

A Letter
From
My Brother

CENSORED

My Army Experiences – 1943 to 1946
By Vern Miller

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FOREWORD

January 26, 2003

In recent years, I've been jotting down some of my more memorable experiences of Army service during World War II as I thought of them and had time to do more than make note of a name or place on a scrap of paper. An attack of Guillain-Barre Syndrome on New Years Day of 2003 triggered a change. During the first few weeks I hallucinated for days at a time. I had dreams that combined reality with hidden wartime fears. In part of one dream I saw myself as a dying patient in an Army hospital in Bournemouth, England. From my first floor bed in the hospital I watched British soldiers lay out my grave in the adjacent cemetery. They used 4' x 8' panels of plywood to designate the area next to my grave where my horse would be buried. It was a beautiful sunny day.

There's more to the dream, but that's another story. And, no, I've never had a horse – neither in the Army nor in civilian life. When the time came to transfer me from the neurology ward of the University of Alabama Hospital at Birmingham to Lakeshore Rehabilitation Hospital I was so helpless that I could not sit up on the edge of the bed by myself. Nurses at Lakeshore Rehab transferred me from bed to wheelchair with a “Hoyer lift” – a sling similar to one used to support large animals that can't stand by themselves. I was truly a “basket case.” Only my head, hands, and feet protruded from the sling – sort of like a jelly fish upside down. How is that possible? Orderlies put me on a blanket, then picked it up by the four corners. Therapists convinced me that my own nerves and muscles would one day begin working just as they had been before I got sick..

Eventually I could choose some of my own therapy activities. As a result I had daily use of a computer keyboard and re-learned how to type. When Carol Sosnin learned of this, she brought me a laptop computer. Carol is a longtime good friend and fills in for our daughter, Joan, who has taken a lot of time off from her work in Austin, Texas to help us. (So did our two boys and their wives, as did Joan's husband Conrad.) Years ago, Carol took us into her home at 3 o'clock in the morning after our house, directly across the street from hers, was severely damaged by fire. So, thanks to Carol, her husband Carl, and the extra time on my hands while recuperating at Lakeshore Rehabilitation Hospital, on January 26, 2003 I seriously started to compile my memories from World War II. Since that time I have continued the project at home because I am not yet physically able to get back to my favorite pastime of creating projects from wood in my basement workshop.

Chapter One

From Civilian to Soldier

UNCLE SAM DRAFTED ME; I DID NOT VOLUNTEER

It was in June of 1943 that my mother and father drove me the 33 miles from Comfrey to New Ulm, Minnesota -- our county seat -- for induction into the Army. My induction had been deferred until I finished one year of school at Mankato State Teachers College. This partly was a result of having a reasonably high score on my application tests for ASTP (Army Specialized Training Program).

However, some of the people who were called up for induction almost as soon as we had finished the tests had scores higher than mine. Most of them had signed up for the Navy V5 program or the Marine or Air Corps Program, though Bob Doyle of Owatonna, MN was called up immediately for training as a Medic under the ASTP. I was assigned to the Engineering program at the University of Illinois, but the class I was in didn't start until autumn so there was plenty of time for me to complete my Army basic training at Camp Hood, Texas -- training center for Tank Destroyer units.

My entry into the Army was not at all like I had expected. We gathered at Turner Hall in New Ulm and shortly after were loaded onto Greyhound busses that took us to Fort Snelling, where actual induction into the Army took place. Loading onto the bus was such a hurried affair that I barely had time to say goodbye to my parents. My mother was crying as I left.

It should be pointed out again that it was my brother who volunteered for military service -- not me. I waited for my draft number to be drawn and then applied for a deferment so I could finish my first year of college. Bob was the gung-ho Marine with two tours of duty in the South Pacific, including Guadalcanal and a stint as crew chief for Joe Foss, the bloodthirsty fighter pilot from Sioux Falls, SD. I was the reluctant civilian soldier who barely made it through Basic Training.

How gung-ho was he? Consider this excerpt from the letter of April 8, 1942 he sent to me long before I tucked in my tie as an unwilling member of the Army of the United States. *"This letter is in answer exclusively to your epistle of March seventh in which you berated me for not getting more rates.*

"If I were in the army and I am not, by choice, I would probably be tech or Master tech Sgt but from my point of view a

Marine boot is equal to an army staff sgt. My statement is proven by the instance of one (name censored) being promoted to staff sgt. Our telephone system here is bigger than the one at home and if that simple (censored) could take over even my job successfully, then I'd be very much surprised.

"Another thing the Marine Corps is out here fighting not at home in the neighboring U.S.O. dancing with the Marines' girl friends.

"You will also note that I achieved rank of corporal on February first of this year and from that time on will receive the sum of seventy-nine dollars eighty cents monthly until the next rate.

"Yes, my boy, when you become a lowly draftee and walk down the street in your ill fitting, unpressed O.D.'s with shoes and belt not shined, belt buckle corroded beyond recognition, and your belt thru a loop on the shoulder instead of around your waist, blouse unbuttoned, shirt wrinkled, pockets jammed full of most everything and tie on crooked then compare yourself with one of the few Marines left over there.

"Do not be disheartened by that withering look all Marines will give you; they detest (censored)"

Harsh words, maybe, but I will have to admit that Marines generally looked sharper than Army GI's. However, a couple of years after receiving this letter, I was as proud of my un-pressed O.D.'s as my brother was of his Dress Blues. And rightfully so. I had gone through Basic Training successfully, earned my Sharpshooter medal on the rifle range, qualified for the Expert medal with a submachine gun, earned my way into the Army Specialized Training Program at the University of Illinois, and gone into the combat zone in Germany with the Eighth Armored Division. I got shot at, outran machinegun fire with my truck, kept my truck on the road hauling gasoline, water, and ammunition for weeks at a time without enough sleep, and looked like Bill Mauldin's Willie and Joe characters.

Yes, I was proud of my rumpled uniform. We (my battalion) received a presidential citation for meritorious service in combat and I have three battle stars on my service ribbon -- Rhineland, Central Europe and Ardennes (Battle of the Bulge).

All this happened without me ever firing my weapon. Because of this I hesitated to join the Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge. I thought the organization was for Combat Medics and Combat Infantrymen. My "hesitation" lasted until about 2005.

Though I never fired a shot, I had my trigger finger in position on various occasions —

especially when out in the truck by myself. And I always worried about being captured by a German night patrol when I had to hike off into the woods to relieve myself, even though I had my weapon in hand ready to fire.

One time when on guard duty in the Harz Mountains I disobeyed orders of “shoot to kill” and have always been glad I did because the “enemy” turned out to be a drunken Russian soldier who was one of five Russians traveling with us. He worked with our kitchen crew. The war was nearly over. We had been diverted from a run to Berlin and sent to Osterode, in the Harz Mountains.

ONE FINAL LEAVE BEFORE HEADING TO EUROPE

Bob never got to see me in my O.D.'s -- neither rumped nor un-rumped. My mother did, though. And my father, too, but he had served with Company E, 34th Engineering Battalion in France during World War I and understood Army orders about uniforms. I got home for Christmas Day in 1943 while I was at the University of Illinois and wore my winter uniform — my Olive Drabs. Bob saw only my suntans when we managed to get home at the same time.

It must have been July or August of 1944 when I finally got the two-week leave that many soldiers had following completion of their Basic Training. The ASTP program had been closed out in March of 1944 and I had been with the 8th Armored Division at Camp Polk, Louisiana for almost six months before my turn for furlough rolled around. Rumor had it that we were no longer needed as a training division and would therefore soon be shipping out to the European theater. Four of us chipped in \$10 each for our share of expenses to leave camp at midnight with another soldier who had a car. He dropped us off at the train station in Shreveport, LA.

My leave had come up suddenly. I had enough money on hand to buy a train ticket, but not much more. . By the time we got to Kansas City I was more than ready for something to eat, When I found that it would be 10 o'clock that night before I could catch the next train toward home, I started wondering how I'd get my next meal. With several hours to wait, I started wandering around the city.

My wanderings took me past the Salvation Army where the delicious smell of onions and potatoes being fried for the evening meal triggered even greater hunger pangs. I must have walked back and forth past that place half a dozen times before I finally decided that I had to swallow my pride and ask for a handout. I walked in the door just as they issued the call for supper. The food was already on the table when the short devotional started. It really was short, I'm sure, but it seemed to take forever.

To this day I have an appreciation for homeless people and for the Salvation Army (which is on our “giving” list every year.) I had only enough money in my pocket to call home. The Salvation Army took me in without question and offered to put me up for the night if I couldn't get on the train.

Mobs of people were standing in lines to get on the train as early as 9 o'clock. I spotted one of the girls I had known at Mankato State Teachers College and learned from her that she would be more likely to get on the train if it looked as if she were the wife of a soldier. She was going home on leave from her job as a welder at an aircraft factory. We stood together in the line with other soldiers and their wives and managed to get aboard without anyone questioning us. We even found a place to sit. That probably wouldn't have happened if I had been by myself. The porter even found pillows for us and in spite of the crowded aisles and frequent stops, we managed to catch a bit of sleep during the long train ride.

This leave was much better than my Christmas leave had been. Other people I knew were back home at the same time and going down to Kelly's Café to hang out was al-



My brother Bob sporting his Corporal stripes, Joyce Brown — the little girl from next door, and me in my official summer uniform.

most like old times. My brother Bob arrived after I had been home about 10 days, so we were home at the same time for about three days. He was wearing his snappy Class A Marine uniform and I wore my rumpled suntans – the summer Army uniform.

My mother was disappointed because she was waiting all this time to have our family portrait taken and she just assumed I would know this and arrive in the dressier winter uniform. We did go to the portrait studio for the picture, but the highlight of that leave was a family picnic with uncles, aunts, and cousins.

Also, Bob sort of made up for his harsh words when we went to visit my Dad's Uncle Wes (Wesley Miller) at New Ulm, MN. "Let's take a walk downtown and give the girls a thrill," he said. Looking back on it, and having just read his letter, it is possible that he was talking about himself. Actually, I don't remember that I had taken offense at his letter -- nor even remembered having received it.

BACK TO ARMY LIFE AT CAMP POLK, LOUISIANA

My immediate work group of about eight soldiers was headed by Second Lt. Nick Kabanuk. He was a 90-day wonder from North Dakota. More about him later, but in spite of all his insecurity and misguided directives, he was a decent person. For example, he didn't drink alcoholic beverages, but when we entered the combat zone he gave our office staff his officer's ration of vodka. He even went to the trouble of bringing a quart fruit jar of grapefruit juice from England to France just for us.

Then there was Sgt. Harold "Snuffy" Schmalzer and our mail clerk, a man of small stature, whose name was Donald Gettles. Both were from New York and they remained buddies until the end. I saw both of them at the Louisville, Ky reunion of the Division. I forget the year, but we were returning to Birmingham, AL from our annual trip home (to South Dakota and Minnesota) and happened to notice the banner announcing the reunion as we passed a hotel near the Interstate in downtown Louisville. It may have been 1973. We took the next exit and wound up right at the hotel. We decided to register for the convention because the first person we saw when we entered the hotel lobby was Snuffy Schmalzer. By then he was a successful stock broker with a big firm in New York City.

The third member of that tight-knit group from New York was Sgt. Michael Dohan. He also was at this reunion and halfway apologized for his current employment. He was a tollbooth attendant for the New York Freeway system. This was below his capabilities, but I believe he had taken early retirement from a more prestigious job and was using this as a fill-in until he could begin drawing Social Security payments.

I remember that he was quite well educated and I preferred talking with him instead of spending time talking with some of the other office staff. He seemed somewhat older than the rest of the staff and a very gentle and caring person.

Then there was Sgt. Alfred Mastrangeli. He was a very unlikable person. Unfortunately he was New York City pushy and Italian. It's a wonder that after despising him so much that I have a lot of extremely nice Italian friends. Mastrangeli was short and walked with a swagger. He always had a smirk on his face and greased his hair to make it stay down. He bragged about his conquests of women. When any of us got a pack

age of cookies from home he grabbed a handful as though they were his even though he hadn't been offered any.

He misused his rank over and over. During “office hours” when both of us should have been doing something else, he often decided to play “office big shot” and pretend that I was his secretary. Even after we got overseas he would dictate letters to his family or girlfriend and have me type them. I was a Private First Class and he was a Sergeant, plus someone I had to work with every day, so there wasn’t much I could do to protest. I typed his letters. He often pulled this stunt during our evening off time, too (if there is such a thing as off time in a war zone.). Finally, he got tired of showing off.

Mastrangeli also enjoyed summoning us to his desk. He especially enjoyed calling Private Thomas Karkos by hollering, ”Karkos, get your carcass over here.” Tom recognized me at our Minneapolis convention (in 1996) and had to explain who he was. Finally I remembered him. He gave me his business card and I have it somewhere among my Army souvenirs. He apparently was very successful in his line of work.



Chow Hounds: Michael Dohan, Harold Schmalzer, Harold Kegg, Vern Miller. We’re still together in Pilsen, Czechoslovakia after World War II had ended..

Chapter Two

Overseas Duty Beckons

MY CHANCE TO ESCAPE

I believe it was in September that one of our officers (not Nick Kabanuk) gave me an opportunity to get out from under Mastrangali -- at least temporarily. Because we were no longer needed to supply trained soldiers to the fighting units overseas, it was our turn to be sent overseas – probably to Europe.

As the rumors grew more frequent, I was delighted that an earlier medical checkup resulted in my re-assignment out of the 49th Infantry Battalion because of high blood pressure. It's possible that my normal blood pressure was on the high side. However, I think I had a high reading because I was scared. This particular medical exam was being carried out because of high casualties overseas and the search was on for infantrymen who could be removed from their current outfit and sent to a replacement center. There they would be parceled out to the units which had the highest casualties. This took place just before I was assigned to C Company of the 130th Ordnance Maintenance Battalion as a Jeep, truck, and tank mechanic.

Without that good fortune I would have been shipped overseas as an infantry replacement or stayed in the 49th Infantry Battalion. Somewhere I read that this unit had more than 100% replacements because of combat injuries and deaths. Now in later years (I'm 80 years old as I write this) I'm glad that the early stages of heart disease probably saved my life.

Quite a few fellows were sent overseas as infantry replacements almost as soon as they were assigned to one of our infantry battalions. I was sent to C Company of the 130th Maintenance Battalion, where I enjoyed my work as a mechanic. The transfer from C Company to Headquarters Company came about when someone found out that I was quite handy with a typewriter. This was easier duty than being a mechanic but put me under the thumb of Sgt. Mastrangeli when I was transferred to Headquarters.

When a request for volunteers to go to England as advance cadre was posted, I volunteered and was accepted, mostly because I was a good typist.

We had special treatment almost immediately. We still bunked with the units to which we had been assigned and were told that we would revert to that same assignment when the rest of the division joined us at our post in England.

We no longer were assigned KP, which had meant getting up at 4 o'clock in the morning and working until the kitchen and dining areas were spotless and ready for the next day. Sometimes that would be as late as 10 o'clock at night. Strange, but some fellows liked that better than the job they had been assigned to. I remember one guy who

had been a wrecker driver managed to get a transfer to the kitchen and became one of our cooks – a good one, too.

As part of the division's advance cadre we were relieved of all training assignments and drill formations, because there was no telling when we would be called together for a briefing or to be issued clothing or other equipment for our overseas assignment. We turned in most of the clothing we had been wearing and were issued new clothing.

Our new combat boots made us the envy of just about everyone in the entire division. Instead of the regular high top shoes with finished brown leather that were normally worn with canvas lace-up leggings when we wore our work uniforms, the combat boots were made with the rough leather on the outside and were not dyed brown. They had a sort of tan natural color. Instead of leggings there was a collar of dark brown finished leather sewn to the top of the shoe. This collar had two straps with buckles that made the entire uniform look much sharper than the regular shoes with leggings.

We soon learned that the proper way to show off our new boots was to tuck our pants legs into the cuff and arrange the trousers into a neat sort of ballooning. We also had tucked our trousers into the tops of our canvas leggings, but leggings came up almost to the knee and the ballooning of trousers tucked into combat boots made a much longer trouser leg. There was talk at the time that all Armored divisions soon would be issued completely new uniforms that had a blue tone instead of the Olive Drab color we currently had. One of our officers told me that the Army really had intended to give us this new blue uniform, but finally decided against it.

We also got new ponchos to replace the raincoats, steel helmets that fit over our helmet liners, and new weapons. I still have that poncho. It is the only part of my Army uniform that still fits.

I do not know how many of us were chosen to be sure everything was ready for the entire division to set up camp in England. As it turned out, we did very little. Most of the work was done by our officers. We enlisted men were sort of guinea pigs. We didn't even serve in that capacity at first.

After a series of more shots of some kind, a final physical examination, long sessions regarding making a will and making sure that we had designated the proper people as beneficiaries on our GI insurance policies – and I don't know what else – we finally were loaded onto 2 1-2 ton GMC trucks (called Jimmies) and transported to the train station.

I suppose we detrained at Grand Central Station in New York City, but I don't know. I'm almost certain that we loaded onto trucks again and then were dumped off at one of the piers of New York City's harbor. After being herded into some sort of formation in this extremely noisy and busy area, we slung our weapons and duffel bags over our shoulders and tramped up the gang plank into the bowels of the ship.

Someone soon directed us down into even lower reaches of the ship and assigned each of us to a bunk. These bunks were metal frames with rope lacings that held a sheet of canvas in place. They were stacked three high in a hold and had maybe 1 ½ to 2 feet of clearance above my head. As you can imagine, this left a minimum amount of space for a person to sleep. The aisles between rows of bunks were not spacious, either.

I made a pencil sketch of our quarters; wonder where it is. A photograph that accurately depicts the situation is on page 18 of a book that Carl and Carol Sosnin gave me: "FROM FOXHOLES AND FLIGHT DECKS: Letters Home From World War II" by Rod Gragg.

My First Ocean Voyage

Our ship was the HMS Aquitania – a British ship of the Cunard Line. It was a sister ship of the Mauretania and of the Lusitania. We generally were free to roam around at will. I do remember that we were told to keep our boots unlaced so we could get out of them quickly in case we were sunk. And we were told to wear the same clothing for the entire voyage because body oils soaking into our clothing would help protect us in the cold water.

In later years Helen and I spent a night at a historic bed and breakfast in Tennessee. The owner had been a ship captain – was hired to ease the cruise ship "Norway" into the Miami, FL harbor the first time it called there. He had a book about the Aquitania that he thought I should see, so I manned the reception desk at the B&B while he went home to get the book for me to read that night.

Though the ship had been converted to a troop carrier, many of the fancy furnishings were retained. Beautiful walnut paneling was left in some areas of the ship. In other places, the rich furnishings were protected with plywood.

One afternoon we got a taste of just how elegant this ship must have been during its civilian days. In typical Army fashion, a large group of us were rounded up and sent onto a salon that I recall as being about 30 feet by 50 feet. There was a piano and small stage area at one end, plus folding chairs for more than half of us.

Irene Manning, opera singer, entertained us for 30 minutes or so. She was on her way to join a USO show for performances in England. Weather was so bad and the sea so rough that she had trouble keeping her balance and had to cut her performance short.

Some soldiers used a former dining room as their mess hall. My group was assigned to a mess hall that was created in the former swimming pool.

In order for the kitchen crews to make the most efficient use of their time, we were called to meals more than an hour before we were served. That meant we stood in

lines – most often on narrow, poorly ventilated stairways, for several hours a day. This wasn't much of a hardship the first few days, but was quite uncomfortable when we were a few days out and the sea was a bit rough.

We were aware at mealtime that we were on a British ship. I don't remember the menu of any particular day, but I do remember the unsalted cold boiled potatoes that we got for two meals every day. Breakfast I believe was scrambled eggs – but made from powdered eggs rather than fresh eggs. Sometimes they had a greenish tinge. I don't know if this was someone's little joke or if this was a natural tinge.

We got cartons of milk for breakfast. Unfortunately, they were frozen solid. I carried mine with me all day until it thawed, then made sure I was outside in fresh air and in a protected area on one of the promenade decks before I drank it.

I spent a lot of time outside because of seasickness. One of my buddies from Chicago (Eddie) and I spent a couple of nights sleeping in a secluded area on one of the promenade decks. That pleasure was cut short, though, because either the Army MP's or the Ship's Patrol discovered us one night and sent us below deck.

They were carrying out orders, of course. The worry was that we would light a cigarette and thus make it easy for a German submarine to spot us.

Getting a good night of sleep in our stuffy quarters was a bit difficult so we spent as much time on deck as possible. Our bunkmates appreciated this because our absence meant they had more room for their almost continuous poker game. Sometimes we were confined to quarters because the sea was so rough that there was a real danger of being washed overboard. "Batten the hatches," was the order.

I took one shower aboard ship. Showers were way up front in the bow of the ship. The water was hot, but so salty that the feeling was that of something like molasses sticking to you. Not many people wanted to experience this discomfort, so the shower area was not crowded. I scrubbed the salt off with a towel as best I could and suffered no ill after-effects.

Rather strange, but the only good thing I remember about the trip over is the excitement of my first ocean voyage. Probably the most exciting event was the sighting of an unidentified ship. It finally was identified as American, but they had trouble identifying us. As a result they fired one of their big guns across the bow of our ship as a signal to stop and identify ourselves. The tense situation lasted quite awhile, at least half an hour, but we finally got through to them and continued on our zig--zag way

The voyage really was quite uneventful, except for the rough weather. Because our ship was a fast ocean liner, we traveled by ourselves rather than in convoy. We made good time. I have a vague recollection that we made the trip in 7 days, but I'm not sure. The time of 9 days also sticks in my mind, but that may have been our return trip (which I sort of remember took 12 days in one of the Victory ships in extremely

stormy weather).

Official Dates On My Discharge: Left USA 21 Oct 1944 Arrived ETO 28 Oct 1944. Left ETO 26 Feb 1946 Arrived USA 7 Mar 1946.

We sailed along the coast of England and had the pleasure of seeing the green, green lands of Ireland. For a while we thought we might land there, but we soon veered away from the Land of the Green and docked someplace that might have been Newcastle. I suppose we landed in northern England because the southern ports were reserved for outgoing troops.

VACATION IN BOURNEMOUTH AT ARMY EXPENSE

Trucks to transport us to our base must have been lined up as we pulled into port because it seems that we loaded onto trucks almost immediately and headed out. Our destination turned out to be Bournemouth, a noted seaside resort. We were quartered in private homes that were similar to our home on Lakeview Crescent except for being larger, more richly furnished and of all brick construction.

We had a lot of leisure time and spent many hours walking along the beach. Though interesting and pleasurable, it also was rather foreboding. Large rolls of barbed wire some distance out from land were designed to protect us against small boats and "frogmen", underwater swimmers who might try to infiltrate.

Passes were given out quite freely. One night I went into town and found a theater presenting a variety show of song and dance acts. I suppose someone was with me, but I don't recall for sure. I do remember that finding my way around town in black-out conditions was a bit scary and difficult.

The show seemed well done but almost the only thing I remember about it is that the male singer had a quaver to his voice and sounded like Rudy Vallee on old recordings. I suppose this was a deliberate attempt to mimic the American singers. The problem is that Rudy Vallee's time was past and recordings no longer had the quivering sound. Of course, it is possible that the guy had developed his own style.

This vacation-period ended in November shortly before we were sent to Camp Tidworth, where the rest of our division joined us. This was maybe 80 miles or so from London. Our time at Camp Tidworth was cut short by the German breakthrough and surrounding of our troops in Bastogne on December 16 -- the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge -- and so the story of my adventures in England is cut short. More about them later. The Battle of the Bulge and events that followed are more interesting.

Chapter Three

Battle of the Bulge Changes Everything

NOW IT WAS OUR TURN

1 January 1945 8th Armored Div ordered to head for France.

Source: In Tornado's Wake

A History of The 8th Armored Division By Capt. Charles R. Leach.

So, memory plays tricks on me – unless our unit headed out separately. I recall that we headed out the day after Christmas.

Whether it was the day after Christmas or the day after New Year's Day, we drove in convoy to the port area of Southampton. The weather was quite cold and my truck had no doors because someone had removed them when I wasn't looking. My response was to find an unguarded truck and remove the doors, then hide them in the back end of my truck. The first set of doors I "requisitioned" were stolen because I made the mistake of installing them on the truck. That's why I had to go through this procedure a second time. When we loaded onto the LST (landing craft) to cross the English Channel, I had doors. As a matter of fact, I kept those same doors all the way through until the end of the war, though they took quite a beating because I had to dive out of the truck without unlatching the doors a few times. They were well worn and tattered by the time I left my truck with my old unit in Pilsen, Czechoslovakia and was transferred to the 26th Infantry Division, then the 83rd Infantry Division – each transfer a step closer to home.

Crossing the English channel on the LST was uneventful. Navy personnel chained our trucks to the deck and told us we weren't allowed to ride in the cab, as I had intended to do. Instead, we were sent upstairs to spacious, neat bunks and served the first fresh milk we'd had since leaving Stateside. We had a good evening meal, too.

Our first sighting of land was the port of Le Havre, but we didn't land there. Instead, we continued up the Seine River. By then, the weather had changed to sunny and warm, so we enjoyed the leisurely trip up the river. It was a pleasant sunny afternoon when a sniper fired at us – just to remind us that there was a war on, I guess. There was just a single shot from a rifle. No one fired back.

Up the Seine River to Rouen

We disembarked at Rouen, site of the famous Cathedral, and reclaimed our vehicles from below the main deck. The Cathedral at Rouen is a beauty, but I never have had a chance to really see it.

Leaving the LST was no problem, but there was plenty of shouting by the Navy guys who were in more of a hurry than we were. Despite the shouting, we quickly formed a convoy and headed for our designated area, known only by our officers and the Military Police who directed us at road intersections. We spent our first night somewhere in the vicinity south of Nancy, as far as I can tell.

I didn't know it at the time, but we were assigned to the newly formed secret 15th Army. We heard about a second break-through of the German Army in a continuance of the Battle of the Bulge and began moving up towards the battle almost immediately.

For its first night in France the 8th Armrd Div was in the vicinity of Basqueville, north of Rouen. Source: In Tornado's Wake.

Assembling our units took quite awhile. We first parked along a tree-lined street in a small-business district of a seemingly small town. One of our officers, a First Lieutenant, told us we could leave our vehicles and walk around if we stayed within sight. He also spoke a little French and told us how we should reply to the girls who swarmed around us as we pulled up in line on the side of the street.

Two or three of us went into a nearby neighborhood bar and had a Cognac that cost us only 15 cents. I really didn't want a shot of Cognac in the middle of the afternoon, but this was sort of like going to the Roller Derby with Denny Hickel back when I was first inducted into the Army. It was a new experience, and walking into a bar and ordering a shot of Cognac when there was supposed to be a war going on seemed bizarre. The bar tender spoke enough English so we could carry on a conversation. He saw nothing odd about "business as usual" while a war was going on. After all, the tanks were quite a distance away and no artillery shells were landing nearby. And he needed money to buy food for his family.

We stayed only a short while. Our convoy moved out after a delay of only an hour or so. And, no, I didn't attempt to use my newly learned French phrases.

However, shortly after arriving in France, I did send my Dad a letter and asked him to send me his little black book of addresses that he might have saved from his days in France during World War I. This was my sneaky way of letting him know that I was close to where he had been. Whether I was successful will never be known. I never did get an answer. Maybe my mother intercepted the letter and was horrified that her

son would think of such a thing. Maybe they both enjoyed my little joke. Or maybe the censors eliminated that part of my letter. I forgot to ask about this after I got home.

10 January 1945 Drove 175 miles to Rheims in blinding snowstorm. Records, not my memory, report that we not only arrived in a blinding snowstorm but also had zero degree weather.

Source: In Tornado's Wake

11 January 1945 Attached to Patton's 3rd Army. Source: In Tornado's Wake.

Source: In Tornado's Wake

12 January 1945 Moved over icy roads to Pont-a-Mousson, about 100 miles away.. Expected German attack on Metz. Another blinding snowstorm.

Source: In Tornado's Wake.

HOT CO-ED SHOWERS IN FRANCE

After a couple of nights at our first staging area, we moved up closer to the real fighting and were billeted in Pont-a-Mousson. I can't picture in my mind what our quarters looked like. I do remember that we were sent to the public showers just a half block away and enjoyed a hot shower. Back in our quarters, some of the other soldiers told about the joys of showering in a co-ed shower. As they told it, women not only used the same shower facilities, but thought nothing of coming in for a shower even though men were already showering. I'm sure that was true, but over a week or so in that town I never found out for myself.

More memorable to me than the co-ed shower facilities was Sunday Mass in the nearby church. Our own chaplain probably celebrated Mass for us somewhere in our billet area, but I found the French civilian Parish and went to communion carrying my 45-caliber sub-machine gun, otherwise known as a "grease gun."

I didn't notice any other soldiers there. Perhaps I was too busy absorbing the pageantry. The priest wore the traditional biretta, or however you spell it – the hat with the three whatevers on it. There were a lot of altar boys and plenty of incense. The procession was really something to see.

The ushers were dressed in velvet uniforms that reminded me of the guys with the ruffled collars at the Tower of London.

13 January 1945 Removed shoulder patches from our uniforms and painted out our vehicle markings that indicated which unit we belonged to.

Source: In Tornado's Wake.

KEEPING CENSORS BUSY

One day one of the guys in our outfit acquired a copy of Life magazine that showed an Army Jeep plowing through rough terrain. The legend said this picture was taken at Pont-a-Mousson, though it surely didn't resemble anything that we saw in that town. Anyway, all of us cleverly sent a letter to let our families know where we were by writing, "Look on page ___ of the January issue of LIFE magazine and you'll see that our Jeeps can go through anything."

I'm sure the censors had plenty of work snipping that sentence out of a hundred or more letters.

The public bathhouse we went to for showers also had indoor toilet facilities. I drew a picture of them in one of the letters I sent home, but learned later that my artistic efforts were wasted. The censor had cut out my sketch, leaving only a hole in the paper. Maybe I should re-draw. The toilet stall featured two raised "footprints" of concrete, a hole in the floor for collecting the waste, and a stream of water flowing from the backside. We thought this was rather primitive, but it surely was better than squatting over the slit trenches that we had been using. Years later, around 1986, we came across the same design in China train stations and restaurants, but they were filthy. The French version was primitive but clean.

It was also some years after the war that Helen and I found out that the camp ground in Canada we had recommended to her graduate school advisor at Samford University, a Baptist Church institution, also was a co-ed facility.

PREPARING FOR THE COLD

With the help of some really good mechanics and ingenious people in my outfit, I cut a hole in the firewall of my truck – the sheet metal separating the engine compartment from the passenger compartment. Then I cut up a large tin can from the kitchen crew, shaped it into a deflector, and mounted it on the exhaust manifold of the truck engine. This didn't work real well, but did keep my feet from freezing.

WINTER CAMOUFLAGE

We did more than just loaf while we were waiting in Pont-a-Mousson to find out where we were needed. Some of our units were sent into combat. Weather reports indicated that we were in for a long period of snowfall so all of us were given orders to camouflage our trucks. That meant I had to empty all of the ammunition, gas cans, and water cans from my truck and head out to a lime pit, if that's what it was, to get a load of white, slurry-like stuff to use for painting our trucks. It was after I had picked up my load that I encountered the first problem with my truck. I had backed too far into the stuff and was stuck.

The first thing I did was unreel the winch on the front end of my truck and hook it to something so I could winch myself out. Not only had I missed any training in how to use the winch, I forgot everything I had learned in physics classes and forgot all about the need to at least double my winch's power by using a pulley at the hookup point furthest from the truck. As a result I had only half the winching power and immediately broke the safety pin. Another trucker felt sorry for me and pulled me out. Our mechanics replaced the pin as soon as I got back to our area and had dispensed my load as well as camouflaged my truck using a broom to paint trees on it.

17 January 1945 Attached to XX Corps, 3rd Army (Patton's Army) Ordered to snow-camouflage our vehicles.

Source: In Tornado's Wake

The sequel to this is that we moved into the combat area a few weeks later, just as the sun came out and melted the snow.

17 January 1945 Teamed Up With 94th Infantry Division.

Source: In Tornado's Wake.

THE BATTLE NEAR THIONVILLE

Company A of our battalion (including my friend Frank McGough from Detroit – later a Jesuit priest) was part of a combat group teamed up with the 94th Infantry Division that was sent a few miles forward to get a taste of battle conditions in the Saar-Moselle triangle.

The first casualty was their Medic, who was killed by a bullet that was aimed directly at the red cross painted on his helmet. This infuriated everyone who heard about it. Word of this atrocity spread quickly and the infantrymen as well as anyone else given the opportunity ignored the orders to take prisoners.

I recall that this was around January 19. They fought in the area of Sierck-Apach-Manderen-Evendorff & Doenigsmacker, according to our official history of the 8th Armored Division (page 61). They attacked the towns of Sinz, Berg, and Nennig – which had been won and lost by both sides several times. We were with the THIRD ARMY at this time. I was completely unaware of how the fighting was going or where the battle lines were. I hadn't even heard of these places until I read about them years later. Thionville, Nancy, Metz, Pont-a-Mousson, and Bar le duc were the only places I was aware of.

22 January 1945 Launched attack on Berg and Nennig.

Source: In Tornado's Wake.

23-24 January 1945. Finally took Nancy. This is the same day the 7th Armrd Div started to retake St. Vith.

Source: In Tornado's Wake.

25 January 1945 Finally took Berg.

26-27 January 1945 Battled for Sinz, just two miles away.

Source: In Tornado's Wake

Somewhere in our travels I had lost my mess kit. Just what I was doing so far forward, I don't know, but whoever was with me in the truck spotted one of our Jeeps that had been hit and retrieved the mess kit of the luckless Jeep driver. We were in the vicinity of the main bridge that carried traffic going to and from the battle zone. The story was that Military Police on our safe side of the bridge directed returning traffic either to the city or to the houses of ill repute. That must have been a rumor because no one intercepted me to offer a choice.

We seem to have spent quite a bit of time in this part of France – not far from the towns of Nancy (to the South) and Metz (to the North). Some people apparently got time off from their duties (I didn't), because the word was to use the back door if you went to the Red Cross club in Nancy to get donuts and coffee. German snipers were zeroed in on the front door.

I didn't get my first experience with a sniper until much later, when we crossed the German border and spent the night in the town of Golkrath.

A lot happened before then, though. And now I remember why I was at the bridge where I got my mess kit. Even though I was listed on the TO&E (Table of Organization and Equipment) as a clerk/typist, my job as battalion supply clerk included carrying a supply of gasoline in 5-gallon Jerry cans, keeping our company supplied with drinking water, and carrying a limited supply of ammunition.

I had some Bazooka ammunition, the anti-tank rockets that were launched from the long tube balanced on your shoulder. I carried the Bazooka behind me in the cab of my truck, in much the same manner as people today carry their deer rifles.

I never had fired a practice round with the Bazooka, but had seen demonstrations and was confident that I could handle the weapon properly if the need arose.

I also carried a couple of boxes of 50-caliber machine gun belts for the gun that was mounted on the truck cab's passenger side of the rooftop. I had a reasonable amount of practice with the machine gun during my basic training, but the guys assigned to me as co-drivers had never fired a machine gun. They would have been an obstacle that I would have had to push out of the way if we ever needed to use the weapon.

Turns out that this never was a problem. We were under PAD (Passive Air Defense) all of the time, even when we were being strafed by low-flying aircraft.

Of course, my so-called co-drivers weren't any better at driving a truck than they were

with a machine gun. They couldn't even stay awake when we were tied up in traffic or motionless while waiting for another unit to pass through our convoy. This was my only chance to sleep and they could sleep all the while we were in motion.

I complained over and over and finally got a replacement just before we crossed into Germany when Bob Wright from Maryland arrived with his freshly pressed uniform, clean rifle, and shoes that hadn't yet stepped in mud. He was fresh out of medical school. After the war he returned to Hahnemann Medical College (now part of Drexel Institute) in Philadelphia and finished his training.

Bob is one of the two people from my time in the Army that I have kept in touch with. We've kept in touch over the years and exchange visits now and then.

MY FIRST ENCOUNTERS WITH THE GERMANS

Back to why I was at that bridge. I was in charge of keeping our battalion supplied with drinking water and carried 5-gallon water cans on my truck. Sometimes a source of water was hard to find and the cooks would let loose their entire vocabulary of Army language when I explained our problem. That meant they had to change all of their meal plans until I could come up with water.

Battle lines were quite fluid in the weeks following the initial breakthrough of the German Army and the rescue of troops surrounded at Bastogne. That resulted in water points marked on our maps being moved quite rapidly. These water points were usually set up near a small stream and were operated by three to five soldiers who could close up and transport their equipment to another site in a big hurry.

They had purifying equipment that could handle the output of the pumps they used to draw water from the stream. Usually the purified water was pumped into a canvas tank about the size of a livestock watering tank found on many Midwest farms. A smaller pump was used to fill the cans in my truck.

The hose usually was long enough to reach all the cans in my truck, so the first thing I did after finding a watering point was flip open the lids of every empty water can on my truck. With hose in hand, I signaled the operators to start the pump. All I had to do was move the hose quickly from can to can until all were filled.

This resulted in some water running over onto the bed of the truck. In freezing weather this could result in the cans being embedded in an inch or more of ice. Breaking the cans loose was a backbreaking job.

I crossed the bridge in question each time I headed to the countryside from Pont-a-Mousson to find the nearest water point. The trip always took me toward the battle lines so the guns got louder as I got near the places marked on the map. One day, after two unsuccessful trips to find water, Lt. Nick Kabanuk came with me to do the map

reading and thus assure our water supply. This time we had an updated map that showed water points in different places.

We still had to cross that main bridge leading up to the front (which at that time must have been near Metz) and still had to jam the gas pedal to the floor as we approached another small bridge on a flat country road. The Germans had a machinegun nest off to the right that fired at us every time we approached the small stream. I never did find out why someone wasn't sent out to wipe out that isolated trouble spot.

It was fascinating to see the pattern of the red tracer bullets coming our way. Luck was with me and I managed to escape injury every trip. As I look back, this really was quite remarkable. The only circumstances in my favor were hardly reassuring. Fortunately, the gunners were probably wary of being picked off by our guys as soon as they started firing. That probably is one thing that caused them to miss their target. And maybe they had to set up their machine gun in a slightly different place each time they decided to take aim.

It always seemed to me that they really had the advantage. Yet, I came close to being hit only twice. And I discovered that only after I got back to my unit. One time I discovered a slug had entered my truck just beneath the driver's seat. Another time, I found a neat bullet hole through the canvass right behind my head.

But this trip with Lt. Kabanuk was without incident. Either we caught the machine gunners without ammunition or I was going so fast that they decided against taking a shot at us. Within a few miles, though, I discovered that Lt. Kabanuk wasn't real good at reading a map. I recall that we went through one little village called Bar le Duc and were headed toward another with a similar name. (The year is 2003 and I checked a recent map. Bar le Duc is now a fairly large city.)

The road we were on wasn't a main road, so it wasn't surprising that we soon came to an intersection where we had to turn either right or left. The water point marked on the map was on the road to the right, but the Lieutenant didn't have the map oriented and wanted me to turn left.

We had a rather heated conversation during which he threatened to have me court-martialed for not obeying an officer's command. I finally convinced him that I had been on this road before and knew where we were.

We found the water point and filled our 5-gallon cans from a big rubber hose. Only three soldiers were running the water purification system. They had a small gasoline engine drawing water from a small stream and were catching the treated water in a large canvas tank that was about three feet deep and ten feet across. They told us we were lucky to get there when we did because they were preparing to move to a different site. This wasn't the place that they were supposed to be.

It was only after we got back to our unit that we learned the water point marked on our

map was a hoax and that the soldiers manning this water point were Germans dressed in American uniforms. We didn't have the slightest suspicion that anything was wrong.

We were lucky in two ways. First, we weren't captured. Second, we didn't pick up adulterated water.

CIVILIANS REMAINED HOLED UP

Most parts of Pont-a-Mousson were badly damaged by bombs and heavy artillery. Few civilians were ever seen on the streets, and I never did see any small shops, large businesses, or large government offices. Almost every morning, though, I saw a few children walking to school. I did not locate the school, so possibly they were being schooled in small groups.

One of the boys I saw just about every day was Andre Claren. To get to his home, He walked a narrow path that had been cleared through the rubble of damaged buildings. Then he disappeared under a crumbling archway. There wasn't a building in the entire block that had a complete roof, so I suppose his family was holed up in one corner of a basement room that had been spared.

The city's water system was in operation, but it seemed unlikely that anyone in this area would have had water available. Electric power had not yet been restored. Andre asked me for only one thing – candles. I had been issued maybe a half-dozen candles, but it seemed to me he needed them worse than I would ever need them so I gave most of them to Andre and kept two.

As it turned out, I could have given him one more. I rigged up emergency lighting in the cargo area of my truck by running wires from the battery to a sealed-beam headlight that had been discarded.

My battalion headquarters unit remained safely back in Pont-a-Mousson while one-third of the division was locked in combat with the Germans. They finally re-captured Nennig and Berg on January 25, then moved on to Sinz, just a couple of miles away. A few days later we were assigned to the NINTH ARMY and began the 250-mile move to the Netherlands.

SCENES THAT MADE ME REALIZE THERE REALLY WAS A WAR

Bloated corpses – people and animals – stench. I have the memory, but I don't know where we were or where we were headed. Perhaps it was on the long move from France to Netherlands. Maybe it was along the Rhine River. I remember the terrain was quite flat. There were trees, but not forestland.

The road took us past muddy fields dotted with dead animals and dead people – the bloated bodies of cows, horses, German soldiers, civilians. Sometimes the stench of decaying bodies wafted through the cab of our truck. The land was torn up from the churning of tank tracks and dotted with craters caused by bombs and artillery shells. Trees were shattered.

Whether it was on this move or another, I'm not sure, but I remember feeling very exposed to enemy gunfire as I drove past Infantrymen in foxholes they had dug alongside the road. I'll bet they envied me because I had some protection from the cold wind.

ONWARD TO HOLLAND

1 February 1945 8th Armrd Div assigned to 9th Army's XVI Corps

February 2-5, 1945 Drove 250 miles to the Maastricht area

Source: In Tornado's Wake

Our weather was just like winter back in Minnesota, only worse because we were out in it all of the time. Roads were so slippery that even tanks slid into the ditch when they cut a corner too short going through some of the hilly terrain. From February 4 to February 20 we were held in reserve up near Maastricht, not far from the German town of Aachen. My unit was in the village of Bunde.

OUR HOME IN HOLLAND

By now the severe winter weather had turned to Spring-like weather. We bedded



Andre Claren's Home



Andre Claren

down in a large warehouse-type building, but Jimmy Acton (from Birmingham, Alabama) went scouting around the town and soon found a Dutch family that took a couple of us into their home. Harry Strange, Jimmy, and I moved in with the J. Boers family and supplied them with our share of rations from the Mess Sergeant. I never did find out how they were compensated for their efforts, but the setup was approved by our officer-in-charge.

Time out for morning snack of grapefruit juice — Bunde, Holland

This was in a small rural village called Bunde. The family kept a cow and other livestock in the barn that was attached to their house. There were no indoor toilet facilities except for chamber pots in each bedroom. Mr. Boers rode his bicycle into Maastricht each day, where he worked as a bricklayer. He took care of the livestock after he got home. In the evening he carved miniature wooden shoes. I have a pair of them someplace. He also made the wooden shoes that he wore to work.

Their address was Mr. & Mrs. J. (Joseph?) Boers. They lived at Papenweg 13 in Bunde, Limburg, Holland. (Our last letter from them was dated 13-1-1950 and sent to us when we lived at 606 High Street, Fairport Harbor, Ohio.) When I lived with them they had a teen-age daughter named Meep, a 4-year-old named Betsy, and a baby just a few months old.

I tried to learn the language by reading the daily newspaper that Mr. Boers brought home from Maastricht. During the day I sometimes had guard duty on the edge of town at a checkpoint manned jointly by Dutch and American soldiers. The town's water supply was operational, so I was temporarily relieved of my trips to find water.

One time Mrs. Boers found enough English words to let us know that she would bake a cake if we could convince the Mess Sergeant to send home some flour and sugar. This turned out to be as big a treat for the family as it was for us.

The biggest scares we had were from the V-1 and V-2 bombs that the Germans kept sending toward Maastricht – or beyond. They usually sailed right over us, but sometimes fell short and landed nearby. The young boys laughed at us because we took cover every time one of the V-1's sputtered overhead. They finally convinced us that you didn't need to find shelter until you heard the engine stop running.

Jimmy and Harry managed to keep in touch with the Boers family even after we had moved on up towards Roermond, where we relieved the British 7th Arm'd Division. They rounded up clothing and food that they took back to the Boers family.

CLOSE CALL

Where was I? It might have been Bunde, Holland. The day was bright and sunny. I was Jimmy Acton's co-driver, so this took place before Bob Wright joined us straight out of Hahnemann Medical School – trousers creased, shirt without wrinkles, rifle stock oiled and polished to a shine. Surely he wasn't wearing a tie, was he?

Where ever we were, we must have been in a hurry. The door on my side of the truck, the passenger side, must have been hanging open. My weapon -- a 45-caliber submachine gun we called a grease gun -- was in my right hand as I ran toward the truck. It was pointed straight up as I slammed it down against the seat on my way in. Surprise.

That jarred the weapon just enough to cock it and send a slug through the canvas covering on the roof – just inches in front of my face.

This weapon was a rather simple piece of machinery. It had a heavy metal cylinder maybe two inches in diameter and seven or eight inches long that normally was pulled back with your right hand when you wanted to load a shell into the chamber. Pulling the trigger released the cylinder when you wanted to fire. However, in training we learned that if you were in a hurry you could jerk the weapon back and load it without losing your grip or aim. And if you held your finger on the trigger as you jerked you had instant firing. We had been warned against doing this accidentally.



Chapter Four

We Enter Another Phase of the War

WE MEET THE DESERT RATS

17 February 1945 8th Armored Div ordered to relieve the 7th Armrd Div

(British) by February 19.

Source: In Tornado's Wake

The British unit, known as the Desert Rats, (The Desert Rats of El Almein – named from their North Africa exploits.) were located along the Roer River in the vicinity of Echt, according to our official history, “holding a defensive line running generally from Posterholt to Roermond, Holland.” Source: In Tornado's Wake, page 90.

I remember that these guys wore berets and never wore their steel helmets. They also didn't like our food that we offered to share with them. They preferred their own hard-tack (dry crackers.) We had good-natured talks about this and agreed to disagree.

CROSSING THE GERMAN BORDER

We moved north of Maastricht – I remember the towns of Heerlen, Geleen, Roosteren (where we stopped for a day or two), Sittard, and Venlo, which is on the German border. We spent our first night on German soil in the small town of Golkrath.

We arrived in mid-morning and moved into what I remember as a large stone public building, where we were to sleep on the floor. The unit ahead of us had taken the town the day before. This was the first time in a week or more that we were billeted inside a building. Before moving in we were warned against attempting to straighten pictures on the wall because they might be booby-trapped.

Despite the warnings, “Snuffy” Schmalzer managed to become a casualty when he attempted to retrieve a cushion from a trash heap. Sgt. Schmalzer was a jeep driver for the Colonel in our Headquarters unit and thought the cushion would be a lot more comfortable than the hard seat he was accustomed to sitting on. He was evacuated for treatment of injuries to one knee, but returned to duty a month or so later.

Shortly after moving into town and before finding out where we would be billeted, another soldier* and I walked across the street to check out the buildings over there. The first thing we saw was the body of an American soldier who presumably had been killed during the battle for the village. He was lying face down in the courtyard. Knowing that the Germans sometimes booby-trapped the bodies of soldiers who had been killed, we did not check to see if he was still alive. One of our officers told us that the Graves Registration squad was on its way and would retrieve the body

***20 February 2007 While visiting with Bob Wright and his wife Phyllis to celebrate his 85th birthday, Bob confirmed that he was the soldier with me.**

I had my own close call that same day after I had staked out my little area in the building to call home. The afternoon was pleasant. The sun was shining. All seemed quiet. With no clear-cut duties I walked a half-block or so down the street to visit with a friend who was manning a machine gun mounted on a half-track personnel carrier that

was positioned to guard the entrance into town. We hadn't had a chance to say much except "Hi." Just as we started talking, there was the sharp crack of rifle fire and chips of brick and mortar from the wall of the building above me covered my helmet. I hit the ground immediately and looked up to see where the bullet had hit. It appeared to have hit a foot or so above my head.

My friend aimed his gun toward the direction of the sniper but held his fire because he couldn't spot his target. About a half-hour later one of the Sergeants from a tech truck went out hunting for the sniper and we were told that he was successful. At any rate, we didn't get shot at again. (As I re-read this, it occurs to me that the dead soldier we saw in the courtyard may have been killed by the same sniper that had me in his sights. I thought otherwise at first because he was not from our division and I've always thought of him as an infantryman – based on the weapon he was carrying.)

That night a special-events crew set up an outdoor movie theater. We had seen only about 15 minutes of the show when we were told to load up and move on out. We never got to sleep in that nice building.

28 February 1945 General Colson and his Combat Command A ordered to take the town of Lobberich, Germany.

Source: In Tornado's Wake

LOBBERICH, WHERE WE BROKE THE BANK

No sleep the night we started to see the movie at Golkrath, but the next stop I remember is Lobberich, northeast of Aachen. We moved into a textile mill there.

Big excitement was finding piles of German money in the street. One of our artillery shells had hit the bank. We were told that the money was of no value, so the big entertainment was setting the money on fire with cigarette lighters. I thought the money would make good souvenirs so I pocketed big wads of it. At the end of the war I found out that it still had value so I used most of it to buy handmade tablecloths and napkins that I brought home, though for the life of me I can't remember where I bought them, maybe in Le Havre, maybe in Brussels.

The few days we spent in Lobberich were very comfortable days. We had a roof over our heads and the town was secure. I don't recall that any of the civilians had moved back home yet, but we weren't in a residential area and didn't have any reason to wander outside the compound. The beautiful fabrics made in the mill impressed me. I unrolled several large bolts of velvet and placed them on a platform so I had a luxurious bed. I even draped some deep red velvet across upright poles to simulate a four-poster bed that rivaled those shown in the movie "Gone With The Wind."

Years later my wife, Helen, made a skirt from some of the velvet that I sent home from this factory. I must have carried this cloth with me for several months and mailed it

home after the war was over. I doubt that I would have been able to package it up and get it in the mail while we were still in a combat zone. At that time in my life I hadn't yet met Helen. The only other girl who got several yards of velvet from that factory was Joan Malherek, a friend from my freshman year at Mankato State Teachers College. Apparently she didn't appreciate the spoils of war. It was only after I was back home from the war and visiting her as a civilian that I finally asked if she didn't get the package of velvet that I had sent to her. She acknowledged getting it but didn't say

“Thank You.” I didn't think of this at the time, but hindsight tells me that I was guilty of looting and I assume that is what she thought.

We had time on our hands at Lobberich because we were in reserve waiting to be sent wherever needed. I set up a portrait studio and shot pictures of my friends for them to send home. Somebody had given me a folding camera that used 4x5 film. As battalion requisition clerk, I asked for several 4x5 film packs – and got them. Strange how the Army supply system works. I had picked up developer, fixer and some print paper from a photo shop while we were in France.

MARIA

Most likely I got the photo supplies in exchange for a Hershey Chocolate Bar or cigarettes. I remember the photographer's shop was on the town square and the family's living quarters were on the second floor.

It now seems likely that my memory is playing tricks on me, but the picture of this building and the photo shop has always been associated with the painting of "Heidi" that hangs on our wall. Helen had it framed for me as a birthday present years ago.

I distinctly remember giving the artist a chocolate bar as payment. Her name was Maria Ortner. She was 18 years old. Her father ran a portrait studio. Neither name nor subject is French, but this town most likely was in or near Alsace – the German part of



Our guys display captured Nazi flag at Lobberich, Germany

France that has changed hands repeatedly, so my memory may not be too far-fetched. Maybe it was somewhere between Pont-a-Mousson and Saarbrücken. I saw her only for ten minutes or so and don't recall ever having been in that town again.

But back to Lobberich. One of the best portraits I shot was of Sgt. Davis with a captured sub-machine gun. He was from North Carolina. I also got a fairly decent portrait of Jimmy Acton from Birmingham, AL. I was assigned as his co-driver on a 2 ½-ton truck for quite awhile. More about this association and our Hartz Mountain experiences later. He probably is the person who gave me the camera.

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ther enjoyed the crisp, clear weather. However, my feet got cold as usual in spite of encasing them in some large baskets woven of straw that one of the previous guards had found.

SNOOPING AROUND THE BUSINESS OFFICE

Now that I think back on it, my idle-time activities were rather stupid. The area I had staked out as my domain was next to the business office. Instead of being wary of booby traps, I looked through file copies of correspondence this company had with one of its customers in England. I was surprised to note that they were exchanging business correspondence and negotiating sales of fabric right up to the day war between England and Germany had been declared.

CROSSING THE RHINE RIVER

7 March 1945 9th Armored Division seized the Remagen Bridge



This is the painting that Helen had framed for me as a birthday present.

22 March 1945 Artillery units of 8th Armored Division moved into position to cover 30th Infantry Division as it crossed the Rhine River north of the Remagen Bridge.

24 March 1945 0400 (4 a.m.) The entire 9th Army front erupted in a barrage of artillery. During the next hour, 1087 shells per minute landed on the other side of the Rhine River. Our 18th Tank Battalion ferried the Rhine with 30th Infantry Division assault troops and helped in the capture of Spellen, the first town across



Vern on Guard Duty, Lobberich, Germany

the Rhine. P.137

During the two days before we crossed the Rhine River up northwest of Essen near Wesel, we had a rather easy time of it. No German artillery shells came our way and no German airplanes strafed us. We hung camouflage netting over our trucks and I had time to enlarge (deepen) an existing foxhole. I found a piece of plywood to cover the foxhole and printed my name on it in large letters in hopes that I would discourage someone else from taking advantage of my handiwork. This was the first occasion that I had time to really prepare a decent foxhole. And then I didn't need it.

Another soldier and I walked to a nearby farmhouse to see if we could scrounge some eggs. We saw three elderly people sitting at the kitchen table. They didn't seem to be

afraid of us, but did seem to be sort of shell-shocked. By that time we knew enough of the language to ask “Haben zee Eier, bitte?”

“Yah,” one of them said and pointed “dort” (there). “There” was down in the cellar. Sadly, the cellar stairs was blocked by the corpse of an old man who apparently had been hit by flak. He had fallen headfirst down the stairway. We lost our appetite for eggs and walked back to our area.

That afternoon I wrote my folks a letter reminding them of a song that was well known in our family. It was called “Watch on the Rhine.” I thought I was being clever by telling them it was a song that reminded me of the times I hated hanging wash on the line. No doubt the censors deleted that from my letter. I don’t believe my parents saved my letters and they didn’t remember me writing about that.

February 2007 My mother did save at least some of my letters. I just discovered V-mails and telegrams in a scrapbook that I did not know existed. The latest letter is dated March 12, 1944.

In earlier locations we often heard the rumble of artillery in the distance. This time we were much closer and the noise was more than a rumble. It wasn’t quite deafening, but it was loud.

We crossed the Rhine River on a Bailey bridge (a floating bridge built on top of pontoons) around sunrise one morning. I remember this bridge being designated as “H”. The bridge “bobbled” as we drove across. Some of our engineering battalion members were standing at various points on the bridge to keep it tied together. As far as I could tell, they used steel cables to tie the sections together.

While we crossed on the bridge, Navy guys were hauling supplies across in assault boats and were helping ferry amphibious tanks to the other side. This was the first time I knew that we had sailors working with us. I had a short conversation with a couple of sailors who were keeping our bridge afloat.

26 March 1945 8th Armrd Div crossed the Rhine during the night at Bridge sites G & H. Finished the next morning. We were the first armored unit to cross the Rhine in the 9th Army sector. Source: In Tornado’s Wake p.138

Official history p.138 explains that we passed through the 30th Infantry Division and secured the road running from Hamm to Soest. My 130th Headquarters unit probably stopped at Soest. I say this only because I remember the name.

RED CROSS TO THE RESCUE

Sometime during the bitter winter, our Supply Sergeant passed out wool sox and hand-knit sweaters given to us through the Red Cross. I wore the wool sox at night and

wore the sweater every day. The lady who knit that sweater will never know how much I appreciated her gift. Only her name was on the slip of paper tucked inside the sweater. There was no state or hometown listed. I saved the slip of paper in the bottom of my duffel bag until it disintegrated.

Supplying us with donuts and hot coffee from their mobile “donut wagons” when we least expected them really sold me on the Red Cross. They were there for us just be-



My Foxhole DeLuxe — Waiting To Cross The Rhine River

fore we crossed the Rhine River, for example. That surprised me because we didn’t know the Red Cross girls ever ventured that close to a combat zone. We thought they would at least stay behind the artillery units.

Another surprise: Years later, while in graduate school at the University of Missouri in Columbia, I smashed my thumb between two 55-gallon drums of fuel oil that we used for heating our barracks apartment at No. 6 “R” Street — just across the track from the football stadium. Helen was at work in the Advertising Department of the School of Journalism, so I walked down the street to a friend’s apartment to ask him to take me to the emergency room of the Student Health Department.

After getting sewed back together, I met his wife for the first time and recognized her. She was the red-headed Red Cross girl who had served me coffee and donuts just be-

fore we crossed the Rhine River.

MY GLIMPSE OF THE COLOGNE CATHEDRAL

At some point I had to cross the Rhine River again – this time at Cologne. The main bridge into Cologne had been heavily damaged, so we crossed on a Bailey Bridge.

By then the battle zone was a bit further inland and our biggest delay was caused by civilians trying to get away from the war zone. Hundreds of refugees clogged the bridge, but there was still a war on for us and we had to push forward in spite of the civilians who were in the way. Unfortunately, we had to keep driving and they had to

Some streets in Cologne remained impassible

scramble out of the way at the last minute. Some of them thought we were bluffing, but eventually had to jump into the river because there was no way we were going to stop to let them have the bridge. Others shoved their carts over the side and managed to hang onto the framework of the bridge while we went by.

In between worrying about the people and trying to keep my truck lined up, I took in the sights of the Cologne Cathedral. At the Cathedral I turned right and drove through a few blocks of rubble before continuing on through the city to wherever it was we were going. Scenes of the damage still stick in my mind – bathtubs and plumbing suspended in midair as almost the only remains of apartment buildings along the river. I made this trip two or three times and always hoped I would have time to see the interior of the Cathedral. I didn't even have time to stop for picture taking. It was years later that Helen and I visited Heinz Kutzner and family at Troisdorf near Bonn and took an afternoon tour of the Cathedral.

AACHEN – OR WAS IT ESSEN?

For reasons I have totally forgotten, I drove into Aachen shortly after we had recaptured the city (Possibly this was Essen even though I remember it as being Aachen) . The sequence of events has long been forgotten, too, but I do remember that

Essen was quite a mess, too, but our guys cleared the streets



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exandria, MN. Earl had been in my group when we were in the ASTP at the University of Illinois. We bunked in the same room of the fraternity house that had been taken over by the Army.

Earl had ended up in the 36th Tank Battalion and was unfortunate enough to have been caught in the column of tanks wiped out by German 88's as they entered the town. Tanks were restricted to the one road going into town. This road had been cleared of rubble by bulldozers, but there was no maneuvering room when the Germans opened fire. They had one 88 for each tank in the company, so made quick work of stopping our advance.

I parked my truck at a staging area where soldiers from the graves registration unit were stacking the bodies of tankers into two-wheel trailers. We didn't have such niceties as body bags and had too many to carry them back on stretchers one by one. Into the trailers they went, just like logs. I looked for Earl's body but trying to identify someone on the bottom of the stack was almost impossible, so I soon quit trying.

I asked about Earl whenever I ran across anyone from his battalion, but never found anyone who had known him. After I got home – around the middle of March in 1945,

I suppose -- I sent a letter addressed to “The Parents of Earl Slipper....” in Alexandria, Minnesota, and enclosed a picture of Earl that I had taken when we were at the University of Illinois.

Within a week I got a reply – and it was like hearing from a ghost. The return letter came from Earl! He is one of the few tankers who wasn’t killed in that ambush. We



didn’t stay in touch with each other. I asked about him at the two 8th Armored Division Association reunions we attended, but, like me, he must have been sort of an outsider so the close-knit group of oldtimers didn’t remember him.

I do remember winding our way in convoy through Aachen without incident. The roads we followed had been cleared of rubble by our tank bulldozers, I was impressed by the damage. When I saw Essen, I decided it had suffered even worse damage.

Chapter Five

Headed Toward Berlin

PROBABLY BETWEEN ESSEN AND ??

Driving in a convoy always included a lot of starting and stopping. Sometimes we had to stop to let another unit complete their move. Sometimes we had to stop and wait until mines were cleared from the road ahead or until enemy outposts were cleared out.

German air power was not much of a threat by this time, so we usually stayed quite close together, especially when we stopped. On this particular day I was driving when I heard the roar of a low-flying plane and the rattle of a machine gun. We were on a narrow, secondary road just wide enough to let another truck pass and were parked with one set of wheels off the road. Luckily the doors of my truck were made of canvas fastened to a light-metal frame. The door on my side gave way as I went through it without bothering to unlatch it. I hit the ditch in a hurry.

The German plane had come up from the rear of our column. As I looked up I saw him swishing back and forth trying to do as much damage as possible. Anti-aircraft guns set up on the other side of the road opened fire, but this plane was so low there wasn't a chance of him being hit. Luckily, he didn't hit any of us, either. But he did do a good job of almost scaring the pants off me. And the AA guns scared me almost

as much. This was the first time I had been that close to big gunfire.

I THOUGHT I KNEW WHERE I WAS, BUT WHEN WAS IT?

My memory tells me we were in Bayreuth, Germany before the big push when we ran out of fuel. My memory must be faulty on this, because Bayreuth is close to the Czechoslovakian border and it seems logical that we would have been there after the war was over rather than during a push toward Berlin. In looking at the map, I can't determine where we had come from, where we were headed, or the date when we moved into this place. I felt certain we were at Bayreuth because that is a memorable name for me. I had heard of it from my piano teacher when studying music by Wagner. And it is famous for a music festival. Maybe this is one of those events where I was misled by purposely misplaced signs.

I remember that we were billeted in a farm house. The family must have been glad to see us because I half-way remember that they weren't forced to move out when we moved in. That is an indication that the war was still going on.

Apparently it was determined that we likely would be at this location for a few days because I walked a few blocks toward town and took my clothes up to the second floor of a small apartment house so the lady living there could do my washing and ironing. This would provide me with the first really clean clothes since leaving Camp Tidworth.

At one point I commented on the crucifix above her door and said I thought Hitler's government didn't allow that. She said, "Hitler doesn't have anything to do with what I do in my own home."

I remember this visit clearly because the lady had just gotten a postcard from her son, who was in a Prisoner of War camp at Camp Polk, Louisiana. This POW enclosure was next to the barracks I had lived in when I was at Camp Polk not too many months before, so I had good news for her. I told her how I had sat on the front steps of my barracks and watched her son enjoy playing cards, dominos, and table tennis after we had come in from a long day of work. I was close enough that I could even hear the music his fellow POW's played on a guitar and accordian.

WHERE WAS I?

Though I was the supply clerk and regularly kept supplying water and gasoline for our company, I sometimes had to track down other supplies. One time I was sent out by myself to pick up a 55-gallon drum of motor oil. The supply dump I found was unmanned, so I searched the median of the autobahn until I found drums of the particular

type of motor oil we needed.

Hoisting that drum of oil up onto my truck turned out to be almost more than I could handle. I did find a 2 x 12 plank so I had a ramp for rolling the barrel up onto the truck bed. However, the plank was so short that the angle was too steep for so much weight. I kept watching for someone else to stop so I could enlist their help, but finally decided I would have to do it all by myself. And I did, but at the cost of an injured back. It still bothers me.

AN ARMY TRAVELS ON ITS STOMACH, BUT VEHICLES NEED FUEL, TOO

How lack of gasoline almost brought our Armored Divisions to their knees and almost kept us from advancing is one of the great sagas of WWII. I remember refueling our vehicles from Jerry cans of gasoline that had been set alongside the road by whoever was in charge of keeping us on the move. The temptation was to fill your tank, but I remain convinced that none of us took more than our allotment, whether it was 3, 5, or 8 gallons. None of our vehicles ever ran out of fuel.

Our tank retrievers were quickly turned into fuel haulers as soon as the shortage was predicted. Our welders scrounged strap iron from captured German factories and made large cages that held hundreds of the 5-gallon Jerry cans. The tank retrievers could handle the weight easily.

I never did see the airplanes releasing the wrapped bundles of filled gasoline cans. They must have flown low to the ground and parachuted them in. I was grateful for the padding that protected the cans when they landed. I kept a top and bottom layer for myself, but passed single layers of the heavy felt and canvass along to others. We used it to make sleeping bags. I often slept in the backend of my truck on top of the watercans and gasoline cans.

RUHR VALLEY

I believe we were at Dortmund when we learned that some German soldiers were hiding out in a barn close to our encampment. Someone found out that civilians were bringing food to the soldiers, but they sneaked out at night to gather more food.

Whether our soldiers were under orders to do so or were just in the mood for adventure, I never did find out, but three or four of our guys went towards the barn to flush them out. Before they got close, the Germans decided to make a run towards the woods. Our guys were so startled that they didn't start shooting immediately, and completely missed their targets when they did start firing. When they saw that the German soldiers weren't armed, they fired toward them without any intent of hitting

them – their sport for the day. Second thought: Maybe they were poor marksmen.

The next day our Colonel, possibly Col. I.O. Drewry, Jr., and his Jeep driver came across a teen-age soldier – 16 or so – in that same town. Apparently the soldier was hiding in a roadside ditch when the Colonel spotted him as he drove by. At the time all I heard was that the Colonel took the soldier's weapon and hauled him off in the Jeep.

Years later the company I worked for, *THE PROGRESSIVE FARMER CO.*, had nine German businessmen as guests for a few days. We took them to dinner at The Club atop Red Mountain in Birmingham, AL and made sure each guest was seated beside one of our co-workers. I carried with me a list of places that I had been during the war in Germany, along with the dates we had passed through the areas. One of the men beside me took a look at the list and told me his story.

Pointing to the town name of Dortmund, he said, "That's my home town and that's where I was captured by an American Army Colonel in a Jeep. Then he looked at the dates I had listed for being there and said, "That's the date I was captured." He went on to explain that he had been removed from school and put in uniform just a few days before this happened. He also said that instead of being taken to a prisoner of war compound, he was told to go home and get into civilian clothes – and that just a few days later he was back in school.

Someplace in my collection I have a picture I took of Graves and Quigley (from Massachusetts) standing beside their vehicle with a wall clock, with pendulum, that Louis Graves had "liberated" in Dortmund because his watch had stopped working. Today we would call that looting. At the time we didn't give it a thought.

T-5 Jack Bushell and T-4 Cris Tatum -- Delbruck, Germany

13 February 2007: Memories cannot be trusted. I just located the photograph.



Men in the picture are T/5 Jack Bushell of Lincoln, Illinois on the left and T/4 C.E. (Cris) Tatum of 1167 E. 18th Ave., Columbus, Ohio. The photograph is marked as having been made at Delbruck, Germany

SOUVENIRS FROM PADERBORN

The souvenir swords and German Army rifle that I sent home came from the town of Paderborn, I believe. But they weren't looted. The people living there were told to bring all of their weapons to the town square and place them in the designated area. The weapons were going to be run over by a heavy tank to destroy them. I salvaged two dress swords that to this day I'd like to return to the families who turned them in. Our son Richard has the

rifle. It's a single-shot Mauser. Our son Randy has the small-caliber long-barrel pistol and a bayonet.

MEMORIES FROM AN UNKNOWN LOCATION

I was on the second floor of a building that we were thinking about occupying for the

night. It was situated at one end of what in brighter times might have been a large park or courtyard. We weren't in a big city and there was no network of streets. Houses that were strung out along the right hand side of the grounds may have been private homes or housing for people who worked in this building. We probably were seeing the back sides of the houses, because people who lived in the houses were walking around the grounds and it didn't seem as if car traffic had ever been allowed.

We were getting deeper into Germany but I never did see or hear the name of this place. There were quite a few civilians around – most of them older people. The war must have rolled right over them before they had a chance to get out of the way. They just stood silently and looked at us and at each other.

At the time I wondered why they at least didn't gather up their dead and bury them. I since have decided that they were in shock and not capable of thinking straight.

Our officers finally sent a detail of three or four soldiers out to supervise burying the civilian dead. I watched them threaten the old people with their rifles. It took that to make the people do something.

The vivid memory I have is two people dragging the body of a portly old gentlemen dressed in a black suit. They each had a grip on an arm and were dragging the body along the ground. He had been caught in the line of fire from a machine gun. One of his legs fell off – severed at the knee – as he was being dragged to a burial spot. They kept on dragging the rest of the corpse toward me. I looked away.

ATTENDING MASS IN ENEMY TERRITORY

Somewhere in Germany, possibly in the Ruhr Valley, our convoy was going to be delayed for several hours one Sunday morning. My memory is hazy on this, but I saw people on their way to Mass at the small Catholic church by the side of the road and decided I would have time to attend Mass, too. So I went in and stood at the back of the church, wearing my helmet and carrying my .45 handgun plus the “grease gun” slung over my shoulder. One of my buddies — maybe Ed Quigley, from Massachusetts — must have gone in with me.

Members of the congregation were a bit nervous, but probably no more wary than me. I wonder now: did I remove my helmet when I walked up to the front of the church to receive communion? I believe I remember that my weapon was “at ready” and my trigger finger was in position to fire if necessary. Knowing how cautious I was, I am almost positive that I didn't go into this church all by myself. Either Quigley or somebody else kept his eye on the congregation when I had my back to them. And I'm sure

I did the same for him.

There was no hymn singing and no playing of an organ or piano. I believe the priest's hands trembled as he put the communion wafer on my tongue, but that may have been because he was quite old.

The church was not badly damaged, but there were a couple of holes in the roof – evidence of either artillery shells or small bombs dropped from airplanes.

GERMAN PLANES NO THREAT, BUT BIG GUNS KEPT US ON EDGE

We saw very few German airplanes. I believe it was just before we crossed from Holland into Germany that I first saw an American fighter plane and a German fighter plane dueling with each other in a typical dogfight. Our guy won and we cheered when the German plane spiraled toward the ground trailing smoke. As we passed through Germany we saw field after field of German planes that had been destroyed.

The long-range guns of the German artillery were always in the picture, though. I remember one artillery barrage that could have been disastrous if we hadn't been saved by one of our officers who couldn't read a map. I'm basing this thought on rumor, but having had the experience with Nick Kabanuk in France, I rather believe the rumor.

When in convoy we merely followed the truck in front of us or, if we got too far behind the rest of the vehicles, followed directions of Military Police at intersections and hoped that we were on the right trail. The forested area we went through had been heavily damaged in the battles that had taken place there earlier. Late in the afternoon we ended up at a crossroads and were told to "dig in" -- that is, dig a foxhole and camouflage our vehicles. I started to dig a foxhole, but tree roots and hard ground kept me from making much progress. This happened often and it was only just before the Rhine River crossing that I finally had a completed foxhole to call my own.

Before I decided there was no way I could dig a hole for protection, I was sent out to find the nearest watering hole. I found it with no trouble, but upon my return found that the area we had been setting up in was abandoned and, instead, we were taking over the quadrant diagonally across the intersection. It's a lucky thing we did because the Germans apparently had their big guns zeroed on the area that we had started to use as our encampment. That night they let loose with a barrage that splintered giant trees and left big craters in the ground. We would have been severely battered, if not wiped out had we been there. I watched the bombardment from ground level because there had been no time to dig a foxhole after I returned. I was ready for bed.

Seems to me that somewhere near here is where I got my first glimpse of Germany's giant railroad guns that could hurl a projectile an unbelievable distance — something close to 50 miles. The gun I saw was on its own set of rails and hidden deep in a for-

ested area. It looked to me to be as big as a battleship.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

As we moved on we stayed much closer to the enemy lines than we had earlier. We also followed much closer behind the infantry and tanks. Instead of moving into a town several days after it had been captured, we now moved in only a few hours behind the infantry.

I didn't know how close behind the infantry we were on this particular Sunday afternoon when we set up shop on the grounds of a coal mine. I do remember how close we were to enemy lines. It was Easter Sunday, April 1, 1945, and many of us had nothing to do but enjoy the warm Spring weather.

Bob Wright had joined us by this time and was my co-driver. I don't remember that he was with me at the time but I do remember the WHOMP! -- WHOMP! -- of our big 105mm guns and how my 2 ½-ton truck bounced every time they lobbed a shell over my head. Our artillery units were dug in on a ridge that ran along one edge of the coal mine and I was on a dirt road directly below driving from our tank repair area back to headquarters. I hadn't noticed the guns until they began the bombardment

It was Easter Sunday, but our chaplain was busy elsewhere and our unit didn't have Mass or any other church service that day. Quite often when we knew the chaplain couldn't make it around to every unit, one of the more thoughtful soldiers would call us together in a small group to recite the rosary and lead us in a few other prayers. This day, though, a few of us climbed a short way up an embankment some distance from the big guns and enjoyed the show. We could see the shells landing at another coal mine that appeared to be maybe five or seven miles away.

Some of us were quartered in the office building of this coal mining operation. This was a bit scary because we were told that underground tunnels led from this building over to the next mining center – the one that was being shelled by our division's artillery. Bob and I decided to check on the tunnel. We found a tunnel entrance in the basement of our building. The first 25 feet or so of the tunnel was about eight feet wide. Ceiling height was about nine feet. Floor, walls, and ceiling were of shiny white tile such as you would find in modern-day bathrooms.

We didn't venture any further into the tunnel because we thought some of the Germans might have stayed behind and we had no desire to get shot or captured. Guards were posted in the tunnel area by the time we turned in for the night.

This is the first place I worried about mortar fire. Normally we were so far behind the battle lines that mortar shells couldn't reach us. Here, though, a German mortar team had stayed behind and zeroed in on the area between two buildings that we occupied. For some reason or other, I had to go from the office building where we slept over to

the next building where one of our officers was interrogating a pretty German nurse. Apparently her job had been tending to prisoners assigned to this labor camp.

As I was leaving the building a couple of our young officers were having a lot of fun at the expense of our medical officer, Dr. Bella Donna. They grabbed him by the arms and propelled him across the courtyard where mortar shells had been landing. Dr. Bella Donna seemed to have a greater fear of incoming mortar rounds than anyone else.

It could be that the young officers were helping get the doctor to his duty station. Maybe they were just having a dangerously good time. But "Bella Donna"? I wonder what Doc's name really was. He spoke with a heavy foreign accent. I have an idea that he was a refugee from one of the European countries overrun by Hitler's military machine.

I have vivid memories of the people rescued here. I remember that they appeared to be walking cadavers. I remember their unsuccessful search for food they thought the German Army had stored in the mine shafts.

I remember the fire they built for roasting a deer or cow that one of our guys shot. I remember listening to the gypsy music, czardas, I believe -- violin and accordion, with the music going ever faster and faster -- and watching those gaunt, pitiful people dancing around the fire. The men did the difficult "Russian" dance, a step called pshatka, during which they are in almost a sitting position while kicking their feet out to the front. I remember how sick they were the next morning because they were not accustomed to such rich food and such large quantities of food. The freed prisoners in their striped clothing and the music were Hungarian. I do not know if they were Jews, but do not recall seeing any of them wearing the Star of David.

I do remember walking in front of that blazing fire while on guard duty in full view of the enemy located just a few blocks away. I was scared when walking that guard post because I knew I was a perfect target each time I had to pass in front of the fire. We later decided that the Germans didn't know that we knew they were so close and were carefully trying not to give themselves away. I watched them patrol their sector with a captured American half-track that they drove back and forth. They removed their temporary swastika insignia from the side that faced me each time they completed a round.

MYSTERY SOLVED: I FOUND OUT WHERE I WAS

Many years later I learned from a history of the 8th Armored Division that we had been at a place called Zweckel, that Zweckel had a coal mine, and that our guys helped the people we rescued look for food they thought was stored in the mine shafts.

27 March 1945 Began the battle for Zweckel. Finished in the afternoon of the 28th. Source: In Tornado's Wake, p. 141

Capt. Charles R. Leach, reports in his history of the 8th Armored Division that “While mopping up the last resistance in Zweckel, the men of TF Walker discovered two deep mine shafts, one stocked with food and the other being used as an ammunition dump by the defending Germans.” P.142 (TF Walker refers to Task Force Walker.)

I remember being at a coal mine location, probably this one, on Easter Sunday. That is possible, despite information gleaned from Capt. Leach’s history, page 153, that on 1 April 1945 we were ordered to the vicinity of Lippstadt and ordered to seize Paderborn. His comment probably refers to our combat troops and not our support unit.

I had looked at many maps of Germany -- both old and new -- but never was able to locate the town of Zweckel -- not even on a map pre-dating World War II. Finally, in the year 2004 I followed the advice of Dr. Bernie Metrick and searched the Internet for “Zweckel” without identifying it as a city. Pay dirt! I found a reference to Zweckel in the mission statement of a young people’s organization from the Katholische Pfarrgemeinde Herz-Jesu (Heart of Jesus?) Catholic Parish in Gladbeck, Germany.

The statement mentioned that the Parish is located in a section of Gladbeck called Zweckel, that many of its parishioners were former coal miners, and that Gladbeck is on the Northern edge of the Ruhr Valley. I immediately tried to contact the president of the group, Peter Rademacher, at the e-mail address given on their web page. That address no longer was active, so I searched for and found a postal mailing address for the Parish, then sent a letter to Peter (using the Parish address) explaining my experience on Easter Sunday and why I was interested in contacting him. Peter answered my letter almost immediately. He said his home is only a quarter-mile from mine headquarters and that my description of the building leads him to believe this is the site of my Sunday afternoon experience.

Not only did he send me photographs of Zweckel as it looked at that time but also pictures of it as it looks today and as it looked in the years just before World War II. He also sent a copy of a city map on which he outlined the area of the coal mine. On top of that, he interviewed Mr. Kuckelmann who remembered the allied invasion of Gladbeck and Zweckel.

“Before Easter 1945, the allied forces came from Kirchelle (look at the map). They got under fire of the German Flag 8,8 and 12/15. Some tanks were destroyed. But the American forces were better and came “Greenthursday” (two days before Easter) to Zweckel,” said Mr. Kuckelmann.

Some months later, as I continued searching for information, I made contact with Tatjana Louis of Ann Arbor, Michigan. She is a native of Essen and was in the United States working on her Doctorate, I believe. Her Master’s Thesis for her degree from the University of Dortmund was an oral history of miners from Zweckel. It was posted on a web site, but I have not yet taken the time to have it translated from the German language.

From my description of the building Bob and I were quartered in and the rough map of the other buildings I remembered, she was almost certain that this is the location of the experiences I described to her.

However, she said that the tunnel Bob and I explored did not lead to the next town or coal mine. Instead, it led to the miner's houses some distance away and was built so they could walk to work comfortably when the weather was bad. It is one of the distinctive features of the mine which sets it apart from others.

2 March 2007 Received a copy of "Lesebuch Zweckel" by Tatjana Louis and Axel Scheibe sent by her father Dr. Gered Louis, Karl-Meyer Strasse 23, D-45327 Essen, Germany. Tatjana currently is teaching German at the University in Bogota, Columbia, S.A.

MOUNTAIN DRIVING

I was Jimmy Acton's co-driver for awhile, but he didn't get a lot of help from me when the driving was difficult. Both of us recognized that Jimmy was a better driver than I was, even though he fortified himself with hard liquor every chance he got.

One of our more harrowing trips was a blackout convoy through hairpin curves of a mountainous area. As a driver, we were to watch for the two pinpoints of light from each taillight of the truck ahead of us. If we were too far behind, we saw only one pinpoint of light in each taillight. That meant you had to drop into a lower gear and jam down on the gas pedal so you could catch up in a hurry.

That's exactly what Jimmy did when the two pinpoints of light ahead of us suddenly had turned into a single pinpoint of light. Luckily, Jimmy had not been imbibing this particular trip so he could back off on the gas pedal as soon as he discovered that the truck we had been following had not gotten as far ahead of us as we had thought. Instead, it had just followed the sharp turn in the road. The single pinpoint of light that we saw ahead of us was on about the fifth vehicle ahead of us – and across a chasm that the hairpin curve in the road was going around.

We were headed for a crash into that chasm, but Jimmy reacted quickly and saved us from a nasty accident. As far as I know, we didn't lose a single vehicle in that convoy through the treacherous mountain roads. When daylight came I relived Jimmy at the wheel. He was more than bleary-eyed.

ANOTHER CONVOY

Whether this occurred before or after the incident just related, I do not recall. Probably after, because I believe I was assigned my own truck shortly after this happened. We were in a daylight convoy through a heavily forested area. Some of the guys had

brought along the women that they had hooked up with. I wasn't aware of this until we were delayed for a short time and I saw several girls jump out of the back end of a truck and head for the woods to relieve themselves.

I also have no idea where we were or where we were going. All I remember is that Jimmy had drunk so much liquor that he didn't have sense enough to stop drinking. He was belligerent and wouldn't let me drive. Rather than take a chance on what seemed an almost certain path to destruction if we ran off the road, I took a chance on being picked up as a deserter and jumped out of the truck as soon as I had a chance. Luckily, our wrecker driver recognized me and had space in his vehicle for me so I wound up at the place I was supposed to be – though not in the right vehicle. A day or two after this I was given a truck of my own.

EATING ON THE MOVE

I still don't know how they managed, but our kitchen crew set up their water heating equipment every time it appeared that we'd be stopped for a long time during our convoy moves. Then they dumped cans and cans of C-rations into the big tin garbage cans so they could hand out warm food to us several times a day.

Each of us carried a small, inefficient can opener that I believe came in our boxes of K-rations. I usually used my bayonet to slash open the top of the C-ration can.

Most of the time we got Pork and Beans. They were pretty good, even when cold. Sometimes we lucked out and got a can of Scrambled Eggs with Ham. They tasted a lot better when they were hot. I usually tried to keep a few cans stowed in the back of my truck, so I wouldn't miss a meal if I was sent out to get a supply of water, or gasoline, or oil. We sometimes tried heating the C-rations by wiring them in place against the exhaust manifold of the engine. That was an iffy procedure, though. Leave it on too long and the can exploded. Leave it on too short a time and your food was cold. Try puncturing the top to keep the can from exploding and you had a mess to clean up.

When traveling by ourselves in France, we sometimes were able to buy bread from a bakery in a small town. Usually, though, the baker told us he had to save the bread for the civilians. That fresh bread which we sometimes managed to get was delicious. It went well with the Strawberry Jam that the mess sergeant gave to me when he found out we were out of K-rations and weren't going to be back to our home base in time for a regular meal. It should be noted that the Army got its Strawberry Jam in one-gallon tins.

Most of the time when we weren't at a base camp, we ate K-rations. These were "Cracker Jacks" size boxes – one for breakfast; one for lunch, and one for dinner.

Main food in the lunch package was a D-bar. This was a concentrated chocolate bar

that had enough nutrition to keep you going all day. It was a bit hard on your stomach if you were hungry and ate it all at once. But nibbling on it off and on throughout the day worked out quite well. I believe there were some crackers in this package, too, plus cigarettes, toilet paper, and Nescafe (instant coffee).

Some (maybe all) of the breakfast K-ration boxes (they were dark green in color and waterproofed with wax) contained a cellophane-wrapped biscuit of compressed oatmeal, complete with sugar and powdered milk. The instructions described how to prepare this by dissolving it in boiling water. Most of the guys thought this compressed oatmeal was the worst thing the Army gave them to eat. I thought it was great, but I ignored the preparation instructions and ate the instant oatmeal as if it were a cookie. I often could collect more of these than I needed without having to trade cigarettes or anything else for them.

Some of the breakfast K-ration boxes had small tins of scrambled eggs with ham – similar to what came in the larger C-ration can. I don't recall what came in the dinner K-ration. That may have been the one with a tin of cheese with bacon bits. Best food of all the canned and boxed stuff handed out to us came in the Jungle rations. Each of these boxes contained enough food for ten soldiers, I think. We managed to get our hands on some of these when we were on the Rhine River and had a feast of fresh eggs with bacon. The strips of bacon came in a Pork and Beans-sized can.

COPING WITH WEATHER

During one particular move, we were delayed on the road during a blizzard while another division moved across our combat position. It was so cold that we couldn't decide if there was less danger from sitting in the cab of our truck wrapped up in a blanket or moving around outside. We were short of fuel so we couldn't keep our engines running to help us stay warm. For some reason or other, the kitchen crew wasn't able to give us hot food or drink, so I resorted to using the one-burner Coleman stove that I had acquired somewhere along the line. My canteen was empty and all of my 5-gallon water cans were empty. The one that had some water in it was frozen to the truck bed. Made no difference. The contents had frozen, too.



T-5 Leamon Newberry, my co-driver.

THE COLD

ular move, we the road during another division convoy to get to tion. It was so couldn't decide danger from of our truck blanket or mov- side. We were couldn't keep help us stay reason or other wasn't able to or drink, so I the one-burner stove that I had where along the was empty and water cans

I scraped snow from the roadside and packed it into my canteen cup, then tried to melt the snow with the Coleman stove. The wind blew all the heat sideways. The only place we had to set the stove was on the front bumper of the truck and even trying to shield it from the wind by standing close to it didn't help. It was so cold we never were able to melt the snow to make coffee.

MY SLEEPING QUARTERS WHEN ON THE MOVE

The German airplanes were almost neutralized as the war came to an end, so we didn't worry much about getting bombed or strafed. There was danger of long-range artillery, of course, but most of the time I disregarded that and slept in the back end of my truck.

I had prepared for this by building a shelf across the front end of the cargo space, but as time went on I had this space filled with my darkroom supplies and my emergency supply of food. It's also where I kept my bazooka rounds and extra machine gun ammunition, so there was no space left for sleeping.

That meant I spread out my sleeping bag on top of the water cans. This sounds uncomfortable, but I had extra padding. This padding was ¾-inch felt glued to heavy canvas that was used to protect cans of gasoline that had been airdropped to us. One layer top and bottom both kept me warm and evened out the lumps of the metal cans.

BEHIND ENEMY LINES

Someplace in Germany a small contingent of our battalion and some of us from Headquarters spent two nights behind enemy lines. I don't know if we were there deliberately or by mistake. Our mission was to retrieve and repair several medium tanks that had been damaged by enemy fire. Ordinarily the tank retriever crews and their specialized hauling equipment would have handled this mission, I believe. Maybe the terrain didn't lend itself to the usual procedure, if there was such a thing as usual procedure.

At any rate, we stopped on the grounds of a large farm late in the afternoon and immediately took over the owner's house. This was a large two-story house, nicely furnished – floors covered with thick carpets, nice richly finished hardwood furniture, a family library where I slept on the floor. We (I think Bob was with me) tried to get some books from the library, but the doors to the shelves were locked and we didn't want to break them. So, we found something else to while away the hour or so before bedtime.

Whoever arranged for our billeting sent the family hiking down the road to spend the next few nights with their neighbors. They had been in the midst of their evening meal. They were ousted in such a hurry that some of the food remained on their plates.

As soon as the mechanics determined what was wrong with the tanks, they sent two guys in a half-track back through the lines to pick up parts. I'm glad I didn't draw guard duty that night. I was scared enough as it was. There was an enemy Panzer (German tank) outfit holed up about a half mile away. Apparently they didn't scout our outfit because they outnumbered us – and we weren't really a combat outfit. I heard rumors that the parts pickup crew had to make another run for parts the second night. We convoyed back to our own lines the next day with tanks leading the way. There's no mention of this in our official history, but I'm sure my memory is clear on this incident. I just don't know where or when it took place

AND YET ANOTHER CONVOY

This happened before Bob Wright was assigned as my co-driver. The "co-driver" as-

signed to me on this particular move probably was our assistant mail clerk, whose name I forget. He didn't know how to drive a truck, so his only job was to stay awake whenever our truck came to a stop. But he never managed to do this. As a result I got very little sleep. We sometimes were in the driver's seat four days and nights in a row.

Finding time to answer nature's call was a real problem. We stayed on the road day and night. Sometimes the pain seemed unbearable. An even worse problem was stay-



Don't know where we were, but we certainly weren't welcome

ing alert while we were moving. On one leg of this particular journey I passed about half of the convoy in my sleep. I was within sight of the lead vehicle when one of our sergeants standing on the left hand side of the road finally shouted loud enough that I woke up and discovered what I was doing. My co-driver didn't even wake up then.

It was during this phase of my Army career that I started smoking the cigarettes that were supplied to us in the K-rations we carried with us. The cigarettes did help me stay awake. It wasn't until after the war -- in 1955 when we were living in Birmingham -- that I finally stopped smoking cigarettes.

In the meantime I had quit my job as editor of *The Fairport Beacon*, a weekly newspaper in Fairport Harbor, Ohio, because I thought the job was the cause of my smoking three to four packs of cigarettes a day. A few months after quitting this job and enrolling in the graduate school at the University of Missouri, Columbia, MO I was once



“With Hitler Is The Way To Victory” is not a sign of “Welcome USA”

again smoking three packs of cigarettes a day.

It was me, not the job. I finally did quit smoking several years later, after we had moved from Little Rock, Arkansas to Birmingham, Alabama. But willpower had nothing to do with it. I had an overexposure of pentachlorophenol, a chemical used for ground treatment to prevent termite damage in the rental house we kept in Little Rock. My throat was so sore from this overexposure that I could not tolerate the smoke.

WE WERE IN ERWITTE

It probably was April 5 or April 6, 1945 when we moved into Erwitte. My unit, along with other parts of our battalion, was billeted in the headquarters of a training school for SS troops. Rumor was that this was a center for the Brown Shirts, an elite SS group.

As support troops we usually were a day or two behind the assault troops in moving into a town. This time we must have moved in a little sooner than we usually did. The movie projector was still running a training film when we walked into the building. And it was only a ½-hour film. I saw this myself, but of course have no way of knowing that one of our guys hadn't started the projector.

I picked up a swastika arm band to take home as a souvenir. At the next day's noon meal, which was served to us in the fancy mess hall of this training center, I placed the swastika on my left arm to show it to my buddies. One of our junior officers came over to me and said he was going to have me court-martialed – whether it was for be-

ing out of uniform or some other reason that he dreamed up, I forget. At any rate, he soon decided he had enjoyed throwing his weight around and gave me a short sermon about proper behavior instead of following through on his original threat.

This wasn't the first time I was threatened with being court-martialed for some minor infraction of the rules. At one encampment in the woods I was singled out as the person to dig a slit trench for the officers to use. I quickly went to work and finished the digging without taking time to relieve myself. No one as yet had prepared the facilities for enlisted men and I would have had to make use of a shallow one-person hole dug just for me. So, I did the sensible thing and used the facility that I had just dug. Another of the superior beings, again a second lieutenant, chewed me out because I was usurping the officers' territory. I told him politely that I thought I was doing him



The arm band that almost got me busted back to Buck Private.

a favor by preparing his facilities before preparing my own and that the territory really hadn't been declared off limits to enlisted men as yet because I hadn't put up the sign marking it as "Officers Latrine." He didn't buy that at all and told me, furthermore, that he would add charges of insubordination. Just because you dig it doesn't make it yours, he told me. I had already defiled the sacred territory, of course, so I half-way believe that he really lost the argument.

PARAPHRASING Bill Mauldin in his book "UP FRONT" – If you must have an army you have to have officers, so you might as well make the best of it.

In addition to the swastika arm band, I also picked up a packet of photographs that the German soldiers had been able to buy as souvenirs to send home. These pictures show the area and buildings in their best form, and include a picture of the mess hall where I almost got busted.

We probably stayed at this location a couple of days. I went for a stroll around the campus and was startled when I saw a sharply-dressed German officer approaching me on the sidewalk. I was so startled that I started to salute! He was a physician who worked at the hospital – and as a medical officer was expected to wear his uniform. It always seemed to me that somebody should have briefed us about the possibility of encountering the enemy in such circumstances.

MY TRIP TO THE DENTIST

I had another surprise in store for me when a team of doctors — well, maybe a team of one — showed up at our unit and quickly ran us through a dental exam. It seemed to me to be a strange time to be worrying about teeth, but I had two cavities that Doc said needed to be taken care of.

Next day, three or four of us were loaded into an ambulance and hauled to a field hospital. All of us objected to being relieved of our weapons as we climbed into the vehicle because we were in enemy territory. We didn't think the Red Cross marking offered much protection. We also knew that some of the Medics carried sidearms, even though it was against regulations. In fact, one of my Medic friends was taken prisoner by the Germans and talked them into releasing him because he was a Medic even though he was armed with a .45 Colt automatic. He told me that he convinced his captors that his weapon was only "for protection" and that he was not an active combat soldier.

The field hospital we were taken to was housed in tents, but the dentist had his foot-powered drill set up outside under a tree. He quickly took care of drilling and filling my teeth without benefit of any pain killers and had us back to our unit before noon.

HALBERSTADT – April 12, 1945

At the National Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC -- close to the main building of the Smithsonian Institution -- I posed for a picture by the 8th Armored Division flag and a plaque recognizing the 8th Armored Division as liberators of a concentration camp called "Zweiberg-Halberstadt". This probably was in the 1990's. (Confirmed date: April 1999).

After carefully returning the flag to its original draping, I strolled past the flags of other divisions that were honored with similar plaques and noticed the sign saying, "Do Not Touch." About that time a guard walked over to us and we told him that we hadn't seen the sign in time. He told us he had started to remind us about the sign but then noted my age and decided I probably had earned the right to unfurl the flag that was on display. I don't know why the sign is necessary. After all, it's not an "original" flag that dates from World War II.

When the museum opened there was no acknowledgment that the 8th Armored Division had liberated these prisoners. Dr. Bernard Metrick of Boca Raton, Florida noticed this glaring omission when he first visited the museum and immediately began asking why the 8th Armored was not among the units listed as liberators. After all, he was the officer who first went into this concentration camp and made a detailed listing of the prisoners and their condition. At the time he was with Company B of the 8th Armored Division's 78th Armored Medical Battalion.

It was at the Minneapolis, Minnesota meeting of the 8th Armored Division Association, about 1996, that he recounted his efforts to get recognition for our unit. All of us owe special thanks to Dr. Metrick, Al Woehlerle (HQ-SSO), and Ervin Brigham (Company A, 36th Tank Battalion, for the many hours, days, and months they spent tracking down the reason 8th Armored wasn't recognized. First they were told that there were no records to indicate we were involved in the action. Later they were told that the infor-

mation about that action was “classified”. This irked them to the point that they contacted anyone in government agencies who could do something about what they called the stupidity of retaining a “classified” rating for actions which occurred 50 years ago.

At the Holocaust Museum I gained entrance to the archives when I explained that I wanted to find out where I had been. Several people there went out of their way to find sources of information when they noticed that I was having trouble finding the meager information that was available. We spent several hours in research. Somewhere I have a written record of the results. Most of the information I found detailed the numbers of prisoners who were removed from the concentration camp on a regular basis as the American Army approached.

I also learned that the camp was a branch of the infamous Buchenwald camp and that it was operated by the noted airplane manufacturing firm (I’ll recall the name eventually). – Messerschmitt?” And I now know that I never was at the particular location that Dr. Metrick described.

The people I saw at Zweckel were political prisoners from Hungary. Nothing I found at the Holocaust museum quite fit my picture of a coal mine although mention of mining coal to support the factory was made, and I now realize that the coal mine operation – also staffed by Hungarians – probably was a separate operation. At one time I thought I might have memories from two locations – both tied together in my mind because the people were Hungarian. Perhaps one of the locations was Halberstadt and the other may have been Zweckel.

In his history of the 8th Armored Division, Capt. Leach cites April 13 as the date of our Halberstadt operation. However, the plaque lists the liberation date as April 12, 1945.

To add to the confusion, here’s the report from the Special Golden Anniversary Edition Newsletter of the Eighth Armored Division Association dated September 1998 – Special Issue # One – Page 4:

“Erwin Brigham (A-36), Bernard Metrick (B-78), and Al Woehrl (HQ-SS) told us they have been successful in getting declassified the information which proved members of our Division took part in liberating the Langenstein-Zweiberglager Nazi Concentration Camp. After relating the terrible conditions found in the camp, they strongly recommended visiting the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC where our 8th Armored Division flag is one of 20 on display.” Note that in 1996 I confirmed in my own mind that “my” coal mine was at Zweckel. Only later did I find out that Zweckel now is part of the city of Gladbeck.

MY TRUCK WAS ALSO MY PHOTO WORKSHOP

A lot of soldiers played cards or rolled dice, or wrote letters home, when they had time. I managed three years of Army life without playing a game of poker or rolling a

game of dice. I spent a lot of time trying to learn the language of the country we were in. I also spent a lot of time rounding up darkroom chemicals and equipment, then processing the film in the back of my truck. Many of the negatives have not been printed to this day. Maybe that should be my next project.

After the fighting was over I found a photo enlarger that was intact except for a lens, a negative carrier, and light source. Previous to that I used an enlarger that I made from tin cans and the lens from a damaged camera.

My light source was a sealed beam truck headlight that was discarded because the low beam was burned out. The tin cans took the place of a leather bellows. One of my friends in a tech truck put the cans on his lathe and cut holes in the ends so precisely that I could easily mount a camera lens in the end of one can. Other cans had holes cut in the ends so I could slide this lens up and down to focus the image.

DON'T FORGET THE ORGAN

My truck really was a catch-all; sort of a rolling basement or attic. Stashed in the backend were food, ammunition, water, gasoline — and almost anything else that anyone wanted transported. I worried about hauling gasoline and ammunition together — especially when driving between burning buildings on narrow city streets. The canvas covering my truck bed must have been fire-proofed because burning embers that fell on the truck never burned through.

The chaplain's pump organ ended up on my truck a few times after he had to leave it with our unit following Sunday morning Mass. Sgt. Harold Kegg was a good musician and sometimes entertained us with sing-a-longs. He always made sure the organ got moved when our unit packed up. I had a chance to play it sometimes, using music that I had copied with my camera and reduced to one-fourth normal size before I joined the Army. Eventually I gave all my music to Sgt. Kegg because he made better use of it than I ever did. It took awhile before the Chaplain could reclaim his organ.

Another of my last-minute loads was a German Army electrical generator that our kitchen crew appropriated. That was almost a disaster. The generator was mounted on a two-wheel trailer and somebody hurriedly hitched it to the back end of my truck just before we moved out. I should have checked it, but it was one of those hurry-up moves and I went out on schedule.

We hadn't gone far before my co-driver noticed we had lost our trailer. Fortunately this coincided with a stop by the entire convoy. Luck was with us that day. When the trailer got loose, it swerved to the right and ended up in the ditch without hitting any of our other vehicles. Soldiers from the fifth or sixth vehicle behind us retrieved the generator and hooked it to their truck. The kitchen crew had lights that night.

THE BIG CITY OF BRAUNSCHWEIG

I was kind of excited when we moved into a large industrial complex at Braunschweig. I was hoping that we'd hole up in the factory that made Leica cameras and that I'd find one to take home as a souvenir. My hopes were dashed when I heard that a bunch of infantry guys had found the Leica factory and had gone through the place smashing every piece of photographic equipment they could find by beating it with the butts of their rifles.

Then the place where we were billeted looked more like a steel mill than a camera factory. It probably was a Krup works. The name Herman Goering Works also comes to mind -- the company that made heavy weapons — but I recall reading recently that the Herman Goering Works was in another location. We were there such a short time that the only thing I remember is the sight of the tall smokestacks and the fences surrounding the compound. I've since learned that we were then assigned to rear area security.

Years later I toured an International Harvester farm tractor manufacturing plant in Germany and had the eerie feeling that I was back in Braunschweig. The IH plant had the same narrow roads, similar piles of scrap material stacked at various places that didn't make sense to me, and isolated parts at odd locations – not at all matching the picture that is often painted about how neat and precise the Germans are.

OUR RUN TO BERLIN HALTED

It was about the middle of April when we picked up the rumor that we were not going to continue our run to Berlin. This must have coincided with orders directing our division to handle rear area security. All of us were disappointed – even disgusted – to hear that we were giving up Berlin in favor of the Russians who were approaching from the other side. Russian troops and American troops, including guys from my unit, I was told, met at the Elbe River.

ONWARD TO THE HARZ MOUNTAINS

Until reading Capt. Leach's history of our division, I was under the impression that our move to Osterode in the Harz mountains was made through previously-captured territory. Only when reading the history of the 8th Armored Division did I learn that we had to fight our way there.

For me, the war was over when we moved to Osterode. We no longer heard the rumble of artillery and it seemed unlikely that we'd gear up for battle again. The only Germans I came across were the elderly people who had to follow the path through the woods to go between their home and the bakery. I have clear memories of one old lady

who stopped quite a distance from me at my guard post in the woods each time she

returned home and, in a scared tone, asked: “Nix boom-boom?” My answer: “Ach, nein. Nix boom-boom.”

Because we were no longer in an active combat zone, our guard postings were rather casual. We were not within sight of each other and we didn't patrol the area – just stayed in one place and kept our eyes open. Quite often we made use of a rough bench that somebody had cobbled together. We relaxed our guard. This turned out to be a mistake. One of our lieutenants was bashed in the head with a hand axe. He was on his way to check out a remote guard post – a post that I regularly manned by myself. The date was 21 May 1945.

THE MOUNTAIN VILLAGE OF OSTERODE

Somebody had quite a battle for the town. Burned-out German tanks lined the road-



On Serious Guard Duty in the Harz Mountains

side. I have motion pictures of me climbing up on one of them and looking down the hatch to the crew compartment. There I am shaking my head as if the poor guy was still in the driver's seat. Now I've forgotten if he really was or if I was pretending.

The town was secure enough that we wandered from building to building without wor-

rying. From all outward appearances, this was a typical village with small businesses side by side – bake shops, tailors, wine shops, bookshops, furniture stores, hardware stores.... It meandered for several blocks along the main street.



Vern On Guard Duty in the Harz Mountains

Looks were deceiving. This was an engineering department and attached factory for producing war materials. What appeared to be separate buildings for each little store

was a series of large buildings that housed drafting tables and machine tools. It was a clever camouflage that rivaled any Hollywood movie set. Other soldiers were rummaging around in this factory the same time I was. While I was marveling at the sophisticated drafting tables a couple of other guys started to bash them with their rifle butts but did stop when I reminded them that other American soldiers could really use the equipment if they didn't destroy it.

OUR LIVING QUARTERS AT OSTERODE

Jimmy Acton, Snuffy Smalzer, James Quigley, another guy (possibly Harry Strange) and I shared living quarters in a one-story lean-to built onto the side of a water-powered mill a block or so off the main street of the village. And where was Bob Wright if he wasn't with us? We had single folding cots that had been left over from



Burned German Tanks Littered the Roads at Osterode

the previous inhabitants. Our door opened onto a path that paralleled the millstream. The water was ice cold, but several times we jumped in to rinse off after soaping up good with water from a metal basin that someone had left behind.

Rumor had it that high Nazi officials from Berlin had boarded a special train and fled to the Harz mountains so we didn't venture far from our quarters. We did go about 300 feet upstream one time and located the dam. Beyond that the path narrowed sharply as it went deeper into the woods.

Chapter Six

The War Is Really Over – For Us

MAY 8 – VICTORY IN EUROPE – VE DAY DECLARED!

I'm not sure any of us were elated when we heard in a radio broadcast that the Germans had surrendered formally and unconditionally. We also were still wary of snipers and small groups of German soldiers who didn't really believe that the war was over. Obviously we weren't wary enough, as evidenced by the attack on May 21 that I've already mentioned.

We did, however, have a small celebration by passing around a bottle of cognac or some other foul spirits that one of the guys had been hoarding for just such an occasion. One small taste was more than enough.

The Special Services unit must have had advance warning. Within a day or so they supplied each of us with neatly printed greeting cards declaring VE Day that we could send home. It wasn't long, though, before we were told to start getting our equipment ready so we could ship out to Japan, where the war was still going on.

R&R (REST AND RECREATION)

Three-day passes to civilization – the bright lights of Paris and Brussels – were offered on a lottery basis to those who wanted some recreation other than playing poker. When the time came for some one from our unit to go on leave, of course, we usually got orders to move out to another location and all leaves were cancelled. Eventually, though, our turn came and my name was among those chosen to go to Brussels. We were transported by 2 ½-ton truck from wherever we were located at the time. I don't even remember if we were in Holland, Germany, or



Austria, but it seems logical that the time must have been after VE-Day. Perhaps we still were based at Osterode. Yes, we were. A note I made on the back of a portrait I sent home from Brussels indicates I was in Brussels May 17, 18, and 19, 1945.

That must be beer headed our way.



Three Beers Coming Up at Hotel Metropole, Brussels

The first few hours in town, three of us thoroughly enjoyed having a beer at an outdoor restaurant. The next day I started exploring the town on my own and was intrigued by the architecture in the old city. After spending a lot of time admiring the Cathedral, I wandered around outside looking at what I later learned were the Guild Halls with their

colorful flags flying from each. It was while walking around the Cathedral grounds that I bumped into two girls from the British Army. They told me about a nearby soldiers club operated by a British organization – not the Red Cross, but some group similar to our USO, it seemed — and we agreed to meet there that night. Specialty of the house was a small sandwich stuffed with the most delicious meat you can imagine — Spam. It seems that the secret to making a good Spam sandwich is to use paper-thin slices of the canned meat from Hormel in Minnesota, my home state.

One of the girls was Nora O'Neill. We exchanged letters after the war, until I met Helen at South Dakota State College and Nora met Ted King. Helen re-activated the letter writing after we were married, and we stayed in touch from that time on – even spending several vacations in England with Ted and Nora. Both have now passed away, but we have occasional correspondence with their son Bob.



Nora O'Neill

BERCHESGARTEN AND KOENIGSEE

After the hostilities ceased, I also had a 7-day leave at Koenigsee, close to Hitler's hideout known as the Eagle's Nest. I remember this place because



The people of Brussels went out of their way to make us feel at home.

that's where I ran out of film for the 35mm Argus camera that I had sneaked by the inspectors on our way to Europe. By that time I had also run out of film for my 8mm movie camera and lost the camera to a thief who worked at an R&R hostel operated by the Red Cross in Salzburg.

One of the side trips during my short stay at Koenigsee was an afternoon visit to Hitler's mountaintop hideout, the Eagle's Nest. We threaded our way along the twisting road up the mountain in a 2 1/2-ton truck and discovered that our bombers had hit their target. All we could see at the top was a pile of rubble and a heavily damaged stone structure. One of our more adventuresome sight seers came away with a souvenir, though. He managed to find an entrance to the building and came back with a telephone he said he found in Hitler's bathroom.

Helen and I drove to Koenigsee in our rental car many years later and I was able to take additional photos of this spectacular resort. It was then that I decided "You can go back." Nothing about the place seemed to have changed, but it is possible the buildings that appeared old are recreations of the ones that were in place when I first visited.

PUTTING MORE MILES ON MY TRUCK

After the war was over — and I don't recall if this was following VJ-Day or VE-Day

— excess ammunition was rounded up and collected near Nuremberg. Bob had been assigned his own truck before this, so somebody else must have been along just for the ride.

We didn't have to load the truck ourselves. All we had to do was report to a nearby ammunition dump and pick up our load of artillery shells to drop off at a bigger ammunition dump near Nuremberg, where the war trials were held. This was just a lisurely jaunt for us, so I took time out to go shopping in Nuremberg.

I knew the city was noted for toy production, but I don't recall that any toys were for sale in the stores that I stopped at. I did find some dolls that were dressed in native costume and bought two of them. I wish now that I had saved one of them for my future wife and another for my daughter Joan. As a newly-minted civilian in 1946, however, I wasn't thinking that far ahead.

In fact, one of my first excursions as a civilian was to the Trappist Monastery at Gethsemane, Kentucky to visit my uncle, Father Cletus Altermatt. He had joined the Trappists following his medical discharge from the Army where he had been a Chaplain.

The Monastery seemed like a good place to escape the troubles of trying to find a job in civilian life. After about the third day of my visit, during which I joined the Monks and Brothers for meals and in some of their work activities, I seriously thought about joining the Trappists. Eventually, I decided I was doing this only to escape making hard decisions on my own. There has never been any doubt that I made a wise and correct decision at that time. As for the dolls, a couple of my young girl cousins got valuable souvenirs.

A VISIT TO MY GREAT GRANDFATHER'S HOME TOWN

One of my driving assignments — either after the war ended or shortly after VE-Day — took me through Koblenz. This is the Rhine River town where the Schumacher family lived before coming to America. My grandmother, Elizabeth Schumacher Altermatt, was born in the United States. It was her father, John Joseph Schumacher, who was born at Bezirk, Coblenz, Rhein Province, Prussia on August 29, 1835. He and his brothers and sisters came to New York City in 1852 with their parents, Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Schumacher. Several years later he married Theresia Huiras, who had come to Port Washington, Wisconsin from Bavaria when her parents came to America in 1848. (Theresia Huiras's father was from Spain, so I can claim some distant Spanish heritage.)

But back to my visit in Koblenz. I had more than enough K-rations with me for this journey, but it seemed to me that I should do something special to commemorate this visit. . So, I found an Army Mess Hall that fed transient soldiers and enjoyed a delicious chicken dinner in my great grandfather's hometown

OUR MOVE TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA

After a month-long “vacation” in the Harz Mountains we were ordered to move to Pilsen, Czechoslovakia (Plzen). The 300-mile trip took two days. Bob Wright and I shared a room in a former schoolhouse on the outskirts of Pilsen -- a suburb east of town called Doubravka.

I remember especially one of the little girls in the group of children who lived in the area and gathered in the schoolhouse yard almost every day.. She was the tiniest, frailest 12-year old that you can imagine. I had thought she was six or seven years old.

I remember some of the ornery boys, too. They enjoyed taunting us when we were on guard duty at the motor pool. What they really wanted to do, I suppose, is sit in the driver’s seat of a tank, truck or Jeep. And what we wanted to do was keep them out of the area. That’s quite impossible when they are quite sure they won’t be shot and have already found out that one skinny American soldier can’t collar more than one kid at a time. An enclosed compound for our vehicles would have been nice, but I suppose they would have scaled any fence we put up.

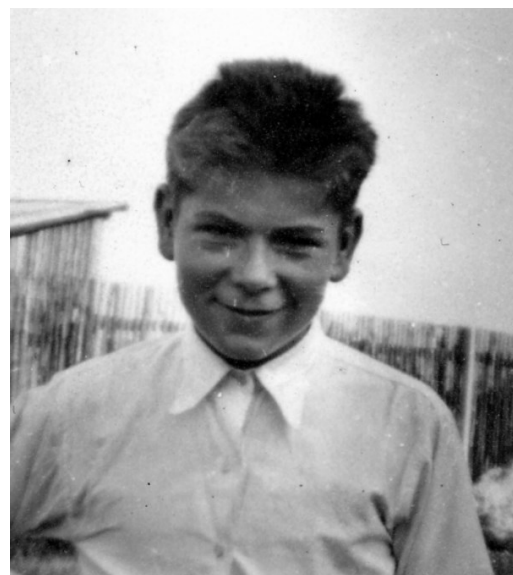
Outside of this little troop of ornery kids I regularly played softball and other games with boys and girls who tagged along with the frail tyke mentioned above. One of them was named Mira. I’ve forgotten his last name. He helped me in my struggle to

learn the Czech language. I had a phrase book that I bought at a bookstore downtown.

I remember one of the “big” girls, too – a 20-year-old with long blond hair. She



The little girl with me is Anna



Mira



I still worked in Battalion Supply but there really wasn't much to do.



Mila

stay in touch with Mila after I was discharged from the Army. However, after a few letters I thought maybe she was more interested in coming to the United States to marry an American than she was in just writing letters.

lived with her parents in an apartment diagonally across a large open field from our school-house. I do not remember where or how we met, but her name was Mila Melicharova. We sometimes took long walks in the evening, and I knew her parents. One night they suggested that Mila invite me to their home for dinner. This was rather awkward because I knew they didn't have enough food for themselves and I had no access to food or any other gift for them. I felt they would not have been pleased had I declined their invitation, so I went and sat down with the family for dinner. They were having peppered rabbit that night. I had a few bites, but was careful to not empty their pantry. Later I was able to send them a chocolate bar. I had intended to

One of the first things the Army did for us after we moved to Pilsen was set up a PX (Post Exchange) where we could buy cigarettes, toothpaste, and stuff. The stock was



These are the neighborhood kids with two of our guys — Vernon Jones, left, in back and Vreeman from Sioux City in middle front.. Name of girl on left was Zdinka.

extremely limited, so each of us was issued a slip of paper with a number on it if we were interested in buying a certain item. One time, for instance, two watches were available for sale and were sold to the two people whose numbers were drawn in the lottery.

We must have gotten in a ton of Coca Cola, because I don't remember having to stand in line to get it or even having to pay for it. I did get two bottles of Coke one day, the first and only Cokes I got, plus one Hershey candy bar. I drank the Cokes and gave away the chocolate.

FOURTH OF JULY IN PILSEN

A couple of us hitched a ride in a 2 ½-ton truck that was headed toward town and were lucky enough to get there in time for the parade. Units from our 8th Armored Division supplied most of the parade entries, but there was one community band made up of men from the town. They were dressed in their national costumes, but couldn't match our band in quality of music.



Street cars (made in the USA) were running and we could ride free.

To get back home we hopped on a streetcar – made in the United States by General Electric Locomotive Mfg. Co. As American soldiers we did not have to pay any fare.

As American soldiers, we also were targets for small arms fire. It sometimes seemed as if we were shot at as often in Pilsen – friendly territory – as we had been in Germany. One reason may have been that the Russian Army still had troops stationed there and it never was clear that we weren't enemies. I was never too comfortable around the Czech soldiers, either. I carried a .32 caliber Browning automatic pistol in a shoulder holster all the while I was in Czechoslovakia and not on official duty.

DID I OVERLOOK THE FAMOUS PILSENER?

One of the first things we discovered is that Pilsen is the home of the brewing company famous for its Pilsener beer. I still had my truck and load of 5-gallon cans for hauling water, so brought beer instead of water back to our kitchen once or twice.

We didn't have our own beer garden, but every once in awhile a civilian would stop by our quarters with a bottle of wine that he wanted to trade for cigarettes. The one I tasted was the driest white wine I've ever had.

Some of the tankers set up an elaborate beer garden as a nightclub. That was sort of a private club for their unit, though, and we suspected we might not be welcome if we



Fair trade: A couple of cigarettes for a bottle of dry, white wine.

tried to crash the party. So, we drove by and looked in with envy.

On page 232 of our history “In Tornado’s Wake” is a picture of that beer garden with this caption: ‘Soldiers of the 18th Tank Bn. Enjoy themselves in the Enlisted Men’s Club near Pilsen, Czechoslovakia. 6/23/45

SEQUEL: Around the year 2002 I became a dues-paying member of the national organization called Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge. The local branch of this group meets the third Monday of each month Birmingham, Alabama. I attended one of the meetings that year because the speaker was a former Signal Corps photographer, Charles Eugene Sumner of Leeds, Alabama, who had just published a book of pictures he had taken. The book is of such poor quality that I did not purchase a copy, but I did flip through and noted that the speaker had taken the picture of this beer garden that is in our official history.

He labeled the establishment “Club Tobasco”. In his presentation, he explained that he really had been a Jeep driver assigned to driving a Signal Corps photographer to his various assignments. However, the photographer didn’t handle stress very well, so Charles learned how to operate the 4” x 5” Speed Graphic press camera and took many of the photographs that were credited to the assigned photographer. Sometimes the photographer didn’t even go along with Charles on the assignment. Word of this eventually filtered to headquarters, so Charles was designated as an official photographer.

THE GENESIS OF AN ADVENTURE

Somewhere along the way, my friend Bob Wright was assigned as driver for a War-



Our guys were rough on our vehicles after the war was over, too.

rant Officer, who was subsequently promoted to Second Lieutenant. The Lieutenant acquired his own vehicle by visiting a depot for automotive supplies and liberating a Jeep on his way out.

Here is Bob's explanation of events that followed: "I was cleaning the Jeep one day when Colonel Hall came up and said he needed a driver and I was it! The Second Lieutenant lost his driver on the spot and he blamed me!"



Colonel Thomas Hall

I remember the Colonel as a likeable person. That memory may be influenced by other memories of trips with Bob around Pilsen in the Colonel's Jeep when he didn't need his own transportation.

But Bob's story continues: "Along the way Colonel Hall liberated a Mercedes — black — two door. Shortly after, he met an attractive local. Then I was driving them to Division parties on Saturday nights."

THE ADVENTURE

Colonel Hall didn't need his Mercedes or his driver one weekend, so Bob suggested that we take the car on an excursion to Prague. We left Pilsen late Saturday afternoon and enjoyed the scenery along the way. But we never got to see Prague.

Instead, we spent several hours trying to get the car back in service after we almost lost a front wheel when two lug bolts broke. That put a damper on the excursion. Instead of exploring Prague, we spent some frantic hours shifting the remaining lug bolts around so we didn't have two broken bolts side by side. Not having the proper tools along didn't help a bit. We limped back to Pilsen late that night without breaking any speed limits.

Bob got quick service on the Colonel's car as soon as we checked back in at the Motor Pool. We were never reprimanded, so the Colonel probably never found out that his personal automobile had been out of service.

Chapter Seven

Now the War Really Has Ended

JAPAN SURRENDERS

We continued to face “deportation” to the war in the Pacific for several weeks. Some of our tech trucks were all packed and ready to ship out before victory in Japan was declared. We knew we were off the hook when the first atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima August 6, 1945. That didn’t mean heading for home, though. Instead, it meant transfer to other units that had been designated as Army of Occupation troops.

“High-point” soldiers stayed with our old outfit, which went back to the States where it was deactivated. Bob and I were both “low-point” men and were sent to the 26th Infantry Division with a whole bunch of other former 8th-Armored guys. About September 9, 1945, we joined the 26th Division (726th Ordnance Battalion) at Schwarzbach . We thought we were in Czechoslovakia, but current maps show that it is in Germany.

From there I believe we went to Reid, Austria and then to Lenzing, Austria — where we were billeted in a paper mill. Not long after, we moved into workers’ housing at Eternitwerke in Vocklabruck, Austria and were shifted to the 83rd Infantry Division. In an amazing show of efficiency, the Army kept each of us in our old jobs each time we joined a different outfit. As guys shipped out, we filled in their old spots on the Tables of Organization. Promotions came quickly. As I moved from the Ordnance Battalion of the 8th Armored Division to the 726th Ordnance Battalion and then the 783rd Ordnance Battalion, I moved from T-5 to T-4 to T-3. If nothing else, we kept busy sewing on our new stripes and shoulder patches.

I SOLD MY WATCH ON THE BLACK MARKET

Linz, located on the Danube River, was quite close to us. I had heard about this city from Fr. Ramiro Wurmheringer, the priest in charge of my home parish in Comfrey, MN.. He was a native of Linz and had been in the German army during World War I. I was an altar boy and often served at the Masses he celebrated because we lived less than a block from St. Paul’s church and grade school. It always seemed strange to me that he drew a small pension for having been in the German Army and returned to Austria for medical treatment related to his wartime injuries.

By the time I got to Linz, our war was ended. The Russian Army occupied territory north of the Danube River. Rumors abounded that the Russians wanted American products so badly that they swam across the river at night to pick up American goods and then returned the same way to sell them at a profit.

Wrist watches with round dials and black faces were a particularly hot item. One of the guys in my unit at Lenzing said he could get \$200 for a watch like that. Other watches would bring less money, but any watch would sell – even if it didn't run. I had brought a Bulova wrist watch with me from home and treated it so roughly that it didn't always run. So, I decided I may as well sell it. The go-between wasn't sure that anyone would want my watch but he took it with him and came back with \$50 for me. That's more than the watch was worth back home.

CHRISTMAS FOR SOME KIDS I NEVER MET

Mail service from the United States was very good after the war ended. It was from someplace in Austria, probably Lenzing, that I wrote to my mother and asked if she could send toy cars for some of the kids in the displaced persons camp. I had learned about them from a girl who lived at the camp and did as much as she could to entertain the little children.

As luck would have it, we remained at the same location long enough for my mother to get a shoe-box-sized package of toys to me. None of the toys were broken. If she's still alive, I'll bet Maria still has the toy Jeep that she said she wanted to keep for herself. The rest of the cars and trucks went to the kids. The Jeep had "Vern" on the hood in white letters – hand painted.

DISPLACED PERSONS CAMPS

A lot of people with no place to call home were concentrated in the Displaced Persons Camps that the Army set up. Just where we were at the time I'm not sure except I do know we were in Austria. The DP camp nearest us was made up of Hungarians.

One of the DP's said he was a radio repairman, so I sent a small table-set radio home with him to be repaired. I do not remember where I got it from or how long I had it. He kept it quite a few days, but eventually showed up with a radio that worked. He didn't want money, because he said money was useless. The only way I could pay him was to give him a candy bar that I was able to buy at a temporary Post Exchange. He wanted food, which I couldn't get my hands on because our Mess Sergeant by then was having a hard time controlling his supplies. We had to feed a lot of transient soldiers.

Another of my friends was a guy named Laszlo. I'm not sure I ever did know his last name, though it seems reasonable that I would have. He supposedly was a member of the deposed Hungarian royalty, but spent quite a bit of time helping me learn the German language. This was a slow process because we couldn't find a textbook. Laszlo also went with me one night to the town of Linz so we could attend a concert given by the Vienna Boy Choir. He was living in the DP Camp, I believe. None of the soldiers in my unit were interested in hearing the Vienna Boy Choir so just the two of us went up to Linz in a 2 1/2-ton truck that I requisitioned through our Special Services Of-

ficer.

THE GOOD LIFE IN AUSTRIA

Frank McGough from Detroit, who had been in A company of our 130th Ordnance Maintenance battalion – the group that was the first from our division to get into combat – wasn't with me in Vocklabruck . But he was with me at one of the symphony orchestra concerts in Salzburg at the Mozarteum during the Salzburg Music Festival. That may have been while we were at Ried, Austria.

Our Special Services officer had free tickets for this performance and no one else seemed interested in going to the concert.

I managed to snag transportation into Salzburg several times during the famous music festival. The first time I arrived at a concert hall without a ticket, I stood near the entrance until some kind Austrian civilian came along and gave me some of his extra tickets. I wasn't so lucky the next time, but managed to be seated anyway because the usher agreed that the empty seats weren't likely to be occupied by ticket holders. One concert I would have liked to attend, but couldn't because transportation was not available, was an appearance by the 8th Armored Division men's chorus. I had been a member of this group back in the States. The director then, as after the war, was Dr. Christianson from Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, MN. Their appearance at the Festival marked the first time any U.S. Army group took part in the festival.

It must have been from Reid that we caught the train to go to Salzburg. I was amazed that the Austrians could get their trains back into service so quickly. Furthermore, they were punctual. If you were a minute late, you missed the train. Best of all, we didn't have to pay for traveling on them.

I believe it also was while we were at Ried that some guys from our outfit came across the famous Lippizaner horses and, with the backing of General George Patton, brought them to the stables near our quarters. Due credit is given in printed programs available at performances of the U.S.-based Lippizaner show. It was sometime in the 1990's that we attended a performance in Birmingham, AL. On our last trip to Vienna, we watched a training session of the Austrian-based troop but didn't notice anywhere that the organization thanked the U.S. Army for rescuing the Lippizaners.

Ried was a pleasant small village. (Current maps show two spellings: Ried and Reid.) One weekend we went to a small carnival where kids were riding merry-go-rounds. I have a short segment of that on my reel of 8mm movie film.

Frank was billeted at Wells, a small town not far away. We saw each other frequently because he had a Jeep at his disposal. Later he was moved to Steyr where his unit took over a VW factory and produced enclosed cabs for Jeeps. One of Frank's friends was a First Lieutenant who shed his officer's insignia when he was hobnobbing with us.

SURPRISES IN THE CHOW LINE

One day after the noon meal, possibly at Ried but maybe at Lenzing, I was waiting in line to wash my mess kit and eating utensils when a shabbily dressed man walked up to me and said, “Hey, buddy. Got a cigarette?” His accent was just like mine and even before I gave him a cigarette, I asked, “Where in the hell are you from?” As he gratefully took a couple of cigarettes from me he replied, “Chicago.” I couldn’t resist asking more questions, of course. He explained that he had stayed in Europe after



Washing my mess kit after giving cigarettes to the guy from Chicago.

the first World War and couldn’t get back to the United States after he finally decided there was going to be another war.

After the war was over and we relaxed our guard a bit, people would often be waiting for us as we left the Mess Hall. They wanted all of the food we didn’t eat. All of us felt guilty giving them our garbage, of course, but soon started asking servers to give us larger helpings of food than we really needed – just so we’d have some left over to give to these poor people.

EXPLORING THE LAKE DISTRICT

It must have been at Lenzing that a friendly Second Lieutenant gave me permission to get a 2 ½-ton truck from the motor pool and go searching for photo darkroom supplies.

I drove through the Austrian resort towns looking for photographers who would sell me print paper and chemicals for processing photographic film and paper. My quest took me on roads not designed for big Army trucks. I remember one time that I had to back out of a narrow gap cut through the rock. And I had to go in reverse for what seemed to be a long distance before I found a place to turn around. I did get to my destination, but had to go around the lake counterclockwise instead of clockwise.

Helen and I toured this area in a rented VW Golf many years later. The roads were smoother, but not much wider – still no place for a big truck, as we found out when we came across road construction crews and their vehicles that were considerably smaller than my Army truck

Some of these towns and lakes are Mondsee, Fuschl am See, Wolfgangsee, and Seewalchen on Attersee. This is the Salzkammergut area of Austria – a popular tourist area because of the salt mines and the lovely towns on the lakes.

MY INTRODUCTION TO THE KIDS OF VOCKLABRUCK

One of the first little kids we met in Vocklabruck was Elfriede Sperr, who let us know that we were living in the apartment her family lived in before the American Army kicked them out. She, her mother, and her teen-age sister, who wasn't allowed to talk to American soldiers, lived in the housing unit's basement laundry room down the street. Her father was still in the German Army, and was thought to be a prisoner of the Russians. Her brother also was on the Eastern front.

"Frieda" had long, blonde pigtails and was about 5 years old. She showed up tagging along behind two other girls that were 9 to 11 years old – Marianne Holvorth and Irmagaard Kubler. It was Frieda who patiently helped me slowly progress in learning the German language by reciting nursery rhymes with me. I believe I can still recite "Mutzy Katz, Mutzy Katz, Wo Bist Du Givesen". (This is my instant recall, probably wrong, of "Pussy Cat, Pussy Cat, Where have you been?")

Even after we moved to Vocklabruck, hungry people waited outside our Mess Hall and asked for our leftover scraps of food. It wasn't long before civilian supply lines were set up and the only people waiting in our line were kids who wanted dessert, which usually was cake. None of the little girls I knew in Vocklabruck, nor their families, ever stood outside our Mess Hall to beg for leftover food. I stopped making sure I had leftovers when a couple of people refused my offerings of a partial piece of cake. But I still sneaked out an extra apple once in a while to take to Elfrieda's house.

We exchanged letters with Frieda for a number of years. Not many years ago, she picked us up at our hotel in Salzburg and took us to her home for an afternoon visit. She also took us by Marianne's home for a short visit, but Marianne was having a difficult time just then taking care of her mother. She didn't even remember that we had ever met. Elfrieda also drove us to her former home in Vocklabruck where we met her daughter, who was a computer programmer for the same factory where Elfrieda's father had worked. The building we lived in was razed to make room for a parking lot. I had tried to contact Frieda, Irma, and Marianne before our visit to Salzburg and finally heard from Frieda. It was her daughter who found my letter being held at the Vocklabruck Post Office. Not only did I not have a current address for Elfrieda because she had moved to another town, I also had an incorrect name because she had divorced and remarried.

Irma eventually sent a letter from New Zealand explaining how her son found a letter from me addressed to her at the Vocklabruck Post Office when he went back to Irma's

hometown with his new bride. I had a wrong name for Irma, too, because she had married and I didn't know her husband's name. She had lived in California before moving to New Zealand.

DISCOVERING GMUNDEN

I believe it was from both Lenzing and Vocklabruck that I was able to requisition a 2 ½-ton truck to transport soldiers into the town of Gmunden. I managed this quite a few weekends. I always managed to find an empty bunk in a downtown apartment building that an Army unit of some kind controlled.



Traunkirchen, one of the views that attracted me to Gmunden

This was walking distance from an ornate Catholic church where I sometimes attended Mass on Sunday. A couple of times I thumbed a ride from Vocklabruck to Gmunden on Sunday morning just to attend Mass there. Not only is the church building a work of art, but the choir was accompanied by a small symphonic orchestra. The players were placed in strategic positions around the church so we were surrounded by music.

Our favorite pastime in Gmunden was going to Saturday night dances at the Strandbad, a pavilion built on Lake Traunsee. From the tables alongside one wall of the pavilion we looked across the lake and could see Traunkirchen. This is a picturesque chapel built out into the lake. I finally got to see it in the 1990's when Helen and I visited.



The Strandbad at Gmunden where Saturday night dances were held for GI's.

The dance pavilion is where I met Lotte Derflinger, who during the week was a student at Gymnasium in Linz. Lotte's father was a high executive in the Austrian Railroad organization. I'm sure he didn't approve of all the soldier friends that his daughter brought home, but I'm sure the entire family enjoyed the American toothpaste and other amenities that Lotte managed to collect.

Nikki Fuller, one of my colleagues from Florida, usually came to the Saturday dances, too, and spent the rest of the weekend with Lotte's best friend, Ellie – daughter of Gmunden's mayor. The Derflingers lived in a small apartment along the main street close to downtown Gmunden. The mayor and his family lived in a spacious two-story mansion at the top of the hill overlooking the entire city.

I was a bit irked with Lotte one Friday evening when she arrived at our Mess Hall in Lenzing just as we gathered for the evening meal. She had hitched a ride from Linz with

one of the soldiers from my outfit when she recognized unit markings on the truck bumper. The driver recognized my name and Lotte convinced him that I was so important that there was no question I would be able to requisition a vehicle and take her home to Gmunden.



Gmunden had many nice homes along the lake.

Our Mess Sergeant wasn't nearly as upset as I was. He quietly ushered us into a private dining room he had tucked away behind the kitchen and served us dinner on real plates. Then our Motor Pool Sergeant came up with a pass already signed by our Special Services Officer authorizing use of a 2 1/2-ton truck to transport ten soldiers to the Gmunden recreation center for the weekend. He filled in my name as the driver and said not to worry about the guys on the list as passengers because they failed to show up at the scheduled departure time. I have no recollection of the weekend activities — or even of spending the weekend in Gmunden.

SYMPHONY

There was one song the band played every Saturday night that was a particular favorite. It was even more tuneful than "Lili Marlene". When we got back home I was surprised to hear this song introduced as a brand new popular tune. The new name: Symphony.

One of the fellows in my unit had been a professional musician before being drafted into the Army and still maintained his membership in the union. With that membership to help introduce himself, he managed to have a visit with the Austrian composer

– one of the Strauss family – who lived just two blocks up the street from the dance pavilion.
Another one of my enterprising colleagues found a way to invest his Army savings in a chateau on Traunsee.

I SPENT MOST OF MY TIME SKIING

When winter came, I teamed up with our Special Services officer and helped prepare for the ski season. We had exercise classes every day to strengthen our leg muscles in hopes of preventing serious injury when we finally got on the ski slopes. I found a shoemaker who made a pair of ski boots just for me. Unfortunately, they didn't fit, but I brought them home anyway. Whoever our Special Services officer was found somebody to make several dozen pairs of skis.



We didn't know anything about the special ski clothing now in vogue.

We used them on Feuerkogel, a ski resort reached by taking an aerial tramway up the mountain from the town of Ebensee, located at the other end of the lake from Gmunden. He also located a cabin in the middle of a ski run for us to use and hired an Austrian man and his wife to maintain it. Our mess sergeant divided up rations so those of us living up on the mountain on weekends had our share.

We had communal sleeping quarters – double-deck shelves along each side of a large room – and similar double-deck shelves in smaller, adjacent rooms. I mention “communal” because three or four guys brought their girlfriends along for the weekend of skiing. Only one of them did much skiing, and I found out that was because the girl thought he was being a bit possessive and, like the others, really hadn't had skiing



Our battalion had the Berghotel on Feuerkogel all to ourselves until it was designated as an official Rest and Recreation Center by United States Forces in Austria.

in mind when he invited her.

The ski slope we were in the middle of was for people more skilled than I was. I never had a serious accident, though, and did not get hurt. Eventually, someone repaired the rope tow that carried us to the highest peak. I tried that once, but found out that the tow moved way too fast for me.

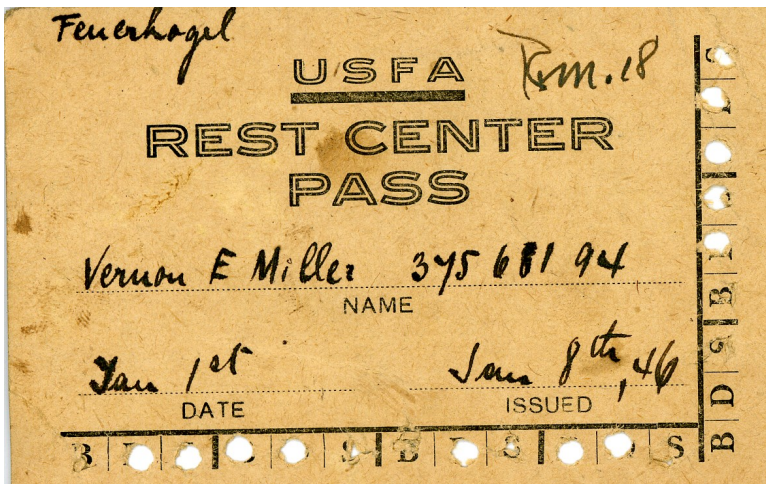
Some Saturdays, we rounded up a load of soldiers plus little kids from the community and went to Feuerkogel for the afternoon. Marianne and Irma were in the crowd one time. Frieda was broken-hearted because she was too young to go. I would have taken her, I guess, if her mother had thought she was old enough even though I wasn't sure how that would have worked out. No matter how her mother and I tried to console her, Frieda couldn't stop sobbing.

Our private ski resort soon was discovered by the Army Special Services group and was then operated as an official Rest and Recreation Center. After that, we had to get official reservations through our own Special Services Officer each time we wanted to go skiing.

Even after its official designation as an R&R Center, Saturday nights atop Feuerkogel weren't a lot of fun. There was no live music. Table Tennis was the only activity.



I could handle the tow on this beginner's slope but the tow on the peak in the background, where our cabin was located, was too much for me.



New Year's Day 1946 started off right with a seven-day pass to the USFA Rest Center atop Feuerkogel.

was an American girl on the slopes. She was with the Red Cross and was the only good American skier in sight. However, we had some good Austrian ski instructors who helped us a lot and I eventually at least felt comfortable taking the rope tow to the top of the beginners' ski run. Eventually I also realized that "Hallo" is not a greeting as is our "Hello" but is a way to get your attention.

GOING BACK

To circumvent this minor irritation one weekend, I spent Saturday night in Gmunden as I had many times before, then hitchhiked to Ebensee Sunday morning. I did this only once. The weather down below was bitter cold and traffic was light.

When I got to the top of the mountain, I had quite a time convincing the people in charge that they really should have been expecting me. Even worse, skiing that weekend was miserable.

Most of the time, though, we had top-notch weather for skiing. The little kids we brought with us and the local kids who covered up the beginners' slope that I favored could ski circles around me.

One afternoon there

It was in the 1990's that Helen and I stopped at the tourist center in Ebensee trying to locate a place to spend the night. When the young man working the desk found out that I had spent time at the ski resort years before as a U.S. soldier, he called one of the hotels on the mountaintop to see if they could handle an out-of-season guest. The man running the hotel was the son of the man who owned the place when I had stayed there in 1945-46.



This gondola now houses a museum.

His wife fixed a special meal for us because he noted that I had had heart surgery and he was convinced I needed a healthier dinner than the Viennerschnitzel his wife was fixing for their dinner. I was served Schnitzel Naturel. We were the only overnight guests.

There were three other long-term guests — a grandfather, his adult son, and the young grandson. The little fellow was getting the “Heidi treatment” — time in the fresh mountain air in hopes of helping his asthmatic condition.

The gondolas of the new tramway are more spacious than those we rode in after the war. Pictures of the construction of the original lift and of the modernization are displayed in a tiny museum. It is in one of the original gondolas.

MY OTHER HUNGARIAN FRIENDS IN VOCKLABRUCK

It must have been our suave friend Nikki Fuller (the Miami fellow) who introduced us to the Hungarians that were living a block or so from us — just on the other side of a masonry wall that surrounded Eternitwerkes in Vocklabruck. These people presumably were members of the royal family. They seemed to have enough money to manage quite well in a war-torn world.

Their only child was just a few months old. I enjoyed being with them, but often was uncomfortable because they were overly kind. There usually were three or four of us who visited them in their apartment whenever we had a chance. One evening, one of us mentioned that the last time we'd had milk was on the troop ship that brought us to England and that we'd really enjoy a glass of milk as soon as we got stateside.

And I did. The first thing I bought when I arrived at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey in March of 1946 was a chocolate milkshake and a hamburger. This was even better than the steak dinner the Army served us in the mess hall that night.

But, getting back to the story of how their hospitality made us uncomfortable.. The man's wife quickly said that they had milk and did we want some? Of course, we said "No, thanks." because we knew that was a scarce commodity and that they needed the milk for their baby. But she quickly went to their refrigerator and started pouring us each a small glass of milk – even as we protested and became more embarrassed.

I realize now that fresh milk to them wasn't as big a deal as it was to other civilians. They had so much money that they simply bought what they wanted. Their apartment was nicely furnished, including a small grand piano. She was a good pianist and must have been a professional singer. Quite often she would entertain us with a familiar semi-classical song. Her favorite was "Temptation". Or was it "Tenderly"?

The husband's hobby was car racing. He had bought a race car and was tinkering with it in their garage every once in awhile. Nikki lowered 5-gallon cans of gas over the wall now and then – at night, of course, when the guards were patrolling in a different area.

One of our majors obviously was accustomed to money, too. He bought an open-wheel racer that became available. At least, I assume he bought it. His intention was to have it packed up and shipped home. Bob remembers that it had an aluminum body.

OUR PLAYTHING WAS A JUNKER OPEL

Bob Wright and I must not have had enough to keep us busy. One day we borrowed a 2 ½-ton truck from the motor pool and gave a couple of civilians a few packs of cigarettes to load up an automobile that seemed to have been abandoned. Back at our quarters, we pushed it into an open stall in a garage and spent our free time trying to get it running. Collecting tools to work on the thing was a problem, though, and we didn't make much progress.

Before we completed our mission, we were called to the Colonel's office. He wanted to know what we had in mind and if we realized we were involved in illegal activity. Our explanation satisfied him and he let us off the hook but said, "Get rid of it." We did. The fun had gone out of the project by then, anyway. It is fortunate that he didn't ask us what we knew about the disappearing gas cans.

In spite of such minor infractions of the rules, as soon as the people above me in rank were shipped out, I was once again promoted – this time to T-3. That's Technical Sergeant Third Grade and on the pay scale and number of stripes is equivalent to Staff Sergeant. I forget when I had been given my Corporal's stripes designating me as T-5.

THE COLONEL'S PLAYTHING WAS A TATRA

It was about this same time that Colonel Hall found his light blue Tatra. Bob remembered this car as “rear engine — 4-cylinder — sharp.” He also recalled “that car never went close to Division Headquarters.” The Colonel was worried that he would lose the Tatra to some General.

Bob drove the Colonel in his Jeep when Division Headquarters called. In his usual neat fashion, Bob kept the Jeep super clean and polished. He did, that is, until the General chewed out the Colonel for having such a clean vehicle. “Get it dirty!” he commanded. After that, Bob spent his leisure time keeping the Tatra shiny.

Being the Colonel's driver had one unexpected benefit for Bob that I had not heard about until we went down to Palm Coast, Florida in February of 2007 to celebrate Bob's 85th birthday anniversary. After the war was over Colonel Hall had to go to



The Tatra provided a lot of pleasure for all of us. Left to right: Paul Hicks, New York; Tech Sgt Gaines, Georgia; Vern Miller; Bob Wright; T-4 Sammy Eisenstadt, New York.. This is the car Colonel Hall never allowed near Division Headquarters because he didn't want to turn it over to one of the Generals.

meetings some distance away. This involved overnight stays.

“Local units provided lodging for me,” said Bob. “One venture lasted a week — about 30 miles from Heidelberg.” The Colonel’s transportation from and to his billet was provided by someone else, so Bob was told he could go wherever he wanted if he could find gasoline. He chose one day to visit the Medical School and Hospital at Heidelberg. “I parked directly in front of the hospital entrance and was provided a guide who spoke English,” said Bob. “I got the whole works. Fun!”

My own short stint as the Major’s Jeep driver wasn’t as much fun. I remember driving him to a couple of late-night parties. Because the Major had no set departure time, I had to stay with the Jeep and be on hand when he was ready to head home. Sitting in the dark for three or more hours without even being able to hear the party music was boring and uncomfortable. Better than combat duty, of course, but what is a soldier’s life if you can’t complain?

ANOTHER LOW-POINT TRANSFER

The transfer wasn’t a low point; I was a low-point man with only 49 points to my credit. These points were credited to me for time served in various places. I don’t know if I was transferred out of the 83rd Infantry Division because my accumulated points were becoming almost enough to get me started on the long road home or if the 83rd Infantry Division was keeping only relatively high point soldiers and being sent to the States as a unit. At that point, I believe 65 or so points was a good enough score to qualify for being sent to one of the cigarette camps around Le Havre to wait for a boat home. I was sent to Salzburg, Austria where I swapped my 83rd shoulder patch for the much more attractive insignia designed for United States Armed Forces in Austria.

Some months before we had been allowed to once more display our 8th Armored Division patch, but this time on the right shoulder of the uniform. The insignia designating our current unit assignment went on the left shoulder.

My original 8th Armored Division had already been deactivated, though I didn’t know about this until years later. I have kept the USFA patch on my Army uniform jacket. Come to think of it, I believe the Army insisted upon calling my “Eisenhower jacket” a blouse. I assume this is done to distinguish the dress uniform jacket from the lightweight field jacket or the warmer tanker’s jacket that we usually wore.

SALZBURG BECAME MY FAVORITE CITY

I didn't know anyone at my new station, but I don't recall that this bothered me one bit. We were billeted in a school house type building outside of the main city. We were close to a main road leading into the city, though, and I went into town quite often. The streetcar lines were operating as I recall, but I often hitched a ride with the many Army trucks that were headed my way. I was surprised that the black soldiers seemed as likely as the white soldiers to give me a ride. This was not an integrated Army back then, though we had Mexicans and dark skinned Puerto Ricans with us in one



Salzburg's castle looms in the background. The Red Cross club for American soldiers was in building at the left. We had coffee, donuts, and great entertainment.

of my units.

My temporary assignment at Salzburg was processing the paperwork and sending soldiers on their way as soon as they had earned enough points. I toyed with the idea of processing my own papers so I'd go home a little sooner, but discarded that thought before I got too serious about it.

The winter concert season was underway and I went to as many concerts in the Mozarteum as I could. Somehow or other, Frank McGough and I teamed up again in Salzburg and spent time exploring the hiking trails that went through the countryside. One day we hiked out to a little church we saw. It was quite a hike through Maria Plain before we reached the church – two or three miles, it seemed.

The priest was from the United States, but was quite old and had been in Austria so

long that he had difficulty speaking in the English language. His name was Rev. Louis Seethaler. Maria Plain seems to be part of Salzburg. The address he gave me said “P. Kasern, Salzburg.” Apparently the city has swallowed up this little church. I tried to locate it during our last visit to Salzburg but was not successful.

I spent a lot of time walking around Salzburg all by myself. I remember how lonely I felt as I walked by the nice homes and saw the families gathering for their evening meal. I seem to have put much of this in the back of my mind, but I’m almost sure that I was in Salzburg at Christmastime — maybe on a three-day pass from Vocklabruck.

SOON IT WAS TIME FOR ME TO SHIP OUT AGAIN

Suddenly my time to ship out came. It must have been toward the end of January. We were loaded onto the backend of an open truck and headed out. The journey is all jumbled up in my mind. At one point in France we were loaded into the 40 & 8 cars left over from the first World War.

Somewhere along the line I got sick. I remember being in a town square – possibly in Le Havre – and being so sick that I laid down on the cobblestone street and went to sleep curled up on my duffel bag. By the time we were told to load up again, I was so sick that I couldn’t crawl back up onto the truck. A couple of guys threw me aboard and asked where my gear was. I told them I didn’t know and that they could just forget about it, but they held up the truck’s departure until somebody retrieved my duffel bag and threw it aboard, too.

We went to Camp Phillip Morris, I believe, and were put up in what I recall as 8-man pyramidal tents that had wooden floors. I found a couple of extra blankets and spent a lot of time in bed without bothering to even get out of my boots. The problem was that we had been given flu shots and I had either a severe reaction or a bad case of the flu.

I could have gone to the infirmary for treatment, but I was in line to go home and didn’t want to lose my place by being sent to the hospital. I knew I was running a fairly high fever, but didn’t realize how sick I was. After missing a few meals, it seemed logical that I should be among the first standing in the chow line for breakfast so didn’t think anything was amiss just because there wasn’t a big crowd headed to the mess hall.

Surprise. One of the guards intercepted me and steered me back to bed as he explained that it wasn’t time for breakfast. He had trouble convincing me that it was about 2 o’clock in the morning.

WHAT AN ADVENTURE THIS HAS BEEN

Who could have imagined that such adventures could befall a skinny kid from a small

village in Minnesota where our high school graduation class of 24 is one of the largest in the town's history? And who could have imagined that one could be so fortunate as to being in a support group for the Army rather than in the Infantry? And who could have imagined that a kid who learned to drive in a town so small that it didn't even have a stop sign would end up driving a 2 ½-ton truck in London, England -- at that time maybe the largest city in the world?

Certainly I was ready to go home. But in Salzburg I had considered applying for a civilian job that would have kept me in an office doing exactly what I had been doing in the Army. As I may have indicated, Salzburg probably is my favorite city of any that I have visited. But Bournemouth, England was a real pleasure, too. When I first landed there it was almost as if we were on vacation

So, before I tell of my "going home" adventures, let me go back and finish the story of my time in England -- the story that I interrupted to tell about the Battle of the Bulge, the Battle of the Ruhr, and some of my experiences in the Army of Occupation.

Chapter Eight

My Time in England

BOURNEMOUTH WASN'T REALLY A VACATION

Bournemouth, England was my first overseas base. We arrived on a beautiful fall day and were billeted in fine, old two-story brick homes vacated by the civilians. Lest we forget we were in the Army, we were roused out of bed at 6 o'clock each morning and stood in formation for roll call and inspection. The uniform of the day never was posted



We had plenty of leisure time at Camp Tidworth. Here I'm wearing the lightweight Field Jacket and combat boots.

at night.

We each had only one wool blanket. Most of the GI blankets were made for people about 5 feet tall – and then only if they didn't want to tuck in their feet. I finally found a blanket that was more than 6 feet, 6 inches long and that helped me quite a bit. I found this blanket by going down the rows of cots we had set up in the barracks for our incoming units and checking the length and weight of every blanket until I found

ed on the bulletin board because we had already been advised that from now on we would wear nothing but our winter woolen Olive Drabs. The weather was nice enough that we often went jogging – in formation – wearing just our shirts as outer garments.

This morning exercise through the residential streets was a real pleasure. Our officers and non-commissioned officers wanted us to stay in shape but to take it easy and enjoy our surroundings.

We spent a couple of weeks in Bournemouth before being transported to our real base: Camp Tidworth. This was reputedly the largest Army base in England. Our first job was to clean one of the old barracks. This was a large brick building with a fireplace at each end as our only source of heat. Coal was rationed. We were allowed one bucketful of coal per day for each building. This seemed unreasonable until we realized that some of the civilians had no coal at all. That didn't make us any warmer. We were cold day and night, especially

one that suited me . My assigned job was to align bunks into neat rows.

The ceiling of our barracks at Camp Tidworth was extremely high – maybe more than 25 feet. One bucketful of coal did little more than warm the fire-place bricks. Sometimes it seemed colder inside than it was outside. The floor was rough cement. We had real trouble trying to sweep out the debris.

Within a few weeks, the remainder of our division arrived. Again, we enlisted men had very little to do, but the officers kept quite busy. It took only a few hours for everyone to find a cot and a place to stow his gear – most often on the floor under the cot. With all our men in one place, I finally had work to do.

My trusty Remington typewriter arrived as well as the heavy wood boxes where we kept our office supplies and files. One of my first jobs was to fill out requisitions for vehicles, including the 2 ½-ton Jimmie that would be my home for the remainder of the war in Europe. As requisition clerk for the entire battalion (four companies plus our own Headquarters and Headquarters Company) I ordered boots, trousers, belts, socks, shirts, jackets – and any other thing you can think of that the Army supplied.



This served as my office at Camp Tidworth. I'm still wearing my original issue canvas leggings because we were not yet fully equipped.

It's quite strange that I ordered vehicles because I didn't order any of the parts needed to repair the vehicles. Nor did I order any tools needed by the mechanics. We brought some of our vehicles and tools with us from the States. The vehicles we brought with us were known as Tech trucks. One truck was the Ordnance Tech Truck. It was a complete shop for repairing small arms on the back end of a 2 ½-ton truck. Another

Tech truck was a watch repair shop. It handled other things besides watches, but one of the men on that truck was a watchmaker in civilian life. There was a machine shop, too, complete with lathes and other equipment for building parts we couldn't get from the supply depot. Another vehicle was the communications truck.

I'm glad I didn't have to order supplies for these. By contrast, requisitioning our vehicles was an easy job because the Army has worked out a Table of Equipment which lists everything a particular unit supposedly needs.

Sometimes we had to take messages to a central office or go to the office to requisition such things as brooms or coal buckets – or coal for the incoming troops. Headquarters was quite a distance from us and I soon discovered that bicycles placed here and there around the camp were available for our use. These were English one-speed bicycles with hand-operated brakes. One lever on the right side of the handlebars was for the rear wheel and one lever on the left side of the handlebars was for the front wheel.

Of course, I may have this backwards — now as well as then. Several times I braked with the front brakes instead of the rear and crash-landed. I never really did master using the front and rear brakes in the proper combination, so settled on using the rear brake only.

IF IT'S NOT LISTED, YOU DON'T NEED IT

If it is not listed you don't need it. That means it is up to you to get what you need. That, of course, leads to the practice of "midnight requisitioning." In our case, the Table of Equipment did not list enough vehicles to transport all of our equipment and men.

But when it came time to cross the channel immediately after Christmas to join the fighting in France, we had the number of vehicles we needed. We didn't acquire them through midnight requisitioning, though. We just bluffed our way past the checkpoint in Liverpool where we picked up our vehicles.

One time we had to convince the soldier at the checkpoint that we had the proper number of vehicles. I had to produce the list of vehicles, which included the type of vehicle and the serial number assigned to that vehicle. Then he went down the line of vehicles we had picked up and checked them by serial numbers. Fortunately, I kept the list in my hand and the guard did not check them off by marking them with a pencil. Our ruse was simple. We

had two Jimmies with the same serial number, but they were not next to each other in the line of vehicles. We also had two Jeeps with the same serial number. There was an additional Jeep that we sneaked out by loading it into the back end of one of the Jimmies that had a tarp across the back end so we could conceal the Jeep. Luckily, the guard never thought about counting the number of vehicles we were taking out.

Going to Liverpool to pick up our vehicles was a fun job. The weather always was nice. We weren't in any particular hurry, so we could, and did, take our time. Driving through the countryside and the small villages was a sort of mini-vacation. It was the middle of November. Some of the grass was still green and some of the trees still had their leaves.

Even the motor pool where we picked up our vehicles was a pleasant place. It was the Liverpool Race Course. I'm sure the groundskeepers had plenty to do after the war getting the place in shape for the first horse race.

Driving these big trucks on the narrow roads, through the villages as well as in the countryside, was a challenge. Villagers who lined the sidewalks of the small towns to wave at us (and sometimes throw fresh flowers to us) increased the challenge. Sometimes the roads through small villages were so narrow that we had to drive on the sidewalks. I never did hear a report that one of our vehicles injured a pedestrian, though.

I should mention, too, that driving on the left-hand side of the road was difficult. Having vehicles designed for driving on the right-hand side of the road made the task even more difficult. It was a big relief for us to get on more familiar ground in France, Belgium, The Netherlands, and Germany -- where people drive on the right-hand side of the road.

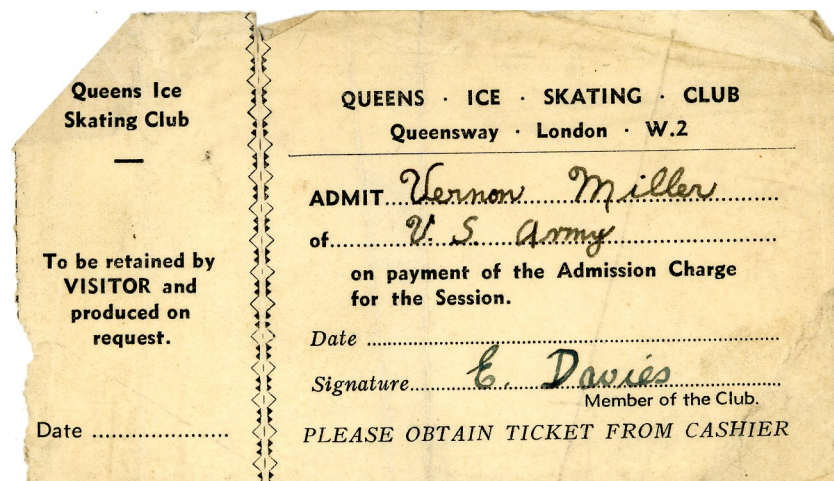
ON LEAVE IN LONDON

Frank McGough and I managed a weekend leave in London during this autumn season. I don't recall that we did anything but walk around in the big city. It was during this weekend that I discovered postal drop boxes marked "City of Westminster" when we were in an area around the Houses of Parliament that I thought of as downtown London, and that the "City of London" is really quite a small area within Greater London, as is the City of Westminster.

In our wanderings, Frank and I were standing on a street corner wondering what to do next when a young lady with ice skates slung over her shoulder

came up and waited for the traffic light to signal that it was safe for her to cross the street.

We commented on the ice skates and asked her if there was a nearby rink where we might go skating. The young lady said we'd be welcome at her skating club, which was in a building just a short distance away. She gave us each a pass to the club and went merrily on her way. I still have that pass signed by "E. Davis." Sightseeing seemed to be a better use of our time.



WEEKLY LAUNDRY RUNS TO LONDON

Even before the main contingent of our battalion arrived from the states, my work entailed hauling clothes to a commercial laundry in London. This was a sort of fun job, but I didn't have a map of the city and had no idea of its layout. Someone who had made the trip several times led the way the first time, but after that I was on my own. Quite understandably, I drove many extra miles trying to find my way back to the laundry to pick up the clean clothes.

I must have made at least half a dozen trips between Camp Tidworth and the laundry. Two of the trips are memorable. The first happening was the re-

sult of a dense fog. As I remember, it was either Quigley or Acton who was with me when we tried to find our way back home in the typical London fog. We had to inch our way along in low gear because we were sort of feeling our



This is my truck parked in front of the laundry the morning after a V-1 bomb killed two workers. This also is a real London fog at its best.

way through the streets. I particularly remember one tunnel under a railroad that we went through. The tunnel was wide enough for only one vehicle, but the fog was so thick we couldn't see either side if we stayed in the regular traffic lane. Our solution was to drive as far to the left as we could – using the side view mirror as a gauge. When we scraped the side of the tunnel with the mirror we eased back to the right just a little.

V-1 BOMB THROWS US OFF SCHEDULE

The other memorable trip also took us a long time because of fog. This time we had gone into town to pick up our clean uniforms. The proprietors met us at the door and apologized profusely because the laundry wasn't ready. They didn't offer excuses, but eventually explained that a buzz bomb had hit their laundry during the night and killed three of their workers. This was only a taste of what was to come our way in a few months.

AN ADVENTURE IN SALISBURY

I know of one time when one of our trucks did some damage in England because the road was too narrow. I was the driver. I don't remember why I was sent to Salisbury, but I do remember having to force my truck through one of the gates to the city. There may have been roads that skirted the city, but I didn't have any roadmaps and road signs were all I had to guide me. I did try more than one gate, but finally had to force my way through. I really thought I had enough space to fit my truck, but misjudged either the width of the stone gateway or the width of my truck.

I felt bad about this, and in later years went back to Salisbury to see if the damage was still visible or if it had been repaired. I couldn't even find that particular gate! However, Helen struck up a conversation with one of the local residents who saw us closely examining a gate and explained why we were looking at it so intently. He pointed out some gouges along one side and said they were preserving them in my memory.

I was lucky enough to be in Salisbury on my own time once. This was especially interesting for me because Mrs. Henry Bradbury from my hometown of Comfrey, Minnesota (population 365) came to the United States from Salisbury. She was a grandmotherly type, but older than my real grandmother. She remembered living in a sod hut, for example, and having Indians come by asking for food (which she shared with them.)

By the time I became acquainted with her she lived in a nicely-furnished two-story house and had a Victrola which she let me use to hear the music on the various recordings she had. Her husband owned the hardware store. Her daughter Eleanor was married and lived in the big city of Minneapolis. Eleanor shocked everyone by showing up in a two-piece swimsuit in the swimming pool at Springfield (13 miles from Comfrey) . This was doubly shocking because almost no one her age took advantage of the swimming pool. The pool was mostly for kids. I saw her because my folks had driven me over to go swimming while they enjoyed a picnic in the park.

But, back to Salisbury. I was impressed with the large green surrounding the Cathedral. I walked and walked – first to visit the Cathedral, then to admire it from every angle. Way off in the distance was a tea room. I wanted to enter and have something to eat, but didn't see any other soldiers in there so

couldn't get up enough confidence to even ask if soldiers were welcome.

Years later, Helen (my wife) and I attended the 11 am service at Salisbury Cathedral. The Cathedral still is a site to see, but new buildings now fill up most of the green and almost completely line the banks of the River Avon. When I first visited, the river flowed through the green, sort of splitting it in half. No more. But, again, the River Avon in Salisbury is worth visiting. We still didn't visit the tea room.

BACK TO CAMP TIDWORTH

We had no radio or newspaper at Camp Tidworth, so had little idea of what was going on across the English Channel. We were as insulated from the fighting here as we were back in the States. Maybe more so. Rumors were our only source of information at Tidworth, but they turned out to be rather accurate.

16 Dec 1944 von Runstedt drove through the American lines into Belgium. This became known as THE BULGE.

When we heard about the breakthrough of the Germans and the fighting at Bastogne, we assumed that we would soon cross the English channel and join the fighting. Until that time, though, we led a rather leisurely life.

Dec 24-25, 1944 The Eighth Armored Division is based at Camp Tidworth. Source: In Tornado's Wake

I remember going to Christmas Eve dinner at the home of a retired Colonel of the British Army. He lived with his daughter, Jo Carver, in housing provided by the British Government. Somehow or other Sgt. Mastrangeli had wangled the invitation and wanted me to go with him.

I had learned just that afternoon that I had been promoted from Private to Private First Class. When I mentioned that, the retired Colonel wanted to know where my new stripes were. I explained that I had no stripes available and no needle or thread to sew them on even if I did have them. He quickly retorted that in his Army I would be busted back to Private immediately if I didn't display the stripes of my new rank. No excuses would be accepted. If you weren't proud enough of your new rank to borrow stripes from another soldier and pin them on or glue them on somehow or other, you didn't deserve the promotion, he said.

After the rebuke, he entertained us with a delicious “American“ Christmas dinner of Roast Turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes, and cranberry sauce – all prepared by his daughter. I had visited them one other time for tea, though Mastrangeli fancied that Jo was his girlfriend. Jo and I corresponded periodically after I got back home. After my discharge from the Army I found that she and my mother were regular correspondents. One Christmas she sent my mother a traditional Plum Pudding. We had it with our Christmas dinner but apparently didn’t know how to prepare it properly because neither my mother, my father, nor I could quite understand why Plum Pudding was so popular.

Chapter Nine

The Home Stretch

HEADED HOME FOR REAL

Waiting at Le Havre's Camp Phillip Morris, one of several "cigarette camps" for returning soldiers, was a test of our patience. I was sick most of the time but finally recovered enough to become bored. That problem disappeared shortly after we found an unlocked warehouse that was used for storing recreation supplies. I selected a guitar and took it back to my tent along with the instruction manual. Our shipping orders came shortly after I had mastered a few basic chords and learned a few simple songs.

Rumor after rumor about when we would board a ship for home had proved untrue. But we finally did board the Coaldale Victory ship in February. Nothing about this venture was reassuring. On our way out of the harbor we



We all felt uneasy about the home-bound voyage.

met a returning ship that was being towed. One tug was pulling the back end and the other was pulling the front end. We could see that the water was rough and it wasn't hard to imagine that the ship had been split in two by the stormy weather.

A few days later we were confined to the interior of the ship because seas were so rough there was danger of being washed overboard. We didn't seem to make any forward progress. We kept repeating the cycle of barely staying afloat. Instead of going forward we seemed to be climbing a wall of water that looked 50 or more feet high. When we reached the top



Wearing flotation jackets we headed home on USS Coaldale Victory.

we'd hang over the edge for an eternity. We'd hang motionless for a moment and then the ship would groan and shudder for a few seconds before it dropped nose first with a sickening thud. Engines went from a laboring sound to a racing sound as if the propellers were fighting air instead of water. Each time the cycle was repeated I figured we were heading to Davy Jones Locker. My thoughts went back to that ship which had been split into two parts.

Eating a meal in the Mess Hall was a real challenge. Quarters were tight. Trying to hang onto your mess kit full of food plus a cup of coffee and keep your seat on the bench was an almost impossible task. Not only did the ship tilt up and down like a teeter-totter, it also rolled. Tables were built with this in mind, of course, so they had a two-inch lip all around. This caught the occasional coffee cup that escaped and also kept spilled food and drink from drenching us. Still, it was quite unnerving to see a flying cup of coffee headed straight toward you. In spite of all these obstacles the sailors running that kitchen prepared some tasty meals.

SUNSHINE AND NO SUBMARINES

Once we got through February's infamous stormy seas of the Atlantic Ocean, life aboard the ship going home was quite pleasant. Many nooks



When the weather was nice, those of us not rolling dice or playing poker spent our time on the main deck and followed the old soldiers' rule: Never stand if you can sit and never sit if you can lie down.

and corners of the ship were crowded with clusters of soldiers shooting craps or playing cards. Fighting your way past them to get to the Mess Hall was somewhat trying, but the biggest gripe of all was having to listen to "Sioux City Sue" blaring over the ship's speakers hour after hour. The ship's chief engineer was from Sioux City and was cheered by his fellow Iowans the first time he played the then-popular song. As time wore on, even the guys from Sioux City had enough of it. Days later we heard that someone sneaked into the control room and broke the record. An official announcement dashed our hopes that we wouldn't have to listen to "Sioux City Sue" anymore. This boat had crossed the Atlantic dozens of times and the engineer had a large supply of replacement records. "Sioux City Sue" was blaring from the ship as we caught sight of the Statue of Liberty and as we docked.

CAMP KILMER WELCOMES US

Rigid military regulations were relaxed as soon as we were delivered to Camp



Glen Miller's "In The Mood" kept everyone happy, though few dancing.

Kilmer, New Jersey. We were free to leave the immediate area and didn't even have to tell anyone where we were going. I immediately headed for a little milkshake and hamburger joint in the town that I suppose surrounded the campsite. It seemed to be just across the street from the gate. There's no way that it could have been far away; I don't recall the need to ask anyone how to get to town and I don't recall having to find transportation, so I must have just walked out of the base and into the business district.

That burger and shake tasted even better than the steak dinner that was promised to us as we arrived. It was good to be home.

The steak dinner proved to be a reality. The cooks even asked us if we wanted our steak rare or well done. In typical Army fashion, you got what came off the grill rather than what you had ordered, of course. But it was great – steak, baked potato with plenty of butter, salt out of a salt shaker. AND APPLE PIE WITH ICECREAM!

The thought of this still is overwhelming. Even almost 60 years later I feel my eyes getting moist as I recall the dinner. The banquet hall where we were served was nothing at all like the Mess Halls or chow lines we had been accustomed to. Even the soft music playing in the background was soothing.

ONE MORE TRAIN RIDE

The train ride to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin where I was processed for discharge has long been forgotten. We probably spent only one night at Camp Kilmer before heading closer to home. But we had several days of lectures and several hours of filling out forms at Camp McCoy before we were free to leave. Camp McCoy was an old Army base out in the middle of the woods and was anything but a showcase as some of today's bases are. The part we were in had no permanent buildings – only leftover barracks and office buildings from World War One.

I was a civilian in Army uniform as I boarded a train to leave Camp McCoy. Following the advice given to all of us, I pre-purchased my train ticket and sent most of my final paycheck home by mail. Even back then, when people didn't lock their doors, unsavory people preyed on easy marks, so we were warned against trying to hitch a ride home as a way of saving money.

My destination was Springfield, Minnesota, about 12 miles from home. The train from Camp McCoy was a military train, I believe. We had no way of knowing what kind of connections we'd be able to make and therefore didn't know when we'd arrive at our destination. I had written to my parents telling them that I was at Camp McCoy, but that's all the warning I could give them. We didn't have bus service to my home town then, and still don't.

A "Toonerville Trolley" that boasted one passenger car and a combination engine-freight car still went through my hometown of Comfrey, Minnesota once a day – well, twice a day but the second stop was a return trip. We were on a branch line that never did try to line up connecting schedules with any of the passenger lines. I counted on being able to reach my parents by telephone when I arrived in Springfield.

It's a good thing that I didn't tell them when I thought I might arrive. Nothing seemed to be on schedule and I arrived mid-morning – about 36 hours later than I had counted on. I wandered up and down the main business area for a short time, hoping to see someone from home that wouldn't mind an extra passenger on the return trip. Then I decided I'd stand a better chance of catching a ride if I walked to the bridge that everyone had to cross if they were headed to

Comfrey. That worked. Matt Schneider, our drug store owner, recognized me and gave me a ride home.

CAN YOU TRUST MEMORIES?

Was this really what took place at homecoming?

I remember my parents meeting me at a train station someplace with a big surprise. They had with them my best friend from high school – Forrest Dahl and his new wife Gladys. That must have been some time after my discharge from the Army because I don't believe Forrest was in uniform and I don't remember stashing my barracks bag in the trunk.

I remember coming home another time and finding no one at home. The key to the front door was under the rug right where it belonged, but I couldn't find the light switch to the hallway light that should have been just inside the door. There wasn't even a wall where the light switch should have been. My parents had remodeled the house while I was gone and hadn't told me about it. Perhaps this was the Christmas leave I had while I was at the University of Illinois in the ASTP program. Or, it might have been the one two-week leave I had from Camp Polk before shipping out to Europe.

My homecoming after discharge from the Army was low key. There was no welcoming party of any kind, just as there had been no band or parade to greet us when we arrived in New York harbor. I probably walked from the drugstore up to the service station that my father managed and stayed there for awhile because my mother wasn't home. As I said, the homecoming was low key – so low key that I don't have any memories of it.

I do remember going down to Kelly's Restaurant that first day home or the next day to discover that none of my old friends were hanging out there as they had before the war. A few months later I left home to go to school at Brookings, South Dakota. Though I still call it my hometown, Comfrey no longer was my home. It is, but it isn't...

Chapter Ten

How It All Started

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

Little did I realize on that day in June of 1943 when I boarded the bus for Fort Snelling that so many adventures would come my way. As I said at the beginning of this story, my entry into the Army was not at all as I had expected.

As I recall, we remained in our civilian clothes the first few days that I was in the Army. Eventually we joined a long line of guys and went through a dimly-lit warehouse where we either picked up or were given each article of clothing called for. If the first item fit, you grabbed another one marked with the same size and hoped that the marking was accurate.

I lucked out when it came to shoes. The soldier giving out shoes was the same person who waited on me at the shoe store I usually went to in New Ulm. He recognized me and explained that he was giving me shoes that were too big because he knew my feet would expand as we started marching. He was right.

It wasn't until we had so much clothing in our arms that we could no longer carry it that we came to the station where we got our duffel bag – a canvas bag maybe 18 or 20 inches across and about 3 ½ feet high.

We each filled our duffel bag almost full, then put on our GI (government issue) shoes, hoisted the bag on our shoulders and dragged ourselves back to the barracks. It was only then that we found out whether our shirts, trousers, socks and other items of clothing fit. We changed into our wrinkled uniform clothing then, but we sure didn't look like soldiers.

Soon it was time to stand in another long line that moved quite quickly. As I recall we went through a sort of (what kind of line am I thinking of? – can't get the right word)—GAUNTLET (inserted Apr 21, 2003) – my mind is becoming unscrambled!

Anyway, there was a medical corps guy that gave an injection in the left arm at about the same time two guys on the other side gave two injections in the right arm. They worked fast, fortunately, so the whole miserable experience was over in a hurry.

On the way back to the barracks I came across a fellow from my home town who was at about the same stage of entry into Army life as I was. He was a few years younger, but I knew him well. His name was Delmar (Denny) Hickel. His father was our barber. His mother, Violet, was a good friend of my mother and they were in many of the same organizations such as Music Club, Garden Club, and American Legion auxiliary.

Fort Snelling is located on the Mississippi River at St. Paul, the capital of Minnesota. I had been to St. Paul a couple of times, visiting my mother's brother, Leo Altermatt, and his wife Viola. At this time Uncle Leo worked at the South St. Paul stockyards, probably as a cattle buyer. Viola worked at the Hook'Em Cow restaurant/bar, sometimes as a cocktail waitress but usually at the dice table or card game. I'm not sure that these were legal at the time, but the establishment had a good reputation and sent mounted cowboys and cowgirls to many of the 4th of July parades around the state. It was a good place to eat, a place where cattle feeders felt comfortable meeting after they had sold their cattle. I'm not sure my mother approved of the place, but I never noticed any misbehavior or rowdiness when I was there.

Anyway, Denny and I found out that we could get an overnight pass and called my Uncle Leo in South St. Paul to see if we could spend the night with him. He agreed to get us back to Fort Snelling for 6 am roll call.

Not everything worked out as planned. First, we encountered delay after delay getting our passes and leaving the post. It was 7 pm before we finally caught a bus for the big city. Then Denny decided we really should take advantage of some of the entertainment offered instead of going directly to Uncle Leo's house – so we went to the Roller Derby and stayed there until close to 10 pm. It was the first and last time I've ever spent money to watch that sport.

By the time we got to Uncle Leo's house, by city bus, he was in bed and had assumed we weren't coming. It was late – probably close to midnight. Denny and I quickly crawled into bed and soon got out of bed when Uncle Leo woke us. From South St. Paul to Fort Snelling is a long drive, even today with freeways and Interstates. Uncle Leo didn't chew us out, but he wasn't happy.

We really had imposed on him, but later I sort of made up for my misdeeds by helping him at his country store in Leavenworth, MN. I spent many days helping out with shingling the roof, painting, and doing odd jobs around the place. One week I was responsible for cooking the noon meal for a crew of carpenters. They were mighty unhappy with me the day they came for the noon meal and it wasn't quite ready. You can imagine that I had the meal ready before 12 noon the next few days.

Actually, Uncle Leo probably was helping me more than I was helping him. This is the same uncle who used to bring me a pair of pants or a jacket that he found at a bargain store in St Paul. I remember that he bought me my very first suit of clothes – a nifty blue-gray plaid suit – coat, vest, and knickers. I was seven years old. We were living in my grandmother's house located right be-

hind St. Paul's Catholic church and just a short walk through the side yard of the church to St. Paul's elementary school. That suit was my favorite. I'm sure that I had other trousers to wear, but I wore the trousers (knickers) of this suit to school day after day.

I remember one occasion when our teacher – third grade – was trying to impress upon us the need to show proper respect for God, especially at Sunday Mass. Maybe it was some other point she was trying to make, but one of her comments centered on clothing and she said something about having special clothes that you wore only on Sunday. The way she phrased her comment must have been in the form of a question because I felt it necessary to raise my hand and confess that the trousers I was wearing at the moment were the same ones that I wore to Sunday Mass, even though they were neatly patched here and there. It seems that every one else in the third grade had special dress-up clothes. This is the only time I recall that I felt we might be poor. But it was a fleeting thought and this is the first time in years that I have remembered this incident.

But back to Uncle Leo. This is the same uncle who, after my discharge from the Army, drove me all around St. Paul visiting camera stores so I could buy a camera. I made a very poor choice of cameras in one sense. I bought a Clarus 35mm camera that was noisy and heavy and had no economical way of adding synchronized flash. In later years, I learned the technique of shooting with existing light so the camera would have served me well. Unfortunately, I had traded it for a different camera by then – at quite a financial loss.

Back to Fort Snelling. Denny and I never saw each other again. I was shipped out to Camp Hood, Texas for basic training. I'm not sure whether Denny died while in the service or if he died after discharge. It was quite awhile before I found out about his death.

BASIC TRAINING AT CAMP HOOD

Camp Hood was nothing at all like Fort Snelling. It didn't have tree-lined roads. It didn't have green lawns that were kept neatly trimmed. It had wood barracks — not picturesque brick building connected by cement walkways. It wasn't near a big city.

Our only drinking water came from a Lister bag suspended from a tripod

that stood out in the blazing sun. We filled our canteens morning, noon, and night unless we were out in the field.

My mother sent care packages quite often, so I carried packets of lime-flavored Kool-Aid with me to mix with the water when I poured it into my canteen cup during our frequent rest periods. My mother also sent me individually wrapped squares of chocolate. Both of these could easily be concealed in the cartridge belt that we were required to wear even though we had not been issued ammunition.

I was based at North Camp Hood – a separate administrative area from South Camp Hood. In fact, we needed an official pass to ride the bus from one camp to the other.

Basic training was no picnic, but I rather enjoyed parts of it. I enjoyed the all-night hikes over the hilly terrain – under bright moonlight. I enjoyed the searing heat of the rifle range because we used real rifles. However, they seemed to weigh a ton and would bruise your shoulder badly if you didn't grip them tightly to your shoulder.

I enjoyed the early morning formations and the 5-mile runs before breakfast. But all of a sudden enjoyment turned to hurt. One night I jumped from my upper bunk and, as I landed on the rough barracks floor, tore the skin back on the bottom of my foot – from the ball of my foot back about an inch.

Next morning I reported on sick call and limped back to the barracks with a neat bandage plus whatever we used before we had anti-biotic creams. My instructions were to stay off the foot until it healed. Instead of regular training I was to be given light duty – peeling potatoes, working in the office – anything to give the foot time to heal.

After one day of this our drill sergeant decided I was goofing off and “asked” me to join in the 5-mile hike with light field pack scheduled for that day. The bandage offered fair protection for a mile or so, but pretty soon I had to start favoring the injured foot to keep from peeling the skin back again. After about two miles my limp was so noticeable and my gait so awkward that I was ordered to sit under a tree and wait until somebody came by with a vehicle to take me back to the barracks. Of course, by that time the injury was much worse than it had started out, so I was confined to barracks for a week or so until the foot healed.

Toward the end of my stay at Camp Hood I learned in a letter from home

that Paul Anderson was stationed at the other part of the Camp. Paul was owner of the Gamble Store in my hometown of Comfrey. His wife, Persia, was a close friend of my mother.

One day I got a package of Brownies that my mother sent for me to share with Paul. So as soon as I was off duty for the day I hopped onto the bus and set out to visit Paul. We shared the Brownies and talked a little bit before I had to head back to my base. I had no pass and would have been listed as AWOL (absent without leave) if anyone had asked for my pass.

Fortunately the MP's (military police) were so pushed for time that they just herded us onto the bus and didn't bother to check anyone's pass. Going home was another story. It was late at night and only a few of us were on the bus. Fortunately the lights in the bus were dim and the MP barely glanced at the piece of paper I showed him for a pass.

My visit with Paul was quite pleasant. He was a lot older than me and I was completely surprised that he had been drafted. I have no idea what happened to his business when he had to leave for the Army. Perhaps his wife Persia kept it going.

Persia and Paul lived just across the alley from us in Comfrey. They had a new house that they had built. It had the latest heating system, one much the same as we have in the house we built at Fair Haven Retirement Center, Birmingham, AL in the year 2000. When the electric power fails the furnace won't supply heat because the fans won't operate and the house gets cold. In contrast, the old, old house we lived in had a fuel oil-burning space heater that we huddled around when it got real cold.

This is what we did when one of Minnesota's famous blizzards shut our town down for several days. The bowling alley was about the only business that stayed open. Paul and Persia came over to our house to while away the hours playing cards with my parents. I slept in my cot in the upstairs bedroom as usual. I suppose Paul and Persia curled up on the sofa and the "overstuffed" chair. We shared our house this way for several days.

I don't recall a lot about our Basic Training at Camp Hood. I remember that the Corporal in charge of our barracks was physically superior to the rest of us and seemingly enjoyed being a soldier. He had completed the basic training camp for the Marines (I believe they called it Boot Camp), but was boot-ed out of the Marines because he was only 16 years old. Most of us rather admired him. He made us feel good by telling us that the training program

we had completed so far was much harder than what the Marines had to endure in Boot Camp. There's probably not even a grain of truth in his statement.

Eventually we completed Basic Training and were shipped off to the various Universities for our ASTP schooling. Quite a few of us headed for the Basic Engineering sequence at the University of Illinois at Champagne-Urbana.

Our train ride was in Pullman cars – a new experience for me. Two of us shared a lower bunk. I believe Don Duvick of Sandwich, IL was my bunk-mate. The upper bunk was occupied by a fellow from the Davenport, IA, Charles Dougherty. The three of us stayed in touch for quite some time. After the war was over, Don and I hitch-hiked from Comfrey to Davenport. We had a short visit with our friend, but I never saw him again. He offered cigarettes from a gold case and gave me the impression that he was accustomed to higher living than either one of us was. Even his posture and mannerisms seemed to be patterned after rich college kids portrayed in the movies.

Don and I spent a lot of time together while we were at the University of Illinois. He had been a student there for a year before being drafted into the Army. We had many classes together and he took me along to some parties at the sorority houses. This was a new experience to me, but I never really felt comfortable in these surroundings. Don and I also double-dated quite a few times. Neither one of us stayed in touch with the girls we were enamored of at the time.

The classroom pace was fast. I couldn't keep up, so had to leave some subjects slide by while doing my best to get decent grades in algebra, trigonometry, physics, and chemistry. Physics was a near disaster. Our lectures were in an auditorium seating several hundred people and there was no way many of us could see the illustrations our instructor put on a chalk board. I saved the text book and went back to it in later years to try to make sense of it. My eyes finally were opened when I picked up the high school text book that our son Richard was using.

Chemistry was a completely different story. It was a repeat course for me. I had gotten a C in chemistry during my freshman year at Mankato State Teachers College. My brother Bob had gotten an A under the same instructor. Naturally, I felt a bit inadequate.

Chemistry really came to life for me at the University of Illinois. The author of our textbook, Dr. Hopkins, taught most of our lecture classes. He supposedly was the discoverer of one of the elements – and at the time it was named Illinium. I remember acing the final exam, which was a laboratory exercise as well

as a written exam. In the lab we had to identify an unknown substance by running the various tests. I was one of the few people who completed that part of the test successfully.

Of course, Don did. He was a superior student and often tried to help me. Unfortunately, the regimen was so strenuous and exhausting that I fell asleep when I should have been studying. I'm sure I showed a bit of laziness, too. Don returned to the University of Illinois after his Army service and completed work on his doctorate within a few years – skipping the Masters Degree that most people acquire following their undergraduate work. Don became a world famous scientist, a corn breeder for Pioneer Seed Corn Company. As writer and editor for a farm magazine, I sometimes called Don for help. He was always patient in his explanations, for which I was grateful. Among his many honors was being inducted into the elite National Academy of Sciences in 2003.

Toward the end of the first semester at Illinois – or maybe it was toward the end of the second semester, it began to look as if we were close to ending the war in the European theater. So, the long term engineering program we were in seemed unnecessary. The end result was termination of that part of the ASTP. None of us had undergone advanced training so we assumed we'd be sent to the European theater as replacements for the thousands of soldiers who had been killed or wounded in battle. As it turned out, quite a few of the people in this pool of untrained manpower were immediately shipped to the European theater replacement depots. We called them "repple depples".

It must have been sometime in February because I remember saying goodbye to a girl that seemed sort of special at the time, though right now I don't even remember her name. (Later addition: yes, I do. Her name was Onilee Curtis.)

I do remember, too, that I have always been thankful that we eventually parted ways. And I know she was. I did visit her in Chicago after my discharge from the Army. By that time she had graduated from the University of Illinois and was working in downtown Chicago. She was comfortable in the big city – and a sorority girl. Even after wandering around London and Brussels during war-time I was a bit lost and uncertain in the big city of Chicago.

MY ONLY CHRISTMAS LEAVE

I had been home for Christmas before we left Illinois. Our sergeant gave me two three-day passes – the second one to begin as soon as the first one expired. The hitch was that a three-day pass had a restriction. We were to travel no

more than 150 miles from our post.

Comfrey is considerably further than 150 miles from Champagne-Urbana, but our sergeant suggested I take a chance. If the MP's intercepted me and discovered that I was outside the 150-mile limit, they would put me in the stockade but return me to my post for punishment. This punishment would be meted out by the sergeant who wrote the risky passes and he assured me that I would not be in big trouble at his end.

I took the train from Urbana to Chicago, then from Chicago to Minneapolis, and then from Minneapolis to Springfield. This train had a two-hour layover in Mankato where I had gone to school. One of the girls I had dated while in school lived straight up the hill from the train station, so I called her at home and told her I'd hike up to see her. We had corresponded a few times while I was in basic training and at Illinois. Her name was Carol Larsen. When I arrived she had just returned from a date with a mutual friend. Eventually she wrote me to say that her relationship with Wes whatever was getting serious and it would be best if she didn't write to me anymore. I remember staying at her home so long that I had to really run down the hill in order to catch my train before it departed sometime before 11 o'clock.

I had called my parents from Mankato as soon as I arrived so they could have a little warning that I would be arriving in Springfield late at night. They were waiting for me when the train arrived in Springfield in the early morning.

Travel took such a long time that I had very little time at home – probably less than two days, as I recall. My recollection is that I was not home for Christmas dinner because of the long travel time back to Urbana. It was rather a disappointing visit in some ways, but I'm sure my parents appreciated the visit. This was their first Christmas without either one of their kids at home. All of us were sort of on edge. My brother Bob was in the thick of battle with the Marines in the South Pacific. I was quite certain I would soon be on my way to the European theater. I don't recall that I saw any of my friends while at home.

BIG TIME COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Back at our studies at Illinois, most of us seemed to be half-hearted students. Not Don Duvick, I must note. We knew that we wouldn't be able to finish this second semester. Basketball season was in full swing and one Saturday night I managed to get a pass so I could attend a big-league college basketball game. I suppose Illinois was part of the Big Ten conference at that time. I don't re-

member who they played that night, nor do I remember who won. I'm not sure I ever knew the final score. I had to leave before the game was over because of our curfew.

Fortunately I didn't have far to walk home. We were housed in one of the fraternity houses that the military had taken over. It was just across the green from the football field and the coliseum. This was no problem during the basketball season, but it was maddening during the football season. We had to do calisthenics and close-order drill in the parking lot while the football games were going on.

Of course, I probably couldn't have gone to any of the games even if we could have gotten passes. For some reason or other the University never felt that it could give free tickets to the hundreds of GI's who were attending school. It surely wouldn't have cost them much. The stadium was never full while we were there. They didn't even offer us a discount.

They did offer us some entertainment, though. We weren't exactly sought out as participants, but Don Duvick knew of some activities that had been carried over from the time he was a civilian student.

One that we particularly enjoyed was an informal gathering at the Student Union building every Sunday afternoon. Someone chose a recording of symphonic music to play. Only a few soldiers were present at these 'concerts' but no one ever asked us to leave or made us feel unwelcome. There were only a few chairs to sit on so most of us lounged on the floor. I often fell asleep

We also were invited to the weekend square dances at the Student Union. So were soldiers from the nearby military bases, so there was quite a crowd. Our big GI boots were not conducive to fancy footwork or even the easy square dance routines. On top of that, most of us were quite inept when it came to square dancing, so the girls who braved the dance floor often ended up with bruised legs complete with black marks from the soles of our shoes. You can imagine that our frequent apologies were not enough.

When the time came to leave campus life, we dressed in our Class A uniforms, ties and all, and once again loaded onto Pullman cars. This time, though, the cars were so packed that we didn't get to sleep in the Pullman bunks. We slept sitting up. Some of us found it more comfortable to drag our duffel bags onto the platform between cars. This was noisier and dustier, but we at least were isolated from the mass of humanity inside.

I don't recall our route – probably I never had figured out where we were. We

seemed to spend a lot of time on sidings or parked out in big freight lots. Judging from all the bumping and clanging, I imagine we changed locomotives quite often.

At one stop a group of ladies and men approached our cars and handed us homemade sandwiches through the windows. These were most welcome. We would have liked drinks, but didn't need them because we had filled our canteens with water before we left.

Eventually we arrived at a rather nice train station. It was at or near Camp Polk, La. We detrained, then loaded onto 2 ½-ton trucks and were driven out into the woods to join the units we had been assigned to. Many of us ended up with the Eighth Armored Division, which was out on a training bivouac at the time. We certainly looked out of place. There we were in Class A (dress) uniforms and all of the veteran soldiers around us were in battle dress.

As I recall, I stayed in my OD's (Olive drabs – the winter wool uniform) for a couple of days because we had no need for fatigues, the work uniform, at school and had turned them in to the supply officer soon after we arrived at the Illinois campus. This seemed out of place at the time, but a year or so later when we shipped out to England and later to France and on up through Belgium, Holland, and Germany, we wore only our OD's. Somewhere along the line, I was told, the Germans had acquired a supply of our fatigues and were posing as American soldiers. As soon as we had switched to OD's, they stood out like sore thumbs and were taken prisoner.

To this day, I don't know if there is any truth to this story. I do know that our fatigues surely would not have been warm enough during that last winter of the war and all of us probably would have worn our wool OD uniforms under the green fatigues.

BACK TO THE REAL ARMY

That first night with the Eighth Armored Division was quite an experience. I did have a shelter half and some tent pegs packed in my duffel bag and eventually found someone else with a shelter half. So we teamed up, buttoned the shelter halves together and pitched our pup tent in a likely spot, somewhat in line with a few others.

As you can imagine, we were ill prepared to camp out in the woods after having lived in a fraternity house for almost a year. I didn't even have a mess kit

or canteen cup. Neither did most of the others. I never did know how many of us were suddenly dumped back into Army life. I do know that seasoned soldiers in the units to which we eventually were assigned were unhappy getting a bunch of inexperienced college kids. We no longer were in decent physical condition and had no idea what real Army life was all about.

In civilian life I at least had been exposed to the work of a mechanic so it made good sense that eventually I was assigned to Company C of the 130th Light Ordnance Maintenance Battalion.

Before that, though, I was assigned to the 49th Infantry Battalion. I knew that being in the Infantry would mean almost instant deployment to the European theater as a replacement. I lucked out when a young doctor decided that I was not a good candidate for the infantry because of high blood pressure. When he questioned me I admitted that my blood pressure probably was elevated because I knew I'd soon be on my way to Europe as an infantry replacement.

We probably stayed in the woods only a few days because we had joined Eighth Armored just at the end of a training program and they were in the midst of packing up to go back to their regular base.

I believe it was here that I shared a pup tent with a soldier who had been a leather goods salesman in Germany until he was rounded up and sent to a concentration camp because he was a Jew. He told me his tale of surviving several executions. He told me about lining up in formation and counting off one through ten. Each day, for three days in a row, the prisoner next to him was told to step forward and was shot – because he was Number 5 in the lineup, or maybe Number 2, or whatever number was called out. And each morning he had to drag the body back to his sleeping quarters and sleep next to it for that night. I had read about this in *READER'S DIGEST* magazine.

One of my other tent mates was Hans Bergmayer. He was assigned to the 49th Armored Infantry Battalion and was killed in battle.

Yet another of my tent mates at Camp Polk was more scary but not quite as memorable. I believe Hans and I had the same experience. We each complained about the other using more than half of the space. When I awakened in the morning I discovered a large rattlesnake lying across my legs. He didn't like me stirring around and slithered away before I had a chance to panic.

Because we came in late and had not been part of the working world, we (the college kids) never were quite part of the unit. One thing that set us apart was the fact that we couldn't share in the retelling of experiences the old-timers

had during the “Battle of the Sabine River” – a particularly realistic and rough training experience.

PLENTY OF TIME FOR LEISURE ACTIVITIES

At Camp Polk, we had most evenings and weekends free. I pulled KP (Kitchen Police) duty at the Officers’ Mess a few weekends and enjoyed seeing how the other half lived. Their food was much better than ours. For breakfast, they could choose how they wanted their eggs prepared. Imagine having your eggs over easy or sunny side up instead of scrambled. No powdered eggs here. The down side was that they had to pay for their meals. The bright side for me was that they shared, so I got my eggs sunny side up, too — with ham.

One weekend I explored our camp and discovered a large recreation area that nobody had told us about. There was a swimming pool that absolutely no one was using. It was so large that I at first thought it was a lake. It even had a sand beach area. Perhaps it was meant for families, but nobody complained when I decided to test the waters. I had been forced to take aquatic lessons at the University of Illinois, but never really learned how to swim. Here the water was warm — and shallow. Over many weekends all by myself, I finally learned to swim and be comfortable in the water.

On Sunday mornings we had Mass in the nearby chapel. The Chaplain’s assistant did triple duty as Jeep driver, organist, and song leader. For that he was well prepared. His name, as I recall, was Charles Terrell. In civilian life he had been a vocal soloist with the Rockettes at Rockefeller Center in New York City. He gave me a few lessons on the chapel organ — a very nice Hammond Electriconic instrument.

I discovered that the chapel was open during the evening, so spent a lot of hours at the keyboard. I started playing hymns, then branched out to a favorite song: “Chapel In The Moonlight.” Then I ventured further afield and turned up the volume on “Tiger Rag.”

Just about the time I figured I had this down pat, the main lights came on and I heard the firm, measured footsteps of someone marching from the entrance to the altar. As I looked up, the trim young Colonel said, “Young man, enough of that. This is a chapel, you know.” “Yes, Sir,” I said. Then he did a smart about face and marched back out.

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

Back at the base I was first assigned to work as a tank mechanic. I knew nothing about the radial engines used in our tanks nor about any other part of this machine. I started reading manuals, but stood in awe of the wrenches we used to work on the body of the tank. They were about 4 feet long and massive. I remember hoisting a wrench up and getting it in position to loosen a nut on one of the bolts that fastened the nose of the tank to the rest of the body. I do not remember ever being able to turn that nut.

It wasn't long before I was assigned to work on Jeeps and 2 ½ -ton trucks, but quickly ended up working only on Jeeps. We practiced changing engines day after day. My partner and I got pretty good at it. I forget who he was, but it's possible he was a fellow named Doversburger. I remember that name because he later decided he wanted to specialize in carburetors. He read and reread the manuals and pretty well knew what he was doing when it came time to tear down a carburetor and repair it. The old-timers, of course, laughed at the college kid who thought he could learn by reading a book. Within a few weeks they accepted him as a carburetor specialist.

At the same time, I was becoming even better at changing engines. My best time at removing an engine was 20 minutes. We even won a weekend pass for winning a contest to see who could change an engine in the shortest time. I also became pretty good at pulling front wheels of Jeeps, cleaning the front-wheel bearings and checking them for wear. If new bearings were not needed, I re-greased the old bearings, adjusted them to the proper tension, and after making sure everything was ready to roll signaled somebody to push the Jeep down a ramp and push another into position for me to work on. We had to service hundreds of Jeeps that were sitting out in an open field. I was told we were getting them ready to put back into service because they were needed over in the European theater.

No one supervised us and we had no quota. We could have spent all our time talking if we had wanted to. However, instead of that we decided to see how many Jeeps we could service in an hour, how many Jeeps we could service in a day, and how fast we could service a single Jeep. I don't remember names or faces of any of the other guys on our three-man team.

One of them may have been a guy named Abraham, from West Virginia. He and I got a weekend pass and decided to hitchhike as far away as we could get and still have a reasonable chance of getting back to camp on time.

He was a nice person and we always seemed to find something to talk about. To start our trek, we took the camp bus out to the edge of Camp Polk and got

off the bus where the military road joined a gravel country road. There were pine trees and cows and pigs around us. Just why we thought anyone would be driving on that road and that they would pick us up, I'll never know. But we both were content just to get away from back packs, soldiers, tanks, and trucks.

We finally were picked up by the farmer who owned the land we were in the midst of. He dropped us off on the main road then continued on his way into the nearest town – probably DeRidder. We got a few rides and decided to stop in Crowley, Louisiana -- billed as the rice capital of the world.

Not able to figure out anything else to do we went into a small café and started drinking the native drink – Coffee Royale -- strong Louisiana chicory coffee tempered with cheap bourbon or cognac. I forget where the bottle of spirits came from. Maybe Abe had brought it with him because I don't recall going into a liquor store. Just being in a civilian atmosphere seemed to be enough entertainment for us. I don't remember doing much more than walking up and down the main street of the town. There seemed to be nothing else to do.

I vaguely remember that we found a cheap hotel where we spent the night, because all of the cots at the USO were filled. The next morning we headed back to camp, worrying every minute of the way that we would be late. We lucked out and got back to camp before our passes expired. The MP's on duty checked us out closely.

Abe, whose first name was Nelson, had one civilian specialty. He liked to take a cigarette break every once in awhile. Though he didn't have a watch, he never missed limiting his break to 10 minutes. That always was how long it took him to smoke a cigarette.

I should mention that 10-minute breaks every hour were typical during our Army work days. "Take Ten" was the oft-repeated command of our sergeants. In later years, around 1953 and 1954, when I was working with Agricultural Extension Service in Little Rock, Arkansas, I started a state-wide radio program featuring the various subject-matter specialists from our central staff. We named the show "Take Ten". Most of the people I worked with never had been members of any military outfit so I had to explain the meaning of the title. It didn't take long for them to begin working that phrase into their commentary or opening remarks.

It was while I was with Company C that I foolishly removed my fatigue blouse while helping on some project out in the sun. At the end of the day I was so sunburned that I was almost sick. The next day I managed to find a fairly soft cotton undershirt to wear under my fatigues. Working that day was sheer tor-

ture, but the word we had was that anyone who couldn't report to duty because of such stupidity was court-martialed.

One event that day took my mind off the pain. One of our wrecker drivers was bringing his big diesel-powered machine into the motor pool compound and had to cope with a runaway diesel. Back then, turning the ignition switch to off didn't cut the flow of fuel so the engine just kept running if it was overheated. The only way to stop it was to raise the hood and close the valve on the fuel line.

Shortly after the weekend trip with Abe I was transferred to Headquarters Company of the same 130th Maintenance Battalion. Someone had noticed that I could type and Headquarters Company needed a clerk-typist, so that is what I was until the end of my Army service.

I was with Headquarters Company for only a short time before leaving for overseas, but I still remember the fairness, kindness, and good sense of our Master Sergeant. He was anything but the typical Army Sergeant. I met him years later at a reunion of the Eighth Armored Division held in Minneapolis, MN – probably sometime during the early 1990's. He looked the same as ever and still seemed to be the sort of person you would like to work with or have as a neighbor. He did not remember me, but that was no real surprise. I was one of those people who just sort of passed through the unit while it was at Camp Polk. As a matter of fact, I got to know just a handful of the old-timers. Just a few years after the Minneapolis reunion, Sergeant Moseley passed away.

WHO AM I

Vernon Emil Miller, born 28 June 1923 at Comfrey, MN, population 365.
Parents: Erven Wesley Miller and Dorothea Theresa Altermatt

ASN 37568194 (Thirty-seven Fifty-six Eighty-one Ninety Four SIR!)
Shoe Size 12 ½ B (Twelve and a half B SIR!)
Rifle Number 4718 (Four Seven One Eight SIR!)

My official weapons: .30 caliber M-1 Carbine (Carried this on guard duty.)
.45 caliber M-3 Submachine Gun — Always with me.
Anti-tank Bazooka -- In truck on rack behind me
.50 caliber ring-mounted machine gun (on truck cab)

Unofficial weapon: .45 caliber Colt automatic handgun (Always with me when driving—usually in seat beside me or, when stopped, in my lap.)

Somewhere along the line -- close to the end of the war -- I traded this Army Issue .45 for a P-38 Walther handgun that a German pilot turned in when he landed his observation plane in our territory to surrender. This P-38 was a prized souvenir and I have not forgiven the thief who stole it from our home at 1069 Lakeview Crescent, Birmingham, AL many years ago. I still remember how angered I was when the insurance company sent me a \$25 check in response to my claim. Some weeks after receiving the check I telephoned them to explain why I had not cashed the check. They then replaced the original check with one for \$300. Or maybe it was \$600. There was no way I could put a value on the weapon, but I had noticed one for sale at a gun show some years earlier so used that as their guide.

Unofficial weapon: .32 caliber Browning automatic handgun that I carried in Czechoslovakia after the war was over.

TRACKING THE 8TH ARMORED DIVISION'S ORDERS

FACT: 31 March 1945 Ordered to withdraw from enemy and be relieved by 75th Infantry Division. Last units of 8th Armrd Div crossed the Lippe River at Dorsten on April 1 and assembled in vicinity of Selm. (I recognize only the Lippe River, not the towns of Dorsten or Selm.)

FACT: Moved 1 April 1945 (Easter Sunday) to vicinity of Lippstadt. Ordered to seize Paderborn, assemble in area of Paderborn-Klausheide-Delbruch-Thule and be prepared for further action to east. P.153

FACT: From Capt. Leach's history—page 153: “The plan of XIX Corps Commander, Major General Raymond S. McLain, was to divide the corps zone between the 2nd Armored Division and the 8th Armored Division (The 30th Infantry Division would follow behind the former to “mop up”; the 83rd Infantry Division would perform the same function for the latter.) This was an armored thrust aimed at Berlin itself!”

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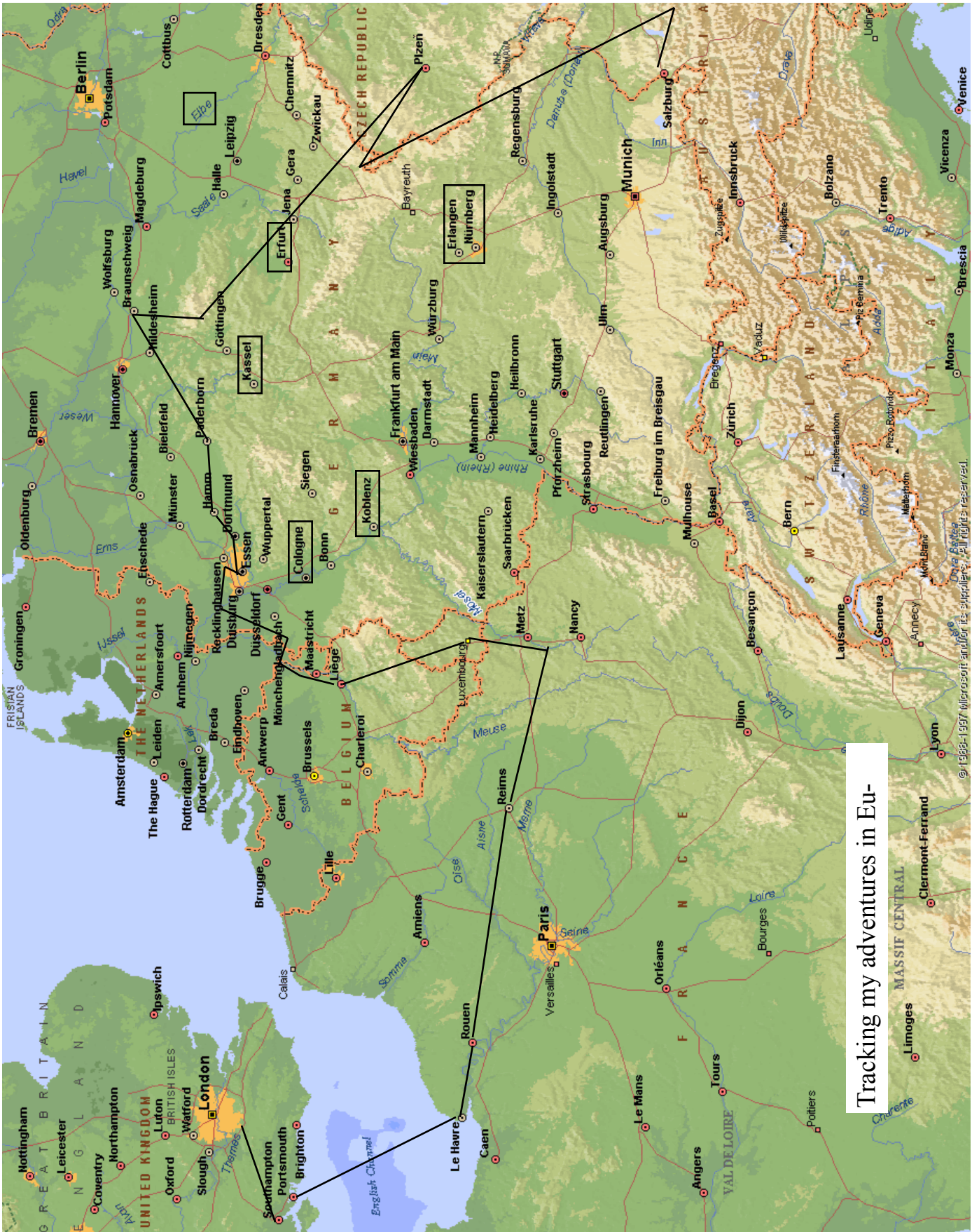
WE WERE IN SOEST Around April 3? See page 156 of “In Tornado's Wake” by Capt. Charles R. Leach

WE WERE IN BECKUM Around April 3?

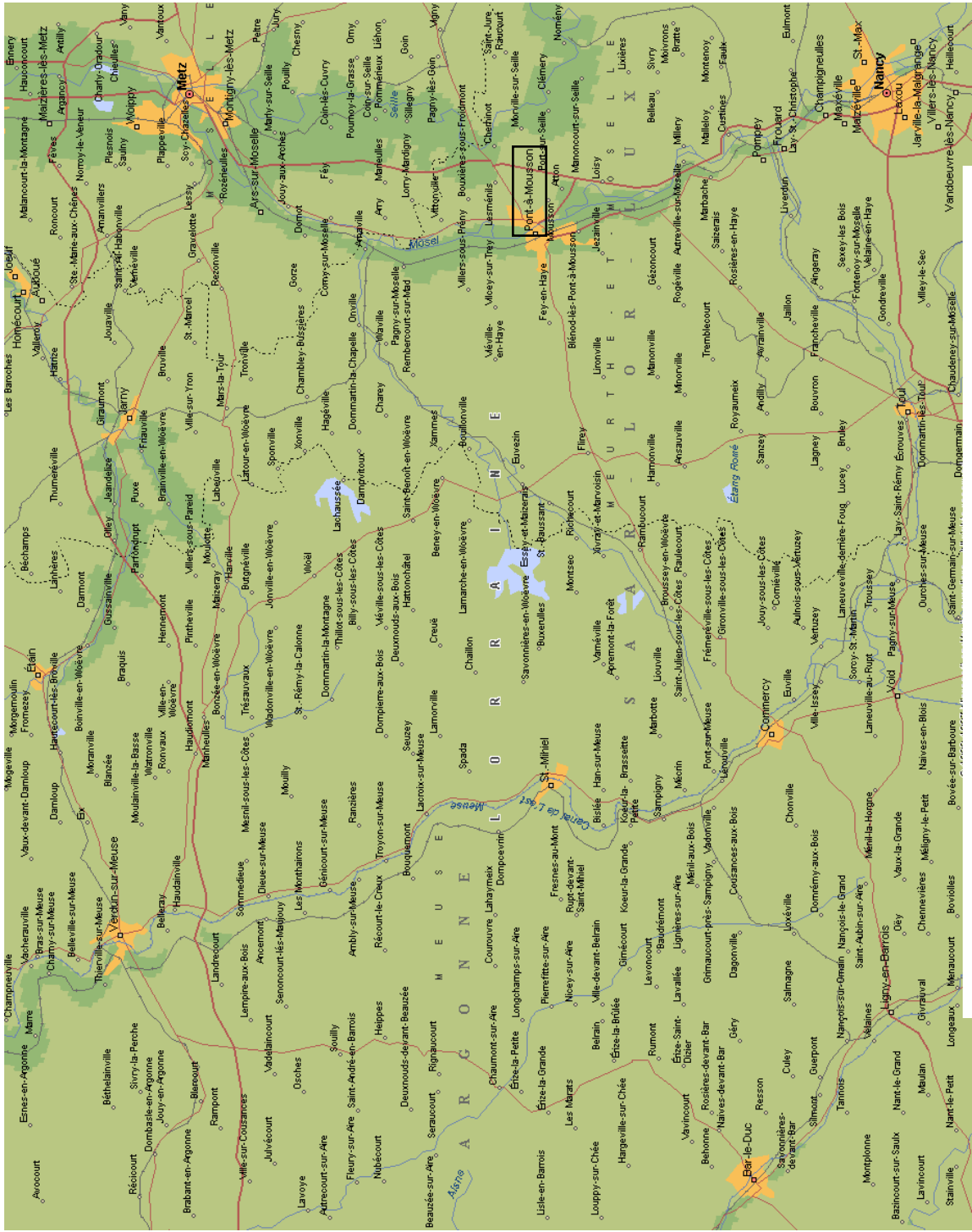
My Route: Roughly: ** Bournemouth, **Tidworth, **Southampton, **Reims, **Pont-a-Mousson, Luxembourg, Liege, Maastricht, **Bunde, Beek, Geleen, Sittard, **Golkrath, **Lobberich, **Someplace on the bank of the Rhine, Spellen, **Zweckel (now part of Gladbeck), Essen, Bochum, **Dortmund, Hamm, Beckum, **Erwitte, Lippstadt, **Paderborn, Detmold, Kassel, Gottingen, **Braunschweig, **Osterode, Erfurt, **Pilsen, **Schwarzbach, Ger or Czech, **Reid, **Lenzing, **Vocklabruck, **Salzburg.

On missions out from one or more of the above towns: Koblenz, Nuremburg, Cologne (in convoy), Madgeburg, Starred entries indicate stops of one night or more.

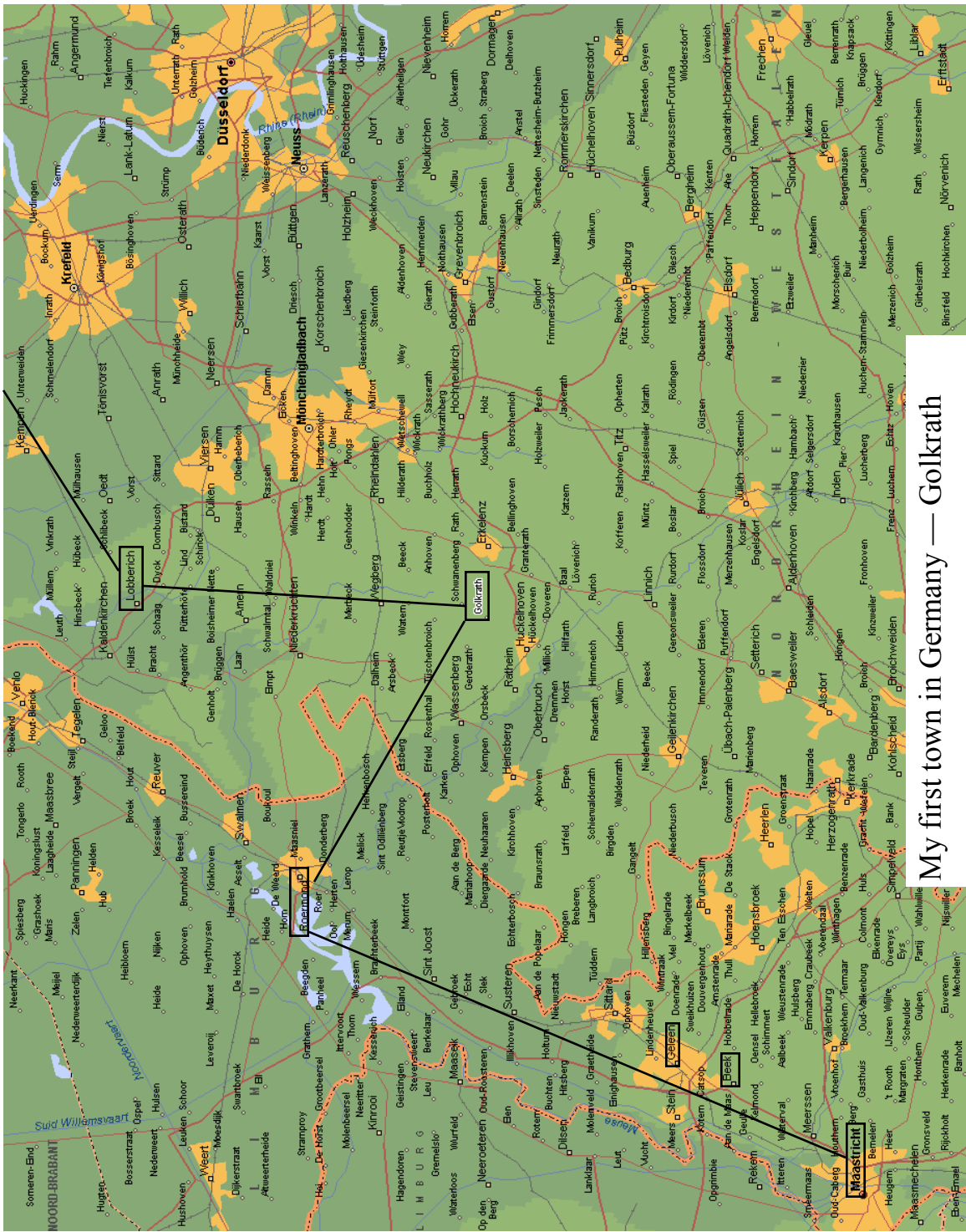
And just for fun: **Gmunden, **Ebensee, **Salzburg, **Brussels, **Koenigsee,



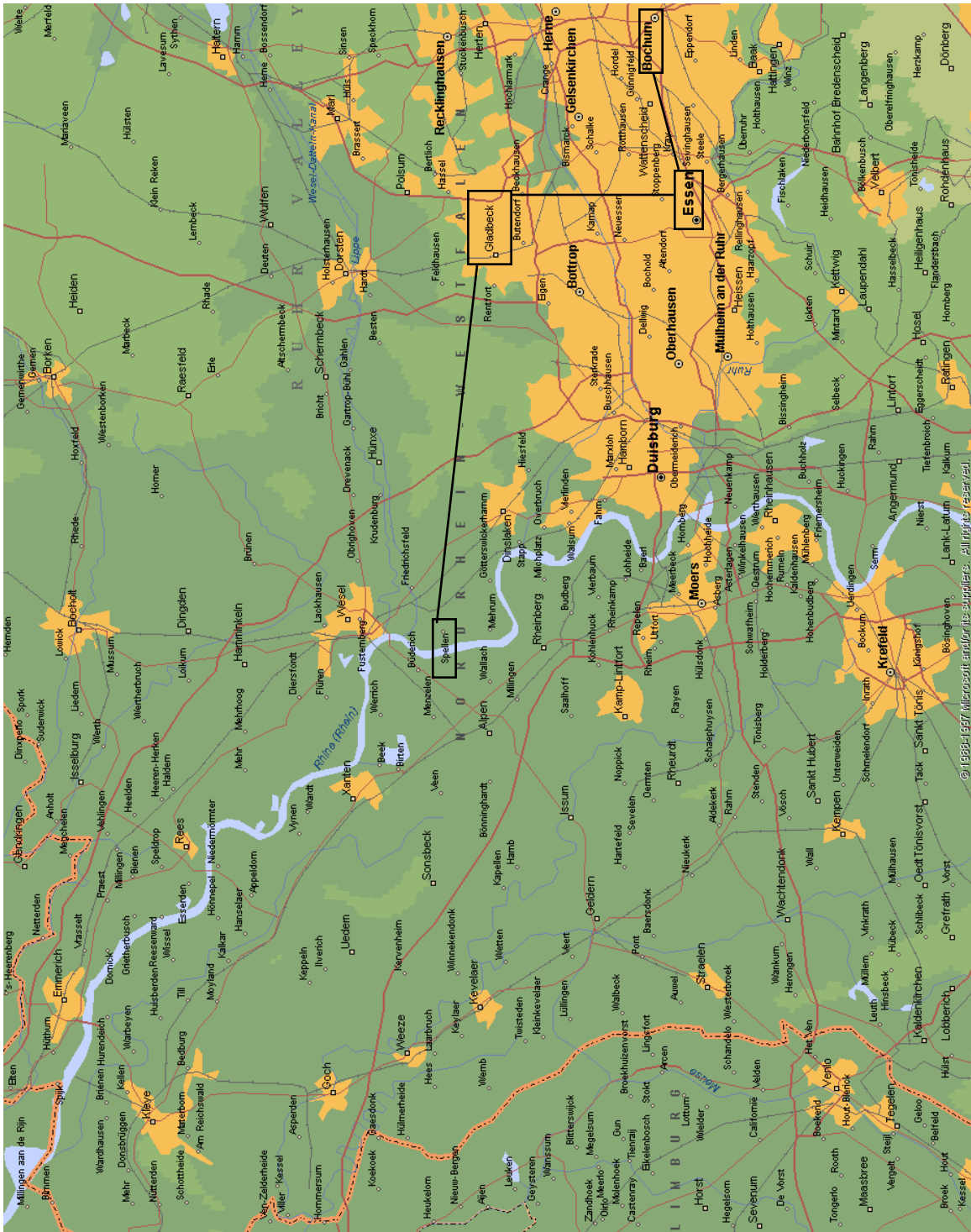
Tracking my adventures in Eu-



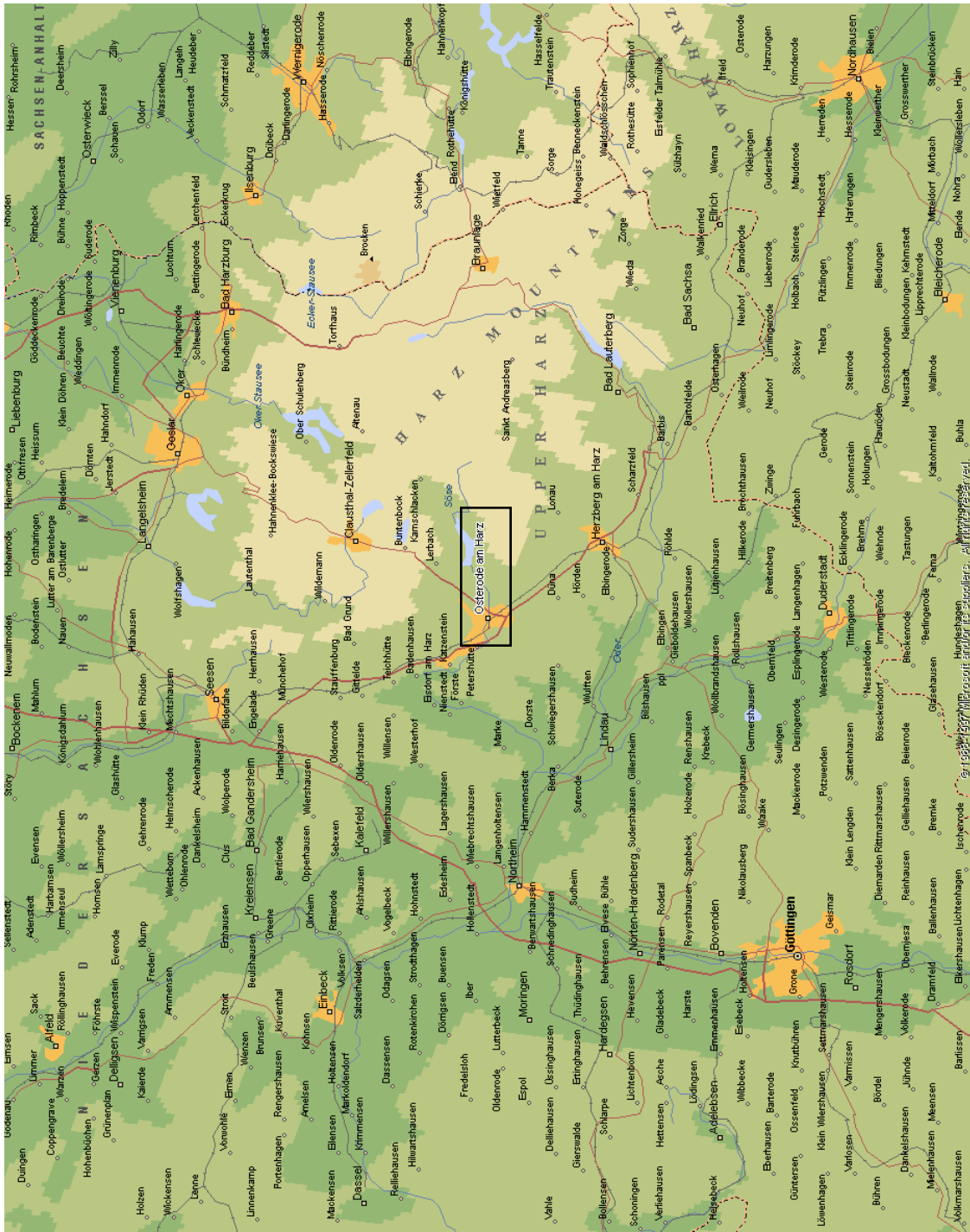
Bar-le-Duc, Pont-a-Mousson, Nancy, Metz



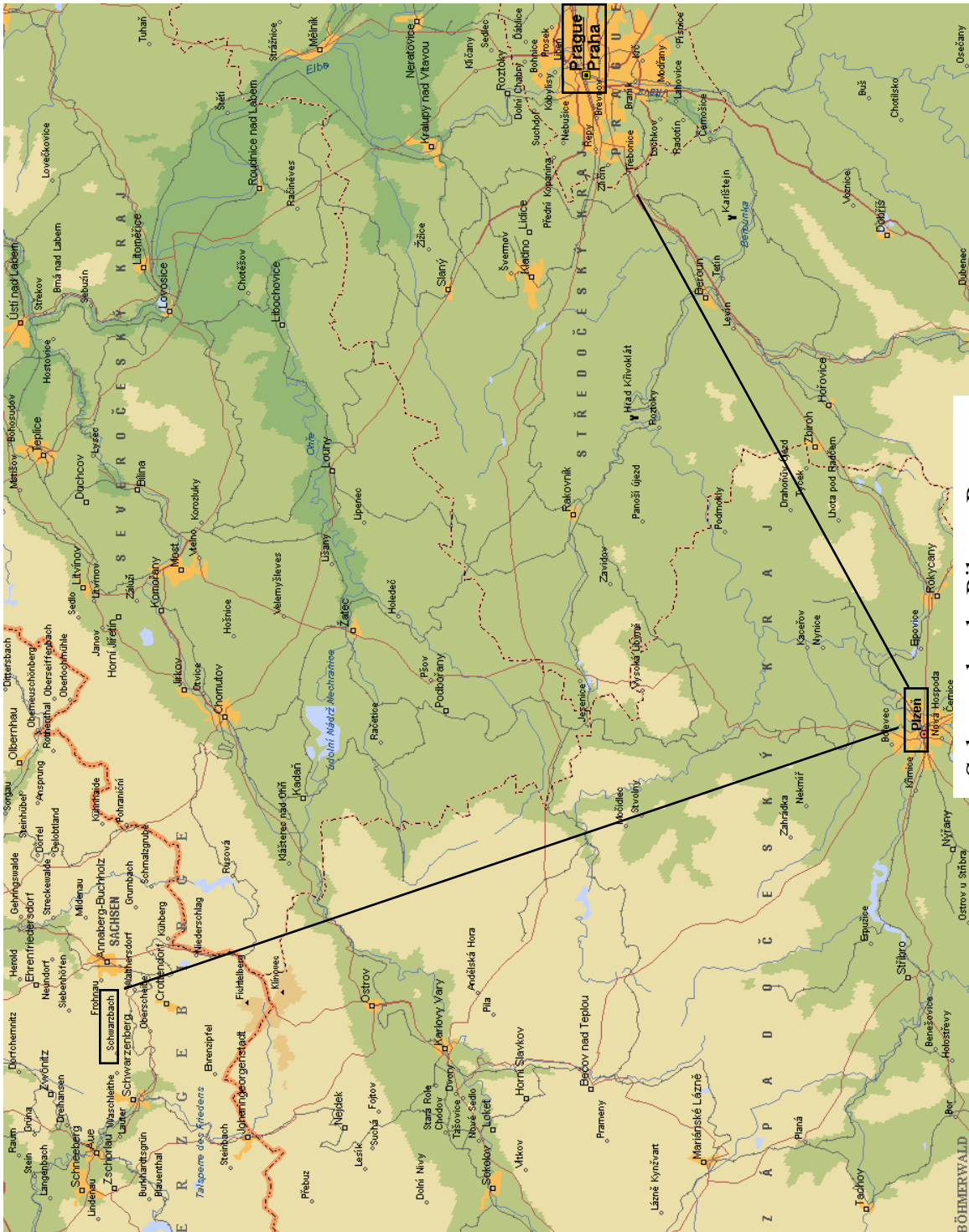
My first town in Germany — Goikrath



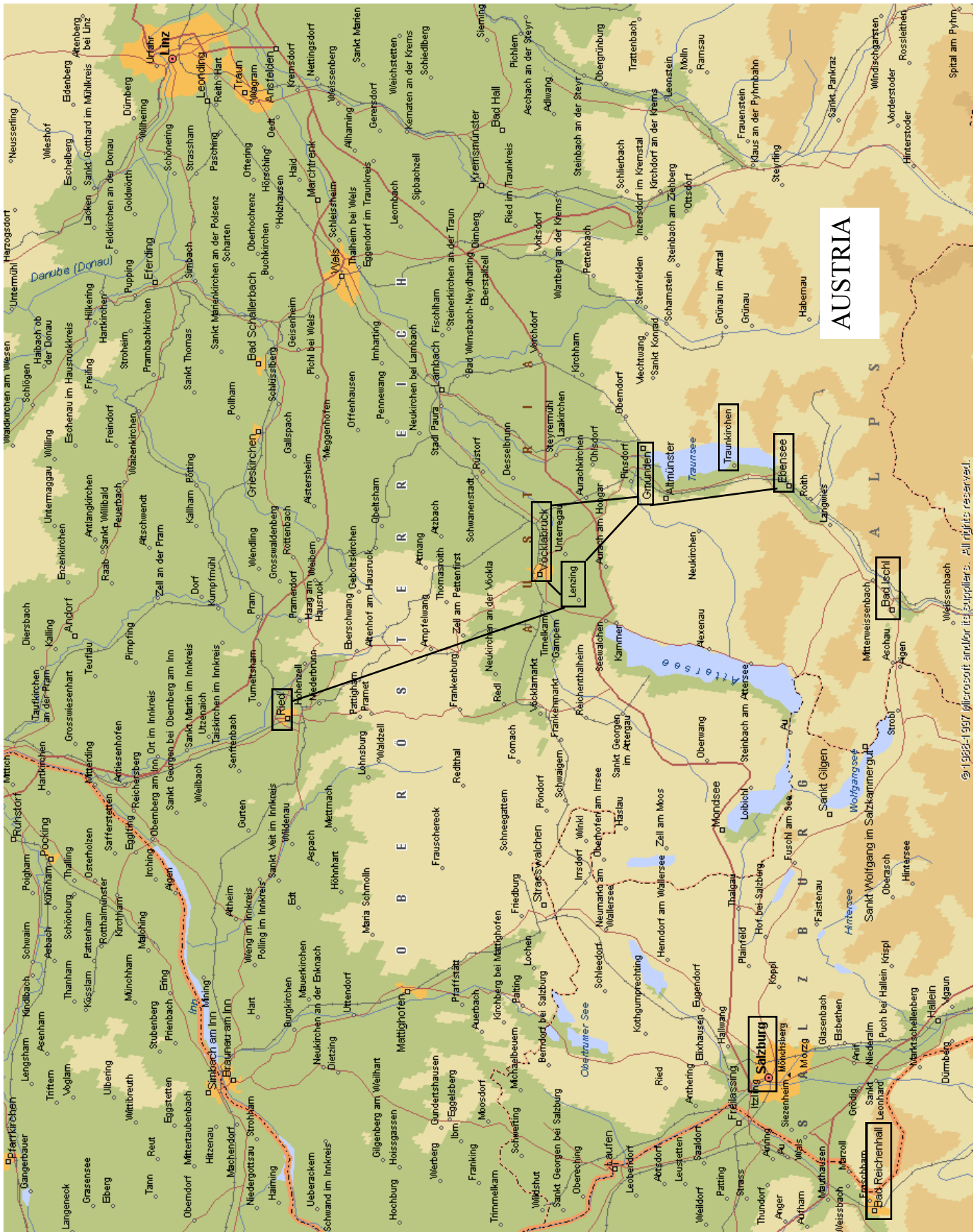
Rhine River Crossing at Spellen, just South of Wesel



Osterode, Harz Mountains, Germany



Schwarzbach, Pilsen, Prague



AUSTRIA

A L P S

Mittlerer Danubien

Salzburger Alpen

Salzburger Alpen

Salzburger Alpen

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Honorable Discharge

This is to certify that

VERNON E. MILLER, 37 568 194, TECHNICIAN THIRD GRADE
HQ 130TH ARMD ORDNANCE MAINTENANCE BATTALION 8TH ARMD DIVISION

Army of the United States

*is hereby Honorably Discharged from the military
service of the United States of America.*

*This certificate is awarded as a testimonial of Honest
and Faithful Service to this country.*

Given at SEPARATION CENTER
CAMP MC COY WISCONSIN

Date 12 MARCH 1946

CHARLES A. FANNING
MAJOR, INF

**ENLISTED RECORD AND REPORT OF SEPARATION
HONORABLE DISCHARGE**

1. LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE INITIAL MILLER VERNON E		2. ARMY SERIAL NO. 37 568 194	3. GRADE TEC-3	4. ARM OR SERVICE ORD	5. COMPONENT AUS
6. ORGANIZATION HQ 130TH ARMD ORD MAINT ENANCE BN 8TH ARMD DIVISION		7. DATE OF SEPARATION 12 MAR 46	8. PLACE OF SEPARATION SEPARATION CENTER CAMP MC COY WISCONSIN		
9. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES COMFREY MINNESOTA		10. DATE OF BIRTH 28 JUN 23	11. PLACE OF BIRTH COMFREY MINNESOTA		
12. ADDRESS FROM WHICH EMPLOYMENT WILL BE SOUGHT SEE 9		13. COLOR EYES GREEN	14. COLOR HAIR DK BRN	15. HEIGHT 5-10	16. WEIGHT 146 BS.
17. NO. DEPEND. 0	18. RACE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WHITE <input type="checkbox"/> NEGRO <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (specify)		19. MARITAL STATUS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SINGLE <input type="checkbox"/> MARRIED <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (specify)		20. U.S. CITIZEN <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
21. CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND NO. COLLEGE STUDENT X-02					

MILITARY HISTORY


22. DATE OF INDUCTION 16 JUN 43		23. DATE OF ENLISTMENT 30 JUN 43	24. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE	25. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE FORT SNELLING MINNESOTA	
SELECTIVE SERVICE DATA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	26. REGISTERED <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	27. LOCAL S.S. BOARD NO. #1	28. COUNTY AND STATE BROWN MINNESOTA	29. HOME ADDRESS AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE 101 HANOVER MANKATO MINNESOTA	
30. MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY AND NO. CLERK STATISTICAL 055			31. MILITARY QUALIFICATION AND DATE (i.e., infantry, aviation and marksmanship badges, etc.) RIFLE SS, CARBINE MKM, SMG EXP		
32. BATTLES AND CAMPAIGNS ARDENNES, RHINELAND, CENTRAL EUROPE					
33. DECORATIONS AND CITATIONS AMERICAN THEATER SERVICE MEDAL EUROPEAN-AFRICAN-MIDDLE EASTERN THEATER SERVICE MEDAL, GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL					
34. WOUNDS RECEIVED IN ACTION NONE					
35. LATEST IMMUNIZATION DATES			36. SERVICE OUTSIDE CONTINENTAL U. S. AND RETURN		
SMALLPOX JUL 44	TYPHOID JUN 45	TETANUS DEC 44	OTHER (specify) TYPHUS FEB 46	DATE OF DEPARTURE 21 OCT 44	DESTINATION ETO USA
37. TOTAL LENGTH OF SERVICE			38. HIGHEST GRADE HELD TEC-3	DATE OF DEPARTURE 26 FEB 46	DATE OF ARRIVAL 28 OCT 44 7 MAR 46
CONTINENTAL SERVICE		FOREIGN SERVICE			
YEARS 1	MONTHS 3	DAYS 26	YEARS 1	MONTHS 4	DAYS 17
39. PRIOR SERVICE NONE					
40. REASON AND AUTHORITY FOR SEPARATION CONVENIENCE OF THE GOVT RRI-1 (DEMOBILIZATION) AR 615-365 15 DEC 44					
41. SERVICE SCHOOLS ATTENDED NONE					42. EDUCATION (Years) Grammar 8 High School 4 College 1

PAY DATA

43. LONGEVITY FOR PAY PURPOSES		44. MUSTERING OUT PAY		45. SOLDIER DEPOSITS	46. TRAVEL PAY	47. TOTAL AMOUNT, NAME OF DISBURSING OFFICER	
YEARS 2	MONTHS 8	DAYS 27	TOTAL \$ 300	THIS PAYMENT \$ 100	NONE	\$ 11.25	\$ 256.33 H L OLDENBURG MAJ FD

INSURANCE NOTICE

IMPORTANT IF PREMIUM IS NOT PAID WHEN DUE OR WITHIN THIRTY-ONE DAYS THEREAFTER, INSURANCE WILL LAPSE. MAKE CHECKS OR MONEY ORDERS PAYABLE TO THE TREASURER OF THE U. S. AND FORWARD TO COLLECTIONS SUBDIVISION, VETERANS ADMINISTRATION, WASHINGTON 25, D. C.							
48. KIND OF INSURANCE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nat. Serv. <input type="checkbox"/> U.S. Govt. <input type="checkbox"/> None	49. HOW PAID <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Allotment <input type="checkbox"/> Direct to V. A.	50. Effective Date of Allotment Discontinuance 31 MAR 46	51. Date of Next Premium Due (One month after 50) 30 APR 46	52. PREMIUM DUE EACH MONTH \$ 6.50	53. INTENTION OF VETERAN TO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue <input type="checkbox"/> Continue Only <input type="checkbox"/> Discontinue		

54.  RIGHT THUMB PRINT	55. REMARKS (This space for completion of above items or entry of other items specified in W. D. Directives) LAPEL BUTTON ISSUED ASR SCORE (2SEP45) 49 TWO (2) OVERSEAS SERVICE BARS INACTIVE SERVICE (ERC) FROM 16 JUN 43 TO 29 JUN 43
	56. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING SEPARATED <i>Vernon E. Miller</i>
57. PERSONNEL OFFICER (Type name, grade and organization - signature) WINIFRED M HEALY 1ST LT WAC <i>Winifred M Healy</i>	

