



World War II Journal
Hoyt Frank Kelley
1943 – 1945

God gave my son in trust to me,
Christ died for him and he should be
A man for Christ, He is his own,
And God's and man's - not mine alone
He was not mine to give, he gave
Himself that he might help to save,
All that Christians should revere -
All that enlightened men hold dear.
"What if he does not come" you say,
Ah well! My sky would be more gray,
But through the clouds the sun would shine
And vital memories be mine,
God's test of manhood is I know,
Not "Will he come, but Did he go?"

(Written by James Hughes, Superintendent of Public
Schools, in Toronto, a short time before his son
fell in battle on the French Front in World War I)

This poem was read by the Chaplain of our outfit
at a memorial service held in Southern France, I
have carried it with me ever since

– Hoyt Kelley, June 13, 2009

Induction



I was in the class of 1941 so just graduating from high school and not old enough to go in the army when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. I remember well the day that seventh of December as we were rehearsing for a pageant at the Stake Tabernacle in Logan, Utah. Someone came and told us that the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor, and I remember asking someone where Pearl Harbor was. I did not recognize the significance of that treacherous act at that time nor the effect it would have on my life and those in my family. The war had been

going on in Europe for some time, but there was a strong sentiment in the U.S. about not sending our boys into war again on foreign soil and some of the most prominent Americans, Charles Lindbergh, Major Bowes (Amateur Hour) and many others were members of the American First Committee, and opposed in some cases even to us sending supplies to the English, French and Russians, as they felt it would sooner or later bring us into the war. Their assumption was right of course, and although it may never be proven there is every possibility that President Roosevelt and many others knew of the Japanese attack, or at least we know they had been warned, and did nothing about it, knowing that attack would have such a strong effect on the American people as to make any one not willing to go to war a traitor. I remember my father telling me that the same feeling prevailed before the Spanish American War. That the people were violently opposed to the entry of the U.S. into that war, but through the



sinking of the battleship Maine in Havana Cuba (possibly done by Cubans to get us into the war) and through the newspaper stories of cruelty by the Spanish in Cuba and Philippines, within weeks the American public was turned completely around in their feelings and were ready to commit their all to the war. This of course happened in World War II.



My uncle Keith Barkle had entered the service in December of 1940 under a one year commitment that many felt would be wise to go in for a year and get their obligation over with. He was to be discharged from his one year service December tenth, three days after Pearl Harbor. Obviously it was about four and a half years by my reckoning until he was home, as he came back from the service after I did. It may have been close to five years. Keith was with the First Armored Division in Africa and Italy. We were in the same vicinity some times but I was not able to find him when I was in Italy.



Old Main (Utah State University)

It was in my second year of college that I entered the service. I had taken a physical examination to get into the Marines about six months earlier but was turned down because I had a high count of albumin, and at one time the doctors told me that I would probably have Bright's disease. Because of this high albumin count, which I had in high school, I was not allowed to play basketball, but did play football, and was on the wrestling team in college. I never had any symptoms of the disease, but did cut back on salt and eating eggs and a few things like that.

It was early in 1943 that I went to Salt Lake City for a physical examination, after being served with a draft notice. I remember we went down on the old electric Bamberger Railroad that wound around Cache Valley and crossed over into Bear River valley at Beaver Dam and then followed the west slope of the Wasatch Front into Salt Lake City. It was a long trip. I recall we all sat silently in our hard leather seats as the train clacked down the track, occasionally lurching from side to side. There had been no "Hero's Farewell", after all the war had been going on for a year and this was March 1943. The "heroes" were making history and selling war bonds, we were just the latest of those who had received "greetings from your fellow citizens" informing us that we were to report to Fort Douglas on this the first Monday in March. As the small train picked up additional boys at almost every little town along the line, we all sat in our own little group, not that we were total strangers, because this was the same train we had ridden to high school on for four years. It was more a feeling of final surrender in putting our future in the hands of God knows who, but at least someone other than ourselves and our parents.

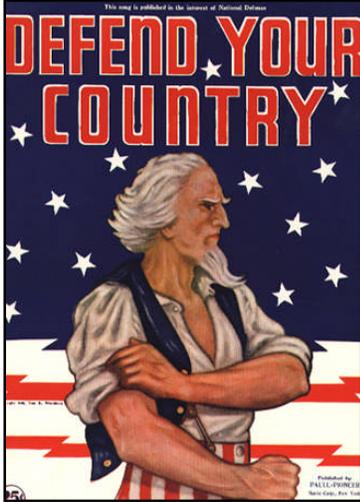


Electric Bamberger Car

Groups of fellows were talking quietly to each other, and it seemed strange compared to what I remembered from the typical shenanigans that went on during the school run. We knew that we had



a two hour ride ending up at Salt Lake City where we were sure the army would transport us to Fort Douglas. I felt numb. I guess it was the sudden change in being relieved from my Engineering studies at the College, and the knowledge that suddenly I didn't have to study, prepare for tomorrow's lesson, maybe never again to have to worry about finals. I had not gone into the army to become a hero. I had gone into the army so as not to be classified as a 4F or "draft dodger". There was no



sympathy for "draft dodgers", and little for the 4F's who were considered unfit for military service. They stayed at home and sometimes unjustly took a lot of flack from the people who had boys serving in the service. Of course there were real "draft dodgers", fellows who suddenly found it necessary to get farm deferments (who hadn't been on the farm for years), and others who sought work which would give them a deferred status. Others played the medical angle, claiming bad backs, eyes, hearing etc. I should mention that I could have been deferred on several basis; on health because of a high albumin test, by working for my father at the quarry because limestone (for its use in purifying sugar) was a deferred industry, or I could have joined the E-7 program at the college which gave Engineers deferred status. I would have had to be approved for the later, and it would have only offered deferment until education was completed. Some of

my friends who were students at the Utah State University went to Alaska under a deferred program for engineers, so there were plenty of options. I was also asked by Bishop Maughan about going on a mission for the church and that would have been a deferment until the mission was over. Regardless of the options, I felt I could not live with myself if I had chosen any of them. I remember there was a Fuhrman kid from our town who had a bar of soap under his arm pit. He had been down twice before but had been rejected each time because he had a fever from the soap. I'm not sure if it worked, but he said it did. There was also Romaine Jensen who got a bloody nose somehow and he was not accepted. He may have gone in later. By and large all the rest of us were looking forward to going in because we had brothers and friends in the service and, because "Draft Dodger" and "4-F" had become words that denoted a coward.

Going away to war wasn't supposed to be like this. I had seen pictures of the W.W.I, dough boys leaving with brass bands playing marching down the street with their parents and especially their girl friends kissing them goodbye, waving handkerchiefs at them. Here we were in the same old train we had gone to school in, picking up kids as usual. Well I didn't want a parade anyway. As I recall no one came to see us off. I think people were tired of seeing the boys off, if they ever actually did see them off, by the time we left.



Five army trucks were waiting at the siding as we walked into the Salt Lake Train station. We piled off the train and climbed into the back of the trucks which had rows of benches built into the bed. A couple of army guys, corporals, made sure we were packed in tight by adding a few more bodies than the truck could reasonably hold and then we started our caravan for Fort Douglas.

Our arrival at Fort Douglas was equally unceremonious. The trucks pulled up alongside a barracks, we unloaded and stood outside the truck until we were formed in the right number of men for each barracks and then marched by a Non-Com into the barracks where we would be housed until assigned to our respective camps. About two weeks prior to our trip to Fort Douglas, we had to report to the induction center in Salt Lake City for physical examinations.

A fraternity friend of mine from Phi Kappa Alpha, Chip Boyle, was in the same group as I was in. He wanted to get into the air corps and be a pilot but was color blind. I made a deal with him and it worked out as we planned I would go through early in the line and he and I would switch places about half way through. That way I would take his eye test for him and he would take the albumin test for me. He later said they kept him there for an hour punching his stomach and testing him to see



Former Army Barracks, Fort Douglas, Utah

why my previous test was positive and then suddenly negative. I don't know for sure if it was true, but in about ten days we were both ordered to report to Fort Douglas to begin our military careers. We both had been in ROTC at Utah State and therefore there was a good chance that we would be sent into the Coast Artillery because of our training there. Neither one of us wanted that. I waited for assignment at Fort Douglas for about ten days, during which time I was on garbage detail, detailed to the gunnery range, and did my share of other things. I found out that when they asked for College Students or those who could type, those that raised their hands expecting soft duty, were told "good, now we are going to teach you college boys how to pick up cigarettes butts." I soon learned not to volunteer for anything in the Army.

There were many other things to learn. Since I stayed there longer than most of the draftees I received an education in some of those other things. The dish in the Sergeants room where we were expected to leave a tip for the mailman, who came out of his way to pick up our bundles of civilian clothes which were mailed home, was actually for the Sergeant's whiskey money. While I was there, the Sergeant came in one evening with a guy who had red eyes and had been crying. He introduced him to us as a kid from California whose mother had just died, and didn't have any money to get home. The Sergeant suggested we all chip in enough money to get him home. I stayed there long



enough to see it happen with the same guy a second time, same story, same actors – only different recruits. It always paid off.

I decided to volunteer for the Army Paratroops, which was the only volunteer service in the Army. The Navy had a volunteer service for submarines, but you couldn't get into that if you were over 5'6" tall. The Marines also had paratroopers but they limited by weight to 140 lbs. (they jumped with smaller 28 foot chutes – Army Paratroopers used 35 foot chutes). The Marines never did jump in combat. Chip Boyle was still at Fort Douglas waiting for a call to the Air Corps when I left, he later volunteered for the Paratroops and was killed on a jump in Lae, New Guinea, with the 511 Parachute Infantry. I know I influenced him to go into the paratroops, and I always felt sorry about that as it likely cost him his life. His name is on the Monument in Logan City.



Sergeant Hoyt F. Kelley
1943 (Before Deployment)
Age 20





Boot Camp

Regiment boot camp training took place at Camp Taccoa, Georgia (later, it became a camp for German prisoners of war). The 101st Paratroops ("Band of Brothers") had trained there just before we got there. Camp Taccoa was between Taccoa Georgia and Cornelia Georgia in the northern part of Georgia next to South Carolina. A beautiful, heavily wooded area, it is covered with southern pine trees and quite a variety of other trees. The camp held two regiments at one time. It was a red clay area with the needed number of barracks, a Catholic Church, a Protestant Church, and little else.

The first day in Camp Taccoa was as were most of the following days, testing days, to see if we would stay or get kicked out. Many were reassigned. No fuss was ever made -- we just did not see the soldier one day and knew he was gone. The first day they lined us all up at the mock up tower. This tower was actually a box about four feet in width, height and length on top of a 40 foot pole. They had a cable angling down to the ground from the box. You had to climb the ladder, stand in the doorway (similar to a plane) and when they slapped you on the leg you jumped out coming down to the earth sliding down the cable. I was about tenth in line when a fellow went up the tower, was standing in the door and I guess someone accidentally touched him on the leg before they had the harness hooked up to his back. Anyway he jumped and fractured both legs. As he was lying moaning on the ground waiting for an ambulance to come, the Sergeant in charge, said to us. "Just stay in line. That only happens to about one in twenty of you guys".



There were a couple of the fellows who asked for transfers rather than take a chance on the "mock-up tower". The food was minimal, the hours were long and the punishment was usually push-ups. We had to be able to do 100 push-ups to stay in the outfit, along with passing time tests on various items in the obstacle courses.

I had only been there a few days when the fellows came in the barracks and told me



that the Catholic Father was out on the steps and wanted to see me. Officers often sent someone into the barracks, rather than coming in themselves and having the whole barracks snap to attention. I went out, telling the Father that I wasn't a Catholic, despite my name being Kelley. I had trouble with this previously as they automatically put "C" on my dog tags. Father Guinette told me he knew I was a Mormon and that he wanted to know if I had a book of Mormon with me as he had always wanted to read it. He was, I found out, a very learned man, having studied the priesthood in France. Because I had a "good mother," I had a Book of Mormon with me and I loaned it



to him. About five or six nights later he appeared on the same doorstep, and told me he had read the book and wanted to ask me a few questions. I agreed, and I remember the first one was do you believe in the Holy Trinity. Being as how my version was the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, I assured him I did. He then asked me if I believed in the Immaculate Conception, and again being as how my version of the Immaculate Conception was a child born to a virgin, I again assured him I did. He then said to me: "You don't know much about your religion do you?" This shook me up and I think for the first time in my life started me to thinking about things I had taken for granted. Father Guinette and I became good friends. He even forged passes for me to get off base, a few times. He



517th Mascot

He drank a lot, so it was not difficult. On one of our last jumps in the States, he got his chute caught on the tail of the plane and landed with the plane, unhurt. However, undeterred, he took the next plane up and jumped with it. He had a lot of courage. He did have some problems later, as he went AWOL while in France to visit some of his friends he had known there while in college, but I think he was only reprimanded and later rejoined our outfit. Being a chaplain for a paratroop outfit was not the choice of most men of the cloth so I don't think they had anyone else waiting for the job. Father Guinette told me that if he were not a Catholic he would be a Mormon or a Jew, as he felt they were the only ones who had a comparable claim to authority. He felt the Protestants were all condemned because they only protested against what they ought to believe in.

Camp Tacoc was a basic training camp. The training was rough and it seemed the purpose was to get rid of anyone who could not make it. We were a combat outfit. We were informed that there would be no applications accepted for O.C.S. (Officers Candidate School), as we were to go overseas as a fighting unit. We ran for six

Boot Camp



miles every morning starting at six, and had the usual training of marching and gunnery range in addition to specialized training for jumping out of planes. They had mock up towers to jump from, and we had to practice jumping from heights of 12 feet, landing and rolling. Much of the paratroop training was still in the experimental stage. I believe four other parachute regiments trained before us and probably five after. We were the first regiment to jump with the Army helmets which weighed six pounds. Previous jumpers had used the air corps crash helmets. They had also used folding stock carbines, and we jumped with the M1 Garand Rifle. The first regiments were taught to jump with their feet apart so the shock would go equally to their hips, we were taught to jump with our feet together, because of the high number of fractures they had. The average man in our outfit was six foot tall and weighed 160 pounds. I don't think any one of them varied beyond two inches or ten pounds from that average. We were, I believe, because of this the finest marching group that the army had. Of course one of the things we liked was our ten inch jump boots with our pants tucked in, and we wore the soft army hat, cocked to one side. We despised, and I do to this day the army hat with a brim. It was usually worn by the M.P.'s. It was never popular for us to wear medals and decorations, like the Marines did.



Toward the end of our basic training they selected about a dozen of us for Military Intelligence Training. I remember Captain Mitchell, who was an English Captain who had been brought over to teach our Military Intelligence School. He was really a nut, but smart. One day while we were taking a break he wired our seats up with blasting caps and pull wires. Of course, when we came back in, the whole room exploded, putting three of our fellows in the hospital with numerous holes in their legs. I fortunately escaped, but the Captain, fortunately, did not escape a reprimand by the commanding officer.



Mount Kurrahee

and my friend and I had girl friends who were from the Garrison family there. There were four Garrison girls, no boys. Frank Garrison had a large peach orchard property. I think he had about 40 trainloads of peaches going out each year, so was one of the more wealthy families there. Mrs.



Garrison taught at the Piedmont College and was a friend of the famous Soong sisters (one of which was Madam Chiang Kai Chek.). We went there for dinner and one week went up to Talulua Lake camping. They were wonderful people to me. They were devout Methodists, and didn't believe in dancing. They had about 15 white families and about the same number of Negroes who lived on their land in homes provided for them. They were paid about \$14.50 a month (white) and \$9.50 (black) but they had their homes and gardens and Mr. Garrison always got billed by the doctors for their doctor bills and medicine etc.

The Garrison's housemaid's name was Bessie. Not having been in the South before, I was not aware of their customs. Cornelia was a typical old Southern town, and had a black town adjacent to it where the Negroes were required to live.

They were not allowed in Cornelia after sundown. One night when I was there they called Mr. Garrison to come get Bessie who was sick and I went with him in his car out to the Negro town to get her and take her to the doctor. I had never seen a southern shanty town before and was quite nervous, but Mr. Garrison was at ease. He was a much respected man by both whites and blacks.

When I first went to the Garrisons I made the mistake of standing up when they introduced me to Bessie. From that time on, she always treated me special, but I think it became a problem for them. One time when I was there Virginia, my girl friend who was about 5'2" and maybe 100 lbs., told Bessie to do something and Bessie started to grumble and complain. Virginia smacked her across the face with a blow I didn't think she was capable of landing and from then on Bessie was as happy as could be. Almost like a little kid who pushes you as far as he can, until he gets a spanking, and then behaves himself.



Present day Cornelia, Georgia



We found there was not such a thing as "southern fried chicken" in the South, but they did have "Montana Steaks" in several places. Many of the boys in our regiment were from the South. The Paratroops was the only non-integrated service, and for those who would not consider serving in the same outfit with a Negro, they were safe in the Paratroops. There was a Negro Paratroop outfit that trained later in the war, but they were sent out west to fight forest fires, as most of them dropped out during jump school.



As Paratroopers we got the usual army pay of \$50.00 a month, an extra \$50.00 jump pay and as I recall, I got another \$46.00 for being a Staff Sergeant. The officers got \$100 for jump pay. They got about \$200 a month regular pay, but had to pay for their own uniforms and a few things we didn't. By in large, I believe, every officer in our regiment who was a Captain or higher came from West Point. They were mostly ex-cavalry officers. For many years the top cadets at West Point chose the Cavalry. I think it was because of the horses, the uniforms and the sabers. When they converted the Cavalry into armored divisions they were not interested in being "grease monkeys" and their only way of getting out was to volunteer for the Paratroops. We also had some officers who had had trouble on previous assignments and volunteered for the Paratroops rather than to loose their commissions.



From Camp Taccoa we went to Fort Benning, Ga. for jump school. Fort Benning was one of the larger military camps in the U.S. and is at Columbus, Georgia. While the camp was much larger and had better facilities for the troops stationed there it was a terrible training camp for Paratroopers. It was nothing but sand, and marching and running was tedious. Columbus was a city in turmoil, with the large military base adjoining it, a large Negro population, and Phenix City, Alabama right across the bridge which spanned the Chattahoochee River, separating the two cities. Phenix City was famous as one of the worst sin cities in the country.

The weather was hot and humid. The food was terrible. Usually it consisted of a boiled potato, salt pork and grits. They said it was field rations and that the purpose was to get us used to eating less food. It was a pleasure to get into town and get some other food when we could. Being a



stranger we soon learned that the main street of Columbus was for white folk and that the Negroes were allowed on the back streets. Most of the Negroes carried razors and many of our fellows were cut up there. Lots of the Negroes were in the Armored divisions and they felt that as they were soldiers they had the right to walk on any street they wanted, to ride in the front of the buses, sit in the downstairs of any theater, go into any restaurants, etc. There were many problems. Usually the Negroes were uneducated southern blacks, who had worked in the fields

for \$4 to \$6 a month. Suddenly they were rich with \$50 a month, allowing their families to quit working, spending money freely as they had never had before.



The bridge across the Chattahoochee River that separated Columbus and Phenix City, was the battleground between the Paratroops and the Armored Divisions. The Paratroops usually blocked it and wouldn't let the Armored or any other military into Phoenix City. Colonel Boyle, who was commander of our Battalion, had come into the Paratroops because as an Armored Division Colonel, he had borrowed a private's uniform so he could join a fight on the bridge. Given a choice of being decommissioned or getting out of the Armored Division, he volunteered for the Paratroops. At least that was the story told to us.

They had a 325 foot jump tower at the base, and part of our training was the same as at Taccoa, only with better equipment. We had to complete five regular jumps from planes to get our wings. The jump field was a large pasture area, bordering the Chattahoochee River. They usually jumped away from the river as there had been a few drownings there, but it was always in our mind. I



I think the first two jumps I made I was swinging in the wind and landed almost flat on my back, and I didn't think I would ever jump again. Since we jumped with helmets, they were probably the greatest hazard as they would come whistling down, if loosed from someone's head. The third jump, I landed very easy and never had a fear of jumping after that time, later making upwards to four jumps in one day. I attended Military Intelligence School at

Benning while the Regiment was being relocated at Camp McCall in North Carolina. They would take us out in a plane and drop us over Alabama, where we would have to find our location and set up road blocks etc. They would fly over with a small plane a short time later and bomb us with flour sacks. Usually we landed in peanut farms, where you would sink half way to your knees in the soft soil. The planes we used were C43s and C57s as I recall, the same plane was the DC-3 transport plane. The 57s were old even then and sometimes they would take a long time in gaining enough altitude to jump. Our jumps at Benning were made from 1300 feet, later in combat we jumped at 400 feet, which didn't give much time for an emergency chute, but left you in the air for a shorter time. In Southern France we didn't use emergency chutes at all (those of us who went in early in the morning) because we didn't think we would have time to use them, and with our weight of equipment we felt the risk warranted not using them.



We spent some time at Camp McCall, which was near Fort Bragg North Carolina. I have often said we spent the time at Camp Toccoa and Fort Benning training soldiers, and the time at Camp McCall training officers. I had two men who were in my S-2 (Military Intelligence Group), killed at McCall. One was impaled on top of a tree when he came down; the other accidentally hooked his rip cord through his chest harness and when he jumped it pulled the rip cord right through his chest. He had been an artist with Disney Studios in Hollywood and was our map man. He was a very talented man and a great loss. There were also some who died when an air corps pilot from Fort Bragg (who was drunk) dive bombed, dropping them on the camp dump, apparently mistaking the burning fires there for the signal fires that were set at the jump site. Amazingly most of the men lived although they were dumped out at about 150 to 200 feet, primarily because they landed in the swamp and there was about four feet of mud to cushion their fall. My brother Charles, who was a Lieutenant in the Navy Air Corps, visited me while I was at Camp McCall. We left Camp McCall for Tennessee maneuvers and spent a few weeks there, thoroughly wet most of the time, cold, misdirected by the officers, several of whom were reassigned at that time.

We did have some freedom to get to know the local people there, and that part of Tennessee will always have fond memories for me. We would go to the farm houses in the mornings when possible and ask the man who opened the door if we could buy breakfast. They would always say "I'll ask the old woman" and then come back and invite us in. They were really back hills people. We were about sixty miles from Nashville, but most of them didn't know where Nashville was, and many of them didn't know they lived in Tennessee. They were all farmers, who had small land, which appeared to me to be overworked land. They had corn and other crops and pigs. The breakfasts were



always great, consisting of eggs, smoked ham, biscuits with butter and honey. Four or five times we went to one place, which was typical, with pigs under the house, and sometimes when they would move the floors would bounce up and down. The man at the house liked me and on my last visit there he asked if I would go outside with him. We walked some distance from the house, when he stopped. He turned to me and with some difficulty asked, pointing up to the sky, "Do

them airy planes fly over them clouds or through them". We saw many people in Tennessee as well as in Georgia who only came out to town once a year to get provisions for their families. They lived not unlike the Hillbillies we have pictured in films and comic strips. I guess the maneuvers were a colossal flop for our officers, as we were constantly captured, an embarrassment, as I have mentioned, that led to a number of the officers being reassigned, including the Division Commander, General Miley.



Without any notice we received orders to get on trucks that would transport us to Newport News, Virginia for transport over-seas. We had much of our training, hacking our way through growth with machetes, and most of us thought that we would be going to the Pacific, but that was not to be the case. The Newport News Camp was a holding place until ships arrived for transport, and we stayed there about two weeks. During this time a Negro barracks was burned, and our outfit was blamed for it, so the camp commander would not grant any paratroopers passes off the base. As a result of this one night we decided to go into Norfolk on our own without passes. We went out through the back of the camp, climbed the fence and hitch hiked our way into Norfolk. We were

walking down the street, when one of the officers from our company came along and told us to join him at a party they were having. We just arrived at the party when the M.P.'s raided the party and we were all thrown in the brig by the M.P.'s. The head M.P. had just become a Captain that day and he was extremely obnoxious to us, as he hated paratroopers as trouble makers. Someone set one of the toilets on fire and that created some problems and they brought in extra guards. There were several sailors there who were queers, as we called them then. I had never seen one before, and they were



Downtown Norfolk Virginia 1943

all made up with lipstick etc. The captain came to the window and told us that our outfit was sailing overseas that night and that we would all be court marshaled for desertion. I had a few words with him, and told him I knew he was lying, that has always been a bad habit of mine, and he signaled me out for special treatment. Soon trucks arrived to take us back to camp. They loaded us up, about 25 in all, half officers, half enlisted men, in one truck and followed it with the other truck which had a machine mounted on it and a spot light shining on us through out the trip. When they got us back to camp they tried to find Colonel Boyle to court marshal us before the camp commander could, because you can only be court marshaled once for an offense. They found Colonel Boyle, who had just got back from town himself, very drunk, and put him in a cold shower to sober him up. He staggered out wet and dripping to where we were all lined up and said "break them, and take away their jump pay".

While this was a relief, I should mention that the only people you break are non-commissioned officers. So the officers and the privates lost their jump pay like the rest of us, but we Non-Com's also lost our Sergeant's pay as well.

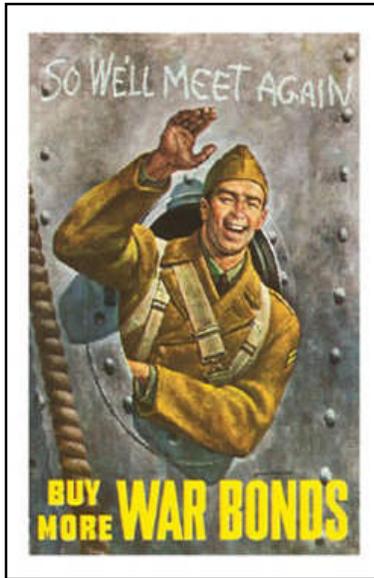
The next day we loaded on the ship for overseas. The Sergeant Major of the outfit said that the camp commander had gone to the Pentagon to override Colonel Boyle's court marshal, and served Colonel Boyle papers as we were getting on the ship, which he claimed to have accidentally dropped in the water off the gang plank. This may or may not be true, as things that seemed so were seldom true in the army.





**517 Airbourne
1st Battalion
Headquarters Company
Camp Toccoa, Georgia**

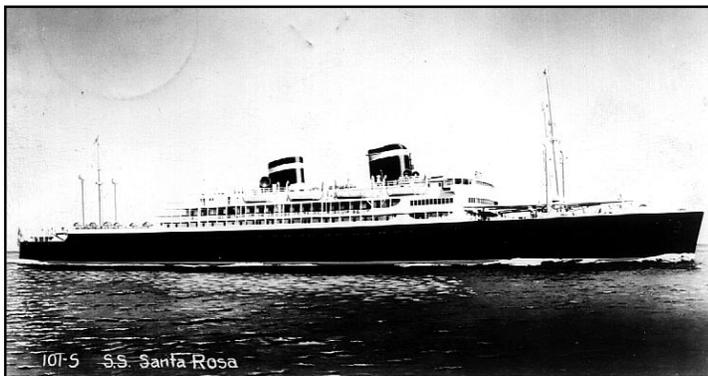




The Voyage Over

With training and boot camp completed, we departed the harbor at Newport News, bound for Naples, Italy. I had a strange feeling that this was not only going to be my first trip aboard an ocean going vessel, but that the ship I was boarding was not the usual one used for Army transport. The ship was the S.S. Santa Rosa, and had been one of the Grace Luxury Liners that toured South America. Of course it had been stripped down for war time use. Our quarters were

in what was formerly the cargo hold of the ship, and the bunks were stacked six high, with barely enough room between them to turn over. However, in my case I had a rather hefty fellow above me who actually prevented me from even turning over. So if I wanted to turnover once in bed, I had to slide out of my bunk (which was the second one from the floor) and then slide back into the bed on my stomach or my back, spending the night in that position until I needed to move again.



The 517th Airborne Combat Team sailed from Newport News on May the 17th of 1943. It was always easy to remember because we were the 517 sailing on 5/17. In addition to the 2,300 paratroopers there were 200 WAAC's (Women's Army Auxiliary Corps). Our ship was one of fourteen in the convoy, which included three transport ships loaded with various units of the army, and the rest of the ships,

which were freighters and destroyers or other navy support craft. All banded together for mutual protection from the German U Boats (submarines). Our route covered a lot of the Atlantic Ocean as we zigzagged across taking fourteen days to make a journey that should have lasted about seven days. The ships were spread out over quite an area and we only saw the other ships about twice, so we felt very much alone out in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

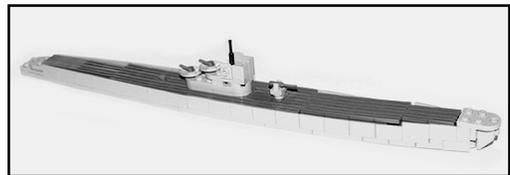


As punishment for my escapade of the previous night, and the court-martial I received; I was given the command of the garbage detail on the ship. However, I was told not to tell anyone I was no longer a Staff Sergeant, and given a crew of five (most of whom had been with me in Newport News the previous night). Because of the danger from German U-Boats all garbage had to be dumped after 10:30 at night,



as the garbage left a trail in the ocean that could be followed by enemy ships. Our duty was to dump the garbage which was in large containers much like our present garbage cans, from the back of the ship, and then hose down the deck. As various troopers got into trouble on the voyage (mostly at night with the WAAC's) they were added to my crew. By mid-voyage I had too many men to handle. All-in-all, this was not a bad duty. Getting out in the fresh air, compared to trying to sleep in the hold

of the ship with several hundred men, many of whom were seasick, definitely had its attractions. No one else was allowed on deck at night other than my garbage crew. Of course no lights, matches or cigarettes could be lit, so we learned to rather efficiently dump the garbage and hose the deck in darkness, sometimes aided by a little moonlight. Because of the limited services on the ship and the large number of passengers aboard, breakfast ran from 6:00am until Noon, and Dinner was from 3:00pm until 9:00pm. Only two meals were served per day, but as the garbage detail, we had the run of the kitchen between 9:00pm and 6:00am, so we did quite well on food throughout the voyage.



German U-Boat

I should mention that the story of that voyage would make an interesting although probably unbelievable movie, It might have been the original Love Boat.. The enlisted men as I mentioned were housed in the hold of the ship both forward and aft. Most of the officers and the WAAC's had quarters in the cabins that had before the war been used by the passengers of the Luxury Liner. Not all of the WAAC's were young and beautiful; some of them in fact had sons in the service. All of them were going to Casa Blanca, Sicily and Naples for hospital or secretarial work. However human nature being what it is, it was not a rare occasion when we hosed down the deck that we would hear some



cussing and some screaming from WAAC's and Soldiers who had violated the "no one on deck at night" rule to do some fraternizing. I'm not sure what the punishment was for the WAAC's but the offending soldier was put under my command on the Garbage detail, until I had more than I could handle and they had to look for other forms of punishment.

All of the fellows on the command referred to me as Sarge or Sergeant. I had been a Sergeant for some time and although I was then a private after the



court martial, they either didn't know, or didn't care. There were life boats all around the deck and quite a bit of canvas rigging around, so there were a few places to hide. Being a land lubber who had only seen the Pacific Ocean once and the Atlantic never, I can still feel the results of my first shower on that ship, which was equipped with salt water showers. I soaped up good, especially my hair which was luckily rather short and then expected the water to wash the soap out. I don't have the words to describe trying to wash the soap off.

The ship was too crowded to have much going on. There were a few fellows and WAAC's who had guitars and during the day, if the weather was nice enough, they were allowed on deck to get some sun and fresh air. I think many of the WAAC's who had never had a man look at them before, suddenly



The Rock of Gibraltar

found themselves quite popular, given that the ratio of men to women was about 12 to 1.

The first land we saw was Gibraltar and we passed quite close to it as it was controlled by the British. The next day we came into port at Casa Blanca in Morocco, and about half of the WAAC's debarked there. I don't think there was any fighting going on at that

time in Africa, but it was being used as a base for air corps support for the army in Italy and there were several rest camps there for injured and mentally disturbed soldiers.



Naples Harbor, Italy (1944)





Sicily we moved up the coast past Salerno, where there had been recent fighting and into Naples Harbor.

Lots of ships were in the harbor as it was the major port of supply for Italy. They had many small dirigibles or miniature unmanned air ships, all trailing tails of aluminum foil as a way to discourage or confuse enemy planes while trying to bomb or strafe the harbor. The first night we were there, German planes did attack and the sky lit up with the light of the many flares and explosions.



Italy



We entered Naples harbor after several hours of sitting in the bay. Eventually our escort destroyers pulled out ahead of us and our transport reduced to half speed as we entered the harbor, which only recently had belonged to the German-Italian Axis. The harbor was a sight of great



destruction, as the hulls of ships were sticking out of the water, the docks were a shambles and the residential district within a mile of the docks gave mute testimony to the



hell that had once hit Naples. They had many dirigibles in the air which had aluminum foil trailing to foil the radar and I suppose discourage German low level bombers. Most of the bombing, the Italians would say, was by the American

planes with only a small part the sinking of ships and damaged docks by the Germans. For the next couple of nights the German planes did come and there were some dog fights with the protecting American planes. We saw one German plane hit and spiral down into the harbor.

The WAAC's were the first to leave the ship and their line moved very slowly, as the wharf was full of photographers and reporters looking for their headline story of "WAAC's Landing in Italy." The WAAC's disembarked and were taken by trucks to their new quarters. For us it was a four mile hike through Naples to a staging area which was a college in Bagnoli, a suburb of Naples. The people of Naples lined the streets and



seemed happy to see us. Some of the G.I.'s bought "glazes" from them which was juice flavored ice. Almost of them ended up in the hospital with dysentery because of the bacteria that was in the water.

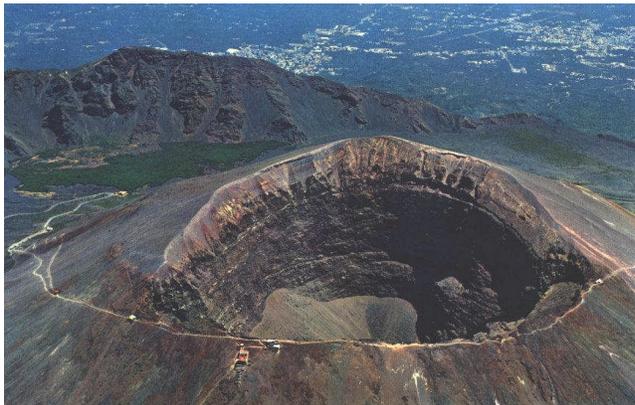
This college which was named after Mussolini's son was newly built but had been used by the German troops and was artistically camouflaged. The buildings were crudely built, and rough even by Italian standards, being bare with few conveniences. It was here in the little town of Bagnoli that we saw what filth was really like. The town had been heavily bombed and there was white chalk-like dust every where.

All G.I.'s in this part of Italy were known as "Joe" and the Italian street kids had learned all the dirty language from G.I.'s who had preceded us and probably thought it was funny. It was always "Hey Joe, you want eat, drink, signorina etc. All the kids knew the Western Theater heroes like Hop-along Cassidy, Tom Mix etc. After a day at the college we picked up our gear and went for a five mile hike inland to a new bivouac area. This was a camp in an extinct volcanic crater, and was the best camp area we had in Italy. The crater had been used by King

**King Victor
Emmanuel III**

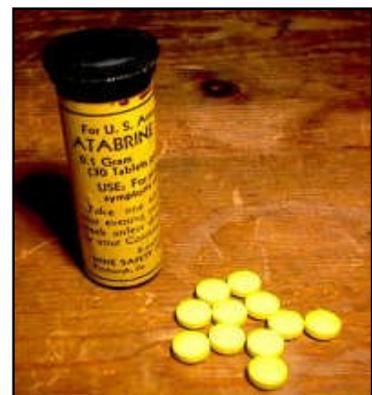


Victor Emanuel as a hunting ground in better days; and was equipped with a convenient water source, a lot of trees, and a gravel foundation that drained well when it rained. We had a series of two men pup tents in strict military formations along each path. Each man had two blankets which was plenty in the mild Italian climate.



When we had the requisite ambition, we could climb the thousand or so feet to the top of the crater and get a beautiful view of the ocean and Bagnoli below. We could usually see the Islands of Capri and Sorrento, while on the left was Vesuvius, a gigantic volcano with the little curl of smoke endlessly

spiraling upwards. Vesuvius was putting on a show for us as it is not always active, unlike Etna on Sicily. There were farms up to the rim of the crater and the Italians there sold wine for 100 lira, which quickly went to 150 and 200 lira as the demand rose – the economic rule of "supply and demand" This was to be the case all throughout Italy.



In many cases the Germans as they retreated had thrown dead bodies of humans and animals in the wells, and with the general disruption of normal water service caused by the war we never got immune to the bug. We bought wine for about \$3 a bottle and



carried that with us. It was raw wine more like grape juice, I always suspected they tromped it out the same morning we bought it, but it didn't poison us. We did have Atabrine to mix with the water in our canteens and that worked quite well, if we could get to a source of clean water. I don't think the Germans would ever throw dead German soldiers in the wells, but many of the soldiers wearing German uniforms were Polish, Yugoslavian and from other Balkan countries, and of course there were many civilians and animals killed. The water systems in use in the 1940's were probably comparable to those used by the U. S. in the twenties so they were not adequate to start with. The time in the crater was used to acquaint us with German weapons, and to be able to tell how they sound compared to our guns. The Germans had almost the same rifle as our sharpshooters carried,



German "Burp" Gun

but they also had "burp-pistol" (the MP40) which was a faster firing automatic than our Thomson Submachine Gun, but also less accurate. Their machine guns were about twice as fast as ours. This training paid off later in battle when we were able to distinguish the German weapons from our own. It also taught us not to use the German weapons, even if they were often superior to ours, as we would risk inviting the return fire of our own men.

The portion of Italy south of Rome was at that time pretty much out of the war. The Germans were fighting a delaying action, mostly with Polish, Czechoslovakian, and Yugoslavian soldiers. These soldiers were very reluctant warriors. If they retreated the Germans would kill them and they usually opted, if given a chance, to surrender to us. Where there were large groups of Germans, the situation was very different. Areas like Anzio where 10,000 Americans are buried and Monte Casino were terrible fields of battle that rival any of the war. Alexander, a British General, was in charge of the war in Italy, with the American Army (General Mark Clark) on the west side and a Free-Polish army on the east.

Being my first time to visit a foreign country, I was impressed by the casas or estates that many of the more wealthy people had. All were surrounded by walls, and most of the walls had either barbed wire or glass imbedded in the top of the wall to discourage intruders. Of course all of the store fronts in every city had steel bars that they pulled down at night to protect the stores and most windows were barred in the homes and apartments. There was great poverty in Italy at that time. The U.S. was sending in bread rations for the people, but since it was distributed by the Catholic church like all other welfare, schooling etc, is in Italy, it did not necessarily get to all the people. I suppose, though, it was the best distribution system they could come up with as the Church was the dominant cultural, religious, educational and social center in every town in Italy.



No matter where we set up chow lines, we would be surrounded by Italians, usually children, begging for food. It was very difficult for me to eat with hungry people around, and I believe I nearly starved giving my food away at first. When we would let them in to take the unused coffee they would try to dump all our sugar in it, or throw any other food in it so they could take that also. They did pick up all the used coffee grounds, and I am sure they were used several times before they were discarded.



After about ten days at Naples we were put on a boat and taken to Civitavecchia. Our original destination had been Anzio, but the war was moving rather fast at that time. Anzio was one of the great killing fields of World War II (now the site of the largest



Veterans Cemetery in Italy with over 10,000 buried). General Mark Clark, made the fateful mistake of commanding that his men dig in on the beach, rather than take the high ground – that delay and ill-advised defense allowed the Germans to regroup and occupy the higher ground, pinning our soldiers down below.

We proceeded to Civitavecchia where we landed shortly after noon. Were it possible, one could write a fascinating book about Civitavecchia, the destruction of Italy's newest port and what had been

the pride of the Fascist regime. Strangely, we noticed the total absence of civilians. We later realized that the cities in this sector of Italy were the fascist cities, and that their people went with the Germans and many didn't return until the end of the war. Many went north to Milano and Turin and other cities. I doubt if any building in Civitavecchia had escaped the bombing. There was no electricity or water supply.



517th Paratroops with 442nd Nisei from Hawaii

We moved eight miles north of Civitavecchia and somewhat inland where we spent the first night in a wheat field. Major Boyle had ordered everyone to dig a fox hole, but eventually the Major, like all of us, found the bales of straw more comfortable than a hole in the ground. Considering the weather in Italy, our outfit wore fatigue uniforms



instead of the woolen uniforms worn by many soldiers including the Germans. After another day we received orders to move to Orbetello and join the 36th Division on the line where they had been fighting for two days, not because of the town, but because of a certain big hill behind the town where the Germans had an observation post that commanded the country within ten miles. From that time on we were ordered by the 36th to take hill after hill as the war arena moved up Italy. We were inland a few miles, while the 442nd, particularly the 100 Battalion of Nisei (Japanese Hawaiians) were attached to the 100th Division who used them as their leading force along the coast. I think history will show that the 442nd and the 517th were used to excess by the divisions to which they were attached.

We were sent in to take a series of hills between the ocean and the central area of Italy. The front was moving north rather fast at that time, and I don't think anyone was sure where the enemy was. Our first real encounter with the enemy was taking small hills that led to higher hills. There was a valley over the first hill and the enemy was down in the valley trying to escape over the next range of hills. Those hills, I would guess, were about 1,500 to 2,000 feet in elevation and about ten miles inland from the ocean. We could see people down in the valley and there was a lot of gun fire on both sides. We had 81 mm mortars and 60 mm mortars as our heaviest weapons, and our 75 mm howitzers back somewhere down the hill with the artillery battalion that was part of our combat team. There were quite a few trees down in the valley and some orchards had been planted on the opposite slopes.



Some people were running up the slopes hiding behind the trees as they went. I think they were probably unarmed peasants, rather than soldiers.

Two of the German soldiers were taken captive and they were locked in the basement of the rock house that was our command post at the top of the hill. I remember hearing an explosion and finding out that some of our soldiers had dropped grenades through the open windows of the basement. We heard the cries of the two German soldiers, dying in great agony from the grenade fragments that had riddled their bodies.

At the time, this seemed shameful to me and not appropriate behavior for American Soldiers. I was to later look upon this incident as a minor example of the cruelty that war brings out in otherwise decent people.

Several of our men were killed in this skirmish, I think all by small arms fire. They were put in mattress bags and loaded on a flat bed truck and taken back down the hill, without ceremony. Eventually after about four hours the firing ceased, and all was quiet down in the valley. I remember a German coming up the hill waving a white flag but someone shot him in the forehead. They said he had emptied his gun at us before raising the white flag, so they killed him. I don't know if this was the case, but it was likely true.



It was perhaps the end of May or early June, at dusk, that we finally walked through the valley which had been the site of that first engagement.

The little dry river that ran through the valley was littered with dead, many of them women and children, some of the women were without most of their clothes. I didn't understand that as we were the first ones down there, and I didn't think Americans would undress dead women. Later I found out that in combat the medics check to see if a person is "gut shot" and if they are they leave them to die while they attend to other wounded. There were also a lot of soldiers dead, some small artillery and a couple of anti personnel tanks destroyed. As we walked down the road which was strewn with war wreckage, I saw a German Officer in full uniform laying beside the road, and thought it was my brother Charles. To this day I can see him and how he looked. I suppose this is the emotional effect that can come upon a young man who prior to the war, shuddered at having to take care of a chore like killing a chicken for Sunday's dinner.



We walked up through that "Valley of Death" to an area on top of the next hill which was still somewhat sheltered more in the saddle of some hills. We camped there in the clean air, built some fires to cook on and that was the end of the first day. As I look back upon it, I guess it was beneficial for someone like me. It certainly removed any romantic ideas I had of the war, or the invulnerability of anyone to the effects of war. There were of course some of the men who cried, some became quite hysterical, but regardless of my feelings I was in a leadership position and had people depending on me. Two of my close friends were killed that day and many others would be killed during the Italian campaign, but no other day ever affected me so much as that first day. It may have been a

"Combat could only be experienced, not played at. Training was critical to getting the men into physical condition, to obey orders, to use their weapons, to work effectively with hand signals and radios, and more. It could not teach men how to lie helpless under a shower of shrapnel, in a field crisscrossed by machine-gun fire. They just had to do it, and in doing it they joined a unique group of men who have experienced what the rest of us cannot imagine."

-- Stephen Ambrose, Citizen Soldiers

combination of the "murder" of the prisoners, or the ghostly twilight that mingled with the smoke of burning vehicles and corpses in the valley we walked through that evening.

The next day we were ordered to take the next hill, and this time my patrol was caught in the middle of a valley, just ten of us who were running a patrol trying to discover where the enemy was hidden. I assumed the artillery was from the Germans, but as I was later to find out, you could not always be sure. But for two hours we were pinned down in a little grove of trees that gave us almost no cover, but exposed us to the additional danger from tree bursts. In an Army cartoon a private explains to his sergeant, "I'm as low as I can get, only my buttons are holding me up." This was certainly our case. Every shell that came in would seem to raise me off the ground a couple of feet and I would crash down on the ground again losing my breath. I thought it would never end and was certain that we would not survive. I assumed it was just a matter of time until they zeroed in on us. Amazingly, we all got back safely.

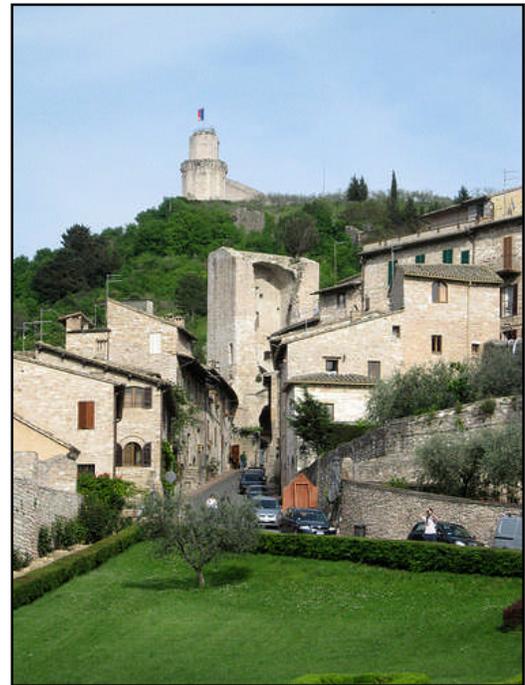


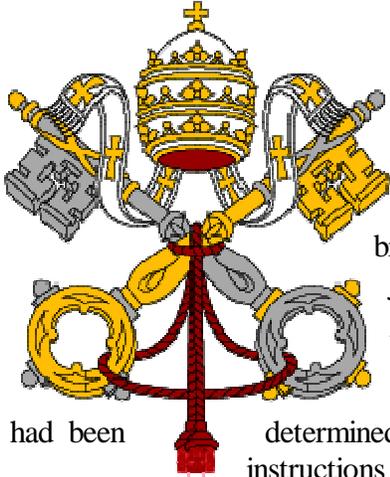


Not all the deaths in war are from enemy fire, although they usually are reported that way to the folks back home. I lost one of my best friends when a shrapnel grenade strapped to the fellow he was sleeping next to exploded and blew most of his head away. Apparently, the soldier who was also killed had rolled over in the night and dislodged the pin from his grenade. Four men were lost when they were trying to load 81mm shells in a mortar too fast and one came out hitting another shell being loaded. Guns were discharged by accident – some not by accident into feet or legs to get out of combat. An old Italian man told me once: "When the German planes come over the Americans duck, when the English Planes come over the Germans duck, but when the American planes come over everyone ducks." That was certainly the case. We often made the mistake of requesting bombing or strafing from the Army Air Force, only to be strafed ourselves. We learned to

depend on our own artillery more and in the case of Southern France, on ships off-shore who gave us artillery support that was more dependable and very effective.

The Italian campaign for the men of the 517th included taking town after town, hill after hill, always followed by a major division. According to Army General Mark Clark, the paratroops were expendable – we got paid twice as much as other soldiers so he felt we should earn it, besides we caused too much trouble when we got back to some town for leave. We walked through a lot of Italy and climbed a lot of hills and mountains. Roughly, we covered the area from Orbetello to Grosseto in the Tuscan region, crossing the River Omorone to Livorno or Leg Horn, which was just short of Pisa. But my memories are of the many, many small towns, mostly hill cities, fortified, and some that were only reachable by donkey cart, entrances too narrow for a jeep. I don't think many of these people were involved with the war. They were much friendlier than the people in the larger cities. The only clean places in these towns were often the Priests' quarters. We sought these out when we could. My friend, the Sergeant Major, once introduced me as a Captain, and the Priest in one of those towns gave us a room reserved for visiting clergy. However, that approach didn't always work to our advantage. One time I took over a Priest's room and threw the straw mattress on the floor where a couple of G.I.'s slept on it. I slept on the bare bed springs but awoke the next morning with flea bites over my entire body. Of course the two guys sleeping on the mattress didn't have a bite.





Rome

I can say now, without question it was my good fortune to be brought back from the front lines to Frascati, Italy to prepare for the jump into Southern France. At that time it was rumored we might jump into Yugoslavia, but I think we always knew it would be France. I came back along with another non-com and three officers who were to get the camp set up. I presume that the area we were to camp in had been determined earlier or by some higher command. We first stopped in Rome for instructions from the command there and the officers, thinking that the rest of the

outfit would not follow us for two or three days, picked up some women in Rome and left myself and the other non-com at the site to get it set up for the combat team when they arrived. Later that evening, our whole combat team came in and the officers were at the Villa above the property (which was to be our command post) with their girl friends. I thought that Colonel Boyle, our Combat Team Commander would court martial all of them, and believe he would have if he could have spared them. We had the area set out for each battalion to camp in, but there had been nothing done to determine the source of water or set up a cooking area for the men. Latrines (in this case split trenches) had to be dug and in use before we had real health problems. I found this lack of responsibility on the part of the officers pretty consistent throughout my service.



While all our officers above the rank of Captain had been West Pointers who volunteered for the Paratroops, to get out of the Armored Corps (which was where all the Cavalry Troops ended up), when they decided horses were not of use in military warfare, the other officers were what we called "ninety day wonders," who had come into the service as enlisted men and been sent to Officer Candidate School for three months before being commissioned. The I.Q. requirement for OCS was 110, while for the Paratroops it was 120. I believe that you can train an army in six months to be an effective fighting force (especially if they feel they have something to fight for), but that it takes about two years to train officers to command.



We encamped in Frascati which is near the site of the ancient Roman city of Tusculum, about ten miles above Rome, where the Alban hills start to rise into mountains, a beautiful area, near Lake Albano (a crater lake fed by underground springs). There were other lakes in the area, and I believe the system in many places was anciently used to supply water to the huge aqueducts of Rome. These aqueducts were along the road from Frascati to Rome, and I recall we passed under them at times. They are really remarkable works of engineering. I do not know if any of them were in use at that time, as the ones I saw were damaged by time and not complete. I do not think it was war damage, although Frascati was bombed at least twice in the war, in 1943 and again in 1944 at the time of the Anzio invasion.



Frascati had several Monasteries where Monks, of several orders lived. Of course it is mostly renowned as the Summer Palace of the Pope “Castel Gandolfo” at Lake Albano, and for its beautiful church San Pietro Apostolo. We spent some time with the Monks as they were highly educated and usually spoke English, Greek as well as Italian. We swam many times in the clear deep water of Lake Albano. Of course the greatest adventure was to go to Rome. We could see the



Pantheon, Coliseum, Victor Emanuel monument across from the balcony where Benito Mussolini addressed the people, the Spanish Steps, the Catacombs, and I went in for three audiences with Pope Pious XII. At that time the Americans had just occupied Rome, which had been declared an “open city” and therefore suffered no damage from the war. There were restaurants operating where we could get a good meal, there was a U.S.O. and facilities for staying the night. We attended movies (usually theaters where the roof slid back after the show started so you were outside), and Rome has the proper

climate for such things. There were other shows of acrobats, operas etc as well. It was a wonderful city.

Being Paratroops, we were without the vehicles the regular army and other services would have, so we would usually try to hot wire a jeep (one time an English command car, which was a near disaster), to drive home. I remember the English command car was in front of an officers club, and we had everything going including the horn and lights but never figured where the starter wires were. After creating enough ruckus to alert the British we raced through Rome to save our skins. The British didn't have much of a sense of humor when it came to our stealing their vehicles. We



resented the fact that all other army units seemed to be loaded with equipment but when we needed a truck to haul a few fellows somewhere we had to borrow it from some remote motor pool, if we got it at all. As a result we often hitchhiked and the other services were good at picking us up and giving us a lift into town. Late at night it was much more difficult to get a ride and the vehicles on the road were not as willing to stop for us. At least the other services knew where to find their vehicles when they were lost, and we never got in much trouble by borrowing them, except one time when my friend who had been in an armored division temporarily decided to borrow a half-track from the First Armored Division, and give us a ride home. Even then we scattered before we got caught, but there was a lot of complaints, investigation, and threats of court martial, which happily never uncovered the culprits.

The Italians had a bread ration of one loaf a day per person. It was usually the round type that they carried around their arm like a large doughnut. Although the ration was provided by the Americans it was dispensed by the Catholic Church. People would soak the bread in wine and feed it to the babies. I never did see a fat Italian woman in Italy, and having never seen one who wasn't in the U.S.A. this was a surprise. But I guess they didn't have enough to eat, they either rode bicycles or walked everywhere, so that probably kept them in shape. We rarely saw a dog, cat or any wild life. I guess their priority for food was low. As it was throughout the service, the medium of exchange was American cigarettes. Since I didn't



With friend Doug Bertling in Rome

smoke, I traded mine for what I wanted in the cities. They were usually worth about \$20.00 a carton in American money whether it was for Lira or Francs.

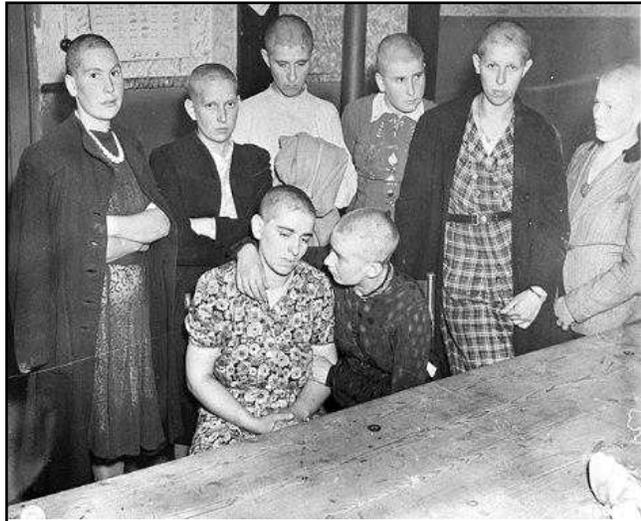
The Italians and French always had a market for clothing, food, candy, silk stockings and especially cigarettes and toward the end of the war the French would buy Jeeps for \$1,000 (in Francs) if you would drive them out to a place in the country. An officer in our outfit got caught selling a Jeep just before we left France. I don't know what they did to him, but he returned about a year later, with great stories of being a hero, and serving in the occupational army in Germany. This was a Captain Bill Young, who I had to tolerate working with for the war up until he was shot in our jump in Southern France. He was much disliked by the soldiers, and had ordered one of our best men to climb an electric pole and cut the wires. He was Danny Fisher and was killed by the electricity. Anyway shortly after that, Young got shot through his helmet (from the rear we believed). Later he was a Military Police in Nice, France, but never returned to the troops. He did put himself in for a silver star and nominated five of us who were with him for bronze stars. I refused to attend the ceremony, so I don't know how many awards were made.



Primarily the Italian cities were made up of women, old men and children. I guess most of the men of military age were prisoners of war or somewhere else. In Italy there were a lot of women, lonesome, beautiful women, and there was no discrimination against Americans who probably were looked upon as big spenders. After a number of years of war, without the men home I think they were willing to settle for anything available, especially if it came with a little chocolate, silk stockings or food. Some of the women and men of Rome were blonde and seemed to be a different race than those we had seen in Naples and other more rural areas of Italy. Some were very cosmopolitan, well dressed and proud people despite being a conquered nation in the war. They seemed to have no discrimination against the blacks either. Many of the black soldiers, I was told, told the Italian women that they were actually white but had taken special shots for "night fighting". Some claimed to be American Indians, but I did find very little discrimination against the blacks in Italy or France. Of course there were no black Paratroopers as I have previously mentioned, so I do not speak from first hand information in this.

The morals of the people on the street surprised me. I thought of Italy as being a Catholic nation, and I did not expect to see children selling their sisters' favors, or fathers selling their daughters' virtue, as was done on the streets of every larger town in Italy. All the Americans were referred to as "Joe" by the Italians. The children had learned all the bad language, from the Americans and they all had something to sell. "Hey Joe, you want to buy some scarves, or hey Joe you want my "seesta". But, as I have mentioned these were not normal times.

I remember the towns in Italy and France, where we would be the first troops to enter, and the people would welcome us as conquering heroes, with bells in their churches ringing and line the roadways with wine for us. They would take girls who had been the mistresses of the Germans and shave their



Italian Women Collaborators

heads and strip them naked and run them through the streets. It always seemed to me that if the Germans were to force us back out of the towns the bells would ring for them and they would also be welcomed in like manner, and this did happen in Italy, but to my knowledge not in France. Both countries disturbed me to this extent.

If ten people were beating up on one person, there would be another 100 come to help the ten. I don't know where we got our idea of helping the underdog in America but it was contrary to the reactions I saw in the Latin countries of Europe, and it gave me an insecure feeling. Crowds would gather at street corners, with all there shouting at the top of their voice, and seemingly no one listening. I wish I could have understood what they were so excited about. My three audiences with Pope Pius XII, were both impressive and unimpressive. The first time I went alone, the other times with soldiers



who were interested or Catholics. The Papal Guard, consisted of Swiss soldiers who were dressed in medieval costumes with spears. Of course the Swiss maintained their neutrality as did Spain, Portugal, Ireland and Sweden. At six feet two, I don't think I came to the shoulder height of any of the Swiss Guards. The Pope was carried out on a platform that held the throne where he sat. He was a little

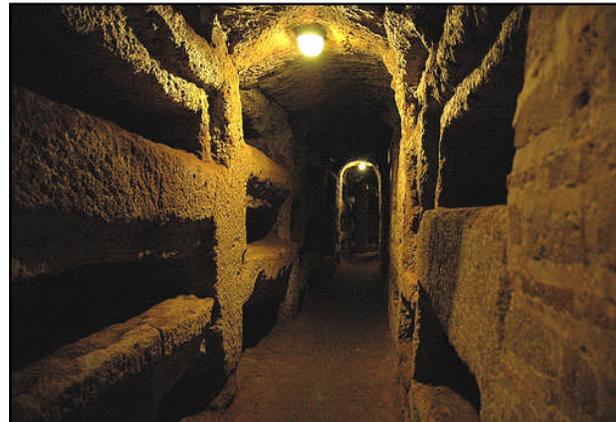


Pope Pius XII

wizened Italian man, probably not over 5'3" who addressed the audience first in Italian, then Polish, French and English. Out of an audience of about two hundred I think there was about three of us who were not kneeling. I have never been known as a conformist. He gave the congregation a general blessing and they held up rosaries and other trinkets for him to bless. Outside of the Vatican were rows of stands where you could buy trinkets that had been blessed by the Pope or you could take them in with you to be blessed. Some of the soldiers who went with me took items to be blessed to send home to relatives. At that time we were quite free to wander around the Vatican City, much more so than when I visited it some thirty years later. We could walk in the Sistine Chapel and Saint Peter's and spend as much time there as we wished. There were no tour guides or guards to push you around. We went out the Appian Way to visit the catacombs where the ancient Christians lived and were buried. You had to

buy candles from the Catholic Monks there, even if you brought a flashlight. You could wander for hours through the labyrinth of tunnels where the early Christians spent much of their life. They were buried in the clay walls of the tunnels and many of the graves had been opened and their bones were there to see. The catacombs were extensive some at four different levels. There are about forty of them around Rome, where the early Christians and one where the Jews lived.

I believe I could spend several years in Rome, without ever getting bored, there is so much to see and do. But, the army time was special because of the freedom we had. We went into the Coliseum, we walked down through the tunnels where the animals and Christians were kept, we were allowed to do almost anything and go anywhere we wanted. There were no guards or guides. The catacombs and other religious areas we visited were controlled by the Catholic Church so we always had to purchase candles. Other than



that there was little supervision. When I re-visited these areas thirty years later, areas that we had seen were fenced off, and very little of the actual Coliseum, for example was available to the visitors.



The time we spent in Frascati was more of a rest period than a training time. We were a well trained group, and just released from combat. One of our Battalion Doctors was a Dr. Sullivan, who had been a gynecologist prior to the war. I don't know how that news got out, but he kept quite busy delivering babies for the Italians near our camp. One evening after dinner, he told me to get a mattress-cover and go with him in his jeep. He told me that the mattress cover was the cleanest thing that the Italians had and that he suspected the reason they called for him was to get a free one. We went a few blocks and stopped where a guy waved us over. His wife was having a baby and delivered a healthy loud girl. The conditions in their home were primitive and I wondered how the baby would survive, without adequate food, clothing or a sanitary place to live.

I probably worked harder than most of the men as I was in charge of Military Intelligence and Training Operations for the Battalion, and we were the ones who planned much of the jump in Southern France. We knew about the jump a few weeks before the actual date, while most of the men didn't know about it until we were in the plane headed for France. Unfortunately as we were to later find out the Germans knew about it long before then. In fact, a few days before the jump in Southern



Axis Sally

France "Axis Sally" who was the German propaganda star, "welcomed the men of the 517th Parachute Infantry to France and said they already had our graves dug. She also reminded us that while we were risking our lives in Europe fighting a no-win war the Jews were at home making love to our girlfriends and wives. With the exception of one Jew named Berg who was in our battalion, the only Jews I met in the army were always in the medical corps or the supply corps. I still do not think it is their nature to do physical labor, train, or risk their lives. I know there were exceptions, but with what we know now about the treatment of the Jews by the Germans, it would seem that they would have been more active. Of course until the war was virtually over and our troops started rolling across Europe we had no idea what was going on in the concentration camps. I think that few people, including the Jews did, and while it has been greatly publicized we should remember that the Jews were about 60% of the people killed and imprisoned

in the concentration camps. We probably do not hear enough about the others who were political, and religious inmates. I believe we assumed that all the concentration camps were work camps. No attempt should ever be made to classify our prisoner of war camps with the concentration camps of the Nazi's. They were wholly evil. Enough about the Jews, because of their great intellect, their domination of the arts, movies, music etc., they have certainly told their own story.



I have all my life remembered the scenes and music of Rome, the sidewalk cafes, the special musical quality of the people. Children would walk down the street singing at the top of their lungs operatic arias. Also, a strange mystery as to why what is probably the most beautiful country in the world raises grapes instead of vegetables to feed its people. I admired the open friendliness of the people who can turn their charm in a minute (especially if they are selling you something). But, at their center, the Italians were a loud voiced, sympathetic and caring people who really never wanted a war with anyone. Mussolini was regarded by them as a great leader who had done much to develop schools, build community baths, and in general bring more cleanliness and education to Italy than it had known in years. I presume that the nature of the Italians made them poor soldiers (unless you compare them with the Ethiopians, against whom they had their only victory of the war). They were a great contrast to the Germans.

I was also amazed as to why the Catholic Church did not take any leadership in meeting their post war problems. I could only assume that the domination of the Catholic Church, which was their only source for education as well as religion, had left them with little personal



The waiting game.

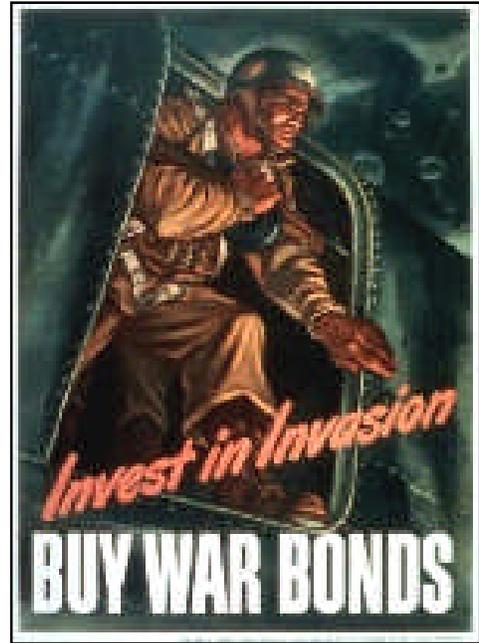
enterprise, and thus easy prey to a dictator, and later to communism, which both depended upon a largely docile, uneducated paisano. I do not think that the Rome of that day had much crime, other than that you had to watch what ever you had because they would steal it from you. But, in a city of old men, women and children, the only real conflicts I am aware of were between the American soldiers. The British were there of course, but the years of war had left them without any fighting men other than their colonial troops from Africa, Canada and Australia. The French soldiers in Italy were even more so, in name only. There was a Polish army that fought up the Adriatic side of Italy, and the rest was American.

The plan for the invasion of Southern France was code-named Underlord. It involved a fleet of Navy Ships making a bombing raid on the beach area of Tulon, France the day before the actual landing, in the hope that the Germans would divert some of their army down there to stop the invasion. Our Combat Team was to jump in the area of Trois Pont (where the road from Tulon joins the road from Niece and Cannes and then goes north into the middle of France). The purpose of our jump was to hold this area from Les Arc's to Le Muy, where the three roads joined, stopping any troops from coming in from Tulon or reinforcements being brought in from the main area of France. General Jake Dever was in charge of the Seventh Army which was our group going into France. We were to jump in early morning of the day the infantry troops hit "Red Beach" an area near Cannes, south of Niece.



On the morning of the 15th of August we loaded into planes at the Ciampino airport about nine miles south east of Rome for the jump into Southern France. The planes had been instructed to fly over the Point of Antibes, then three minutes due-west and turn on the light, which was our jump signal. Our planes were all C-3 Transport planes, which were to become an important plane in civil air travel for years in the U. S. It was only intended that we would get a chance for one pass at the drop zone, so there was just twelve of us to a plane. We were to jump at 300 - 340 feet. A height determined to give the enemy little time to shoot us in the air, and barely enough time for the chutes to open. Since there was no time for an emergency chute we discarded them, and we did not carry gas masks.

I jumped with two pounds of TNT, a pound strapped to each ankle. Tetrol caps for igniting the TNT in my groin where there was the least chance of pressure igniting them. If we could not hold the area we were to demolish bridges, railroads and communications. I also had two bandoleers of rifle ammunition, my M-1 (Garand Rifle) my switch-blade knife in a zippered pocket for cutting the shroud lines in case I landed in a tree or high tension line, and a pack on my back which contained D rations (which were a bitter chocolate bar), which I could exist on for three days until we had some food. Included was a small waterproof bag that contained silk maps of the area a tube of morphine and some bandage & tape. I still have the maps but I don't remember at this time anything else we carried. We were required to leave all identification behind other than our dog tags, which merely gave our last name, service number, blood type and religion.





Operation Dragoon Southern France

We boarded the transport planes at an airport near Civitavecchia, North of Rome. We numbered about two thousand paratroopers all members of the 517th Parachute Infantry Team, which included infantry, a company of engineers and a battalion of artillery, the 509 battalion (an independent battalion which had seen action in Sicily), and an anti-tank battalion of the 442 (Japanese) Regiment coming in by glider the next day.



Our mission was to secure the area around Le Muy where the road from Tulon joined the road from Red Beach the landing area near Cannes and Nice on the French Riviera. I went in ahead of the other troops with the Military Intelligence Unit, to mark the drop zone where we hoped to land the rest of the troops. Fortunately the plane we were riding in dropped us some six miles

from our drop zone. We had to hike all night to get to the original landing site (losing half of our men on the way). One of the reasons our casualties should have been much higher (as it was, we



only suffered 20% casualties) was that the Germans had completely mined the intended drop zone, which was a large bare field where we had originally intended to land. Had any of our men actually landed in that field, they would have never survived.

The pilots of the transports that took us in were pretty poorly trained. Our plane was

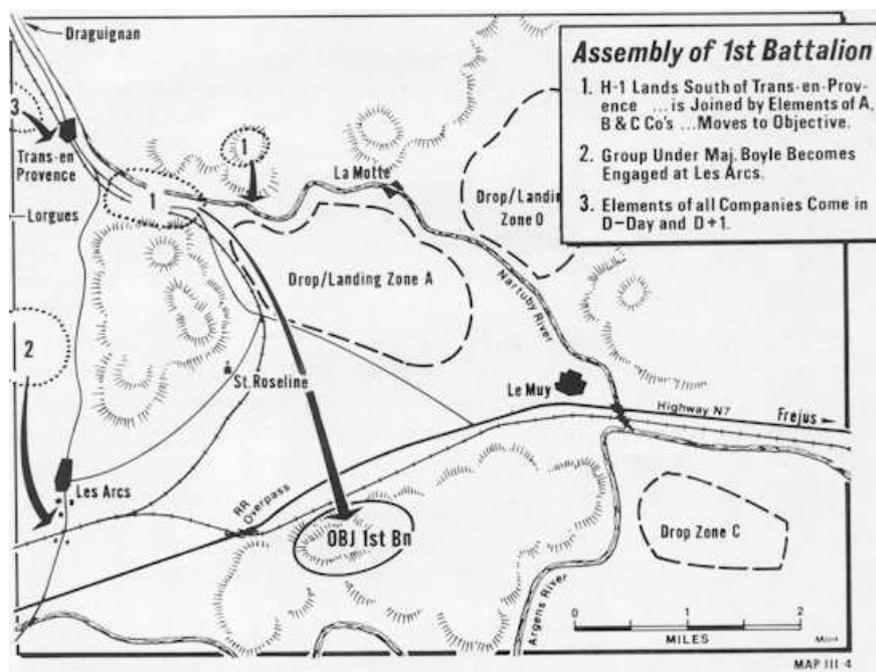


to cross the Point of Antibes and fly directly west for three minutes before giving us the green light to jump. I do not know what the Pilot thought was the Point of Antibes but obviously he was a long way off. Another plane which carried a howitzer from the artillery battalion dropped their complete load of men and howitzer out in the Mediterranean and they were never located again. I think that the pilots became frightened and confused when the Germans started throwing up some "ack ack" as we called it (Anti aircraft artillery) and just dropped us, spreading us all over the French countryside. I hit a stone fence in landing and cracked a hip bone. However, many of our men landed in the river, high tension wires and other hazards. One of the troubles was there was a low fog about twenty feet thick covering the ground, and many men thinking they were landing in water, prematurely slipped out of their harness high above the ground. This increased the casualties.

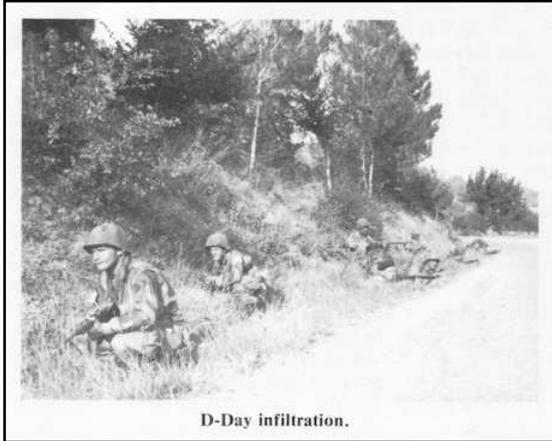


At first when I landed it seemed very quiet after the noise of the plane. We had taken off our reserve chutes and gas masks so we could carry more ammunition and in my case, a back pack with a few D Rations (which were hard unsweetened chocolate bars). We knew we would have to live off the land until some supplies could be flown into us, but for the present, bullets were more important than food.

I came upon the little town of Le Muy early in the morning, and as I got closer and the fog lifted it seemed almost a fairy tale place, with a farmer clanging his milk cans and the usual noise of early morning in a small farm community. I had two other members of my squad with me and the first sound that startled us was two Germans coming up the road on motorcycles. Our mission was to hold everything at Le Muy, not letting any German troops get back into France and stopping any reinforcements coming in to repel our troops



that would land that morning at Red Beach, having made a fake attempt to draw the Germans down to the Tulon area in the south. We shot and killed the Germans from the hill, and then moved into the town as more of our men joined us. When we got into the town we found two of our



Paratroopers in the church, shot dead with their hands tied behind them. The old French caretaker said the Germans did it, telling us that the Germans called us "Butchers with Big Pockets". I am sure this was reference to the jump suits we wore that had lots of pockets for all the things we carried and the pocket near our throat where we kept our switch blades in case we landed in a tree or somewhere where it was necessary for us to cut the lines from our parachutes. Of course being as how we were behind the German lines they realized that we could not take prisoners, so there was never any love between the Germans and the paratroops. We knew

if we were captured we would be killed, and I do not know of any of our men who survived capture, although I know of several who were captured. I mention these things to de-glamorize war. It is not like it is in the movies. There are no heroes, there are only survivors, dead soldiers and in some cases, the surviving dead - but no heroes.

It was easy to hide up in the hills if one wanted too, so many of the officers who were to take over often did not show up until the area was secured. By about noon there were thirty-five to forty paratroopers in Les Arcs, and so I and a member of B company, named Jim, left to go across the valley to the hills where most of our regiment was supposed to be, and try to establish contact with them. We needed to make sure the road, rail road track and telephone wires were not still intact. As we left the town and walked down through the vineyards and small farm plots, we were about two miles from the town when we



spotted about one hundred and fifty soldiers walking up the rail road tracks. Jim started to wave at them. They stopped and immediately started firing at us. It was then that we realized they were German troops and not our boys. I heard Jim moan as they shot him and I dived into the vineyard which had small plants and furrows about a foot deep. The Germans flanked part of their men into the field and started firing down the rows while the other continued firing from the rail road tracks. I could hear the bullets hitting me but I didn't feel any pain. I remember it was August 15th and my mother's birthday was August 16th, and that was all I thought about. I thought how terrible that she would never be able to celebrate her birthday again without remembering that I had been killed the day before. I remember praying that they would find my body that day so that they would not send



word to my mother that I had been killed on her birthday. I did a lot of praying in those days, but it probably came so natural I don't remember much else. I was laying on my gun, and would not have fired it even if I could as that would only have brought their fire directly down upon me. I could hear Jim gurgling like he was trying to breath with his throat full of blood.

All of a sudden the firing ceased and after a few minutes I looked up and saw the Germans marching very quickly down the railroad. I think something must have startled them, but on the other hand they had no reason to think they had not killed us as we were both standing straight up when they started firing. I waited until they were about a half mile down the road and crawled over to Jim. It looked like he had been shot in the mouth with the bullet coming out the back of his neck. I did not try to go back to the city because that was the way the German's were going. I ran for the mountains, trying to keep low along the hedge rows, and down some small rivers that drained the valley. One particular area was lined with dead soldiers from my outfit, but I did not recognize them as they were from another battalion. I just remember they all seemed shot through the head, bees were going in and out the holes in their heads. I think they probably were killed by the Germans after they were taken prisoners, or the Germans were extremely good shots. I do not know. I think there were seven of them.



**A Company of marching German Soldiers
(Looking like Americans with their helmets off)**

I had probably been running for miles and hours when I reached the mountains on the other side of the valley. There I found most of my regiment. They had set up road blocks and effectively stopped German reinforcements from getting to Red Beach from Tulon. The group at Les Arcs, after having engaged the Germans company who shot at Jim and I, successfully held that area, stopping any reinforcements from coming in from the Lyons France area.

When I got to the other side of the valley, one of the troopers asked me if I planned to fire my gun. I didn't know why until I looked at it. There was a hole where a bullet had completely gone through the barrel and another bullet had gone through the stock of the gun. I also had four holes in my back pack, which was only holding on by one strap as the other had been shot away. I did not have a single nick from a bullet although as I have previously said I was laying on my gun in the vineyard during the shooting. The Captain asked me if he could have the gun as a souvenir and I gave it to him happily, finding another gun to use. I presume if I had tried to fire the gun it would have exploded. I was so scared (I guess that is the only word for it) and so completely exhausted that I had never thought of checking the gun, assuming I would use it anytime it was necessary.



I remember one of the men on the hill, a felon who had been released from prison when he volunteered for the Army (he had kidnapped a child who smothered accidentally when they had him tied up) was performing a laryngectomy on one of the troopers who was shot through the throat. He cut a hole in the man's windpipe and after cutting the top of his fountain pen, inserted it in the man's throat saving his life. It was a couple of days later before they were able to set up a field hospital, but the man survived and there was a newspaper article written about the incident. [There was also a newspaper article written, about myself and my gun that day, and published in a newspaper in Waco, Texas. I used to have a copy which was sent to me by Doug Bertling's parents, but it has gone the way of the few souvenirs I had. The article said that my gun and pack was shot up while I was descending in a parachute, which wasn't true of course. But few things that are reported in war are ever true.]



Two days after our jump a plane came in low and dropped two supply chutes. We risked our lives to go out into the open field to recover them, and when we got them back to the hill, we found that they contained just two things, copies of the "Stars and Stripes" newspaper from Rome, and cartons of cigarettes. To rub salt into our wounds, the front page article honored the brave pilots who flew us into France, quoting one Captain who said "It was just a milk run, we flew over and dropped the paratroops and came back." We all wanted to apply for a few days pass in Rome to look up that Captain.

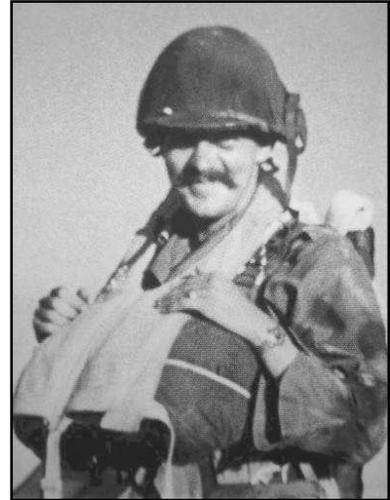
From that point on I believe we walked over most of the French Riviera, through well known cities such as Grasse, Cannes and Nice, and through hundreds of others, finally ending up for a few

Soldiers in the Great War didn't know what a foxhole was. For all the terror of their daily existence, they at least had the comfort of being with comrades, seeing men around them, sensing their own power. World War II soldiers didn't know what trenches were. In their foxholes they had one, at most two companions. . . . Compounding the isolation was the unnatural situation of living below the surface of the earth plus the misery of digging a hole just big enough for you coffin at the end of an exhausting day.
 -- Stephen Ambrose, *Night on the Line*

weeks on the mountains above Sospel at Piera Cava (a ski resort), and generally along the Maginot line which ran through Sospel. We set an army record of being on the front line for over 100 days without relief. To the right of us were the S.O.S. troops which were English and Canadian. But, we had no troops to relieve us. Our artillery support came from ships off of Nice, and they were very accurate against targets around Menton and Sospel. We had high casualties in this area, because of a determined German force.



Many of the shells that came in exploded in the trees, creating what we called “tree bursts,” which had the effect of large grenades (resulting in missiles that injured and killed those below). We soon learned to live in fox holes and not slit trenches. The constant time under fire was very hard on our men and several cracked up mentally. One man, whose brother was killed in the Pacific, killed a whole truck load of German prisoners we were taking to Nice, by shooting them with his automatic Tommy Gun. One of my men, who lost a brother in the armored division, turned up missing from our outfit, and I went out to find him. I found him boiling the head of a German in his helmet over a fire. He cleaned all the flesh off the skull and carried it in his duffel bag until three months later we shipped him back to the States during the Battle of the Bulge. Another man in our outfit, while at Pierra Cava, went crazy and ran down the road shooting his rifle at everyone. He was killed by one of our men. I always thought they could have shot him in the legs, but they didn't. I was not there, although he was assigned to me and we lived in a home which had a large library, and he was one of the men who went on patrols with me. He was a good guy.



Col. William Boyle

At that time and throughout the remainder of the war, I was the S-2 sergeant. Our Headquarters battalion was made up of a commander Col. William Boyle,¹ Major Brobie (S-1 Adjutant (or Asst. Commander) (S-1) Captain Bill Young (S-3 - operations and training), and the S-4 who was in charge of supplies, kitchen etc. The S-2 (military intelligence) did not call for an officer, so I held that position, and doubled as the S-3 Sergeant for training purposes when we were not in combat.² It was my job to run the patrols, and we would send out day and night patrols. I usually

¹ Bill Boyle was commander of the 1st Battalion, a west pointer and the finest leader in the army. He was a leader in all ways and was at the forward Observation Points with me many times. We played chess together, and he was good. I carried the board and he somehow found the chess-men. Unfortunately the S-3 officer was Bill Young who was the worst officer in the outfit. Bill Boyle did get a Silver Star and a Distinguished Service Cross for actions in Belgium, and injuries took him out of the rest of the war.

² As in most paratroop outfits, the 1st battalion was made up of a Headquarters Company of three platoons. Communications, Machine Gun and Mortars, and three rifle companies A, B, and C. The 2nd Battalion had a similar HQ makeup with rifle company's D, E, and F. (as in F company in Band of Brothers) and the 3rd Battalion a similar makeup with companies rifle G, H, and I.. It all started with HQ. Company 1st battalion, and I trained with the 81 M. Morter Platoon, but was picked for Military Intelligence training just before we left for Ft. Bennion and Jump School. They picked the eight who had the highest I.Q. s in the Regiment (we may have been the only ones sober on the day of the test). Most of these fellows became the S-2 & S-3 non-coms in the battalions and companies. Dave Hinds (Dorisse Thomassen's fiancé) was the S-3 Sergeant in Company D of the 2nd Battalion. These three battalions made up the Paratroop Infantry part of the Combat Team, which included a company of Engineers (who most of the time set mine fields, or cleared them) and a Battalion of Artillery (75mm Howitzers). They were all troopers who jumped in combat. The 82nd Airborne was made up of three regiments of paratroopers and two regiments of glider troops. The 101st was made up of two paratroop regiments and three glider regiments. There was two other Combat teams I know of. One which went into Sicily early in the war, and another in the Pacific that jumped in Lae, New Guinea.



had five to seven men in my squad, and we took different rifle squads from the companies with us on most of our patrol duties. In Pierra Cava the Germans had mined all the roads and trails heavily, so we would be out for hours some nights, crawling miles down hills feeling for any trip wires across the trails as we went, and then trying to get back before it was light and the Germans could spot us. It was important that we knew where they were, and what reinforcements, ammunition etc. was getting to them. We also looked for movement of civilians because we tried not to kill more of them than necessary. Sometimes we would spot what appeared to be complete schools, or churches walking down a road, and this often signaled a movement of the troops or reinforcement for a battle. We also looked for ammunition dumps, and fuel dumps, which were usually hidden in groves of trees, or in small canyons, caves etc. I remember such dump above Sospel that we found one night as we could hear trucks moving into a large area covered by trees. We directed the fire from our 4.2 mortars on the area the next day and I thought the whole world was going up in flames. I think we destroyed the German's major fuel and ammunition storage area, and it probably hastened our taking of Sospel, because they left it about ten days later.



As the Germans had in other areas of the Maginot line, they had reversed the French guns from the east to the west and they had trained some really heavy artillery against us. Most of it was mounted on rail road track and it would appear for a few rounds, and then go back into the mountains. Without the heavy guns from the Navy we never would have been able to penetrate their defense with the small guns we had. Our largest guns were 75 mm howitzers, which lobbed shells at targets, without too much accuracy. They were effective as were the 4.2 mortars against personnel, but relatively ineffective against armor. We did get our men into Nice occasionally, usually for passes of one or two days. Since we were there from August until December, the weather in the mountains was cold, but at Nice just an hour away' they were swimming in the Mediterranean. Nice was a very pretty town with people that were quite friendly, probably because it was once part of Italy, and there was still much of that influence there. Also, Nice was a great vacation area, so the people had an affection for tourists.





A few words about the French Freedom Fighters, or the FFE as they preferred to call themselves – my involvement with them was pretty limited. They were young kids would drive their old trucks up to the front lines and bum gas from us, and as soon as we gave them any they would head back to Nice, with a machine gun on the top of their truck and have a parade. No doubt, some of them were certainly involved in some heavy fighting. We did once turn over a hill we controlled to the FFE, as their "Captain" assured us that his men would hold it while we went over to the other side of the valley. The next morning I sent three men in a jeep to check on the hill and they were ambushed by Germans.

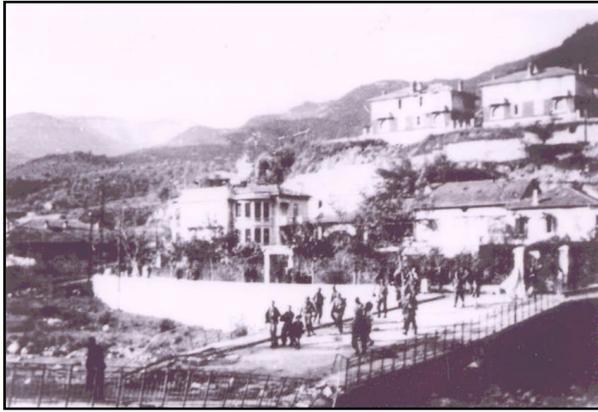
I went with one man from my squad and four men from Company B to try to get the men out. They were about four miles up a steep road that wound around the wooded hills. We thought that the Germans would probably not fire on us if they knew we were merely trying to get out our wounded men. We crawled up the side of the road, keeping in the cover of the small trees and bushes, until we reached the spot where the jeep was. There was an old French truck there, that appeared to be operable, and the Jeep was shot to pieces. Two of the men were still alive. The other three were dead. They said they had no warning, and had just driven up there thinking that the French were still holding the hill. We dragged the one man we could reach off to the side of the road, and although he was shot in the leg and stomach, we were able to get him down around the turn of the road and out of sight of the Germans. His name was Steele and he was from Reno, Nevada (he later recovered and took a battlefield commission when it was offered to him. In the Bulge he lost a leg and ended up in Bushnell Hospital in Utah where my Mother was a nurse and looked after him).



We could not see the Germans but we heard them talking. We finally decided to load the other man in the back of the truck and try to get him out that way, hoping that the Germans would not fire on us if we did not have our guns with us. Two of us carried him to the truck which was already pointed down hill, we loaded him into the truck, he was seriously wounded, and I don't think he knew what was going on. I hollered for one of the men to get in the truck and I removed a rock from the wheel and tried to push it. It slowly moved, very slowly, down the hill, but just as we got to the corner, and within moments of safety around the bend the Germans opened up spraying the truck with machine gun fire. We stopped around the corner, but the fellow was dead with several wounds. I don't remember his name, I recall he was from Michigan, I believe. Having loaded Steele in the truck along with the dead paratrooper, we rolled down the hill about two miles to where we had left the jeep. The truck never started, I think we tried to start it to get out of there, but it just coasted.



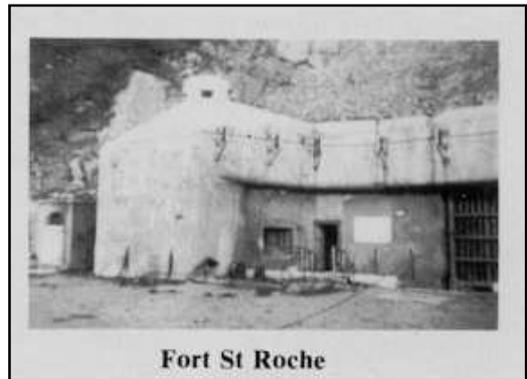
There were many areas in the mountains above Nice that I think had escaped the war quite well. Roads, bridges and major military targets had been to a great extent destroyed, but there was generally nothing back in the hills to bother anyone. Some of the little hill towns we went through, I



suspect, had never even seen a German, and they were interested and friendly toward us. I recall once we found a place that sold us some chicken eggs, which was the only time I remember seeing them in Europe. There was always plenty of wine, but little good food. There were few restaurants like we enjoyed in Italy. The French were not friendly like the Italians, and I suppose everything was available for a price. There was open prostitution of course in France then, and if it were not for the number of American Soldiers in the Riviera area I do not think it would have

felt like a war was going on only a few miles into the hills. The hills I refer to are the Maritime Alps. They are extremely steep, and the army that controls the heights can wreak a terrible toll on an attacking army as we unfortunately found out. The roads zigzag back and forth climbing the hills, and with the German artillery accuracy, we had some very interesting trips.

I do not know where civilians go during a war but they do disappear, and we used any homes we found for shelter, although much of the fighting in this area was in the tops of the mountains where there were not houses. Our command post was kind of a half way house, on the crest of the hill, where the road dropped down into Sospel. It was a stone house, with a large fireplace, and the only house within several miles. We lived in slit trenches or fox holes for weeks and months. They filled full of water when it rained, sometimes you were buried when a shell hit close. The fox holes were small round holes, enlarged underground to give you enough room to curl up and sleep. When a foxhole was not available, I remember sleeping at night with a tree in my middle so I wouldn't roll down the hill asleep. When we could get back to the command house, we could get a cup of coffee as they kept a big iron kettle boiling in the fireplace all the time and occasionally threw in a few handfuls of coffee and a bucket of water. I remember one night sleeping on the cobblestone floor, and I think of it as being one of the greatest night's sleeps I ever had -- to be on a floor that was flat and to have the protection of a house over and around me. It is amazing how wonderful simple comforts can be when you don't have them. I never drank coffee or wine before I went to Europe. But with the quality of the water, you would not have survived dysentery long without boiling water or having wine to drink.





We found France to be somewhat cleaner than Italy. In particular it smelled better. Italy had few toilets and their urinals were usually just sides of buildings, with a drain into a sump. France had open toilets, usually lattice like iron works around them in the city parks. The toilets in France were holes in the ground, with foot pads on each side. We called them rocket launchers. They were fairly efficient to keep clean, because we could just hose them down each day, but they were also that way in restaurants etc. Most homes we saw in Italy did not have toilets or privies, just a ditch or ravine behind the homes were the people went. I

am amazed that they didn't have more disease than they had. Most theaters in France had just one rest room but an attendant, usually a woman who directed the men to the left and the women to the right. It took a little getting used to, and probably hasn't changed that much today, and maybe we are a little too prudish in these matters.

As I mentioned before we set a record of being on the line longer than any other unit of the army, in Southern France or any other place for that matter. We were finally relieved about the first week of December, loaded on trucks, occasionally on trains, and moved north. The Allies had landed in Normandy in May we had jumped in Southern France in August, and it now seemed that the German Army was in full retreat on all fronts. We finally ended up in Soissons, France, which was a World War I battlefield. We were housed in barracks there and a detachment went to England to arrange for a supply of Turkeys for our Christmas celebration. We assumed that we would be soon on our way home and would probably cadre a new unit going to the Pacific if the war was still on there, but we did believe that we would have about three months time in the U.S. before deploying to Japan. All of this changed suddenly, around the middle of December. Things were about to get much worse.



*Each for his land, in a fair fight,
 Encountered strove and died,
 But the friendly earth that
 Knows no spite, Covers them side
 by side.*

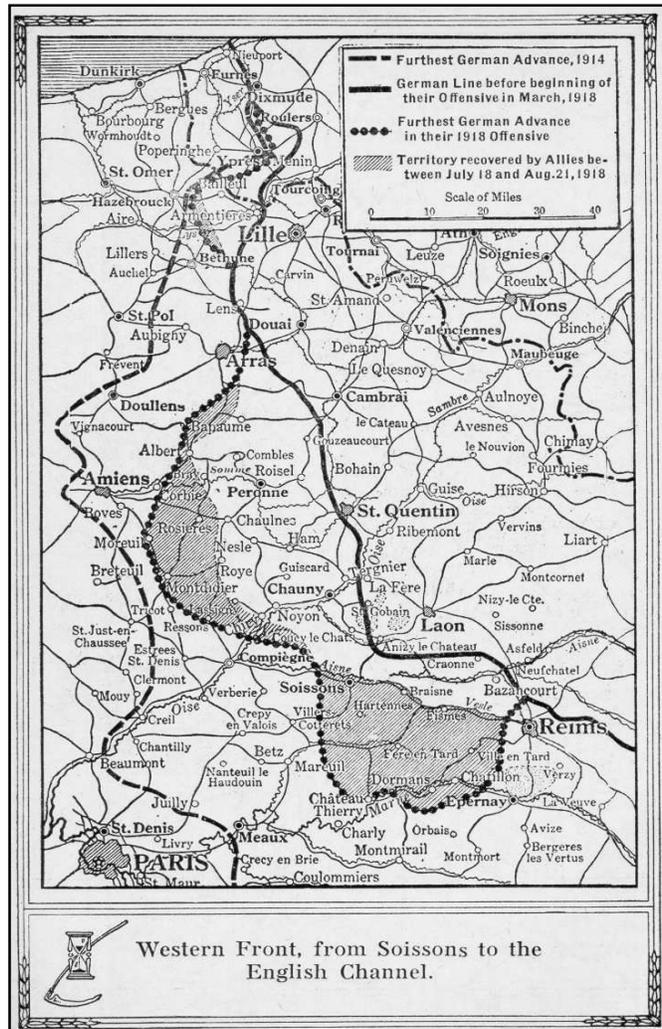
This Poem by Rudyard Kipling (written after the American Civil War) made a great impression on me, as I spent many hours burying the dead, both Americans and Germans – there was no difference.

The Bulge

After setting a combat record of 94 consecutive days on the front line in Southern France we were relieved by new troops and with little warning we loaded the regiment in trucks and proceeded to Lyons. I rode in the back seat of Colonel Boyle's command car, and thought I had a wonderful spot to sight-see France, but when we got to Lyon we were herded into boxcars for the balance of the trip to Soissons in northern France.

Looking back now I think it was much like the boxcar trips that the Jews took to the concentration camps. I presume that the officers had better accommodations. I was once again the ranking Sergeant in charge of our boxcar, this time for real, as I had been given my Staff Sergeant stripes back after the jump in Southern France. We had clean straw, and there was room to sit down, but no lying down, and I didn't see much of France. Soissons had been a battlefield in WWI, and was now a staging area, not too far from Le Havre, the major port for troops that were to go home. We understood that we would be leaving for the U.S. and that our outfit would receive replacement there to cadre a new regiment, and that we would probably get a furlough home, before going to the Pacific.

Few people today realize the magnitude of the war in Europe, where almost 450,000 American Soldiers lost their lives. Along the Western Front that stretched from the Baltic Sea to Mediterranean Sea, there were 110 to 115 Divisions. Most of these divisions consisted of about 15,000 men. Mostly infantry, but lots of armor, artillery, engineers, supply troops, etc. The majority of

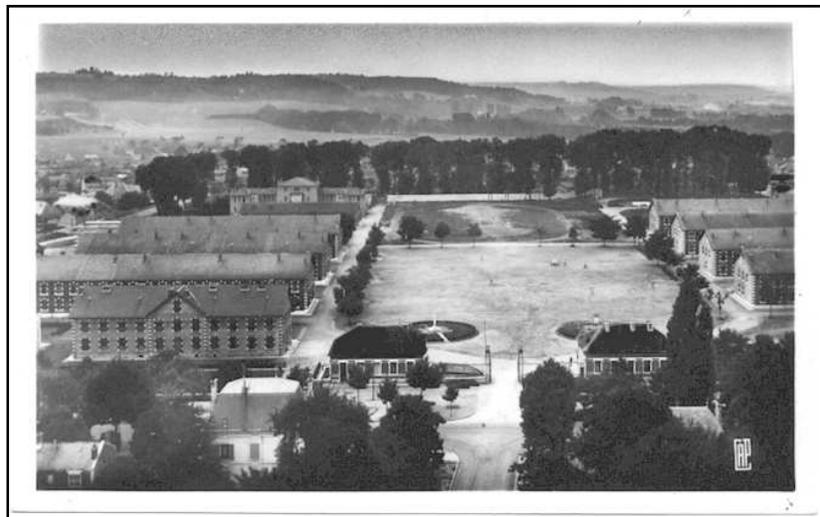


these divisions were American, but there were also French which were mostly their colonial troops from Morocco and Algeria, and also English, which again were mostly colonials from Canada, New Zealand and Australia. The English and French had been in the war for several years by this time and since France was occupied by the Germans, I believe they never did have a great number of Frenchmen in their forces, and of course the British were limited, being mostly Scot, Northern Ireland and Welch. The Irish Free State had declared itself neutral as had Sweden, Switzerland and Spain. The war in the Pacific was large in scope but seldom involved more than one to five divisions of Army or Marines. The Marines were under command of the Navy, and they did not serve in Europe. I do not know how the German Army held off the forces in the West while fighting the Russians on the Eastern Front. With the war in Europe winding down we felt sure that once some of our troops could be deployed to the Pacific, the war there would be over there as well.



Cathedral, Soissons, Belgium

Having spent four months on the French Riviera we did not have any warm clothing, just shoes, fatigue jackets etc. The weather was colder in Soissons, but since we were housed in an old Army Barracks I do not remember it being a problem. It was the week before Christmas and we did not expect our orders to be cut until there were troopships available at Le Havre.



517 Regimental Command, Soissons, France

We had sent a contingent from our outfit to England and they were to return with turkeys and other food items so we could

have Christmas in rather peaceful conditions. It did appear that it was only a matter of time until the Germans capitulated. Our ratio of artillery shells to theirs was about 30 to 1, and our bombers from England was, according to the Stars and Stripes newspaper, obliterating the German cities. The German Army was at that time completely out of France except where we had fought them in the Maritime Alps, and there were only pockets of resistance in Italy, Norway, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg.



On December 23rd, two days before Christmas, General Von Ronstadt's army struck with the most violent offensive of the war. It now seems almost suicidal, but it was well planned and caught the Allies completely off guard. The German Armored Divisions came through our lines, circled several of our divisions and they were moving with speed as their only hope of success lay in capturing enough fuel to keep their tank rolling. Being as we were in Soissons, we were the first outfit into action, and we were attached to the 18th Corps, which was commanded by Montgomery, the famed British General. We were thrown into battle as armored infantry for the Seventh Armored Division commanded by

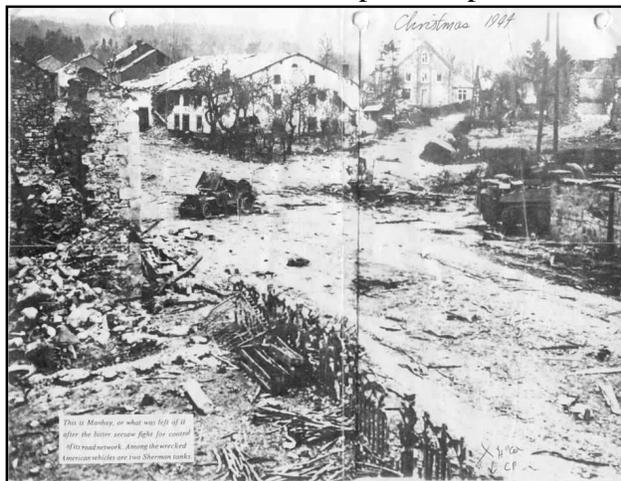


Mark 8 Tiger (German)

General Rose, who was killed about that time. He was famous as the only Jewish General in the Army. Almost all of the Seventh's infantry had been wiped out, and without infantry, tanks are helpless. The Germans had used their new Mark 8 Tiger Tanks to head the assault and our tanks were no match for them.

We were loaded into trucks with what equipment we had, but no provisions were made for food or to get the boots, overcoats and other equipment that would have been standard for winter weather. The ground was covered with about three inches of snow and it never got warm enough to do any melting. To complicate problems the Germans had dropped paratroops behind our lines

and their sniping at supply trucks had discouraged the drivers from trying to get food and ammunition to us. I suppose it was a fitting irony that we soon would learn the havoc that paratroopers can bring behind enemy lines. Within about three days in the cold, sleeping out in the open with at best an army blanket for warmth, and no food we were reduced to the level of animals. We took overshoes and overcoats from the dead Germans and Americans and searched their pockets and backpacks for food. Some of the Germans had items that looked like Graham Crackers, but they tasted like sawdust, which is probably what they were made from. I possessed an army blanket that I had brought from Soissons. I sometimes found a small ditch or low place in the ground, and stretching my blanket over me it occasionally gave me some warmth as it would be covered by snow in the morning. I was never warm enough to quit shivering. At least in Southern France and Italy we could grab a handful of green olives, or some garlic out of the field to allay our hunger. There was no such food in Belgium, where it kept snowing lightly, probably too cold to snow heavily.



Manhay, Belgium (Dec. 1944)



The skies were over-cast so there was no way to summon up our superior air power. In fact the American Air Force stayed grounded for several days, although the Germans fighters were in the air,

*They've got us
surrounded -
The poor bastards!*

(General McAuliffe reporting to Eisenhower on the deteriorating situation for 101st Airborne)

occasionally strafing our lines in support of their troops. The main thrust of the Germans had been in the vicinity of Manhay and since they were already there we were diverted into the town of Soy. The remnants of part of the 7th Armored Division were there. They only had one operable tank and they were using it to tow the disabled tanks so that they were in position to point their guns down the roads leading out of town. Most of the tanks had been

burned and were inoperable, so it was really a bluff to discourage the Germans from coming in. We set up a perimeter defense around the town, and tried to get with the Armored troops to determine what

the situation was. Eventually the Germans with their Mark V tanks did take the town driving the defenders into the hills above the town. I with two other soldiers did not get out of Soy but hid in a basement which was occupied by four Belgians with a young girl of about ten years of age. The basement had a large kiln for the village baker, and its oven had an opening just large enough for us to squeeze through and we could almost stand up inside. Twice the Germans came by but the Belgian people, probably at the risk of their lives, did not divulge our whereabouts. When out of the oven, they shared with us their only food, which was Chicory, a drink like coffee but made out of grain. We had nothing to share with them.



Soy, Belgium (1944)

After the first days of the Bulge, the skies cleared and the sky was blanketed with bombers and accompanying fighters on their way to Germany. They came over in waves, thousands of them from the British Lancaster to the American Bombers. They flew over for about four hours, and there was only a short lull until they flew back the last one going home shortly before midnight. We had a love-hate relationship with the air corps. As we laid shivering in our snowy trenches, we knew that they were going back to England where a clean bed and warm food awaited. We also envied the fact that they could drop their bombs often on civilian population, but never would they have to view the dead.



After several days, the Germans were forced out of the town and our troops returned. The First Battalion, of which I was the Staff Sergeant, was given a command to rescue a platoon of the armored division surrounded by the Germans in a town called Hotton. An American Infantry Division, (I think the 79th) fresh from the states had tried to get them out but had been annihilated in the attempt. We had to take a circuitous route in order to have cover from the forest. By the route we took, I would guess it was about eight miles. Before we got to the town of Hotton, the trapped Infantry Division opened fire on us. We contacted them by radio, but they were too frightened to believe that we were actually Americans and kept firing. They didn't know the code of the day, which all men on the line had to know. Colonel Boyle got on the phone and using some choice cuss words from his early life in New York, informed them that if they fired one more shot we were equipped to wipe them out. They seemed to understand



Modern-day Hotton, Belgium



Lt. Colonel Boyle

good American cussing and let us come in. When we reached the infantry division, we found only one officer, a very young Captain, probably in his early twenties in charge. He informed us that all the other officers were back in the town, as he was the only one who had gone with the troops. They had tried to cross an open field about a mile square in size, and the Germans let them get all the way into the field and then mowed them down with machine guns as well as on tanks. The field held some 200 to 300 dead Americans. They died in close formation as if they were on their way to a picnic. We couldn't believe the lack of training that could lead to such a massacre, or the officers sitting back in the city who should have been with the men if not leading the green soldiers who never made it through their first day of combat.

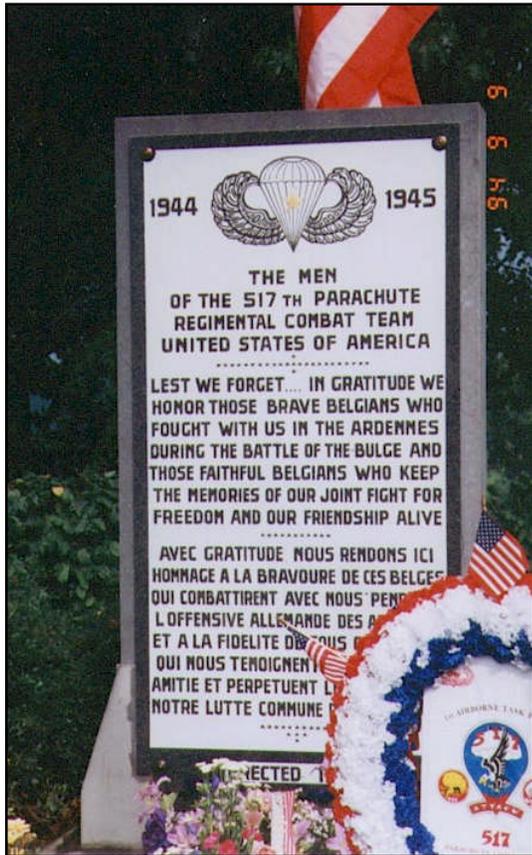
We sent half of our men back with the Captain and those of his troops who had made the safety of the hill and then went into Hotton with the rest of our battalion. The armored team called Task Force Hogan had no operable equipment so it was just a matter of destroying what ammunition and fuel we couldn't take with us and returning to Soy. We didn't lose one man in this assignment and Colonel Boyle was later given a Distinguished Service Cross¹ for leading the action.

There are no unwounded foxhole veterans. Sgt. Ed Stewart of the 84th Division commented decades after the war that he had "never known a combat soldier who did not show a residue of war." Stewart's mother told him that he "left Europe but never arrived home." -- Stephen Ambrose

¹ The Distinguished Service Cross is one of the military's highest awards, second only to the Congressional Medal of Honor.



The Bulge II



It was difficult to know where the Germans were, as the front was moving fast, where they ran out of gas they pulled back and where they had fuel they moved ahead. It was the German's last desperate struggle, as evidenced by looking at our captured prisoners, most of whom were old men and boys. A final attack was launched at night in the area. I had obtained a bazooka and remember firing three shots at a German tank, and they just bounced off as I dove into a ditch and the tank seemed to pass over me. If not over me, it was close enough that I had to dig myself out of the dirt. We had a first aid camp set up and I made several trips with wounded that night. I remember an American soldier screaming and cursing God for what seemed to be hours before he died.

Another death that I remember well was Lieutenant Allingham. He was a cheerful officer that was well liked by all the men. A prankster, in Nice he had impressed the troops by riding a bicycle backwards, only to end up crashing into a bus. During a fire fight, a phosphorous grenade that had been strapped on his chest had been ignited by a bullet, and his whole stomach was burned out. He was still alive when we reached him and whispered "kill me"! I probably would have, but he thankfully he died before I had to make that decision. My good friend Master Sergeant R. E. Anderson was also wounded that night. I remember taking him in to the aid station and telling him he was a lucky B... because he got a ticket home. A bullet had shattered his leg and he would be out of the war. All of our fighting in Belgium had been in the province of Luxembourg as far as I know.

Another six inches of snow had fallen and as we moved through the fields there were bodies of men which were just barely showing through the snow. A few had been impaled on the barb wire fences, and most were frozen in the position of death. I know there is much talk nowadays of recovering the bodies of fallen soldiers and possibly returning them home. However, in World War II there were literally thousands of missing soldiers – the primary



reason being that so many were buried where they fell, often in areas that were not generally accessible. We put a bayonet on their gun and used the gun as a headstone, with their dog tags draped on the gun. If someone needed the gun I suppose it didn't last long and the local citizenry often collected guns for souvenirs for sale to non-combat troops. We buried the Germans in like manner, by hollowing out a



place in the dirt, rolling them over and piling enough dirt on them to clear the air. I believe we were the first troops into Malmedy where the Germans massacred about 200 American prisoners, and the bodies were now showing through the snow. The Germans had taken them prisoners, placed them in an open field and then backed up a truck with a machine gun on it and killed them. Apparently there was at least one survivor, who reported they thought the Germans were going to load them into the truck for transportation to prisoner of war camps. The following days were filled, not by

fighting the Germans, but fighting against the cold. We went through many towns and stayed in a few homes and barns that were quite immaculate compared to the Italian and French homes we had been in.

One night we were in a German town called Bergstrom. I was with Colonel Boyle at the forward operations post which was a two story house on the side of town from which we were to launch our attack that night. I remember the house had a beautiful clock on the living room table, under an oval glass cover. It must have been the family's proudest possession. We had called Company B up and they were all resting in comparative safety around the house. Colonel Boyle had left with one squad to try to contact A Company.² That night Colonel Boyle ran into a German patrol, and was shot through both arms and the chest. They brought him back to the O.P. and had him upstairs with the medics working on him. As I went upstairs to check how he was getting along, the Germans lobbed a artillery shell into the house, likely coming through the downstairs window and probably hitting the ornate clock. There were 46 men killed by that shell that night, as I probably would have been had I not gone upstairs to check on the Colonel. I don't remember how I got out of the house, but I do remember sometime later walking down the road with along with other wounded men, with blood in my eyes. I stopped by a barn on the other side of town and there were some of the other officers including Captain Ehley, who



Modern Day Bergstrom (Germany)

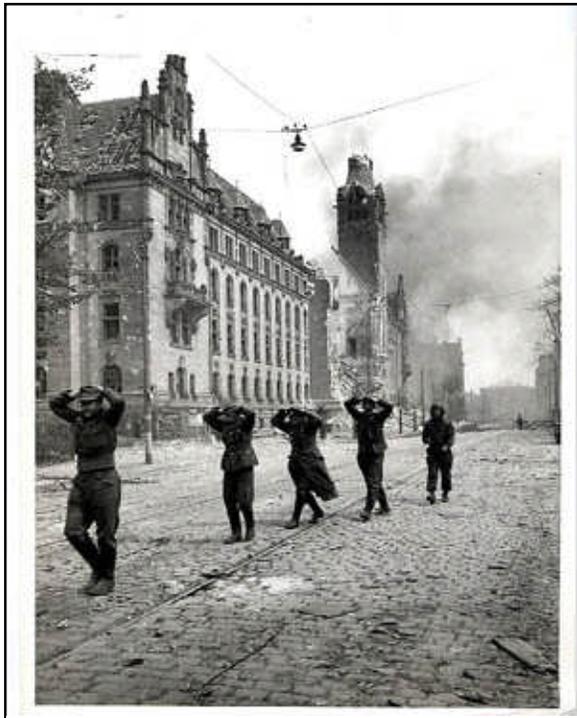
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² A few words about Bill Boyle: Wild Bill Boyle was a West Pointer like most senior officers in our outfit. He was a leader, and always took the forward command post. I had worked with him throughout our training in the U.S. and the campaign in Europe. He used to say I was part of the Irish Brigade, which included Boyle, Dugan, Brodie and other officers with Irish surnames.



was sitting by himself crying openly. I do not know why Ehley was not with his men. I guess he had just broken down at that time. He was replaced after that and of course Colonel Boyle was replaced. At the time, I thought that Colonel Boyle's wounds were so severe that he had died. But found out after the war he had survived.

My next clear recollection was being in a hospital which I later learned was near Liege, Belgium I don't know whether they ever checked me out, I suspect not. Anyway the German's hit the hospital with a U-Bomb, which was an unmanned plane like they used to bomb Britain. It hit the hospital and there was a great amount of confusion. I left the hospital on my own, which I realized later was a mistake as the army had no record of my being there and only that I was wounded with cuts and abrasions at that time. I caught a ride back to the front with a supply truck and after asking directions for some time, rejoined my outfit in Stavelot. Stavelot was a picture town like you would see on a Christmas Card. It was also a vacation town for many being on a river. King Leopold of Belgium had his mistress there and when the Germans retreated he went with them. He later tried to return as King



German Soldiers captured in Stavelot

of Belgium, but the Belgium people would have none of it. I think they recognized Queen Beatrice as his successor and eventually his son, Prince Baudoin.

In Stavelot we stayed in the villa that had been occupied by Leopold. It was a four story mansion, but with all its windows blown out and some walls missing. It originally had large rooms downstairs for dancing and entertainment and many bedrooms on the upper floors. The basement held a large wine cellar (with no wine) but there we made our headquarters for communications and it proved to be bomb proof. In the large entry room were several paintings, all were full of shrapnel from the bombs, and they were open to the weather as a side of the building was missing. I took the two Kruseman paintings from the wall with the help of another soldier, and removed them from their heavy gold frames. Warming them over the fire we had in the basement, they naturally

rolled up. I then inserted them into a surveyor's tube that I had for maps, coiled much communication wire around it and mailed it to my mother. I didn't think they could ever be restored and thought of them as a souvenir much like the German helmet I had sent my Uncle Lowell, which had a bullet hole in it. I did send my Mother a letter asking her to get Ev. Thorpe, our town's local artist, to care for them. When I got home much later, Ev. Had nailed them to the living room wall with carpet tacks.

While in Stavelot I got a Christmas present from my Mother. It was a fruit cake that had accumulated about an inch of mold on it. We cut the mold off and all happily shared it. Mother also sent a toy truck for some unknown Belgium child. I gave it to the town policeman who took a button



of his jacket to replace the wheel that had been lost in transit. The Belgium people were kind, generous people who shared with us. Sometimes it was a bit of cheese, once an egg, more often it was the warmth of their homes or barns.

When the Germans retreated from Stavelot we followed them to Aachen, Germany. The citizens of Aachen were out cleaning and stacking bricks from the bombed buildings. At Aachen we were attached to the 82nd Airborne Division, and fought with them through the Ziegfried Line, which was a series of pill box type fortifications and tank traps that made fighting very difficult. The Artillery and tanks had little effect on the pill boxes. If we could get behind them we had a couple of bull dozers which could cover them up and leave them buried. At night we could sneak through and pour gasoline into the fortifications and ignite it. The Germans were very adept at using flares, and sometimes the dark of night would turn into daylight.

Our last serious battles were fought in the area called the Hurtgen Forest. While we went through forests, the cities including Hurtgen were complete rubble. There had been so much tank and



The Huertgen Forest.

artillery fire that nothing was standing above about 4 feet high. Even the tombstones in their large cemetery were just rubble. The Germans were sending in A-bombs which were pilotless planes which carried powerful bombs. We could hear them overhead as they pattered along like small aircraft. These were not guided missiles, as they said in the war “the bombs are not sent with your name on them, they are inscribed to whom it may concern.” Our battalion was given the mission of stopping the Germans from destroying a dam on the Oder River, which if blown would inundate a large area of the front we were in. We lost a lot of our second battalion that night as they got into a mine field. The Germans threw up a lot of flares and destroyed much of the battalion who were in the valley, alongside our battalion which was in the hills, where we had some cover. Melvin Biddle, who won the Congressional Medal of Honor, was with the 2nd Battalion. After we came back from the lines I had the job, along with a few others, of writing him up for the Congressional Medal of Honor, which he later received. Being the Operations Sergeant for the Battalion, I always had maps for our operations. They needed my maps and descriptions of the terrain. In typical army style everything had to be in 7 copies and you have to show how the action of a recipient might affect his outfit, the army in general and the War in Europe. He did deserve the medal, as he wiped out several machine gun nests and had a few bullet holes in his clothes as evidence.



It was on the last day of battle Dave Hines was killed. Dave was a Sergeant in D Company in charge of operations for his company. After being mortally wounded by a piece of shrapnel in the chest, he waved his men back to take cover and died. I was called



out that night to identify the dead. They had all came in on trucks loaded with corpses intertwined with American and German bodies. They laid them out in a tent, and I identified Dave Hines and another man from my squad. The man from my squad had worn a dog tag that belonged to one of our fellows previously killed, because he said if he were killed he wanted his mother to think he

was missing in action, as he worried about her heart condition.³ I left the tag on him in accordance with his wishes and I presume his mother died thinking her son was missing in action. I do not wish to moralize on the advisability this action or my almost killing Lieutenant Allingham-- those were different times.

I never got used to death. I did get hardened to it so that seeing dead soldiers didn't bother me. However, I never got used to seeing young women or children dead. I remember near Stavelot a soldier picking up what he thought was a doll by the leg (you know, the kind they have in the old country that are realistic dolls with long legs and arms) and it was really a dead girl of about three. The soldier was a replacement from the States and got very sick. I could somehow accept the killing of soldiers, old people, even adults, but children, never.



Medal of Honor

After following the retreating Germans through Aachen toward Cologne, we were pulled back to an airfield at Amiens, France. There, we were alerted to jump three times but in each case Patton's 3rd Army had passed the drop zone before we could get there. While there, I remember a sign posted on the Air Corps notice board, that effective that date every member of their command could wear another oak leaf cluster to their bronze star for gallant action fighting the enemy. Medals were a joke, as far as we were concerned. Often the officers got silver medals and the enlisted men got bronze stars, if anything.

The only medals that made sense to us were the Purple Heart and the Congressional Medal of Honor. All other medals could be won by sitting at a desk or other jobs far away from the front lines. While in Amiens the Captain talked to me about accepting a field commission. I told him I had no intention on staying in the service, and was not interested. Actually it would have meant that I would be transferred to another battalion and would, as a second lieutenant, be an assistant platoon leader in a rifle company. I think the Captain was disappointed by my decision.



Purple Heart

³ During World War II, if the dog tags were not found on a dead body, a soldier would be reported as Missing in Action. Thus, but taking the dog tags off his dying friend, the soldier would prevent word from reaching the mother's soldier that he had died – rather, it would be reported that he was missing in action.





Although the war in Europe was going well it was still possible that we would jump in Norway. The Germans still occupied Norway which had been a strategic move for them to control port traffic in the North Sea and Baltic areas. On May 7th I was sent to Allied Headquarters on Victor Hugo Blvd. In Paris, near the Arc De Triumph, to obtain maps so we could plan drop zones in Norway. As we were entering Paris, there was much excitement, and the noise grew louder as we got closer to the center of the city. We stopped a man who was waving a flag and he told us that

Germany had surrendered. I have never been in such a scene of celebration.

We were in a command car (the larger jeep) and we were moved along with the crowd. There were people hanging on all parts of the jeep and setting on the hood. We moved only as the crowd moved. There were Russian soldiers marching and singing the International, French soldiers marching and singing the Marseillaise, and Polish, English and Americans, and probably all the nationalities of Europe and much of the world. We were at the Palace de la Concorde, and not ten feet in front of me was a man taller by a foot than us all. He was standing on a monument deck and trying to speak to the people. I realized it was General Charles De Gaulle.



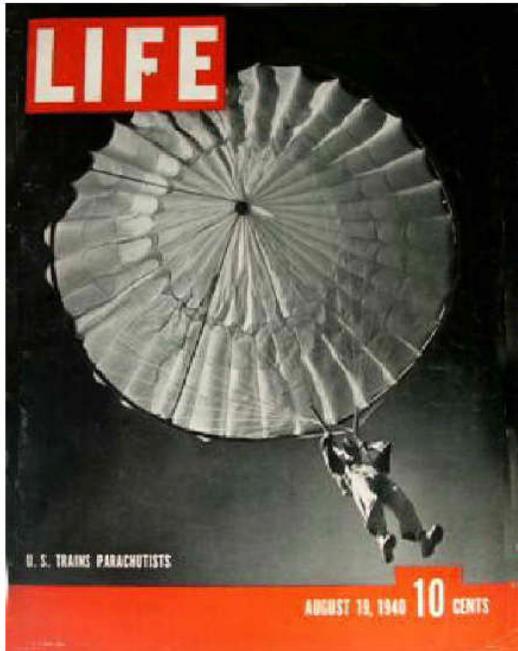
I didn't know a word he said and I doubt if any people could hear him above the tumult of the crowd. General De Gaulle was the hero of the French.

VE Day, May 8th, 1944

Finally after several hours we got to Allied Headquarters where they affirmed that the war was truly over, but that the day May 8th would be celebrated as VE (Victory in Europe) day, because that would be the day for signing the unconditional surrender by Eisenhower and the Germans, and that would give more time for a celebration? It was a great day for Europe, and Paris was

far from the front lines, and ready for freedom. I am grateful that I had that opportunity to be there, although purely by providence. It was a scene, a sound, an international celebration I shall not forget.





Home

After a few days in Paris helping the French to celebrate Victory in Europe Day, we returned to our troops in Amiens and shortly thereafter we were relocated to Joigny, about fifty miles south east of Paris. We left the historic city of Amiens with its world renowned cathedral to go to an even more picturesque French city. We were housed in a former French Barracks consisting of several buildings. They were four stories in height with accessory buildings, a parade ground, room for storage and French outside toilets, that were just holes in the ground.. I presume it would compare to some of the National Guard facilities, sans

toilets, in our country. It was certainly the most comfortable facility we had since leaving the states. For the first time we had a roof over our heads, a kitchen where real food could be cooked for the men, and we were issued canvas folding cots to sleep on.

The city of Joigny was picturesque in that it was set alongside the Yonne River. It was an old storybook place. They had a new bridge that had been built more than a hundred years ago, and an old bridge built four hundred years ago. There were beautiful wooded areas along the river as well as in the countryside. We still had training and calisthenics, although with the war over in Europe there was not much enthusiasm from the men. Often on maneuvers through the hills we would come upon a little French Village quite unexpectedly. They each had small farm areas and were unique and individual in their own way. The French people we met were courteous, but not as friendly as we had previously experienced. I think they viewed the Americans as interlopers who they would rather not have in their country.



Since Joigny was directly connected to Paris by rail line, it was only an hour ride into the city, and we went there often. We loved everything about Paris except for the people. I think our



lack of respect was equal to their attitude towards us. De Gaulle had dealt heavily with the English and Americans in that our dollar only went for about one-half as much as it did in Italy and earlier in Southern France. I think he tried to restore the French economy on the back of the American Soldiers. But I guess, I would have done the same if I were in his place.

The days in Joigny were wonderful compared to the Belgian Bulge. It was while at Joigny I had the job of helping to write up Melvin Biddle for the Congressional Medal of Honor. My main responsibility in this was the fact that as S-3/ S-2 sergeant I had a collection of maps of all the areas we had served in and they needed me to plot his service and diagram various areas included in the nomination. In Army style, everything had to be submitted in several copies, which I had to do without the aid of a copy machine or carbons. Melvin got the medal and he deserved it. I actually felt sorry for him, in as much as he was restricted to barracks and could not go to Paris with us. The brass, didn't want to take a chance of anything happening to a hero. They still needed to sell war bonds in the U.S.



Melvin J. Biddle

Since the 517th had fought in two theaters of war, African-Mediterranean and the European, and you got points for discharge for each medal, wound, campaign ribbon, etc. most of us had enough points to warrant a trip home to the states to cadre a new outfit for the Pacific, or we could choose to volunteer for occupational duty in Germany. The veterans of the outfit were about equally split in their choice. When the first orders came down they told us that the outfit was going to be rerouted to Marseillaise and shipped to the Pacific via the Suez canal and therefore all of us who opted to stay with the outfit who had over 80 rotation points were being assigned to occupational duty in Germany. On the basis of this information we thought we were going back to Germany, and would have a chance to get all the souvenirs we wanted, so we gave our souvenirs, our German Lugers and Italian Birettas, to the new guys who were all going home. Two days later they announced that the 517th had been reassigned to the 13th Airborne, and that we would be leaving for



Le Havre and shipping out through the English Channel for home. Our other possessions were in our foot lockers which were sent to Fort Bragg in North Carolina. We never saw them again, and suppose that the soldiers in the supply department got all the souvenirs.

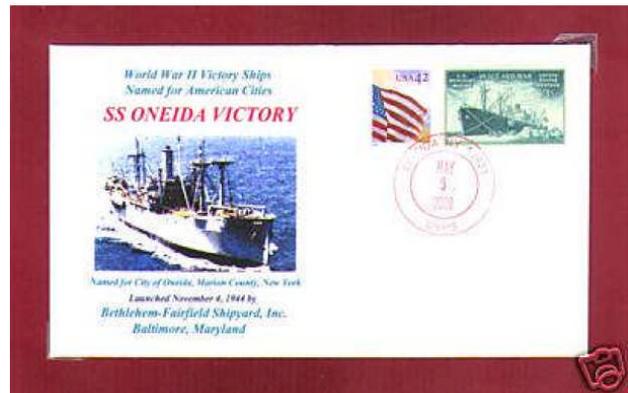
Since the 517th was assigned to the 13th airborne, and they had arrived in Europe just as the war ended, we were given preferred treatment and left Le Havre on a Victory Transport two days before the rest of the Division sailed. The rest of the Division sailed on the Queen Elizabeth, and passed us about three days later as we were wallowing in heavy seas. They got to Camp Shanks, up the Hudson River about three days before we did – So much for seniority.



But the good news was, the first atom bomb was dropped during the second day of the voyage after we left Le Havre, so by the time we got to the United States both wars were over, and we knew we would be sent home for demobilization. At Camp Shanks, a picture of the outfit was taken with the men standing in the same position they were when they were photographed before leaving the states.

There were only about 1,187 left out of over 2,000 who had originally posed. They said the picture was for Life Magazine, but I heard no more of it. It really didn't mean much as men were missing for many reasons other than being killed. They did say we had the highest casualty rate in the army, but I have heard since then that the 442nd Japanese combat team that we served with in Italy and Southern France had more.

Their anti-tank company came by glider into Southern France to support us after we had cleared an area for landing. This was their first trip in a glider, and they volunteered to come in to help us. They were a great outfit. The 442nd fortunately missed the Belgian Bulge.



One of the books written about the 517th lists me as being a medic. I was never a medic, But I carried my share of wounded in, and had the highest regard for the Medics in our outfit. It was so



cold in Belgium that if the wounded were not brought in immediately they were dead. Everyone we carried in was another soldier that did not die. Some died as we carried them in but they would have all died if we had not tried.

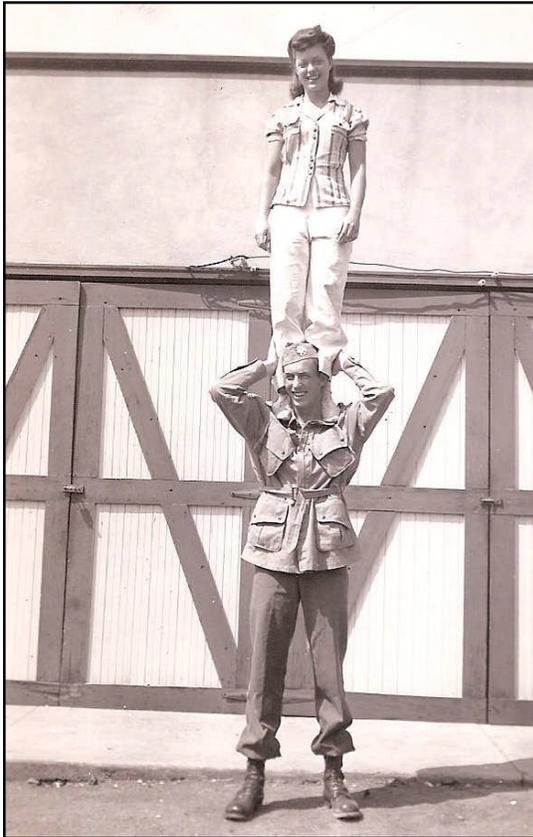
Getting out of the Army and returning to Civilian Life was something we were not prepared for. At the time of discharge they asked me what my experience in the service would qualify me for in Civilian Life. I told them probably a bouncer in a night club. I have since heard World War II referred to as the "good war". I can understand this as I feel it was probably the last war fought for a worthy cause. We did not question the war, the need to go, or what we were fighting for. There was no R&R. We were there for the duration, which could have been months or years. But World War II, was an ethical

war, if a war can ever be claimed so. Both sides had poison gas, nerve gas and gasses to poison the



earth, and cause disease, and yet they agreed not to use them. There were some rumors of use, and maybe accidents where shells got mixed up but I think both sides feared the consequences of chemical warfare.

There were ten million soldiers who came home and a half-million who would not be coming back. As I previously mentioned, Dave Hines was killed in the last day of combat in Belgium. As soon as I could, I wrote a letter to his Mother, Wilma Hines. I had told him once that I would do so if anything happened to him. I had once met his sister Millie and Dorisse Thomassen on the train from Ogden to Denver. My Brother Charles met me in Denver and we visited with Dad's associate Frank Norberg. Millie and Dorisse had noticed that I was wearing the same uniform as Dorisse's fiancé Dave wore, and they were meeting him in Chicago. Dorisse's father worked for the railroad so they had free passes for the trip. I visited with them and detrained with them in Denver. I remember



Charles kidding me about the two attractive girls who got off the train with me. I saw Dave after getting back from the furlough and remember he had a picture of Dorisse in a silk blouse she had made from part of a parachute he had sent her. After writing them about Dave's death, numerous letters followed from Dorisse, Wilma and her mother, Millie Hines.

When I got out of Camp Shanks, I immediately headed home, which took about three full 24-hour days by train. Arriving in Providence, I told my Mother that I wanted to visit Dorisse in Los Angeles, where she was staying with her friend, Ruth Ellen Athay and family. My Mother was a little unhappy because the city of Providence had planned on a ceremony to honor the returning veterans. I have carefully avoided such ceremonies most of my life, and I went to Los Angeles, I believe by bus, got there in the morning at the Athay's home by taxi, and was about 12 hours early, as our communication was faulty. Dorisse had planned on meeting me at the bus depot in the afternoon. The Athays were wonderful hosts, taking me to Lake Arrowhead for an overnight trip. Dorisse and I knew

each other by letter, probably better than most young people do. We had some things in common: religion, a love of music and the arts. I think we probably had more in common than she and Dave Hines did, as he had little interest in music, and mostly his life had been sports. Millie, who was devoted to her brother, once said she thought we made a better pair.¹

¹ After Dorisse and I were married, we purchased a fourplex in San Jose, where Millie and her mother lived next to us for a couple of years.



After a week or so we went up to San Jose to see her folks. They also were very nice to me, especially her mother Beth. While there I got a call, almost a summons to meet Sam Dela Magorie at San Jose State. I knew Sam was the wrestling coach. Sam, in his rough Italian way demanded to know why I thought Dave Hines was dead. He said that before Dave left, he had given him a St.



Christopher Medal and he knew that it had protected him, and was sure Dave was only missing in action. I told him that I had seen Dave dead when they brought him in. Sam said Dave was like a son to him, as he had taken a father's interest in him, because he didn't have a father. He seemed convinced, but not happy with my explanation.

Dorisse and I decided to get married in the Logan Temple. Her Father, Mother and Ruth Ellen were to come up in two weeks, during which time I had to get my discharge at Fort Douglas, buy a car, find a job and locate a place to rent. I did – it's amazing what you can do when you are young.

