



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2209

April 13, 2014

*517th Parachute Infantry Regiment
460th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion
596th Parachute Combat Engineer Company*

Website
Send MailCall news to
MailCall Archives
2013 Roster (updated!)
Thunderbolt (Winter 2014)

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www.517prct.org/roster.pdf
www.517prct.org/archives

More Palm Springs Reunion Photos

Photos from **Karen Frice Wallace**:





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MailCall News

RE: **Howard H. Epley**, 460-B

Sam, PS: There was a **Private James Epley** also with B Battery. Is that a coincidence or are they related?

Bob B.

Harvey Epley was one of 18, yes 18. I will find out if they are related. Harvey was killed in a construction accident in 1960. I believe he was awarded the Bronze Star, Silver Star, and the Purple Heart. Thank you for your helpful information,

Sam Pedicone

Round Canopy Parachuting Team
Presents, 70th D-Day Anniversary
from June 3 to June 8, 2014.
Dakotas Over Normandy

https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=Pqc2GunVPis&app=desktop





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Bob: another stellar Mail Call. So enjoyed the Palm Springs reunion pictures (congrats to **Leo** as it looks like he did another jump); **Lory Curtis'** notes about his Arizona visits and pictures, and **Juliana Stonis'** pictures of her Dad -- a most handsome young man, then and now. How blessed she is to come from such gene pool!

Am glad the electronic vote has put President Johnson's mind at ease and thanks to **Howard** and **Joanne** for all they do (as well as you.) Having said that, re the comment about the "Void's" defects -- agree that the too clean tanks is right on the money, but take extreme exception to the "the actors are too handsome!" From my humble, unbiased but well informed perspective, nobody could be as handsome as the men of the 517th!

Thanks for the first 5 pages of **Bill Houston's** "Army Life." He writes rather well, or it may be that I'm just interested in what he is writing!

A blessed Passover and Happy Easter to all.

Pat Seitz and Alan Greer

From **Phil McSpadden**:

A Speech Every American High School Principal Should Give, By Dennis Prager

To the students and faculty of our high school:

I am your new principal, and honored to be so.
There is no greater calling than to teach young people.

I would like to apprise you of some important changes coming to our school. I am making these changes because I am convinced that most of the ideas that have dominated public education in America have worked against you, against your teachers and against our country.

First, this school will no longer honor race or ethnicity. I could not care less if your racial makeup is black, brown, red, yellow or white. I could not care less if your origins are African, Latin American, Asian or European, or if your ancestors arrived here on the Mayflower or on slave ships. The only identity I care about, the only one this school will recognize, is your individual identity -- your character, your scholarship, your humanity. And the only national identity this school will care about is American.

This is an American public school, and American public schools were created to make better Americans. If you wish to affirm an ethnic, racial or religious identity through school, you will have to go elsewhere. We will end all ethnicity, race and non-American nationality-based celebrations. They undermine the motto of America, one of its three central values -- E pluribus unum, "from many, one." And this school will be guided by America's values. This includes all after-school clubs. I will not authorize clubs that divide students based on any identities. This includes race, language, religion, sexual orientation or whatever else may become in vogue in a society divided by political correctness.



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Your clubs will be based on interests and passions, not blood, ethnic, racial or other physically defined ties. Those clubs just cultivate narcissism -- an unhealthy preoccupation with the self -- while the purpose of education is to get you to think beyond yourself. So we will have clubs that transport you to the wonders and glories of art, music, astronomy, languages you do not already speak, carpentry and more. If the only extracurricular activities you can imagine being interested in are those based on ethnic, racial or sexual identity, that means that little outside of yourself really interests you.

Second, I am uninterested in whether English is your native language. My only interest in terms of language is that you leave this school speaking and writing English as fluently as possible. The English language has united America's citizens for over 200 years, and it will unite us at this school. It is one of the indispensable reasons this country of immigrants has always come to be one country. And if you leave this school without excellent English language skills, I would be remiss in my duty to ensure that you will be prepared to successfully compete in the American job market. We will learn other languages here -- it is deplorable that most Americans only speak English -- but if you want classes taught in your native language rather than in English, this is not your school.

Third, because I regard learning as a sacred endeavor, everything in this school will reflect learning's elevated status. This means, among other things, that you and your teachers will dress accordingly. Many people in our society dress more formally for Hollywood events than for church or school. These people have their priorities backward. Therefore, there will be a formal dress code at this school.

Fourth, no obscene language will be tolerated anywhere on this school's property -- whether in class, in the hallways or at athletic events. If you can't speak without using the f-word, you can't speak. By obscene language I mean the words banned by the Federal Communications Commission, plus epithets such as "Nigger," even when used by one black student to address another black, or "bitch," even when addressed by a girl to a girlfriend. It is my intent that by the time you leave this school, you will be among the few your age to instinctively distinguish between the elevated and the degraded, the holy and the obscene.

Fifth, we will end all self-esteem programs. In this school, self-esteem will be attained in only one way -- the way people attained it until decided otherwise a generation ago -- by earning it. One immediate consequence is that there will be one valedictorian, not eight.

Sixth, and last, I am reorienting the school toward academics and away from politics and propaganda. No more time will be devoted to scaring you about smoking and caffeine, or terrifying you about sexual harassment or global warming. No more semesters will be devoted to condom wearing and teaching you to regard sexual relations as only or primarily a health issue... There will be no more attempts to convince you that you are a victim because you are not white, or not male, or not heterosexual or not Christian. We will have failed if any one of you graduates this school and does not consider him or herself inordinately fortunate -- to be alive and to be an American.

Now, please stand and join me in the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of our country. As many of you do not know the words, your teachers will hand them out to you.



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Some photos from Giles G, in Normandy 2010:



Please continue me on the Mail Call list. I really enjoy them and I thank you for all the work of being our web master. I read my last mail call on an android program by Google and it also Deleted it from my AOL file when I closed it.

Thanks again, **Gene "Zoot" Snyder** CO.



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Operation Dragoon Intelligence Reports

A while back, I visited the AHEC in Carlisle, PA and found a box of documents that **Col. Graves** had donated to the center at some point. They included a 20+ page Intelligence report prepared by the 517th (**Capt. Albin P. Dearing**, S-2) for Anvil, describing the LZ and surrounding area in So. France, as well as intelligence on tactics, weapons, units and key commanders. The documents also included a detailed "lessons learned" for the period from 15 Aug to 2 Nov '44 written by **Col. Graves**, along with some personal papers. All told, there's about 60 pages that I photographed.

I can't recall if maybe I'd sent these to you before. If these are already on the website, I must have just missed them when I was browsing.

If these don't ring a bell, I'd be happy to send them to you by email or if the files are too big for that (each is about 2 megs in a jpeg format), I can send them to you on a flash drive. I'm attaching the first page of the Intelligence report and the first of the "lessons learned" so you can see what I'm talking about and whether I'd sent them before.

Take care,

Mike Kane

Hi Mike,

I don't remember seeing these before. But it's always possible that I got them and misplaced them. I would think that I would remember these. I can take them via email.

Thanks!

Bob Barrett

The files go to 0853 Bob. Looks like you may be missing the last 5. I'll resend them tomorrow. They really are fascinating. I'm sure **Howard H** will enjoy reading them. Wish I'd come across them years back. The AHEC is only 15 miles from where I live. I took **Frederic Brega** and his wife there a couple of years ago and they had **Dick Spencer's** uniform on display. Fred recognized the 517 blue patch behind the jump wings right away before we'd even read the description on the display!

Mike Kane

Sample pages of the "Intelligence Report" are on the following pages.

More in future MailCalls



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INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

NUMBER ONE

The following pages contain a condensation of a vast amount of generalized information, intended to bring into sharp focus only pertinent data pertaining to the 517 P.R.C.T. operation. It is divided into discussions of Terrain, Weather, Communications, Health and Sanitation, Enemy Dispositions, Probable Enemy Reactions, and Civil Affairs. A subsequent S-2 Estimate of the Situation will deal conclusively with latest information about the enemy. Unit Commanders desiring any more specialized information not sufficiently treated with herein may obtain it through the facilities of this Section. Additional maps and photomaps will be made available in sufficient quantity to cover all unit and individual requirements.

.....
 ALBIN P. DEARING
 Captain, 517th Parcht. Inf.,
 S-2.

Maps & Photomaps:
 FRANCE 1/25000
 DZ "A" (2 Mar '44) Enlarged

Town Plans: DRAGUIGNAN, LES
 ARCS, LA MOTTE, LE MUY, TRANS
 EN PROVENCE.

Annexes:

- A. Photo Interpretation Circumstances, "A"
- B. Bridges & demolition schedules.
- C. Prisoner of War Procedure (7th A.
- D. Enemy Order of Battle & Blog. Not
- E. Enemy Methods of Deception. (AFH)

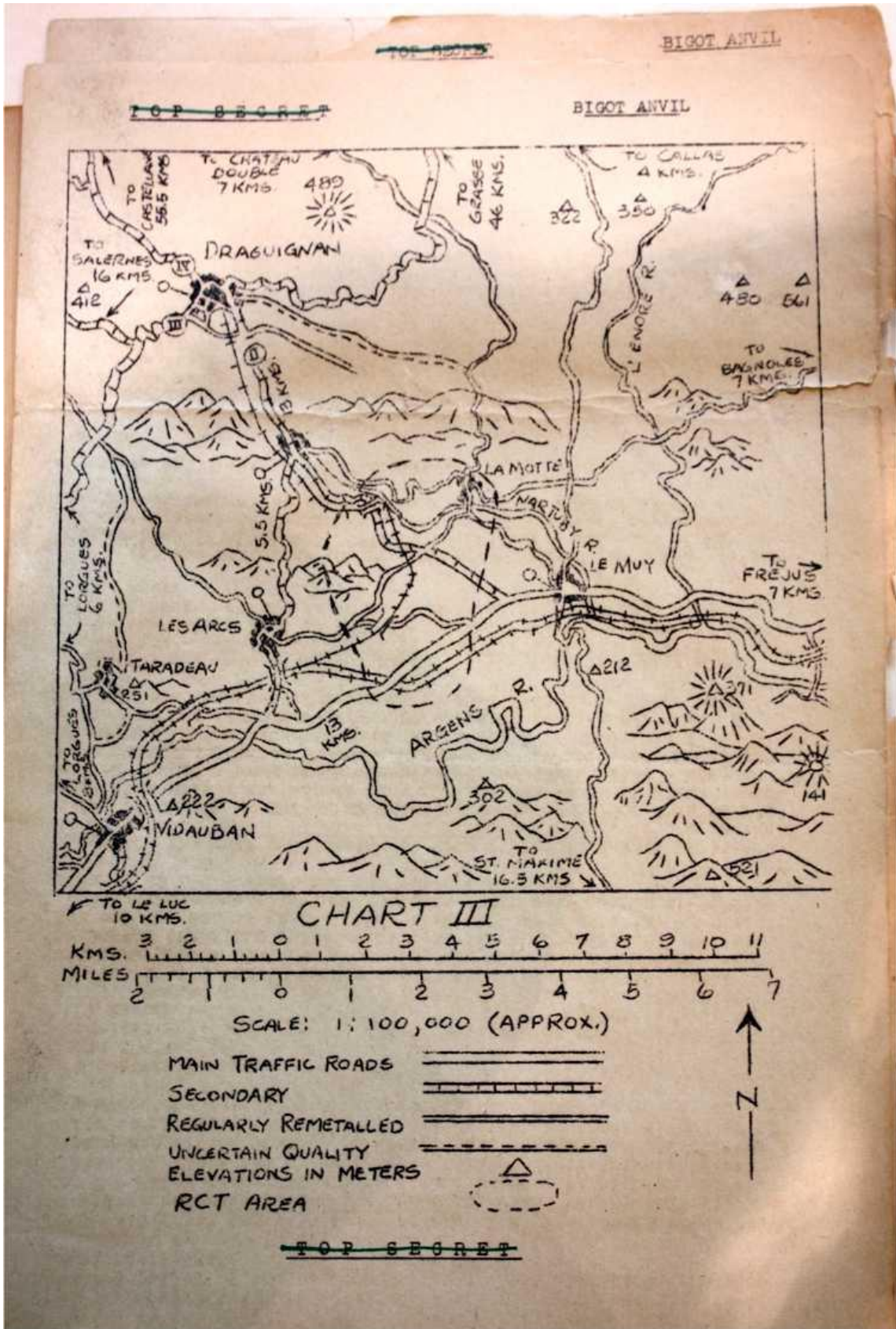
APPENDIX 1

Target and Point Designation for 517 P.R.C.T., plus attachments, with overlay (ABTF).

~~TOP SECRET~~



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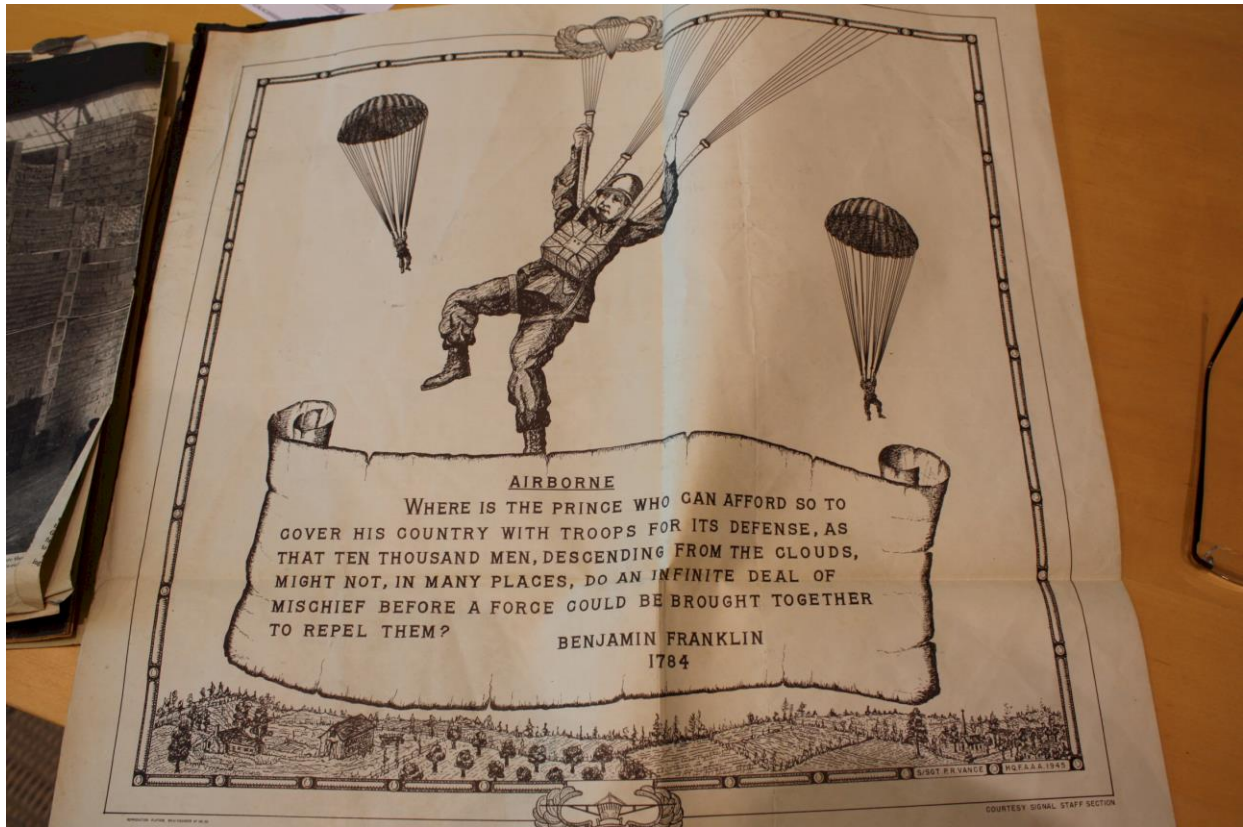


For more pages of this Intelligence Summary, visit: [Operation Anvil Intelligence Summary](#)



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And another sample from Mike Kane's findings at Carlisle:



Army Life, as told by PFC William B. Houston (Part 2)

Just wanted to give credit where credit is due: My son's father-in-law who recently purchased the **William Houston** journal (that's appearing now in MailCall) is Paul Trencan. He has quite a bit of interesting World War II memorabilia that he's acquired over the years from the medal shows he frequently attends. Since hearing some of the stories I've shared about my Dad, Paul has especially been on the look-out for items related to the 517th, and that's how he came upon the journal.

Thanks so much!

Shirley Catterson (daughter of **Ed Smith**, D CO.)

Hi,

It is good to see Bill's letters in print again. He wrote this in the late 1990's and Merle McMorrow had these published in the Thunderbolt when he was president of the 517. Bill was a member of the 460-C.

Pat Houston (Bill's widow)

On the following pages is installment #2 of William Houston's wartime journal. This is the first half of his chapter is about Camp MacKall, including a detailed description and diagrams of the Mess Hall.

CAMP MACKALL, NORTH CAROLINA

I was shipped to Camp Mackall in North Carolina and arrived there on May 7, 1943. Although Camp Mackall was a temporary camp it was at least neat and clean. With its grass and pine trees it had a pleasant, but not a resort, appearance. It had been named in honor of a paratrooper killed in action in Tunisia. For the first two weeks we were restricted to the battery area so I was not able to get to the post office to mail home the pennant and T-shirt, which I had bought.

The barracks in no way resembled a luxury hotel. They were about 65 feet long by twenty feet wide and were poised on piles of cement blocks. These piles varied in height from only a few inches to about two feet, depending upon the grade of the land. The roof was a gable type with an interior height of just seven feet. Each battery had two barracks and each barracks housed forty-eight to fifty two men in double bunks.

I was assigned to Battery C of the 460th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion in the 17th Airborne Division at this time. Some handle! This was new division, just being formed, and had, as its insignia, the eagle's claw. This patch consisted of a yellow claw in a black circle with the usual "Airborne" arched over the top. It was not too long before we discovered that a little Mercurochrome applied to the tips of the talons made the shoulder patch look rather vicious and bloody. At this time we were allowed to wear the parachute/glider patch on our overseas cap, which made us feel like paratroopers even though we had never been up in an airplane or made a jump.

At Camp Mackall there was a lake which the army had improved by dredging and bringing in enough sand to make an acceptable swimming beach. During May the weather was hot in North Carolina and that particular year the entire area had turned into a dust bowl so swimming was a treat. Well, a treat except for the three mile hike we had to make to the lake and back.

Very early in our basic training we went to a location known as the "Camouflage Area" to learn how to conceal equipment and land features by the use of camouflage. In this area there were wooden mock-ups of jeeps, field pieces and even an anti-aircraft gun hidden in a house. All of this was extremely interesting to me, but it was not so much the technique as it was the full size models that I marveled at. Looking back on the entire set-up I don't recall ever using these ideas in combat.

At Mackall I started making friends and some of those friendships have lasted to this day. The men in my barracks were from all over the United States and have been to reunions or we have kept in contact through the years. To mention a few, there was Sgt. Schneider, my favorite sergeant who lived near Detroit, Floyd Dunn and Frank Hupman from California, Rex Johnson from Utah, Sgt. Bill Westbrook from Florida, Cameron Gauthier of upper New York, Merle McMorrow who now lives in North Dakota but was from Minnesota at the time and Albert "Bud" Gallwas from Washington who frequently wrote to my sister Marion and even Dad. There are are some I have not seen or heard from since leaving the service; Fitz Patrick from New York, Long from New York and Ping from Chicago, Illinois. As other men joined us the battery grew to its full strength of 108 men. To me it was a surprise to discover how few of the men had ever been outside of their home state before joining the army. I guess that I was fortunate in that Dad worked for a railroad and we were able to travel on a pass, so I had traveled much more than the majority of the men.

Pat and I had spent a month in Florida in 1992 and on our way home we stopped and stayed a night with Gaylord and Roselyn Bucher who spent their winters in Rockingham, the nearest town to Camp Mackall. The old sergeant and I paid a visit to what is left of Camp Mackall, which is still an active military establishment, but there was little to be found of the camp as we knew it in 1943. Trees had grown where barracks and roads had once been and all that remained were the cement slabs which had served as the floors of the latrines and some abandoned plumbing of a few mess halls. The latrines brought back memories which were not the most pleasant ones, those of the long rows of stools where you had no privacy. For that reason, when I first went into the service, I tried to go to the toilet late at night, or even during the night, so I would be alone. At that time the absence of toilet lids, although there were toilet seats, made a bad impression on me.

Along this line there was another phase of army life which I could have lived without - the "short arm inspection". These inspections were always unannounced and at random intervals. For such inspections we were required to fall out and into formation wearing only boots and a raincoat. Then we had to hold our penis and "milk it down" as the regimental physician walked by and inspected for evidence of syphilis or gonorrhea.

At Camp Mackall I first saw the field piece with which we would eventually use in combat. It was an antique looking 75mm. howitzer. I say antique because of the wheels, they were made of wood, 30 inches in diameter with twelve wood spokes, and an iron tire. The wheels looked like farm wagon wheels and I am sure that they were a hold over from World War I. The field pieces were known as pack howitzers or mountain howitzers and were of a design which allowed them to be broken down into parts, packed on mules, transported through mountains, then reassembled quickly and made ready for action. This was the ideal field piece for the airborne artillery because it could be disassembled into units small and light enough to be dropped by a cargo parachute, then be reassembled and in action in a matter of minutes, that is if all the parts could be found. A cargo parachute could carry about 400 pounds so it was necessary to use several parachutes, one for each belly and each door load, to safely lower the howitzers to the ground. American paratroops during World War II jumped from Douglas C-47s, the standard cargo plane used by the United States and most of the Allied nations. The C-47 carried six belly loads, in our case parts of the howitzer and ammunition, and three smaller loads in the cabin. The cabin loads were made up of the wheels for the howitzer, the gun sight, survey equipment, .50 caliber ammunition, radio etc. and were pushed out of the door just before the first man jumped and as the belly loads were released. This method gave our airborne infantry artillery support within minutes after landing which was a reality only in the U.S. Army - the parachute units of other armies had to go it on their own until glider troops could be brought in, before they could enjoy the support of artillery. One fact that was never pointed out until we were ready to start our training was that there would not be any vehicles to pull the field pieces and that they have to be pulled by hand. For this reason we tried to capture enemy vehicles intact to be used for this purpose. To pull the 1365 pound artillery piece it took seven men, six to pull by means of a harness and one to sit in the tube to counter-balance the piece. It was a hard, hot job but we got plenty of practice during training.

Not long after I got to Mackall, probably by the second week of June, the wood artillery wheels on the howitzer were replaced with steel wheels fitted with pneumatic tires. I do not recall of ever pulling the howitzers outside of the battery area before the old wheels were replaced but, after the new wheels were installed, we pulled the howitzers all over the countryside.

By the middle of May we had been introduced to our personal weapon, the M1A1 carbine. This was a .30 caliber, semi-automatic gun with a fifteen shot clip and a folding stock. This was a great improvement over the .45 caliber side arm which the artillery formerly carried in that it had a much greater range, the clip carried almost three times as many shells and was far more accurate from 50 to 300 yards.

On May 1st I was assigned to a detail to unpack the new carbines which had just arrived at Camp Mackall. These guns were coated with oil and wrapped in brown paper, then placed in wood boxes for shipping. It was our job to unpack and clean each gun. It was not a bad detail - we could do a gun in about ten minutes but we had another lesson to learn, that of gold bricking. We learned the second lesson well - we spent an hour and twenty minutes to do each gun. We started to do the unpacking and cleaning outside but it started to rain at 1500 hours and it rained so hard that the entire detail, of eight or nine men, went back to the barracks and goofed off. The rest of the men were assigned to guard duty so we had the barracks pretty much to ourselves.

On the preceding day we had been introduced to the bazooka. This was a portable launcher from which a rocket propelled missile was fired. We went out to Area A and fired practice rounds at a moving tank. It is said that this weapon can knock out a tank.

Our training about the carbine went into full swing. We learned to disassemble, name and identify the parts then reassemble the carbine while blindfolded. This is to make us able to care for our carbine under a combat condition even if we did not have any light. I, personally, never had to use this training while overseas.

We were issued gas masks on May the 14th. There was never an occasion where we had to use the gas mask except for one false alarm in Italy which will be recounted later. Instead, many of the masks were discarded and the case used to store hoarded rations.

On May the 15th, 1943 I found myself on K.P. At Camp Mackall K.P. was miserable except when the rest of the battalion was out in the field. At least the K.P.s were allowed to eat an early chow and always got plenty of food. When assigned to K.P. the day started early and ran late but, because of the uncertain hours which varied with each tour of duty, I cannot recall my exact hours. I do remember that if you were on K.P. there was little time to do anything else after you finished in the evening except maybe to write a short letter. For one thing, by the time you finished you were so dog tired that the only thing on your mind was to get some sleep.

One month after the eleven volunteers for the paratroops left Fort Snelling there were only three left. The entire idea of the airborne was to weed out as many of the candidates as possible, even before they got to jump school.

Mail call was always the high point of the day and I was very fortunate in that area. My family wrote frequently and there was a steady stream of letters from friends all through my army career.

Since we were in the South there was a difference in the diet. I had to get used to food prepared the southern way, to army rations and to mass produced meals which was a real change from the home cooking I was used to. For example, in North Carolina we got a lot more salt and more green vegetables than I did in Minnesota but far less fats and proteins. We had heard that steak, an almost forgotten commodity in civilian life, was plentiful in the service but I would like to know in which part of the service - I have not seen any so far. Butter was scarce and we only had it for breakfast but, as I mentioned in one letter home, you get used to not having it with every meal. One food that I really hated was goat's meat. I could not stand the taste of it, but even worse, I could not tell what it was by looks alone.

As a consequence I would load my plate up only to discover, after tasting it, that it was not beef. There was no particular odor to give a clue as to what it was.

There was a man in our battery, whose name I cannot recall, who was a vegetarian so I made it a point to befriend him and be right behind him in the chow line. In that way I became the happy recipient of his share of meat. I don't know what happened to him, he may have shipped out to a different outfit or may have decided to eat meat in order to survive. Either way, I was happy that he had spent some time in my battalion.

Another hard to find item in civilian life was film but the P.X. would get in a supply every once and a while and, if you could get there at the right time, you could buy up to two rolls at \$.25 per roll for the 116 size. This gave me eight pictures per roll on my camera. This price was a bargain when compared to the \$.37 I had to pay for the same film before going into the army. It made little difference that I did not have a camera in camp but I had hopes of having mine sent soon. Cameras were permitted but you were required to get a permit and use common sense as to what pictures you took.

Our laundry could be sent to the quartermaster laundry and \$1.50 would be deducted from your pay or you could do your laundry but it would have to be done by hand and the weekend was the only time you could find time to do it. To identify our clothes each piece had to be stamped with the initial of your last name and the last four digits of your army serial number, thus mine was H-8318. I do not know what the chances are of two laundry markings being the same but, by some coincidence we had two such people in our battery. This caused a great deal of confusion since the clothes were all the same style and color, right down to the socks and underwear.

Then there was Cameron Gauthier, an industrious young man who spent his weekends doing laundry he had taken in from other members of the battery. He charged a small fee of, as I remember fifteen cents per item, for his labors. During World War II servicemen were not allowed to wear civilian clothes, except in their own home while on furlough, so there was never a problem of mixing up, losing or identifying civilian clothes.

G.I. insurance was optional, at least for the single soldier. The price was very reasonable, only \$6.50 per month for a \$10,000 policy which could be continued on after their discharge.

When payday came and the deductions were added up there was not much left. For your laundry \$1.50 was withheld, for insurance another \$6.50 and an additional \$18.75 for a war bond; that left you with a mere \$23.25 for the month.

One day I decided to have sparkling shoes (this was before we got jump boots) so I took my G.I. shoes into the shower one night and went after them with a scrub brush and bar of G.I. soap. Guess what - the following morning there wasn't any color left on the shoes.

Movies were a great source of entertainment on our free evenings. Now that I look back I feel that most of the enjoyment came from the fact that you could sit down for an hour or two. There were at least two, and maybe even four, theaters at Camp Mackall at which each movie would be shown three or four days, then the movie would move to the next theater. This was great for several reasons. If you heard the other fellows talking about a particularly good movie you still had a chance to see it, or if you really enjoyed a certain movie, you could catch it a second time. It was very seldom that you missed a movie because you were busy every night that the movie was in camp.

The theaters were buildings without air-conditioning but with fans mounted high on the walls to circulate the air. Usually you had to get there early to get a seat, but even

getting there early did not guarantee a seat since an entire section in the center, and well toward the front, that was reserved for officers.

The beer garden was a neat place to spend an evening. There were no flowers there of course, but there was a large concession stand in the center of the garden and picnic tables spotted around the grounds. Beer, hot dogs, pop and other goodies were offered for sale at very reasonable prices. You can imagine what a popular place this was for those who were not on some sort of detail and, at the same time, too broke to go to town and pay civilian prices.

We had one fellow who wanted to get out of the army so was 'bucking for a section eight', a mental discharge. His favorite thing was to eat glass. He would go to the beer garden, unscrew an electric light bulb from the eaves of the concession building, place a bit of mustard on it and proceed to eat the bulb. What was even worse, he would sometimes wait until after 2130 when all of the lights were out in the barracks, then take out a bulb, break it on the steel frame of his bed, much as you would crack an egg, and eat the glass. The sound of crunching glass in the dark made us all hope that his discharge would come soon. Eventually it did, the lucky dog!

During this time I may have had a chance to get out of the army but I was too dumb to carry the procedure to its logical conclusion. At the Fort Snelling Reception Center they noticed that I had flat feet and about once a month they would ask if my feet bothered me. They did not cause me any trouble so my answer always was that there was no problem so I stayed right where I was. Had I claimed pain or trouble with my feet I may have been put on limited duty or even discharged.

Back to K.P. I had observed that there were a great number of dishes to be washed at the mess hall. We did not have a dishwasher so every dish had to be scrapped off, then the dishes, cups and silverware were washed by hand. The plates and cups were placed on racks and sterilized with scalding hot water, then these two items were left on their racks to dry. Somehow I always managed to burn my hands with the hot water. I still remember how the silverware was dried, it took two men and a mattress cover. A mattress cover took the place of a sheet on our bunks. It was to the mattress as a pillow case was to a pillow but was made of a muslin material and fit over the mattress. The silverware was placed inside of the mattress cover, then with a man at each end the cover, the silverware was bounced up and down for several minutes until the contents were dry. In civilian life this method was usually frowned upon - something about scratching the silverware.

The floor of the mess hall had to be scrubbed of course, but one of the most clever operations was the scrubbing of the tables. At each table there were benches, rather than chairs, but only on one side of the table. The top of the table consisted of three boards, the two outside boards were fixed but the center one was removable. This enabled the K.P. to remove the center one and thoroughly clean between the boards. The center board was then raised at one end and the lower end was wedged in this upright position of about 30 degrees. After the table had dried the board was put back into place.

By May 21st I was in trouble again. That was the morning that nine of us displayed an independent streak and took off for the mess hall on our own. As a result the first sergeant invited us to go for a ride, which sounded like fun until we discovered that it was a truck ride and, since we had exhibited so much energy earlier in the day, we were required to load the 2 1/2 ton truck and the one ton trailer it pulled, with dirt. I would rather have not gone for the ride but I had no choice.

During the day we had the regular calisthenics, drill, a lecture on cannoneering, a lesson on how to grease, change oil, and take care of a jeep plus a lesson on how to

disassemble and assemble a .50 caliber machine gun. And, remember, we self taught ourselves how to shovel dirt into a truck and trailer.

At about this time we had a driving test. They piled us into jeeps, three men and a non-com to each one, and off we went to show our driving skill. I didn't do too bad but I did pray that I would not have to stop going up a hill and start up again. I was not sure that I could do it without jerking the living daylights out of the other passengers. I was surprised at the number of men who had never driven and marveled at the Californians, all of whom seemed to be good drivers. Driving a 2 1/2 ton truck was a different story, a sad story to be sure.

The heat in North Carolina got to me one day so the doctor ordered me to take some salt tablets and stay in the barracks for the afternoon. This was a welcome mini-vacation.

I took time to write home about one exceptional meal we had at Mackall. We had roast pork, asparagus, creamed corn, bread, celery stuffed with cheese, eggplant and ice cream. Butter was missing, though we still have only one pat at breakfast and potatoes are seldom served.

I did write home about a breakfast too, a breakfast which consisted of only three fried eggs. Fried eggs were a real treat and when they were served we always went into the mess hall through the back door and directly into the kitchen. There the mess sergeant and K.P.s would be cooking eggs on the top of the stoves and we would point to the egg or eggs we wanted, thereby getting the ones that were "just right". That is about as personal as the army could get. Normally, when eggs were served they were scrambled and the rubbery mess was set out on the mess line in a huge pan. By the time you went through the line the eggs were cold. You wouldn't think that scrambled eggs could be messed up but, believe me it is possible.

I also began to develop a definite hate attitude toward the Army Air Corps, especially at 0400 in the morning, when they flew their C-47s over our barracks at about 200 feet.

Every soldier must learn to pitch a tent using his shelter-half and so it was on one nice May day when we went out to Area A for our lesson. This particular day we dived up into groups of four and combined our shelter-halves to make a four man-tent. Everything went fine until the center pole got out of line and one of our men had to crawl inside to straighten it. Somehow the tent got buttoned up with him inside. At that time an officer came by, lined us up and was about to inspect our work when he noticed that there were only three men. He made us tear the tent down and start all over again.

Area A was the section of our camp in which we did most of our training - a field about a quarter of a mile from our barracks that had no buildings and only a few trees. Oh yes, there was one building, the latrine. This had a canvas shield around it and all it amounted to was a crude outhouse.

On May 23rd my camera arrived but I could not use it until the permit came through.

One of our bivouacs was an overnight affair, as most of the bivouacs were, but in this instance the plan called for a march of thirteen miles by way of a round about route and a shorter, more direct route of seven miles on the return. We lucked out for once, the short route was used in both directions. The packs were light, about twenty five pounds, but the sun was exceptionally hot and never stopped beating down on us. I am not kidding when I say my fatigue jacket was dripping sweat after I took it off, even without wringing it out. The same was true of the helmet liner which was so hot that I could not touch it with my hands.

The shoulder straps that support the musette bag did a good job of cutting into my shoulders during that march. It must have bothered some officers too because it was not

long after that we were supplied with felt pads to protect our shoulders. Of course the pads were considered "sissy stuff" but they were secretly appreciated everyone used them.

Back to the bivouac. We arrived at our destination at 1530, pitched our tents and camouflaged them, always aware that the enemy might be nearby. I drew guard duty from 0200 to 0300 and found out how dark it can really get. The guard post was about 100 yards from my tent but when I tried to find my way back to the tent I walked for twenty minutes, and had passed within fifteen yards of it, before I finally found it.

While on bivouac we had to eat in the field, and I complained in my letters sent home about the small size of the mess-kits - they simply did not hold enough food. So much for bivouacs for now.

Pay day was another experience worth note even though it only came around once a month and always in camp. If we were out on a problem the pay had to wait until we returned to camp. Let's run through the typical pay procedure. We went to the day room, stood in line while waiting our turn and, when our turn finally came, we would uncover, enter the office, salute and give our name, rank and serial number before receiving our pay in cash, less deductions, at the first table. This left three more tables to stop at - it reminded me of an obstacle course. Nothing happened at table number two so the next stop was at number three. At that table we were relieved of \$1.70 for swimming trunks which we were required to buy. This was not the end of the ordeal and it was at the last table that they took another \$.30 cents for shoulder patches, items which we were required to buy and wear. And who sewed them on? We did of course.

A day room was a barracks, divided by a partition through the short dimension of the building, so one building could be shared by two batteries. Each day room contained an office for the battery commander and first sergeant in which they could do their paper work. The office area was separated from a recreation area for the men by a wall. Our day room area was mostly used for loafing, letter writing and playing cards. The lower portion of the walls, from the window sills down, was fir with a very unusual decor. The wood was charred slightly with a blow torch which darkened the soft part of the grain and created a contrast between the soft and hard areas. Then a coat of varnish was applied to protect it and give a glossy appearance. It was furnished with a couple of picnic style tables with attached benches.

While writing some letters in the day room one evening the first sergeant asked for a few men to move some "junk" in. I helped and now our day room is one of the nicest in the entire camp with six chrome chairs with red plastic upholstery, four foot-stools, four wall lamps, a three-way floor lamp, curtains and a honey of a table model radio worth about \$49.00. Until this time we had been able to get only local stations, which did not offer much, but now we are able to get something worthwhile from stations in large cities.

By the end of May I had hoarded at least sixteen rolls of film, each with a capacity of eight pictures. Since film was so hard to get I bought a roll or two every chance I got.

Brownies were always a welcome gift from home and in a letter I wrote to mother on May 31st I thanked her for the brownies I had recently received and thanked her for not cutting them. Since it was impossible to conceal food from the rest of the guys it was necessary to share with them and, if they were not cut, they could be divided into the appropriate number of pieces. On this particular occasion I was able to save an entire row for myself.

Heat and hikes came with June. In June we started to pull the field pieces, by hand, on our hikes. And it was hot, so hot that our shoe polish melted and we could not polish our shoes. Everyone felt pretty bad about that.

On June 5th we went on our second hike which they called a tactical problem, this meant that we had to pull the howitzer and play like we were in combat. But this time we did not have to carry a full pack, only a musette bag on our back with a rain coat, mess-kit, a towel and a pair of socks in it. Our shelter-half and one blanket was rolled into a long roll and slung over the howitzer tube to lighten our personal load.

First we went to a crossroad, four miles from our area, and set up a position until dark. At 2230 hours we got the C.S.M.O. (Close Station March Order) and set out for another position 0.7 of a mile down the road where we went into position for the night. All activity was carried on in the dark and with a minimum of noise. It was a very uncomfortable night - we laid our shelter-halves down and slept on it with the blanket over us. The big problem was trying to decide whether we should keep the blanket on us and suffer from the heat or discard the blanket and feed the mosquitoes. The next time I am going to leave my dog-tags where they are clearly visible so the mosquitoes will not have to roll me over to find out what type of blood I have.

From 2330 to 0030 I had guard duty. We were not supposed to use a flashlight but there was one case when I would have been better off if I had - that was after I had finished my time on guard. There was no written or formal order stating or who was to go on guard or at what time, so it was the responsibility of each soldier to wake his relief up to stand the next hour of guard. First I tried to get Fritz up but he made it clear that I had relieved him. Then I tried a sergeant who, because of his rank, would have no part of guard duty. Finally I got Andersen up and on duty. It was so dark out in the North Carolina woods that you cannot see five feet in front of you and it is deadly quiet.

At 0530 we had to get up and we had breakfast. We had to dig the battery in - a trail-pit, gunner's fox hole, slit trenches and an ammunition pit to simulate combat conditions. It took thirty minutes to dig the holes, then a lieutenant-colonel came by, fell into a foxhole and within a matter of thirty seconds completed his inspection. After the inspection we had to fill the holes in, then we moved out. We were back in camp by 1130 and guess what - we had to clean the guns.

We were always carrying our carbine. It went through the chow line with us, we had it on our shoulder while doing drills on the howitzer and slept with it both cocked and within easy reach. All of this but no ammunition had been issued, not one shell.

I made a Venetian blind for the window over my bunk out of cardboard and string and it worked perfectly - that is until the first inspection after I had installed the blind. At that time I was ordered to remove it because it was not regulation and the other windows were not similarly equipped. It did a good job of keeping the sun out on the one Sunday which I did not have to get up before the sun.

There was a mention of strawberries in a letter from home and I answered that I had not seen any since before I joined the army. We did get blueberry pie once in a while. Butter is still only a breakfast item.

More than once I stayed in camp because the transportation to town was so bad. Often it was a wait of one to three hours to get on the bus, and after you go to town there wasn't much to do and all there was to see was hundreds of G.I.s. The bus itself was not exactly a first class or luxury vehicle. The tractor unit was a Dodge truck which pulled about a thirty foot trailer, probably without springs, if one was to judge by the quality of the ride.

There were times when K.P. was not too bad. One example was a Friday when we had 350 for noon mess but only 95 for the breakfast and the evening meal. All we did is loaf

around, eat oranges and pie and pester the mess sergeant. We were done by 1900 rather than the normal 2130 and there were so few men in the barracks that we turned the lights off when we felt like doing so.

During the day we had made an even hundred pies but after the K.P.s left there were only ninety-nine. It comes down to the fact that one K.P. (not me) had a pie to himself. The following morning the mess-sergeant set out to find the thief. When the sergeant found him he made the culprit return the pie tin because, he the sergeant, had been charged out with 100 tins and did not want to be charged for the lost pie tin. The sergeant didn't ask any questions or even mention the pie, but he did get his pie tin back.

We had two popular mess-sergeants, one was Sgt. Hess and the other was Sgt. Prill. Therefore the mess hall became known as Hess' Mess or Prill's Grill, depending on who was our reigning sergeant.

Fritz and I were trying to perfect a chocolate sauce to put on ice-cream so be ready for a new and tasty treat from Camp Mackall in the near future. Nothing more was ever heard of this invention.

Fritz had a good and bad experience. First the good one. His brother had been reported killed in action by the Navy Department about five weeks ago, but since then his family has received a letter from him. The bad thing is Fritz's black eye. His harness was too loose the last time he jumped from the mock-up tower and it smacked him on the left eye which is still black.

At Camp Mackall I completed my post graduate course in bed-making and finally arrived at the stage where I can make a bed with the blanket so tight that a "quarter would bounce on it", which is supposed to be the ultimate test.

On Sunday, the 13th of June, I went to Mass which was supposed to start at 0700 but did not start until 0725, as a result I missed breakfast. Boy, was I hungry! Hungry because in those days we were required to fast from midnight, even in the service. I did make up for it at noon with an outstanding meal of ham with raisin sauce, string beans, a salad, bread, ice-cream, cookies and lemonade. This meal was worked off by playing two games of pool and going swimming. Of course all of these activities worked up an appetite and I was compelled to have some ice-cream made into a fresh orange sundae.

The heat was still a point to write home about. The number of runs and the double-timing with full pack has been cut, but not completely eliminated. This freed up more time for lectures and "games", which is another way of saying personal competition. On June the 14th it thundered all day while the sun continued to shine but there was no rain. This weather, with all of it's sunshine, did help my tan which was as deep and dark as I have ever had. Don't forget though, before the tan came a deep, red burn, also the worse I have ever had.

With the hot days and full training schedule it was common that I would write a letter in the evening, after lights out, while sitting under the streetlight. This is what happened on June the 18th after going to see the movie "Bataan". At least I started to write but I had to cut the letter writing short because it started to rain. I was looking forward to seeing a movie coming soon, "Five Graves To Cairo", at least it gave me a chance make some choices while in the army.

Earlier in the day, the 18th, a new fellow, fresh from Toccoa, joined our outfit and reported that a G.I. had fallen dead while running the mountain when they were both at Toccoa.

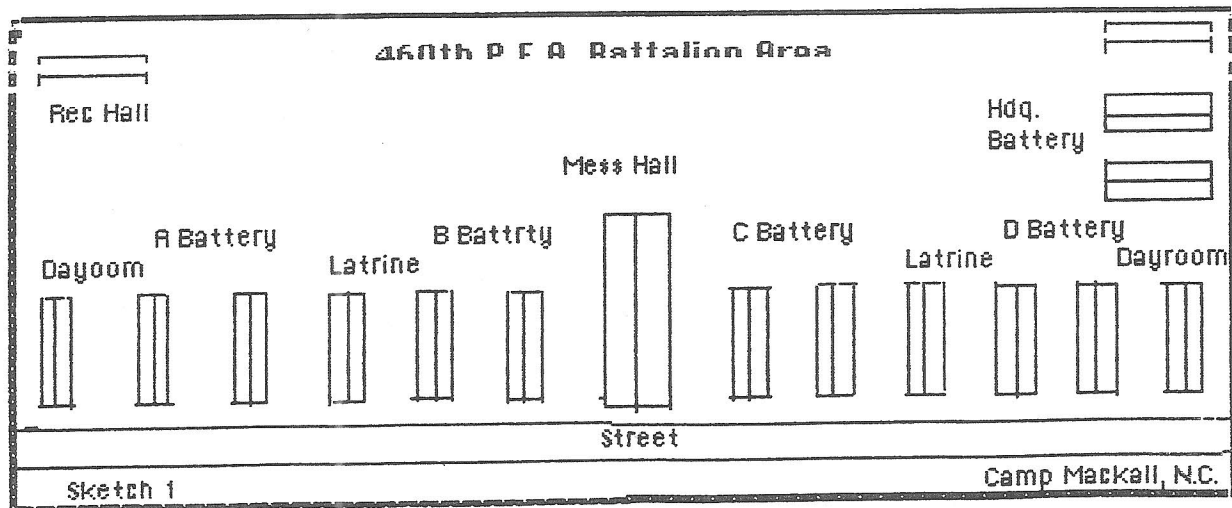
In a letter I wrote to Dad on Fathers' Day I described how Fritz and I had learned how to make the best of our bivouacs. It was rather simple. First we pitched our tent on a pile of

sand left from digging the field pieces in, this was soft for comfort and high enough so the warwe would run around it and leave us high and dry in the event of rain. Then we buttoned our raincoats over the open end of our shelter-half so we were comfortably enclosed. After pitching the tent we took a walk down the road to a small store and bought some cokes, cheese-crackers and a large box of vanilla wafers. With the oranges and checker game we brought with us we had an interesting evening before the rain started. During the rain we stripped and took a shower, a rather cold shower at that.

Letters began to mention a possible trip to Mackall by Mom and Dad. They could stay for three days in the guest house, which was a barracks divided into rooms, but reservations had to be made at least two weeks in advance. The cost was \$5.00.

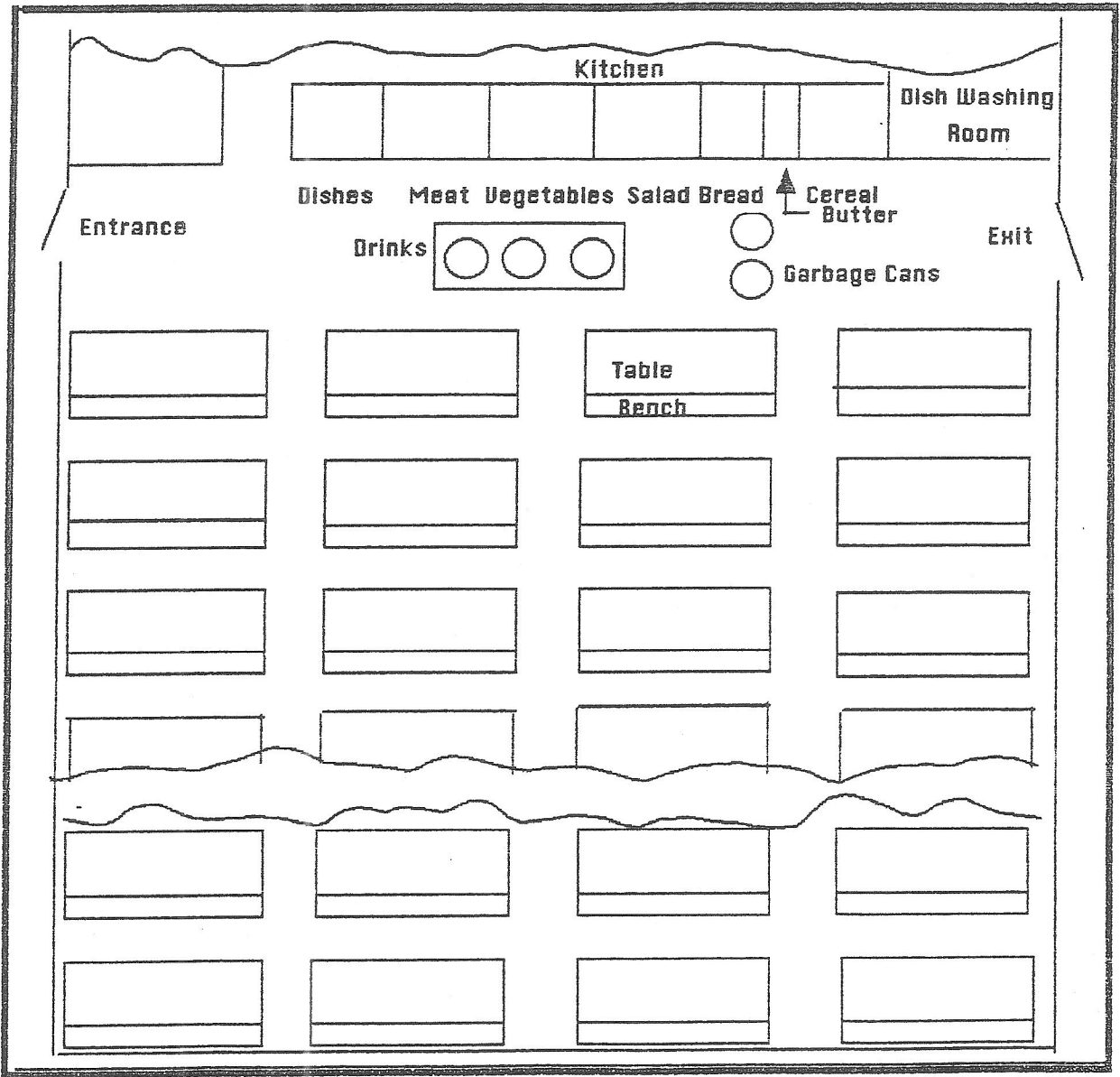
The official temperature was 100.2 degrees on June 17th but it felt like 120 in the sun. That was an all time high for that date, so what did we do but go on a hike with full pack.

Since there was little to write about I choose to describe the mess-hall (See sketch 2). My first sketch shows the general layout of the battalion area with the mess-hall wisely placed in a central location. Those of us in C battery were fortunate in that our barracks were located next to the mess hall and on the entrance side so we could watch the line. With this advantage we developed a tactic to save time and energy - we could wait in the barracks until the line got rather short, then join in. This was not a foolproof method, but a gamble as to whether the food would run out or there would be a little extra. If the food ran short the servings got smaller and smaller toward the end of the line and sometimes even ran out. Sometimes we were lucky and there was plenty. In such case the servings increased and those at the end of the line came out best. Seconds were rare but sometimes available. There was a very ridged schedule followed for the serving of meals. Meals were served at 0615, 1145 and 1745 and the doors were never opened ahead of time. This resulted in a long line before each meal and another waiting period. At the precise time the doors were flung open and the line started to move. In about fifteen minutes you were at the door, then it happened - you were through the door and in a different world. It was then that you realized why it was called a mess-hall.



Once inside you took a plate and loaded it with everything you could get your hands on, then you sat down and ate. (See Sketch 2 on following page). After eating you scraped

the remaining food from your plate into the garbage can and put your plate through a window into the plate room and left. From there you usually went to the P.K. to get something else to eat. Oranges were about the only thing you could bring back to the barracks from the mess-hall but an apple or two have been known to fall into my lap and find its way back to my bunk.



On June 24th we went out to Area A to take part in some maneuvers. No sooner did we get out there than it began to rain. For about fifteen minutes it rained harder than I have ever seen it rain in Minneapolis and then it drizzled for another half hour. I had a letter in my pocket which I had started to read but did not have time to finish - what a mess that was! The envelope came unglued and the ink ran to the point that the letter was almost impossible to read.

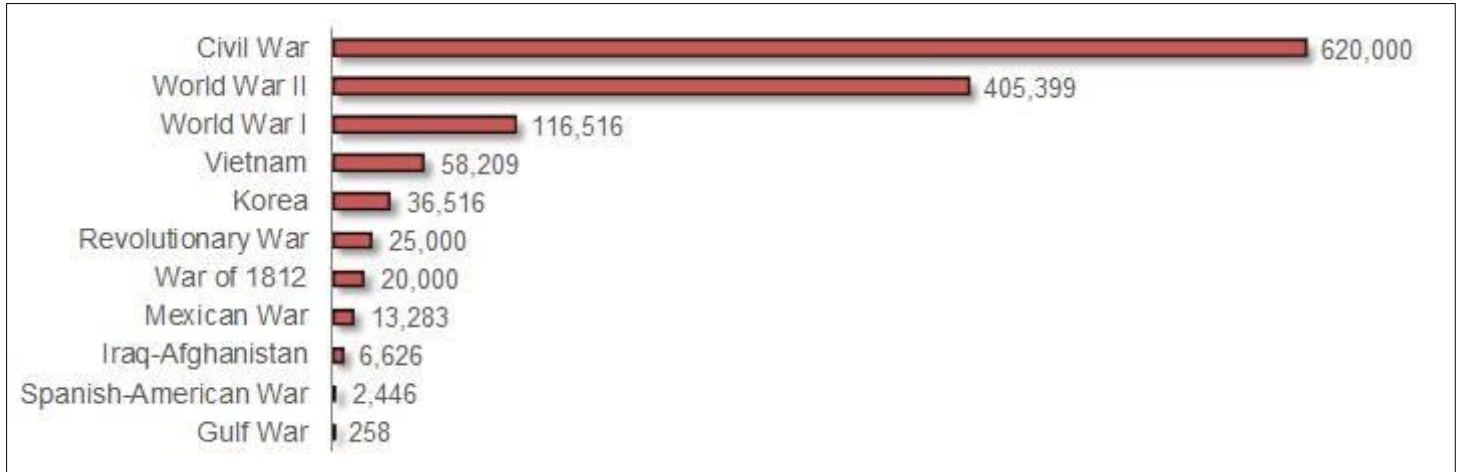
On my nineteenth birthday, the first birthday I spent in the army, I don't remember



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Military History

April 9, 1865: The most deadly war in American history came to an end at Appomattox, Virginia. One in four soldiers never returned home and 2% of the population died. To put that in perspective, it is the equivalent of 6 million people today. 149 years ago today.



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