WORLD WAR II

by

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"YOU'RE IN THE ARMY NOW,
YOU'RE NOT BEHIND THE PLOW."

CITIZEN SOLDIER
WORLD WAR II

The first time I heard Hitler speak was in 1937 on a school day. Several of us, high school students, were gathered around our school superintendent's car radio. It was a small rural school about 10 or 11 miles north of Stephenville, Texas. The superintendent had wanted us to hear this German leader. Perhaps he sensed that we students would be involved in some way, though the problems of Europe seemed far away. Little did we know that, though our own country was then at peace, soon we young people who had scarcely been out of Erath County, Texas, would be in the military service fighting the German war machine and its allies throughout the world.

Some of us would die in distant lands.

THE DAY OF INFAMY

ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR

December 7, 1941. While pulling cotton for a farmer near Matador, Texas, the bad news reached us about the Japanese attack. It was near noon on Sunday when he came out to the fields and told us what he had heard on the radio. Our cotton pulling crew consisted of me and most of the Hunter family who were our neighbors north of Stephenville, Texas. Waylon, Dean, Sy, and Buford were sons of Crecy Hunter. (She would pull over 600 pounds of cotton and go to the shack and cook a hot meal. She pulled more cotton than any of us and cooked our meals. We all kicked in to the "kitty" to buy groceries.) Upon hearing of this dastardly sneak attack we were ready at that very moment to do some shooting.

Again, little did we know that two of us would have that opportunity, one to die and one to be wounded in the Pacific war. Two of us would go to Africa or Europe against Hitler's minions, one to be wounded at Aachen, Germany, the other to fight with the 1st Armored Division against Rommel and the Africa Corps.

I later went to El Centro, California, to work on a Marine air base in the desert. This was the summer of 1942. Dad and I had been working in the construction of an Army base near Gainesville, Texas. At that time I was in the union and working as a carpenter, drawing good wages, about $1.17 an hour. Dad was a guard in the security department.

I had seen a recruiting bulletin at union headquarters seeking workers at El Centro which paid $1.35 an hour for carpenters. I asked Dad if he would want to go, and he said he felt his job would last a good while so he would stick with it. But itchy feet got the better of me, so I loaded my suitcase and tool box on a bus and headed for "Calaforny" all by my lonesome.

Arriving in El Centro, I stepped off the cool air-conditioned bus into the desert temperature of about 130 degrees. Wow! I finally found a drug store where I nearly froze to death. They had their air-conditioner turned up to the top. After cooling down I barged out into the heat and found the union hall on the second floor of a building where a little breeze came through open windows. I signed on to work, paid my dues and wondered how I would get

to the base location out in the desert.

A well dressed young man came into the hall and signed on for the base. I struck up a conversation with him and found that he was from a wealthy family in Kentucky, and he was doing defense work to keep from being drafted. He offered me a ride to the base which I readily accepted. When he showed me what he was driving, my eyes, I know, bugged out like a bull frog's. It was a brand new Lincoln Continental. Most beautiful car I had ever seen! We floated out to the base about 7 miles out of El Centro.

We checked in at headquarters and were assigned to a barracks. Cots were lined up on both sides, and I picked a placed to sleep. Late afternoon we joined the crews when they came in and got in line at the mess hall for supper. The food was excellent. There was a very nominal fee for meals and no charge for the cots.

The boy from Kentucky didn't last long. He just had never done any type of construction work. In about ten days he received his pink slip and went back home. Our crew was building the Administration Building for the base. The concrete foundation had already been poured when I arrived, so we began the framing and decking of the roof. The temperature beat down on us at about 120 degrees. We drank lots of water and ate salt tablets to keep going in such torrid weather. At night we pulled up one or two blankets as the desert got pretty cold before sunrise.

I received my draft notice and showed it to my boss, who was a nice fellow, and he understood my resigning and heading back to Texas. The trip back on a bus was long and tiring. Couldn't rest much because several soldiers and sailors were drinking booze in the back of the bus with several pretty girls. With all their loud talk and laughing no one could rest. It was miserable and made the miles go slowly.

After arriving at Stephenville, I reported to the draft board in the Erath County courthouse where I was set up for an examination in Abilene, Texas. A bus load of boys was sent for the examination in a few days. I failed the physical exam as I had a hernia. I had known about it for some time, and it didn't bother me much. But the medical team turned me down. When I got back home, I went to see Dr. Jim Terrell. After he examined me, I told him that I wanted surgery. I had saved enough money for the operation and told him that. He asked if I planned to go into military service, and I indicated that was my intention. He believed that the Federal Government would pay for the surgery, and so, that is the way it turned out. After surgery, I laid flat on my back for two weeks in the hospital and about three more weeks at home before I began to move around. It was very painful when at last I tried to walk. In fact I was all bent over and taking very small steps.

OFF TO ARMY CAMP

I was called up again in January for another physical exam in Abilene, and in early Spring of 1943, nineteen of us boys met at the bus depot for the ride to Camp Wolters, Mineral Wells, Texas. Dad, my sisters, my girlfriend, and several neighbors and friends came down to see us off. Some had tears in their eyes at the parting, perhaps thinking they might never see us again. Amid much waving and blowing kisses we were soon on our way to the Army base

about 45 miles away.

We were quartered in eight-man tents while we were being processed, more and more papers to fill out and sign. Our first task, after being handed the Army Manual, was to study and memorize the General Orders. I remember struggling with this, hoping to be ready to recite a General Order when called upon by a Non-Com or an Officer. We had to pull guard duty around the tents our first night. I was more afraid of being approached and called on to recite than I was of the dark and, in my mind, kept saying them over and over again.

BOOT CAMP , FORT RILEY, KANSAS

After the processing was over, nineteen of us boarded a train for Fort Riley. We were all Texans, and Fort Riley was noted for being a horse cavalry and mechanized cavalry post. Our imaginations began to run full tilt. No doubt about it, the Army needed us Texans for the horse cavalry. Where else could we Texas cowboys (and drug-store cowboys) better serve the good old U.S. of A. than on a horse.

As the train pulled slowly into Riley, we looked out the train window and saw a group of soldiers in front of stables currying and grooming their sleek, shiny horses. Our hearts leaped in our throats. Our dreams were coming true! We alit from the train, elated at our prospects. After forming ranks we marched off down a street. We passed a large sign which read, "Camp Forsyeth". It was a new addition to Riley consisting of wooden barracks. The old section of Riley was mostly stone buildings built a long time ago. We didn't get the picture even then.

We were met by a cadre of cavalry officers and Non-Coms. They all wore the classy cavalry uniform with the prettiest shiny leather boots we had ever seen. We just knew we would look as sharp when we were issued ours. The girls would go wild when they saw us decked out in those beautiful brown boots. They came nearly up to the knees.

IN THE INFANTRY

As we stood in rank, the Commanding Officer (CO), a 1st Lieutenant, introduced himself and his cadre with a big smile and a warm welcome as if we were long lost brothers. It made us feel good. Things were sure looking up. Then he said something that dashed all our hopes on the rocks and made our hearts stop and knees tremble. "You're in the infantry, and though we're cavalry, we are going to train you for thirteen weeks and make fine soldiers of you." He went on to say the training would be hard. We would learn discipline, take orders, and be shaped into the finest fighting soldiers that the Army ever produced. Well, we were flabbergasted. Somewhere, there had to be a mistake. But the mistake was ours. We grumbled some under our breath among ourselves, but it did no good. It was the infantry.

We finally settled in and found ourselves in a totally different world. Our time was no longer our own. "Do this; do that. Don't do that." We found out that our bodies and minds belonged to the Army, though they did let us keep our souls , at least that is what they told us. Falling out at 4:00

a.m.; high-stepping (knees up to our waists) and double-timing for two miles before sunrise; making beds; cleaning rifles; and double-timing to the mess hall for chow. Calisthenics for an hour; close-order drill; moving at double-time individually or as a unit wherever we went. One chore which galled us was the "G.I. PARTY" most Friday nights. Hot sudsy water was thrown on the floor. Then down on our knees we went with large brushes scrubbing until we were sweat soaked, our knees rubbed raw, our egos insulted, and mad at the world. Soldiers doing house maid work. Bah! We use to say the floor was so clean you could eat on it. We cleaned windows until they shined, damp-rag cleaned everything in sight, got our foot lockers in order, and then started on our gear , rifles cleaned and oiled, bayonets and knives, too. Saturday morning was regular inspection day (how we hated it). Standing at attention at the foot of our beds, which were stretched so tight that a quarter would bounce, we awaited the officer and Non-Coms who would come down the line giving you the evil eye. The officer usually inspected at random, every now and then wiping his white glove along equipment or window sills. If he got the slightest smudge of dirt on that pretty glove, somebody or a whole barracks got gigged. Sometimes, a rare thing, the entire barracks got so many gigs that penalties were assessed on everyone in the barracks. Sometimes this meant redoing the whole cleaning process, floors and all. Sometimes it was KP for individuals or marching up and down with a full field pack (70 - 90 pounds) on the parade ground for several hours, latrine duty, and other unpleasant tasks.

On the Firing Range, we qualified with the M-1 Rifle. It had good fire power, eight cartridges in a clip, 30-30 cal. You could fire eight bullets as fast as you could pull the trigger. The empty clip would automatically drop out. You could slap in a new clip quickly and be ready to fire again in no time. This gun was gas operated. It had a porthole near the end of the barrel through which gas would hit a piston rod, which in turn opened the breech, and then a strong spring would chamber a round of ammo and have the rifle ready to fire again. It was carried by a leather sling. The M-1 didn't have the kick on your shoulder or the accuracy of the Enfield 30-30 Rifle, but it fired faster. This was the weapon I used most in combat.

We qualified on the following: M-1 Garand Rifle, 30-30 Enfield Rifle, Thompson Sub-Machine Gun, Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), 60 m. mortar, 45 cal. pistol, grenades (pineapples), etc. We trained in hand-to-hand combat (judo), knives, and bayonets. The bayonet course was a booger, thrust, parry, rifle butt, slash, jab and feint.

Near the end of basic we attacked a mock Nazi village on a hill. It was a long run up. Firing as we ran at pop-up targets in windows, doors, alleys, stables, roofs, etc., we were all eyes and ears. I advanced with a "Tommy" gun (all of us had live ammunition) and blasted everything in sight. I would take a building and hold it, at the same time laying down a covering fire to the front as the next man caught up to me. Then, he would take the next, and I would join him when he signaled all clear. The boy behind me, a Texan, was holding a house as I entered a stable spraying 45 cal. bullets at targets. I had finished and was waiting for the boy behind to come up. He didn't come. I looked back to see what was happening. A Non-Com was cussing and kicking the boy who was my back-up. I learned that he had fired his "Tommy" gun into the stable while I had been in it. I had not heard his firing as all I could hear was my gun firing at close quarters. That could have been the end of the war for me.

One night we were camped out in two-man pup tents near a small stream. We had to take our turn on a hill at a listening post overlooking our camp about : miles distance. We had been told that a bunch of officers were going to try to infiltrate our lines and capture our camp. We were on pins and needles. My buddy and I lay on our bellies in the weeds and grass, just near enough to the top of the hill to skylight anyone coming over the hill. We had only been in position a short time when it began to rain, a regular Kansas toad floater. Water ran under our bellies and through our slickers in torrents. Our condition was further worsened by mosquitos as big as Jumbo jets who forthwith made a meal of us. You were not allowed to swat the blood suckers as the slap would give away our position to the "enemy". We looked and felt like drowned rats by the time two of our platoon came to relieve us. Going down to our tents we became lost for a time in the darkness but finally found what was left of the camp. The small stream had become a big stream in a short time and had overflowed. Tents and equipment were floating away at a fast pace. We managed, however, to salvage most of it. I lost a canteen and cover to the flood which I was told I would pay for out of my $30.00 per month. That didn't set well with me but. . .

Occasionally, we went on a one day or night pass to Junction City, Kansas, which was only a short bus ride away. Once or twice some of us managed to go to Manhattan, a larger town. Everywhere the people were friendly to us, often buying us a beer or inviting us to a social event. They really tried to make us feel at home.

Several American Indians were in our boot camp. One night three or four of them were in a two-story honky-tonk in Junction City, and a fight broke out. The Indians, and I'm sure others, were drunk as theycould be. One was knocked out a two-story window and crashed on the sidewalk. All the combatants were arrested by MP's and spent several days in jail. When they came back to camp they still showed the effects of the melee, except the soldierwho went out the window. He looked like he'd been on vacation. No bruises, no broken bones. Nothing. Tough fella.

I remember the first time we went through the "infiltration course". We had to crawl on our bellies for several hundred feet through, under, and around barbed wire while machine gun bullets were popping over our heads. Keeping our heads and butts down, we snaked along the ground while carrying our rifles in the hollow of our elbows. Explosives from time to time were set off near us showering us with clods of dirt and blasting our ear drums. In some places we had to turn over to go under wire and thus transferred the rifles to our chests and stomachs. The boy who carelessly fired on me in the Nazi village froze on the course, and an officer had to crawl out to him and make him stay down, eventually getting him out from under the flying bullets. The boy and others who failed the course had to go through again at a later date.

During practice on the firing range another incident occurred with this same boy. That day we were firing 30 m. mortars. Our team, or mortar crew, was down the line some distance away, but we saw the commotion. In a mortar crew we rotated positions upon command. Gunner, loader, etc. Later we heard that when it came time for the boy to be the loader, he fouled up. He got in position, was handed a shell, and rather than sliding it into the barrel and letting go of it, he tried to drop the shell in. Fortunately, one of the fins caught on the lip of the barrel, and the shell was swinging back and forth. An officer behind the line saved them all, he saw the situation and

quickly ran forward, grabbing the shell. Should it have hit the ground, we would have had several funerals.

About the tenth week of basic, we had our regular Saturday morning inspection, and I had worked on my boots (combat, not cavalry) until you could almost have shaved by them. Polishing and brushing had made them shine like a mirror. I noticed our CO say something about my boots to a Sergeant. After inspection we were just sitting around taking it easy, relieved that the inspection was over and it went so well. An orderly came in the barracks and called out, "Johnson, report on the double to the CO." Everyone looked at me. What in the world now! Had I got a gig? On the run to HQ (headquarters) I didn't know what to think. The CO was waiting on me with a big smile on his face. And, a pair of cavalry boots...his own darling boots. "Johnson, you really did a good job on your boots this morning. I'd like you to make these boots shine as bright as yours looked this morning." I stammered a "Thank you, sir." So, I went to the orderly room where the 1st Sgt. handed me rags and polish. The boots no doubt had been sitting in a closet for some time. They were wrinkled and scuffed , in the worst condition I had ever seen. There was no way I could do much with them. Nevertheless, I began. All of this affair puzzled me. I sweated and toiled. About 2:00 p.m., I looked out the orderly room window and saw all my buddies going to get their night passes. They would grin and wave at me. Sort of got to me. There I was, working my tail off because I had the best shined boots in the company, and all my buddies getting some time off. About four o'clock, I said to the 1st Sgt., "That's about all I can do with these boots." "Well, work on them a little longer," he told me. Somewhere about 5:00 p.m. he came over to me. "That will do it," he remarked. The boots still didn't look like much. The CO then came in, took the boots, and said, "They look pretty good. You did a good job." He turned and left. I got ready to leave, and the Sgt. said, "Don't forget your money!" "What money?" I asked. "On the counter." I didn't see him do it, but the CO had left me several dollars as a tip. "Don't forget to thank the CO for the money when you see him next time," so ordered the Sgt. I did thank him later, but I still felt punished for doing a good job on my boots. They passed inspection each time, but I never put the mirror-like shine on them again, except when I was on pass.

One Saturday afternoon we were sitting on our bunks as an officer was lecturing us on some topic. It was boring, and our minds wandered as we looked out the windows every now and then. Suddenly, we saw debris swirling around in the air. "Tornado! Head for the ditches!" We ran out of the barrack and fell in the ditches alongside the street away from the buildings. It rained hard, and we laid in the ditches until we were soaked through. The storm passed through quickly. We were the sorriest looking bunch of soldiers you ever saw. As we returned to the barrack, fragmented lumber, clothes, blankets, etc., were seen scattered about on the ground and on the buildings. The tornado had hit three or four barracks about four blocks from us, and that is what we had seen flying through the air. We were put on guard duty that night around the destroyed barracks to keep out looters and others who might wander into a live electric wire. We learned that four or five soldiers were killed and many others injured. That was my only Kansas tornado to experience, though I was told that they were not unusual for that area.

A hard and fast rule was enforced when we went to the mess hall. We were to sit down, fold our arms, and wait for the 1st Sergeant's order to eat. We

would come in and sit waiting (hungry enough to eat a horse) and not say a word while the 1st Sgt. stood and watched us for infractions of the rules. He seemed to delight in making us wait and catching someone saying something or reaching for a platter of food. When the order to eat was given, it was like the tornado, plates rattling, elbows shoving, shouts of emotions, loud cussing. It was wild! You shoveled in the food like it was going out of style.

One of our cadre was a corporal who thought he was a general. We hated his guts. We would be marching along on troop street or on a hike and he would run up, get in your face, and eat you out just for the heck of it. Every time he'd get in my face I'd look right back at him with a look of contempt. If looks could kill, he would have fallen over dead. But I wasn't the only one. Most everyone else despised him. He sure was bucking for promotion to Sgt.

Several Non-Coms in the cadre were challenged by some of the recruits. One Sgt., so challenged, told the soldier to meet him after dark near a dike behind the camp. We could hardly wait to see the fight. About dusk most of our platoon was at the site. It was a whale of a fight. But it ended a draw. The Non-Coms attending the Sgt. and those who were seconds for the private called it a tie. Both men were muscular and strong as bulls. It was something to see. Several of these fights occurred during boot camp. Though against the rules, the officers looked the other way and ignored the rules.

One of our instructors in bayonet was a 1st Lt. who had fought the Japs in the Pacific. We never did know if he were putting us on or not, but he told us that a Jap bayonet had slashed him just above both his eyes. We could see scars, and his eyelids did droop. He said he didn't want us to end up like him. So, he was going to see we were experts at the bayonet, or he would kill us trying. He put us through the works until our tongues were hanging out and we were so mad, we'd have killed most anybody.

At last the thirteen weeks of basic were over. We boarded a troop train, destination unknown, but East. I remember crossing the Mississippi River, my first view of this mighty river. We were fed tuna fish sandwiches until they came out of our ears. The ash from the locomotive settled all over us, our clothes, eyes, faces, etc. We looked like darkies trundling bales of cotton on the river pier.

That was the only time I ever volunteered for KP. When the call went out for men to work in the baggage car kitchen, several of us eagerly rushed forward. I figured, as others had, that it would be better than tuna fish. It was. We ate what the officers were being served in their own private car. In addition, we had all kinds of free time. We would sit in the open door of the baggage car with our legs dangling, while leaning on a two-by-four across the opening, watching the scenery go by. What beautiful country it was! Often we would look down from the mountains into a green valley and see farm houses (some of them log cabins no doubt) scattered about. It looked so peaceful there with smoke slowly curling into the early morning air from fireplaces. We could just see the families rise from their sleep to greet the new day. It made you want to jump off the train, make the valley your home, and forget the war.

CAMP BUTNER

We arrived at last in Camp Butner near Durham, NC, in early July of 1943 and became attached to an infantry division (some famous World War I fighting unit). Later we learned it was "burned out", overtrained. They had been training full speed for over eighteen months. Ambitious officers were trying to get the division to live up to the glory of its past. We fell right in and began training all over again, marches, infiltration course, bayonet course, bivouac, rifle range, etc.

I can't remember the name of the division. There were more chow hounds in that outfit than I've ever seen. I recall being in the mess hall at supper time when one of these "hounds" got his just desserts. When the order to eat was given, he grabbed a platter, emptied it, and handed it to a soldier sitting next to him who forthwith stood up and slammed the empty platter on top of his head. The broken platter flew everywhere. Several of the Non-Coms came running over to our table to see what was going on. "Oh, someone just dropped a platter," we explained. The bully shaped up after that little incident.

I was on the firing range deep in the piney woods, when a messenger from HQ's came up and called my name. "Johnson, you have a ten day furlough beginning at noon today." It was then 11:30 a.m. I fell off the line, handed my rifle to someone, and jumped into the jeep for the ride back. I broke all records getting my suitcase packed, obtaining my papers, and catching a bus at Durham to head out for good ole Texas. The bus went down through South Carolina, Georgia, the northern tip of Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and then arrived in Stephenville at night. Looking out the bus window, I saw more blacks than I had ever seen in my life. I didn't see as much of the country as I would have liked because of night travel, but I thought, as I passed through Georgia and Alabama, that though my folks, on both sides of my family, had lived there before, during, and after the Civil War and before coming to Texas, they could have it. I'd take Texas anytime.

I enjoyed the leave in and around my home town. My oldest sister, Bennie Sue, was near the time of her first baby. Her husband, Milton Snow, was at that time in the Pacific, U.S. Army signal corps. Another sister, Dolta Jo, was just a teenager and was working at the telephone office in Stephenville. Earline, the third sister, was living in Fort Worth. Dad and little brother, Dwight, were living on a farm north and east of Oakdale. I saw all of them except Earline, I believe.

I arrived back at Butner late in the night of August 28, 1943. Early next morning, Sunday, I was sleeping; tired from the long bus ride. No duty on Sunday, so I had planned to rest up for the grind ahead. The CQ shook me awake to tell me I had a telegram from Louise Tate, Sue's sister-in-law. Sue had a big, bouncing baby boy. Both were doing fine. Name: Howard Eugene Snow. I considered that an honor. A nephew with my name. I was an uncle for the first time.

We loaded, once again, on a troop train going north. We landed in Fort Mead, Maryland, and stayed for a few weeks. While there, several of us visited

Baltimore. It was an interesting old town. Buildings looked ancient though they were solid structures of stone, built to stay.

APO CENTER

I don't think the brass knew what to do with us, two or three hundred G.I.'s just out of boot camp. They kept us on the move like we were some kind of secret weapon they were going to use against the Germans or the Japanese. Either late September 1943 or early October, we were moving again, on a troop train heading north again along the East Coast. From the windows, we saw the pretty Fall scenery. The trees and countryside displayed all the colors of the rainbow. We disembarked at Camp Miles Standish, Taunton, Massachusetts, an APO Center. It was not far from Providence, Rhode Island, where we went on pass a number of times.

Most every day long troop trains would pull in with a load of soldiers or pick up a train load and head out for an unknown destination. So, much of time the camp was a "ghost camp". Empty barracks everywhere. It gave you an eerie feeling. But then next day every barracks would be full to capacity, and things would get lively. We spent our time playing baseball, football, wrestling, exercising, and playing pranks on each other. It finally became monotonous to us. We were ready to move on. We had developed itchy feet.

One day, after a train had come in, I heard there was a unit comprised of Texans. Several of us went looking for them. We found them in an old run down barracks. Four or five of them were sitting around making music. Fiddling, playing guitars, mandolins, banjos, you name it. It was a good string band. We stood around for a long time just listening to the kind of music we had been raised on. Good ole Bob Wills and other foot stomping tunes. It made our day.

One day an order came down to stencil our duffle bags. Rumor had it that the numbers meant the Pacific Theatre of Operations. Well, some of us had wanted to shoot at some of those sneaky devils. Now would be our chance. A few days later we were told to "X" out the numbers and put on a new set. We learned later that this meant we were going over and visit jolly ole England.

While at Standish, several events remain in my mind. "Red" Rich and Poston (both from Nocona, Texas), Hollister (an Irishman from Pennsylvania), sometimes Burtis Jarrell (Oklahoma), Victor Jordan (Kentucky), and I teamed up when we played games and went on pass. All of them good ole boys. One night four of us went to Providence to take in the sights and drink a few beers. I think we also went to a movie. Red, Poston, Hollister, and I were going along the street heading for the bus station to go back to camp. Several high school boys about a half block ahead of us called us some dirty names and the race was on. They separated, and so did we, each taking after one of them, hot on their trails, through alleys, back yards, and lawns. I thought I was in good shape, having been through basic training, but the boy I was chasing was fast as a deer. Finally, out of breath, I gave up the chase and went back where the race had begun. None of my buddies had caught their boys. I found Red talking to an MP Lieutenant. A well dressed black man and several other MP's were standing around them. It seems that Red, while chasing his boy, ran in front of the black man's car and was nearly run over. Red boiled over and called him "a black so-and-so". The black man had

gone to MP HQ's just a block or two away and returned with the force of MP's and confronted Red. By this time Hollister and Poston came back, curious as to the crowd around Red. Red, having had a few beers, saw he might be in serious trouble and told everyone that he liked blacks; in fact, he loved them like brothers and had several black friends in Nocona, Texas, he was mighty fond of. He apologized profusely. Nevertheless, the MP officer had us all hauled down to MP HQ's to decide our fate. We all took up for Red, telling everyone what a swell and harmless fellow he was. After a rather stern lecture by the Lt., reminding us that we were up North, not down South; and all of us answering "Yes, Sir," and "No, Sir," and promising to be good little boys, he allowed us to leave. We caught the bus back to camp under the watchful eye of an MP at the depot. We teased Red unmercifully every chance we'd get after that. Red would see red again and boil over, but we knew how to deal with him from then on.

Poston, from Nocona, was an eighteen year old who had just finished high school. Also, he had married a pretty young girl, his childhood sweetheart. A very likeable young man, fun to be with, though you can imagine where his thoughts and heart were. His wife came to see him a time or two while we were in the States. A very nice young woman.

Victor Jordan was another clown. From Kentucky, square jawed, stocky built and witty. He kept us in good spirits. His grandfather was an old-time circuit riding Methodist preacher, and from Jordan's way of speaking about him, I sensed he had a good and lasting influence on Jordan. He could almost to a "T" look like Mussolini. Strutting around with his chest and jaw stuck out, waving his arms, and saying how his mighty Roman legions had conquered the stick wielding, rock throwing Ethiopians. We nick named him, "Moosy", what else?

Burtis J. Jarrell was from Oklahoma. A married man, with children, a constant smile, and mischievous blue eyes. He had pretty girls following him around like kids after candy. At one time he had been a boxer in carnivals and was still very good. He, Jordan, and I were together some in the States but more so in England. Jarrell was pleasant and helpful in many ways, he having more experience of life and being older than any of us. Jordan, Jarrell, and I were in the same battalion, but, due to the earlier separation on the docks at Liverpool, different companies. We didn't get together as much as we would have liked. Several years later, after the war was over, Jarrell came to visit me, but I was living in Mullin, Texas, at that time. He left me his address, and I sent him a letter giving my address but never heard a word. He was in San Antonio. What his line of work was, I never knew.

Standish was an APO Center, a center for troops shipping out overseas. While there I got acquainted with a number of boys from all over the United States. One boy, Jackson, a big country kid from Iowa, was a nice friendly sort. He was a Quaker. We asked him several times why in the world he was in a fighting unit like the infantry. He'd always say he was drafted, and thus, had no objection to serve where his country needed him. No conscientious objector was he. A small tough kid, Hampton, upon learning Jackson was a Quaker began to ride him every chance he'd get. Those of us who liked Jackson didn't approve of his harassment. Though Hampton was small, he was physically strong as an ox. One day when Jackson was away from the barracks from some reason, Hampton seined a small creek near our camp and caught a big

bucket of minnows, frogs, tadpoles, etc. He pulled back Jackson's blanket and sheet on his bunk and dumped the contents. He then made up the bed neatly. Jackson came in about "lights-out" time, undressed, and slid down between the sheets with the fish, frogs, etc. You could hear his gasp all over the building. He yelled so loud, they may have heard him in Iowa. An acting Sgt., a former New York cop (more about him later), who was in charge of the barrack, flipped on the lights, disturbing our slumber even more. Of course, Jackson knew who the culprit was and proceeded to whip the daylights out of Hampton. He was a mad Quaker. He'd had enough of Hampton, and you couldn't blame him. It was a hum-dinger of a fight. You'd have thought Jackson could have wiped up the floor with the little man, as he outweighed him by 50 pounds, but he didn't. It ended in a draw. Both of them bloody, bruised and out of gas, they called it a day (or night). Hampton did ease up some on his harassment as he found out Jackson, the Quaker boy, would fight.

The ex-New York policeman who I mentioned briefly was disliked by all of us. He was acting Sgt. and slept at the front of the barracks near the master switch for the lights. He had arbitrarily made the rule that all lights were to be out at 10:00 p.m. each night. If they were not, he'd cut them off at the master switch. We sure did not like this rule because it made it hard to find your bunk in the dark after being out on the town. The ex-cop was a big man with a bigger mouth and carried himself with authority.
Red, Rich, Hollister, Poston, and I had been to Providence again, and after entering the dark barrack, we were stumbling, cussing, and fumbling around in the wee hours of the morning trying to find our cots. Swearing like an Irishman, which he was of the highest fighting order, Hollister said, "I'm going to kick that SOB's big butt for turning out the lights." So, up the isle he teetered, fuming and raging like a mad dog. The rest of us seconded his motion, but we continued to seek our bunks. Unknown to us, two soldiers, who slept across the aisle from us, had come in about the same time as we. They had been in town getting "beer-ed up," and, like us, had come in late and were trying to feel themselves into bed. One decided he was going up front and get that big SOB policeman. He stumbled up the aisle, foaming at the mouth. In the dark, he and Hollister bumped into each other. Each, thinking the other was the Sgt., lit into the other, and the dangdest fight you ever heard began. Cussing and threatening, they wrestled across bunks and sleeping men, each trying his best to kill the other with his bare hands. The barracks was in turmoil, everyone half-drunk, half-asleep, and fully peeved. The Sgt. threw the master switch and on came the lights. He had sense enough not to come back where the fighting was going on or near us, for most everyone was calling him "pet" names. Red and I finally pulled Hollister and the other soliderapart. Everything at last quieted down. We went to bed and dreamed peacefully the rest of the night.

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Several of us volunteered for shore duty in Boston Harbor when the duty was announced. It helped to break the monotony. There we were, billeted in a first class hotel. This was living high on the hog. Plus nice rooms, we ate in the hotel dining room where we were served excellent food. We also had time off for recreation and fun. We unloaded Army and Navy trucks on the pier and had plenty of time for rest between truck convoys. It lasted about ten days. Though it was hard work at times, it was interesting, and the environment was different. So, it was back to Camp Miles Standish.

Each morning, we always made it a point to go by the bulletin board at HQ's to see if our names were on the shipping out list. Poston's name appeared one day, so this broke up our foursome, which made us sad. We helped him pack his gear, not talking much as we usually did, and the next day saw him off at the train. Just before getting on the train, he joked in his happy-go-lucky way, "You all won't have to go over there. I'll have all those Germans whipped before you get there, and the war will be over." Later we learned he was killed on his first day in combat serving with the 28th Infantry Division (Pennsylvania Division). We were over there by that time in France with the "Big Red One", 1st Infantry Division.

One morning most of my buddies' and my name were on the bulletin board list. So, next day we packed up and loaded on a long troop train heading north again. It was November 1, 1943. We were tired for lack of sleep because the U.S.O. had sponsored a Halloween Dance the night before and it was late in the morning when we hit the sack. We did have a good time dancing the night away with all those pretty Massachusetts girls. They knew we were going overseas, so they were extra nice to us. The train rails ran alongside the Atlantic Ocean, and we enjoyed the Fall scenery which was beautiful that time of year. The sun came up as we moved North, and the ocean was almost dark red from its rays.

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA

We arrived in Halifax on the night of November 1, disembarked, and loaded on a large ship at a pier. It was cold and wet as we got aboard and settled in where it was warm and dry. The "Martinique" was a Canadian ship manned by British sailors (limeys). It was our first encounter with the British, and they were nice enough, but their accent just killed us. It wasn't long until several of us began to mimic them. Several of us were pretty good at it, and we'd talk to each other just like the limeys, that is, until some serious minded "bloke" told us to shut up and stop the tom-foolery.

We thought we were going over in a convoy of ships. We found out that it would be a solo trip. This didn't set well with us soldier boys. We'd heard a lot about what the German U-Boats were doing in the Atlantic, so we couldn't understand this solo thing. Later we learned that the "Martinique" was one of the fastest big ships on the seas, but we didn't know that then. We just knew that there were packs of U-Boats out there waiting to sink us.

"Moosy" Jordan and I discovered a life-saver storage bin and made it our bed for the ride over. Most had to sleep in hammocks that swayed back and forth. Our bin was like being on a mattress at home. The only thing that worried us was that the bin was next to the hull of the ship. We could reach out and feel the cold condensation from the water outside it. There was just a thin plate of metal between us and a lot of sea water. We were well below the water line, and this added to our anxiety.

After getting squared away several decks down, we noticed a permeating odor coming from the ship's galley. They were cooking mutton stew. Coupled with the motion of the ship, this began to have a debilitating effect upon us. Nausea set in almost immediately upon sailing. Sure enough when chow time came, it was mutton stew, bread, marmalade and hot tea. No coffee! We had never been without it in our mess halls. Hardly anyone ate much of this

stuff which the British called food. They must have cast-iron stomachs. It wasn't long until many of the boys were up-chucking in the latrine. Some didn't make it that far. Between the smell of vomit and British food, the hold was a miserable place. It was strange; I never did up-chuck, just felt bad nearly all the way over. I might have felt better if I had. My head did ache like the devil was twisting an iron band around it. There was some relief every now and then as our unit was allowed to go on top deck for fresh air and exercise drills. This helped our feelings considerably. One day, while on top deck, we saw British sailors scurrying about. Soon a cannon fired out over the sea. Of course we thought the worst, they were shooting at a U-Boat. Inquisitive G.I.'s were told they were only practicing, shooting at a wooden crate they had dropped overboard. We thought them very foolish. No doubt that U-Boats had heard the noise of the cannon for hundreds of miles around. The less noise, the better for our safety's sake.

The "Martinique" zigged and zagged all the way across the North Atlantic. This was the only evasive maneuver of which we were aware. However, the ship may have had sonar or some other evasive device. We were never told. Life drills were held now and then. We would grab our life jackets and rush to our spot on top deck, just hoping this would never have to be for real.

We made the voyage in six days and nights, arriving in Liverpool Harbor, in England, and dropping anchor. We were told there would be several days before we would disembark, so we waited and were bored. At anchor we spent more time in the fresh top side and got away from the fetid air in the lower decks.

One night we heard the motors start, and we began to slowly move into port. We lined up on the pier loaded with gear and waited. A sergeant came down the line counting heads. He would count to ten and say, "Drop out," and then start counting again. We got the drift. They were splitting us into groups of ten. Some of us didn't want to be separated, so we began to shift around in the dark. Ten of us lined up very quickly, one after the other in single file. And wouldn't you know it, the Sgt.'s count split us down the middle. Anyway, five of us would be together.

We loaded on an English train and pulled out in the night, destination unknown. The next day we arrived at a camp near Coventry, England. This town had really been bombed by the Germans. We were assigned to nice brick two-story barracks. While here, for most of the time, we pulled KP in a huge mess hall. Everything, almost, was automated. Vast dishwashing machines, large stainless steel vats, conveying steel roller belts, even machines for peeling potatoes, had been installed. We'd never seen anything like it. There were many fights among those who lined up for chow. The lines were very long and chow-hounds would try to "buck the line". Then the fists would fly, plus some choice words exchanged. The camp was full of American soldiers. It was a replacement depot; the men were to be scattered out among divisions and units that needed replacements. One good thing, when we went off duty at night, we would grab a couple of one gallon cans of peaches, pears, apricots, and other fruit and take them to our barracks where we shared them with our buddies. The fruit helped us get the mutton stew and marmalade out of our system. So, we justified our thievery in this way.

I don't remember how long we were at Coventry, several weeks I believe. Our next move was to Dorchester, a town in southern England. A colonel welcomed us to the First Infantry Division (The Big Red 1) as we stood in formation

and told us the Big Red One was always the first division to go fight in all the wars and the last to leave. This wasn't encouraging. The First had just arrived from the Battle of Sicily and had also been in the African Campaign. It was a Regular Army Division and had many Non-Coms and officers who were career soldiers.

My five buddies and I were again split up, going to various Infantry Companies. I was assigned to 3rd squad, 2nd Platoon, Co. L, of the 3rd Battalion, 18th Regiment. The rest were scattered through the Battalion, wherever needed. The First Division had lost many men in Africa and Sicily. We were billeted in English barracks about 100 ft. x 30 ft. with a foyer at the front. Our mattresses were straw filled, and bunks were double-decked. After being here a few days, the First Sgt. came to me and asked me to follow him. "Now what?" I thought. At Company HQ's he told me my records showed I could type. (I could, but I was no Speedy Gonzales.) He put me in charge of company records. One good thing about the job, I didn't have to pull guard duty or KP. That was O.K. My job, however, lasted only a few weeks. A college graduate usurped me, and I was back to the 2nd Platoon, just a rifleman, classification, 795. I really didn't care. There was too much brass coming and going around HQ's, and they made me uncomfortable. I don't remember my Platoon Sergeant's name, but he was a nice fellow, older than most of us, about 40 years old, and originally from Canada. He was regular Army. He'd been in the service for years. You could see by his and the other regulars' conduct and demeanor that they were different. They exuded confidence and knew how the military operated.

The 2nd Platoon Leader, Lt. Thompson, had come up through the ranks. He had what was called a "field commission". He received his gold bars in Africa or Sicily and his silver bars soon thereafter. He had not gone to OCS (Officers Candidate School) as had most officers. The 2nd Lts. were called "90 Day Wonders", meaning that it was a wonder they ever got through the school or they were so wonderful in that they knew it all. Most were so green, they didn't know anything.

On the other hand, 1st Lt. Thompson was very competent and knew the score, having been in a number of battles on the front line. He had a lantern jaw, was ruggedly built, and just looked mean as the devil. We new men were scared to death of him. I remember being on guard duty alone one night at a gate not far from the mess hall when Lt. Thompson was OD (Officer of the Day). We had been told by some of the older men that he would sometimes try to slip up on you and grab you. All of us on guard were as nervous as cats on a hot stove because of this. We were like a bunch of bug-eyed owls swiveling our necks around. About dusk, I saw someone coming up the road toward me, and I recognized Lt. Thompson. As he came closer, I called, "Halt! Who goes there?" He didn't say a word, just kept coming. He stopped in front of me, and I was trembling like a leaf with my rifle held at port arms. I didn't know what to do. "Johnson, what is your serial number?" he asked gruffly. "38372663," I stammered. He grinned like a "possum in a 'cimmon tree", did an about face, and quickly walked away. I felt ready to collapse but sighed deeply in relief as I saw him going toward another guard post. Nevertheless, I was fine tuned as could be to every sound of the night. Another time, on guard duty at a different gate, I was miserable as I stood shivering in the coldest rain I had ever known. I had on a G.I. issue raincoat. The word "rain" was a misnomer as the coat shed no water at all. I had my rifle muzzle down with its strap over my shoulder. Cold water poured down my back and on down to the crack of my butt. I was soaked

completely through by the time my relief came. Lt. Thompson wasn't OD that night, which was some help. We pulled 2 on, 4 off (2 hours on guard and 4 hours off). I was really glad when that night was over, as were the other boys.

A few weeks before D-Day, our Battalion was marched to a castle in Dorchester early one morning to be reviewed by General "Monty" Montgomery. This was at his request. We stood in formation in the castle's cobblestoned courtyard, almost as large as a football field, waiting for him to appear. Our patience was almost at an end when he finally arrived in a command car. He stood on the back of the car to address us and asked us to break ranks and gather around the vehicle. The First Division had served under his command in Africa. He also asked us to remove our helmets so he could see our individual faces. We looked too much alike with them on, he explained. He encouraged us with many fine words and told us in typically British style that victory would be ours in the coming invasion. We had always heard of Rommel being "The Desert Fox". And he was indeed, no doubt, a sly one, but "Monty" fit the bill in appearance. He was a small man with thin fox-like facial features with little red eyes peering from under a black beret set jauntily on his head. He carried a small riding crop in his hand which he slapped against his leg from time to time to emphasize a point of importance or passion. He wore a field uniform, and you could have shaved with the crease in his trousers. His chest stuck out like a banty rooster, and he stood straight as a ramrod. There was total military authority exuding from every pore of his body.

THE JOUSTING WORKOUT

One morning our platoon marched to a large stone building in Dorchester. Upon arriving, we discovered it was a British gym. There were mats on the floor, and poles about five or six feet long with padded ends were stacked alongside a wall. Lt. Thompson was leading us that day. He grabbed a pole and began to call out names. When our names were called, we lined up in single file. He was going to play the jolly-good jousting game with us,one at a time. Every man ahead of me was quickly knocked to the floor. By the time my turn came, I was mad clear through. "Who does he think he is?" I was thinking. Someone handed me a pole, and the Lt. beckoned me toward him, daring me to hit him. "I'm going to knock his ugly head off." I was so irked. I swung and missed. He laughed. I swung again and hit him on the shoulder. That stirred him up like a hornet's nest. He came charging at me. I danced away. Just when I thought I was at a safe distance, the end of his pole cracked me on the head, and down I went. I came back up, rushing him, swinging that pole like a windmill. Which was a mistake. He laid me out two or three more times and then called for the next man in line. I'll never forget that hard earned lesson in jousting.

TWO BUDDIES

Two veterans of Africa and Sicily (White and Vigue) slept in a double decked bunk bed near me in the barracks. Both were fine men. They had been good buddies for years in the regular Army. One night, White, having visited every pub in Dorchester, staggered into the barracks about one o'clock in the morning. He quietly climbed into the top bunk and went to sleep. Somewhere

around 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. all of us were rudely awakened by Vigue cussing and threatening White. The lights were switched on and we saw Vigue ranting, walking around, and wiping his wet eyes and face. White later told us he dreamed he was in a latrine, so he let go and relieved his bladder of a gallon or two of English ale. Of course, this began to seep through his straw mattress down on Vigue who was asleep in the bottom bunk. Vigue woke up and first thought he was sleeping outside in the rain. What a mess! He was dancing around, wiping his face, and watching the drops still falling on his formerly clean and neat bed. White was sitting up; his blood-shot eyes staring around, his white hair sticking straight up. He couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. We laughed until we were weak. Vigue got over it in a few weeks and forgave his buddy, but their relationship was cool for awhile. Poor White! He was killed on the beach at Normandy. Vigue was a little Frenchman from Maine. He would often tell us boys from Texas and other states, when we got to bragging about how good the hunting was in our states, to come up to Maine if we wanted to see some real hunting country. His family were pioneers in Maine, and generation after generation had made their home there. Vigue was later wounded in France and sent home to his beloved Maine, where no doubt he was hunting the game he loved to hunt rather than human beings. He wrote us once or twice while we were in France, telling us he was O.K. and a civilian again.

A NIGHT OF CHAOS

One night we went out on what was called a "night problem". Our platoons were carried in trucks ten or twelve miles out on some British country road and unloaded. Each Platoon Officer was to rendezvous his troops at a certain hill by daylight of the next day. We had maps of the area and compasses. It was pitch dark, and we wandered around most of the night, trying to figure out where we were by compass. A flashlight was used to read the maps and compass under a field jacket so the assumed enemy wouldn't see the light. Near daybreak, we came on a barn by a road and lay around trying to get our bearing. When we could see a little distance, we saw we had only missed our rendezvous hill by a mile and a half, so we hurried to the hill where our CO and staff were waiting. We were told to dig in. We dug foxholes overlooking a road and waited. The Battalion Commander arrived and looked things over. Two platoons had found the hill, but one was missing. "Who's the Platoon Leader of the missing platoon," he asked our CO. "Lt. __________", was the answer. (I can't remember the Lt.'s name.) The Bat. CO was a big man, a Major. "I might have known," he said.

The Lt. in question had come from the Army Finance Office and was put in charge of a platoon. He was tall and skinny with a white face which had not seen much sun. When we would stand Company Formation, he would stand in front of his platoon facing us. The Quartermaster had issued him pants that were too big and were baggy. His field jacket was too large for his skinny frame and the sleeves so long you couldn't see his hands. His helmet was so big it looked like a coconut sitting on a broom stick. When he called his platoon to attention he sounded like a shrill-voiced woman. "'Ten-shun," he trilled as loudly as he could, standing on his toes. It was a sight that caused much pain as we wanted to belly-laugh but couldn't or be in trouble.

Back to the hill. We waited and waited. The Major got madder and madder. His face turned red. "Where is that so-and-so?" he'd ask anybody who was listening. Our CO was getting mighty nervous. He was responsible for that

officer and the lost platoon. He was wearing a rut out in the ground as he paced back and forth on the hill while watching and praying that the platoon would soon appear. About ten o'clock we heard something coming down the road. In a few minutes the Lt. appeared and then the platoon. With his field jacket drooping and his pants bagging, he looked like a scarecrow on the loose. The Major bellowed like a bull, "Get your asses up here in position." The Lt. started running around the platoon like an old woman shooing chickens up the hill. I was about ten paces away, when the Lt. ran up and saluted the Major. I have never heard such an eating out. He was dismissed, and the Platoon Sgt. reported. He was a combat veteran. He admitted that he purposely lost the platoon because of his and the platoon's dislike for the Lt. He got an eating out, too, but the Major understood the situation. The Lt. was transferred back to a desk somewhere.
We often got passes to go into the town of Dorchester. Several of us received three day passes to visit Bath and later Southhampton. Most of us spent our time in the pubs of Dorchester. Some of us roamed the country in the area, just looking at the scenery and visiting with the farmers in the country. We'd find a pub at a cross roads or road intersection where the farmers congregated and chat with them. Most of them were friendly, and we met several "characters". Some of them were so comical, they kept us amused. Just people being people. You saw what you got, usually. They would come in from the fields with horse drawn wagons loaded with hay, clipping their words a mile a minute, smiling from ear to ear, anticipating the pint of ale awaiting them. Hot, sweaty, and thirsty men. Jolly and fun-filled, yet hard working blokes.

In one pub in Dorchester was an old bartender we liked. He was ex-British Navy and told us Yanks sea stories by the hour. He was good at it and kept us well entertained. He had a gimpy leg and hobbled about behind the bar. Every now and then we noticed he would put his hand under the bar, bring his pinched fingers up to his nose, and sniff something into each nostril. We finally learned he kept an open tin of snuff under the counter. He was so quick at it, you'd have to be looking directly at him to catch him. Most of us had never seen snuff used that way. Dip it, yes. Sniff it, no. But after all, sniffing was the original way of using snuff. The gentlemen of earlier English times had their gold or silver snuff boxes from which they sniffed their snuff.

We drank barrels of ale and played darts in the pubs. You had to take your turn at the dart boards. Often there were too many British at the dart boards, and we didn't get a chance to play. Occasionally, they would invite us to join them. I think they did this partly to show us Yanks up. They were experts at the game. My how they would laugh when they beat our tails! They would order a pint of ale or stout and make it last all evening. We Yanks would drink a barrel of the stuff and cry for more. Next day, we suffered for it with logger heads and hangovers.

A MOST UNNECESSARY AFFAIR

One of the most ridiculous things happened one night in a Dorchester diner. The black-out was in effect, so the diner had a heavy curtain just inside the front door. We entered, stood in line, as usual, and received our plates through a service window. England was filling up with all sorts of American military units, getting ready for the invasion of France. An artillery unit had moved in near Dorchester and was often in town. The only difference I could see between our unit and them was they had red braid on their caps and we had blue, and of course, different shoulder patches. Several red braids were in line behind us in the chow line that night, but I didn't pay any particular attention to them. With our plates full, we moved to a spot in the dining room opposite a fireplace. There were about ten of us blue braids at two tables pulled together. I was giving my attention to the hot food before me but glanced up when eight or ten of the artillery boys came in and sat at two tables near the fireplace. I had taken about two bites when Ford, a young boy from New York, jumped up, darted across to the red-braids, and knocked one of them out of his chair. Well, the fat was in the fire. Fists began to fly, dishes began to crack, and all that good food ended up on the floor. I backed into a corner and fought a red-braid to a fare-the-well, a stand off. Finally, it was over. So back to the chow line we went to get more food again and pay again. We had no more than sat down to try to eat once more when a little Italian blue-braid jumped up on our table, ran across our plates, and launched himself through the air at a red-braid near the fireplace hearth. One of his buddies was wiping blood from his busted nose, suffered in the first bout. He was using a wet towel that a woman had brought him from the kitchen, and they were minding their own business as far as I could see. The war began anew. Twenty or more brawling men in a small room is something to see. It was over in about ten minutes. I, as well as several others, were disgusted with the whole affair. I told Ford, who was one of my best buddies, that I wasn't going anywhere with him again. Yet, I did, only after admonishing him each time about the senselessness of fighting and wasting good food. He promised to act half civilized, and he'd only fight when attacked. I refused to go with any group that included the little Italian who started the second go-around. He was crazy as a bed bug in the bed springs.

A side note about my buddy, Ford, I really liked the little devil. At least you could reason with him a little. He was a tough rascal in a fight. He was the jeep driver for our CO (Company Commander). When we got into France I saw him a few times, but we didn't get to talk much as the CO was on the move a lot. I was told that he was shot by a sniper as he and the CO were going along in the jeep. A bullet went through the fleshy part of his leg. He refused to go to the medics or hospital. Bandaging his own leg after sprinkling sulfa-drugs on the wound, he continued to drive for the CO without a break. Sounded about like what he would do. He was tough.

We loaded into trucks one day, the entire company, and drove west. Liverpool was our destination. There we sashayed around in the sand dunes and hills. We practiced taking pill-boxes, shot the bazooka at old Army tanks, and did other attack training. It was here I learned to shoot my first bazooka (stove-pipe). We took turns on it blasting away at old tanks. I didn't have any sense; I thought you were supposed to do your best at anything you did, so I did well with it and made one of the higher scores. I learned later, most of the boys didn't try to hit anything. You can guess what happened. I was told to turn in my rifle and ammo, and they honored me by issuing me a brand new stove-pipe. This was to be my one and only weapon when we hit the beach at Normandy. I asked the Lt. to find me a Colt .45 pistol so I

wouldn't feel so naked. He said that he'd tried but couldn't find one anywhere. That pissed me off. However, there was nothing I could do. I was stuck with the bazooka.

KLEINDINST

Before going to Liverpool, a new bunch of replacements from the States joined us. We found them to be fine boys. Though green, they fell right in and did their part. There was one exception. This boy turned out to be a pain in the butt for all of us. He came from the streets of Philadelphia. There, or so he bragged, he was the top thief and mugger in town, stealing anything he could get his hands on. To hear him tell it, he had been a thief from the time he had been a button. He bragged, too, about how he had outsmarted the cops and how dumb they were. But if they were so dumb, how come he was arrested so many times, we'd ask him, when he'd brag about being in jail so much. The last time he was caught, he was told he faced a long prison term. The judge gave him a choice: prison or the Army. Of course he chose the latter, and our company inherited him. All of us got mighty tired hearing his bull, but our Pl. Sgt. really took a strong dislike to him. He gave him all kinds of extra duty because of his big mouth. The extra duty we called, "the shit detail". He was at the top of the Sgt.'s "shit list". The boy's name was Kleindinst (an unusual name).

One morning Kleindinst turned up AWOL. I guess he'd had enough "shit detail". Our Sgt. was furious. Kleindinst had been gone several weeks when our CO, Captain Fitch, was in Dorchester one day, not a mile from our post. He was walking down the sidewalk when he met an enlisted man who saluted smartly and said, "Good morning, Capt. Fitch." Kleindinst and the CO continued up the street a few steps. Capt. Fitch thought, "Do I know that man?" Then it hit him. It was the AWOL Kleindinst. He turned around and began running after Kleindinst; Kleindinst outran him, and the Capt. lost him. Finally, giving up, he started back toward his jeep. Walking along a yard hedgerow, he looked up, and there was Kleindinst, peering over the hedge at the Capt. with a grin from ear to ear. The Capt. said they were eyeball to eyeball. There was only one thing separating them, a two-foot hedge. The CO had been mad before but Kleindinst's grin set him ablaze, and he lunged into the hedge. The race was on again. The Capt. came out of the hedge with scratches all over and his nice uniform in tatters. Kleindinst, however, gave him the slip again and disappeared into the back yard and alleys of the English town.

We saw Capt. Fitch when he returned to camp. He looked like he had tangled with a grizzly bear. When he came to our platoon area to tell us about the incident, he was the maddest man I've ever seen. He emphasized all he was going to do to Kleindinst when he caught him. Well, he was a disgrace to our platoon, and it made us mad, too. The Capt. sent some of us out on street patrol for several days, looking for Kleindinst, but we had no luck. He was holed up somewhere, we figured.

A few weeks later, the CO got a tip that Kleindinst was living in a certain English house in Dorchester with a woman. I was one of six enlisted men who were handed carbines and told we were going after that SOB. We loaded into two or three jeeps and took off. The Capt. put me off on a street that commanded a good view of the alleged house. I was told not to take my eyes off the front door of that house, and if Kleindinst came out, order him to

halt. If he did not, I was to forthwith shoot him dead. The Capt. stationed three more men around the back and sides of the house and moved in. I had a grandstand seat on the whole thing. I was distracted for a minute or two because an old English woman came out of a house near me and said, "I bet you're looking for that Yank." "Yes, ma'am, we sure are." "Well, 'es down there awlright," she stated.

The Capt. sent Leonard, a tough but good kid from Scranton, Pennsylvania, and another boy into the house to find Kleindinst. They flushed out a middle-aged woman and a pretty teenage girl who came out in the front courtyard. I could see the Capt. talking to them. Leonard later told, "We searched downstairs and found zilch. Upstairs we searched closets, a bathroom, under a bed, wherever someone could hide. I even poked my rifle under the bed as far back as it would go. Nothing!" They were on their way down the stairs when Leonard pulled up. Looking under the bed, he'd noticed the corner was darker than other areas; so he motioned to his buddy, and back up the stairs and to the bedroom they went. They both got hands on the bed and quickly jerked it from the wall. There was Kleindinst grinning up at them like a "possum in a 'cimmon tree". It was all a big funny game to him.
From my hillside view, I saw Kleindinst emerge from the front door with his shoes in his hand, clad only in his G.I. shorts, with a big grin for everybody. Capt. Fitch, however, wasn't laughing. He was still madder than a wet hen, thinking, no doubt, about all those scratches and the nice uniform he'd once had, in tatters now. He would not allow Kleindinst to put on his clothes or shoes. Kleindinst was handcuffed, chained around the ankles, and hauled into a jeep. He wasn't going anywhere, except to the guardhouse under tight security. Later we would pass the guardhouse every day on our way to the mess hall. Kleindinst was always at the barred window, looking out and talking friendly-like to us. Sometimes he'd call out to us to bring him some cigarettes, chocolate, etc., but we never did. We'd have been in serious trouble if we had.

He escaped after several weeks. It happened this way. The prisoners were made to work around the company area, digging ditches, picking up trash, placing rocks around the HQ's building's walks and flower beds. Two armed guards watched alertly from a safe distance. The guards were from our own Company L. One day Kleindinst asked to go to the latrine. A guard escorted him to the door and waited outside. He waited and waited. Finally, it soaked into his mind that something was amiss. He opened the door to an empty room. Kleindinst had climbed over an interior wall, into the shower stalls, and out the other side of the building. At the back of our camp the net fence was loose at the bottom. This was behind one of the barracks, and once through the gap, it was clear sailing down a railroad embankment. This was the place where he scooted to his freedom. Whether it was a part of the military law or rules or something the brass thought up to keep us on our toes, I don't know, but we were told that if a prisoner escaped while we were guarding him, we would have to serve out his sentence. This did keep us alert, bright eyed, and nervous. I am sure a guard would have been charged with dereliction of duty and courtmartialed for letting a prisoner escape. I do not know what happened in the above case.

Sometime later our battalion was sent to Southhampton on the East coast to relieve another unit. While there, we pulled guard duty, but it was boring, just staring out over the English Channel. Someone had a really first class accordion, and I played it now and then. I wasn't very good on it and practiced on it mostly on rainy days, as we couldn't get out much. We were

quartered in metal quonset huts which had concrete floors. The acoustics were unusually loud. A buddy, Thompson, from Montana, complained to me one day about the accordion driving him nuts. I didn't realize how it had been affecting the men in the barracks; no one else had said anything. Some had even said how much they liked the tunes. However, I stopped playing. I could see Montana's point. He told me he didn't like accordion music anyway, plus the fact the metal building caused the sound to increase in decibels.

We obtained passes occasionally and would go into Southhampton for a little time off. Several of the boys from our unit were walking along the streets one night and spotted Kleindinst nonchalantly roaming the town. They reported to the MP's, and sometime that night, Kleindinst was caught by them in Southhampton. He was put under guard in our hut in chains, and it fell our lot to guard him night and day. In a few days, we returned to Dorchester and were put under security quarantine in preparation for D-Day. In addition to the other inconveniences we endured, our platoon had to guard Kleindinst who was chained to his bed in our barracks. This continued until we got on a boat headed for Normandy. I remember it galled us to have this extra duty when we could have been doing something worthwhile. During the quarantine, the brass had emphasized there would be no passes. They didn't want us to go into town, and perhaps while "in our cups," blab about our destination, invasion of Normandy. However, some of us did slip out at night, at the same spot Kleindinst had escaped. We slid under the net fence, down the railroad embankment, then followed the railroad into Dorchester. We'd drink a few pints in about an hour and return to camp under the fence again.

We had been given a short briefing as to our military objective in France, but now the briefing began in earnest, and in more detail. I remember looking at reconnaissance pictures, blown up, and we could see the Normandy beach that we would hit on D-Day. One picture showed, in detail, a German soldier with a horse and plow, planting mines in the sand. To see all of that, and knowing we would have to go through those mines, made our butts tighten up until I don't think you could have driven in a ten-penny nail.

During the quarantine, British soldiers (Tommies) patrolled the outside of our camp fence and our own MP's the inside of the fence. Should we have been caught in our forbidden visits to the pubs, we would have been in serious trouble. But, we got away with it, and none of us, so far as we knew, got loose-mouthed about military secrets. It was common knowledge among civilians, military, and even the Germans that we were going to invade France. Where the strike would be made was another matter. I'm sure German spies in England did their best to find out all they could. We later learned that our military intelligence used a great deal of deception which kept the Germans guessing, and at the same time, saved many of our lives.

STRING BAND

I do have to note that, while at Dorchester, we formed a small string band composed of boys in our company. Luzier, a little boy of French descent, from New York, played a good fiddle. He had an extensive repertoire of all the popular tunes. A little Pole (name forgotten) was a master with the accordion, and could he play polkas! Someone every now and then would go along and play the piano, if there was one available. I played rhythm guitar. We made some good dance music, if I do say so. Who arranged our schedule? I'm not sure. I think it was Sgt. Chandler, a likable fellow from

Georgia, because he was along most of the time.

We called him, "Knothead". Someone had given him the funny name several years before. He had been to town one night and got in a bar room brawl; the MP's used billy clubs on him when he resisted and put knots on his head. He was brought back to camp in bad shape. He had the habit then, though he had matured some since, of drinking the keg dry and fighting till the cows came home. He was a quiet fellow but had settled down to a steady, reliable Non-Com. He was likable and fair in all his dealings with his men.

Our band played for dances in a number of places. The English civilians and soldiers asked for return engagements a number of times. They were friendly and seemed appreciative of our efforts, and of course, supplied us with an abundance of food and drink. Luzier couldn't really get the fiddle hot until he'd had at least three drinks. Then, he'd burn that fiddle up. The little Pole was an excellent musician and could make you want to move your feet. We enjoyed playing, and, of course, all the attention we were getting. It made us feel important, not just another foot soldier.

We played for a dance in Wales one night. It was a long ride in a small Army truck. We left camp about the middle of the afternoon and arrived at our destination about dark. We passed through a number of towns and villages and were amused at their names. They were the longest and strangest names we had ever seen. We couldn't even begin to pronounce them. Wales was like an entirely different world in comparison with the part of England we knew. However, the people were very friendly and received us warmly. Most of the people had already gathered in the huge auditorium and were the largest crowd we'd ever had. They applauded after every tune or song. It was a joy to meet and talk with the people during our breaks. Many of them had odd names which we didn't even try to pronounce.

Our Company Commander, Capt. Fitch, engaged us to play for the 3rd Battalion dance, which event was held two or three times a year, if possible. A hall in Dorchester was rented in the downtown area, and several of us got cracking on decorating it up nicely and getting it clean and in good shape. Capt. Fitch fell in helping us and getting the logistics correct, which included inviting various military units, American, WACS (Womens Army Corps Service), British units including their WLAC (Womens Land Army Corps). This task also included obtaining several barrels of British ale, American beer, good whiskey, and just about any libation you could think up. We built a platform for our band and set up our P.A. system. The dance was a huge success. Tremendous crowd. I never saw so many people in one place, G.I.'s, Tommies, British girls, WACS, WAVES, British civilians. Everyone decked out in their Sunday clothes. The Capt. was M.C. and bragged on our band every time he came to the mike. Made us feel good and made us play our best. I'll never forget what a hangover most of us had the next morning from mixing all those different drinks. Except for that, we enjoyed cleaning up the hall the following morning, which was Sunday. Anything to get away from camp for awhile.

CHOW?

At Dorchester we had chow in a large British mess hall. Powdered eggs, powdered milk, marmalade (all uninviting flavors), and hot tea. I had never

seen so much hot tea. We Americans weren't used to so much tea! I guess I poured out several hundred gallons of it until the 1st Sgt. got on us for wasting it. The tea was pre-mixed with milk, cream and sugar. Ugh! However, we continued to pour it out when the Sgt. wasn't looking. And marmalade! I can't stand the sight of it to this day.

A VISIT FROM THE BRASS

Just before quarantine, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, General Omar Bradley, and several high ranking officers came to Dorchester to inspect our unit. We stood formation in a faint mist (it seemed to rain or be misty all the time we were in England) and again waited for about two hours before they arrived. "Ike" would stop in front of a soldier every now and then as he went down the line and ask questions, "Where are you from, soldier?" "How old are you, son?" He missed me by two or three men, so I didn't have to answer any questions. I got a real good look at these famous generals. "Ike" was pleasant in manner, and Bradley seemed to be "all business".

A SAD EVENT

During quarantine, one of our buddies committed suicide. It was sad, heart breaking, and dampened our spirits. He was in my squad. I'll call him "J." Before being fenced in, he, I, and several of us ran together a lot, went on pass, visited the pubs, and tried to have a good time. He was friendly and witty, so we enjoyed his company. He received letters from the States as most of us did. Then he got a letter from his girl, a "Dear John Letter", we called them. This caused a great change in him. (I think he was engaged to the lady.) J. was 31 years old, and the girl was just a year or two younger. The letter was written in green ink. J. didn't want to go anywhere or do anything, just laid on his bunk reading the letter again and again, and laughing in a strange way. This sudden change in behavior baffled us. We tried to get him to go places with us, but he refused to go anywhere. Then our unit was sent to Southhampton again, and we got on boats loaded down with full gear and plenty of ammo. We pulled out in the night, supposedly heading for the English Channel. The next morning, about daylight, the boats headed for a sandy beach we could see in the faint light. We thought it was a live beach landing. We hit the beach prepared for battle, armed to the teeth. We green hands, as well as veterans of Africa and Sicily, noticed we'd met no resistance. No shells coming our way. No bullets flying at us. Then someone told us it was just a training exercise, a dry run. But, during the exercise J. seemed to snap out of it and was his old self again, laughing and talking. We stood formation a mile or so inland where our weapons were routinely inspected by officers and were told to turn in all of our ammo. Apparently, J. kept one 30-30 round of his BAR ammo. Stuck it in his pocket perhaps.

An amusing, but also serious, incident occurred during this inspection and after turning in our ammo. Our CO went down each line, inspecting rifles and sidearms. He stepped in front of a soldier who had a 45 cal. pistol. He took the pistol, inspected it, and handed it back to the G.I.. The soldier did exactly what he was supposed to do. He received it, and while holding it at the port arms position, cleared his piece by pulling the trigger, which was standard procedure. The only mistake he made was, he had left a bullet

in the chamber when he turned in his ammunition, and it exploded out the barrel. It went by the CO's face and shoulder. That was one mad and scared officer. The poor soldier was flabbergasted and humiliated. A Sgt., standing nearby, grabbed the soldier and took the pistol away from him. It was scary and yet funny to us. I don't know what happened to the G.I., but I imagine he got plenty of dirty detail for that mistake ,like cleaning latrines, carrying "honey buckets" , pails of shit.

When we returned to Dorchester, J. lapsed into his strange behavior again. He still wouldn't go with us anywhere or hardly move off his bunk unless he was going to chow or was on duty. He just continued to read that darn green ink letter and laugh weirdly. Several of us talked to our NCO's and our CO about J. They made him go on "sick call" several times, but the M.D.'s would always send him back with a handful of pills.

Under quarantine, we moved into eight man tents, where we stayed until we shipped out. It really got cold just before sunrise each morning, and we would pull our blankets over our heads trying to keep warm. J.'s bunk was in a back corner of our tent. Early on Sunday morning the CQ (Charge of Quarters, a Non-Com) stuck his head in the door of our tent and called for J. to get up. He was on KP for the day. Of course the CQ woke us, too, in the process. Most of us had dozed off, trying to get that extra twenty winks, when there was a sound like a muffled shot fired in the distance. I think some of us thought the Tommies or MP's had fired at a G.I. trying to slip out of camp. However, in a moment we heard a gurgling sound coming from J.'s corner. Several of us threw back our blankets, calling J.'s name, and rushed to his bunk. It was dark as pitch, and we couldn't see a thing. Someone had the presence of mind to bring a flashlight and threw the beam into the corner. The scene horrified and numbed us. For a moment we could only stare round-eyed. J. had shot himself under the chin with his BAR. His brains were splattered on the slanted top of the tent. He was dying, and there was nothing anyone could do. Someone said, "Get the Major," our Battalion Commander. I took it on myself to do so. I wanted to get out of that tent as soon as I could. I ran top speed to Bat. HQ's and told the Major. The Major was a big, easy going Pole, until he lost his cool. We all liked him. He and I quickly returned to our tent. The side of the tent had been lifted, and the men were standing around sad faced. The Major looked at the shocking scene and was told that J. had just died. The Major told us to get him out of the tent and carry him down to the Medic station just a few blocks down the street. Four of us got him out of the tent. It was a difficult task, emotionally, as he had been a close friend. I took one of his legs, and with three others, carried him out and put him on a stretcher. After taking the body to the Medics, we asked the Major for permission to speak. He granted it. We wanted to know what his folks and the insurance people would be told. It would be reported as an accident. That seemed fair to us. His parents were old and, no doubt, needed the insurance money. And besides, J. had fought in both the African and Sicily campaigns. Just a few days before his death, I did get J. to talking about those campaigns. He seemed to enjoy talking about them. He showed me his halver-sack which had been with him through it all and the holes in the canvas where fragments of a mortar shell had torn it. He was lucky, he said, that none of the fragments entered his back. The pack was so beat up, he should have turned it in for a new one long ago. He never did say, but I think he might have been like some G.I.'s I knew who had good luck shoes, boots, etc. In talking about J.'s death, we knew he had fully dressed in the dark after the CQ's call, but we couldn't figure how he reached the trigger of the automatic rifle, used a stick or

what. We believed the BAR was loaded and ready for business several days in advance. J.'s death really dampened our spirits and depressed us. It added to the anxiety of the invasion which loomed before us.

D-DAY
JUNE 6, 1944

Several days before D-Day, we gathered our gear and were transported to Southhampton, on the English Channel, where we boarded an LCI (Landing Craft Infantry). We knew then that we would not be in the first waves to hit the beach. Nevertheless, we'd be in the thick of it soon enough. The 16th Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, had been selected to be the first unit on the beach, going in on assault boats.

The LCI was cramped for space, only room for just over a company of men, plus the Navy crew manning the craft. I can recall the smell of diesel fuel, especially near the heads,latrines. When I smell diesel fuel today, I am immediately transported back in time to the LCI. On the night of June 5 we began to move. This was it! We were heading toward the French beach we had seen in the recon pictures. Before leaving port, we had received a letter from Eisenhower. It was encouraging, to me, that he had taken the time to communicate with us. (Though an aide may have composed it.) His message boosted some of us anyhow. He closed with something about the American people and people all over the world praying for us. I appreciated that because I felt it to be true.

We tried to relax, but it was impossible. Sleep didn't come that night. We prayed silently and cleaned our weapons over and over, from force of habit and training. When dawn came over the English Channel, our boat was circling, going round and round. There were about six or eight boats in our circle. There seemed to be hundreds of circling boats all sizes and shapes. We had never seen so many ships. It looked like all the ships in the world were gathered in that part of the Channel. I'm sure the Germans watching from shore were as bug-eyed as we at the number of ships. The attack was already under way. We could see our planes diving at the beach and Naval shells bursting on shore. Not far from us, broadside to the coast, several U.S. battleships sounded a continuous roar of thunder as their big guns pounded the German positions. We asked about a big battleship nearest us, and one of the sailors said, "You guys from Texas will be proud when I tell you this. That's the Battleship Texas." We watched her for some time as she poured salvo after salvo inland.

Our circle broke up and peeled off heading for the beach. As we got closer, we could see the Germans running around on top of a cliff and see the enemy shells hit the water sending up great gouts of water into the air. Now and then we'd see a direct hit on one of our boats and knew that men were dying. Most of our infantry company were on the top deck watching the battle scene. Made you want to turn around and go home. Many of our men had to remain below deck because of the lack of space topside. Weighted down with gear and weapons, we were as ready as could be for what lay ahead of us. The odds of coming out of it alive were small. As our boat came slowly into shore, it struck a mine under the water on its right side. It tore a hole in the thin hull and killed and wounded some of our men under deck. A friend of mine was brought up by the medics with an arm blown off at the shoulder. Blood was spouting from an artery over the deck. It didn't look like he had a chance of living. His skin was the color of gray ashes. I didn't observe him long as our attention was diverted to getting off the boat and on shore. (We would later learn, in France, that my friend survived, was sent home in a few

weeks, and discharged from service. He was a fine family man with children, and it cheered us immensely when we received his letter telling about how he came out of it all.) A shell or another mine then hit our left loading ramp. This brought us to an abrupt halt. The mine on the right had damaged the right ramp, so there we were, like sitting ducks in a pond, with shells hitting all around and bullets flying by like mad bees. Being stationary targets was nerve wracking. We felt so helpless. The water would be over our heads, and in no time, loaded down as we were, we would have gone to the bottom. We shall always be grateful to one of the sailors who tied a rope around his waist and dove overboard. Swimming through heavy fire, he swam to shore and tied the rope to a log sticking out of the water. Another sailor then swam in and thus provided us with two ropes to the beach. Loaded with 90 to 100 pounds of gear, we grabbed a rope, and hand over hand, made our way to the beach. The Germans were throwing everything they had at us, yet most of us got onto the sandy beach where we found it was difficult to move because of the intense fire power of the enemy. We could see the sand exploding all around us from the bullets and shells. I remember turning my head from a prone position and seeing several boats unloading our tanks to the left of us. The German big guns were zeroed in on that spot. I saw three of our tanks take direct hits from .88 shells and explode in flames just a few yards inside the beach.

We were ordered to move up into the mine field and stay between the white tape where our combat engineers had cleared a narrow lane. (I've often thought about that white tape the combat engineers laid down before we got there and how many of them died getting the job done. You talk about guts. If you ever meet a combat engineer, be sure and stand at attention, then take off your hat in respect, for they deserve it and more.) We crawled single file only a short distance into the mine field and halted. It seemed we were delayed for hours, but of course it wasn't that long. We couldn't go forward or backward. Just lay there, while the enemy fire took a heavy toll. Someone finally said that just one German sniper was holding us up. The taped path led through the sand to a twenty foot cliff. Every time one of our men stuck his head over the top, the sniper would fire. He'd already killed and wounded some of our men. Capt. Fitch, our CO, got frustrated and excited about the delay and the number of casualties we were having. I saw him jump up from behind my position and run outside the taped area. A mine blew off a foot, and he fell back on the sand. Seconds later, we saw him disappear in a cloud of smoke as a shell hit him direct. We turned our heads away. We didn't want to see anymore. But we did. It was only the beginning of the nightmare and horror of war. Everywhere you looked, men were being blown to pieces. Finally, two or three men near the top of the cliff outflanked the sniper and captured him. Some of us lying in the mine field remarked, "We'd have killed the SOB, not captured him," but G-2 no doubt wanted to question him. As they brought the sniper through us, he kept pointing and saying, "Minen," smiling all the while. "Yea, mines, we know it, you SOB," we told him heatedly. We wanted to get hold of him, we were so mad. The sniper had run out of ammo and then surrendered, after killing as many of us as he could. His smiling at us set us off.

We finally got to the top of the cliff, knocked out some pill boxes and moved inland several hundred yards where we spent the night of June 6. The big guns fired all night, and small arms fire continued to buzz over our heads in the dark. After posting guard, we slept the sleep of the dead through most of the night. I can't ever remember being exhausted as I was that night. The emotional drain was worse than the physical exertion.

HEDGEROW FIGHTING

Next morning, sitting under a cluster of trees and chewing on rations, little spurts of dust began to explode among us. We knew it was another sniper, and he was so far away that the bullets had almost lost their power by the time they fell among us. However, we shagged it out of there quickly and found cover. We prepared to push inland, and while waiting for the order to move out, our position was behind a hedgerow next to a road. Two American officers, rear echelon probably, walked over to a gate facing the Germans. They just stood in the hedgerow gate peering across a field. We knew a sniper was out there somewhere because, earlier, several of us had crossed by the gate at top speed and several bullets had whizzed past us. I was near the gate, and I remember saying to the officers, "I don't believe I'd stand in the gate. A German sniper has been shooting through there..." You talk about two officers getting it in high gear and finding cover, they vacated the spot,"toot sweet". One of the officers thanked me for warning them. The other was probably so scared he couldn't say anything, just thinking how foolish he had been.

We had a few skirmishes as we penetrated the hedgerows. Every now and then the Germans decided to turn and fight (a delaying action). They would set up a road block with machine guns, bazookas, and sometimes an anti-tank gun. So, we'd have to knock it out. We had two or three tanks with us most of the time. It was comforting to have them with us at times, and we were grateful for their support; but they drew all kinds of fire, small arms, bazookas, mortars, big guns, anti-tank and what have you. We didn't like to be very close to them, too, because you couldn't hear anything above the roar of their engines. You couldn't hear bullets and thus, get down. Encountering one road block, one of our two tanks was hit by a German bazooka. It didn't hurt any of the crew. They bailed out fast, scared to death, of course. The blast knocked off one of the tracks so the tank couldn't move. Because it was the lead tank, the other tank couldn't go around it on the narrow road. Thus, we left them to their own business and attacked the road block. We were on our bellies in the ditches on each side of the road near a gate or gap in a hedgerow. The gap opened into a field, and we were receiving machine gun fire through the gate; the bullets were hitting a grilled fence next to a farmer's house, striking sparks and ricocheting here and there. Our Platoon Leader, yelled at us, "Follow me!" and plunged through the gate with his little carbine. We thought it a foolish thing to do. He was immediately pinned down by the machine gun and could move very little, but he kept calling for us to follow. Finally, several men rushed through after a burst of fire from the German gun, turned right and hit the ditch behind the Lt. They could only crawl a short distance because the bullets were kicking up dirt all around them. Lucky no one was hit at this time. I still had the bazooka (nary a bullet to shoot). We had been trained to use it on tanks, trucks, houses, etc., and had been told it could be used as a mortar. I'd never tried the mortar bit. I waited after the machine gun burst and dove through the gate, landing on my belly. I turned left instead of right. In a prone position, I thought I detected movement across the field in a courtyard behind another farm house. I loaded the bazooka and quickly lifted it, fired, then fell back prone. I saw and heard the round go off in the courtyard. I don't know if I did any damage, but I did see them pick up their weapons and run. We didn't get any more bullets through the gate.

Just before this skirmish, someone had found a cache of cognac and champagne bottles hidden under a pile of manure in a barn. We assumed some French farmer had hidden it from the Germans. Anyway, it was my first taste of champagne. Boy! It was good! We drank as much as we could hold then put a bottle or two in our packs when we moved out. At the road block we began to receive enemy fire and sought cover. The bullets were clipping the bushes over our heads. Sgt. Belcher, Georgian, wouldn't get down. Just stood there like a wooden Indian, trying to spot the German positions. The rest of us were either crouching behind the hedgerow or in a prone position. "Get down, Belcher!" I remember yelling. "Hell, the SOB's have shot at me a million times and haven't hit me yet," he replied. All that liquor had made him bold and foolish. Others of us were feeling its effect, too, but we still had sense enough to get our heads and butts down.

During the fire fight, Belcher did get hit, only one of his fingers. The bullet hit the fore guard of his rifle and sliced the finger nearly off. I thought sure he would lose the finger, but he later rejoined our unit after a short stay in the hospital. You could hardly see the small scar on it. Non-the-less, I confiscated his slightly damaged rifle, took his ammo, and told the Lt. that a tank had run over my bazooka. Actually, it was a fib. I had left the bazooka in a hedgerow. The Lt. didn't buy my story, but he didn't say anything. He might have felt a little humble after putting us in such an awkward position and nearly getting us all killed. I was never so glad to get a weapon that fired bullets. I had the stovepipe up till then and felt circumscribed in carrying it with no pistol. But, I paid for that rifle in this way. I was made 1st Scout for our platoon, out ahead of everybody when we advanced.

The Germans set up another roadblock about three miles on the same road. As we advanced, they fired on us for awhile, then withdrew. Several of us left the road and began sweeping forward through the hedgerows about 2 mile from the road. Peeping up quickly over a hedgerow, I saw two German soldiers kneeling along another row. I started to fire but noticed there was something odd about the scene. They didn't move. We carefully approached them, thinking "ambush." Both were dead. Shot center while kneeling and drinking French cognac. The bottles were tipped over at their feet, and the cognac had spilled out, mingling with their blood on the ground. We later learned that a young Sgt. in one of our platoons was roving ahead of our lines all by himself. (We didn't see him until later.) He had just received word that a brother who was in another infantry unit had been killed. It seemed he was out to avenge his brother's death. He had caught the Germans busy drinking and off guard, killed them, and moved on looking for more. He continued to rove ahead of our lines from time to time all the way to Germany. Near Stolberg, Germany, he was seriously wounded but recovered, so we heard. He also received the Congressional Medal of Honor for his exploits.

We advanced almost to St. Lo, France. We dug in and stayed in the area for about six weeks. Our forces were building up behind us for an expected breakthrough. Our platoon moved a number of times on this line close to St. Lo during this period. At one place German patrols gave us a fit for several nights. We dug foxholes and four man dugouts. The latter were back 200 yards from the foxholes, and we slept in them. We pulled guard in the foxholes. Because of the German patrols, I couldn't sleep one night. I was to relieve another boy on guard about midnight. I crawled out of the dugout with my rifle and slowly moved toward our front lines. No one challenged me,

so I first thought a German patrol had slipped through us and cut his throat. They had done this on several occasions, so we'd been told. As I got closer, I knew better. He was snoring like a big bullfrog. The thought that the rest of us depended on him with our lives made me see red. I jerked him out of the foxhole and knocked the "snot" out of him. He went to our dugout whimpering like a child. The next morning, while in the chow line, our Lt. said, "Johnson, I heard you all had a little trouble over your way last night." "Yes, sir," I replied. That was all that was mentioned about the incident.

A CLOSE CALL

Before arriving in the St. Lo area, we dug in late one evening on top of a hill overlooking Treviers, a small French village. About dusk the Lt. sent Holcombe and me with the bazooka out in front of the lines. We set up the bazooka in a ditch alongside the road leading down to the village. We took along six or seven anti-tank mines which we strung across the road a safe distance from our bazooka position, but close enough to shoot at a tank if we had to. I was the bazooka gunner; Holcombe the loader. A little after midnight we heard German tanks start their engines in the village and begin coming our way. Holcombe and I loaded the bazooka and got as low as we could in the ditch. There were a few scattered clouds and the moon was up, so we could see the road fairly well. We had a walkie-talkie (small radio) by which we alerted those behind us on the line. Soon we could see in the glow of the moonlight what appeared to be three German tanks in single file moving up the middle of the road. They were coming slow and stopped just before reaching the mines. They had spotted the mines across the road and sat there forever, it seemed, as Holcombe and I prepared to meet our Maker. One German tanker from the rear tank walked up close to the mines and stared at the hill for a long time. He then went back to his tank. Holcombe and I sent up a sigh of relief when all three tanks did an about-face and went back the way they had come.

A GERMAN PATROL

About 3:00 a.m., that same night, a German patrol led by an SS officer, penetrated our lines and got all the way back to our Battalion HQ's. They sneaked in and captured our Bat. CO with two or three of his staff. The SS officer had a pistol in the Major's back prodding him out of the area. Fortunately, the Major remembered where some of the guards were positioned around HQ's and as he passed a guard who was behind a hedgerow whispered, "The man behind me is an SS officer." The guard lying on the ground and out of sight, skylined the Nazi and shot him dead. The Major dove for the bushes as all hell broke loose. Bullets were flying everywhere in the dark. Several of the patrol were killed or wounded by our men. The rest vanished into the night toward the German lines. We suffered only one or two casualties. The Major was the same one who had helped us when J. killed himself in England. It was said that he raged around like a goaded bull for several days after that little affair. No doubt about it, the Battalion guards shaped up after the Major got through with them.

THE DEATH OF THE LITTLE ACCORDION PLAYER

The little Pole musician in our band was killed in a day patrol near St. Lo. He was in a different platoon than I, so we heard of his death through some of his buddies. He and four other men were working their way along a hedgerow when the Germans ambushed them. Chief, an Indian, was in the patrol. He, only, survived. He said that all his patrol were either wounded or killed outright when the Germans opened up on them. Then they killed the wounded by a shot in the head. Chief had three bullet holes in him. He played dead when they turned him over and kicked him several times. Because he held his breath and played 'possum, they didn't shoot him. It was about noon when all this happened. The Germans walked all around him that afternoon, and he didn't turn a hair even when ants began to bite him. When darkness came, he made his way back to our lines. He survived his wounds.

CHIEF

I don't know what tribe he came from, but he was a rugged one. I had seen him a few times when in England and had talked to him several times, I did most of the talking. He was typically Indian in that he didn't say much. I remember seeing him in a pub one night. He was by himself at the bar drinking, of all things, rum. Seeing me, he motioned me to come have drink with him. Not wishing to offend him, I said OK. The bartender poured out more than three fingers in the glass, and I gulped it down. It was like liquid fire. I gasped, sputtered, and nearly kicked the bucket. Chief laughed a big belly-laugh and said, "Paleface only drink beer?" It was his way to joke with me. I didn't appreciate it much at the time but finally concluded it was his Indian way of playing a joke on a friend. I don't know what kind of rum it was, but Chief had to have a cast iron stomach to drink that kind of stuff. I never saw Chief drunk, and he didn't get aggressive when he drank, which I thought was unusual. We were still friends, and he didn't go around bragging about his little trick on me, which many would have done.

A WOMAN SNIPER?

One day, moving on foot through the country, we approached a farmhouse and barn near a road. We were going cross country, avoiding the roads at that time. The platoon was sheltered from the house by the barn, and our men were dashing across the road one at a time. A German machine gun was shooting down the road from up the road about 300 yards. Each man would dash across, hit the bar-ditch in a prone position, pause long enough to catch his breath, then make a break for an orchard close by. Pizzaro, an Italian from New York who had seen plenty of action all through Africa and Sicily, ran across the road and hit the ditch. A weapon which had not fired previously opened up on him. We knew it to be close to us; near the house it seemed. Pizzaro was hit several times and in a few minutes died. No one could get to him. I remember running into the barn, climbing into the loft, and using my rifle to push up the tile shingles to get a view of the house. I didn't see anything unusual. Several of us advanced to the house where out came two young French women. We shook down the house but found no weapon of any kind. We knew it was an automatic weapon, probably a Schmeizer. Later we surmised that one of

the women was the gunner and had dropped the weapon in the well located next to the house. It could have been easily dropped from the second story bedroom window just above it. One of the things which irked us about Pizzaro's death was he had been sick for several months with yellow jaundice. He had been in the hospital in England, and the "powers that be" sent him back to our unit for the invasion of France while still a sick man. He had felt bad all the time he was in France.

THE HERO

A word on Kleindinst: On the boat, just before we hit the beach, Kleindinst was handed a rifle and ammo. He made it through that action without a scratch. He was in another squad of our platoon, so this was their story. Four or five men were advancing along a hedgerow with Kleindinst bringing up the rear. A big German soldier jumped up on the row in front of them. He had the drop on them, and they were like sitting ducks. They froze, all except Kleindinst. From the rear he calmly and quickly lifted his rifle and shot the German dead center. He fell off the row almost on the first G.I. They would have died but for Kleindinst's quick action. These men, as all of the platoon, didn't think much of Kleindinst because of all the trouble he had caused us in England. However, after that incident, they sang his praises.

One day going through the woods, they came to a field. A large haystack stuck out like a sore thumb, a good place for a German machine gun, so someone remarked. No one wanted to leave the relative safety of the woods to find out. Without a word to anyone, Kleindinst took off by himself. He approached the haystack, kicked the hay around with his feet a few times. No Germans there. He returned to a group of men who looked and felt a little sheepish. Kleindinst was different than anyone else. A whole lot different.

THE PARATROOPERS

While we waited for the breakthrough at St. Lo, we often roamed about in groups of two, three, or four, just looking around. One morning we made a gruesome discovery. In the corner of a hedgerow we saw a pile of dirt four or five feet high. Upon closer examination, we saw a human leg and an arm sticking out of one side. We got our small shovels and dug enough to know that there were several bodies. The stench was so bad, we couldn't complete the job. We did discover them to be American paratroopers. We reported our find to an officer, and he sent down a detail of German POW's with shovels. Many of them became so sick they couldn't continue. Masks were supplied, and the unpleasant and sad task was completed. The count: 20 American paratroopers. All twenty had been shot in the head. They had jumped into France the night before we hit the beach. Most of them had sustained other injuries, incurred in the jump perhaps, but we saw how brutal the Germans could be. This made us mad clear through. We swore we would not take any more prisoners, but we did. We did not believe in murder. Yet, when it came to "kill or be killed," we could do it. We could defend ourselves and our buddies. We hadn't asked to be sent there; yet we were there, and "by cracky" we were going to do everything humanly possible to survive. And this

meant we would have to do some things that were against our nature and rearing.

THE BEE TREE

One day we found a bee tree. They were small, black, and fairly aggressive Italian bees. Some of us country boys knew what to do about that. We cut it down using leaves to smoke them and helped ourselves to the honey. It was good stuff and took the greasy taste of "C" rations out of our mouths. We ate as much as we could hold and gave the rest, a large dishpan, heaped high, to the company cook. Though the bees were aggressive, we kept them pretty much at bay with the smoke. We suffered a few stings, but nothing serious.

BUTTS UP

During a barrage from the German .88s, a funny thing happened with a buddy and me. The shells began to fall very near us. Several trees close by were splintered and small pieces of the shattered limbs showered down on us. Our foxholes were some distance from us, but our two-man dugout was close; so we made a run for it. It was near sunset on this particular day, and we had no trouble finding the dug-out. Just as we reached it, a shell hit very close and we dove for the entrance. It was only large enough for one man to enter. Both of us got heads and shoulders stuck in the opening. So, there we were, face to face, with our butts up in the air and artillery shells exploding all around. We stayed there for a while, not moving, and laughing our silly heads off. We could have very well died laughing.

"SCREAMING MEEMIES"

On the line before the St. Lo breakthrough: The Germans regularly threw artillery at us day and night. Early one morning, they threw something else. Suddenly, a strange sound which we had never heard before began to come toward us. It was a screeching, screaming sound. We'd never heard anything like it. Most of the screaming sounds went over our heads and exploded a short distance behind us. We called them "Screaming Meemies". Cylinder shaped and rocket propelled, they were really short range missiles. Loaded with some type of petroleum liquid, they did little damage as the impact area was rather small. The explosion threw burning oil in a circle and burned itself out in a few minutes. The scary thing, though they were fired at random, was the screaming sound which worked on our nerves. Just thinking about one of them dropping on top of your head further stretched our anxiety. Their main purpose, of course, was to demoralize us. To some degree, it succeeded.

Some Lt. in an ordinance unit had captured four or five of the "Meemies" and set up a little surprise for the Germans. With the help of some of his men, he set up a battery of the "Meemies" a short distance in front and to the right of my foxhole. His idea was to fire his "Meemies" when he heard theirs coming in. Several of us infantry boys had a ringside seat. For several mornings all was quiet except for the regular German artillery. The Lt. and several of his men slept nearby, at ready. Then early one morning, just at

light of day, we heard the "Meemies" coming in. The Lt. and his crew jumped out of their blankets, rushed to firing positions and fired all of their missiles. The "Meemies" were in wooden racks, set at an angle, with fins sticking out near the rear. They took off with a "swoosh", screaming and smoking toward the German lines. We foot soldiers laughed till our sides hurt. We never got any more "Meemies" fired at us. We figured, as the Lt. did, that the "Jerries" thought something bad wrong had happened to their "Meemies"; that they turned around and came back at them. It was fun to see them get a dose of their own medicine.

SUICIDE VILLAGE

We were still at the place where we shot the "Screaming Meemies" back at the Germans. To our front and left out about a mile was a French village. We called it "Suicide Village". It was in no-mans land. We kept a squad of men there part of the time. I say that because the village would change hands every few days. The Germans would decide they wanted it and attack with force. Our boys would retreat to our lines. They would occupy it a few days and our boys would get orders to retake it, attack it, and run the Germans out. This went on all the time we were there. Most every evening, about dusk, when it was still, we would hear a German soldier singing at the top of his voice. We wondered what he could find to sing about. Better to sing than cry. We named him "The Singing Heine". Listening to him, I often thought, "I don't have anything against you. Not personally anyway. You're a long way from home and loved ones as I am, but it's you or me in this war. I hope that if only one of us goes home safe and sound, it will be me. It's up to God and His providence. Maybe both of us will get to go home and live in peace."

We had an important visitor one day, a two-star General. He arrived with a bodyguard armed with a Tommy Gun. He looked our front line positions over and then requested the CO to furnish him with a guide to Suicide Village. I never did know just why he wanted to go out there. Guess who got picked to guide them. Though I knew how to get there, it was my first and only trip to it, and first time to see it up close. I led them through a narrow path without incidence and arrived at our destination in a short time. Our boys had their positions in the houses along a small street with only one outpost in the back yard of a house facing the German lines. The General talked to most every man he saw, asking all kinds of questions. Sometimes just passing the time of day with them. I guess he thought he would boost their morale, an American general showing he was interested in what they were doing. It might have been a learning trip for him or an ego trip, I couldn't say. But, I don't think it helped the boys much. Later, we headed back the way we had come. Just before reaching our front line, the General expressed a desire to visit another Infantry Division positioned to our left. I asked him if he needed me anymore, and he said, "No," and thanked me for my service. I proceeded to our lines alone. I knew his name for a time, but it eludes me now. Later, I heard he was killed in Holland. He was then commander of the 184 Infantry Division. It was reported that an incoming German shell made a direct hit on him. He seemed like a nice sort of fellow.

"GAS ATTACK"

One day we had a little time off so several of us infantry boys were back of our foxholes about : mile visiting with the Armored boys. We were gathered around a Half-Track listening to a baseball game broadcast from the good ole U.S. of A. The Half-Track radio picked it up loud and clear. The Brooklyn Dodgers and some other team were having a "hum-dinger". It was especially good to hear things going on at home. So, we were enjoying it immensely. A big German gun began firing at us and hitting about a mile to our right and front. It wasn't shooting our way, so we weren't much concerned. Then we saw a secondary explosion from one of the big shells. Then another. And another. Some idiot yelled, "Gas!" We had left our gas masks at the front, only had our weapons and ammo with us. You never saw such a foot race in your life as we headed toward our gas masks. We arrived huffing and puffing and were putting on our gas masks when someone reported that it was only one of our ammunition dumps the shell had hit. What a sigh of relief went up from all of us, yet we wished we knew the idiot who had yelled "gas" and caused us so much trouble. We'd have strangled him "bare handed".

INFANTRY PATROL

I was on one "day patrol" toward St. Lo, sometime the latter part of June '44. Six or seven of us moved through the brushy countryside toward a river and valley in supposedly unoccupied territory. It took us awhile to reach our objective as we moved slowly, watching for an ambush and stopping undercover every now and then to use our binoculars on the terrain. We kept to the bushes and trees. We finally made our way down a valley and found ourselves near a river bridge. We were trying to be so quiet as we moved toward the bridge. Looking down to a clump of trees near the bridge, we saw a vehicle of some sort with a group of about ten men sitting around a small fire. One guy was singing. We thought we'd found another "Singing Heine". Through binoculars we discovered they were G.I.'s. We called out from the bushes and identified ourselves. They were members of a Recon. unit. The Recon. vehicle had light armor with big wheels and tires, and was fast. They told us that they had crossed the bridge the night before and sped through a village, shooting up the place as they moved through. They went on for several miles to complete a mission, then returned about dawn, shot up the village again, crossed the bridge, and had just settled down for breakfast.

We had seen a few crazy people in our time, but we thought they were the craziest bunch we'd ever come across. They were daring, living on the edge even more than we. The boy we had heard singing got out an accordion and favored us with a few songs. One was "Mares Eat Oats and Little Lambs Eat Ivy". I think of him even when I hear the song today. We liked the singing and enjoyed seeing them; but most of us were very uncomfortable sitting around the fire, and this bunch made too much noise to suit us. We were ready to get out of there. We might get killed in this war anytime but saw no sense in advertising our whereabouts to the Germans with all this noise. We returned without encountering enemy or mishap.

BREAKTHROUGH AT ST. LO

In late July the breakthrough at St. Lo began. It was a massive attack. We were loaded with equipment and got ready to "jump off" early one morning. At first light of day our bombers began bombing St. Lo and the surrounding area.

It was a spectacular sight. We had a ringside seat. Someone said there were over 6,000 sorties made that morning. The ground beneath our feet shook like an earthquake until about 12:00 noon as our planes pulverized the enemy. We were poised about three or four miles from the bombing impact area. Every now and then the German ack-ack would hit one of our planes. It made us sad and mad when we'd see one of them streaking toward the ground on fire and smoking. Our men were dying up there. Many of the planes dropped their load of bombs, flew back to England, loaded up, and came back for another bomb run. We infantry boys had never seen so many planes in action at one time. One of our generals, Gen. McNair, and several of his men were killed by some of our bombs that fell short. They were too close to St. Lo. I suppose they wanted to be the first unit to enter the town.

Most of the buildings in St. Lo were still burning when we went through. I remember seeing a cameraman, a war correspondent, taking pictures behind us as we lay in a ditch alongside a street. Though the Germans were shelling the town, we met little resistance. We did meet some enemy fire just outside the city, German roadblocks of machine guns and other small arms fire. How anyone could have survived the massive bombing was a mystery to us. We knocked out these pockets of resistance and continued advancing until nightfall, then we dug in for the night. I don't know why that night stands out in my mind, but while on guard behind a hedgerow, I kept seeing things, shadows moving in the hazy-bright moonlight. I suppose I was extremely tired. It had been a long day. My imagination worked overtime that night. It did keep me keenly alert. I almost fired at some moving shadows but realized that the wind was up and was moving the grass and bushes.

Having put aside my bazooka, with a 30-06 Enfield Rifle, I was the 1st Scout of our platoon. The 2nd Scout, a green kid who had not been with us long, followed me about fifty yards behind. The main body of the platoon trailed along behind some 100 yards. Scouting was nerve wracking because you were the first into enemy territory, and at times you could almost feel someone take dead aim at the center of your forehead. I remember coming upon a German tank. It had been hit and burned itself out. It was cool enough to stand on the turret. Looking down into the open hatch, I could see the burned and grotesque bodies of the crew. The stench was overpowering, so we didn't tarry. We passed many huge bomb craters. You could have buried several Army trucks in each one. Our unit advanced in this fashion for several days, then were ordered to ride three or four tanks so we could move faster and further. Six to eight men on top of a tank was no fun. You had to get a good grip on something to keep from falling off because some of the drivers were really wild. Several times, I almost lost a leg as we went around trees. We had to watch closely and pull our legs up high as we went around them.

Two things stand out about our approach to French villages and towns: Just before entering a settlement, our tank would stop, and if there was a church steeple in sight, our big tank gun would shoot the top off, which usually included the belfry. These were favorite spots for German artillery observers. It was a necessary precaution, but it sort of went against our rearing and belief about the sacredness of church buildings. Many times we would go by the church, and sure enough, find one or two dead German soldiers in the debris on the ground or in the church.

Outside the villages, near the road, we invariably found religious creches. Some were small stone statues of the Virgin Mary or of Jesus on the Cross.

They were well kept, no grass or weeds cluttering the ground. Often we would see fresh flowers someone had placed at the feet of the statues. These were reminders to us of our Christian background and our God. A few times, the Germans would set up a bazooka or machine gun behind a large statue to stop our advance. In knocking it out we occasionally destroyed or damaged the statue.
Our attack took us near two French towns, Mortain and Averanches. We bypassed them and soon swung North moving twenty or thirty miles a day. The Germans counter-attacked behind us with a strong force of Panzers and infantry to cut us off and stop our overall advance. At night we could see the glow behind us and knew a big battle was in progress. Their attack failed. We kept going either riding trucks or tanks. Our spirits were high as rode along through France. We had the Germans on the run. We knew that the sooner we got to Germany, the sooner the war would be over. Then, we could go home to the United States.

ENEMY PLANES AT NIGHT

For four or five days we rode trucks, moving fast. We would start out at dawn and continue late into the night before stopping for a rest. German bombers pestered us every night. They seemed to know exactly where we were and would catch us moving along some road. We knew we were in for it when a lone German plane came over us and dropped several flares. It lit up the area like daylight, and you were a sitting duck. When the flares popped overhead, we would bail out of the truck and run two or three hundred yards off the road and hit the ground in a motionless heap. The enemy planes would first come in low, tree top level, and drop anti-personnel bombs on small parachutes. They made a clicking and popping sound as they scattered shrapnel in all directions. Then the planes would go higher and make another run on us by dropping their heavy bombs. I remember one night, while lying on my stomach, the German planes were coming over about tree top level. I peeped up and could see a German pilot's face as plain as day while he looked down searching for us. We had been told not to look up as our faces would shine, and we would be spotted. I only turned my head a little and caught this glimpse out of the corner of my eye. We had talked about why we were so popular with the German Luftwaffe and how they knew where we were as we traveled miles and miles day and night. We concluded that someone with us or traveling alongside of us was sending signals to the Germans somehow. We never found out. After several nights the attacks ceased. "Knothead" was seriously wounded one night by a heavy bomb. We learned he survived and married the Scotch girl he went to see in Scotland while posted in Dorchester.

ON THE TANKS AGAIN

Then we were on the tanks again, going pell-mell in the direction of Paris. One day (we were on the lead tank) our tank pulled to a sudden stop on a hill overlooking a valley. We could see a farmhouse near the road on the next hill. Our tank commander stood up in his hatch and took a good long look at the hill. "Boys," he said, "it looks like the Jerries have an anti-tank gun trained on the road. It's positioned near the house." He let several of us look through his binoculars to get our opinion. It did look the same to us. We were ready to get off the tank and take our chances on the ground. The commander continued to use his glasses. We were on a good paved road. All

of a sudden, the commander told us to hang on, that we were going across the valley at full speed, hoping to make the moving tank a poor target. We squenched up. How we wished we were on the ground, away from that tank. We hung on for dear life, scared to death, as we made that wild dash. The commander continued to use his binoculars as we flew along. About midway to the farmhouse, he yelled to the driver, "You can slow down. The damned Jerries have set up a wagon tongue to make it look like an anti-tank gun." Sure enough, when we got to the hill, we could see that he'd called it right.

THE CHATEAU

We moved so fast about this time; I do not remember all that happened. Our unit rested for a day. We cleaned up and lolled about in a beautiful forest of tall trees. Some idiot Non-Com or officer wanted to give us close-order drills in order to keep us busy. Some of us, including our Non-Coms, rebelled at this. The order was rescinded. The terrain here was hilly with streams of water flowing from springs. I thought at the time, "What a poet's Paradise!"

Some of us, wandering around, discovered a huge picturesque chateau high on a hill overlooking the greenest valley we had ever seen. The occupants had fled. There were large rooms with beautiful furniture, servants quarters, flower gardens, fountains, a fairyland. You can imagine some of the comments from some country boys and hillbillies about this life of the nobility. Some wealthy count, perhaps, sure had a wonderful estate, out in the middle of nowhere, living high on the hog. You could see for miles around over his kingdom. I'm sure there were villages not far away, probably part of the estate, but you couldn't see them for the trees.

THE FALAISE POCKET

We had the Germans trapped in a pocket, and they were cut off from Paris except for a small gap through which they tried to escape. Our planes and artillery destroyed great amounts of military equipment and slaughtered many of their troops. Quite a few of the enemy got through the gap in spite of our intense shelling, bombing, and strafing. Our swing to the North was part of a pincers maneuver which closed a ring around the Germans in the pocket. We set up perimeter defenses around several artillery batteries as they shelled the pocket night and day. Our tanks were also doing the same. The constant roar was deafening. We'd walk around addled a lot of the time.

This continued for several days. We really dealt the Germans a blow in this action. We saw some of the destruction of life and material and were surprised at the number of horse drawn equipment the Germans had. Dead horses and men were scattered about everywhere. It was a killing field. We saw more of the horse drawn weapons later, and dead horses.

CROSSING THE SEINE

We continued to ride tanks and trucks until we came to the Seine River south

of Paris. Pontoon bridges had been set up by our engineers over the river, so we crossed over on foot.

It was amusing that all the way from Normandy to Germany, when we would enter most of the French villages, the French would welcome us warmly with fresh bread and wine, handing them to us as we walked along. Along with this, they kept up a constant chatter with much waving of arms. Telling us, I'm sure, how much they hated the "Boche" and how much they loved us. We were told they did the same for the Germans when we had to retreat and they came through. Trying to curry a little favor, I suppose.

TANK BATTLE AT TWILIGHT

After crossing the Seine, we saw more and more Germans surrendering. They were coming to us from right and left with hands in the air. Entire companies and larger units waving white flags were coming in constantly. We would be going along a road, and they would come out of the woods and fields, smiling and friendly. Sometimes we would stop, search, and disarm them and send them to our rear. Someone in the rear echelon would have to deal with them. We didn't have time.

Walking along one evening about dusk, our unit was following three of our tanks up a hillside road. We had just passed through a French village with its customary bread and wine. We infantry boys were in single file on both sides of the road. Just as our tanks crested the hill they ran head-on into three or four German tanks with troops following behind them. Both our tanks and the German tanks fired at each other, but because both sides were surprised and shook up, missed. Our tanks, as did the Germans, quickly went left and right off the road. We infantry did the same. I was in a bunch that ran left and got behind some trees about 200 yards from the road. The German troops did the same. All hell broke loose then.

A close up tank battle and fire fight took place. It was a hum-dinger, and we were right in the middle of it. We did a lot of shooting at running and moving shadows and at muzzle flashes in the growing dark. The German tanks fired a few white phosphorous shells at us but misjudged our positions and did little harm. After all these years, I can still see them exploding and looking like a 4th of July fireworks display spreading their white bursts in a circle. They might have been pretty, but they were deadly. We knew that if only a small piece of the phosphorous hit us, it would burn through our clothing, flesh, and to the bone. Made your hair stand on end.

The battle continued perhaps twenty or thirty minutes, and the Germans disengaged. They turned back and fled down the road. We went back to the road and followed them the rest of the night. Every now and then, our tanks would stop, cut their motors, and we would all listen. We could still hear the German tanks moving on. The sound from the Germans ceased about daylight in a French village located in a valley. We left the road and began to dig in on a hill overlooking the village. We just about had our foxholes deep enough for safety when we heard the order, "Move out." So, away we went again. The Germans were pulling out of the village. We went through the village about sunup on the alert for resistance. Meeting none, we continued on until we came to a crossroads. It was determined that the Germans had taken a smaller road to our right. We let them go. We continued on the main

road as we had our own direction and objective.

FOOTSORE AND WEARY

One day, loaded down with ammo and gear, we traveled on foot about 32 miles. (So we were told, and I believe it.) We had left some place near daylight and didn't stop until two or three o'clock next morning. We were spent, about dead, and ready to drop in our tracks. We dug in close to a town on a slope looking down on a railroad yard. We slept the sleep of the dead. If the Germans had attacked that morning, all they would have needed was fly swatters. It would have been that easy. I remember having a high fever that night, and the next day many of us sported fever blisters on our lips.

A HAIR RAISER

Another night, still in France, tired to the bone, we bedded down next to a hedgerow. Our guards were posted at two corners and another in the middle of the row facing the direction from which an attack might come. I couldn't sleep. I got up and walked toward the guard nearest us just to check on him and see that he was awake and on the alert. I called his name softly as I approached. He whirled around and stuck the muzzle of his rifle in my belly. I saw his shock and surprise. Later, he told me shamed faced that he was half asleep and pulled the trigger. However, the gun was on safety and didn't fire. He was so nervous and scared that night, he was loco.

I returned to my place and had just dozed off when someone nearby screamed to high heaven. My hair stood on end. Down the hedgerow, a few feet, a struggle was taking place. I recognized the voice of an Italian boy in the melee. Everyone was awake and was thinking the same thing, a German patrol had got in the middle of us. It was so dark you couldn't see anything, so I didn't think it prudent to move. I did put my head to the ground trying to silhouette the combatants while holding my knife in my hand. In the dark you couldn't tell the difference between friend or foe. With my head on the ground I could faintly see forms struggling and could hear cussing and grunting as the physical battle continued. Finally, the sounds ceased, and we called out to the Italian boy. He answered right away. We assumed he had done someone in. Then someone else near him said that everything was all right. Several of us then moved on down to check. We got the straight of it at last. The Italian boy had had a nightmare and grabbed another boy sleeping near him thinking he was a German. The other boy thought the enemy had him by the throat and was trying to kill him, so the fight was on. They had put on quite a show. It's a wonder one or both weren't killed or seriously hurt.
If the Germans heard the ruckus that night, I'm sure they shied away from the spot. We had been hearing how the German patrols had been penetrating our lines, cutting throats, and vanishing into the night. I'm not sure, but these stories may have originated with some of our Non-Coms to make sure we were on our toes. This was on our minds that night. We were tense and as tight as cat gut strung on a fiddle. Needless to say, none of us slept anymore that night. I remember that the days were bad enough. The nights were worse. You could imagine all sorts of things happening. We did our best sleeping in the daytime when we stopped for a short break. We could drop off to dreamland almost immediately and be snoring by the time our heads

hit the ground.

We continued pushing into Northern France, meeting resistance occasionally and mopping up, searching woods or buildings for German soldiers who were coming from the French and Belgium coasts trying to get back to their Fatherland.

THE OLD FRENCHMAN

One day another soldier and I were near a farmhouse when we met an old Frenchman. He couldn't speak English. We could catch a French word we knew now and then. With this and gestures, we finally understood some of what he was saying. He mentioned "Boche" a number of times. This meant "German". He motioned for us to follow. He had something to show us. We couldn't imagine what it might be. However, we were on high alert. We didn't trust anyone. He led us to a pig sty, and in the mud was a German soldier with his throat cut from ear to ear. The old man laughingly told us how he had slipped up on the German asleep in the barn loft, killed him and threw him in the pig pen for his swine to eat. He thought all this very funny and just retribution for the suffering his countrymen had experienced at the hands of the Nazi. This scene turned our stomachs, even though we had already seen death in its most unpleasant and gruesome forms.

MOPPING UP

Another time we were following a group of Germans through the countryside. Their units had been torn to pieces by our planes and artillery. They were disorganized and demoralized. We trailed them down a small stream for a time. They were easy to track as we found all kinds of military equipment and clothing discarded along the course of the creek. For some reason we turned back to a small village on a hill where we found many dead Germans and horses. Two of the dead German soldiers were booby-trapped. One of our new replacements started to turn over one of the dead bodies to search it. Several of us told him not to touch it. Both bodies lay on their backs with arms outstretched. We walked around gingerly and examined them. We saw a small wire around the ring finger on each hand. We found a long wire, attached it to the legs, and from a safe distance moved the bodies. Sure enough, hidden grenades exploded blowing off the arms of each corpse. The raw recruit learned a lesson, and we old vets became even more cautious.

As we stood on the hill, an American half-track pulled up, and we were passing the time of day with them. All at once we looked back toward the wooded stream and saw the groups of Germans we'd been pursuing coming up the hill waving a white flag. They were surrendering. I'm not sure if the half-track gunner saw the white flag or if he was just in the mood to kill somebody, but he began firing his .50 cal machine gun from the top of the half-track. Some of us yelled at him that they were surrendering. He ceased firing, but not before he had killed two or three and wounded one of them. The Germans had hit the ground in a prone position upon receiving fire. Though, some of them ran back to the woods. We walked out and took most of them prisoners, yet some got away.

We carried the wounded German back to the half-track where a medic attended

him. Just one .50 calibre bullet had hit him in the thigh. His leg was almost severed. He was taken back to one of our hospitals. From the nature of the wound, we didn't see how his leg could be saved. We never knew what happened.

CHALAROI, BELGIUM

One day we received a tip about a company of Germans in Chalaroi, Belgium. We were about three miles from the town. Company L was sent to engage them. We arrived near dusk at the edge of the city and began to move down a street. It was getting dark when we came to a street downtown named America Street. We proceeded down this street and had not gone far when we met a group of men in the Belgium Underground. They told us the Germans had pulled out about an hour before we arrived. One older man spoke good English, and we visited with him for some time. He, as were the others, was friendly and pleased that we had come. He and I exchanged home addresses. For while, after getting back to Texas, we corresponded several times. We both grew lax and lost touch. He was a nice old man.

AN UNEXPECTED CONVERSATION

In a Belgium town we were walking down a street following our tanks when German artillery began to shell us. We broke away from both sides of the street, and some of us found shelter behind a two-story rock house. I was crouched under a shuttered window. All at once a woman's voice in excellent English asked, "Are you American soldiers?" "Yes," I replied. "I taught school in Chicago for about 40 years," she related. All through the lulls in the shelling we talked about life in America and her decision to retire in her home country, Belgium. It was an interesting experience. I never saw her, but her voice and her many years of teaching told me she was elderly. When the shelling ceased, we said, "Goodbye and good luck," and I moved on. None of the shells hit her house.

THE ZIEGFRIED LINE

We soon came to the Ziegfried Line, concrete pill boxes, dragons teeth, and a maze of trenches. The dragons teeth were concrete slabs sticking out at an angle. It was impossible for a tank or other vehicle to cross them. One of our tanks with a bulldozer blade welded to its front solved this problem by scooping up dirt and covering enough of the "Teeth" so our vehicles could cross over. Then we were on our way again. We encountered many pillboxes. Some were manned and some not. We knocked out the manned pillboxes and used high explosives on all we found to destroy them. One manned pillbox stands out in my memory. As we approached it, we received machine gun fire. Several of us flanked it, slipped up to a slot and threw in two grenades. We flushed out the German gunner. Though he was wounded, we later learned, he managed to get into the main part of the pillbox.

We surrounded the pillbox and an engineering unit began to prepare explosives to blow it to kingdom come. Some of us thought we ought to give the Germans a chance to surrender. A Jewish boy in our platoon could speak German, so he got as close as safety would permit and called upon them to give up. It took a long time for them to make up their minds. In the meantime our engineers

were fretting about the delay. They were ready with their explosives.

We could hear the wounded German moaning and calling for his "Mutter", mother. At last nineteen Germans came out but left the wounded one. We wondered why they had not brought him out. Suspecting a trick, we discussed it for a short time, and then I grabbed one of the prisoners. Pushing him ahead of me, with a buddy following me, we moved into the pillbox's outside steel doors and then through another set of steel doors into a large concrete room. By flashlight we found the wounded boy, just a teenager. He was carried out, and one of our medics attended to his wounds.

I'll never forget how big the pillbox was. In addition to the large main room, it had a number of smaller ones. At one time many soldiers had occupied it as it was full of arms, ammo, food, and all the comforts of home. We withdrew a safe distance, and the engineers blew it.

We battled in and around Stolberg, Germany, for several days. We threw everything we had at them but the kitchen sink, and they did the same to us. We were constantly under artillery, mortar, and tank fire, plus attacks by German infantry and grenadiers. We had a number of boys who became "shell-shocked". They were sent to a hospital in our rear. Several of my close buddies were victims of this traumatic experience.

In Stolberg some of the houses were on fire as we moved into it. We could hear an old woman calling for help from one of the burning buildings. Some of us expressed a desire to help her get out, but others before us had tried and were unsuccessful because of the wall of fire. I'll never forget her forlorn voice. There was nothing we could do. Yet, it made us sad for her. We moved on.

On a flat hill in the edge of Stolberg, a buddy and I came under machine gun fire. We were pinned down and couldn't move. Bullets were kicking dirt into our faces even though we were in a prone position. Finally, my buddy, a Czech from Ironwood, Michigan, decided he'd had enough. He became angry and lost his cool. He stood up firing his Browning Automatic Rifle. I crawled over to him and knocked his legs from under him. Made him mad at me for a moment. I told him if he wanted to commit suicide, not to do it when I was around. We were unable to spot the machine gun position, so then during a lull, backed off the hill. My buddy, after cooling off, thanked me for knocking him down. We had been pals for a long time. He was a good reliable boy until he lost his cool.

THE CAVE

Fighting around the edge of the city, we came upon a cave dug into the side of a hill. A pretty German girl came out when we approached it. Upon questioning her, she indicated no on else was in the cave. Another friend and I decided to find out. We found candles, lit them, and discovered two rooms. In the smaller room we saw several mattresses piled up. I pushed two or three out of the way and found a bed frame with a mattress on it. I put my bayonet on the end of my rifle and poked around under the bed. Didn't strike anything. Both of us returned outside and rejoined our squad.

Some of the men were still talking to the woman. I motioned to my buddy, and we went back into the cave. The woman had not seemed sincere about her story, and I had remembered something I had seen in the dim flickering light in our first search. I had seen the sleeve of a German uniform under the bed, but my bayonet didn't find an arm in it.

My buddy got his rifle ready. I relit the candle and jerked all the mattresses off the bed. Looking down through the bed springs, I saw a large German soldier lying on the ground. Carrying his coat, he was prodded out of the cave. He was young, big, and about 6'4". He offered no resistance but seemed resigned, friendly, and smiled all the time. He kept saying something in German. One of our men said he was saying, "Don't kill me. I am merely a soldier like you are."

The German girl's face really fell when she saw we had discovered her sweetheart whom she had hidden so well, she thought. We sent them both back to our HQ's under guard.

FRANCE, RESISTANCE FIGHTERS

When going through Northern France, especially, we would often meet resistance fighters (The French Underground). Walking along a road one day, we saw a car coming toward us at high speed. Our guns were ready for action, but then we saw that the two occupants were civilians and meant us no harm. Still, we watched them closely as they drew to a stop.

One man was driving, and the other was sitting on the back seat with an automatic weapon resting on his knees. Both back doors had been removed so he could fire from either side. Both began talking French very rapidly with much gesturing of hands. They had gone through the town just ahead of us and shot it up. They had received answering fire. So, they told us to expect resistance.

I'll never forget the fat Frenchman in the back of the car. He look like one of Al Capone's gangsters.

Some of the French were quite daring in their attacks on the Germans. They were out to avenge what the Nazi's had done to their country.

HITLER YOUTH

I almost forgot an incident which was similar to the above. An officer, from some unit, not ours, took it upon himself to scout ahead of us in a jeep. A Non-Com drove for him, and he sat behind a .30 cal. machine gun mounted in front of him. We were traveling along a road in France one day, when he returned to tell us he had met resistance in a town just ahead. He had fired at them for awhile with his machine gun, but there were too many German soldiers for him.

We advanced into the town but got into a fire fight with a group of

retreating Germans after passing through. It didn't last long. Two Germans were on bicycles pedaling like mad on the road. They were killed. Then we ran into several wounded Germans after passing through. One was just a boy. He had been hit in the testes. I remember looking down on him as he lay near a tree. Someone saw his emblems on his uniform and remarked that he was a member of the Hitler Youth Division. If looks could have killed, we would have all been dead. I've never seen such hate as he glared at us.

A NIGHT PATROL NEAR EICHWEILER GERMANY

Our squad was honored (ordered) with the assignment to go out one night and capture a few German prisoners for interrogation by G-2 (Intelligence). We prepared in late afternoon, selecting equipment that wouldn't rattle or make noise, making sure our boots were rubber soled, studying maps, cleaning our weapons, blacking our faces, etc.
Five or six of us set off down a road about 22:00 hours, armed with automatic weapons, grenades, and knives. For awhile it was so dark you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. We held on to the belt of the man in front of us. Our plan was to follow the road to a certain point, turn off the road into a wooded area, cross a stream, and play it by ear the rest of the way.

On the road we would go ten steps, stop, and listen. Then repeat the procedure. We had just started walking when we became aware that one of our number had not followed instructions. Someone had on hob-nailed boots, of all things! He made enough racket to wake the dead. Sgt. Bobs, our patrol leader, sent him back to our lines alone. We proceeded, one man short.

We turned off the road into the woods, went about a mile, all of this very slowly and listening most of the time. We found the stream, and holding our weapons high, crossed over. The water was about waist high. After crawling up a muddy bank, we assembled and began to move parallel to the stream. We heard Germans talking too close for comfort.

The clouds had broken a little, and the moon began to peep through every now and then. There was light enough for us to see that we were near a village or town. We observed a tall smoke stack on a hill near us, probably a factory of some sort located there.

Nearer us, and downstream, we saw much movement. A number of German soldiers were milling around near parked trucks and many tanks. Our approach was to their left flank, and we had gotten behind them. We crawled forward slowly but could never get close enough to get our hands on even one prisoner. Most of them stayed in large groups, and this discouraged us from attempting a capture. We tried to spot sentries, with no success. We figured they were probably on the other side of the stream facing our lines. We returned the way we had come, still moving as silently and slowly as ghosts. (Which we'd rather have been that night.)

Back on the road and the ten step thing, we finally got back to our lines about daylight. It had been a long night. We had failed to get even one prisoner, but we did report the location of the large concentration of Germans and armor we had discovered. We ate breakfast, had laid down and just dozed off in a sleep of exhaustion when our artillery and tanks opened up on the enemy position we had reported. This kept us awake for awhile.

However, exhaustion won the battle, and we slept like logs. For sure! Those Germans we had seen didn't get any rest.

OUTPOST AT EICHWEILER

We stayed in Eichweiler for several days. I had been promoted to Buck Sgt. about two weeks before and had six or seven men at an outpost several blocks down from our Platoon CP. We had anti-tank mines strung out across the paved street in front of us and a bazooka aimed out of a window in the house we were occupying. A guard was posted at this window at all times. From it you could see the mines and the street which extended several hundred yards where it made a bend to the right and disappeared from view. Just beyond the bend, we could see a church steeple, so we figured the Germans had an observer in the bell tower. However, we received only sporadic mortar and artillery fire. It didn't last long each time. We never knew when the shelling would begin, so we made sure we were undercover and not exposed.

Kleindinst was a member of the outpost. I had no problem with him, except every now and then he would disappear, when not on duty, and would be gone for several hours at a time. We later discovered he had found a concrete bomb shelter out in front of us. It was filled with people, mostly old folks and children, some were ill or wounded. Apparently, he treated and attended them. All this we later learned when two German civilians appeared at our outpost one day carrying a young woman who had a serious bullet wound. We stopped them near our mines, and they lay the stretcher down on the pavement. One of the German men said they had brought the woman to the "Army doctor". We didn't know what they were talking about. I phoned the platoon CP and reported the situation. Our CO and several medics came down. It turned out that Kleindinst was known by the Germans as the "American Doctor". I don't know how many times he had gone out to the bunker, but the Germans trusted and relied on him to help them. The Lt. went back to the CP to call higher authority. The young woman was allowed in and was transported to an Army hospital in a rear area. Most of us were pleased about this because we didn't like to see people suffer, especially non-combatant men, women, and children. I remember how pitiful the woman appeared lying on the stretcher. She had been shot in the cheek; the bullet lodged near an eye. We gave Kleindinst a new name, "Doc". He didn't seem to mind. Took it as a compliment, I suppose.

Just across the street from our outpost was an abandoned drug store. During daylight hours we often wandered through some of the buildings, always careful of "booby-traps," and had rummaged around in the drug store. It seemed well stocked, though every item was labeled in German. Not many of us knew German or read it. I guessed that Kleindinst got someone who could read the labels and selected drugs and bandages for his treatment of the victims in the bunker.

"BOOBY-TRAPS"

Sgt. Belcher had returned to our platoon after being wounded in Normandy. He came down to the outpost one day and wanted me to help him set out some booby-traps. We set them to the front of our position and off the street. We did this in several places to protect our flanks. We used trip wires attached to grenades. He got a big kick out of it.

KOLAN AND I FIND AN UNDERGROUND BUNKER

I don't remember what town we were near when Kolan and I found the bunker. We were wandering around in front of our lines one day, and we entered a bombed out factory in the edge of town. It was foolish of us to wander around like we did even though we were armed and kept our eyes open for danger, especially booby-traps. The plant was huge and made armored vehicles, tanks, etc. We saw large sheets of steel and iron stacked around. We went up a set of steps to what we assumed was the administration room with full sized kitchen. In the latter we found a couple of pies. It was stupid of us. We ate the pies. Were they good! We could have been poisoned.

As we left the room, a German dressed in civilian clothes came toward us. We were ready for any tricks. He spoke a little English. Keeping our weapons trained on him, we began to question him. He told us there was a large concrete bunker beneath the building filled with mostly women and children.

So, living dangerously, we two idiots followed the civilian down concrete steps through several steel doors and into a large room. Using flashlights, we swept the room. I would not even try to estimate how many old folks and children we saw. Several hundred? All of them looked at us with fear in their eyes.

Kolan and I were still alert, but we knew we were sitting ducks if there were German troops in civilian clothes or in a hidden place in the bunker. When Kolan and I saw the little children, we couldn't help but smile at them. This broke the ice. They came running over to us, hugging us around our legs. Some very old women hobbled over and hugged us. I'll never forget the relief on their faces when we smiled. Kolan and I left them a few "C" rations, which wasn't much but all we had with us. We returned to our lines.

NAVAHO INDIAN

One of our replacements on the line was a young Navajo Indian. In a town near Aachen, Germany, I was sent with four men from our squad to set up a road block at a fork in the street. I put two men on guard while the rest of us got some R & R (Rest and Relaxation). The Indian I placed just inside the front door of the house we were in so he could get a good view of the two streets in the fork. I put him in a chair back from the door where he couldn't be seen from the street, then left him watching with his rifle across his knees.

I went up on the second story, found me a nice bed, and was just dozing off when I heard two shots from the direction of the platoon CP. It was several blocks behind us. I hit the floor and raced down the stairs. The Indian was still sitting in the chair. I stepped into the street and began to walk toward the CP to find out what was happening. I met Platoon Sgt. Cunningham coming up the street. He was as mad as a wet hen. He reamed my butt good.

Two Germans on bicycles, with rifles slung over their shoulders, had pedaled by the Indian and got all the way to the CP. Sgt. Cunningham spotted them and knocked them off the bicycles with two shots. I showed him where the Indian was located, and we both chewed on him good. He sat like a wooden Indian, didn't say a word.

After Sgt. Cunningham left, I asked him if he saw the Germans ride by. He nodded. "Did you know they were the enemy?" I asked him. No response. I couldn't get through to him. He was never put on guard alone again. Always, someone was with him. One thing he was good at, as you would expect, he could see like a hawk. He could see a German patrol coming toward us long before any of us saw anything. However, he never volunteered anything. If you asked him, "Do you see anything?" He would point in the direction of something he saw. If you wanted to know how many of the enemy he saw, you had to pull it out of him.

OUTPOST NEAR AACHEN

At this time I was a Buck Sgt., but my papers hadn't come through. In fact, they never did. I felt a little cheated about this later. However, we were moving so much and so fast that not much paper work was being done at Company L Headquarters.

Three men and I were sent to a house in front of our lines to set up an outpost. We reeled out a telephone line about dusk to the house which was next to a road. A large cemetery was located just across the road. We joked about how convenient it would be to bury us there. I set up the guard schedule of "two men on, two men off" for the night. The off men slept in the house while the other two were positioned at each front corner of the house and next to the road. Our position was on a hill overlooking Aachen which was two or three miles away and across an open area. We had the Germans in Aachen completely surrounded. The back of the house and rear courtyard faced the city. The courtyard was cluttered with debris from the house roof which had been shelled.

Sometime after midnight, I was by the phone at a corner of the house. A stone stairway ran down this side of the house into the courtyard. We expected German patrols to approach from the rear of the house. A noise issued from the courtyard. "So," I thought, "we've got company." I whispered to the guard at the other corner to get ready. I laid down with my head on the ground, peering toward the bottom of the stairs. With pistol in hand, I was ready for action. Then, I saw a shadow begin to move up the stairs. I thought it was a German on his hands and knees. The shape was almost to me, so I couldn't miss. I tightened my trigger finger. Before I could fire, the shape went by me like a rocket. I heard a big "Woof! Woof!" as it went by. Streaking across the road, it became lost to view in the cemetery. It was a large German Shepherd. Why the animal didn't attack, I never understood. Seeing or hearing me move my pistol into position may have spooked him. I was spooked, too. I almost swallowed my gizzard! Why didn't I fire? I have no explanation.

A German patrol was definitely in the courtyard that night. They panicked when the dog ran off. They were so scared they left their weapons and ran. We found the weapons the next morning in and near the courtyard and in some

bushes back toward Aachen. German patrols often used Shepherds to spot our positions at night.

WOUNDED NEAR AACHEN

We fought around Aachen and inside the city for several days, then our unit pulled out and set up defenses facing both Aachen and outward. The city was completely surrounded, and the Germans in the city showed no signs of giving up.

On a rainy night (October 17, 1944) we had just bedded down in a captured pillbox where it was nice and dry. We were rousted out into the rain, and our platoon was moved to a gap in our lines on a hill.

The rest of the night our squad dug foxholes around another pillbox overlooking Aachen in one direction and looking down on a small valley in another direction. At daybreak the Germans from outside Aachen tried to punch a hole in our lines and get their troops out of Aachen. They attacked a hill just to the front and right of us.

Screaming and yelling like banshees, similar to our Rebel Yell, they struck the pillbox with full force. It made your hair stand on end. Our troops were really getting it; bullets and shells flying everywhere. Men were dying on both sides. As the day grew brighter, we could see the German troops and tanks swarming about on the hill. The Germans overwhelmed our men, and the battle quietened some.

Then a big self-propelled gun began to advance across the valley with troops following behind it. It was armored like a tank and sported an .88 gun. A spotter walked behind it for protection with a mike and earphone directing its fire. Several of us were in our foxholes, others in the pillbox as we saw the muzzle of the .88 swing our way. The .88 fired very fast in clips of three rounds. The gun opened up on our pillbox, using fragmentation shells and bouncing them off the pillbox. When they hit the concrete bunker, pieces of hot metal flew in all directions. We began firing at the troops behind the gun. They would hit the ground for a time and then jump up and run to catch up with the vehicle. Our CP was located in another bunker to our left. I could hear our Lt. calling on the radio and phoning for artillery fire, but he wasn't getting through. The supporting fire we desperately needed never came.

Our bunker received three more .88 shells, and a piece of hot metal hit my right forearm. I knew I'd been hit; how bad, I didn't know. I couldn't hold my rifle. I called out to Sgt. Bobs that I'd been hit. "Go back behind you under the hill. There's a medical unit set up there," he yelled. Down the back of the hill I went while the battle continued above me.

I found a medical unit of the 30th Infantry Division located in a stable near a farmhouse. I sat down on a mound of hay and waited. There were many wounded and hurt worse than I, and they were getting the attention of the medics. One corpsman did give me a shot of morphine and tagged me when I arrived. Later they sprinkled sulfa powder over the wound and bandaged the arm. After the morphine I didn't feel a thing. I was on a high. One G.I. had a stomach wound. The medics kept trying to push his intestines back in

while shaking their heads at his condition. I don't know how long I was in the stable, but the battle above us continued.

Just before leaving, I learned that our troops and tanks, with artillery support, counterattacked. The Germans were knocked back and sent running. Part of what I heard in the stable was the counterattack. It was late coming, but effective once it began.

ARMY HOSPITALS

I was transported to a field hospital (large tents) located some miles back of our lines. There I was examined, treated, and bandaged again, then sent on to a hospital in Maastricht, Holland.

Surgery was performed on the arm and the metal removed. I was shown the piece of metal. It was about a square inch in area and one-half inch thick. Someone asked me if I wanted to keep it. No, I didn't.

After two or three days I found myself on a hospital train bound for Paris. A young soldier on the train, near my bunk, had been hit in the testes. He was in no pain at this time, but he was worried about his ability to father a child. He was married and wanted children. I never saw him again after we left the train.

PARIS

In Paris, for my first and only time, I was in an old hospital several stories high. We were downtown. Looking out a window, I could see a lot of the city, but don't remember seeing anything distinctive as the Eiffel Tower or Notre Dame. After five or six days, we proceeded by train to Le Harve. From the train window, I could see some of the places and areas through which we had fought on our way to Paris and Germany. To be out of the fighting was an immense relief. I wanted to sleep all the time. There had been so much fear, tension and so many sleepless nights that now my mood was euphoric.

BACK TO ENGLAND

We went by boat from Le Harve to England and then to a hospital somewhere in England, The Halloran General Hospital, I think. It was sometime in November 1944 when we arrived until leaving for the U.S.A. in early January 1945. We were put in large wards, twenty or thirty men to the ward. One of my good buddies, "Alabama," was in a bed next to mine. We played checkers a lot, sitting on the side of our beds, to keep from being bored and pass the time. I never could beat him. He was sharp. On the other side of his bed was a man from Oregon. I'll call him "T". He had been in a medical corps. I don't recall what his religion was, but it forbade him taking life. He was supposed to have an injured back. Alabama rode him unmercifully about his religion and accused him of faking his injury. We noticed he didn't have any trouble getting to the mess hall. He would pass us in the corridor on his way to chow like we were standing still. Could he put the grub away! We had

never seen anything like it. "T" talked a lot about his girlfriend back home and would write her letters every day. Alabama would tease him and say that she was stepping out on him and had forgotten him. It would set "T" off saying she was a pure Christian girl. Many nights after the ward lights were off, he would write her a letter holding a flashlight under his blanket.

One night after writing his letter, "T" went to the latrine. Alabama had prepared for just such an opportunity. He had filled a condom with water and was waiting. He placed it under the sheet at the edge of the bed where "T" usually sat before turning and stretching out. Most of us in the ward knew what was in the offing. Soon "T" came into the dark room with his flashlight, plopped down on the edge of the bed, and the "thing" burst. He came up gasping and moaning with a wet butt. He called down God's curse upon the heathen, Alabama, as he knew who was responsible for this outrage. We laughed most of the night, till our ribs hurt. "T" left us and went back to the latrine, trying to dry out, and praying for God's wrath to be mightily poured out on Alabama, I guess. Of course, Alabama was put on report for this dastardly deed, but nothing ever came of it.

One boy in our ward, a dead-beat if there ever was one, bragged about shooting himself in the leg with his rifle just to get out of the fighting. None of us liked him. Alabama called him a few pet names every chance he got. Most of us avoided saying anything to him, just ignored him.

We spent Christmas 1944 in the hospital where we read about the Battle of the Bulge. We felt for the boys fighting in the cold and snow. We may have also felt a little guilty about being snug and warm, away from the battle, but only for a short time. The Christmas dinner which was served us had all the usual trimmings. We did it justice.

What a coincidence for me to find in our ward a boy from our unit on the hill in Aachen! We compared observations about the attack. He had been positioned near our CP that morning. He, too, was wounded about the time our tanks began to push the Germans away from Aachen.

MY SOUVENIR

I had arrived at the hospital with an almost new German P-38 which I had taken off a captured German officer. We were ordered to turn in any weapons we had. Those of us who had arms complied, receiving a receipt which declared, in writing, that when we left the hospital, the arms would be returned to us. This action by the powers-that-be came about because some fool patient had gone on a pass, got drunk, and shot up an English town. In a few weeks, the Commanding General of the District issued an order that our weapons were confiscated. We couldn't get them back even with a receipt. I raised such a racket that a Lt. from HQ's came to see us and explain the situation. He was nice and just carrying out orders, but we got "hood winked". We know what happened. Some of the rear echelon officers had them some nice souvenirs, and they hadn't been within a thousand miles of the front line. I was a mad as a rabid dog for awhile, and so were the others affected by this order. We could have wrung the neck of the son-of-a-gun who had shot up the town.

SAILING HOME

We returned to the U.S.A. in January 1945 on board a Liberty Ship. This craft had a thin hull, was large, and easily sunk. I don't know how many were on the boat, but it was filled to capacity. Soldiers and servicemen from many units who had been injured. The ship had been converted into a hospital ship, so many medical personnel were aboard to attend their patients.

My arm was still in a cast with a sling to lessen the weight, and I walked around, getting acquainted with some of the men. I struck up an acquaintance with a uniformed Capt. of the U.S. Merchant Marines. We conversed on several occasions standing by the rail of the ship,just looking at the ocean as we talked. He was older than most of us and was on his way home to "captain" another ship. He'd been in command of a "Liberty Ship" which had been sunk by German U-Boats. Fortunately, he and most of the people on board had been rescued. That had been his second "Liberty" sunk by the enemy. He carried a large briefcase at all times which he said was the log from his sunken ship. His story about the sinking of all those "Liberty Ships" didn't help our feelings a bit.

In walking around I observed more dice and poker games in progress than I'd ever seen. One of my buddies finagled a twenty dollar bill out of me after he lost his wad in a dice game. I gave it up as my contribution to a friendship that should have never begun. I was unexpectedly surprised when the next day he returned it. His luck must have changed considerably, no doubt.

NEW YORK!

As we sailed into New York Harbor, we stood on deck and saw "The Lady", The Statue of Liberty. My, she looked good to us. Made us happy and proud to be a part of the land of the free.

We were transported to a hospital located in the edge of the city. Those of us who were ambulatory received passes so we took in the city for a couple of days. In a swanky restaurant, I ordered two large bowls of stewed oysters. Boy! Were they good! Most of my buddies ordered big juicy steaks. There I was, an old Texan, passing up steak for oysters. I just had a craving for them. We all ate like food was going out of style. I'm sure the very proper waiter thought we were the looniest bunch he'd ever met. After tipping him well for his good services, we left to do some serious drinking. We called it celebrating coming home to the good old U.S.A.

The snow was ankle deep on the sidewalks, and the weather was cold. None of us had had anything to drink in months, being in the hospital without a pass.

We bought some of the best whiskey we could find, and because of the cold, it went down like water. Several of us woke up in a hotel room the next morning. The first thing I saw was a nearly full bottle of whiskey on a dresser. Several of the boys started passing it around and swigging it down. Not me! I'd had enough. We all had hangovers that wouldn't quit. Later we went back to the hospital. Our fling was over.

THE GOAT BONE

We stayed in New York for five or six days. I believe it was there several Army doctors called me in for a consultation about my arm. The ulna bone still had a gap in it, and they thought they could repair the bone with a goat bone transplant. Without the transplant they said my right arm would be shorter than my left. It was my choice.

I didn't want a piece of smelly goat in me. I smelled bad enough as it was. I have often thought, throughout the years, that I should have assented. Goat bone transplants were relatively new at that time, and the doctors, of course, couldn't guarantee its success.

There was another reason I thought might result from that goat bone. People might look sideways at me if I went around bleating at social functions, church going, and the like.

HEADING FOR TEXAS

It was a train ride to the Lone Star State that left New York and finally ended at McCloskey General Hospital in Temple, Texas, which brought me back to Texas. We stopped along the way to let patients off at other military hospitals. I saw some of the U.S. that I'd never seen before, and it was interesting. A buddy and I often stood leaning on the rails of the caboose, watching the countryside, and hearing the clicky-clack of the wheels. They seemed to say, "going home, going home." It gave us a good feeling.

THIRTY DAY FURLOUGH

I arrived at McCloskey and almost immediately got a thirty day furlough. With duffle bag, I walked to the edge of Temple one morning to hitchhike to Stephenville and got there about 2:00 p.m. Soldiers didn't have much trouble catching a free ride in those days, and because of having to wait on a bus, you could usually beat the bus to your destination.

It was good to be home, see all my folks and friends, but I soon became bored, not having anything to do. "Pop" Snow, the father of a brother-in-law of mine, was really kind to me. He took me fishing a number of times. This was enjoyable, and he was great to be with. I had always like to fish, and Pop knew I was twiddling my thumbs and bored with nothing to do.

HOSPITALS AGAIN

I had had two surgeries on my arm, and it was still in a cast. When I returned to McCloskey, the doctors approached me again about the goat bone. They told me it was up to me. I opted, again, not to have it. After several weeks, I was sent to the Waco Annex for two or three months. The dorms there were new and very nice. Two men to a room. They were two-story buildings, and I was on the second floor.

We could sign up for various technical or mechanical training courses. As we had a choice, I enrolled in a course which rebuilt carburetors, fuel pumps, and rewound armatures for auto starters and generators. I enjoyed it very much, and though I had a cast on my arm, did very well.

The chow at the Annex was excellent and plenty of it. On Fridays we had all the fried oysters we could eat. Needless to say, we took advantage of all the good food. We were allowed night passes and learned the town of Waco pretty well, especially some of the night spots.

"SAN ANTONE"

A C-147 flew several of us to Ft. Sam Houston in San Antonio. There I began a therapy program for the arm after the cast was removed. In a well equipped gym, we lifted weights, worked out on the oar machines, etc. Various musical instruments could be checked out during week days, so I tried my hand on the clarinet, trombone, saxophone, and violin. We were sent to an empty building. We'd find us a room, which we had all to ourselves, and make all the noise we pleased. I didn't do well on any of the wind instruments. All I could get out of the clarinet was a squeak about every other note. I knew right away it wasn't for me. The others were equally difficult. I gave them up except for the fiddle. Though it is a difficult one to play, I had better luck with it. However, I soon recognized that innate ability counted for more than I had at first thought. Finally, I checked out a guitar. (I had played this instrument some since I was eleven years old.) I had never been very good on it either, but I got down in earnest. I did improve a little, and my ego began to inflate some until I heard some of the guitarists who could really burn one up. My feathers drooped then. Though I haven't, through the years since, improved my proficiency on it, playing the guitar became a type of mental therapy for me.

We were quartered in two story wood barracks known as the convalescent section of Brookes General Hospital. There were no fans or air conditioning, so we got mighty hot that summer of 1945. The humidity was extremely high, and this further added to our discomfort.

THE SURE BET

When the sun got low in the West, you could see men coming out of the barracks going to the shady side of the building. Some of them carried blankets, so you knew a card or dice game was about to get underway. Usually, the man with the blanket set himself up as dealer and took his cut of each pot. One evening a buddy and I stood watching a black soldier dealing a three card game. It was similar to the old "shell game". He was using three aces from the deck. The object was to pick out the ace of spades. The black would shuffle the three cards awhile and lay them face down on the blanket. It was obvious the ace of spades was crimped on one corner. All watching the game could see it. One soldier lost about $100. (I think he was the black's shill.) He kept betting and would never pick up the crimped ace. My buddy got excited and put down a bet. He selected the crimped card and won. He continued for awhile and won several small bets. Then the stakes got high with a lot of side betting, too. My buddy shot the works, bet all he had. If these idiots wanted to give him all their money, that was fine with him. He could hardly wait to pick up the crimped card. The three cards were tossed on the blanket, and there was only one card with a crimped corner, so my buddy picked it up. It was the ace of clubs. He'd lost a wad. Even after he lost, he couldn't see how he had lost. He begged me to loan him $20 so he could get back in the game. Reluctantly, I did. This he also lost in no time at all. Some people never learn. He did pay back the $20.

A BAR ROOM SCRAP AND SET BACK

I became acquainted with a boy from Walnut Ridge, Arkansas, and we went out on the town several times together. He received his discharge orders one day, sewed on his "ruptured duck" emblem, and packed to go home. I went to the train depot to see him off. I really hated to see him go as he was a good kid.

After his train left, I found a bar and dance hall in downtown San Antone and began to whoop it up. Dancing with some dance hall girl, an airman kept tapping my shoulder and cutting in. I'd have to sit out most of the dance. There was a group of airmen at a table, and I was alone. Dancing with the girl again, another airman tapped me on my shoulder. I turned and knocked him across the floor with my right fist. Right away, I knew I'd broken my injured arm. The cast had been off for several weeks. but the arm was far from complete healing. About then three or four airmen jumped me, and I was having to make do with only my left arm. I was getting the worst of it when a boy I knew, 3rd Infantry Division, came to my rescue. He put all my assailants on the floor. MP's began coming up the stairs. I gave them trouble when they proceeded to take me in and did nothing about the airmen. They used their billyclubs on me. I felt like "Knothead" did in England when he got some of the same treatment. At last subdued, I was docile as a lamb. The 3rd Division boy told them where I belonged, so the MP's transported me to Fort Sam and Brookes General Hospital. There I gave them fits, too. I didn't have any sense with so much to drink. An orderly, a Yankee, kept trying to tell me what to do and all the punishment I was in for, so I started the Civil War all over again. They finally gave me some kind of shot and put me to bed on an upper floor ward.

Next morning, I awoke at peace with the world. I looked to my right, and there was a Sgt. from Oklahoma whom I knew. He had broken his leg a day or two before while sliding into second base when we were playing a game of

baseball during our recreational period. He smiled at me and asked what in the world was I doing there. I told him the whole sad story. He laughed until I thought his sides would split. I laughed, too, mostly at his amusement. I know I wasn't a pretty sight, black eye and knots all over my head and skinned places on me. I was a little sore with all that bar room workout but, other than the broken arm, was in fair shape.

My arm was reset and another cast put on it. I'd have to wear it at least six months. I had already had to wear a cast for almost a year. It was no fun to think about this kind of set back. There was no one to blame but me and my "shenanigans".

Two mornings later, an Army doctor, Col. Geraud, came to see me, carrying a clipboard and my records. He noted that I was from Stephenville, Texas, and told me he had been reared near Chalk Mountain, a place about halfway between Stephenville and Glen Rose. He reminisced about his boyhood and asked me some questions about Stephenville where I was raised. All of a sudden he asked, "How would you like a sixty day furlough?" I thought I was hearing things. I couldn't believe it. "Just fine, sir," I responded. I didn't want to forget to say "sir" with such a gift. Col. Geraud's kindness to me, I shall never forget. In a few hours I was on a bus headed for Erath County.

On the bus I met a soldier going to Oklahoma on furlough, also. He was a brother of Burtis Jarrell. Burtis, Victor Jordan, a Kentuckian, and I had run together in the States and England for awhile. We were part of the five who were assigned to the 3rd Battalion. Though in different companies, we went to Dorchester and other places together when we could. Burtis had a wife and children in Oklahoma. He had been a Golden Glove champion several years before and was still pretty good at fist-a-cuffs. While in France, we'd heard he was hit in the shoulder by a bullet, and the injury would keep him from ever boxing again. His brother told me Burtis had been given a disability discharge, and he and his family still lived in Oklahoma.

While in Stephenville for the sixty days leave, I hunted and fished some. Pop Snow, Milton's dad, was very kind to me. He had a car and would come drive by, and off we would go fishing. We fished some on the Cowhouse River near Potsville, Texas, where we had good luck catching catfish. Most of the fish were not large but good eating size, two and three pounders. It was relaxing and fun.

Sid Andrews asked me one day if I would like to go to work for him. My right arm was in a cast, so I told him I wouldn't be much use to him. Sid was buying peanuts, and the fall harvest was good that year. He asked me if I could write. My fingers were free of the cast on the injured arm, so I indicated I could. "All you will have to do is write checks to the farmers when I buy a load and keep records on the peanuts," he said. I enjoyed this, and it gave me something to do. Also, I made a little spending money, which was welcome. I'll never forget Sid's kindness to me.

BACK AT FORT SAM

After the sixty day time off, I was in much better spirits. After a few days, several of us were sent back to McCloskey, where I stayed another four months. The cast was then removed, and I went before a review board of

doctors. They evaluated my disability and recommended a disability discharge. I was rated 40% disabled. I got my "ruptured duck" sewn on my uniform, picked up my discharge, and got on the road just outside Temple to catch a ride to Stephenville.

The 40% disability rating has never changed. All that was over 46 years ago. Unaware of it much of those years, time has moved on. Though the arm is permanently partially paralyzed, gives me some pain when too much stress is put on it, or when the weather changes, I can't complain. I made it back from combat. Some of my buddies didn't. One drawback occurs when shaking hands with someone. I can't get my thumb and little finger out of the way as they flop down. At first it was a little embarrassing, but I concluded that, what the heck, it was a very small thing. I also was thankful when I saw so many G.I.'s who were really seriously wounded. While on the front line, it was common to hear someone say, "I hope I get a million dollar wound." It may not have been a "million dollar" wound, but it was sufficient to send me home.

AND...

So it was for this citizen soldier of World War II. I've often asked myself, "Would I do it again?, go through all that again?" There were many other young men and women who saw the hell of war, some never returned to their beloved family and country. I can't speak for them, only myself. "Yes," I wouldfor freedom's sake and my beloved family and friends. I, wouldn't like it. But I didn't like it then.

War brings not only casualties to young men and women in the military but to the civilian population. Some people grow up during adversity. Others never do. All of us were forever changed. Some for the better while others suffered loss of character and moral perspective.

Epilogue
By
Albert (Bert) Johnson

On June 3, 2001, my dad and I threw our suitcases in the back of my pick-up and headed for the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport. Our destination was Paris, France. Sometime back in the winter, we had agreed to make the trip. Dad was 78 years of age. It had been fifty-seven years since he landed on the sands of Omaha Beach in Normandy, France. He was going back; this time with his fifty-three year old son.

After many hours in the air we finally flew over England. I was straining my eyes for the first glimpse of the English Channel. When I saw it I said, "Dad you are about to cross the English Channel headed for Normandy for the second time in your life". He did not have to tell me that this time would be nothing like the first time.

We had a great time. Dad was fighting a cold the whole time, but was determined to hang in there. The tour we were on would take us from Paris to Normandy and then on a big loop west of Paris. From there we would go east to the "wine country" south of Paris. This route was almost the same as Dad had traveled with the Big Red One those first few months in France, 1944. We must have crossed his path several times. Dad commented more than once that it was nice to see France in such good shape because "we were tearing it up when we came through."

After seeing some sites in Paris, (Notre Dame, Eiffel Tower, etc.) our tour headed for Normandy. As a kid and all of my adult life, I have tried to picture in my mind what that day looked like. D-day. I am sure Dad had little trouble recalling that this was indeed the place of nightmares and horror. At our first stop on Normandy, I was slow to get off the bus because I was changing out batteries in my camera. Dad, on the other hand, shot off the bus like a rocket. Before I could look up and before many of us had stepped off the bus I glanced up to see Dad walking steadfast toward the edge of the cliff overlooking the English Channel. He stepped over a cable (obviously meant to hold people back) and stood high on the cliff overlooking the beach below. It was a gorgeous day. The channel was like a smooth lake, so serene and beautiful. I can only imagine what was racing through Dad's mind. It was nothing like that chaotic day in 1944. No machine gun fire, no shells exploding, no dead and wounded, no smells of war. Dad walked along the edge of the cliff, alone.

Members of our tour group noticed the passion with which Dad exited the bus and walked toward the beach. His lonely figure told a story. Tour members began asking me "Was he here on D-Day?' "Is this where he landed?" "Is he a veteran?" Before long, Dad had company. Members of our tour surrounded him and began to cautiously ask him questions; listening to his every word. They had discovered an eyewitness. Throughout the entire trip, members of our tour were very careful to acknowledge Dad's experience. These were people from the USA, England, Australia, New Zealand, et al.

Our next stop was the American Cemetery overlooking Omaha Beach. (I later learned in my research that the cemetery is very close to where Dad spent his first night on the cliff above the beach on the evening of June 6, 1944.) Here were buried some twenty soldiers from Dad's outfit. Our tour guide, Frances, an Englishman by birth, was very helpful to Dad and went out of his way to help him find

some of the markers in the cemetery. Among the thousands of white crosses, one was for Dad's Commanding Officer, Captain Fitch, who was killed before Dad's eyes on the beach that morning. (Page 35) The other was a fellow soldier whose name was Danny White. He was wounded on D-day and died the next day. These two markers were the only ones we had time to find. Watching Dad in the cemetery is a sight I shall never forget. To him, these were the heroes of D-Day and beyond, the ones who never got to go home.

We left the cemetery and drove down to the beach on the west end of Omaha. While we were there, a unit of the 101st Airborne was touring the beach in full uniform. I talked to one of them and told him that I was with my father who landed on Omaha Beach in 1944. He asked if he could meet Dad. By coincidence his name was Johnson. I introduced him to Dad. They talked a while and the young soldier expressed his heartfelt gratitude and admiration for what Dad had been through. Apparently, word got around that a D-Day veteran was on the beach. As we were loading the bus, another paratrooper asked to speak to Dad. Soldier to soldier, he too wanted to pay his respects. He spoke softly and kindly to Dad with the sincerity of brotherhood. I could hardly watch with dry eyes.

Our tour had to move on. In hindsight, we would have liked to have stayed at Normandy for at least the entire day. I think we would have both liked some time to just sit there and talk. I would have. After our brief stay, we moved south by St. Lo. Dad remembered St. Lo in rubble after American bombers and artillery had pounded it. We moved on South and then swung below Paris into the wine country. There we had a pleasant stay and added to our consumption of fine wine. To have done less would have been rude. On June 6, 2001 we were dining at a fine restaurant and I seized the opportunity to give Dad a toast with our tour friends and everyone joined in enthusiastically. Fifty-seven years earlier he was "dug in" near the Cemetery at Omaha Beach.

For me the trip to France with Dad was a trip of a lifetime. Priceless. We not only made a historical journey, we traveled as friends, taking in the sites, laughing, and enjoying the company of our tour members. I will never know just how much Dad's thoughts went back in time to his first tour in France. If any part of it really bothered him, he did not let anyone know, but that's just Dad. He is no doubt proud of his military service,however, I have heard Dad say many times that he "came home and got on with his life." The older I get the more I realize how important that is. So many soldiers were unable to make the transition and made a mess of their lives. Dad eventually answered God's call to the ministry and spent 40 years in the Methodist Church. He also earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Howard Payne University and taught for a short while in the public schools.

Dad has never boasted nor thought he deserved something for his military service. It just falls into that category of honor and duty. He won't even apply for free car tags for which he is entitled by earning the Purple Heart. In addition, there is one event that Dad quite purposely did not tell us about in his memoirs. He earned the Silver Star for gallantry in battle. In rare defiance of my father, I included the citation on the next page.

I have often wondered how they did it. How did all the farm boys and city boys from all over this country stand up to the test of combat and sacrifice so much to destroy the Nazi war machine? Perhaps it is summed up by the words of Steven Ambrose in his book, Citizen Soldiers; (Dad used that title first)

> "At the core, the American citizen soldiers knew the difference between
> right and wrong and they did not want to live in a world in which wrong prevailed.
> So they fought, and won, and we all of us, living and yet to be born must be forever
> profoundly grateful."

The members of the Howard Johnson family will never forget Dad's military service. With it, he has earned a place in history. We are equally proud of the fact that he was able to put it behind him (as well as anyone can) and be our Dad and a husband to our wonderful mother Elizabeth, who is a hero in her own right after overcoming the loss of her first husband in World War II. Dad and Mom have many nieces and nephews, grandkids, and great grandchildren. I hope all of them will help us remember the lives of courage and sacrifice lived by the men and women of what Tom Brokaw called the "greatest generation".

File/ Dad