

Recollections

Of

Charles Kinsman Corthell

(1926-2005)

Served 1943-1948

Company I, 319th Infantry Regiment, 80th Infantry Division

For my granddaughter, Delaney Jean

And

For my grandson, Kinsman Robert

Transcribed and edited by his daughter, Kim Corthell, over several years and completed in 2004.

You're In The Army Now

"The last good war" or "when they hit your balls"

Back to my story. I went to Fort Devens when they called me up to the service.¹ Everybody from Northern Maine, I guess, ended up in Fort Devens because that was the place where everybody went and then they sent you out from there. I was there a few days and got some uniforms, and they sent me down to Camp Wheeler, Georgia, on a troop train.

There is nothing more miserable than riding on a troop train. You're crowded. It's dirty, steam engines with coal smoke, going through tunnels. It's hot and the food is usually lousy. You had to walk all the way through the cars to get to the mess car and all the way back again before you could eat, and it's usually hot dogs and beans, three meals a day. We got to Georgia around the first of May, I suppose, or into April, and it was already hot and it got hotter as time went by.

We'd had eighteen weeks of basic training. When I was almost all the way through, I ended up getting ringworm and had to go to the hospital for a week so that set me back. They wouldn't let me back in my own company again so I had to start, not all the way over again, but three or four weeks behind where I had been with another company to finish up. I made my expert badge with every weapon I fired, the sixty millimeter mortar and the new GI² carbine, and the M-1, Springfield, and the machine gun and the pistol, bazooka. At least I could shoot if nothing else. Of course I always wanted to be a soldier anyway so I was quite happy.

I went from Camp Wheeler to Fort Benning and the paratroopers.³ In those days it was a four-week training session with the first week all nothing but physical training. You ran for hours. They did pushups and pull-ups and sit-ups and you jumped out of mock airplanes and you jumped off platforms backward to learn how to fall and just did all kinds of physical stuff. If they took your name so many times without being able do what they wanted you to

¹ Created by the demands of World War I, Fort Devens was originally a temporary cantonment area known as Camp Devens. Located in Massachusetts, the post came into existence on September 5, 1917. In 1940, the first peace time draft was instituted and Fort Devens became a reception center for hundreds of men from all over New England. A massive building program was instituted at the post in 1940. More than 1,200 wooden buildings, including two new 1,200-bed hospitals, were constructed at a cost of \$25 million. In February 1944, a Prisoner of War Camp for 5,000 German and Italian soldiers opened at Fort Devens and remained in operation until May 1946.

² GI was originally an abbreviation for Galvanized Iron, a U.S. army clerks' term for items such as trash cans (which are galvanized), but later the abbreviation transformed to stand for "Government Issue" -- all articles issued in conformity with US military regulations or procedures. Still later the abbreviation transformed to refer to US soldiers themselves.

³ Fort Benning is known as the "Home of the Infantry." Benning enjoyed a construction boom in the mid-1930s as a result of federal work projects during the great depression. The boom continued into the 1940s with the eruption of war in Europe. Troop strength swelled with the arrival of the First Infantry Division and the establishment of the Officer Candidate School and Airborne training

do, you had to start over again. My polio leg caught up with me there and I just couldn't run for hours. Sometimes the platoon sergeants, if I was still running all by myself, would let me fall in with them to go back in to the formation. I fell out too many times, and they took my name. I started through twice and never did make it, so I finally said the hell with it. I'm never going to get through this because I was getting worse instead of better.

They sent me from there to Camp Drum, New York. No, wait a minute, it wasn't Camp Drum. They sent me to Fort Meade first for assignment overseas and then they sent me from Meade to Camp Drum. From Camp Drum we moved right into New York City and on board the Queen Mary on New Year's Eve 1944.⁴ We went overseas and landed in Gourock, Scotland, and took a train across Scotland to South Hampton. Got on a little Polish freighter in South Hampton and went across the channel. Landed in Le Havre and then went across France to Belgium in the old forty or eight boxcars. They hold forty men or eight horses. It was colder than a son of a gun. One time when the train stopped, we went into the railroad station to wait till the train got ready to start again. We stole the hot stove and the asbestos mat and the stovepipe right out of the railroad station with all these Frenchmen screaming along behind us and we jumped back on the train, so we finally had some heat.

When we got into eastern France or Belgium, I was assigned to the 80th Division, Company I, 319th Infantry. This was during the Battle of the Bulge⁵ and the Fourth Platoon had just been wiped out, either killed or captured, so they needed mortar men or machine gunners, so I ended up being a mortar man. I was never, or wasn't in those days at least, particularly pushy. All the other guys wanted to be the gunner on the mortar so they kept kissing the sergeant's butt and showing him how good they were. I knew I was the best but I wasn't pushy. At some point a few days after we'd been there, we went out to do some shooting and when they found out how good I was, they said, "there is the gunner right there, the heck with these other turkeys." They became ammunition bearers and I was the gunner and then, sometime after that before the war was over, they made me sergeant squad leader. I was kind of proud of that, being a sergeant in the Army in a combat situation at the tender age of nineteen.

When the war ended, we were down in Austria living on farms in the Austrian Alps. Maybe one platoon in the farmhouse and a mile or more up the road would be another platoon, then another half a mile would be the company headquarters. It was delightful.

⁴ The Queen Mary sailed from New York on January 1, 1945, arriving in Gourock, Scotland on January 7, 1945.

⁵ The Ardennes Offensive, popularly known as the Battle of the Bulge, was the last major German offensive on the Western Front in World War II. During most of the eleven months between D-day and V-E day in Europe, the U.S. Army was carrying on highly successful offensive operations. Then the German Army launched its powerful counteroffensive in the Ardennes in December 1944 with the design of knifing through the Allied armies and forcing a negotiated peace. The Battle, which lasted from December 16, 1944, to January 28, 1945, was the largest land battle of World War II in which the U.S. participated. More than a million men fought in this battle including some 600,000 Germans, 500,000 Americans, and 55,000 British. At the conclusion of the battle the casualties were as follows: 81,000 U.S. with 19,000 killed, 1400 British with 200 killed, and 100,000 Germans killed, wounded or captured. During the battle the Germans expended the majority of their Air power and men. The Allies, however, had plenty of men and equipment left. With few forces left to defend "The Reich," Germany's final defeat was only months away.

Beautiful country. We all had all the beer we could drink. Every night we sent two men to the company headquarters and they brought back two-bushel baskets full of booze. Basically, there were three bottles apiece per man, a bottle of cognac, a bottle of rum, a bottle of any kind of French liqueur they were able to put their hands on, so we stayed pretty much in a state of intoxication for several weeks. The good thing was there was no duty so if you felt tired at two o'clock in the morning or two o'clock in the afternoon or seven o'clock in the morning, you just laid down wherever you felt comfortable and went to sleep, and when you woke up you just started all over again, so there were no hangovers. It was just a delightful time.

After that they sent us over to Landsberg where we ran the Landsberg prison for a short time. That's the prison where they kept the war criminals eventually. They were just plain German prisoners when I was there. After that they put the political prisoners and the people they eventually executed for war crimes in there.

Then they sent us to Czechoslovakia that was supposed to have a big election. They wanted us to guard the polls. We were surrounded by Russians in this little town, called Grazlitz. It was like being in West Berlin. The only way in and out was through a Russian controlled checkpoint. My duty was I had a squad out in one of the roads leading into town with a little pole across the road and about three hundreds yards up the road were the Russians with their little pole across the road. We were checking people that came from either direction for passes and proper documentation. The Russian soldiers were all little Mongol type guys. You could just see these people giving them a few loaves of bread or a couple quarts of rice, and they could probably go for a month. They looked like something out of the Ghengis Kan.

The Russian officers were pretty weird characters. They used to get drunk and come down and raise holy hell with me in Russian and I didn't even know the first word in Russian except "tovarich."⁶ Eventually they would pull out their pistol and wave it under my nose. We were supposed to be nice to the Russians in those days so I just had my guys lined up in the window of the house and said, "okay, if those bastards shoot me, you shoot them before they get out of here." I'd call the company headquarters and tell them I had a couple of mad Russians out there and, by the time they got there, why these characters had gotten through blowing their tops and gone back to their own outpost.

The Army came up with a deal at that time that if someone reenlisted, they got a ninety-day furlough. The division was being broken up. The old-timers were being transferred out and sent home. We were getting all kinds of new guys in. It really was no more fun because all your friends were being split up. I wanted to stay in anyway so I reenlisted in Franzenbad, Czechoslovakia, came home in November 1945 and had Christmas at home. During the trip home, I got the lump in my throat that eventually became a brachial cleft cyst. It didn't bother me too much while I was home so I had a ball. Had a pint under the seat of the car almost every place I went. Was always going into Pembroke and having a couple of snorts with the boys. I took Keith to Washington, D.C. when I was on my way back to the service and spent

⁶ Translation is "friend" or "comrade".

a couple of weeks with Alice. I showed him all over Washington because I had a five hundred dollar reenlistment bonus plus my pay so I was really flush.

When I went back to the service, I went back to Fort Devens again. I'd gotten the scabies on the way back from overseas and didn't now what it was.⁷ I went to Doctor Brooks in Eastport who told me I had eczema and gave me some eczema medicine which was just like putting fertilizer on these scabies because I was scabs from my eyebrows to my toes. I finally met a guy who remembered what it was, benzyl benzoate, they used to treat it. He told me what I had, so I bought a pint in the drugstore and kept painting myself and I kept them under control, but it never did cure them.

When I got back to Fort Devens, the guy took a look at my throat and said you got to be in the hospital with this big lump I had. So they sent me to the hospital and the hospital said, "hell, you've got scabies, you can't come in here," so they sent me back. They bounced me around two or three times. Finally, the doctor at the aid station said, "look, you've got to get to the hospital with that throat." He called somebody and they agreed to take me in the hospital, and they put me in a ward first where they cured the scabies. They painted me with a paintbrush all over. I don't know what it was they used but it was pretty potent stuff because when they hit your balls, you knew you were getting painted with something.

After two or three days of being painted, that killed the scabies and they put me in the surgical ward and started to treat my throat. They never did find out what was wrong, what it was. Fort Devens sent me down to Halloran Hospital on Staten Island.⁸ Shortly after I got there, the officers were coming through on their grand rounds one day and one of the junior officers was going ahead of the colonels and majors and reading the tags on the bunks. When he got to my bunk, he said, "here he is, right here." I figure, oh shit, what have I done now? They all gathered around as soon as they found out they had found Sergeant Corthell. They said, "who do you know in Washington," and I said, "I've got an Aunt there." "Why would the Surgeon General call us about you?" I said, "fellas, that's my god damn aunt. She knows the Surgeon General and she apparently asked him to check up on me," and so he did. He apparently called the hospital. Of course, that scared the living shit out of these people. They wouldn't even give me an aspirin after that so they sent me to me Walter Reed, which was the number one Army hospital and still is.

I remember when you leave Halloran, they take you by Army car out to some corner in some little town where you eventually get a bus to go into Washington, or a bus to the railroad station and then eventually into Washington. You wait for the bus at a little bar, and the bartender kept giving us free drinks. Apparently he was a real patriot, I guess, and he must have had thousands of guys from the hospitals who were being transferred but he still was buying free drinks, and this was sometime in 1946.

⁷ Scabies is an infestation of the skin with the microscopic mite *Sarcoptes scabiei*. It has infested humans for at least 2,500 years. It is often hard to detect and causes a fierce, itchy skin condition known as scabies. Infestation is common, found worldwide, and affects people of all races and social classes.

⁸ In 1938, a site in Willowbrook on Staten Island, New York, was acquired for the Department of Mental Hygiene, which became Halloran Hospital during World War II, the largest facility in the nation for treating injured soldiers. After the war (1947), it again became a mental health facility, until scandals forced its closure in the 1970s. The site became the campus for the CUNY College of Staten Island in 1989.

Oh, go back a little bit. When I left Fort Devens for Halloran Hospital, we went in a medical convoy from Worcester, Massachusetts, to South Station in Boston with ambulances and hospital buses. We were put on board the hospital train. Before the train was ready, we were all milling around South Station in Boston and, of course, we were all wounded veterans. The war hadn't been over that long, just six months or a little more, so all the civilians were still very interested in veterans and they were buying us drinks and anything we wanted for free. This, as you've heard me mention, was probably the last "good war" that we've had. There was a lot of patriotism in those days. We were out to make the world safe for everybody, and Nazis and Japanese were universally hated so there was nobody on the other side except the enemy. You didn't have all the factions that you have today who were for or against whatever it is the government is doing.

But anyway, when I got to Walter Reed, they diagnosed my case and they snapped out this tumor that I had, and I went back to Fort Meade where I became the orderly sergeant for a guy named Captain Lucy. We had a great big three, four story Army barracks with its own PX and a tailor shop and mess hall and poolroom. We had it in this great big building, like a big apartment building, with its own little mall. They called it "Lucy's Hotel". Captain Lucy was a little fat, MP captain. He used to tell me when he was mad, he'd say "Corthell, I'm going to cut your tits off" or "Corthell, I'm going to stick my foot right up your ass." But we got along, pretty much. He thought I was a pretty good man.

I finally got tired of being a dog robber,⁹ so I asked him if he would sign my papers for overseas. He said sure and he tried to get me a promotion. At the time, the problem was right after the war there were so many non-coms in the service that there was just too many.¹⁰ We only had about two privates in the whole unit I was in. We had half a dozen first sergeants and 20 master sergeants and god knows how many techs, staffs and buck sergeants. We had a couple idiots from Boston who were privates that were on permanent KP, and that was about the only privates we had in the company.¹¹

I went from Fort Meade up to Fort Lewis, Washington, supposedly to go overseas.¹² When I got there, they decided I didn't have enough time left. I had only two years and a few months so they decided to keep me at Fort Lewis. I worked in the replacement depot there interviewing people who were being transferred overseas or coming back from overseas, filling out their service records and interviewing them for their "form twenties."¹³ They

⁹ According to CKC, "a dog robber is like a batman in the British Army. He takes care of his officer, i.e., a half-assed assistant and servant. It can be a nice safe cushy job but not highly regarded by real soldiers." According to a Marine Corps Dictionary a dog robber is an aide to an officer, usually a Second Lieutenant with his head up his ass [source - <http://www.paulnwhelan.com/marinecorpsdictionary.html>].

¹⁰ Noncom - a military officer appointed from enlisted personnel.

¹¹ KP - Kitchen Patrol. A term used in the U.S. military to denote working in the military kitchen.

¹² Located on Puget Sound in Washington State. At the end of the war, the northwest Fort Lewis staging area became a separation center and discharged its first World War II veterans in November 1945.

¹³ According to CKC "a form 20 is a preprinted form on heavy stock that is part of your service record and contains all pertinent information about your military job qualifications, decorations, civilian and military education, etc. It will tell you just about anything you need to know about a service career. It may be different now than it was fifty years ago."

eventually closed out Fort Lewis as a replacement depot so they sent me down to Fort Bliss, Texas, where they assigned me to the motor pool.

The first day I hit Fort Bliss, I found out I wasn't going back to the infantry which is what I wanted to do. So as soon as I got in there, I asked the First Sergeant how you got a transfer out. He gave me such a blast, I figured you better shut your mouth or you're going to end up being in worse shape than you are, so I just decided to go along with it. They sent me to the motor pool and they made me the parts clerk under Pappy LeJune, the warrant officer, who was one of the finest guys I ever met while I was in the service. He eventually retired and they made me the supply sergeant for the parts department.

At this point, I was a practicing Catholic and we had a Catholic chapel on the post with a library and I used to spend a lot of time in the library reading. [I] got to know the chaplain, not by name, but he knew who I was and I knew him. One Sunday night I was in the chapel reading and the chaplain came in and informed me that his assistant had stolen the collection money that day and had gone to Mexico with it, and the MPs had just caught him with the collection money all spent. He needed a new assistant. I only had a few months to go so I said, "if you want someone just for only a few months, I'd like to take the job."

So he had me transferred to [be] his assistant, and I kind of enjoyed it. I lived in the chapel, had my own room, telephone, hot plate to do cooking on. The chaplain had an apartment on the other side with a kitchen and a shower, so between both places I didn't really have to go back to the company at all except on pay day, or if I felt like eating at the mess hall, I did. I would go the commissary and buy food, keep it in my locker, and cook it on my hotplate. When I wanted¹⁴ a drink, since I bought the sacramental wine for the alter, why I'd go out and pour a little wine from one of these gallon jugs they had in the wine room. If I was broke toward the end of the month, I'd go the vigil stand and borrow a couple of dollars. I took care of the bank accounts so I bought everything for the chaplain, waxed the floor, polished everything, kept the alter in good shape and just generally did all the maintenance work around the church.

When I eventually was discharged, I wanted to make sure that I'd paid back all the money that I owed god for borrowing out of the vigil stand so I put two new twenty dollar bills in the stand. The chaplain apparently opened up the money box and found these two new bills in there so he said, "hey, did you put that money in there," and I said "yup," and he said, "here, take it back, don't worry about it," so I got my money back and I came home.

¹⁴ Audiotape says, "needed", not "wanted." Correction by CKC.

Fort Benning to the Queen Mary

"I didn't want all that vomit coming down from overhead on me"

Maybe we can get to Fort Benning now, unless I think of something else that happened earlier. By the time I was sent to Fort Benning, I'd had about six months of constant exercise and basic training, running for miles in the Georgia heat, rolling logs on my head, and jumping up and down, and leaping off walls and sliding down rope, and doing all the stuff that they do for basic infantry training, so I thought I was in pretty good shape.

When you join the paratroops at Benning, the first week is entirely physical -- running constantly, you never walk anywhere, pushups, squats, knee bends. You name it. They do it. Also jumping off platforms and learning how to roll when you land, hooking up to a harness and jumping out of an airplane fuselage and learning how to land when you hit the ground. Anything they can think of to make it a stressful situation.

I'd always been able to hide my right polio leg from the doctors when I had physical examinations by standing behind someone else when they were looking us over, and that's how I ended up getting in to the paratroops in the first place. My leg should have been in pretty good shape but I think with all the exercise, constant twelve hours a day, it was really starting to break down rather than getting better.

They had a system where if they took your name three or four times during the first week for failure to do something, you either had to quit or were kicked out or had to start over again. The constant running apparently made the leg start to really break down and I could do everything else but that. I could run for maybe half an hour, forty-five minutes, and then I just couldn't keep up with the crowd. One day, one platoon sergeant took pity on me. I was still running along all by myself because my platoon had left me in the dust and he said, "fall in behind me and you won't get caught this time," so I did that and was able to keep up with that group.

However, they took my name too many times so I said okay, I'll start over. I'm not going to quit. I started through the second week and instead of getting better I just got worse. They finally caught me and said, "okay, that's it," so I was out.

I spent the next couple of weeks in a casual company waiting to be reassigned and pulling mostly guard type duty, either formal guard in a fixed position or as a prison chaser where you go down to the stockade and draw an M-1 carbine or a old ninety-seven shotgun loaded with brass shells and double-aught buck and take out anywhere from one to three or four prisoners to do various jobs around the base. One of the more interesting assignments was in the armory where I got to disassemble, clean and reassemble hundreds of M-3 grease gun submachine guns.

On one prison detail I was scared to death when I brought the guys back. I was out with three of them, policing up the post. They found some bottle beer back of the PX and, of course, they all stole a bottle, so I took them down underneath the road in a great big culvert that you could walk through and let them drink the beer. Of course, they hadn't had any alcohol for a long time since they were in prison so they got bombed out of their minds, and here I am with a shotgun trying to herd these three drunks back to the stockade. I figured, oh my god, if they catch me I'm going to be in here with these guys. They were able to get their act together enough so they got back in the stockade without anybody being the wiser, and I was very, very relieved to say the least.

When I left Benning, I got a delay-in-route, which is a system the Army used to give you some time to go home, or whatever you wanted to do, so I was able to go home for a few days and then reported down to Fort Meade. At Fort Meade, they were assembling packages of troops to be shipped overseas, and from there we went to Fort Drum in New York, stayed overnight for one or two nights and then to Camp Shanks. I believe I spent Christmas of 1944 at Fort Drum, New York.

While I was at Meade, we were restricted to the post because they were going to ship us out at any time. One night I found out that they weren't going to ship us out that night so I just went into town to see Alice, and she was scared to death when she saw me, that I was trying to run away. I said, "no, I just figure they're not going to do anything, why the hell should I stay on the post when I can come in here and see you."

The next morning when she went to work, she told General Lear who was Commanding General of the Army Ground Forces. They used to call him "Yoo-Hoo Lear." On the Louisiana maneuvers a truckload of soldiers were hollering at girls as they were driving by on trucks and hollering "yoo-hoo," and this General Lear did not like that, so he disciplined them and, from that point on, he became known as "Yoo-Hoo Lear."¹⁵ He just thought it was funny that I'd said to hell with this, I'm going into D.C., and [he] got a big kick out of it.

We went from Camp Shanks directly to the docks in New York City by train, and the Army somehow did a fantastic job. I never did understand the logistics of it but every guy was lined up in the perfect position. There were fifteen thousand of us. We walked on board and right in to the compartment that you were assigned to. I don't know how they ever handled all that many people and got them where they're supposed to be, but they did.

¹⁵ General Ben Lear Ben Lear fought in WWI and then trained soldiers for WWII. After a series of assignments as an instructor and Cavalry commander, he received his first star in 1936 and took command of the 2nd Army in 1940. He reached the statutory retirement age in 1943 but was called back to service. He succeeded Lieutenant General Lesley J. McNair as commander of the European Ground Forces. In closing the phases of the war in Europe, he served as Deputy Commander of the European Theater of Operations, a post in which one of his responsibilities was to speed up training of infantrymen and to move large numbers of soldiers into combat. He was known for disciplining soldiers who were calling to passing women while on maneuvers. When he returned from Europe as a Lieutenant General in July 1945, he was piped ashore from transport in Boston by hundreds of GI's shouting "Yoo-Hoo." Ramrod straight, he walked down gangplank in stony silence. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

My company was assigned to be the MP Company. We lived on the promenade deck in the cocktail lounge, right at the forward end of the ship. There were bunks built in, just pipes with canvass stretched across, and probably five or six high. One thing I made sure of was that I got a top bunk because I didn't want all that vomit coming down from overhead on me, and believe me it really did. When fifteen thousand guys got seasick on the Queen Mary, the stuff was so thick you could see it rolling back and forth on the decks.

My assignment was manning a machine gun down in the guts of the ship somewhere in a long corridor, and my job was to mow the troops down if they tried to rush the lifeboats if we got torpedoed. The big brass was on the top deck. This was in officers' country and they wanted to get all the officers off before the troops could storm the boats. I made up my mind that I was not going to shoot anybody. If I heard a torpedo hit that boat, I was going to take the machine gun with me and go up topside and throw it overboard and get in a boat.

The Queen Mary was highly vulnerable if the Germans could find her, but she was also faster than anything else we had so it always traveled alone. We had no escorts. It took us five days to go across. Of course, we would have gone across a lot faster except we were zig zagging to avoid any submarines. We landed in Gourock, Scotland. Went ashore in small boats and got on a train and went from there to South Hampton, England. Stayed in a tent city there for a couple of days until they got us sorted out and then we were shipped across to France on a Polish freighter.

The freighter didn't have bunks. It had hammocks and the hammocks were stowed in a big wooden hammock locker. I didn't feel like sleeping in a hammock so I waited till all the guys drew their hammocks and then I crawled in the hammock locker and went to sleep very comfortably.

It took us a whole night to go across the channel. I don't know exactly why. It's only about twenty miles. The next morning they loaded us all in landing craft where you crawled down a big net into a landing craft with a big ramp in front that drops down, and we went ashore at Le Havre.

Chapter Fourteen

The War

"I'm moving the poor bastards so they don't all get killed"

All I remember about Le Havre was that we landed on the beach, walked through the town and up a tremendous big hill out to a woods on the outside of town where they had tents set up and an outdoor field kitchen to give us some hot chow.

They also issued us a rifle and took us out to a thousand-inch range. I can't recall what the sight settings are now but when you zero your rifle in at a thousand inches, it's dead on at several hundred yards, so it saves having a great big range to sight in on. They gave us one clip of ammunition and told us to shoot it. Probably fifty or sixty of us at a time did this. My rifle didn't even hit the paper so I never did get it zeroed in because they didn't give us any time to adjust our sights whatsoever. You were just supposed to fire your one clip and hope for the best.

Before we left for overseas we were issued a great big pack, which was just a great big bag with shoulder straps on it, and we were issued every bit of clothing and equipment that a soldier ever was issued. They must have weighed seventy-five or eighty pounds, I suppose. It was a good easy way to get all that stuff overseas. You didn't really need it when you got there but they would need it eventually, so rather than have it all packed up and shipped over by separate ships, they just gave it to the soldiers to carry over. When we got in to the woods at LeHavre, they took all that stuff away from us and gave us a duffel bag to put our personal stuff in and took the big load off our backs at that point.

I think we only spent one night there and then they loaded us up on the old French forty or eight boxcars the next day. The forty or eights were used in World War I and they held forty men or eight horses. As you might expect for something that was used in World War I, these were in pretty tough shape with doors that really wouldn't close and holes all over, and we were freezing our butts off. This was January 1945. One of the worst winters they ever had in Europe.

They'd stop the train periodically to let us wee-wee and sometimes to feed us. They had field kitchens set up along the tracks. We stopped in one little French town with a little railroad depot and inside was a pot-bellied stove on an asbestos pad with a [unintelligible] stovepipe going up through the ceiling. We waited until the train was actually moving out and we rushed into the depot, picked the stove up by the asbestos pad and grabbed a hold of the stove pipe with gloves, and took the whole thing back on board the train with about half the population of the town chasing us. But by that time it was too late. We had the stove and we ended up staying fairly warm after that.

When the train had taken us as far as it would go, they took us off and put us on trucks. We went to a beautiful castle where we stayed overnight. This was not a castle that had been

hit by the war at all so it was in really great shape and was a beautiful place. Next morning they gave us our assignments and a bunch of us, of course, were assigned to the 80th Division, 319th Infantry, Company I. We got to the company sometime after dark that night and the mortar squads had just been either killed or captured, so they were looking for mortar men. Almost all of us in this group were assigned to the Fourth Platoon mortar section. Since I was an expert rifleman, I'd have much preferred to be a rifleman, but I didn't argue. I just went along with the crowd.

That night we stayed in a shattered farmhouse in Luxembourg. It had one room still left with all four walls and a ceiling. The rest of the house was pretty well broken up. There were doorframes without a door on them or a half a wall missing or the roof gone, but we were quite comfortable in this one room. Sometime during the night we heard a noise outside and the Section Sergeant that was with us said, "okay, let's go see what that is," so three of us went out, two of us with rifles and the Sergeant had a flashlight. The noise was coming from behind a door that was still on its hinges. He said, "okay, I'll open the door, stick the flashlight in there, and you guys holler 'stick em up'." So he did and we did, and I almost pooped my pants because I was looking at some horrible face that I couldn't quite figure out what it was until I realized I was looking at a big cow with horns.

Again, that same night, we were on guard on the road and a guy in an American uniform came walking down the road and didn't know the password, so we captured him. Took him to the company headquarters and found out that he was a tanker that had been out plowing roads with his tank and had run out of gas, so he was unable to get the password because he wasn't anywhere near where anyone could have given it to him. So they chewed our asses for that. But during the Bulge, the Germans had American speaking soldiers in American uniforms out disrupting all the road traffic and trying to confuse everybody, so we still felt that we did the right thing by bringing the guy in.

Also that night when everybody had gone to sleep except the Section Sergeant and one of the guys who had just come in, the Section Sergeant and this guy were fiddling around with the rifles and they fired a shot out through the ceiling. No one even woke up. I heard it. I knew that they'd shot but they didn't say they'd shot anybody so I just laid there and went back to sleep again. Next morning I couldn't convince them that I'd heard them because they said, "oh, you guys all slept through that shot last night." I said, "no, I just figured you guys were fooling around and as long as you didn't shoot me, I wasn't going to worry about it."

The next day we all practiced setting up the mortar to see who was the best. I must confess I probably was the best one there but I wasn't interested in showing off like some of the guys were. A lot of guys were really pushy to show how good they were. They picked a couple of them for gunners and I became an ammunition bearer.

We stayed there a couple of days and then we were moved when they moved the battalion off to another town. That night they brought in a great big truckload of what you'd call L.L. Bean hunting shoes. We used to call them gum rubbers. I don't know what the Army called them, but we'd been freezing our feet because of the leather combat boots that we were all wearing. They were very thin leather and they were tight and you just couldn't keep your

feet warm, and they'd lost a lot of guys to trench foot. So they brought these rubber bottom, leather top boots in for us, and we just pawed through the pile until we found a pair that fit.

They also started issuing us great big long woolen socks that went all the way above your knee, and they were great. We used to keep a spare pair in top of our helmet to keep them dry, because one of the worst problems soldiers have is keeping their feet in decent shape when they're spending all their time outdoors in the wet and the rain and the snow, and getting cold, and no place to warm up.

There was a lot of snow and along the sides of the road where they'd plowed with the tanks you'd see a head or an arm or a foot sticking up out of the snowbanks where somebody had been killed and just stayed there and froze stiff.

What happened between then and the time we ended up outside Luxembourg for a five or ten-day rest, I don't really recall. It was just walk and shoot and dig holes and do what we were told pretty much. I guess we were winning the war. We had no way of knowing because we were just a small isolated group.

Luxembourg is a small duchy, I think they call it, which in the scheme of things is about as important as a barnacle on a whale, but it was a nice little country. We were billeted outside of Luxembourg City, several miles in the country, very pleasant, nice homes that hadn't been destroyed by the war so we were quite comfortable during our rest. While we were there, I was designated the bazooka shooter and so we practiced firing the bazooka at barrels set up at several hundred yards to see if we could hit them and learn how to zero in. I didn't have to carry one, but I was the guy that would do the shooting if we ever had to use them.

I can't recall when the Bulge, or the Battle of the Ardennes as it was really called, was over. I think it was either late February or early March. Then came the Battle of the Rhineland and central Europe for which I have the three battle stars.

When we left Luxembourg, we took up positions overlooking the Siegfried Line on the bank of, I think it was, the Our River, a big high hill with a steep bank leading down to the water, and a steep bank on our side to get up.¹⁶ By this time the spring thaw had set in and it was raining and muddy, and there was so much mud you couldn't really climb this hill without the help of the steel cable that we ran down the side to pull yourself up. We hauled ourselves and all of our gear up to the reverse slope of this big hill and dug in our guns. We had some sheet metal that we'd dragged up that we used to make a roof over our foxholes in the side of the hill, but it still didn't keep the rain and the mud from coming in.

After we'd gotten up there and got everything dug in, we had to send someone back for blankets and water and ammunition, so they asked for volunteers. I was totally beat but I

¹⁶ There were two Siegfried lines, both situated on border between France and Germany. They were lines of defensive forts and tank defenses built by the Germans. The first was built in 1916-1917, during the First World War. The second was built during the 1930s, opposite the French Maginot Line, which served the same purpose.

figured, hell, I might just as well go, so I volunteered to go back down, as tired as I was. I think that's when I first started to make a name as someone who could or would get the job done. When I got down to the bottom of the hill, I just slid down through the mud and when I reached the bottom of the hill there was a field that we had to cross to get to the houses where the rations and water and ammunition were. A German mortar shell came in and landed about two or three feet away from me but fortunately for me it was a dud. It just stuck up out of the mud. That apparently got my adrenaline flowing because I wasn't tired any more and I grabbed whatever it was that I was going to lug back and scooted up that hill without any trouble at all.

As uncomfortable as our living conditions were, it was really an ideal place to be because the hill was steep and the Germans couldn't hit us with the artillery because they were firing over the hill and it would go beyond us. The only thing we had to really worry about was the mortars that come almost straight down on you, but they didn't seem to have too many of those.

We were there for a few days and while we were there we'd alternate one night on the hill and then go back down into the little village and sleep in a cellar where we could warm up and have a little peace and quiet.

When the decision was made to attack across the river, my battalion was assigned to carry the assault boats to the riverbank so that the troops that were actually going to cross would be fresh and rested for the assault. We lined up on a road, muddy, probably mud a couple of feet deep on either side, and we carried these big wooden assault boats that would hold probably eight or ten or twelve men with all their gear. During the approach to the river we were stopped, and most of us had dysentery or at least diarrhea and I was no exception so I had to go bad. We were all lined up on one side of the road so I figured, I'll walk across to the other side so no one will step in it after I get done, so I stepped off the side of the road and went into the mud clear up to my knees. By the time I got myself out of the mud, I'd already pooped my pants, so I just dropped my drawers and took my trench knife out and scrapped off as much as I could and pulled them back up and wore them for the next couple of months.

We got the boats to the riverbank and the engineers were there with a Bailey Bridge they wanted us to lug down so they could put that together to go across the river with.¹⁷ We were supposed to leave before a certain time because the big artillery barrage, machine gun fire and all that stuff was supposed to start. But as a result of lugging this bridge down to the water, we were stuck out there when the whole thing opened up, and we had artillery and our own machine guns and mortars were firing over our head at the Germans on the other side of the river.

¹⁷ The Bailey Bridge is a portable pre-fabricated bridge, designed for use by military engineering units to bridge up to 200-foot gaps. It requires no special tools for construction, is small enough to be carried in trucks, but is strong enough to carry tanks. It is considered one of the great bits of engineering design. Donald Bailey was a civil servant in the British War Office who tinkered with model bridges as a hobby. He presented one such model to his chiefs, who saw some merit in the design and had construction started at a slow rate. A number were available by 1944 for D-Day, when production was ramped up. The U.S. also licensed the design and started rapid construction for their own use. Bailey was later Knighted for his invention, which continues to be widely produced and used today.

That's when I got hit in the back, a real burning sensation. I figured, oh my god, my back's gone, so I wiggled my feet and wiggled my arms and everything seemed to work, so I got up and by that time they were telling us to go ahead and withdraw. I ended up carrying one side of a stretcher of a guy that had been wounded. I was in the rear and somehow the first two guys on either side of the stretcher walked over a foxhole. I was walking along carrying the stretcher and all of a sudden I went about five feet down, straight down in the ground. Scared the hell out of me. Of course, it didn't help the guy on the stretcher either when I ended up dropping him.

We got back to the little village we were staying in and I took my shirt and underwear off and the guy said, "yeah, you got a little hole there," but it didn't seem to bother me any so I didn't bother to go to the medics to have them look at it. I would have had a Purple Heart for that if I had.

The next day we were supposed to cross the river in boats to join the other battalion on the other side. During that morning we tried four times to go across and every time we put a boat in the water, they'd kill everybody in the boat. We finally gave up and withdrew back into town again.

In addition to killing guys in the boats, the Germans were plastering the whole column with artillery and it was going off all around and over us. And a lot of guys were getting wounded and the medics were having a real tough time trying to get them back, so my platoon, being in the Fourth Platoon, we were on the end of the column, we started grabbing stretchers and carrying guys back. They put us in for a Bronze Star for this, for evacuating the wounded under really bad artillery fire.

When we got back to the village, they told us to go ahead and eat, so I took off my pack and brought out one of my rations. It was all covered with this real sticky coffee that came in little envelopes, and I started swearing because I figure somebody had been in my rations and screwed up my coffee on me. Come to find out I'd been hit in the back with a big piece of shrapnel. It went through my pack and my raincoat and my rations and stopped right at my back. I didn't even feel it at the time.

Before that when we were up on the hill, I was going down again for something and was in this bunch of woods at the top of the hill.¹⁸ The Germans started in shooting artillery at us and getting tree bursts over our heads. I looked down at one point and a piece of shrapnel had gone between my fingers while I was laying on the ground and a little fire started right between my fingers from the red hot piece of metal that had landed there. That does have a way of getting your attention.

Somehow that night the engineers succeeded in getting a bridge built about halfway or two-thirds of the way across the river, so we went up again in the middle of the night, walked across the bridge as far as it went, and then jumped off and waded the rest of the way ashore. We were looking uphill at a great big bluff with German pillboxes and machine gun nests

¹⁸ Beginning Tape Five, Side B, 1997

and artillery nests, and they were shooting off flares. I was the last guy in the whole column because I was platoon guard at that point of the Fourth Platoon. [The] platoon guard's job during combat is to stay in the rear and push the stragglers up and be sure no one gets lost. I got lost when we crossed the river. I lost contact with the rest of the guys and I'm wandering around by myself trying to find out where the hell they went.

So while I'm wandering around, all of a sudden this German flare went off which lit the whole place up like day. You're trained not to move when a flare goes off because the enemy sees the movement. They can't see you if you don't move, but if you move around, they see the flash of your face or the movement. So I froze in place and I looked down and I'm right in the middle of all of our troops with an officer sitting there saying, "Get down! Get down!" I said, "I'll move." I just moved my lips. I said, "I'll move when the damn flare goes off. I'm not going to move now and get my ass shot!" I guess that was another case where I started to make a name for myself as being a little strange or at least willing to speak out when I had a good reason for it.

We dug in along the road for the night and at daylight we attacked the Siegfried Line, the pillboxes that still hadn't been captured. There were some tanks out in front of us and we were all laying on the ground on the side of a hill with the platoon stretched out behind us over probably fifty to seventy-five yards. The Germans were shooting artillery at the tanks but they were missing them, and it was going over our heads and landing right in the middle of the rest of my platoon behind me. I looked around and I could see that the artillery was forming a definite pattern right in the middle of them. Our platoon sergeant had wandered off somewhere to see what was going on so I just stood up and gave them a signal. I moved them all sideways about fifty yards to get them out of the artillery. About that time the platoon sergeant comes back and screams, "what the hell are you doing?" I said, "I'm moving the poor bastards so they don't all get killed. You're not paying attention to what's going on." Again, another illustration of my taking the bull by the horns.

While this was going on one of the youngsters that had joined us, I say youngsters, I was only eighteen at the time and so was he. But he was one of these bragy, know it all, show off types, and as soon as the artillery got anywhere near him, he started weeping and wailing and crying and claiming he was sick, so we ended up sending him back just to get rid of him. He will come up later in the story here.

We captured some pillboxes and the trench line between the pillboxes and stayed there for, I suppose, almost a week. There was one big pillbox out in front of us that we never did crack. We attacked it and shot at it. They shot at us and we never did go anywhere with it. But during this time we had to go back for ammunition and water, rations and so forth, oh, probably a mile or two back behind the lines. And one episode, we needed ammunition. I went to another pillbox, probably five hundred yards away from where we were, where the company had some spare ammunition and hand grenades that they'd let us have. Another guy and I, Carmine Armaretti, a young Italian lad from New York who hated the name Carmine so he says, "just call me Dago." Anyway, we went back to get the ammo and I can't recall what they weigh now, but the ammunition in those days came in a big green chest . . . with a lid screwed on it. It was heavy as hell. It had ammunition in bandoleers for the M-1 rifles

inside. When you cracked it open, all you'd do is grab a strap and you'd end up with a bandoleer of ten clips to hang around your neck.

It was raining and it was muddy, and we had a hell of a time trying to carry this thing. Your grip just kept slipping off, so I finally said, "look, I know what we'll do." I said, "I'll get down on my hands and knees and you get that stupid box on top of my back." So we were able to do that, and I crawled the five hundred yards with this big load of ammunition on my back and he held it on, because we just couldn't carry the stupid thing any other way.

We enjoyed taking prisoners back or going back for rations because they had a field kitchen set up and you'd get something to eat. [Unintelligible] also a great big freshwater tank in one of the pillboxes that still had good water in it so you could drink all you could hold and then fill your canteen while you were there, because water was always at a premium. You basically got one canteen a day and that was it. We all carried Halazone tablets, which, I guess, are some kind of an iodine mixture, little tiny pills like a saccharine pill, you put in your canteen. So we'd fill our canteen at a reasonably clean mud hole or any water that looked like it was halfway decent. We'd fill the canteen and then we'd put a pill in there and shake it up and wait for an hour before we drank it. I guess they worked because we never got sick on it.

One of the mortar gunners and I had the gun dug in an old shell hole not far from the trench line, and one night we were sort of sitting up in the side of the hole watching a tank attack this pillbox when the Germans fired a round and lit right on the edge of our hole. It scared the hell out of both of us and pretty well stunned us, and we both dived into our foxholes. Neither one of us said a word for probably two or three minutes and finally I said, "you okay?" and he said, "yeah, how about you?" I said, "yeah, no problem." So somehow we both escaped that one. I didn't say anything to anybody but he apparently complained to the platoon sergeant about how close we'd come to getting killed, so they said we could go into the pillbox and get a few hours sleep. So I ended up getting a chance to go inside one of the pillboxes and stretch out on a bunk for awhile.

We had a listening post nearby that was just a big deep foxhole that was manned all the time. I was usually assigned there at night for the night, two of us, and one stayed awake and one slept. Every morning the Germans would start shooting artillery at us. They figured if they [could] catch us at breakfast, they might be able to kill somebody. This foxhole was right in the middle of where the fire was coming and there were explosions all around. The ground shaking. The smell of the burning exploding powder was so heavy that it gave you a headache, like smelling nitroglycerin too long. I kept thinking one of those shells is going to have to come down this hole because it's just all around us everywhere, and the ground looked like it was plowed. It was smoking from the explosions. When they finally got done, you stuck your head up to see what it looked like.

When we left the Siegfried Line, where we'd failed to take that one last pillbox, I really don't know where we ended up. In fact, the rest of this narrative probably is just going to be disconnected bits of stories that I remember because I have no idea when in time they happened or in what order.

Eventually, this weepy willie that we had let go back in the Siegfried Line rejoined us again, and he hadn't changed a bit. He was still running around shooting his mouth off. He told them in the rear that he was a mortar gunner, which entitled him to carry a forty-five, so they issued him one. All the way up to the front, he was shooting farmers' pigs and anything else that moved, just showing off because he was such a big shot. The next morning, we were about ready to go into the [unintelligible] and attack, we were all laid out in a piece of woods waiting to move out. We could hear shooting starting in the front of us and then some artillery started to rumble, and this kid immediately started weeping and wailing and crying again. So we took his forty-five away from him and told him just to start walking and go away from the guns, and we never did see the guy again. I hope some German shot the son of a bitch.

Chapter Fifteen

A Soldier's Life

"I ate forty-eight in twelve hours

I used to get a kick out of Bill Brandenburg, one of my buddies in the mortar squad. He used to sit in the corner when we were behind the lines and promise god all kinds of things that he would do and would never do again if he was just allowed to live. And, of course, he was the biggest fornicator and drunk that we had in the outfit but he kept promising god that he was going to stop all these things if he just didn't take him. Well, god didn't take him and he didn't stop either.

At one point, we were in reserve and had a chance to do a little training, so we went out where we had a big open field, where we could see probably four or five hundred yards out in front of us. There were a series of trenches and dugouts and things spotted over this field, so we were able to see where our rounds were hitting and we fired the mortars. They tried each guy out. Most of them couldn't even come close to whatever the target was but I laid them right in. Being a Cortshell, I could shoot anything that I could hold so the sergeant says, "there's your gunner right there." So that afternoon I became the mortar gunner.

I guess I should try to describe how you fire a mortar for the benefit of you folks that have never had that wonderful opportunity. The distance a mortar fires is based on the angle with the ground. The higher up you elevate the muzzle, the shorter the distance it goes, and the lower the muzzle, the further it goes. You also adjust the distance by the number of increments, which are little pieces of powder bags that fit on the end of the fins. A mortar shell weighs about three pounds and on the rear end are four metal fins and between each fin is what they call an increment of powder. The only thing I can think of that would compare with it would be a sugar cube made out of phyllo dough, the very thin, thin pastry. A lot of ammunition has a range table that comes with it that tells you to shoot for four hundred yards, you set the gun at thirty-six degrees elevation and use two increments, and each shell has four so you take off increments if you don't need them and just throw them away.

The mortar tube must be level, vertically and horizontally, so a mortar sight has two bubbles, one vertical and one horizontal, so you can level the gun after you put the settings on it. The sight has a vertical line and you put a stake out in front of the gun and you line up your vertical line on your sight with the vertical line of the stake. Then when they say, "left ten mils," you put left ten mils on your sight and then you drag the vertical line on your sight over to that stake and you know you've moved it ten mils. Or if they say, "down a hundred," you look at your range chart and if you've been firing at five hundred yards, you look up four hundred yards and it says elevation sixty-five degrees, three increments. So you take one of these increments off the shell and set the sight at sixty-five degrees and level it, make sure it's vertical with the stake again and horizontally level and then you drop a shell in and fire. I'm sure that's gobbly goop.

The complete mortar weighs roughly forty-five or fifty pounds, and the squad leader is supposed to carry the sight which comes packed in a very heavy leather case with a shoulder strap. Kinny has my sight now as a matter of fact. You're supposed to take the base plate off, and one guy carries the base plate and another guy carries the tube and the bipod. The only trouble is, if any one of those guys gets hit or killed, . . . the gun is useless. You've lost your sight or you've lost the base plate or you've lost the tube, depending on which one of them got hit so, as a result, the gunner carried everything. You could always, if he got killed, at least you knew everything was there so somebody else just picked it up and took it away.

The ammunition was carried in a canvass rig with a head hole and a pouch for your back and a pouch for your front. You probably carried, I suppose, six or eight shells. I've forgotten now how many, but if you put your head through the hole, when you had to hit the ground, the shells on your chest would hold you up off the ground. So as a result, we never carried them over our heads. We just twisted them together to make a single strap and then carried them over one shoulder. When you were being shot at, why you'd put your head between the two piles of shells, figuring well, if they go off, I'm not going to know it and, if they don't, it will maybe save my head.

I guess I forgot to mention how all this leveling is done with the mortar. Basically, you've got a yoke that holds the front of the tube with a horizontal bar that goes across and on one end is a crank, and then in the middle underneath the tube is another crank and on the left leg of the bipod is a sleeve that screws up and down. So to drag the sight back and forth, you just crank the crank on the right hand side of the tube and it pulls the gun right or left. Then to level the range vertically, you use the crank in the middle of the underside of the barrel and that raises the barrel up and down. And then to level the gun horizontally, you use the sleeve on the left-hand side and move that up or down. So the gunner has got three different cranks to use plus looking at the two bubbles to make sure that they're level, plus looking at the sight to make sure that it's aimed where it's supposed to be aimed. So it's kind of busy. The assistant gunner is the one that actually drops the rounds in the tube when he's told to.

Typically, if you were in a fixed position for several days, like we were in the Siegfried Line, you'd fire some rounds out in front of you to get some aiming points and some ranges, and you'd have your gun set at a particular range on the aiming stake. Then if somebody, an observer, saw somebody he wanted to shoot at, he'd holler "fire mission." Knowing where you were aimed, he'd say "down one hundred," which meant down a hundred yards, "left ten" which means left ten mils, then "fire one round." When that went off, he would then decide, okay, I've got to back up fifty, so he'd say, "up fifty, right five" and hopefully he'd be on at that point and then he'd say, "fire for effect" and you'd dump in six or eight or ten rounds, whatever you decided would be the number you'd use when you were firing for effect. What you normally try to do is get one round over and one round under and then the third round right on. Since no artillery shell or even a bullet hits in the same hole every time, even though it's aimed at the same place, the normal dispersion would pretty well blanket a small area.

A mortar squad generally was five men, a squad leader, a gunner, and three ammunition bearers. The squad leader, as I said, was supposed to carry the sight and the gunner carried the gun, but what we actually did was the squad leader carried the gun and everybody else

was an ammunition bearer. The squad leader was armed with a .45 automatic pistol and the rest of the squad had M-1 carbines.

While we were doing this training, where I became the gunner, we also were given one of the so-called knee mortars, brand new, never been seen before. You didn't know quite what to do with it until one of the officers who had been to some training class came down and showed us. It was just a tube with a little base plate that you stuck against a tree or against a wall. You could either drop the rounds down the tube and they'd fire automatically if the barrel was elevated enough, or you could drop them down and set the firing pin so you could pull a lanyard and fire it like a regular cannon and get direct fire from it. They gave me that gun and made me a sergeant. I think this was right around my nineteenth birthday so I figured that was a pretty good birthday present.

Everything you owned or needed, you carried on your person. You didn't have any suitcases or bags. You carried weapons in your hands, so everything else was carried on or about your person somewhere. Starting at the top, you had a steel helmet. Inside of that, you might have a clean pair of socks, maybe some cigarettes and matches up underneath the helmet liner where they'd stay dry. Then you had a pair of heavy canvass suspenders that held up your pistol belt. On the rings on the front of the suspenders, you carried hand grenades. Hand grenades come packaged in a little cardboard tube that was taped together so you'd take the tape off, take the grenade out, hang the spoon handle through the ring on your suspenders and then re-tape the spoon down to the hand grenade so it wouldn't fall off. Even if the pin got pulled accidentally, it still wouldn't go off as long as the spoon was down, so you carried two of those, one on each side in the front.

On the pistol belt, I had a pouch for two magazines for my rifle, my trench knife, my first aid kit, my canteen, my shovel, my compass, and I usually had either a strap or a length of rawhide that I tied my rations together with and hung those on the belt somewhere. The rations came in boxes very much [like] the shape of a Cracker Jack box, only larger. One for breakfast, dinner and supper. Usually they gave you one day's meals everyday when they could, otherwise they might give you two or three days at a time.

Around my neck, I wore a pair of captured German field glasses and a GI flashlight clipped to my shirt somewhere. I also had a pair of goggles on the helmet to keep out the dust when we rode trucks or when we were walking on these real dusty roads with all the vehicles going by. Your rain coat was worn folded and tucked in the back of your cartridge belt, very much like the football players wear the towels on the backs of their pants.

And then I carried the knee mortar, which was probably fifteen or twenty pounds, unless it was the big gun and then it was forty-five. If you carried the big gun, then you ended up carrying the sight too which was probably three or four pounds.

In your pockets, you had your handkerchief, if you were lucky enough to have one, your cigarettes and matches, and your comb, and toothpaste and toothbrush, and soap and toilet paper, writing materials, a pencil or a pen and paper and envelopes, and anything else you felt you had to have and you could stand to carry.

We didn't carry mess kits because they would have rattled and we didn't get hot food all that often anyway, so I just carried a small teaspoon to eat with. If I ever got anything I had to cut, I had the trench knife so that's all we needed. When we got hot food, we were usually in a German village or town and we could take a plate out of German cupboards to eat on.

Our rations came in three boxes, breakfast, dinner and supper, about the size of a Pillsbury cake mix box. It had camouflage paper on the outside and very heavy waxed box on the inside, waterproof. Breakfast was some kind of a small can, oh, not quite as big as a tuna fish can, of scrambled eggs and ham, a little roll of toilet paper, a little package of, I think, three or four cigarettes, a fruit bar which looked like a plug of tobacco but it was real good, and then a bunch of what we called dog biscuits. They were some kind of high energy, hard crackers that had all the vitamins and stuff you needed.

Then for lunch, another little can. This time usually cheese and maybe some ham or something mixed in with it, and some hard candy, more cigarettes, and the biscuits, and some powdered fruit drink like lime or lemon or orange. Oh, breakfast, we got coffee and a little tiny box of granulated sugar.

Supper was a can of meatloaf, some bouillon powder, more cigarettes and crackers, and a great chocolate bar that was about, probably, an inch square and maybe three or four inches long. The old timers were hooked on coffee so they'd come around swapping their chocolate bar for our coffee ration, and most of us young fellas weren't that hooked on coffee so we were glad to get the chocolate. The meatloaf or whatever it was supposed to be wasn't all that great so instead of making the bouillon into a soup, we used to sprinkle the bouillon powder on top of the meatloaf and heat it with the heat tab and get it sizzling and it gave it a little zest.

When we opened the boxes, we used to be very careful to keep them in good shape because, if you were in a foxhole and had to widdle and didn't dare get out because you were being shot at or artillery was coming in, you could always widdle in one of them and then pour it out later when you had a chance. If you had to poop, you just did the best you could either lying on your side or squatting if your hole was deep enough, and then took your shovel and threw it out.

The two things we wanted the most that we couldn't get most of the time were milk and eggs. If things were reasonably quiet and we were on a march, we used to send scouts out to [unintelligible] all the German farmhouses to get either one or the other. One time we took a German village one night that apparently was the dairy center for the surrounding area because the house we were in was full of eggs in bushel baskets all over the house and great big five liter cans of milk in the spring house. We stayed up all night and cooked eggs. I ate forty-eight in twelve hours.

Sometime during the night, we heard shooting and then a knock came on our door. We were all in the kitchen cooking and we opened the door and here are two German soldiers scared to death because they'd just come on one of our roadblocks. Our guys had shot one of

them and these two guys got away, so I invited them in and fed them eggs all night, too. The next morning, the cooks had also discovered eggs in their house so they had a big treat for us -- eggs for breakfast! So I had seconds. I ate four for breakfast. Then when we left, I boiled a dozen and took them with me and those were gone before the day was over.

Sometime back I think I said I made sergeant on my eighteenth birthday. Actually it was the nineteenth, if I did say it was eighteen.

It's interesting what you can get used to and what your reactions are to certain things. I remember one time the cooks came up with hot chow and right at the head of the chow line were the bodies of two dead German soldiers in the middle of the street. We just walked around them and got our food and went off and ate.

The thing that bothered me the most, much more than dead humans, were the poor wounded horses that were running around after they'd been shot or ripped open by artillery fire with their guts hanging out and suffering. The Germans in spite of their blitzkrieg and their reputation for fast movement still used a tremendous number of horses to pull their wagons. I can recall walking by a convoy of German troops that had been shot all to hell with bodies laying in the road and bodies still sitting inside vehicles with their brains running out, arms and legs burned down to the bone. It didn't really bother me at all. But when I saw the horses in the field that were still alive and wounded, I really started to cry.

Something else that makes me cry today when I think about it is when we got down into Austria, which was beautiful wooded country and beautiful hunting country. All the towns were full of these gorgeous German hunting rifles and drillings.¹⁹ They were combination shotgun and rifles that sell for thousands of dollars today. We didn't really know what they were at the time and we didn't really care. We'd take them out of all the houses and pile them up in the main street and burn them. Probably any one of them would sell today for several thousand dollars.

One sight of human suffering though that did shake me up was the concentration camp at Ebensee down in Austria, which was a branch of Mauthausen, one of the big German major concentration camps.²⁰ The people were just total skeletons. It was unbelievable how they could still be alive as thin as they were. Some of them died when the gates were opened because their hearts just couldn't stand the excitement. We made the German officials, their

¹⁹ Drillings and vierlings - the drilling is a European hunting gun with three barrels. Typical drillings have two shotgun barrels over a rifle barrel. However, drillings have been made in many configurations (rifle & shotgun) and caliber's. Drilling guns are typically used for mixed bag hunting. The German word vierling denotes a four barrel long arm configuration mostly manufactured in Germany and Austria.

²⁰ Mauthausen was a group of 49 Nazi concentration camps situated in the small town of Mauthausen in Upper Austria about 20 kilometers east of the city of Linz. It was established on August 8, 1938. Among those prisoners liberated was Simon Wiesenthal who published in 1946 a book titled "KZ Mauthausen, Bild und Wort" (Concentration Camp Mauthausen - pictures and words). Together with the Mauthausen sub-camp of Gusen, Ebensee is considered to be one of the most diabolic concentration camps ever built. The construction of the sub-camp began in late 1943 and the first 1,000 prisoners arrived on November 18, 1943, from the main camp of Mauthausen and other Mauthausen sub-camps. The main purpose of Ebensee was to provide slave labor for the construction of the enormous underground tunnels in which armament works were to be housed. U.S. troops liberated Ebensee on May 9, 1945.

burghermeisters and all of the local big shots, come out and bury the bodies just to make them aware of what had been going on that they claimed they knew nothing about. There is a picture of a wagonload of bodies in my Army photo album that was taken there.

The day Roosevelt died, which happened to be my birthday, April the twelfth, we captured a little German town that still had electricity, so we had radios and hot water and electric lights. We thought we'd all died and gone to heaven. We did hear that Roosevelt had died but I don't think it really had much effect on any of us. There was no particular reaction one way or the other that I can remember.

I do remember while we were there though that one of our guys was looking out of the upstairs of the house we were living in and saw a rabbit out in the field and shot it with his M-1. A Lieutenant happened to be walking by at the time and he came roaring in all pissed off because the guy had shot his rifle, and he took his combat badge away from him for shooting the rabbit. I think he got it back in a couple of days because they knew we were pretty well pissed off, and that he [the Lieutenant] might not make it to the end of the war if he didn't get it back.

Chapter Sixteen

The War Ends: Austria and Czechoslovakia

"I was always pretty good at finding a decent place to sleep"

When the war ended we were down in the Austrian Alps, absolutely gorgeous country, and we were billeted at first in farm houses scattered out over the area, probably half a mile from where our platoon was located to the company headquarters. Everyday we'd go to the company headquarters with a couple of guys and bring back two big baskets full of booze. Usually a bottle of wine, a bottle of cognac, and a bottle of rum that the Germans had captured somewhere and then we took it away from them. Plus we had beer that we'd found in the farmhouse, so we had a big wooden keg of beer right in the hallway and all the booze we could drink. So we kept a glow on for, I suppose, two weeks. Never a hangover because you just drank and got a buzz on and when you felt tired, you laid down and went to sleep wherever you happened to be, and when you woke up, you started all over again. That's where the picture of a bunch of us sitting on the railing was taken.

Of course, we were always hungry, and I figured out a way to get food for the crowd. I just walked up when I was about two-thirds in the bag to the company headquarters and pulled the tarp off the rations like I was supposed to be there. Picked up a box of "10-in-1's" and staggered off down the road to our house again. A "ten and one" was a ration that was supposed to feed ten men for a day, and it had some pretty good stuff in it. It had butter and bacon and bread and all kinds of goodies.²¹

This tape's about done so I'll get it off to Kim and I'll start a new one and continue with Austria next time.

I left off down in Austria but I think I'll go back to wartime for a couple of incidents that I remember. One time we were in a big German city living in some big red brick buildings that were still reasonably safe, and we were offered a chance to go see the Bob Hope show that was in Europe somewhere. We had to be driven on trucks for about a hundred miles to get there. I wouldn't go a hundred feet to see Bob Hope, so I volunteered to stay behind and guard all the guns and equipment while the rest of the guys went. I enjoyed the peace and quiet while they were gone a lot more than they did the show, I think. They came back sometime during the middle of the night, cold, tired, dirty, and hungry, and I was just enjoying myself.

²¹ A typical menu included such canned items as butter spread, soluble coffee, pudding, meat units, jam, evaporated milk, and vegetables as well as biscuits, cereal, beverages, candy, salt, and sugar. Accessory items were cigarettes, matches, can opener, toilet paper, soap, towels, and water-purification tablets. The partial dinner unit was inclosed in a cellophane bag-in-carton for easy distribution to the individual soldier for his noontime meal. Within the unit were biscuits, a confection, beverage powder, sugar, gum, and a can opener. These items were provided on the theory that an individual "snack" was sufficient for midday meals when there would be neither time nor opportunity to prepare the ration for group feeding. Source: Army Operational Rations - Historical Background.

When Nuremberg was captured, which was the big center for the adoration of Adolph Hitler, we were assigned to jeep patrol to patrol the entire city. We were there probably three or four days. When we moved on, they discovered the tunnels under the city, which were full of the German treasure -- U.S. money, gold, gems, artwork. You name it. They had it stored in these old castle tunnels underneath the town. It's a good thing we didn't find it because I might of come home with a lot more souvenirs than I did, with a lot more money, too.

We would have had no compunctions about stealing as much as we could carry. There was one time we were staying in an old German church with a safe in the back. We had no idea what was in the safe but we blew it open hoping we'd find some real valuable stuff, but all it had was a couple of gold plated chalices and it wasn't very interesting to us. We were quite disappointed there wasn't something more valuable in there.

When we left the farms in Austria, they moved us to Illertissen Schloss, schloss being the German word for castle. The castle was on a cliff overlooking the town of Illertissen. A beautiful old castle with a sally port²² and a drawbridge. You walked across the drawbridge in through the sally port and there was a great big courtyard big enough to form up the whole company, and there was a great big manor house at the end of the courtyard and small turrets and things on the sides. You could look out the windows and look down on the town. And when you went out through the sally port, there was a big parade ground and a shooting range.

The shooting range was the best I've ever seen. It was a small building and on one long side were a series of doors about a foot wide and six feet tall. All you had to do was open one of those small doors and you could shoot standing, prone, any position you wanted to, and only have about a foot of air space, so you could stay in there and stay nice and warm and comfortable in the winter time. The targets were on wires so you could pull them back and forth and never had to leave the building. We took advantage of this to set up qualification firing for the company and naturally I was number one on the rifle but not too well on the pistol. I'd never had any real pistol training, and it was much later after this that I became proficient with a handgun.

One thing about living in a castle, it makes you feel like a real soldier. When you form up in the courtyard and then march out through the sally port to the parade ground and have a parade, it makes you feel like a grenadier guard.

Down in the town there was a little ice cream store that was still open. All they had was vanilla and they had no toppings. I'm not sure what they used for thickening but I think it might have been flour. It wasn't like real ice cream, but at least it was cold and looked like ice cream so we ate it with great gusto. We hadn't had any ice cream since we'd left the States.

Sometime after we left Illertissen, we moved into Landsberg, where the big Landsberg prison was and my platoon was assigned to be the armed guards at the prison. The Germans

²² Sally port - [in a fort or the like] a gateway permitting the passage of a large number of troops at a time.

still basically ran it but we supplied the armed guards, inside and outside the prison, and lived in a house next door. It was here that I got in to Hitler's jail cell where he wrote "Mein Kampf." There had been a big plaque on the wall because it had become as shrine, of course, and some GI had gotten up on the wall and torn the plaque off for a souvenir.²³

It was here that I first saw the Japanese Nisei from the Regimental Combat Team that was the most decorated U.S. unit in Europe.²⁴ One day I was standing guard outside the prison gate when a truckload of Japanese soldiers arrived with their cameras. Looked just like Japanese tourists. I'd never even heard of the Regimental Combat Team nor had I ever heard of all the Japanese that were serving in it, so I was quite surprised and didn't really have any idea where they'd come from, why they were all Japanese. Just like typical Japanese tourists, they stormed into the prison, took the photographs of Hitler's cell, and rushed out and on their way again.

We were in another town down in the Austrian Alps living in a great big old house with a big iron fence around a courtyard, and one night they decided to have a company party with kegs of beer and refreshments for the whole company. The next morning the ground, of course, was littered with cigarette butts and paper cups and all the other debris from a party. We had not had a chance to go out yet and police it up when the colonel came down for an inspection and found out we were living in what he called a "pigpen". He made us move out of the house into pup tents out in the field. I think we had more fun living in the pup tents out in the field because we could have a nice big bonfire. The tents were all lined up like a company street. We had two or three guys who could play musical instruments, so we ended up sitting around the campfire at night and singing songs, having more fun than if we'd been inside the house.

In this same town, we found a German weapons dump out in the woods, just on the outskirts of town, where they had stacked up all kinds of weapons from all over Europe. There were French and Russian and Polish and Italian and German weapons of all kinds, from pistols to machineguns to mortars. We used to go out there and pick out a machine gun and dig up some ammunition for it, and we'd fire the guns until the barrels started to melt and the wood started to burn if they had a wood stock. This is where I found a beautiful little German machine pistol that I wish I had brought home. I kept it for a while but we were told that they were x-raying the baggage when we went on the ships to go home and, if we got caught, we'd end up in jail so I ended up ditching it.

²³ Hitler was put on trial for high treason, and in 1924 he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment in Landsberg Prison. Here he dictated a book called *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*) to his deputy Hess. This ponderous work contained Hitler's views on race, history and politics, including plenty of warning of the fate that awaited his enemies, particularly the Jews, should he ever attain power. The book was first published in two volumes: the first in 1925 and the second a year later. The prospects of Hitler attaining power seemed so remote at the time that no one took his writings seriously.

²⁴ The 442 Regimental Combat Team, the most decorated military unit in American history. Also called "The Purple Heart Battalion." Nisei refers to second generation Japanese-Americans. The principle units in which the Nisei served were the 100th Infantry Battalion, which was formed in Hawaii, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, formed from volunteers from the internment camps, and the secret Nisei Military Intelligence Service whose members served with army and navy units from the Aleutians to the far reaches of the south Pacific. The Nisei soldiers became famous for their heroism and the high number of casualties they sustained in combat.

I think it was while we were in this town that I was asked if I wanted to become an officer. They'd set up an OCS²⁵ training program in Europe. They were taking enlisted men who wanted to become officers in for training. The only problem was you had to sign up for an additional year in Germany, and I was tired of Germany by that point so I decided not to do it. In retrospect, if I'd known what was going to happen to me later, I would of gone.

Because the Germans had brought in slave labor from every country that they overran, the country was full of displaced persons [DPs] who were trying to get home. Sometimes their homes didn't even exist any longer. We were collecting these people and putting them into DP camps so that we could sort them out and send them on their way once we discovered where they were supposed to go. We were guarding a DP camp at one point and they, of course, were going out all over the countryside, looting from the German homes, and getting drunk on anything they could find, and they at one point got my platoon sergeant drunk. When he was caught and brought before the company commander, he decided while he was being chewed out to take a leak against the company commander's desk. He became an immediate private and, wouldn't you know, they gave him to me in my squad. This was quite embarrassing because here's a guy who I'd been following and taking orders from all through the war, and all of a sudden he's a private that I'm in charge of. Fortunately, he left shortly afterward and I didn't have to really give him too many orders, which was quite embarrassing to me.

I can't recall whether I mentioned this or not but, back during the time we were practicing the mortar gunnery and I became the gunner, I had a brand new field jacket. It was latest issue. Sort of a light tan fingertip length with buckled sleeves and slash pockets for hand warmers and cargo pockets. It was really a great looking jacket and I had the only one that I ever saw. One day in the chow line, a staff sergeant approached me and said his colonel would like to have my jacket. The colonel was sitting in a jeep, oh, I suppose, fifty yards away, watching what went on, one of these rear echelon dudes that wanted to look sharp. The sergeant tried his best to convince me that if I didn't let him have that jacket, I was going to be in big trouble, but I was damned if I was going to let it go just to dress up some nitwit colonel, so I refused and nothing ever came of it. I hope the bastard got his ass shot off.

As you probably figured, we had a lot of fun down in Austria, except for the concentration camp inmates that we had to take care of and the DPs we had to round up, and once in awhile we had to go out and try to find some German SS troop holdouts in the mountains, but nothing very exciting.²⁶ At some point in the late summer, there was going to

²⁵ Officer Candidate School.

²⁶ The *Schutzstaffel* (German for "Protective Corps," often abbreviated as SS) was an elite paramilitary unit of the German Nazi party. It was formed in 1925 to be Hitler's personal guard. In 1929, Hitler appointed Heinrich Himmler as the leader of the SS, which then had only 280 people among its ranks. By the time World War II began the number of members rose to 250,000 and the Waffen-SS was formed in December 1940 to fight alongside the Wehrmacht, Germany's regular military. The SS also received control of the Gestapo in 1936. The SS evolved into a highly effective and deadly force during World War II. At its peak, its name and reputation for efficient and terrifying violence was enough to strike fear into the heart of anyone. Hitler gave the SS jurisdiction over all concentration camps and allowed them to oversee the day-to-day control of all countries conquered by Germany during the war.

be an election in Czechoslovakia for a new president and they were concerned about riots at the polls since there were still a lot of Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia, so they sent our division up there to guard the polls.²⁷ We ended up in a place called Grazilice.²⁸ I think it's spelled G-R-A-Z-E-L-I-C-E or G-R-A-C-E-L-I-C-E, I'm not sure which. It was a nice little town that had a lot of lace manufacturing and a lot of musical instrument manufacturing going on. The town even had a German steam bath we used to visit once in awhile. That was the first one I ever was in. And, they had a German dentist that I went to when I had a toothache and no Army dentist was available.

We were totally surrounded by Russians like Berlin was, with roadblocks at all incoming roads and my unit, my squad was stationed at one of the roadblocks. We lived in a house and had a young German lad who had been one of the Hitler Youth who spoke good English who took care of us and found things we needed, and his mother used to wash our clothes and wash our mess kits and come over and scrub the house once in a while. We had a German farmer that lived up the road in the Russian territory that used to have an old horse and wagon that he used to drive down into town, and we'd get him to haul coal up from the local school where there was still some coal left. He'd come in in the morning and start our fires for us on his way to work.

Most of the battalion was living in a big hotel downtown and had a dance every night, so if we felt like a little nightlife, we'd go down there and you could buy booze and beer and usually find a young lady to take home if you were in the mood. The Czechoslovakians were very jealous of us associating with the Germans. They hated the Germans, of course, since they'd been persecuted by them for years, and they were very resentful of the fact that we were dating German girls.

One night we heard a rumor that they were going to pick up anyone on the streets after ten o'clock at night and put them under arrest, especially if they were with German females. As usual the enlisted men knew more than the officers because we had a colonel come up to the dance and make a speech assuring us that there was no such thing going to happen, that it was all a bunch of malarkey. I borrowed a thirty-two pistol from one of my friends and started walking home with another bunch of guys and girls and all of a sudden out of the shadows comes a Czechoslovakian officer telling us we're under arrest. I started to go for the thirty-two and then out of the corner of my eye I saw two Czechoslovakian soldiers with submachine guns coming out, so I figured, I don't think I want to take them on with a thirty-

²⁷ Sudetenland - a mountainous region in north and northwest Czechoslovakia; annexed by Germany in 1938; returned to Czechoslovakia 1945. The Sudetenland is a historical region comprising areas of the Czechoslovakian provinces of Bohemia and Moravia, in the vicinity of the Sudeten Mountains. Although the majority of inhabitants in the area were German speaking, in 1919 at the conclusion of World War One, the Treaty of St. Germain incorporated the area into the Czechoslovak Republic. In subsequent years control over the territory became a point of bitter contention between Germany and Czechoslovakia. Matters worsened in the 1930's when, as a result of the worldwide economic depression, the heavily industrialized area suffered massive unemployment. The laid off workers were susceptible to the anti-Semitic, anti-Czechoslovakia, pro-German rhetoric of Konrad Henlen and his cohorts, who founded the Sudeten German (Nazi) Party. Coupled with discriminatory actions of local Czechoslovakian officials, publicity of the ensuing unrest caused the leaders of the western democracies to fear the possibility of war. The result was the infamous Munich Agreement of September 30, 1938, which sanctioned the annexation of the region into Germany.

²⁸ Graszitz?

two pistol, so I stuck it back in the pocket. They escorted us down to the military headquarters where we were rescued by an American Army officer who came out and told the Czechs to back off, that they had no business trying to do this kind of thing, and that would be the end of it, so we had no real problem.

But it was interesting and amusing sometimes because the Czechs were desperate to get rid of the Germans, and they'd get them out on the road, all lined up, and started them marching back to Germany, and we'd get orders to go back out and turn them around and send them back in again. I don't know how it was ever resolved. Of course, the Russians took over Czechoslovakia anyway so I guess it didn't make too much difference.

We had a little guard shack down on the road next to the house with a swinging pole that went up and down to stop traffic. We were supposed to check IDs and passes and all that sort of thing. Since it was getting cold in the fall, we had a little stove in there and my beautiful, wonderful jacket was used to put out a fire in the shack when someone got the stove too hot and the building caught on fire. I'd hung my jacket up in the corner and, of course, instead of using their jacket, they used mine, so I came back from wherever I'd been and found out that my jacket was burned beyond recognition.

The elections never did take place and we started losing a lot of our old-timers who were going home on the points system and getting in a bunch of new people who still had time to serve, so the whole unit was really being slowly dissolved with a lot of strangers that we didn't know coming in. It was at this point that they announced the reenlistment program where, if you reenlisted, you got a ninety-day furlough and were sent back to the States immediately and then could go overseas again. I planned to reenlist so I figured, this is a good chance to get out of here because I don't know anybody much anymore. So I reenlisted in Franzensbad, Czechoslovakia. I think that's F-R-A-N-Z-E-N-S-B-A-D, but I'm not sure.

The night before I left the company the liquor rations came in. When we had our old crew there, we used to divide them up between everybody in the platoon. If we got a couple of bottles of scotch or gin or whatever, we'd all share it. We had a whole bunch of new non-coms. I was the only old timer there in my company, in my squad and platoon, [and] the new guys didn't want to share. They said, "the hell with it. We'll cut the cards and see who gets what." I think there were four or five bottles. I ended up winning a bottle of gin on the cut so I took that to the dance that night and was making the rounds of all the tables, saying goodbye to everybody that I still knew. Every table had either beer or some kind of booze, schnapps, wine, whatever and, of course, I'd have a drink of gin out of my bottle and share it with them. The next morning I woke up with the most god awful hangover I've probably ever had in my life. I didn't touch gin for years after that until I started drinking martinis when I became a big shot executive.

I left Czechoslovakia on a train either the day before or the day of Thanksgiving. The Army was dedicated to seeing that every soldier got a turkey dinner for Thanksgiving dinner and, every time the train stopped, here would be a portable mess hall along the tracks with mess officers smiling and beaming and passing out turkey legs with all the trimmings. I never

got so sick of turkey in my life as I did on that particular train trip between Czechoslovakia and Paris.

In Paris, we had an overnight stop so I ended up getting to see the Eiffel Tower and riding in a little horse drawn French cab. We got to Pig Alley, which was the GI version of, I think it was, the Rue Pigalle, but we called it Pig Alley, which was where all the action was, the girls and the booze and the girlie joints and all that stuff.²⁹ We started to go into Pig Alley and there was a big fight between a whole bunch of GIs and a bunch of Frenchmen, and I decided I did not want to get arrested by the MPs and end up in the stockade rather than on the boat to the U.S.A., so I just never did see a lot of Pig Alley. I left and I guess I went to see the Eiffel Tower and some other things.

I'd hooked up with a couple of guys. They were traveling with me and that night we left Paris we were in a French train that had compartments and there was no aisle way in the train. Each compartment had a door on either side, so you had to get in your compartment and you had to stay there until you stopped. They'd both gotten totally plastered somewhere. I ended up loading them up on a baggage handcar and taking them down to the train like a couple of sacks of garbage. I got them in the train and they both started puking. I ended up with one of them by the scruff of the neck, by either hand, one out one door and one out the other door on either side of the train. Fortunately, the train wasn't that wide so I could stick their heads out both doors and hang on to them so they didn't fall out, and let them do their stuff overboard.

I was always pretty good at finding a decent place to sleep. One of these train trips, I suppose, between Czechoslovakia and Paris, it was really crowded and there was no place to sleep really. You couldn't stretch out. You just had to sit up in a train seat. I discovered where the baggage car was with all of our duffel bags, and I just crawled in on top of those and had a real good night's sleep, like I did in the locker, the hammock locker, on the Polish freighter going across the Channel in the first place.

We ended up back at Le Havre and a camp, I think, was called Camp Herbert Tarrington, which was a cigarette in those days and all the camps were named after cigarettes. Very politically popular today, I'm sure. We spent four or five days there while they were assembling a boatload of us and got paid off. I got five hundred dollars in brand new bills with a yellow Treasury seal. The yellow seal was so that you couldn't spend it in Europe or trade it on the black market. They wouldn't accept it in the European Theater. It had to be brought back to the States and spent over here. For several years after the war, you'd still occasionally see a bill with a yellow seal on it. I think I may have one in my collection, I'm not sure.

While we were here, my throat started to go bad with that brachial cleft cyst, or whatever the hell it really was, in my throat. I got this golf ball size lump but I was not about to turn myself in to sick call. I wanted to get on the boat first. So I waited until I was on the boat and

²⁹ Place Pigalle was the notorious "Pig Alley" of World War II. This center of nudity in Paris was named after a French sculptor, Pigalle. Toulouse-Lautrec had his studio right off the square. When Edith Piaf was lonely and hungry, she sang in the alleyways, hoping to earn a few francs for the night.

then went to sick call and they put me in the sickbay for several days, so I had a very comfortable trip back. I was lying down most of the time in the sick bay, and I don't think I got back to my bunk in the hold until probably a day or two before we hit port.

Something I forgot to mention about Czechoslovakia. This town we were in, I mentioned, had musical instruments and lace manufacturing. Right next to our house where we had the outpost was a little factory with, oh, I guess, fifty or sixty young women who were making lace, so we were able to trade cigarettes and candy bars and food in general to them to get some nice things to send home. So I did send home some, either sent it or brought it home, from them. My mother had a lace tablecloth for years that I brought back. I'm sure it's long since disappeared.

In addition, when we were downtown in a house, I was up on the third floor in a finished room with another guy, and the other half of the attic was a storage area that was locked. Of course, we never let a lock stop us so we broke in and I found several musical instruments, among which was a beautiful trumpet, so I liberated that and put it underneath my bed in the attic. One day a new Jewish lieutenant was coming around for an inspection. I mention the fact he was Jewish for particular reasons which will become obvious, not because I didn't like Jews. This lady who owned the house and lived downstairs, and we lived on the second two floors, she came up with him and started yabbering at him in German, which he understood and pointed to my bunk and told him that the horn that I had taken was underneath my bunk. I figured, oh boy, I'm going to get my butt handed to me now. Fortunately for me, this Jewish lieutenant was not about to be sympathetic to any German after what they'd done to the Jews so he proceeded to chew her ass royally, told her to mind her own god damn business and never come upstairs again as long as we were there. I kept the horn and I eventually traded it to some guy who wanted it worse than I did. I guess I probably got a pistol for it.