sure enough, the sergeant's wallet was balanced precariously on this ledge and just about to tumble onto the road. Fortunately, I was able to grab it before it did so, much to the relief of everyone. Since the wallet contained several months pay, the sergeant tried to give me a reward, which I would not accept, of course. Any one of our "family" (as we had become) would have acted in the same way.

Along about the 30th of October, I was promoted to the rank of sergeant. In a small unit with a limited number of opportunities, this was quite an

achievement for, in addition to a small increase in pay, there were many duties that I no longer had to perform. Thus, I became the one who metes out such assignments, and I must say that having been on the receiving end for two years, I was very careful to be fair with everyone in my platoon. I also discovered that the rank of sergeant was the best in the army. If members of your platoon complained, you passed it "up". If ranking officers complained, you passed it "down"!

Our returns to Luxembourg were always welcome respites, mostly because we had a chance to clean up ourselves and our clothes. Aside from wandering around the town, we got to see occasional movies set up by Special Service troops and, once, we were entertained by Marlene Dietrick through the auspices of the U.S.O., although this was the only time we ever had such an opportunity during our entire stay in Europe. We heard about these productions, but we must never have been in areas where they were being offered.

We were provided with sports equipment along about this time, I suppose, to keep us in condition. Among these items were footballs, volleyballs, and boxing gloves. The latter nearly led to my undoing. As in the case of many soldiers, I had identified a sergeant that I felt had "picked" on me by giving me too many details, and otherwise concentrating to make my life generally miserable. Having reached the same rank, I became anxious to find a way to "even up the score" and thought a round or two with my nemeses would provide the perfect ploy. Prior to entering the service, I had done a little boxing, so I considered myself an expert. This was the chance I had longed for! I promptly, but in a matter-of-fact way (I didn't want to scare him away), suggested that we try a couple of rounds.

In retrospect, I realize that he was surprised (and a bit amused), but he cordially agreed to my stupid challenge. I thought at the time that his condescension was due to the fact that he out-weighted me by fifty or so pounds, and he even announced that he would not use his right hand. Secretly delighted, I struck my my professional pose. I then had the shock of my life! In a very few minutes, he nearly killed me, and I spent most of my time getting up off of the floor. Pretty soon, he called a halt to the mayhem, picked me up, and wiped me off. Very quietly, he suggested that I pick my opponents with more care for, it seems, he had spent most of his growing up days in a gym in Boston where his Dad had been a trainer for such boxing greats as Jack Sharkey. I learned my lesson well and immediately gave up any thoughts I might have about becoming a professional fighter. As it turned out, the sergeant and I became good friends from that day on, and I directed my athletic interests to the calmer sports such as football and volleyball.

Speaking of football, out unit had two or three fellows who had played in college, so we managed to put together a pretty good team that challenged any unit that happened to be in the area. One fine fall day, we played in the soccer stadium in Luxembourg against a team that represented a large Engineer Battalion. Although we lost, we were not disgraced, especially since the other fellows out-weighed us considerably. The "fans" that wandered into the statium were mostly local folks who had never seen American football, so that while they were undoubtedly confused, they cheered and clapped enthusiastically. Since this happened to be Thanksgiving Day, we were bruised but contented when we returned to our H.Q. to enjoy a traditional turkey dinner (almost). We all felt we had experienced Thanksgiving just as though we were back in our hometowns. It just so happened that this was one of the last really carefree days we would enjoy

for sometime to come.

The operations that took place during the time we were headquartered in Luxembourg were not much different from those we experienced in France, except for weather conditions. Wherever we went, it was cold and if not raining, it was snowing. We did our best to keep dry and warm and became expert in the art of constructing nearly weatherproof dugouts. These were often constructed in ditches and covered with fenceposts, cardboard, or whatever we could find to fend off the rain and snow. Once we used railroad ties, but when somebody built a fire on the inside of the dugout, the whole thing caught on fire and drove us out into the night. We learned the hard way that creosote makes quite an fire and some of the guys lost most of their possessions. No one lost clothing, however, since whatever we had was worn! Anyhow, we stayed near the fire since keeping warm was our most important objective. I remember that on one cold day, I placed my foot so close to the fire my shoe started to blaze. I did not hurry to extinguish the fire, but rather turned my foot this way and that to toast all sides! This gives me some recollection as to just how cold we got.

An especially cold operation was held near the town of Elsenborn, which was in the coal mining area north of Luxembourg. it snowed most of the time, so just being mildly comfortable became nearly impossible. For obvious reasons, fires were not advisable, even to prepare food, so everyone became desperate for any item that might afford the slightest bit of comfort. I witnessed two soldiers, for example, fight bitterly over a board; not as fire wood, but to sleep on! Finally, we took refuge in a small room over a store that had been badly damaged through shelling. Since it was extremely dangerous to occupy buildings, especially if they had already been zeroed in on by the enemy, we knew that we were taking foolish chances. Nevertheless, it was dry, and well worth the risk. We knew, also, that enemy patrols were in the area, so we did at least take precautions to post guards. My "watch" happened to be in the hours just before dawn, so I stood in the doorway of the store where I had a good view of the street and other buildings. I soon became conscious of figures moving slowly on the other side of the street, although I could not tell how many were there. I was trying to decide whether to alert my sleeping buddies or to open fire (since I did not think they were aware of me) when I heard an approaching vehicle. Before I could do anything, fortunately, a bus pulled noisily up to the corner and the "enemy" boarded - as commuters do the world over in order to get to their jobs in the city. Thus, I again witnessed life going on "as usual" regardless of the fact that I was about as close to the "front" as one could get without joining the "other side"! It was obvious that Elsenborn was a suburb of Luxembourg City.

Chapter XV

In early December, we were sent on an operation near the German city of Koblenz. We were excited to be in Germany for the first time, and were still contented from our happy Thanksgiving events. News from the "top" indicated that the Germans were retreating on all fronts and that the war could not last much longer in Europe. Our spirits were high as we went about our "mission" and I can really not recall any details other that being given the assignment to serve as the "rear eschelon" sergeant. This meant that, along with a corporal and jeep driver, I was to follow the main unit to take down any signs or other items that might give away our deception. Since this was not difficult, we took our time, and even stopped in an abandoned farmhouse to cook a decent meal and spend a dry night out of the weather. There was a library in the house, so that when we had finished supper, we looked at some books by candlelight and though we could not read French or German, just the idea that we were spending time in such a peaceful pursuit gave us a warm feeling. At one point, we were visited by what we thought was an infantry lieutenant and his driver who shared a cup of coffee with us. We were not concerned by all the questions the lieutenant asked, nor were we sorry to see them leave, since we did not want to share our happy lot with anyone. We were surprised, but again, not concerned by the amount of shell fire we heard during that night. On the following morning after a leisurely breakfast, we continued on to Luxembourg where we had to go through a check point manned by some very serious looking infantrymen. It turned out that we were the last Americans to come out of the area. The Battle of the Bulge was on! We also quickly surmised that the "lieutenant and his driver" were infiltrating Germans who had donned American uniforms to gather information for the invading forces. They must have been thoroughly confused by us since we (as trained), had told him we were part of a unit that was still in the States!

When we arrived at our headquarters, we found everyone rushing about packing to move out. The mood was somber to say the least and no one seemed to know what was coming next. The news from 12th Army Group Headquarters was conflicting and not very encouraging, since the Germans had broken through our lines resulting in many casualties. Rumor had it that all troops were to become infantrymen and that we would be sent to relieve an infantry battalion somewhere on the "front". Thoughts of a Christmas being as pleasant as Thanksgiving dissolved along with hopes of an early end to the war.

It was snowing hard when we convoyed back to Verdun. There was little conversation during the ride as we watched several convoys of tanks and trucks moving along the road to take up new positions. We knew that most of these troops were recruits not yet exposed to battle, so we felt a certain amount of concern about the state of the Allied forces. If the conduct of the was was to fall to the lot of raw troops and people such as ourselves (who were not trained infantrymen) things were in a sorry state!

We soon arrived in a casern in Verdun where we were quartered indoors with billets very similar to our accommodations in Luxembourg. Things were "looking up" until the 1st sergeant told me to form a detail that would dig a latrine outside. I had just begun to warm up so I was not too happy but, being a "trained seal", I picked about four guys as volunteers and headed out. The 1st sergeant went with us long enough to indicate where the hold was to be dug before

retreating to his warm quarters. Well, we tried our darndest to cut into what we thought was frozen earth and I even took a turn just to keep warm. When I realized that we couldn't even scratch the surface with our shovels, I enlisted the aid of an engineer outfit that was nearby to send one of their compressors with a jackhammer to do the job. Finally, after much toil (since none of us knew how to use the equipment properly), the task was completed. We went back to our cozy corners, not so much to get warm, but to cool off! A day or so later, rain washed away the snow and, lo and behold, we had dug the latrine right in the middle of a concrete driveway! I remember that when we left the caserne, trucks were very careful to avoid the massive pothole we had so laboriously laid in their path. I often wondered what was said when the original owners returned, but consoled myself in the knowledge that I was simply following orders.

As promised, we were sent to "defend" a section of the "front", which happened to be in a small Belgian town called Les Bulles, and it was there that we stayed during the Battle of the Bulge. The snow was very deep as we approached our new position. As a matter of fact, the snow was banked up even with the tops of our trucks on both sides of the road so that we had very little visibility. Les Bulles was located on the crest of a hill and as we wound our way toward it, we could see the inevitable church steeple dominating the skyline. We soon discovered that this was a very lovely little farm community that had been completely passed by. There were no shell holes, no bombed out buildings, and to our surprise, there were no sounds of war to be heard. At first, we set out our bed rolls in an abandoned barn at the invitation of the local burgemeister, but soon were invited to bunk on the floors of the farm houses. It seems that the locals were glad to have Allied troops on hand, so they did all they could to make us welcome. My platoon was particularly fortunate since the lady of the house had a husband somewhere as a prisoner of the Germans, so she made every effort to share her meager provisions with us. She even kept coffee (ersatz) brewing constantly and was forever asking to wash our clothes. As it turned out, we received no mail during this operation (and couldn't send mail out, either) but we did receive oranges for some strange reason. These were the first we had seen since leaving the States. Out of gratitude, we made a point of sharing these with our hostess and her children - and their excitement over such a small gift made us all feel like Santa Claus.

We remained on our "outpost" for over a week and seemed to be completely out of the war. No enemy ever appeared, and only distant shell fire could be heard. We patrolled the perimeter of the village, having worn paths through the deep snow, and stopped occasionally to watch the farmers tend to livestock or gather wood. All this, and we were practically in the middle of the heaviest battles. It seemed as though the war was passing us by, leaving us in one of the true "garden spots" in the E.T.O. Then one day we heard the unmistakable grinding of tanks moving toward us. From our vantage point on the hill, we watched while the impressive monsters of several tank battalions lumbered past our quiet little village. The Americans had broken through. For all intents and purposes, the Battle of the Bulge was over.

Chapter XVI

Although the American forces had driven the Germans back, and although the enemy had apparently "shot its bolt", we didn't have the great feeling that the end was in sight (which we had held prior to the Battle of the Bulge). The almost consistent advance of our forces had been seriously set back and the invincibility seemed to be less assured. Morale was not the highest when we realized we had a ways to go before any kind of victory could be achieved. On the way back to our headquarters, we passed through Bastogne and Malmedy where American troops had suffered tremendous losses, and I could not help but think "there but for the grace of God . . .". One clue that summed up the German plight should have been obvious to us, but we overlooked it completely. That was the fact that the roads were littered with German tanks and trucks which were not damaged, but had simply "run out of gas". We later discovered that this was the reason we finally won the war - being able to keep supplies moving to the "front". The enemy, on the other hand, had put everything into this "big push", and then were unable to carry on without fuel, food, and other vital materials. In addition, their air arm was almost non-existent, so that when the weather finally cleared, they were "sitting ducks" for the multitude of Allied bombers that were always overhead.

On Christmas Eve, we were quartered in a reasonably dry building, so we decided to celebrate as best we could. We sent a detail out to cut down a tree and put our collective artistic talents to work in creating decorations. Tin cans were painted, toilet paper rolled to make garlands, and those little rubber things (that were distributed to keep soldiers from getting V.D.) were inflated and also painted. These made excellent decorations for the tree and did much to raise out spirits. In a letter home, I commented that "the results were imaginative if not classy".

On Christmas Day, the cooks managed to put together a good feast although not as elaborate as the one we had enjoyed at Thankgsiving. We also "reversed rank" for the day so that the lowest private was in command while sergeants pulled guard and K.P. duties. This was no big deal, since everyone used mess kits, so we only had a couple of pots to scrub. Naturally, we sat around the tree singing carols (which was funny because half the guys were Jewish). Our best effort in lines with the spirit of Christmas probably was to pool our candy rations and distribute them among the children in the town. Christmas of 1944 was not so bad afterall!

On December 26th, we were sent on an operation in the area of the city of Metz. Aside from the everlasting quest to keep warm, dry, and full, I can recall only two things about that operation. This was the time that the Germans began using the "buzz-bombs", and that was the place where we first encountered them. In my mind, they were the "scariest" weapons of the war, since you could both "see and hear" the damn things and you knew that if the very loud drone of the jet engine ceased, they would come down in about ten seconds. They were quite indiscriminate as to where they fell and each carries an explosion factor of one thousand pounds.

My second memory has to do with a trip to the 12th Army Group Headquarters, where I was send to pick up some information for the Battalion Commander. While I waited in the room that served as a message center, a call

came from General Patton announcing that his armored group was approaching Metz. It happened that Metz was one of Europe's most fortified places, so there was a big conference held by the top brass before Patton was advised to by-pass the city. A few minutes elapsed before there was another message from Patton which said "I've already taken it. Should I give it back?" I felt privy to history in the making.

Indicentally, these rare trips to 12 Army Group Headquarters were a real event for any enlisted man. This was the main nerve center for the entire E.T.O. and that was where General Omar Bradley and his staff made decisions that affected all operations. We "non-officer types" were always amused by the long lines of tents that served as the "barracks" for both lieutenant and full colonels, each of whom vied to see who could acquire the most "luxurious" items such as bunks, any kind of table, and chairs. Obviously, the higher the rank, the more furnishings were in evidence. Aside from the orderlies that served each of these officers, there were very few enlisted men to be found. We assumed that, in view of the shortage of "labor", Lt. Colonels, at least, had to pull K.P. Actually, none of us were the least bit envious since we believed that we probably had it better than they!

Operations which we took part in through January and February of 1945 tend to run together in my memory. I know that we were in Leglise, Belgium in mid-January before moving to Luxembourg for operations at Flaxweiler and Steinsel. Next, we traveled to Landonville, France before engaging in what turned out to be a very memorable operation near Saarlautern, Germany.

The further east we went, the colder the weather got - so sleet, snow, and rain became even more of a problem. In addition, the defenders of the area around Saarlautern included the German version of our military academy, and these guys were real sharpshooters with artillery. We had inflated our rubber "guns" along the banks of a railroad and to get to our kitchen unit (which was of the utmost importance), we had to cross an open field. From our vantage point, we could watch these well-trained cadets pick off jeeps with 88's as though they were shooting ducks in a gallery. Therefore, we were well aware that to return for chow would definitely be risky business. Nevertheless, after a couple of cold meals that consisted of K-rations only, we began to take our chances. At first we crawled along the furrows in the fields which were full of water, snow, and slush so that when we finally made the kitchen, we were soaked with no change of clothing, and with the happy knowledge that we had to crawl back to our position by the railroad. Our solution to this dilemma came when we decided to drive our truck as fast as possible and over a zig-zag course so that if we made our destination, we would at least be dry. In later years, every time I've seen one of those "demolition derbys" on television, I've remembered those wild rides across the fields of Saarlautern!

The month of February seemed to be the time most of us turned our thoughts to home and everything related to home. I suppose this nostalgia was augmented by the bleakness of the weather, the desolation of the war-torn scenery, or the comparative increase of operations that seemed ever more dangerous. In my case, I drew a map of my hometown (Towson) from memory, and send home several sketches of a house I intended to build after the war. I even wrote a "poem" that really did nothing more than reflect my homesickness:

On the corner of Fayette and Howard Streets (In Baltimore)
Stands a French sailor.
As the Number 8 street car clangs by,
The Frenchman feels
No pangs of joy,
No recognition.
He eyes the streetcar coldly and with indifference.
He doesn't care that it passes 33rd Street.
He wouldn't care what movie plays at the Boulevard (theater).
He wouldn't even notice and doesn't care that
The Coldspring Lane that he passes leads to Charles Street.
He has no idea that Charles Street is nice in the Springtime.
He wouldn't feel the least anticipation as the trolley passed Normal School
His heart wouldn't race as it turned at Wagner's Corner.
He wouldn't even know to get off at Pennsylvania Avenue.
He never heard of it.
Couldn't pronounce it.
He'd feel no pangs of joy,
No recognition.
He would eye the whole scene coldly and indifferently
For he is lonely
And homesick for places far removed.
A tiny village with a large church,
An ancient house with a barn attached
Where pungent odors and cows
Mingle with fair women and lean men.
Probably, I've been there.
I felt no pangs of joy,
No recognition.
I eyed the whole scene coldly and indifferently.

This "poem" was, in reality, a "map" of the trolley ride from downtown Baltimore to my family home in the suburbs (an event I was obviously looking forward to). At any rate, the same guy who sent my story about the pianos to the New York Times did the same thing with the poem. Sure enough, it was published, but the editor gave the by-line to my friend! Since this was the same guy who fell into the garbage pit some months before, I did not make much of a fuss, although he was furious and wrote several nasty letters to the editor. As far as I was concerned, the composing was just a way to release my feelings at the time, and I was not concerned about publication.

During this same period, we began to receive Christmas gifts which, although late, were very welcome. By this time, the folks at home had cased to send useless clothing or perishable food. Instead, we had requested and received such delights as peanut butter, tuna fish, crackers, and jellies. These provided many hours of pleasure whenever we had a mail call and the opportunity to share packages from home. Beverages to accompany each repast usually consisted of coffee or tea and, very rarely, some local wine. Soft drinks, beer, and whiskey were not available.

Every officer, however, received a ration of whiskey and most of them shared these with their men. Our lieutenant happened to be either a tea-totaler or skinflint (we never completely decided), but he rarely invited any member of our platoon to share his ration. One day, when we were pulling out of a billet, he ordered two members of my squad to get his footlocker from his second-floor quarters. All of us knew that he kept his booze in that footlocker, which was

contrary to the orders of the battalion commander, so the two selected bearers were only too happy to comply. The problem was that they dropped the footlocker from the second floor window to the concrete courtyard below. Every bottle was broken, of course, and the lieutenant's clothes and personal possessions were thoroughly soaked. He was absolutely furious but couldn't say a word! Rest assured that his liquor rations were carefully shared with the platoon from that day forward!

March found us still traveling all over France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Germany going about our "deceptive" practices. The first signs of Spring began to be noted as trees that survived incessant shelling began to bud. The frozen, snowy turf turned to mud, but daylight lasted longer and some days were warm enough to portend better times ahead. Allied bombing became even more fierce as the skies were almost black with sortees of Liberators that passed overhead constantly. Below the bombers, flights of fighter planes were always on patrol at tree-top level, all of which was noisy but very comforting to us. We learned later that during this period of constant aerial attacks, German farmers were tilling their fields at night.

In the midst of all of this confusion, one guy in my squad found a large gray rabbit which turned out to be a fine Belgian hare. He was convinced that we (at last) had a "mascot". This was fine until the rabbit chose my bedroll as his personal toilet. At that point, the "mascot" was given to a handy farmer who promised to use him for breeding purposes. I don't think anyone was fooled, and it was a good bet that the "mascot" made a pretty tasty supper as soon as we were out of sight. Later, another fellow found a wooden duck pull-toy that was much more readily accepted and carried with us for the remainder of our stay in Europe.

It was still early in March when a major reason for our existence finally came to light. For the first time, the entire battalion worked together in one operation, and we traveled to the very banks of the Rhine River. The objective was to have this small battalion of about 300 men along with one infantry company that was comprised of 200 battle-weary veterans replace the thousands that made up the entire Ninth Army. For three days, without any time for rest, we covered an awfully large chunk of real estate, lighting fires, making noise, playing our phoney records, inflating all of our "dummy" tanks and guns, and generally trying to impress the Germans that a very large force has assembled to cross the Rhine at the point where we were located. A few real howitzers and anti-aircraft pieces had been left behind by the "real" troops, and we went from one to the other blissfully firing into space. Meanwhile, the "intelligence" specialists blabbed away in the nearby towns to reinforce the impression that the Ninth Army was all set to attack. My particular assignment had to do with the firing of the anti-aircraft guns, so along with a jeep driver, we constantly circulated to complete our task. Once, our vehicle ran over a small "bump" which turned out to be a German hand grenade - an event that would have given us more concern if we had not been so exhausted. Since the thing obviously did not explode, no harm was done (except to our nervous systems when we reflected on this at a later date). Apparently, the mission was a success, for the Germans moved a couple crack Panzer units on the opposite side of the river while the Ninth Army went down the river a piece and walked across the bridge at Remagen with little real opposition. The 603rd never received public credit for it, but we were given to understand that our "play acting" had must to do with the success of the whole crossing. Officially, we received the Presidential Citation for our part in this battle to get across the Rhine

with minimal casualties. Since our status remained "secret" until well after the war was over, I suppose the top brass simply forgot about the operation, but then, was military leader would want to confess that such an important event was made partly possible by rubber equipment and a handful of crazy artists?

Chapter XVII

After this major operation, units of the 603rd were scattered over the Saar-Palatinate-Moselle regions as well as across Germany. My Company 'B' traveled through Belgium, Holland, and across Germany before reaching the border of Czechoslovakia. Although we performed our "deceptions" a few more times, it was difficult to "keep up" with the Allied forces that were now moving rapidly in pursuit of the collapsing German army. Not that this was a "piece of cake", for the enemy fought for every inch, and many Americans were casualties during these final weeks. In our case, however, there was little use for the deceptive tactics for which we had been trained, so we sort of "tagged along", always ready, but seldom committed.

In a sense, we had a "ringside" seat for the final battles, as well as a very nice tour of the territory. Liege reminded me of a typical American town, since the use of bricks for construction was more prevalent than in any other city we had passed through. When the convoy stopped at a street corner, it was easy to imagine that I was on the corner of "Howard and Fayette Streets". In Holland, the platoon was billeted for a day or so in some "row houses" that bordered a lovely canal. The family with which I stayed was friendly and generous in sharing coffee (ersatz) and cookies with me. We sat in their living room and though I spoke no Dutch, we had almost normal conversations. Surprisingly (to me), so many Dutch words and expressions were similar to the English language that, if one listened intently, meanings became quite clear.

At this time, the roads were crowded with refugees of every description and most of them carried their worldly possessions either on their backs, or in little push carts. We discovered that many were Russians, Poles, or Italians who had been serving as "slave labor" for the Germans. These poor people were herded into what became known as Displaced Persons Camps and we were assigned the task of not only guarding them, but also of arranging for their food and lodging. Our surprising elevation to this new role probably had something to do with the fact that the word "intelligence" was part of our unit title and, since Military Government types had not yet arrived, some high-ranking chap decided that we could fill in. Since we had no way to convince them otherwise, we set out to do the best we could.

My first D.P. Camp contained mostly Italians. Our first objective was to identify the highest ranking person among them and soon came up with three or four generals who were very cooperative in organizing all facets of the camp. Cooks were identified, and the American depots in the area supplied food, mostly in the way of soups. Problems arose when we realized that pots for cooking were not available, so it took a search of nearby bombed out buildings before these were located. By this time, large tents had been erected and all of the 5000 refugees were assigned to reasonably dry, if not luxurious, quarters. Most of the people immediately began to wash themselves and their clothing, and things were moving on a fairly happy note. Since everyone was so cooperative, we had little to do other than to patrol the perimeter and meet occasionally with the designated leaders.

Naturally, as soon as the Italians were reasonably settled, we were dispatched to set up a camp for the Russians and the Poles. I suppose someone

reasoned that since these were all Slavic peoples, they would get along very well. However, we had much more difficulty settling arguments and actually preventing more mayhem than we counted on. It seems that these people hated one another, so we finally divided the camp into two distinct areas, and then had to enlist a company of infantrymen to help us maintain the separation. While the Italians had been cooperative by staying within the confines of the camp, the Russians, particularly, were constantly raiding the countryside, slaughtering cattle, plundering homes, and generally making nuisances of themselves. They were strange people who were outwardly friendly but totally disregarded any kind of authority. We finally mounted machine guns around the perimeter of the camp, not so much to confine them, as to protect the surrounding villages. It was clear to us that the Russians were going to be troublesome and they even announced to anyone who would listen that they would one day conquer the world. One day, we located a Russian who had climbed a tree to avoid detection. When he was ordered to come down, he pulled a pistol from his belt and aimed it at us. Not waiting to see whether or not he was serious or not, we shot him in the rear end. Both the man and the pistol came out of the tree in a hurry, and although he wasn't seriously injured, the word got around and we had no more trouble. Such was our introduction to the "cold war" months before it actually became a reality!

Chapter XVIII

During the final month of the war in Europe, aside from out stint of duty as guardians of the D.P.'s, we continued in our quest to seek whatever comforts we would find. One of my "treasures" was a bed spring that, even without a mattress, was a lot more comfortable than the ground. Another find was a guitar which I had sought since arriving in the E.T.O. Actually, the Company Commander found it and gave it to me as a present, I suspect, because he was particularly fond of singing. Thus, every time we had a chance to sit around a campfire, the Captain appeared with a big smile and ready vocal chords.

As we traveled through Germany in the early Spring, cherry trees were beginning to bear fruit, so these became frequent culinary delights. At the same time, very strict orders were issued that prohibited any kind of fraternizing with the German people. This was frustrating when we rode along the highway and were unable to accept the boxes of beautiful cherries being offered by the pretty little frauleins, so we had to rely on finding our own trees and doing our own picking. Incidentally, when we were in Germany during those last days, we could find no Nazis. Everyone said they had been innocent victims of Hitler and the "Black Shirts", so we had to wonder where the hordes that had been shooting at us came from.

On one occasion, I was dispatched to a little German village to procure some stove pipe for one of the D.P. kitchen units. At this point, the local citizens were actually afraid of any Americans, so that when I appeared in my jeep, the streets were empty. Having learned the German words for "stove pipe", I stood in front of a shop that I identified as some kind of hardware emporium and shouted "Haben ze aufenrohr?" Pretty soon, an upstairs window opened and a man appeared to ask (in perfect English) "What are you looking for, buddy?" Finally, he admitted me to the store and gave me the pipe in exchange for a Military Government chit, and told me that he was an American from Milwaukee who had been caught in Germany at the outbreak of the war. He claimed he had been unable to leave and was grateful to be freed at last. I didn't believe a word of it, but at least we had our stove pipe.

This business of trying to use the languages of the various countries was a source of frustration and amusement for me. Once, in a town near Paris, I had attempted to purchase some india ink, and using the little book of phonetic French that I had been given, I stumbled and stuttered all over the place. Finally, the clerk smiled and said in perfect English, "What are you trying to say, buddy?" This "Frenchman" turned out to be an American from Chicago!

The most amusing event dealing with language misunderstanding involved a man in my platoon who never made the slightest effort to speak or understand any language other than "New Yorkese". He was one of those "macho types who thought every girl in the world was dying to spend the night with him, so he was constantly propositioning every woman he saw. One day, we were traveling through the small village of Fuchoe somewhere in Belgium, and my "mouthy" friend was smiling and waving at all the girls along the way. His gestures, if not his language, were universal. Finally, he hollered at one young lady, "Hey Babe? What town is this, anyhow?" When the girl called the name of the village, "FUCHOE", he was absolutely furious. "Well, fuck you, too!", he

screamed, and then proceeded to sit down in the truck to sulk. Nobody ever told him about his misunderstanding, for this event seemed to take the "wind out of his sail" for awhile, much to the relief of the rest of us.

Easter, 1945, was a day that we decided to dress in our best uniforms, not for parade purposes, but just to honor the season. Someone found a large tub that provided a unique experience for all of us, since for the first time in nearly a year, we could soak in warm water! This was a real luxury! When not in the tub, we scrubbed our clothes, shaved, and generally made every effort to remove the rubbed-in grim that had accumulated over the long winter. As we shared our Easter rations, I think everyone was concerned about the new "odor" (cleanliness) that permeated the area. I remember there was a great deal of sneezing, mostly because the only soap we had was (logically) some kind of disinfectant.

Early in May, Company "B" was billeted in a beautiful old schloss high on a hill overlooking the ancient city of Trier, Germany. For the most part, the city had been leveled by bombs, and strangely enough, the only walls still standing were those constructed by the Romans many centuries earlier. Close inspection showed that no mortar had been used in these walls, so one had to conclude that either the Romans were terrific engineers or luck had somehow spared them from total destruction. We suspected the former, since we had seen this same evidence throughout Europe, wherever the Romans had built walls or viaducts.

Life in the schloss was terrific as far as we were concerned. We had our "tub", beautiful rooms to sleep in, plenty of cherry trees, and a cellar full of the finest rhine wines. We were probably the only soldiers in the E.T.O. that had wine for breakfast, lunch, and supper, although not in fine glasses. We found that our mess cups served quite well, but the connoisseurs among us were offended. This did not prevent anyone from filling his cup to the brim, however, so most had a warm "glow" on for the entire stay at the schloss. We also discovered a small river in the valley, and since it was quite warm during the day, we made many trips to swim in the icey waters. The only problem involved the climb back up the hill when the cooling effects of the dip were erased by the efforts to make the steep ascent. Still wearing the same heavy wool uniforms, it did not require much effort to break our in perspiration.

On May 7, we were informed that the war in Europe was over. I remember writing a letter home that contained just one word - "WHEE!" We were still at the schloss so we spent the day playing ball, drinking beer (we finally got some) and champagne. The real impact of the news didn't hit me right away, since this was almost too much to comprehend. From our vantage point high in the hills, the ravages of war could not be seen, so I guess we were all in a kind of a daze. I remember going to my sack early and sleeping late (until 7:30) on the next day. This was also a luxury that none of us had enjoyed for many months. We were all conscious of the fact that we'd, as a company, had come through a lot with only three casualties in spite of the fact that we had been attached at times to units that suffered as much as three hundred percent losses! Considering that it was our objective to draw enemy fire, this was a remarkable record, and we had to thank our "lucky stars".

On May 10, 1945, I celebrated my 24th birthday by trying to paint with watercolors, taking a nice hot shower, and an afternoon nap. This latter was a special treat, but I was awakened suddenly by a friend who was holding a package under my nose. It turned out to be a watch being returned from the manufacturer

in the States where it had been sent exactly one year before - on my 23rd birthday. This was even stranger in consideration of the fact that I had received the watch as a gift from my brother on my 21st birthday. Within a month or so, the watch ceased to work, so I returned it to the factory as directed on the guarantee. I was still at Fort Meade on my 22nd birthday when, lo and behold, my watch was returned on that very day! Thus, for four consecutive years (and always on May 10), I either got the same watch for a present or sent it back for repairs. I learned my lesson and put the watch away for safe keeping. It would seem to be tempting fate to expect any more such coincidences.

During the next few days and weeks, we did what we could to see some of the sights that we had missed while under combat conditions. Among the memorable excursions was a drive along the Rhine with the platoon lieutenant and another sergeant. We were impressed by the magnificent castles and vineyards that covered the banks. The vineyards especially amazed us by the way they were planted on almost vertical banks, and we wondered how harvesting could ever take place. When we reached Coblentz, we could understand the full extent of the Allied bombing, since the entire city seemed to be leveled. A massive bronze statue of Bismark had been blown off of its pedestal and hung "head down" in a most undignified position. If we were not already aware of the horrors and futility of war, those trips along the Rhine clearly brought the message home!

Chapter XIX

In late May, the 603rd assembled in the fields near the German town of Idar-Oberstein to prepare for shipment back to the States. While we waited for orders, the Battalion Commander decided that we needed to continue military training, so calisthenics, close-order drill, and forced marches became the "order of the day". This did not sit well with us, but we were too close to home to argue. It also became his practice to have small bulletin boards placed in the "company" areas upon which these various "chicken details" were posted. I'll never know what possessed me to keep an eye on that thing, but one day, I noted an order which stated:

> **"Whenever the Commanding Officer approaches a platoon, the non-com in charge will call the troops to attention, salute, give name, rank, and identify the platoon".**

Being very experienced troops by this time, we considered the "forced marches", especially, to be a total waste of time. Consequently, as soon as we were out of sight, we would find a comfortable place to sit and loaf until it was time to return to the tent area. A few days following my reading of the bulletin, we had just returned to our tent and since it was raining, were making an effort to get into dry clothes. Men were in every stage of undress when who should strut into our tent but the C.O. with an entourage of lesser officers. I was in my underwear when I called the shocked platoon to attention, saluted, and smartly stated "Sir! Sergeant James B. Laubheimer, Company B, Second Platoon, reporting as ordered!" I thought the company commander was about to kiss me, while the gruff old Colonel smiled broadly, asked how we were doing, and strutted out of the tent. I later learned that the old man had been in every tent in the area, and that we were the first to have read the stupid order. At any rate, two days later, I was brought "front and center" before a formation of the entire Battalion and awarded the distinction of being the "soldier of the month". As it was for me on the rifle range, pure luck had made me seem to be a better soldier than I really was!

The long trip to the port of LeHavre seemed like every other convoy to us, except that we were on our way home for a furlough. (We also expected to go on to Japan eventually, but that was not a concern at the moment.) I remember passing through the city of Rheims and being awed by the huge Cathedral where we were allowed to stop for a brief tour. Other than that, I suspect that the anticipation for "coming events" blurred the scenery in our minds. We reached LeHavre, finally, to note that this was another completely leveled city, and the only wall I could see was obviously the last remains of a cafe, for the words "Le Lune" stood tall above the rubble.

We were put aboard ship almost immediately upon arrival so we had no chance to view the harbor. Some were concerned about the small size of the vessel, but most would have gotten on a row boat if it would take us home. It was nightfall, so we were directed below decks and crowded into bunks that were four tiers high. For some reason, I selected a top bunk, possibly remembering the trip over and wanting to be over, rather than under, the many who were bound to be sea sick. Unfortunately, I did not account for the fact that the English Channel is especially rough at times, and this happened to be one of them. When I awoke the next morning, we were underway, happily rolling over some pretty giant swells.

There was a small light just about at my eye level and I made the mistake of trying to follow it as it went up and down, up and down. Pretty soon, I figured I had better find the "head" and when I got there, every possible sink, urinal, or toilet had a line of guys waiting for a turn to throw up. I gave up and went "topsides" where the fresh air soon settled my stomach, but I had gained a much more sympathetic attitude towards those who had been sick on the ship coming from the States!

As it turned out, this was a Navy ship, and a fortunate choice for us. The first time I went to breakfast, I couldn't believe it when we were served real bananas to go along with the traditional navy beans. Except for the oranges we had in Belgium, the apples in Normandy, and the cherries along the Rhine, this was the first fresh fruit we had enjoyed. In fact, most of the meals were super by our standards, and even the perpetually "sick" missed very few trips to the galley.

Morale was high, naturally, but a crowded ship needs a lot to keep it that way. Those of us who could make any kind of music were quickly enlisted to entertain and since we had a "captive audience", we enjoyed the chance to show off. When we weren't performing, they showed movies on deck and, although they were probably old, no one cared, since we had seen very few since leaving home. Card games became very serious events, because most of the soldiers on board received about six month's pay in American currency just after getting on the ship. This got out of hand as the "sharks" (mostly sailors) began to clean up, and the more desperate types began to steal money to try to recover their losses. Most of us got into the habit of literally clutching our wallets and sleeping with them under our heads, but the stealing continued until the ship finally docked. I realize just how wild these games were when a member of my squad, a card shark from Philadelphia, asked me to hide $20,000 for him. Not wishing to end up overboard one dark night, I politely refused and suggested that he "cool it" lest he end up in the drink. He took my advice and spent most of the rest of the trip hovering by my side.

As we awoke one morning, we could hear shouting and rushed up on deck to see that we were approaching land. It happened to be the southern tip of Virginia, so pretty soon, we neared Hampton Roads. It was July 3, 1945, and the Bay was full of small boats blowing horns and generally welcoming the returning soldiers. We were permitted to go to the very top decks usually reserved for the officers. With everyone hanging on the rails, waving, and shouting, I thought the ship might capsize! We eventually docked and disembarked with our worldly possessions in the duffel bags on our backs. To our surprise, we were told to leave them on the dock where they would be carried for us by porters to our barracks at Camp Patrick Henry, which was a very short bus ride from the docks. Again, to our surprise, we were assigned to quarters that not only had bunks, but actually had sheets to go along with the blankets! We were told that the mess hall would be open 24 hours for our convenience, that phones were available for calls to home, and that we were to make ourselves comfortable while orders were cut for the long-awaited leaves. Of course, we made a bee-line for the mess hall, and were offered any kind of food we could imagine including steaks, chops, fresh fruit and milk, cakes, pies, and ice cream. Being overwhelmed, we loaded trays with as much as we could carry only to discover that we could barely make a dent in these delicious treats. More than a year of dehydrated chow had shrunk our stomachs, and I know it was a long time before I could eat a full meal.

From Patrick Henry, we were sent to the post nearest our homes for final processing, which meant that I went by a very slow and smoky train to Fort Meade. By this time, we were impatient and getting grumpy and not interested in waiting any longer for the red tape to unravel. I know I gave the clerks at Fort Meade a rough time until they hustled to get us through. We all played up the idea that we were hardened combat troops and that they had better not mess around too long. Apparently this ruse worked, for I soon had my furlough papers in hand, went to a phone and called my father who actually worked on the Post. After he recovered from the shock (he did not know I was State-side), he arranged for me to ride in a Coca Cola truck all the way home. It may not have been a triumphant way to arrive, but it was quick! As I recall, the only person in the house was my aunt, who immediately showed great concern over my "thinness". I was home - at last!

Chapter XX

The thirty days at home were something I had dreamed about for a long time, and as in the case of all "dreams", I couldn't possibly accomplish all that I had planned. The first thing I did was to don civilian clothes (which was against regulations) simply because I was very tired of olive drab after seeing little else for three years. Those favorite foods which I had looked forward to for so long were generously provided by a doting family, but I discovered I could only consume small quantities. Most of my pre-war friends were still off in the service making old"haunts" places that had been taken over by strangers. Gasoline was severely rationed so that cruising around town looking for "action" would have been a selfish thing to do and would have grounded the rest of the family. So I did a lot f restless walking, a lot of lying about, and a lot of thinking about whether or not we were going to end up in the Pacific Theater. When the furlough was over, I was rested but a bit anxious to get on with whatever the future would hold. I did learn, however, that nothing was quite as one might anticipate, and I never again tried to cram too many activities into any kind of limited "vacation".

On August 7, 1945, I reported to Fort Meade where others from my unit who lived in the 3rd Army area were assembled. After many hours of sitting on our barracks bags, we boarded a train for Camp Pine, New York. Fortunately for us, the train was air-conditioned and we had pretty fair meals in the dining car. There were a couple of breaks along the way, including a ride on the ferry from New Jersey to New York, and a "layover" in Grand Central. On the morning of August 8, we were at Utica, and as we traveled through the lovely (but very rural) country, we began to wonder why they always located army camps in the "sticks". We arrived at Camp Pine about 2:45 p.m. and quickly noted that it looked like every other installation we had ever seen with its rows of gray barracks, neat little mess halls, and company streets all arranged at right angles. It had apparently rained during the night so that the ever-present mud was very much in evidence and waiting to attach itself to our new boots. As soon as we were assigned to a barracks, we shared exaggerated tales about the furloughs, speculated about the delights of Watertown, and complained about finding it so hot way up in the northern part of the country. That same afternoon, we learned that Russia had declared war on Japan! Morale suddenly soared.

For the next few days, we were never far from a radio as reports of Japan's supposed offers of surrender were broadcast. This was a "nail-chewing" time, but we still managed trips to Watertown, which turned out to be the "biggest little town in the U.S.A.", where we enjoyed good steak dinners and swims in attractive public pools. Since all of the unit had not yet assembled, we had no real training program but plenty of time to play ball or "go on pass". One weekend, four of us went to Alexandria Bay where we got rooms in a second rate hotel. Finding no light bulbs in these sleazy rooms, we went about removing them from every fixture we could find so that we, at least, had plenty for the entire time we were there. We probably would not have been such vandals if the owners had not reminded us that "there was a war on" when we requested one bulb for each room. Later, we rented canoes and paddled around some of the famous Thousand Islands, so we had experiences that were normally reserved for the rich. We got back to camp short of money, but quite content.

News about the use of atom bombs was not something that created a sense of panic or concern for the future. At the time, we were understandably interested in seeing the end of the war, and, quite honestly, did not worry much about how this might be accomplished. Our excitement and anticipation mounted and we continued to stay near radio news until the announcement of the "end" reached us on August 17. In addition to exuberance, we were shocked and a bit dazed, and not quite able to believe it. Before we could react, we were assembled by the Commanding Officer and "ordered" to get off the post for two days! So, with not much money left, we headed to town where we were treated like "heroes" even though we were just ordinary G.I.'s I remember standing outside of an exclusive country club watching the membership enjoy swimming and having a good time. It wasn't long before we were invited in, offered food and drinks, and provided with bathing suits. It was still very hot, so when I dived into the blue waters of the St. Lawrence, I received the shock of my life! This was like diving from the fire into pure ice water, but as soon as my breath came back, I found that it was most refreshing, and at any rate, this very luxurious experience was free.

During the following days, we had a very "loose" schedule, with little military activity and a lot of recreation. We were informed that plans for the discharge were being formulated and that those with more than "80 points" would probably be sent to the Post nearest their homes to be discharged. Since I had accumulated "85", I decided that I would not have long to wait, so having fun became my main objective. At the same time, I was concerned about my "buddies" with less points, since there was no word as to when their turns would come. "Rumor" had it that some might even be shipped back overseas to serve as Occupation Forces. This made everyone furious, even though there was no truth to it, and there were all kinds of plans for "strikes" and other foolish activities which never came to pass. We even sent petitions to our local congressmen, but fortunately, all issues were resolved long before they could respond. Meanwhile, I joined a local Musicians Union and began to perform in hotels and bars in watertown. This supplemented my diminishing supply of funds, and allowed for "nights on the town" with my friends.

On August 29, some of our old friends, including the 1st Sergeant, were sent to reception centers for discharge, which was a sad event for us. I remember there were tears in his eyes when he came to say goodbye. In spite of the barbs that we had directed to this man, everyone had grown fond of him, and I was as sad as everyone else. A very significant part of my life was over.

In early September, I went home for a long weekend and returned to a very unusual army schedule. For all practical purposes, there was no revelle, and unless you wanted breakfast, you could stay in the "sack" until 9:00. Other than an occasional stint as "charge of quarters", I had no duties at all. Soon, I was informed that due to crowded conditions at Fort Meade, I was to be processed for discharge at Pine Camp. There was one last Company party held on the 7th of September and then the bulk of the good old 603rd was shipped to Mississippi (of all places). There were obviously many tearful partings, and many promises to "get together" in the near future (something that never really took place). I was immediately transferred to the 1209th Casual Company where I sat around until September 28, when I was finally discharged.

I should comment on this final experience in the army, for it is obviously very memorable. We went through a thorough physical examination and I did well until I reached the eye doctor, who discovered that blind spot in my right eye.

It was his opinion that I should "stick around" and apply for a medical pension but, while he was out of the room, the corporal aide asked me if I wanted "out" now and when I said "You bet!", he stamped my records and sent me happily on my way. We were then issued entirely new uniforms including cartridge belts, winter and summer clothes, and a complete set of mess gear. The fact that we had gotten everything new just a few weeks earlier when we reported to Camp Pine made no difference, so we stood in formation beside the newly-filled duffel bags and went through a "graduation exercise" while being handed our Honorable Discharge, whatever ribbons we had earned, mustering-out pay, and all of our army records. We were even invited to remain on post for a delicious dinner, but I for one wanted to get away before somebody changed his mind. At the train station in Watertown, I rented a locker for ten cents and foolishly placed everything except the clothes on my back inside (an act I often regretted). I boarded the train and was off to home and freedom! I had served in the army for exactly three years to the day.

I arrived in New York City about five in the afternoon and promptly took a local to my brother's apartment in White Plaines. When I got there, a cocktail party was in progress, so I volunteered to stay in the kitchen to prepare drinks. I'm not sure how many drinks I fixed for others, but will guarantee that I did not stint myself! Since this was a Saturday night, we had plenty of time to recover before Monday, when my generous brother took me to Brooks Brothers and completely outfitted me with suits, ties, shirts, and shoes. The next day I rode the train to Baltimore dressed in my very civilian clothes and kind of hoped that some M.P. would accost me, since I clutched my discharge papers in my hands. I had been a soldier, and I was proud. I was now a civilian again, and I was ecstatic. On the following day, I enrolled in the Maryland Institute College of Art to begin a career that was to mold the rest of my days.

EPILOGUE

Looking back, I believe that serving in the army was the best thing that could of happened to me. When I entered the service, I had little sense of direction other than a rather vague idea about becoming an "artist". I was overly dependent on my family and others, and was content to drift along and take whatever came my way. I don't think I was as apprehensive about being in the army as I was concerned about being away from my little circle of "protectors". My early letters home bear this out, for complaints, thinly disguised "cries for help", permeated every page. At first I attached myself to others as insecure as I was, or sought out men that I thought would be some sort of protectors. Gradually, my circle widened and I took on new interests and began to realize that I could really fend for myself. This became especially true when my unit was moved far from "home" and found that there was more to life than that which existed in the limited of "greater hometown area".

The army life taught me many things other than how to fire a rifle or make up a full-field pack. Most of all, I learned to appreciate "order"in the strictest sense of the word. They had very definite ways to teach you not to leave dirty clothes around, and not to allow a speck of dust to fall upon your rifle. One was constantly aware in the "orderly" way that everything was arranged, whether vehicles in a motorpool, or the line-up of soldiers in formation. All "camps", whether wooden barracks or tents, were carefully arranged in a straight line, and deviations from this were always perpendicular or, on rare occasions, placed at a forty-five degree oblique angle. I do not believe that there is a curved road on an army post in the world unless it is a perfect circle with a flag pole in the very center.

"Order" carries over into the daily life of the soldier. From Revelle to taps, everything operates strictly according to well-synchronized watches. There is no such thing as "overtime", and I became convinced that if it were time for a battle to be over, both sides would withdraw to pursue the next item on the agenda. Of course, "orders" given are to be stringently obeyed. "That's an order, soldier!", was the most often heard statement under any military conditions. It is true that men would march off a cliff upon the orders of a superior unless an order to halt was issued. In basic training, guys fell all over each other because some inexperienced N.C.O. forgot the "magic" word.

And yet, it is "order" that makes the successful operation of such a large group possible. This applies to living closely together and maintaining at least some semblance of sanitation and neatness, and it applies when troops are required to move unflinchingly into battle. Imagine the success of an operation if the C.O. said "Would you guys mind attacking that enemy position?" Thus, it is an accumulation of experiences with "order" that makes one function without question when plain common sense tells you otherwise. I'm sure that there were many times when a soldier had a fleeting idea that he should say, "Hell, no. I won't attack that stupid enemy position! I might get hurt." Nevertheless, so enured were we to obeying "orders" that such a thought never really reached fruition.

Of most significance was that I learned how to live with a great variety of people and how to share both fortune and adversity. I developed the philosophy

that one should always move forward and not spend too much time worrying about escaping to the rear. This was useful in a combat zone, since to "run away" could easily lead one into the path of a shell that was directed to the rear. To be sure, we lived with uncertainty, but we took advantage of every opportunity that came our way, whether it was a chance to visit the Notre Dame Cathedral or to procure a bed spring that would make sleeping on the ground a little more comfortable.

As a student, this association with experienced professional artists obviously made me aware of my "amateur" status. Up to this point, my critics had been my family and friends who convinced me that another Michelangelo had been born. It didn't take much exposure to some really talented people before I realized that I had a long way to go to reach even their lofty plane! Nevertheless, when I entered art school after discharge, I was well advanced over most of my classmates, a condition that would not have been possible without the lessons learned by observing my "army buddies". I no longer worried about becoming a "master", but continued to strive to reach my potential and to enjoy myself in the process.

I know that most people mature in spite of themselves, and I suppose I am no exception. Had I not gone into the army, however, this process would have taken much longer. I entered as a boy, and came out with confidence that I could face anything that might confront me as a man. I entered as a dreamer and emerged with a purpose and a real sense of direction. In retrospect, I certainly believe that my three years in the army were far from a waste of time.