

Recollections of:
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Inspired by the recent diaries documented by Jim West of fellow 106th soldiers, I came to the conclusion that time was becoming very short if I were to be part of the parade. Having just passed the 81 age marker, now declared legally blind (glaucoma related), a survivor of three heart attacks and open heart surgery, I feel very fortunate to be able to cope with the `Golden Years` even on something other than a level playing field. I recognize that much of my survival is due to my wife Joyce, together with my three sons, five grandchildren all of whom live within a five mile radius of my current abode.

I envy those soldiers who were in a position to record specific times, places, events, and dates throughout their military careers. As I look back, I am quite certain that there were events and circumstances when the rule was just to forget. In these twilight years some memory gaps seem to be filling in and hopefully will make some continuity of this discourse.

I was born on January 22, 1925 in the rural city of Corning, New York – then and now the headquarters of Corning, Inc, a large glass manufacturer, located in the Southern Tier of upstate New York State. Early youth was quite uneventful -- with school activities dominating much of the daily routine.

I do recall the date of December 7th, 1941 quite vividly. Several of my high school senior class members were occupying booths at our local drug store, sipping sodas, listening to music on the radio -- when the announcement was made of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Needless to say, we all realized our lives would never be the same. Conversation the next day in school was for the most part was directed toward which branch of service was best. I had aspiration of joining the Air Force, but was over a year short of my 18th birthday. Meantime my two older brother did join, Brother John in the Navy and Charles in the Army Air Force. Likewise many of my friends who had passed their eighteenth birthday were signing up. Graduation in that summer of 1942 was an anti-climax --- our trip to Washington DC was cancelled. I went to work as a laboratory assistant in the Corning Glass Works Research Department until I could meet the Air Force age requirements.

In April 1943 I boarded a train destined for the Fort Niagara Reception Center. After tests I was assigned to a cadre pool supposedly awaiting an opening in an Air Force Training facility. After a month or so, I was advised that I was accepted into an Army Specialized Training Program and my anticipated Air Force career would be delayed.

Next step -- basic training at Camp Wheeler, Georgia and thence to University of Alabama to study Basic Engineering. At the end of our second semester the program was dissolved completely and the 800 U/A contingent were scattered around the country. Most, some 600, were shipped to [Camp Atterbury](#) to join the [106th Infantry Division](#). [My assignment was with Co E of the 424th Regiment](#). The Division had just returned from War Games in Tennessee which perhaps was somewhat of a prelude of expectations of things to come. Training became more intense. I scored well on the rifle

range which resulted in an exchange of my M-1 for a brand new Springfield O-3 w/scope coated in cosmolene -- a truly beautiful weapon -- and a designation as `company sniper`.

Finally -- sometime in the fall of 1943 we boarded a train, chug-chugged to Camp Miles Standish near Taunton, Massachusetts. A three day stay -- shots and equipment replacement -- then another train ride to New York City to board the Aquitaine for the voyage across the ocean. Docked in Glasgow harbor and via train to Bambury. Quonset huts, potbellied stoves, straw mattresses --- damp cool weather.

The highlight of my visit here was a three day pass I managed to obtain without restrictions. My intent was to try to locate my older brother who had been stationed in England for the last two years with the 8th AF. I headed for the large USO center at London Piccadilly Square. When I enquired about the whereabouts of the 390th Bomb Group, I was not only rebuffed but was advised questions of that nature were definitely off-limits. As luck would have it, a young Lieutenant called me aside, where I informed him of my attempt to contact my brother -- he slapped me on the shoulder and told me to return here at 6pm. He knew my brother and being a flight crew member of the 390th also knew the transport routes. We boarded a truck and after a 2 hour ride, he told me to exit and knock on a specific door. Who opens the door -- my brother who I had not seen in almost three years. Needless to say we had a wonderful reunion -- good feeling for both of us. My brother got me back to London and the return to Bambury without incident.

In early December our company crossed the channel, landed at Le Havre, boarded trucks and headed east toward Belgium. Another cold damp bumpy ride --- finally stopping a point where we exchanged positions with members of the 2nd Division. Quarters were in log type bunkers, potbellied stove, another straw type mattress -- near the Siegfried dragon tooth line. Little information was given as to location. I recall some statement that we would likely hold at these positions until spring and then finish the march thru Germany.

I remember going on several patrols with our platoon leader, Lt. Harold Hawkes during which time I was promoted to Sergeant with a title of squad leader. Patrols were more of the contact variety -- trying to maintain communication with our neighbor, the 28th Division situated to the south of our position.

On December 16th --- Hell broke loose!! We were rudely awakened by constant artillery and mortar fire striking in and around our bunkered position. Not one or two rounds but constant explosions for several hours. Motorized vehicles could be heard in the distance. Field communication wires had been severed to the 28th, so I was ordered to take my squad and proceed on a retrace route to establish contact. We stocked up on K rations -- heading south in snow sometimes at waist high depths -- cold, tired, scared, uncertain --- By early afternoon we reached our abandoned objective -- the 28th had pulled back. So we headed back toward `home`. As we came closer to our former position, it was apparent that Germans now occupied our area. We were in no position to fight it out with half/tracks and company strength infantry - so in the shades of darkness, our little band of tired and cold soldiers made a left turn, thru the dense forest, on a route parallel to the road to St Vith. For the next several days we continued our journey under cover of darkness, avoiding roads, catching a little stand-up sleep in a shed

or outhouse. Our group increased in size with the additions of mess personnel who had to scatter on their own. Most had pockets stuffed with edibles which were shared by all.

We vowed we would fight if necessary, but everyone realized that we were no match for the mechanized force of the German Army. We would not start any encounter. Finally a clear blue sky day arrived and of more importance the Air Force began bombing and strafing runs to halt the German advance. I did not have a clue as to our position, but that afternoon we heard the rumble of tanks coming from a west-to-east direction.

We were finally able to peek out of our secluded positions to see a parade of 7th Armored Division tanks and supply carriers. What a sight!!! The Captain in the lead tank jumped down and spotted my sniper rifle. Apparently he was a sometime big game hunter, so I swapped my rifle for an unfired carbine and a sheepskin lined tanker jacket. What a deal!!! Oh yes, we had our rations replenished and a ride on the outside of the tank toward St Vith. We all could breathe somewhat more easily at this stage. Somewhere along the route we ran into elements of our company, and learned that we would be reformed into a Regimental Combat Team to continue to carry the 106th Flag. Company E had been decimated --- many wounded, some killed, some MIA and perhaps POW. I was real distressed to learn of the capture and surrender of the 422nd and 423rd because many of my Bama buddies had been assigned to those regiments.

The German army was now in retreat once our Air Force could join the fray. We started to iron out the Bulge – town by town --- once we had the artillery, air and tank support. On the 26th of January, the day the Bulge was declared obliterated, my company was crossing an open field trying to secure a hedge row some 300 yards in the distance. Suddenly artillery shells were exploding all around us --- not quite sure whether theirs or ours -- but at the end of a 45 minute barrage, several of us were hurting. I had an extreme burning sensation in my lower back and buttocks, coupled with a wet dripping feeling. I Managed to crawl back to a roadway where fortunately a medic station patched me up, hauled me to a battalion aid station, then by ambulance to the port of LeHavre. My combat boots were finally removed by cutting and the doctor scribbled something on a tag around my neck. Next thing I knew, I was on a boat, then a train, with a final destination ---` a field hospital in Cardiff, Wales.

The shrapnel wounds healed in three weeks, but there seemed to be a daily discussion as to whether several frost/bitten or trench foot infected toes should be removed. Daily whirlpool and massage did not seem to improve the condition. One day a British doctor added a new prescription -- a shot of Irish whiskey morning and night. For some strange reason -- it worked and my toes began to heal and the talk of amputation subsided altogether. Thank God.

My brother, Charles, spent week with me on leave from his duties as the NCO in charge of the briefing room for the 390th Bomb Group. In the last week of April, I was declared `fit for return to duty`. Before I crossed the channel again, I obtained a three day pass and revisited my brother. This time I was treated like royalty --- nothing too good for a combat infantryman`. My brother managed to arrange a ride in a B-17 as a waist gunner during a food drop in the Netherlands --- a very rewarding experience and much appreciated.

During my confinement in the Cardiff hospital, I had ample time to reflect on various aspects of the war during the Battle of the Bulge some of which I will attempt to relate here.

In securing homes in Belgium, it was quite common to find both German and American flags -- somewhat of a conflict of interest or allegiance. Or perhaps just some way to survive. In clearing one cellar of women and children, we were assured NO BOCH -- NO BOCH. That is -- until the so-called root cellar revealed two officers and three enlisted soldiers hovering in a corner. They surrendered without incident.

The merits of being captured (taken as a POW) vs. fighting to the bitter end probably will be debated for eternity. I know that I withheld fire on many occasions -- mostly from a fear of more intense reprisal fire.

As a general statement, I have always felt that soldiers of the 106th were not particularly well informed. I have never seen a plausible explanation as to how a defeated German Army could surprise and penetrate the Allied lines to the extent that they did. Someone obviously was fast asleep at the switch.

I don't ever recall attending a briefing session relative to the status or functional purpose of the 106th while I was an active member.

By early May, the war in Europe was essentially completed and I was on my way to Southern France for reassignment. Somewhere during my military career, I had my records emblazoned with a notation that I was a qualified newspaper editor. A junior high school reporter -- perhaps, -- but a newspaper editor -- quite a stretch. In any case I found myself as the NCO in charge of the Public Relations Department of the Delta Base Section. Located about 15 miles from Marseilles at a former German Air Force Base, this complex was soon to house several thousand soldiers destined for duty in the Pacific Theatre. My commanding officer was a Lt Alexander Stolley, a recent graduate of Columbia journalism and OCS. We moved into wonderful quarters, both office and sleeping, in an 80 x 20 cinder block building. Plush by everyone's standards. Our ranks increased to twelve -- with some very good newspaper people from legitimate big time papers. Three jeeps and a $\frac{3}{4}$ ton were assigned to our section, complete with drivers if needed.

There was a rather large German POW camp on the base which for the most part literally ran the camp. One rather jovial German soldier was assigned to our group -- Willie Welters by name, and supposedly a confiscated Dutch boy. Willie had the knack of getting things done so when I needed a PRESS sign for the jeeps -- it was accomplished in a matter of hours.

Our group circulated throughout the camp, interviewing likely candidates for a hometown newspaper story and forwarding up thru channels.

Monaco and the French Riviera were situated somewhat to the east of our domain, and were visited quite frequently. Celebrity visits and USO performances were also within our control. I had the pleasure of this assignment for almost nine months and fortunately saw most of the veteran soldiers head for home rather than the Pacific Operation.

Sometime in the fall, Switzerland was opened as an R/R destination. I was able to obtain a visitor furlough in an Army sponsored program for a seven day tour -- at a price of

\$35.00. This had to be the best run venture of the American army and was beyond my expectations. My point score for return to the states continued to build until my number was selected in March 1946. I sailed out of Marseilles harbor on a Liberty ship for an extremely rough crossing to New York. Memory of the agony of sea sickness -
- stretched out on the open deck -- listening to a Les Brown record -- Sentimental Journey -- in constant play. From the docks of Pier 98 in New York City, a bus ride to Fort Dix, a short stay for discharge and then a train ride on the D L & W to my home in Painted Post, New York. The family reunion lasted a couple days inasmuch as both my brothers had made it home several months before.

In a few weeks, I returned to my lab tech job at Corning. I purchased a 1936 4/door Chevrolet sedan from a lady whose husband had passed on. The car had been up on blocks for the war years and was in excellent shape --- nary a scratch and at a price of \$300.00. This gem was to be my pride and joy for the next few years.

The director of the Corning Lab was also on the Board at Alfred University. Without any fanfare he had enrolled me in the Ceramic Engineering Program. I was extremely gratified for his intervention. At the end of my second year, I realized that my desire to be a ceramic engineer had changed.

I contacted my high school history teacher who was now Dean of Men at Syracuse University. Upon his advice I enrolled in an Administrative Engineering Program (combo Business and Engineering) and graduated in 1950. During my stay at Syracuse, I was also a member of the Air Force ROTC program which awarded me a commission upon graduation.

I returned to Corning, Inc as a member of the Technical Glass sales staff in a territory which encompassed the northeastern quadrant of the United States. Road travel and business relationships were quite enjoyable.

Rather unrepentantly, I received orders to report for active duty at Lakeland AFB, Texas for testing. Following two weeks of tests and interviews, I was informed to report to Scott AFB, Belleville, IL for entry in an Officer Communication School. I was now back in the service again, in the Air Force -- but not flying.

After completing my course instruction for a Communication Officer, I was retained at the base as an instructor in Advanced Cryptography. This turned out to be a real plush assignment -- 8 to 5, five day week, one week/month for prep --- students mostly staff officers, including an occasional General officer -- and best of a all, a permanent assignment for my two year Korean conflict obligation. Within a few weeks, I purchased a new Ford Victoria hardtop, went back home on leave, married my hometown sweetheart, and returned to Scott AFB to establish a new home for the duration. With a brand new apartment in a new Complex on base, access to the Officer Club, golf course, PX and Commissary --- we had it made. In uniform we had a free pass to all Cardinal and Browns baseball games, concerts in the park at St Louis, and even paddle-wheel boat rides up and down the Mississippi. Who could ask for anything more?

As a side note -- I recall at one of the dress dances shortly after I received my silver 1st Lieutenant bars, I was proudly wearing my CIB over my Purple Heart, Bronze Star, and campaign ribbons, when the Base Commander walked up to me and said "What is that badge you are wearing?"

Combat Infantry Badge, sir", I replied

"How come you were awarded that?", he snorted

I answered – "Doing forward observation during close air support in WWII."
"OH", and he walked away.

I introduced my bride to Enos Slaughter, Cardinal right fielder, who ran a small jewelry store in Belleville, Il during the off-season. We purchased a set of eating utensils, at a bargain price, and is still be used today. His buddies Stan Musial and Marty Marion used to visit the officer's club on a regular basis.

With the Korean conflict winding down, "crunch time" was rapidly approaching. Do I commit for active duty with a move to a new assignment a certain possibility, commit to the reserve – go home- return to civilian life – with a gamble for further duty, or request discharge. MY wife, God blesses her, left the decision entirely up to me. We did discuss the merits as well as the drawbacks for several days. The inability to have a stable home environment for the children we hoped to one day have, finally tipped the scales in favor of the return to non-military life. I now know, by virtue of obtaining my records after separation, that the next duty assignment had been recommended within the Pentagon in Washington, DC.

My wife and I returned to Corning; I rejoined Corning; built a new ranch type home in a new development; soon were blessed with a newborn son and two years later with twin sons.

One of my customers in Norton, MA offered me a proposition that I just could not refuse - manager of a family owned company fabricating electronic enclosures. This turned out to be my home for the next 35 years.

Looking back, the ride has been very rewarding -- requiring the very minimum of change. Perhaps from a philosophical view, I would suggest living each and every day to the fullest -- don't save time or energy for those Golden Years --- appreciate what you have, especially your family and friends.

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