

Walter Greve
Communications Platoon
Headquarters Co. 1st Battalion
423/HQ
106th Infantry Division
Stalag IV-B (4-B)

THE LION HEARTED by WALTER C. GREVE JR.

JANUARY 29, 1944- JANUARY 6, 1946

My army life began with induction on January 29, 1944 and entry into active service at Fort Sheridan, Illinois on February 19, 1944. I had attempted to enlist six months earlier but was not accepted because of spots on my lungs (from bronchitis while I attended Concordia College in Milwaukee). I went through numerous tests for TB but none was found.

I was accepted into the ASTP but learned it was closed the day I entered active service. Radio school at Fort McClellan, Alabama was the alternative. This involved a strenuous but shortened period of infantry training and then radio school where we learned the Morse code.

At the end of our training we had a week-end pass which we used to hitchhike to Birmingham, Alabama. Eight of us stayed in one hotel room. To say the least it was crowded. All of us went down to the hotel bar and sat at a large round table. A fellow at the bar thought he knew me and bought us several rounds of drinks. I didn't know him from Adam, but we all toasted him with each new round. After our return to base, I was to go to Fort Benning, Georgia for further training but was held back for a minor operation.

After several weeks of recovery, I was sent to Fort Meade, Maryland which was a replacement depot. I missed out on advanced radio school. I stayed there for several weeks during which time I visited Baltimore and Washington, D.C. In July or August I was transferred to the 106th Division at **Camp Atterbury** near Indianapolis, Indiana. Our group of replacements was shipped in specially made troop trains which were spartan but comfortable. I was assigned to the communications platoon of Headquarters Co. 1st Battalion, 423rd Regiment and further radio training was given. Our officer was 1st Lt. Miller whose father was also a Missouri Synod pastor and whose cousin was a fraternity brother of mine at Valparaiso University. This might have influenced my later assignment.

Through a chance meeting while hitch-hiking home to Chicago, I met a soldier from South Holland, Illinois with his Olds 98 convertible. We traveled back and forth with two or three other 106'ers on every weekend we could get a pass. I was fortunate to get some gas ration stamps from my Dad and "Fish" Ryba who worked in a gas station and kept me supplied with plenty of stamps. We traveled at speeds of over 100 mph. up and down U.S. 41. A few years ago I contacted Rinkema, our driver, and found out that his dad and brother picked up the car after we shipped out and had flats on the way home to South Holland. If we would have had a flat while cruising at over 100, we might have missed the Bulge.

To digress a bit, on the trip from Fort Meade to Indianapolis I met Robert Peak from the suburbs of Boston. He and I were assigned to the same platoon and were together until I was sent from Stalag IVB to a work camp. We lost touch, but when I retired in 1985, I sent a letter to the Boston Globe newspaper asking them to help me locate Peak. Within a week I received a call from Peak's step-son who informed me that Peak had died in 1982. He always was a heavy smoker and emphysema took its toll. He had worked as a service manager for a car dealership and later as a guard at a national park. I sure wish I would have contacted him sooner.

In late September or early October the division was sent to Fort Miles Standish, Massachusetts. While there I lost most of my pay in a crap game (my last crap game). Without money I didn't get to go on a weekend pass with Robert Peak to his home near Boston. We were sent on hikes to keep us in condition. Before one of these hikes we were given a new style boot with a buckled top. We looked pretty sharp, but the manufacturer had not driven the nails into the soles and heels properly and we ended up with bloody feet from the protruding nails. What a mess! We received new boots the next day.

On the 17th of October, 1944 we sailed from the Port of New York on the Queen Elizabeth and landed on October 24, 1944 near Glasgow, Scotland, My unit was fortunate to be assigned to an outside cabin on A deck. We were warned not to throw anything out of the porthole as this might lead a sub to us. We complied. The cabin was designed as luxurious quarters for two. We had 18- 20 crammed into bunks, but luckily we had our own washroom with a tub. We only had salt water though.

The ship must have been a floating palace before it was converted to a troopship as we could see traces of the original elaborate decor. During the comparatively short voyage I roamed throughout the ship and saw the quarters endured by some of the fellows. Not too good. Even on such a large ship the bow rose and fell noticeably. It sure couldn't have been a very comfortable trip for those fellows.

The food that was given us was very greasy and hardly what was needed on a sea voyage. There was a lot of pork sausage which wasn't too tasty. I ate as little as possible.

Just above A deck was a large enclosed area which was the site of one of the biggest crap games I ever saw. Thousands were bet. Needless to say, I had learned my lesson and didn't get into this game.

Many years after I was out of the Army I discovered that we had almost 15,000 men on board, but there were enough lifeboats for only about 2500. We did each have a life jacket. I don't know how much good they would have done. We were told that the ship changed its course every seven minutes to thwart any sub attack. The speed of the ship also was in our favor.

After landing near Glasgow, we traveled by train to a camp that was once Gen. Montgomery's headquarters just outside Cheltenham in the Cotswolds. The site was Sandywell Park on which was situated a three story mansion in which the officers occupied the servants quarters. We, the enlisted personnel, lived in Quonset huts set under a row of huge trees. We were occupied with hikes and zeroing in of the carbines issued to us in England. At nights and weekends we went to Cheltenham to visit the

Queens Hotel where we sang around the piano. Sgt. McGoogan was our accomplished pianist. Of course we visited various pubs including the Unicorn to drink the warm beers and sing ribald songs. "Roll me over..." was the most popular.

This carefree existence ceased the end of November. We were ordered to go by convoy to Southampton where we boarded an LST. I was named a jeep driver and Bob Peak was my passenger. The crossing of the English channel was very rough. Even some of the veteran sailors became seasick. I, however, survived. The LST lost both the bow and stern anchors and would have been unable to land on the beach, so we returned to Southampton and switched our vehicles to another LST and headed back across the channel. On the way back I drew guard duty on deck. We were to see that none of the vehicles on deck broke loose. Boy, it was sure wet and cold! Eventually we landed at LeHavre, France and started immediately through France and Belgium. During one of our rest stops a farmer gave us a glass of calvados. That is one powerful drink. We stopped at night to gas up and get a few hours sleep and then on to the front. It started snowing heavily, and we slid all over the roads as we were nearing the front lines. Our group camped one more night before relieving the 2nd Division. While camped one of the fellows committed suicide by shooting himself with his carbine. Guess he just flipped.

I don't know why, but I never thought I would be killed or wounded. I thought I would survive. There was no doubt in my mind at that time. This changed later to some extent, but I always thought I'd survive. Being captured never entered my mind.

We relieved the 2nd Division on December 11, 1944. Our platoon and company were placed in a former German bunker right in the Siegfried Line. I was assigned as a jeep messenger between regiment and battalion and was quartered at Regimental Headquarters. This was arranged by my good friend 1st Lt. Miller and kept me for a while about a mile or so behind battalion HQ.

The house I was billeted in was a sturdily built farmhouse with stone walls about 2 feet thick. Much better than the cold bunker. I shared a room with three others on the second floor. One of the fellows had his violin with him and kept us entertained. He was very good. The house had a barn attached and a small courtyard.. It was typical of homes in the area. Just north of the house a latrine was set up for the troops. My jeep was parked in a lane across the country road. Each morning and afternoon I would take a packet containing the password, codes and orders for the day to battalion and return with their correspondence. I was to leave at 8 AM and 4 PM. My little trek led me past the medics to a road which ran parallel to and just behind our front lines. On the right side of the road was a high chicken wire camouflaged fence. I was told to travel fast down that stretch of road as it was within sight of the Germans. Our lines bulged out from the Bulge leaving our right flank exposed to observation by the Germans. Being German myself I knew the Germans would be methodical and note the times I traveled in the morning and evening, so I varied the departure times. I figured they might drop a few mortar or artillery rounds on me if I went at a set time each day. Lucky I did because on a day when I delayed my departure by 15 minutes I learned that just prior to my arrival our company area was shelled. Count one up for the good guy.

After the war, I met a fellow from Hegewisch who was a master sergeant with the 2nd division when we relieved them. His name was Meezu (my spelling)., He told me they as they were happy to leave the position as they knew something big was coming, and the position could not be held. Our men heard tanks and trucks and reported it but

were told that what they heard was probably a recording. They didn't want to believe inexperienced soldiers like us. They should have listened. Nobody liked our setup.

On December 16 at about 5:30 A.M. a tremendous shelling started. It was very intensive, From what I have read this was one of the most intensive displays of artillery and mortars of the war. The Germans broke through in an area between our 423rd and 424th regiments. This area which contained the road which was a direct route to St. Vith was protected by troops accustomed to scouting and a cannon company who were not prepared to man a defensive position. They put up a good fight but were greatly outmanned. I consider this one of our weaknesses. The other was a unit in the infamous Losheim Gap between the 422nd and the 99th Division. The Germans poured through north and south of us. They were helped by the fact that our division was spread over a 28 mile front which left no great concentration of forces in any spot along that front. I understand that the normal front is about 5 miles for a division.

During the first day of the battle I was sent south of Buchet by jeep to pick up two linemen. As neared the location, I saw two soldiers ducking behind their jeep and pulled up next to them. They tumbled into my jeep and hollered to get out of there fast. I floored the accelerator and we flew back to safety. Their jeep had been disabled by enemy fire, and they had still been under fire shortly before arrived. Not a shot was fired while I was there. Lucky again!

German forces were in Bleialf just south of Buchet, so Regimental HQ decided they had better move north to the 3rd battalion area. This was done on the 16th of December. I spent that night in a barn which was also used by the medics to treat wounded Americans and some Germans. The Germans seemed to moan and cry much more than our fellows. I didn't sleep much.

In the morning there was a meeting of officers near a bunker which was off limits because of mines. I recall a Colonel carrying a Thompson sub-machine gun who arrived in his armored car. I don't know who he was, but he sure was the dashing figure of a soldier.

Shortly thereafter we started moving back towards Belgium. Our first stop was a small town on a hill called Oberlascheid. There I saw a jeep going through an open field hit a land mine. The rear of the jeep was thrown high in the air but kept going. That afternoon I was given a bazooka and told to put in my jeep and take it south down a road paralleling a stream and deliver it to an officer there. I believe the town was called Radscheid. I traveled down the road without incident. When I met the officer and gave him the bazooka, he asked me how I had gotten there. I told him I had just come down the road from Oberlascheid. He said nobody had been able to travel that road for hours because of German fire. This didn't make me too comfortable going back, so I floored the accelerator all the way. Not a shot was fired at me. Lucky again!

The regiment moved again a short distance west to a house just north of Radscheid which was at an intersection with Skyline Drive. That night I slept in the hallway of our headquarters.

On December 19th we proceeded south and then west up a forest lane and stopped at a small creek which was named Ihren. This cutoff was made through the woods to by-pass the intersection named "purple heart corner" because so many were

wounded and killed there. The Germans knew the area so well that they had many locations zeroed in with their artillery. I parked my jeep just northwest of the creek. I met several of the 1st battalion boys just north of the creek. In talking with them I heard the of the adventures of Sgts. McGoogan and Caldwell. They had been very busy. While traveling in their jeep a shell landed in front of them and then one to their rear. They figured the next round would hit them so they jumped out and the jeep continued on. It was destroyed by the next round. They both were captured and forced to carry a litter containing a wounded German. The wounded man started to moan, so the German guard told them to set the litter down. When he leaned over to tend to his friend, they clobbered him and escaped. They later became prisoners with the rest of us.

Both survived the prison camps. McGoogan died recently but had been ill for some time. I talked to him by phone several years ago when I visited Chicago as he lived in Blue Island, a suburb. He was a little disoriented at the time I called as he had been through several operations just shortly before my call. Caldwell lives in Natchez, Mississippi and recently semi-retired from his CPA firm. I've been in touch with him by letter and hope to meet him at one of the reunions one day.

At about 9:30 A.M. there was a meeting of battalion commanders and regimental officers. I wasn't more than 20 yards from them. Heavy shelling began, and I dove for a foxhole that was near. learned during a lull in the shelling that I had taken another fellows foxhole. When the shelling started again, I gave that fellow extra protection lying on top of him. Scary! That shelling didn't bode well for our battalion as our Colonel Craig was mortally wounded, and we were without our accustomed leader. A shell evidently landed practically in the middle of the of the meeting.

We were instructed to disable our vehicles and proceed on foot to take the town of Schoenberg, a town to our front. !f we were successful, we would be able to reunite with our division as we were completely surrounded at that time. The promised relief by armored divisions especially the 7th Armored never materialized as promised. To disable my vehicle I pulled the rotor from the distributor and threw it into the woods and moved to the right, north, down a wooded slope. Just short of an open meadow we dug in. Another fellow and E went forward and met two fellows who told us that the road ahead was full of tanks and mechanized equipment, German. I went back to the others and found Bob Peak leaning against a tree smoking a cigarette even though there was sporadic small arms and artillery fire. I told him to get down or he'd be shot. He told me he was too young and beautiful to die. I guess he was right, because he never got a scratch.

Several heavy periods of shelling later we received word that the battalion was surrendering because we were out of ammunition and food. Our attack on Schoenberg without supporting armor or artillery had cost too many lives, and our officers figured it would be suicide to continue. We were ordered to destroy our weapons, so I took the bolt from my carbine and threw that into the woods also. We all moved west towards Schoenberg. A German sergeant led us to a farmyard just short of town. As we entered the farmyard, A German soldier lowered his four barrel anti-aircraft gun and aimed it at us. We thought we were goners as we had heard of the Malmedy massacre. I wish I could personally thank the German officer who waved this gun off of us. Very scary.

We were searched and assembled in the farmyard for our march to German territory. We were marched east and eventually arrived at Pruem which was well back of

the lines. About this time I wasn't thinking too clearly , so I don't know how long it took. The scenery along the way consisted of knocked out American vehicles and a long seemingly endless line of huge German tanks and mechanized equipment. We were jeered as we walked by. We had been told the war would be over by Christmas. Nobody told the Germans about this timetable. After Pruem, we stopped at Gerolstein. There we were put in a cobble-stoned courtyard for the night. It was very cold, And Bob Peak and I covered ourselves with my overcoat as he had disposed of his. We shivered through at least one night. We were eventually put into boxcars which were meant to hold forty men or eight horses. We had about 60 men in ours. A few years ago I received a list of some of the fellows in our boxcar. We had each put down our name and address. Sure enough ,there in big bold print is my name and address. I don't remember writing it.

Again my memory is not clear as to how many days we were in that boxcar, but I do know we were very hungry. We used our helmets to dispose of human waste and threw it out when we had the chance. Most of us had loose bowels by this time. I believe we had some of the famous German brown bread which didn't last long.

The evening of December 23rd was the worst part of our trip to Stalag IVB and possibly one of the most horrifying experiences of my service life. The train was stopped in a railyard yard outside of **Limburg**. That night an eerie green light created by RAF flares lit up the sky followed by bombs. understand now that the lead plane dropped the flare which signaled the spot at which the following planes were to drop their bombs. Someone was able to unlock our boxcar door, and we poured out. dashed across a field and got as close as I could to an embankment. This was one time I thought I might not survive as bomb after bomb fell causing the ground to heave. Dirt flew all over and men were screaming. How long did it last? I don't know. It seemed like an hour. When it stopped, another fellow and I decided to take off. We got about a mile away and were going to cross a road when we were confronted by a German officer pointing his Luger at us. He hollered " Halt".

We halted. We hadn't seen him standing there and couldn't figure why in the world he was out on that road. He took us to **Stalag XII-A** which was just a short distance away in Limburg. Fifty or sixty were killed in the camp by the bombs. We spent the night there, and the next morning after sleeping in the extreme cold air we got our first taste of the thin infamous German soup and a piece of bread. Both tasted pretty bad. We were taken back to the train and welcomed because we were thought to be among the dead. Not too many from the train were killed. Lucky again. The picture of the railyard makes one wonder how anyone survived that pounding.

Our journey continued. I don't know how many days it took, but it was cold and miserable. By the time we arrived at **Stalag IV-B**, we were starving. The Stalag was located near the Elbe river and near Muehlberg.. We were interrogated briefly and assigned to a barracks. One end contained an outhouse type of latrine and the other contained a washroom which was frigid as was the water. The bunks were three high and the barracks was cold. There were British paratroopers in the barracks who were captured in Montgomery's ill-fated drop at Arnheim. They shared some of their Red Cross parcel with us which was greatly appreciated. They also had set up and decorated a little Christmas tree which was put on a table. A good deal of time was spent talking about favorite foods and bragging about Mom's cooking. We also bragged and exaggerated about our accomplishments in civilian life. The rest of the time was spent in the latrine. Our stomachs were really queasy.

After a short period of time, I was sent to a work camp by means of the familiar 40 and 8 boxcar. This work camp was southwest of Cottbus. Bob Peak and I had been together up until this time. I never saw him again. The town this work camp was located in was Finsterwalde to the best of my knowledge. I never have been sure of the name of the town. I sent a letter to the mayor of Finsterwalde but never received a reply. We were put in barracks with two high bunks. There were two or three rooms with separate entrances housing 80-100 POW's. We were split into three groups. Two groups were sent to work in the open pit brown coal mine and one worked at the chemical plant named Farben which was in town. The group I was in was assigned to lay and align railroad tracks in the mine which were used by a small train in the mine. One day when I wasn't feeling well I was forced to go with the chemical factory group. Their work was much easier. At our workplace there was a huge bridge stretching across the open pit. This bridge, or "bruecke" as they called it, was mounted on rails on both sides of the pit so that it could travel the length of the mine.

The rotary buckets on one side skimmed the topsoil off one side and deposited it on a conveyor belt which carried the soil to the other side of the pit. This exposed the brown coal or lignite on the original side. That was then gathered up by huge electric cranes and deposited in freight cars. It was really quite a smooth operation and returned the land to about the same shape as before. The mined brown coal was taken to a plant and pressed into briquettes about 3x8x3 inches. We luckily got some of them to use in our barracks stove to stave off some of the cold. Each morning we arose very early and were marched to the mine returning late in the afternoon. The exact times I don't recall, but it was a very long cold day. At noon, we received a thin soup for lunch which we ate in a small hut located on the floor of the mine.

In our work group was a young Polish gentleman who kept me advised of the Allies progress. It was good to hear that the Allies were pushing the Germans well back into Germany. He would sneak maps from newspapers to show me. He said he was a former Polish army officer whose wife and child were in Paris. He hoped to meet up with them after the war. He vowed he would never be taken by the Russians as they would kill him for sure. He intended to get to American lines. I hope he made it. I learned from him that we were located southwest of Cottbus in the town whose name always escapes me.

The food each day consisted of soup (very watery and I believe most of the times made of sugar beets) and dark bread and a dab of jam and oleo at times. The bread it was rumored consisted of large parts of wood powder. We received a portion of a Red Cross parcel, I believe twice. We never received a full parcel. The tins of meat were punctured so that we would not store them up for an escape. Because of this we had to eat those items quickly to prevent poisoning and before it spoiled. The powdered milk, Klim, was one of the favorites in the parcel. At the time most of us were heavy smokers, so the cigarettes were really a priority item. Kools were the most wanted because they seemed the strongest. There was a small tin of instant coffee which I traded for a half loaf of brown bread. I traded with our German boss. One of my fellow POW's helped me smuggle the bread into camp as it would have been too bulky in one piece.

I'll describe our camp a little more. As I mentioned, there was our barracks. There also was a separate latrine, a Russian compound separated from us by a barbed wire fence and the guards quarters. This was all surrounded by barbed wire fences with watch towers. We all felt sorry for the Russians who were poorly clothed, fed worse than us and

treated like animals. One ration of soup given to us was so foul nobody wanted to eat it. I suggested we place it next to the Russian compound. They reached through the fence and gobbled it up. A sad sight.

I remember getting a brief shower in the guards barracks once. The water was cold, but it felt great to clean up a little. Too bad it was the only one we had. Maybe the guards couldn't stand the smell. We were really filthy.

We were assigned a new guard who was from Dresden and had lost most of his family in the huge air raid. He wanted to punish us for the raid, but we told him we were ground troops and had nothing to do with the raid. This seemed to mollify him somewhat. He was about 55 or 60 years old and later guarded us on our march back to American lines. They really were short of manpower to be using him. Come to think of it we captured some Germans in the Bulge who were not much more than 14 or 15. This guard disappeared when we reached American lines at Wurzen.

During our entire stay at the work camp most of us suffered from diarrhea and lost a lot of weight. I often had severe stomach pains and consequently spent a lot of time in the latrine.

One day while returning to form up for our return to camp a fellow in the other group told me to hurry up. I was so tired I four lettered him and was promptly challenged to a fight when we returned to camp. I usually don't curse, but I was so tired I couldn't hold back. We had quite a spirited fight until it was finally broken up. Maybe that is where I received my deviated septum.

One of my last clear memories of this work camp involved a bombing raid by B-17's. We were all pointing to the bridge hoping they would hit it. I'm sure they couldn't possibly see us, but our German boss did and became very upset. He worked us extra hard. Once the bombs started dropping we all scattered. The ground was really shaking and I sought shelter in a low concrete building which turned out to be a washroom for the German workers. It was spotless and equipped with regular porcelain toilets. hadn't seen or used one since the trip on the Queen Elizabeth. I spent my time during the raid like a king enthroned on my white porcelain trembling throne. I guess it wasn't the brightest thing to do, but at the time it was great.

This all occurred on the upper level of the mine. We were shoveling a path up there. Our German boss got after one of our boys and pushed him around. Our boy took his shovel and was ready to brain the German. Another of our boys stopped him. The German called the guard who took the offender away. We never saw him again and don't know what happened to him. This was a day of many events. On that day my legs swelled up so much that they completely filled my pants legs. I learned later this was probably beri beri (wet).

During our stay at this work camp I served as an interpreter for my work group. My German wasn't great, but it helped in getting information from the Germans and from my Polish friend. I wish remembered his name. Shortly before we were marched from camp our German boss gleefully told us that Roosevelt had died. He figured this would throw America into such confusion that Germany could win the war. We quickly told him

that Truman would take over and there would be no change. This deflated his optimism in a hurry.

About a week later we were told we were to march away from the rapidly advancing Russians toward the American lines. This was great news as it meant we might soon be liberated. The problem was that we were all weak and skinny. We didn't know how long we would be marching, and we knew we would have to walk all the way. While we were on this little hike we were strafed and buzzed several times by Russian planes. As tired as we were, we moved plenty fast then to get off the road. The roads were flooded with people rushing to escape the Russians in any type of transportation imaginable. There were few cars because of the shortage of gas. A group of Poles gave us a swig of their homemade potato whiskey. That was a mistake to accept the offer as it was very strong.

We wandered across fields and down roads for several days getting more tired and hungry all the time. In a town along the way I begged for food from the people in a very nice home. They let me in and gave me some potatoes. That was really appreciated. While talking with them their son noticed that I kept using the formal address of "Sie" instead of the familiar "du" for "you". I had become so accustomed to using the formal address that I didn't even realize I was using it. While there the woman was drying her dishes and noticed the swastika on the back of the plate. She spit at it in disgust and blamed Hitler for all of Germany's problems. They were well off, so I wonder if they might not have been followers of Hitler until the reverses in Russia and France.

The next night was spent in an unfurnished, abandoned barracks. It kept us out of the weather and was appreciated. To the rear of the barracks were a lot of vehicles including some dandy sports cars. We would have ridden in style if we had gas. It would have been much better than walking.

In the morning we started out again. Just before we crossed the Elbe at Riesa we passed a group of starving young girls who could just barely walk. I presumed they were Jewesses. A pretty young thing dropped out of line and was beaten by her guard. I wish we could have helped, but we were warned not to as we would be shot by those guards. These girls were about 12 years old. What bestiality!

Leaving that sad sight behind us, we waded across the Elbe river on the sunken bridge structure to Riesa on the other side. Our route was almost due west now along the Elbe. While traveling through the next town, we saw a nattily dressed German officer standing next to his vehicle. He had several cigars in his jacket pocket. They were very inviting to the fellow ahead of me, so he snagged two. The officer was so surprised he did nothing. The fellow had an enjoyable smoke. Next we crossed open country and after a while saw a jeep flying an American flag. What a glorious and welcome sight. It brought tears to a lot of eyes. We were told that the next town was Wurzen which was in American hands. Tired and weak as we were we hurried to the town. In the town was a huge stack of weapons and cameras. I picked out a 35mm camera and a small caliber rifle which was in perfect condition and had a highly polished stock of a golden color.

The only route across the Mulde river that we could see was across the destroyed bridge. It was a steel structure which lay at every angle imaginable, but several of us were so eager to get to the other side and into American quarters we slid and climbed

across. We could have killed ourselves, but no one thought of that at the time.

After crossing we came to a small town in which Americans troops were quartered. They heard us coming and leaned out of the windows. We asked them for any canned rations they had, especially desserts. They threw everything they had, and we gobbled it up. We soon learned that our stomachs couldn't take all that rich food anymore and had to slow the intake.

We arrived at some barracks that were filled with sugar beets. We were forced by an American officer to shovel the beets out of the barracks and then we had to sleep on the slimy floor. That officer was lucky there were some calmer heads in our group, or he never would have survived the war. To this day I don't know why he didn't have the German civilians in the neighborhood clean out the barracks for us.

Disinfecting was the next unpleasantly we submitted to. They sprayed us with powder to kill the fleas and lice. I'm sure we needed it. Finally 2 1/2 Ton trucks arrived and took us by way of the Autobahn to Leipzig. We were unloaded at a large multistory red brick building and were to bunk down on pallets set up in a large airy loft. The only problem was I never got to enjoy these quarters or see Leipzig as I passed out while stowing what little gear I had.

I woke up in an Army hospital set up in what was a former officers' cadet school. The rooms were bright and clean. How long was I out? I don't know. I do remember being awake for D-Day and having some of the rum drink prepared by the nurses. That was a bad move. It caused me to pass out again and not from the alcohol.

After a while, (notice how indefinite I am about time) a bunch of us were taken to an airfield in Merseberg. On the way I remember seeing some of their elevated trains suspended from metal supports. Quite unique and quite an engineering feat. At the airport we were loaded into C-47's, plunked down in bucket seats, and flown to Swindon, England. We could see the flooded areas of Holland on the way_ The hospital at Swindon was very large and composed of many connected wooden buildings. I was diagnosed as suffering from "malnutrition severe". This meant I could have all the food I wanted. We even had a small kitchen in the ward which was well stocked. The big favorite of everyone was ice cream. When they X-rayed my chest, they noticed the spots on my lungs and suspected TB. I told them it was from bronchitis in the early 40's. They nevertheless X-rayed me from every angle and tested everything that came out of me. They kept me at that hospital until they fattened me up from my 97 pound weakling status which I weighed when I hit the American lines.

I was able to draw back pay while there and went into the city of Swindon and had some of the great English fish and chips served in cones made of newspaper and of course some of there warm beer. That fish was delicious.

At last, on June 17th 1945, I sailed from Bristol, England on a hospital ship named Clara Barton. I was in a large ward and assigned an upper bunk. Music was piped in and they played songs requested by the patients. The most popular tune was "Sentimental Journey" by Les Brown and his band and sung by Doris Day. Believe it or not we still liked the song when we landed at Charleston S. C. and the

welcoming band played it. I have to mention several unusual events that occurred on the trip which was made on smooth seas, no storms. Each patient ate their meal while sitting on their bunk. I had finished my meal and kept hearing a spoon clinking against a bowl. The poor fellow below me had received a severe head wound and just couldn't comprehend that there was no more in the bowl. We all tried to help him the rest of the trip. Did he ever recover? I wonder. There was a section of the ship which had individual cells for some even less lucky. They were literally raving lunatics.

Upon our arrival at Charleston's harbor the ships there blew their whistles and as I mentioned a band played our favorite tune. I still like the song.

At the hospital all of us were assigned to wards. A fellow I hooked up with was a husky Finn from Minnesota. I could never remember his unusual name. He was an opinionated fellow who would not sit in the mess hall were the German POW workers indicated he should sit. He just wouldn't take any more orders from Germans. We had a pass and went to a seaside amusement park. A lot of beers later the SP's decided my Finnish friend was getting too boisterous and threw him in a brig they had set up there. I went to the brig to try and get my friend released. They told me to get out of there or I'd end up in the brig also. My friend showed up the next morning.

Most of the mid-westerners were shipped by train to Fort Custer near Kalamazoo, Michigan. We were given passes several times and went into the neighboring towns. Nothing special. I served as company clerk and was promoted to corporal.

I was finally sent home on leave. No parades or anything, but I sure was happy to be home with my family and friends. During that leave my Aunt Emma wangled an invite to a very plush home on Lake Geneva in Wisconsin. It was two doors away from P. K. Wrigley's place, so that will give you an idea of size and elaborateness. It had a Chinese room, a Japanese room and so on. My cousin Robert Gauger had just gotten out of the service and came with us. While there I suffered severe stomach cramps again which ended the party. We drove back to Milwaukee where my parents were. From there Dad rushed us home to Hegewisch and called reliable Dr. Brown. He diagnosed my problem as an infected or enlarged appendix. He called the Army and said he would hold them responsible if anything happened to me because of any delay on their part. In no time an Army ambulance was at the door, and I was rushed to the Army hospital set up at the Chicago Beach hotel at about 53rd Street and the lake front in Chicago. After tests, I was given a spinal, and my appendix was removed. It was so large the doctors decided to save it. During my weeks stay at the hospital the Chez Paree Adorables and a comedian put on their floor show for us. This was big time entertainment at that time. VJ Day came while I was in the hospital. The breweries brought truckloads of beer to the hospital and a lot of the fellows got loaded. One of my roommates in a full body cast really got loaded. He was a crazy Irishman from Chicago who fractured his hip at his welcome home party when he got loaded and walked off a balcony.

I received another extended leave and then was to report to Fort Sheridan for my discharge. When my Dad was taking me to Fort Sheridan, he was confronted by a car broadside across the road. To avoid the car Dad veered and hit a tree. Mom sustained a bad gash to her knee, so I applied a tourniquet, and Mom was taken to the hospital for first aid. I received another two weeks leave, and I was finally discharged on January 6, 1946. I was discharged as a PFC even though I had been promoted to corporal. They told me I would have to wait until they received copies of the orders to indicate the corporal

rating on the discharge. I told them I wanted out and wouldn't wait. That ended my Army career

I was awarded the following decorations: The Combat Infantry Badge, The Bronze Star, The Victory Medal, American Theater Ribbon, European-African Middle Eastern Ribbon w/3 battle stars, One Overseas Service Bar, Good Conduct Medal, and The Prisoner of War Medal.

EPILOGUE

I took advantage of the GI Bill and continued my education at Valparaiso University in Valparaiso, Indiana and graduated with a B. A. degree in English with a minor in Business. After graduation I started to work in the insurance claims business and stayed in that field until I retired in 1985. I secured the designations of CPCU and ARM while working and I retired as a branch claim manager and examiner.

The best thing that happened to me was that I married Jo in 1951. She has put with me for what will be 45 years in December 1996. We have two boys. They both graduated from college and one earned his masters. degree. We have twin grandsons who naturally are very smart. Jo and I are enjoying retirement in Aurora, Colorado.



Page last revised
James D. West
www.IndianaMilitary.org