

John M. Roberts (Jack)

592nd FABN

Spring was in the air as we loaded up on our vehicles and headed for Camp Atterbury, Indiana. It was on March 27, 1944 when we left the Tennessee area for what would be our final station in the US before going overseas.

The Division moved out in "serials". The Field Artillery Battalions were among the first serial. Each serial in turn bivouacked at Fort Knox, Kentucky, the first night out, a distance of 120 miles. We arrived at our destination, the second day, on March 28, a distance of 110 miles farther. Both days we ate "K" rations, however the kitchen did set up and serve a hot supper at Fort Knox.

Our arrival at Camp Atterbury was a signal that we were to get ready to go overseas. Whether our departure would be to Europe or to the South Pacific was still unknown. Our training at Camp Atterbury was quite intensive. The reason for the grueling training was due to the mass exit of many officers and enlisted personnel being sent overseas and the arrival of replacements who needed accelerated field training. Just when we thought we had a solidly trained Division, the shifting in personnel would take place.



The day we arrived at Camp Atterbury, we unloaded our equipment and were assigned our barracks. This was a nice camp, newer, but much like Fort Jackson in many respects, with the same facilities, barber shops, P. X.'s, chapels, movie houses, training grounds, artillery range, parade grounds, etc.

On June 3, 1944 our Division was up to full strength and we went to the field in full combat gear. We were visited and observed by Undersecretary of War, Robert P. Patterson. He called it a "great performance".

A Division parade was to be held the weekend of June 15th. This review included everyone in the Division, with all our combat gear and equipment. This meant the vehicles, half tracks, howitzers, cannons, etc. had to be in tip top condition and either cleaned or painted.

There appeared on the bulletin board a notice that I dreaded, but knew it had to happen. We were scheduled to take a survivor training exercise which consisted of jumping off a tower into a lake. On camp site there was a small lake where a tower was built over the water itself and had a steep ramp running from the tower top platform to the ground level. Each soldier, dressed in full combat gear with back pack, carbine, etc., was required to climb the ramp to the top of the tower, then jump some twenty feet into the water below and swim to shore.

Did I ever luck out ! The day before the survival exercise, I was summoned to the First Sergeant's office and told that I would be on special assignment the next day. The special assignment I received, along with a few other guys, was to go to a special building near Divisional Artillery Headquarters to assist in indoor training exercises for the artillery officers.

This large building was built specifically to house a simulated artillery firing range. Inside, and to one side, was a high platform where the artillery officers stood to overlook a large 3-D miniature landscape. The landscape contained miniature houses, trucks, tanks,

personnel, roads, etc. It was very well done. The structure beneath the landscape to hold all of it in place were wood support beams. The landscape itself was mounted on rigid mesh burlap.

Everything, the trees, grass, hills, houses, tanks, personnel, vehicles were all painted and built to scale. A marvelous piece of craftsmanship and looked very authentic. The underside of the landscape was anywhere from one foot to several feet over our heads, depending upon the terrain of the landscape and marked with coordinates, just like an artillery terrain map.

Our job was to work beneath the landscape and to receive our commands from the artillery officer by field telephone, who was simulating firing howitzer shells at a particular target over our heads.

The officer gave his commands to us in the sequence of Fire Command Orders, such as Battery Adjust; Shell HE; Fuse Quick; etc. We listened to the officer's commands as if we were at the gun position. We then mathematically transposed his commands so that we could go to the proper coordinates where the shell was supposed to hit. We used a gadget that sent out a puff of white smoke (powder) through the mesh landscape to simulate an impact "burst". The officer, observing the "smoke", knew exactly where the shell landed.

If the officer missed the target, he would then telephone additional commands for us to adjust his firing. We would then follow his commands until he accomplished his mission. We never knew which officer was doing the firing because we could not see him.

On July 4th, there was an "Independence Day" parade in Indianapolis. The 589th FA was asked to represent the artillery and we in the 592nd did not have to participate, nor did the 590th and 591st.

About this time a notice appeared on the bulletin board stating that all units of the 106th were to have a group picture taken and Divisional booklet would be published.

About the second week in September, the notice appeared on the bulletin board that there would be no more furloughs or weekend passes. We knew this meant we were getting near the point of departure from Camp Atterbury. Within the next couple of days, the Division was placed on full alert. We were only allowed to take government issued essentials. Anything else had to be either destroyed or shipped home. Any pictures we kept had to have addresses obliterated. We were all issued new "dog tags" which only listed our name, army serial number, religion and blood type.

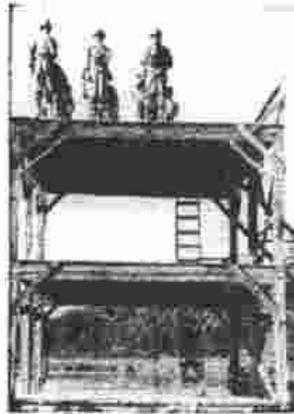
I called Mom and we all agreed to meet the next weekend, Sunday, September 19, 1944 at the Visitor's Center near the entrance to Camp Atterbury, in time for lunch.

When the big day arrived, we all met and had a good lunch, I then asked Mary Lou outside as I wanted to talk to her. When we arrived at PX 19, the only place to park was in back of the building itself. I walked around the car, and handed Mary Lou the box, that Mom had earlier slipped me. Between gulps of surprise, I finally said, "Will you marry me?" So.....behind PX 19 at about 1:00 p.m. on Sunday, September 19th, 1944 at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, Cpl. Jack Roberts asked Mary Lou Staarmann to become his wife. I always thought it ironic that we became engaged on the "19th", behind PX 19.

Three weeks after becoming engaged to Mary Lou, I left Camp Atterbury to go to the east coast and then overseas. Those three weeks at camp were spent getting ready to leave. We were confined to the Camp area. The next time we unpacked our equipment, we would be somewhere in Europe.

The Dreaded Water Tower at Camp Atterbury

The Tower, in reality, was located in the Yellow Wood Wildlife Preserve, between Nashville and Columbus.



GETTING WATER-WINGS



source: Jack Roberts

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James D. West
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