Everett Firth Perryman

Diary-Journal of an Infantry Replacement
424th Regiment
106th Infantry Division

"S-2 wants us to walk around in this clearing and draw fire so he can direct some counter-battery fire." Speaking was Sergeant Bill Bulman, Company A, 424th Infantry Regiment, 106th Infantry Division. He had assembled four other company A members and asked us to get extra bandoliers and hand grenades because he was taking us on a daylight reconnaissance patrol. Once we had emerged from the timber of the Ardennes Forest into a large treeless area, he told us our mission. My heart began to race; panic was near. I thought my journal of my so-far short army experience was coming to an abrupt end.

I was drafted August 3, 1944 and was requested to report to the Armory in Syracuse, NY. The night of August 2 I spent in Ithaca, NY. I slept in the basement of the house where I had roomed for two years while attending Cornell. The morning sun didn't reach the basement, and I over slept and missed the draftee bus. I took the next public bus and arrived too late for the group swearing in, so I had a personal swearing in.

From then on, my army experience followed the standard operating procedure. Train to NYC. One night in Grand Central Palace, a few days at Fort Dix to get uniforms and shots. (My memories of Fort Dix are of the bravado of the short-timers, one or two day veterans of army service and the huge dining hall. The short timers warned us of the "Hook" -- the shots we were to receive and the workers in the kitchen. The kitchen workers opened loaves of bread by standing them on end and smashing down with their fist; that popped open the wrapper.) Then on to a train to join Company A, 203rd
Regiment Training Company, 2nd platoon, 4th squad, hut 8, Camp Blanding, Florida.

Squad members were William H. Richardson, Ohio; Edgar L. Parker, Georgia; Edmund R. Osgood, New York; Fletcher Newman, New York; Stewart Paterson, New Jersey; Ralph Reuss, New York; David J. Phillips, Pennsylvania; Charles L. Prizer, Pennsylvania; James Pearce; Willard Perkins, Tennessee; Gerald K. Potter, New York; Frank Ortolani, Pennsylvania; Raymond G. McReady, New York; Robert H. Nelson, Pennsylvania; and Hoyt Parris, Georgia.

Cadre: 1st Lt. Austin, commanding, Lt. Ginsberg, Lt. Bartlett, S/Sgt Mueller, S/Sgt Wiley, Sgt Deak, Sgt Creque, Sgt Fitz-Simmons, Cpl Blaney, Cpl Carr, Cpl Arger, Cpl Podhainey, Cpl Polly, Cpl Siebert, T/4 Aguilard, T/4 Sneider, T/5 Horton.

At the end of the 17 weeks of Basic Training, we all got furloughs. I went to my home in Sheridan, WY and was there when the "Battle of the Bulge" started. I learned later some recent graduates of Basic were called back from furlough and flown to Europe, but I completed my furlough and reported to Ft. Meade, Maryland as scheduled.

After a few days, I was sent to Camp Shanks, NY as part of a group of 8 or 10 to be cadre for a group of army prisoners, whose sentences were cancelled when they consented to be infantry replacements in Europe. We met them in the stockade in Camp Shanks. That stockade consisted of a couple of one floor barracks behind barbed wire.

In a day or so, all of us boarded the Queen Mary in New York City and sailed for Europe, unescorted, January 24, 1945. We landed in Greenoch, Scotland (Glasgow) about 10 days later. I was thrilled to go on board this world-famous ship.

Our group was assigned to three-high bunks in what was, in civilian days, the Green Tavern on the Queen. We ate two meals a day in the grand dining room. We were given a button with a letter on it. There was the "A" mess and the "B" mess, etc.

A soldier too sick to eat would give his button to someone who could then eat four meals, if he desired. The crew was English and the food was, too. I recall boiled cabbage and mutton. We were assigned no duties as cadre of the group of forgiven troublemakers we had been assigned to. One night, an officer was chasing one of our group. Our man got to the darkness of our quarters first. When the officer reached the entrance, he stopped and called into the darkness for the soldier to come to him. Instead of the soldier coming to him, someone threw a canteen cup at the officer, whose body was silhouetted against the light of the hall. He left.

At some point during my days of going through New York, while going from Fort Meade to Camp Shanks and the Queen Mary, I bought a bottle of whiskey at a liquor store near Penn Station. Because of the war, whiskey was in short supply, and I thought I ought to buy some since it was available. It fitted in the pocket of my army overcoat.

The Queen Mary zigged and zagged a lot to make herself a tough target for German subs. Every minute or so she would turn sharply, creating an uncomfortable tilt, but a tilt was better than a hit by a torpedo. I found a small library near the grand dining area and read Hemingway's "For Whom The Bell Tolls" before we landed.

As we cruised up the Firth of Clyde toward Greenoch, the name of the harbor serving the city of Glasgow, I could see the Queen finally had a destroyer escort. The waves, essentially unnoticed by the Queen Mary, were such that our escort would sometimes be hidden in the trough of a wave.

Following a ten day voyage, we docked during daylight on maybe February 3, 1945, and marched right to a train. We were in a compartment holding six of us. We remained on that train all the way to Southampton just before dawn the next day. As we went through Scotland, people waved to us from windows, which I thought was amazingly wonderful because so many troop trains had passed through over the previous three or four years. The train stopped once in Leicester where we stretched our legs and got some coffee and snacks at a Red Cross unit in the station.

I was not feeling well during this time on the train. I felt feverish and had a headache. I was weak as we marched through the ruins of Southampton from the train to our cross channel transport, but I was determined to push on without complaint. I was this close to the front and I was not going to mention any illness until I collapsed. I didn't collapse and gradually got better.

Our next ship was a Polish freighter. I had a hammock above a table in the dining area. I began to feel better. At one point, I talked with a fellow who had been wounded and, after being patched up in the hospital in England, was on his way back to the battle. He seemed cool about it all. I found this a very moving experience because

my stomach was churning with thoughts of going once into danger and here was a man calmly going back the second time.

In the early evening we reached LeHavre. We disembarked into a smaller vessel, possibly an LSI, which took us to the dock. We marched to a train station, where a Red Cross unit staffed a chow line.

After we ate, we were given the lining of an army sleeping bag and put on a 40 & 8. There were perhaps 22 - 25 men in my car. Conversations with other GI's in the months ahead about their box car rides always revealed we were lucky; most all other units had more men per car. The next paragraph, copied from http://fortyandeight.org/ describes the 40 and 8.

The Forty & Eight's titles and symbols reflect its First World War origins. American servicemen in France were transported to the battle front on narrow gauge French railroads (Chemin de Fer) inside boxcars (Voitures) that were half the size of American boxcars. Each French boxcar was stenciled with a "40/8", denoting its capacity to hold either forty men or eight horses. (quarante hommes et huit chevaux.) This ignominious and uncomfortable mode of transportation was familiar to all who traveled from the coast to the trenches; a common small misery among American soldiers who thereafter found "40/8" a lighthearted symbol of the deeper service, sacrifice and unspoken horrors of war that truly bind those who have borne the battle.

It was dark by this time, so we got into our new sleeping bag liners and shuffled around until we found a way to lie down. We lay crosswise of the box car with our feet between the heads of the two GI's of either side. Their feet were on either side of my head. For relief it was necessary to walk carefully through the bodies to the center of the car and slide open the door.

On this first trip in a boxcar and on most of the later rides, the goosey men seemed to locate near the end of the car. When they got up to make their way to the door someone would goose them and they would run hell for breakfast to the door, stepping on all and any in their way.

Remember the bottle of whiskey? Still undetected in the pocket of my overcoat, it was still mostly full. One night to help me get to sleep, I stealthily drew it out of my pocket and helped myself to a swallow. I didn't want to share it with my new companions from the Camp Shanks stockade.

I can't recall how many days we were on that train. It stopped at mealtime, and we helped ourselves to food from a chow line already set up beside the track.

As the train passed into Belgium, people came out of their houses with coffee and bread and fruit if the train happened to stop in a residential district. I felt very moved by this because of all the troop trains they had seen, they could still show friendship and help to us.

We got off the train in Verviers, Belgium where a small Infantry replacement depot had been set up in houses in the town. I was billeted in the loft of a barn. While there we heard our first buzz bomb. The officers announced that it was indeed a buzz bomb and we could mention it in our letters. Meals were served from a chow line set up in the

front yard of a home. We were issued the outer liner of our sleeping bags and probably a rifle, although I don't remember when we got the rifle.

In a day or two we were loaded onto a truck and headed for the front. The ride was fascinating, yet frightening. We passed through small towns crowded with GI's. The tanks we saw were partially covered with a brightly colored fabric, I suppose for identity. Now and then bodies of dead soldiers could be seen where the snow had partially melted, exposing what had been hidden. The roadside was a tangle of communication wire; the trees were shattered from artillery bursts I assumed. I became more and more apprehensive about what I was getting into. The road signs consisted of words having no connection with any army unit, but they meant something to our truck driver, I hoped. We got off the truck at First Battalion headquarters of the 424th Regiment of the 106th Infantry Division. (We learned later there was no longer a 423rd or 422nd Regiment of the 106th. They had been overwhelmed and captured in the "Bulge." Soldiers who escaped capture and replacements like those of us in the truck were put into the 424th to build it up to standard strength.)

We were divided into the four companies of the First Battalion. About eight were assigned to A Company. We followed a company runner to the Headquarters of A Company. Just a few yards down the road, we passed a gate reminiscent of those seen in movies like "The Mouse That Roared," indicating to me we were crossing the border into Germany. About the same time, we heard the heart-stopping click of a rifle safety being removed and a whispered, "Halt!" But all was well; the guard was another GI.

The company headquarters was shocking. It was a shallow hole in the ground covered with logs. Inside were the commanding officer and his First Sergeant. Both were lying under blankets. The hole was too low for them to sit upright. The light was from a flashlight. In a brief speech, Sergeant Rifleman (his name, honest.) told us we were at the "frontest front" we would ever see. Our group was again divided into those assigned to the different platoons. Two of us were to go to the First Platoon, so we followed the platoon runner towards platoon headquarters. Soon the runner whispered to us the unit had moved into this position that very day, and he wasn't sure if he could find the first platoon. We were walking down a one lane path or a poor road. I kept my balance and stayed on the path by looking up. The sky was slightly lighter than the trees, and I was using that path of lightness as my guide. Soon the platoon runner whispered, "We might be walking right into the German lines. Let's stop here until morning." We wholeheartedly agreed and stepped off the path to lie down in the snow to sleep. We didn't discuss who or how we should keep guard; we just fell asleep.

When we woke it was just getting light, and there, 100 yards away, was the platoon headquarters. We received no special greeting of tribute as we walked into the platoon area. Breakfast was brought to us by jeep soon after we joined the platoon. After breakfast we surrendered our mess kits, except for the spoon. The mess kits were washed in the rear area where the cooking was done. A GI can of clean bottom halves of mess kits came with each meal brought to us. With the food delivery was an assortment of "K" rations; Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner. The Breakfast ration contained a packet of toilet paper. This packet fit very nicely in the helmet liner. A packet of instant coffee was in one of the "K" rations. The instant coffee was a fine powder which didn't dissolve as easily as the granules of instant coffee in today's grocery stores.

After breakfast I was sent to share a "hole" with two guys. They were replacements also. They had been with the platoon for a few weeks, but were not with the 106 Division during the "Battle of the Bulge."

This "hole" was much like the others I saw. About six inches of dirt had been removed from an area about 7 feet by 7 feet. The sides were built up with logs and more logs formed the roof. We established a guard duty schedule in which one person stayed awake for two hours during the night using my wristwatch for the time. More than once the "guard" would fall asleep and the next morning we had to search through the blankets to find my watch.

A tank destroyer from an armored division on which was mounted a large gun, was assigned to the area for added protection. They had their own rations. We thought their rations were better than ours. They had a small gasoline-fired stove and could heat their food.

At first there was a steady routine of eating and sleeping and no shooting or sighting of the enemy (Our artillery was firing over our heads. We could hear the shells as they whistled through the air. I was actually able to see the shell itself as it went overhead.)

After a couple of days, Sergeant Bulman called to me and said, "Perryman, after breakfast, get a couple of extra bandoliers and two hand grenades and report back here. We are going on a reconnaissance patrol." My pulse quickened. We were told in Basic of two kinds of patrol; reconnaissance, for looking around passively and, combat, for aggressive engagement with the enemy. I think there were four or five in the patrol. We walked through the trees parallel to what I thought was the front line, then turned and walked toward the edge of the trees and the front line.

As we neared the edge of the trees, we saw a GI about ten feet up in a tree. He and the sergeant exchanged greetings. The sergeant told us the GI was from "Divarty." I thought perhaps that was the name of a town. It came to me later that the GI was a forward observer for Division Artillery.

Once we left the trees and were feeling bare-naked in this large treeless area, the sergeant told us our purpose was to tempt the Germans to shoot at us. The forward observer, if he could tell where the shots were coming from, would direct our artillery to fire on the sources of enemy fire. Well, nothing happened. We had a nice walk seeing no enemy. There were a couple of shells landed with a bang, but they were not close. I did drop to my knees at the sound of the first one. I was at the end of our patrol line and none of the others seemed concerned. Fortunately none of them saw my "chicken-hearted" act, but my uniform had wet knees. Out there in the clearing, we could see the "dragon's teeth" constructed by the Germans to protect them from a tank attack.

The next patrol was about two days later, and it was a night reconnaissance patrol, led by the same sergeant. Again there were about five guys. It was night and there were no lights, but somehow we were able to see a path as we went up a hill through the trees, parallel to the front line. Then we turned toward the front. We came to a GI foxhole, had a brief whispered conversation and then kept going. About 25 yards farther there was another GI foxhole right on the edge of a clearing about 200 yards in diameter. When the sergeant whispered we were going across the clearing, the GI said he wouldn't go out there because he had too many booby traps set in front of his

hole. The sergeant said we'd be careful! Well, all five of us went forward into the clearing. We didn't set off any booby traps.

In the center of the clearing was a lookout tower, perhaps for fire prevention of the forest. I was sure it was full of Germans waiting to shoot us. But no shots came from the tower. Now and then a flare would explode overhead, and we would be exposed in bright light. We froze each time a flare went off thinking a stationary object would be harder to detect than a moving one. We had just been issued new trousers. They had a smooth surface so snow didn't cling to them as it did to the wool pants. But as we walked through the weeds and grass, there was a rasping, scratching sound as the weeds brushed the smooth surface of the new pants. I thought, if I take longer steps there will be less scratching. I was taking such long steps, I kept losing my balance and shuffling to and fro to keep from falling. One of our group whispered to me, "Take shorter steps."

Once we reached the trees on the opposite side of the clearing, we paused to listen. We heard a soft command, "Halt" or was it "Alt?" We weren't moving anyway. We continued listening. We heard a horse walking and what sounded like a wagon. The horse and wagon stopped and there was a short conversation (Remember Bill Mauldin's cartoon in which two GI's are listening to conversation coming from a building and one of them says, "Is that German or Brooklyn?") Well we weren't sure. Then the horse and wagon went on. We turned around to face the challenge of the booby traps again. We all passed through safely the second time. Not at all related to my skill at seeing and avoiding tripwires; I couldn't see a thing. I think our success was related to the ineptness of our friendly GI.

Our next night reconnaissance patrol was to the same area. This time we had the platoon lieutenant and a different sergeant with us. When we got to the first foxhole we got no response to our whispers. We proceeded down the trail. When we were about 50 yards beyond the unresponsive foxhole, we heard the "pling" from the activation of a hand grenade come from that foxhole. Sure enough, a few seconds later the thing exploded. We could hear the shrapnel whizzing around and the slapping of pieces hitting branches and leaves overhead, but we were not hit. So we kept on going a few yards, but varied our previous path slightly to pass a few yards to the right of the foxhole with all the booby traps. The next thing we heard was the opening and closing of a bolt-action rifle as a round was slipped into the chamber. This stopped us. Our leaders indicated we were going to return to base, and a couple of us should lag slightly behind to cover our retreat.

On our next night patrol a couple of days later, our mission was to observe a pillbox as day dawned to determine if it was occupied. This pillbox we were told was in the same general area as our previous night patrols. This was a reconnaissance of four. We started from the platoon headquarters about 3 AM. We found positions before daylight with no distractions like hand grenades or booby traps and decided to lie down such that we could peer over the top of a small mound at the pillbox area. We had good vision to the front and felt protected by the mound. As dawn broke, we could see something lighter than the forest floor right below us. It was so close we couldn't even whisper to each other. Then we could make out the light area was a face. Was it a German watching us? Now what? Well we just had to lie quietly until it got lighter. Soon we could see by the uniform that the face was that of a dead GI. The good news was that this was the face of another GI. The bad news was the man was dead.

Just as we had hoped, we could see the pillbox through the trees. A German came out of the pillbox to relieve himself. Now we knew the pillbox was occupied. What we had to do now was get that information back to the platoon. However, first we felt we must look for other GIs. We found six or eight other dead soldiers, all wearing the patch of the 82nd Airborne Division.

Later that day, we watched from the platoon headquarters area as a Combat patrol headed for the pillbox. Two or three hours later, that patrol returned. They had captured the pillbox. One man was wounded by a booby trap.

To retreat a bit in time, I must finish the whiskey bottle story. I decided to let my foxhole buddies share it with me. When they saw the bottle containing an amber liquid and the label all scratched and worn from its 3000-mile trip through enemy submarine-infested waters and a train trip and a box car ride and a truck ride, they wouldn't believe it was whiskey until I took a couple of swallows. Then the bottle quickly emptied.

At some time while we were at this location, I got the impression our unit was the southern-most unit of the First Army. Each evening, patrols of our unit would contact patrols of the northernmost unit of the Third Army. Twice I served this duty. Four GI's would take their sleeping bags, and near dusk walk south to a prepared hole and take up residence for the night. We had a sound-powered telephone. We were given a password for the night. Each two hours our guys would walk to another post manned by soldiers from the unit to our south. The walk was about 500 yards. The last 100 yards were along a railroad track fill. We were thus silhouetted against the sky, a very scary situation, I thought. Then the tracks entered a cut and our friends had a post atop the cut. When challenged, we would give our half of the code word. The guys in the other unit would answer back with the other half of the word. The next two hours, they would come to us. The results of these encounters were relayed by sound-powered telephone to platoon or company headquarters

One day, a group of us was sent for showers and clean uniforms. The showers consisted of stalls on the trailer portion of a tractor-trailer and a method for heating water. The water was turned on long enough to get us wet and then turned off so we could soap up, then turned on again briefly so we could rinse off the soap. Then clean uniforms, all very nice.

On the way back to the company area, our truck suddenly stopped. The driver yelled something like, "Everybody get out. "We are being strafed!" We jumped out and scampered into the woods at the side of the road. Sure enough what looked to me to be a light plane, not a sleek, fast fighter, was firing at us or at the Battalion Headquarters, which happened to be on the other side of the road. We could hear the bullets smacking the ground. Then the plane flew away. I looked at the tree I was behind, and there was a mine fastened to it about waist high. No one was wounded, the truck was not hit and apparently the headquarters building was not hit. In the scramble to get out of the truck and into the trees one fellow's helmet fell over his eyes and cut his nose. Another soldier fell in the road and got his clean uniform muddy. I thought later, strange that none of us fired at the plane like the soldiers in the movies do.

One day, our platoon leader asked two or three of us to accompany him on an unofficial patrol -- more or less a hike along the front. At one point, we walked down one side of a valley, while on the other side was a pill box. The pillbox showed on the map

the Lt. had, but he said, "Let's go ahead on this path." Nothing happened, although we could clearly see the gun port, maybe only a hundred yards away.

Next we came to an area occupied by another unit of the 106th. This unit was in trees overlooking a clearing. There was a distance of perhaps 200 yards from the trees we were in to the next clump of trees. A fence ran from one clump of trees to the next. The fence probably paralleled a road, but the road, if it was there, was covered with snow. Their Lt. berated us for entering his area because our movements could draw enemy fire.

In the center of the clearing were four bodies wearing gray German overcoats. Two were in the road area, one was tangled in the fence, and one was on the other side of the fence. We asked the GI's about this, and they explained, "Those four guys came walking toward us carrying white cloths. Suddenly one of us started shooting at them. Then there was more shooting until the Germans stopped moving.

We thought this a very sad and sickening story, but shrugged it off and never talked more about it. We returned to our platoon with no further incidents.

One day, a daylight combat patrol was formed. There were perhaps 15 of us from several platoons. We were all heavily armed. The patrol had a name-- Stormy-- and a radio. One pillbox we found empty. From another pillbox, about 15 unarmed enemy soldiers walked out with hands up. That climaxed the patrol, and we all returned safely to camp. I forget who took the prisoners where.

Then a day came when the whole battalion advanced. We were halted and told to dig in three times during the day, but no shots were fired and no prisoners taken. That night we were billeted within an empty barbed wire enclosure.

The next day our platoon moved to a pillbox not far from where we spent the previous night. There were bunks and we were warm and dry. There was a stream nearby. We killed fish by throwing hand grenades into pools. The shrapnel seemed to be unable to exit the water.

By this time we were near Berk, Germany. We left there March 14, 1945 in 40 and 8's and traveled to St. Quentin, France where we were billeted in a warehouse. That's where the sergeant handed out our Combat Infantry badges. I objected mildly, saying I hadn't seen any combat, but the sergeant insisted, saying we were at the front and in patrols and definitely in danger of combat.

There was a large cathedral visible from our warehouse in St. Quentin. Much to my regret I never bothered to visit this cathedral. At the time I thought all is waste and destruction, why walk up there just to see more damaged buildings, streets and homes.

We left St. Quentin again in 40 and 8's on April 6, 1945 for the vicinity of Rennes, France, and bivouacked in pup tents the next day.

We marched 15 miles into Rennes on April 13th. The word went informally through the ranks that President Roosevelt had died the previous day, April 12, 1945. I felt sad, but somehow detached; it was of little interest. We weren't doing anything different because of his passing.

While we were in Rennes, two more regiments were added to the 106th to bring the division up to three-Regiment size. We held daily formations complete with a band. I loved those formations. The command, "Pass in review," spoken in a conversational tone of voice by the General, was followed by the commanders of each unit calling out, "Regiment, Battalion, Company," and away we started marching, past the band, past the reviewing officer and back to our formation.

We left Rennes, France April 20, 1945, again in 40 and 8's, on our way to Heidesheim, Germany, arriving April 23rd. We lived in pup tents until May 8, 1945 when we were trucked to Welgesheim, Germany. When we arrived at Welgesheim that day, we learned that the war in Europe had ended, although I don't remember any whooping or hollering or other celebration of this news.

In Welgesheim and Heidesheim we were guarding German Prisoners of War. In Welgesheim, our platoon occupied a large farmhouse. All the farmhouses seemed to be together as a village. I saw no homes in the fields. This farm consisted of the house, a barn for animals and a separate kitchen building, all grouped around a courtyard and enclosed by a fence.

Most of the personnel served guard duty around the clock. Some of us, who had knowledge of the German language, worked days screening new prisoners for those trained to be medical persons. The prisoners came by 40 and 8 and marched up the hill from the railroad to be screened and sent to one or the other of the several pens within the stockade. The stockade encompassed maybe five acres. In the groups we screened were units formed of men in countries overrun by the Germans. Hungarian men, for example, had an identifying patch on their uniforms. They were directed to the area for Hungarians, etc. There were no shelters. It was an open field enclosed by a barbed wire fence.

There were five or six lanes each manned by a German-speaking GI. Each prisoner had to show his little booklet, giving his name and address and unit. Members of the SS had that noted in their information booklets. Sometimes a man would deny being an SS trooper. We would have him roll up his sleeve, and if "SS" was tattooed on his arm, he was SS.

Let me make a confession. While inspecting each man's belongings, I became tempted to help myself to a compass, a leather billfold and two Netherlands bills. I redeemed the money in the US for $12. The compass and the billfold have disappeared. I said to myself, if it wasn't for these guys I'd be eating regular food with friends or family and sleeping in a bed under a roof. Ridiculous, I know. The individual soldier had no more power over the situation than I did, and may have been thinking the same thing about me.

One cloudy, cool day we saw in the line of prisoners trudging up the hill from the railroad one carrying a violin case. We decided we'd ask him to play for us. We struggled amongst ourselves for a tune suitable for a violin and had a title we knew the German words for. We voted down "The Boogie-Woogie Bugler Boy from Company B". "Lili Marlene" would have been just right, but we didn't know of that song until a few months later. We settled on "Tales in a Vienna Woods" and started saying Wien Wald to the violinist. He understood and soon the beautiful notes of the music briefly warmed the spirits of all within earshot that dreary day.

June 22-27, some of us got passes to go from Welgesheim, Germany to Namur, Belgium. I hung out with two other guys. We decided to go to Brussels, Belgium. We just got on a regular passenger train—no tickets. No one questioned us. We did have to stand because all the seats were taken. In Brussels we went to the Red Cross or USO. They gave us addresses of where we could stay. The house where I stayed was very nice. I had a wonderful bath in a tub. I don't remember the owners of the home, but they must have shown me the room and the bath. We did not do anything cultural or uplifting. I bought a German pistol from a British soldier for $12. It looked like a Luger to me, but it was a P-38. Later back in Welgesheim a guy asked to borrow it for protection because he was going to walk somewhere. I gave it to him and found out a week later he had been transferred. I guess he forgot to return my pistol. A good break for me because I had no use for it.

We fooled around and somehow missed the train and truck that was to take us back to Welgesheim. Now we were AWOL. We took a train back to Bonn, Germany where we should have been a day earlier. It was night and when the train stopped in Liege, Belgium one of our three said, "I've been in Liege before." And hopped off the train. Of course the train started up again and our friend was left behind. We didn't know what to do, but we figured he was in big, big trouble. The next time the train stopped, he hopped on. We were pleased, relieved, curious and mystified. He said he went to the MP's in the station for help. They put him in their Jeep and drove him to the next train station, no questions asked.

Once we reached Bonn, we expected to go by truck to Welgesheim, but of course that truck left the day before. Fortunately, there was a Lieutenant in the train station who wanted to go to Welgesheim. He called someone, and a truck appeared. It was raining a light rain, and it was an open truck. The driver said he thought he was to pick up some DP's (Displaced Persons). The Lieutenant hopped in the cab, and we got in the open bed of the truck. I had bought a basket of cherries from a kid in the station, because as I remember we had not had breakfast or lunch. For some reason, between worry about being AWOL and no regular food, I got sick to my stomach. For part of the trip I was hanging over the tailgate, tossing up the cherries.

Well, in Welgesheim not a word was said about us being AWOL. Whew. I had been very concerned about what this would do to my record and what punishment we might face. Apparently the concern was all in vain. Part of the journey in the truck was along the Rhine, and we got to see the bridge at Remagen. It was down by then, but it had been intact when the GI's first got there, and some units were able to cross before it collapsed.

On July 11, 1945, I was in the courtyard of the house where we were staying in Welgesheim when a Jeep pulled in carrying 1st Lt. Thomas Kessinger as a passenger. Tom and I were classmates back home in Sheridan, WY. We were in the same Boy Scout troop and bunked together at Scout Camp. He was in the Combat Engineers. The war in Europe was over, and his company commander told him he did such a good job helping the American Army cross the Rhine, where there was no bridge, he should take a Jeep and a driver and travel Europe. How he found me is a mystery. All units did have signs at crossroads and in villages, but the signs used code words, not actual unit names. I gave him my best salute. After some small talk, we each had things to do and he drove off.

The very next day after Tom's visit, we were taken by truck to Marxzell, Germany. This was a lovely tourist area. The signs were in German and English. We were billeted in a dormitory type building, small rooms, but containing beds.

One of the guys from Pennsylvania had a reel and line and hooks. He let me borrow them one day, and using grasshoppers as bait, I caught five or six trout. I gave them to a German family.

At the end of the chow line in Marxzell, there were usually two or three kids with containers. They collected left-overs and took them home. This was in contrast to my observations in Rennes, France three months earlier where I remember seeing a man bicycling down the road with two loaves of bread in the basket of the bicycle.

I learned later that on July 16, 1945, while we were in Marxzell, a test explosion of the first atomic bomb took place in New Mexico. The test was called Trinity.

Also while in Marxzell, we read in *Stars and Stripes* that fraternization would now be permitted. The Battalion Commander told the assembled group that he didn't take his orders from *Stars and Stripes,* and we weren't to talk with the German people until he told us it was OK.

While at Marxzell, I was sent to Karlsruhe to try out for the division baseball team. There was some mix-up somewhere. The other guys at that tryout were real pros. They threw the ball hard. I was relieved not to make the team.

We left Marxzell, Germany July 20, 1945 by 40 & 8 for the 19th Reinforcement Depot, 106th Reinforcement Battalion, 504th Company near Paris, France. We remained near Paris until July 30th, but I never even made an attempt to visit the city or the place the WWI Armistice was signed, Versailles, or the town where Joan of Ark was born, Domre¢my. I later learned my uncle Curtis Perryman had visited her birthplace at the close of WWI.

We were in the 40 & 8's again. On July 31st, we had breakfast in St. Quentin and then on to Camp Top Hat, Antwerp, Belgium. Again, like a nothing person, I made no attempt to visit Antwerp. It was time to go home.

We left Camp Top Hat August 5, 1945 on the SS Frederick Victory. There was much concern amongst us as to whether we would go to the U.S. or on to the Pacific. In the English Channel, the ship stopped, and we all thought this is it! They are going to take us to the Pacific. The ship actually backed up a few feet. We were told a cable or rope had become entangled in the propeller. But, in a few minutes we started moving forward and didn't stop again until we arrived in New York harbor, August 15, 1945. Japan had surrendered the day before, and fireboats were out spraying water in great celebration.

At some point during our voyage, a small notice was posted on a bulletin board saying something like an atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan August 6, 1945. We had no idea what that meant. I bought a *New York Times* when we reached Camp Shanks and was able to read a good description of the "Manhattan Project." I learned that a second bomb had been dropped on Nagasaki, Japan August 9, 1945.

We stayed briefly at Camp Shanks, New York, and left in a Pullman for Ft. Logan, Colorado on August 16th. These are the dates in my notebook, but it seems to me I was in Camp Shanks long enough to visit Nancy Hubbard, my future wife, who lived in Queens, New York at that time. I remember walking with her in Manhattan and meeting, unexpectedly, another girl, who also wrote letters to me while I was in Europe.

Our train arrived in Ft. Logan, Colorado August 19th. I left Ft. Logan the next day and arrived home in Sheridan, WY, August 21, 1945.

I spent a 45-day furlough in Sheridan and then was sent to Camp Bowie, Texas, October 8, 1945. Here I was assigned as clerk-typist in the 806th Replacement Battalion, and I lived in a hut with three other men. The work was easy. After work we could go to a gym or to a movie in Brownwood, Texas.

After this time, I stopped recording dates, but during the time at Camp Bowie a Cornell classmate was working for an oil company in Odessa, Texas. By mail we arranged that I should meet him in Brownwood and ride with him in his car to Dallas, Texas. He and his date got me a blind date and we went dancing outdoors. The next morning, he and I attended worship services in a huge church. He got me back to Brownwood after dark, and he had to keep driving to Odessa for work Monday morning.

From Camp Bowie, I was sent to the 2nd Infantry Division in Camp Swift, Texas. Shortly after I joined the 2nd, it was moved to Ft. Lewis, Washington, where my father trained for WWI. Shortly after arriving at Ft. Lewis, I wrote to someone-- Army Headquarters? -- a senator? – the Quartermaster Corps? -- saying I wasn't doing anything in the Infantry and was there some other outfit where I could be of more service? Whoever I wrote to was the right place. Orders came for me to be transferred to the Quartermaster Food and Container Institute on Pershing Road in Chicago, Illinois. My first sergeant was upset because I had gone over his head to get the transfer, but I was now out of his jurisdiction.

In Seattle, on the way to get the train to Chicago, I met a fellow who had been on the track team at Cornell at the same time I was. He was in the Navy V-12 program at Cornell. When we met in Seattle he was an Ensign. We just had time for a couple of beers before I had to catch my train.

Somewhere I read that when reporting to a new unit, a soldier should salute and say in a clear voice his rank and name and add, reporting for duty. I thought that was a good policy. Also I felt I was representing the Infantry so where the manual said clear voice, I changed to loud voice. So I saluted the officer I was to report to and said in a loud voice, "Technician 5th grade Perryman reporting for duty, sir!" This had the desired effect; the lieutenant was properly startled, and so I joined the Quartermaster Corps for my last few months in the Army.

The Food and Container Institute tested the shelf life of various foods that had been submitted as possible food for a soldier's ration. Foods were stored at different temperatures in different containers and samples examined periodically. They employed bacteriologists, home economists and packaging personnel. The enlisted men were mainly helpers. I drove an Army car now and then. On one occasion I drove three officers to Illinois University where they could see some dairy processing equipment the University had obtained from Germany or Russia.

Another time, three or four enlisted men and a bacteriologist and a home economist went to a town in Pennsylvania. A small plant there made a batch of Chicken a la King. It was packed for shipment to Chicago via Railway Express. I rode the train to watch over this material until it reached the Food and Container Institute.

The enlisted men had rooms in the YMCA in downtown Chicago near what was then called the Stevens Hotel. A few times I worked in the evening at a nearby bowling alley setting pins. Once the USO gave me a ticket to watch the White Sox. Another time I was able to play a round of golf at a country club, thanks to the USO.

I was discharged from the Army in early July, 1946 at Ft. Sheridan, Illinois. I had served 23 months.

EPILOGUE

"The 106th: The story of the 106th Infantry Division," was published by *Stars and Stripes* in Paris in 1944-1945. It can be found on the internet at:
http://lonesentry.com/gi_stories_booklets/106thinfantry/index.html

In approximately 2000, I sent for a new complete set of Army decorations so I could make a nice display. Much to my amazement, a Bronze Star was included in the collection with a note that, by order of Congress, all holders of the Combat Infantryman's Badge were now to be automatically awarded a Bronze Star.

I collected several home addresses of my Army contacts. The other replacement, who spent the night with me and the platoon runner who was lost, said he didn't know where he would be living after the war. He gave me the name of a friend, saying he would know where I could find him. One day I called, and the friend said if I went to the Minetta Tavern on two consecutive nights, I would surely find my friend there. So, one night, Nancy and I went to the Minetta Tavern, and there he was. He was trying to find work as an actor. I haven't heard from him since, although on a couple of occasions when in New York City, I have gone to the Minetta Tavern but haven't found him there.

Another time, I was on a bus near the Wyoming/ South Dakota border. The bus stopped, and there was a guy I had known in the 106th. He was putting his sister on the bus. I talked with her, but I never followed up with a letter or phone call.

While stationed at Camp Swift, Texas, I was walking down a street in Austin, Texas and met one of the fellows who had been AWOL with me in Namur and Brussels, Belgium.

One fellow from the 106th lives near me. We have visited back and forth and now mainly exchange letters. His son gave me John Kline's e-mail address that connected me with Jim West. John Kline is the secretary of the 106th Infantry Division Association and the editor of the "Cub," a pamphlet carrying news items from former members of the 106th. John Kline was captured during the "Bulge," and his story of that experience is at. Jim West lives near Camp Atterbury where the 106th trained. He is collecting stories of individual soldiers and storing them. He calls this collection "Saving the Past for the Future."

St. Quentin, France

Cpl McEnely, unknown, Cpl Robert Hirst

Sgt. O'Neil, Sgt. Gordon, Sgt. Hodges, Pfc. Kietsman

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