

WORLD WAR II SCRAPBOOK
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423/D
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During the time that I was away during World War II my Mother and Dad kept letters, newspaper articles, and other mementos in a scrapbook which they gave to me upon my return. The pages of the old scrap book deteriorated, but now on the 50th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge I am putting them back together and writing this synopsis thinking that it might be interesting to future generations of our family. When I'm gone, I want the scrapbook to be kept by my grandson, Donelson E. Houseman, who was named for me and for my Dad - and I hope he will pass it along to one of his heirs.

As I have been putting the book back together and rereading the letters and clippings, I realize more than ever the anguish of my Dad and Mother during the time that I was in the service and particularly when I was "missing in action". Only after having children of your own is it possible for a person to understand the love of a parent for his child. I get cold chills when I think of my Mother and Dad picking up the newspaper one morning and unexpectedly seeing the article about my division, the 106th, being wiped out. Then later the telegram from the War Department saying I was "missing in action" and the long months of waiting - because they never knew until I was liberated whether I was dead or alive.

To give a little summary of my participation in WWII - - - The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and within a few days the Germans also declared war on the United States. I was 18 years old and in my sophomore year at the University of Texas and, along with almost all other male students, started looking into joining one of the branches of the Armed Services. Some enlisted in the Air Corps, some Navy, and some Army. I applied to be a pilot in the Air Corps, in which my Dad had served during World War I, but lacked the required 20/20 vision, so I chose the Army. Those who enlisted in the Army were placed in what was called the Enlisted Reserve Corps, and we were to remain in school until they were ready for us. We expected to be called to active duty within a few weeks, but so many all over the nation had enlisted that it was over a year later - on April 27, 1943 - that we were finally called. The tower building at Texas had chimes which chimed every quarter hour and also played tunes on special occasions. I was sitting in class that April morning when all of a sudden the chimes started playing "You're in the Army Now". We knew what that meant, and we just closed our books and walked out of class. There were about 900 of us in the ERC, and we each received a telegram telling us to report to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio.

Out of the 900 who were inducted at Fort Sam Houston eleven of us were assigned to Antiaircraft basic training at Camp Callan near La Jolla, California. The rest were sent to camps all over the country with the great majority going to Camp Maxey at Paris, Texas, for basic training in the Infantry. Going to California was not quite as good as it sounds, because we trained 6 days per week and were restricted to the base even on Sundays for the first 13 weeks. However, upon completion of Basic, I remained at Camp Callan for a couple of months and did get into La Jolla, San Diego, and once up to Los Angeles. I was supposed to go to LA on another weekend to meet my good friend and Phi Delt fraternity brother at Texas, Chuck Storey, who was in pilot training near LA. Chuck was a real ladies' man and had arranged for dates with a couple of Hollywood starlets. Would you

believe I got assigned KP duty, and in no way could get anyone to switch.

All of us in the ERC were supposed to go to Officer Candidate School after completion of basic training, but as it turned out only about 20 % were selected. I was lucky enough to be one of them and was sent to Antiaircraft OCS at Camp Davis near Wilmington, NC. The officer's training course lasted 90 days, and they busted out about 25% of our class - but I made it so on January 20, 1944 at the age of 20, I became a Second Lieutenant.

On a 10 day leave I returned to Texas and in January 1944 became engaged to Kathryn Buckley. We had gotten "pinned", which in those days meant you dated no one else, on March 2, 1943, (Texas Independence Day, but not for me) just before I was called to active duty and while I was Junior at Texas University and she was a Freshman. We married in June 1945 after I returned from overseas. One funny thing about our getting engaged and my giving Katy an engagement ring - - My Army pay as a new 2nd Lieutenant was \$150/month, and I spent \$125 on the ring, which I felt was a lot. I brought it home and proudly showed it to my mother asking what she thought about my selection. It had a white gold band with one diamond in the center about the size of the white part on a kitchen match head. Her comment was "well it looks like it's paid for." But Katy loved it and wore it many years until I finally used the one diamond along with several others that size plus a big one and made her a new ring.

After graduating from OCS and becoming a Second Lieutenant, I was assigned to an Antiaircraft Artillery battalion stationed at Fort Fisher on the coast of North Carolina to be on guard against a possible German invasion. (There had been reports that a German sub had been sighted off the Carolina coast.) .Like so many of us in those days, I was anxious to get into combat, and after a few months of this, I requested a transfer to the Infantry. I was sent to Fort Benning, Georgia, and when I got there found they were asking for Paratroops volunteers, so I applied. However, I did not qualify for the "parachute infantry" because I lacked 20/40 vision, and I remained in the regular infantry. We took a 6 weeks Infantry Officers' Refresher Course and upon completion I was assigned to [Company D, 423rd Regiment of the 106th Infantry Division](#), which was in training near Indianapolis. By way of explanation, during WWII a division was composed of three regiments, each regiment had three battalions, and each battalion had three rifle companies and one heavy weapons company, which supported the rifle companies. D Company was the heavy weapons company of the 1st Battalion and supported rifle Companies A, B, and C. D Company had two platoons equipped with heavy water-cooled 30 caliber machine guns with about 40 men each and one platoon equipped with three 81mm mortars with about 40 men. I was with the mortar platoon. In combat the mortars were a few hundred yards behind the front line, but the lieutenant had to be out in front of the rifle companies to direct the mortar fire. Not a good deal.

The [106th Division](#) went overseas in October 1944 aboard the [Queen Elizabeth](#). It was the world's premier luxury liner and was converted to a troop carrier. It carried most of my division of 15,000 men plus half of another one. We did not have escort ships because the Elizabeth could outrun all subs as it zigzagged across the Atlantic. It carried many men back and forth during the entire war and to my recollection was never torpedoed.

I was in a luxury stateroom for two, but we had 22 sleeping in it. In fact, there were really 44, because the entire ship was divided into two groups - one shift stayed in their rooms and slept or read while the other shift wandered around on deck, and vice versa. One day while on deck I ran into Buddy Ashby who was a Pfc. in the other division. He was a year younger than I, but we had been friends since childhood. When I returned, I

learned Buddy was killed his second day in combat. You can see his name on the bronze plaque at Highland Park High School along with the names of many, many other of my close friends. I still get all choked up whenever I go out the front door of the school and read that plaque.

We landed at Glasgow, Scotland and went by train to Cheltenham, England, where we went through rigorous physical training for about a month. One weekend I got a pass and went to London. The Germans were sending nightly buzz bombs plus air raids, so the city was in total darkness. Weird to walk around with no lights. Sunday morning I went to church at St. Paul's Cathedral in the center of London, which was virtually untouched despite everything around it being in ruins. (Later I saw the Cathedral at Cologne, Germany, which likewise suffered minor damage despite the devastation around it.) The service was in the basement, and right in the middle of a prayer a bomb hit. It sounded like it hit the Cathedral above, but the priest never missed a beat. I must have come up 2 feet off my knees. After the service I found a buzz bomb had hit a block away.

The [106th](#) crossed the English Channel in November on ships, and I was on an LST (Landing Ship Tanks). It has a flat bottom so it can go right to the shore and unload troops, trucks, and tanks, etc. The sea was so rough that we were all deathly sea sick, and a lashed down jeep tore loose and fell overboard killing two men. When we finally reached shore, the front unloading door of the LST wouldn't open to let us out. Lucky we didn't come in on D-Day.

We were bivouacked in pup tents in France for a couple of weeks during which time it rained constantly. We then moved by truck convoy to the front lines to relieve the 2nd Infantry Division, which was holding dugout positions in the Siegfried Line in the Ardennes Forest along the Belgium/German border. We had only been there a few days when the so-called Battle of the Bulge started just before daybreak on the morning of December 16, 1944. The Germans shelled us for about three hours in one of the heaviest artillery barrages of the war and then sent two whole Panzer Armies (the 5th and 6th) through the area occupied by our division. Despite some limited casualties we were able to hold our positions, but by the third day the [422nd and 423rd Regiments of the 106th](#) were totally cut off from the rest of the American Army. The temperature was well below freezing, and the skies were so overcast from snow and fog that our planes could not fly to drop provisions and ammunition. We ran out of food, were running out of ammunition, and were ordered on December 18 to leave our dugout positions and to try to fight our way back to American lines.

During the afternoon of the 18th we started moving back towards the Belgium town of St. Vith and were able to advance only a short distance. We lost a bunch of men taking a hill right at dark, but we pushed the Germans off it and dug in for the night. We planned to start again the next morning. Just after daybreak on December 19th my battalion was hit suddenly by a concentration of heavy artillery, mortar, and rifle fire. In less than 20 minutes my battalion commander, Colonel William Craig, and my company commander, Capt. James Clarkson, were both killed, and about half the officers and men of D Company were killed or seriously wounded. I received a shrapnel wound in my right wrist. I think I was hit by fragments from a German mortar. A burst hit just down the hill from me, then another just above me, so I dropped to the ground and instinctively held my head. The third burst hit right near me, but missed me. I didn't feel any pain nor realize I had been hit - probably because it was so cold - until I noticed my glove had filled with blood. Had I not grabbed my head I guess the piece of shrapnel from the mortar would have gone in my temple.

The shelling finally ceased, and the German Infantry and tanks started coming. We moved from our open position across a small creek (which I fell in) and into the dense woods. There my platoon sergeant, Sergeant Robert Stringer from Massachusetts, took my first aid bandage and put it on my wrist. My company, D Company of the First Battalion was decimated, and those of us who were left joined a rifle company. That afternoon I was nicked in the leg with a rifle or machine gun bullet as we were attempting to cross an open area which in peace time served as a fire break between the woods. I made it to a temporary aid station, where there were several hundred wounded, in order to get my leg bandaged. There I apparently passed out or went to sleep from exhaustion and loss of blood. The first thing I heard upon waking was the guttural voices of Germans. I was told that just before dark a ranking officer, who felt we were completely surrounded and defenseless for lack of ammunition, surrendered us to the Germans.

From the start of the Battle of the Bulge on December 16th until December 20th nearly a fourth of the men in our two regiments were killed or wounded. By December 21st almost all those not killed had been captured - less than 150 out of all the men in those two regiments made it back to American lines.

It was still nighttime, but they started us marching with hands over head back along a road on which their advancing troops and tanks were coming. Some Germans were riding in captured American vehicles. What humiliation. We had to carry those who could not walk, or else they would have been left to freeze to death in the snow. About mid-morning we came to the little German town of Auw, where we were herded into an open field enclosed with barbed wire and guarded by Germans armed with machine guns. Many American prisoners were already there.

The next day - after a bitter night in the freezing cold which we made by taking turns lying on top of each other - those who were wounded but could walk, including myself, were segregated and marched to the town of Prum. There we were put in an old two story bomb-damaged hotel building which already held German wounded. We all lay on the floor together, with the Germans in one section and Americans in another. On December 24th some German fraus brought small Christmas trees from the forest and started decorating them for the German wounded. Right in the middle of it, American planes started dropping bombs, and those who could (including Americans) moved to the basement. I'll never forget lying on that cold, cold basement floor on the night of Christmas Eve when a wounded German started singing Silent Night in German. Other Germans joined in and later we Americans joined singing in English. How about that - a few days before we were trying to kill each other - and now we were united through Christ.

On about December 30th a bunch of us wounded prisoners were loaded into an open truck. There were so many of us that it was impossible to lie down, and we traveled for two days before arriving at [Stalag VI G near Cologne, Germany](#). It snowed on us the entire time and two horribly burned Air Corps pilots went crazy from their pain and both died. At least three others in the truck also died during the trip. We had to just throw their bodies out in the snow.

Stalag VI G was an established German prison camp with prisoners from all nationalities, some of whom had been there since the early days of World War II (which had started on September 1, 1941 when the Germans invaded Poland). I think Stalag VI G had about 50,000 prisoners, who were separated according to nationality. Also, officers were

separated from enlisted men, and the wounded were kept in a different area - so I was sent to a building which housed wounded American officers. The building had about 40 double bunks, plus an adjacent room with 2 toilets and 2 wash basins and 1 shower (however, since the building was unheated and with the outside temperature below zero, no one showered. In fact, it was so cold I never showered or even removed my clothes until sometime in mid-March.) There was another small room with 2 beds which was the so-called operating room. We had a couple of captured American medics, and they did the best they could.

Since my leg wound was so slight, I used an upper bunk, because many had injuries which prevented them from being able to climb to the top bunk. There weren't any tables or chairs and very little vacant space, and it was so cold that for the most part we just stayed in our beds under the blanket with our clothes on.. The doors to the building were locked, and we couldn't go outside except on very rare occasions.

Once a day a couple of German guards would bring buckets of water from melted snow plus loaves of dark bread sufficient to have 1 loaf for each 6 prisoners. So our ration of food was 1/6th loaf of bread per day. The bread was made with husks and sawdust mixed in with the flour, and it gave everyone dysentery, but we ate it because it was filling and helped satisfy our gnawing hunger. We would carefully carve the loaf in exactly 6 equal parts and then divide the crumbs 6 ways. Everyone that could walk stood around while this occurred to make sure he didn't get cheated.

Some of those in our compound had been in prison long enough to be receiving Red Cross packages. The "rules of war" provided that the Red Cross in Switzerland be notified when someone was taken prisoner. Switzerland would in turn notify the American Red Cross, which would notify the next-of-kin and the War Department. Then the American Red Cross would start once a month sending mail and a package containing food, cigarettes, candy etc. to the prisoner. The family could also send one package a month. A few of these packages made it, but most didn't for one reason or another. I guarantee you when a package did arrive, that prisoner was the envy of everyone, and he could trade one of his food items for a watch, sweater, or other things of value. Unfortunately I never received a Red Cross package the entire time I was in prison.

One time I traded something (can't remember what) for a small piece of cheese less than an inch square. I would take a very small bite each day, and then hide it under my pillow. (You wouldn't think it necessary to hide something from fellow Americans, but stealing happened since everyone was so desperately hungry.) One night while I was sleeping I felt something move under my pillow, and a big rat ran out with my cheese. I was crushed.

About once a week the guards would let a few of us go out into a courtyard adjacent to our building. Other prisoners would also be out there, and we were surrounded with armed guards. We were about 15 miles from the center of Cologne, whose factories and railroad yards were the targets of Allied air raids. It was mid-January, and on a clear day we would watch the bombers coming over by the 100's with anti-aircraft shells bursting all around them. They converged on Cologne from every direction and the sky was full of "con" trails and bursting shells. An unbelievable sight. Every now and then one of our planes would be hit by anti-aircraft and would start down in flames. Sometimes parachutes would open up, but most often not. We grieved for the guys in the plane.

My hand, wrist, and arm all became terribly infected and swollen, and I was in such pain I

sometimes didn't think I could stand it. Maybe the only consolation was that there were others in the room in even worse pain. We had absolutely no medicine or pain killers available, and we didn't even have bandages. The Germans gave us rolls of 3 inch wide crepe paper (similar to what is used to decorate for a party) for the medics to use as bandages - but we only had enough paper to change each man's bandage once a week. During the week the wounds would secrete pus, which would dry out and stick to the skin and the paper. You can imagine what it was like when it came time to remove the paper bandage and wash the wound. Excruciating, almost unbearable, pain. My arm got to be about 5-6 inches in diameter from all the infection, and during one of the changes, the medic told me he counted 19 holes in my arm and hand where pus had forced a hole in the skin and was coming out. One day a medic cut an X in the top of my hand to drain pus and relieve pain. The scar still shows. This condition lasted from early January until March when I was sent to have my arm amputated (later in the story).

In early February we were told that all wounded who could walk were being moved - I have no idea why. We were marched with arms overhead along a highway and then through the center of Cologne and then to a railroad yard at Siegburg. This was only about 30 kilometers but took 2 days because we were so out of shape. There we were loaded into railroad box cars and the doors shut tight. There were no windows or openings of any kind, and there were so many in each box car that we couldn't sit down at the same time. Everyone had dysentery - so you can imagine the situation. Once a day while we were in the box cars, they would stop the train, open the doors, let out a few at a time in a field to relieve ourselves, give us a hunk of bread and drink of water. We were in the box cars for 3 days, until we finally unloaded at [Stalag XIIIA](#) at Limburg, Germany. The last 2 days were on a railroad siding at Limburg, and each night the British Mosquito bombers would bomb the railroad yards. Some bombs sounded like they hit right on top of us. When we finally got out of the box cars, I learned that one box car had taken a direct hit and either killed or horribly wounded the prisoners inside.

Stalag XIIIA was a huge prison with many prisoners of all nationalities. I was not put with the wounded here but was put in a compound with other American officers, most of whom were not wounded. The food ration was the same 1/6th loaf of bread, but about every third day they would give us a potato to split among 6. Also, the medical room was in another building, and they had some real doctors, who had been captured - not just medics. But the bandage situation was the same and still no medicine or pain killers.

At this Stalag I learned the difference between men who had the will to live and those who gave up. Some had been prisoners a long time, and the ones who just lay in bed withered away. No matter how bad you hurt or how bad you felt, you had to get up and keep going.

One thing about prison that was maybe even worse than pain were the lice. By the time I had been in for about two weeks I started getting lice, which are very similar to fleas that get on a dog. There was no way to get rid of them, and they drove you absolutely crazy. They were constantly crawling around your body making it impossible to sleep soundly, and they kept you constantly scratching when awake. It was too cold to take off your clothes, so you just picked away underneath your shirt and coat to try and pull one off. When you did get one and smash it, it would leave a blood spot the size of a dime. I can distinctly remember the day at Stalag XIIIA at Limburg when we finally got a bright sunshiny reasonably warm day. We went outside, took off all our clothes, and started picking and killing lice. We helped each other pick them off our bodies, and then we each started pulling them out of our own uniforms. I had picked off over 100 when I stopped

counting, and it looked like there was a 1/2 pint of blood where I smashed them on the ground.

My arm became so badly infected that one of the doctor's told me he was sending me and about 6 others by truck to a nearby German medical facility. In early March I was moved to a German Army hospital at Montabaur. The place they sent me consisted of a large multistoried stone building plus some other stone buildings, all surrounded by a stone wall. It had formerly been an insane asylum operated by an order of Catholic monks. The German army had taken it over to be used as a General Hospital for German wounded. Also inside the walls were several frame buildings within a barbed wire enclosure, and that is where I was placed. Once again the Germans separated officers and enlisted men, so I was placed in a building with about 20 American officers and one Russian first lieutenant - Schinkarenko Woldimar Iwanowisch (with English pronunciation the W's become V so we called him Valdimar.)

At the Montabaur Hospital there was an American doctor, Capt. David V. Habif, from New Jersey, who had been captured at the 101st Airborne Infantry field hospital at Bastogne. The Germans made him assist their doctors with the German wounded, but they allowed him to also treat the American wounded. He examined me right after I arrived and said I had been sent there because my arm probably needed to be amputated to keep the infection from spreading further. He said he had access to some sulfa drugs being used on German wounded, and he was going to use some on me. He applied the powder about every third day and changed the bandage at the same time. The bandages were still paper - not cloth - but changing them regularly rather than every week or 10 days made a huge difference. The swelling in my arm started going down and this relieved a lot of the pain. By the time I was liberated I was in much better shape, and I will be forever indebted to Capt. Habif. He didn't have a lot of time to visit, but we nevertheless became good friends and remained in touch for several years after the war.

Another great friendship I made was with Valdimar, the Russian lieutenant. He and I and George Reed (a young captain from Indiana with the Fourth Infantry Division, wounded and captured in the Hurtgen Forest during the Bulge) were the only ones in our building who could walk so we had to help feed the others, take them to the bathroom, etc. At first Valdimar and I communicated only by sign language, but later we got to where we could talk to each other pretty well in German. He spoke it well (I assume he did since he talked regularly to the guards), and he taught me enough to get by. He was a great guy! He had been wounded a couple of years before with shrapnel at Stalingrad and captured, but his wounds had healed except for deafness and drainage in one ear. He was very interested in hearing all about America, and particularly wanted to know all about Katy. He couldn't believe I was going to get married (if we ever got out) and hadn't even "tried her out". He said "How do you know you are going to like her?" I told him we just didn't operate that way in our country.

All in all, Montabaur was a great place compared to where I had been. Instead of 1/6th loaf of bread per day, we received 1/3rd loaf plus 1/3rd of a potato. My weight had dropped from about 150 to around 115 when I got to Montabaur, but it went back up to about 125 by the time I was liberated. Also, the weather was getting better, and we weren't so cold.

There was always a certain amount of information to be received in prison - mostly rumors but some fairly accurate. We heard the Americans had crossed the Rhine on a bridge at Remagen, which was not too far from Montabaur, and we were plenty excited.

One night we were informed that all who could walk were being moved out. I was sick! However, Capt. Habib prevailed upon the Germans that both Reed and I were too weak to march. They did march out Valdimar. (Sometime later at the hospital in England I ran into James Cooley, an enlisted man from my battalion in the 106th, who was also at Montabaur and marched out that night. He said there were about 40 prisoners with 2 German guards. Valdimar had a knife and killed both guards. The group hid in a field for 2 days until the American tanks came down the road. All of them except Valdimar remained, waiting to be sent back to American hospitals, but Valdimar climbed on one of the tanks with American Infantry to go kill Germans. I had his address in Russia and wrote him several times but never received a reply. I have no idea what might have happened to him, but he was all soldier - that's for sure!)

A couple of days later tanks from the American 9th Armored Division rolled up to the gates of the hospital. They had only a few infantrymen with them riding on the tanks and said the main force of the 2nd Infantry Division should arrive within 48 hours. In the meantime they were moving on and would leave us weapons to defend ourselves if any Germans came back. They told us the German hospital staff and guards had already surrendered, and they were leaving a few men to guard them and assist us if needed. An SS patrol did return to retake the hospital, but we killed several and the rest left. I got a ceremonial sword off one of the dead SS officers and brought it back to my Dad. It later disappeared from his house.

When the 2nd Division arrived there was an Associated Press photographer with them, and he took a picture of several of us who had been liberated. It did not run in either of the Dallas papers, but Katy's Aunt Mabel saw it in the San Francisco paper and thought she recognized me. She sent a copy of it to Dallas, and my Dad had his friend, Jim Moroney, a top executive of the Dallas Morning News, dig it out of their files and make a huge blowup. They still couldn't be sure it was me, but when my "well and safe" telegram arrived several days later, they felt confident it was and were elated that I appeared healthy. Up until this time they did not know whether I was dead or alive, and if alive, what shape I was in.

A very tragic aspect of the Associated Press picture relates to the number of people who contacted me and were convinced that the person in the picture was not me but their son or relative who had been reported killed. These letters continued for months after the war and are in the scrapbook. It's so sad, because they just wouldn't believe their son or loved one was dead. I finally took a picture of myself in uniform and in the exact same kneeling position to send to them.

After a couple of days I was sent with others by truck to an airfield near the Rhine. We then were flown in a C-47 (the military version of a DC3) to Paris. My seat on the plane had a bullet hole in it where they said a paratrooper had been killed with ground fire. The first thing they did at the Paris hospital was take all our clothes and burn them and put us in a hot steam room to kill the lice. At the hospital we were allowed to pick two canned sentences for a telegram to no more than two addressees. I sent "Am well and safe. Love you more than ever" to Miss Kathryn Buckley in Austin and another to Mr. and Mrs. D. H. Houseman in Dallas.

After about a week I was flown again in a C-47 to an Army hospital in England. There was a terrible fog where we were to land, and the pilot made several passes at the field, one time nearly hitting a hangar. I thought "My gosh am I going to be killed now after all I've been through", but he got us down. From the hospital there I wrote long letters home

telling about my experiences, and these are in the scrapbook. One morning a few days later they came by my bed to tell me my telegram to Mr. and Mrs. D. H. Houseman needed to be resent because Army Regulation number so and so provided that all cablegrams had to have the full first name, and I had used only initials I told them to just forget it since my letters had probably arrived by now. To her dying day my Mother believed I could only send one cablegram and sent it to Katy rather than to her.

A funny aside to Katy's cablegram - - At the time they still did not know whether I was alive or dead, only that I was "missing in action". She was living at the Pi Phi house and was called to the telephone. The operator said "this is Western Union and we have a cablegram from Lieutenant Donelson M. Houseman ". The operator never got to finish because Katy threw the phone in the air (breaking it for which she was later charged) and ran two blocks in her slip screaming to where my sister, Leila, was living. There they phoned my mother and dad, and when he asked what the cablegram said, they didn't even know. They had to drive down to the Western Union office to find out and call back.

From England I was sent on a hospital ship back to the States. The war was still going on (this was in late April 1945 and the war ended in Europe on May 8th, 1945), and the German submarines were still active, so we had a convoy of Naval ships to protect the troop ships. In fact, one destroyer escort was hit by a submarine missile, but it didn't sink, and the crew was saved. We arrived in New York harbor on April 28th, my 22nd birthday. What a birthday present - the sight of the Statue of Liberty. I remained in an Army hospital in New York for about a week and then was put on a train for Temple, Texas, and McCloskey General Hospital. When that train crossed the Red River there is no way to describe how happy I was to be back in Texas.

McCloskey had about 4000 patients, 98% of whom were amputees. I later learned from Dr. Dale Austin, who was the commanding officer of a wing of the hospital and later my good friend at Dallas Country Club, the reason I was sent to McCloskey was that my medical papers indicated my arm would probably need to be amputated at the elbow. I was blissfully unaware of this - and of course, it didn't happen. I still had a lot of infection including osteomyelitis, which is infection in the bone and bone marrow, my wrist was fused solid and all five fingers were completely stiff.

Right after arriving I applied for and was granted a two week leave to visit my parents and Katy. During this leave Katy and I decided to get married, and I asked for my parent's blessing. They agreed, but my Dad said he was somewhat disappointed because he wanted me to finish college, and then he wanted to help me go through Harvard Graduate School of Business. I assured him I agreed with the plan and would follow it even though married, but he said we would probably have children and never be able to do it. He was sure right because we had three within 3 years and didn't get to Harvard, although I did finish at Texas. We married June 9, 1945 - Katy was 20 (4 days later she became 21) and I had just turned 22. She dropped out of school and lost all credits for that semester, which would have ended in another 2 weeks. We have a copy of her letter asking her mother "Do you think Daddy will mind?"

We stayed at the Adolphus Hotel in Dallas our wedding night and then took a train to New Orleans to stay at the Roosevelt Hotel for a 3 day honeymoon. Katy had never had a mixed drink, and she wanted to try the specialty of the house everywhere we went that first evening in New Orleans. First the Roosevelt's famous Gin Fizz, then to the Court of Two Sisters for a Pink Lady, then Pat O'Brien's for a Hurricane. I tried to warn her, but she was having fun. Before our second course was served at Antoine's, she was "history".

And so went the second night of our marriage.

Another funny part of that trip was that I couldn't get to sleep in the soft bed - I guess because I was so used to sleeping on the hard floor. - so I slept on the floor and she in the bed. The last night she moved down to the floor with me, thinking it improper to spend our honeymoon sleeping separately. After a train ride back to Dallas, we drove to Temple in a 1937 Terraplane to start married life together. We couldn't find any place to live, because the war with Japan was still going and Camp Hood at Belton (only 30 miles away) had about 40,000 military plus families and McCloskey Hospital had perhaps 6,000 counting nurses, doctors, etc. A wife could stay at the Officers' Club for no more than 7 days, and I was afraid Katy was going to have to go back home to Dallas - but on the last day we rented a room in someone's basement. The only light was from an exposed light bulb in the ceiling plus a small shaft of light from a coal chute to the outside. The only furniture was a bed, a chair and a card table. We were allowed to use the owner's powder room upstairs, but it had no tub or shower. The basement had a shower head coming out the ceiling (but no shower curtain) plus a floor drain in the middle of the room. We also could keep a limited amount of food in their ice box and could use their stove when they weren't. Not exactly what a girl who had grown up in the Park Cities was accustomed to.

We lived in that basement for about two months until we luckily found a garage apartment in Rogers, Texas, about a 20 miles south of Temple. There were two other wounded officers and their wives who lived in rooms in the main house on the property. One of them had a car so we took turns driving back and forth to the hospital, thereby leaving a car with the wives. They were very pleasant people, which made it nice for Katy. One of them was an infantry lieutenant who had lost his arm and was pretty bitter about it. He told being in the front lines and receiving letters from his mother saying she was so glad he was in a "quiet sector", and she was so worried about his brother who was stationed in Brussels where the German's were sending buzz bombs. (For a month or so just before the Bulge the American advance slowed down, and the press reported that there was only isolated patrol activities. He was leading one of these nightly patrols behind enemy lines when he lost his arm.)

The war against Japan ended in August 1945 after we dropped the two atomic bombs. This undoubtedly saved thousands of American lives, because the Japanese culture was to fight until killed, and we would have had to take island by island and finally invaded Japan itself. It must have taken a lot of soul searching by President Truman to give the order to drop the bombs, but he did the right thing despite killing a lot of civilians. After all, the Japs gave absolutely no warning when they suddenly attacked Pearl Harbor killing over 2300 Americans, sinking 21 American naval vessels, and destroying 165 planes. I will always dislike and be suspicious of them - strange, because I was a prisoner of the Germans, for whom I have the greatest respect. Let me also point out that about 95% of the Americans captured by the Germans were returned after the war whereas less than 50% of those captured by the Japs survived.

One funny thing happened in Rogers. I had an operation on my arm and had to remain in bed in the hospital for about a week instead of commuting to Rogers. During that time my former University of Texas roommate and best friend, S. M. Leftwich, returned to Dallas from the Pacific, where he had been an Infantry Lieutenant. He was still in the Army but on leave recovering from wounds caused by hand grenade shrapnel. (He threw a grenade at a Jap machine gun emplacement, but in the excitement failed to count to three after pulling the pin. The Jap caught it and threw it back at him. S.M. had shrapnel working out of his body for at least 15 years.) He heard I was at McCloskey and

immediately drove to the hospital to see me. Katy was at the hospital visiting when S.M. arrived, and when we learned he was driving back to Dallas late that night because there were no hotel rooms, we both insisted he sleep in the kitchen of our apartment on an extra cot we had. The next morning they were eating breakfast with S. M. in uniform and Katy in her robe when the landlady came in to ask Katy how I was doing. I don't think she ever believed Katy's explanation that "this is Don's best friend."

The doctors couldn't do anything about my fused wrist, but the finger movement started coming back by use of daily whirlpool treatment plus massage and other physical therapy. In early October 1945 they performed an operation on my wrist to fuse it at a different angle, and it was going to take 90 days to heal. I applied for and received a 30 day leave (maximum allowed) and since I had nothing else to do, I decided to go back to Austin and try to get my degree. I lacked 18 hours, and although the semester had started 2 weeks earlier, I signed up for all 18 hours.

Once again we couldn't find a place to live because so many men were returning to school after being dismissed from the service. In desperation we finally rented by the day a one room cabin at Dan's Dollar Courts, a "hot pillow" operation right next to the Avalon Night Club. We kept looking for something better but never found anything. Every morning I went to the motel office and paid my \$1 while the manager begged me to leave so he could rent it 3 or 4 times per night - but we stayed there the whole time. Once again, it was a very bad deal for Katy. First, she had all four imbedded wisdom teeth pulled at once and had a terrible time. Then she became pregnant, was deathly ill the whole time, and couldn't eat a thing. In addition to that was the Dan's Dollar Court factor. There were 8 of these little cabins with about 6 feet between each one, and with no air-conditioning and windows open, you can imagine some of the things that were heard by her pristine ears. Also the music at the Avalon 20 feet away blared away until the wee hours. Every 30 days I had to drive back to McCloskey for 2 or 3 days to get another 30 day leave - leaving her stranded in that awful place with no car.

In late February 1946 I had taken two of my six final exams when I received a telegram telling me my leave had been cancelled and to return immediately to the hospital. After much mental debate I decided to ignore the orders, take my chances on being court-martialed, and to finish the other four finals.. Immediately upon finishing the last one some 6 days later, we got in the car which was already loaded with everything we owned and drove to Temple arriving about 10 PM. The place was pitch black dark and deserted except for a few sentries. McCloskey had been closed by the Army and all the patients, nurses and doctors assigned elsewhere. There was no way to find where I was being sent except at the Eighth Service Command Headquarters in Dallas. We kept on driving, arriving there about when it opened at 7AM, and found I was assigned to William Beaumont General Hospital in El Paso. Fortunately, they allowed everyone 10 days travel time to make the move and I didn't get in trouble. But I had to drop Katy at her parents house and keep on driving in order to make it. A long two days.

Our stay in Austin while I finished the University of Texas hadn't been all that much fun. But we made it, and I graduated with 6 A's for that final semester despite having to learn to write left handed. It's amazing what can be done in school if you follow the Army routine of up at dawn and work non-stop until 11 at night.

The reason I had to remain in the hospital so long after the war was over was that I still had bone infection and could only slightly move my fingers. After I got to El Paso it was about a week before they got around to X raying and otherwise examining me. During

that time I searched for a place for Katy and me to live but never found anything. When I finally got examined, the doctors said I needed some more time for the fusion to set and gave me another 30 day leave. I came back to Dallas, and when I returned to El Paso after the 30 days we decided it was best for Katy not to make that long trip, so she never joined me in El Paso. I lived on the base and continued therapy until being transferred in August 1946 to Brooke General Hospital, a permanent Army hospital in San Antonio. By that time Katy was 8 months pregnant so I didn't even try to find a place for us to live in San Antonio. Fortunately I was able to get home several weekends and also when our first child, Nancy, was born in September 1946. I finally got out of the hospital and the Army effective December 8, 1946.

In conclusion, it was an experience I wouldn't want to relive but one that I wouldn't take a million dollars for having been through. Each day that I see the sun rise I thank God that I am here to see it and that I am an American. . Each day I thank God that I am not hungry or cold or in pain, because I experienced that and know the difference. And most of all I thank God for letting me survive to have the most wonderful family anyone could possibly have. The kids laugh about the time I was saying the blessing at one of our traditional Thanksgiving dinners. I got all choked up and nearly cried. But let me tell you - to look out over that room and see a lovely devoted wife and five children with their five wonderful spouses and 13 grandchildren, all happy, healthy, and sharing love for each other - - - that's enough to make a grown man cry.



Page last revised
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