

MY WAR

REMEMBRANCES OF WORLD WAR II

E. G. Keefer



MY WAR

1941 was a landmark year in my life. It was in that year that I turned 18, graduated from high school and left home to go away to school. That's quite a bit to cope with at 18. Little did we foresee that on December 7th of my 18th year the Japanese would attack our military at Pearl Harbor and change our lives forever.

I was born in Illinois and attended grade school at Princeton a town of about 5,000 people. When I was about 12 my father went into the furniture business at Monmouth in western Illinois about 20 miles from the Mississippi River. That's where I went to high school. When not in school I spent a lot of time helping my dad at his store -- doing mostly a lot of dirty work, like washing windows, unpacking stuff, and moving furniture around.

In my junior year my mother suffered a stroke and was not expected to live. (She fooled the doctors, though, and outlived them all -- she died just about a month before her 102nd birthday.) My sister and I pitched in to take care of household chores. Despite the extra duties, I managed to hold down a spare time job and take part in school and social activities, and was elected to the honor society in my senior year.

My father thought that I would eventually stay and help him at his business, but I didn't want any part of that. Although I loved and respected my parents I just wanted to get out and see the world and do things on my own.

The summer of 1941 I spent painting houses -- a couple of them were three story buildings, and I had to manhandle those heavy wooden extension ladders. It was a hot summer and I did an awful lot of climbing up and down, scraping old paint, stirring paint, moving those ladders, and wiping off perspiration, but I was making \$10 a week for six days of work and saving money so that I would be able to pay tuition for my first year of college.

I had received brochures from various colleges, and, not knowing exactly what I wanted to do I decided that perhaps it would be a good idea to enroll in a business college. There was one in

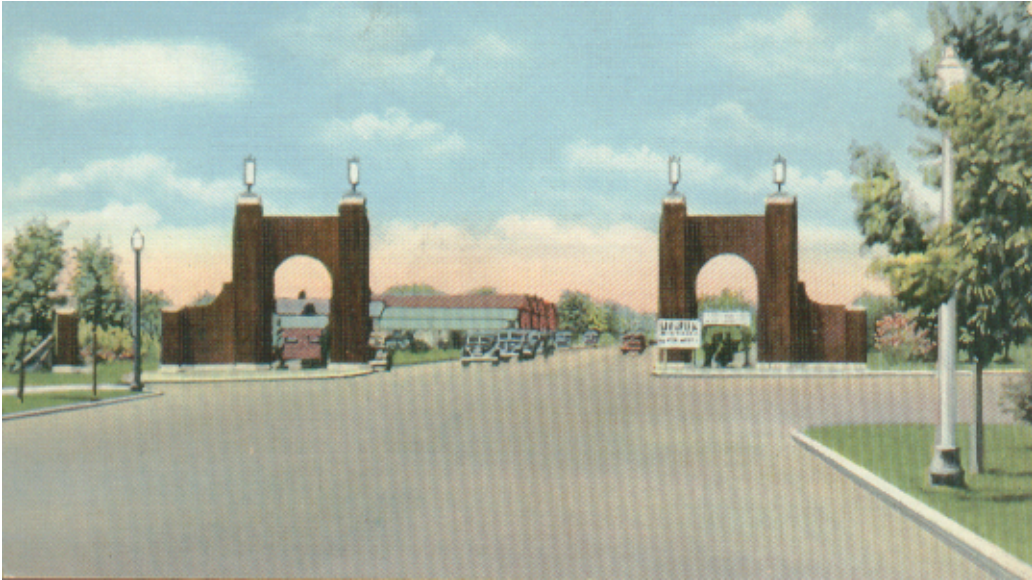
Peoria, Illinois, that got my attention, and I contacted them. I was not only accepted but was promised a part-time job which would take care of my room and board.

The part-time job was busing dishes in a cafeteria, and the pay was 25 cents per hour. Meals were included, but each meal cost one hour's pay. I found a room with another student who also worked at the cafeteria. I believe we paid about \$2 or \$3 each rent per week. We managed to put in enough hours to pay the rent and have a bit left over, which would keep us going, if we didn't get lazy and pay 5 cents to ride the streetcar up hill to our room. The walk was good exercise and we might need our nickels for a treat -- like a coke or something.

And so it was that on Sunday afternoon of December 7 -- three months into my newly chartered life, I had fallen asleep on my bed -- taking a rest, because I had to work that evening. The radio was on and I awoke to hear an announcer telling about Japanese planes dropping bombs on our Navy ships at Pearl Harbor. My first thought was that this was probably another Orson Wells radio drama, but I soon found that it was true -- hard to believe, but true nevertheless.

The next few months were strange. A lot of guys were enlisting in the service, anxious to be involved in protecting our country. Several of my friends signed up. I wasn't anxious to go into the Army and I didn't feel "gung ho" enough to be a Marine. However, I thought the Navy might be a good branch. I don't know why, because I had never been great around water and hadn't done very well at all with swimming lessons. Perhaps it was the bell-bottoms and jaunty sailor caps that seemed to appeal to the young girls that caused me to visit the Navy recruiting station. They wouldn't even talk to me because I was wearing glasses. I tried the Coast Guard and they didn't want me either. Same reason.

In the meanwhile, I had finished my business courses and took a job in the personnel depart-



Front Gate Fort Francis E. Warren, Cheyenne, Wyoming



The old brick barracks at Fort Warren

ment of Pabst Brewing Company. More and more men were being drafted into the service. I figured that if the Army wanted me, they could come and find me. They did. In a few months I was called up for a physical exam, and in January 1943 I was inducted into the service. Within a few days I was on a troop train west to Fort Warren, Wyoming, at Cheyenne. Our train arrived at night and the temperature was 30 degrees below zero.

Basic training wasn't so terribly bad, except for the cold and snow. Those forced marches were not exactly pleasant, and firing on the rifle range was really tough in the cold weather. I volunteered to work in the pits to get some protection from the wind and keep moving to stay warm. I didn't much care how I scored on the range -- the main thing was just to get it over with and get out of there.

I was assigned to the first platoon of our basic training company. Someone told me that you were placed according to your IQ score. I am inclined to doubt, that, however, as I caught a bad cold just before taking the tests and felt so miserable that I really didn't care what I wrote or how I scored.

Our company commander was a lawyer from Kansas, and it seemed he was always trying to do something that would bring attention and credit to him and his company -- mostly him. One Sunday we were told that Captain Immel had invited Governor Hunt, the governor of Wyoming to have dinner in our mess hall. We had to stand outside and wait until the governor arrived, and he was over an hour late. We were not impressed.

It was during our basic training period that the first company of WAACS arrived at Ft. Warren. The captain decided that we should entertain the women in that contingent. We were told that photographers from Life Magazine were going to be there to record this historic event. Accordingly we were marched to the WAAC barracks, the new arrivals then joined our ranks, and we were paired off and marched back to our barracks where some kind of refreshments were served. Most of these WAAC recruits were quite a bit older than the guys in our company, most of whom were about 18 or 19. It was regrettably a memorable night which we all wished to forget. One of the nice things about growing older is putting all the bad things out of your mind and remembering only the good or fun things. During the first few weeks of basic training there were no passes and we were pretty much confined to the barracks -- except for an occasional excursion to the PX. When

we got through those first few weeks, however, we got passes to go downtown Cheyenne. There was an active USO a few block from downtown, with dances on the weekends. And real live girls to dance with. There was one girl I enjoyed spending time with, but my brief flirtation with her was short-lived, because she had been selected Miss Frontier for the annual Frontier Days and had to spend a good deal of time getting ready to lead the parade or whatever rodeo queens do. I volunteered to ride with her in the parade but she rejected my offer. Well, I was just kidding, because I never could ride a horse, anyway. Upon completion of basic and a few weeks attending the Army Administration and Personnel School, I was assigned to work in Motor Training School. I am not too sure just what my duties were, but I was informed that if I had to go anywhere I could either walk or ride a motorcycle. So I learned to ride a motorcycle -- it was a bit of a problem, because we had both Harley Davidsons and Indians, and the hand controls were reversed, so it was important to pay attention to which one you were riding, otherwise you could get into some real trouble. After a few weeks I was transferred to Training School headquarters where I was assigned the task of writing a preventive maintenance manual for Army 6 x 6's. That was a great experience, because I didn't even know how to drive one, let alone write a manual on how to maintain one. I feel sorry for any trainee who had to use that manual.

At that time the post was being changed over from a replacement training center to a unit training center for quartermaster units to be sent overseas. One of the officers in the Motor Training School, Major Warren Danforth, was being transferred to a new division under the Inspector General, and he requested my transfer there. I had been promoted to the rank of corporal by that time, and with the transfer I was promised a promotion to sergeant.

There were a great bunch of guys in Headquarters Company, many whose names I have long forgotten, but whose faces linger in my memory. A few who became good friends I kept in touch with for a number of years until finally, over the years, I lost contact with all of them.

At the Status and Inspection Division where I was assigned, there were a number of officer inspectors who visited the units in training and reported on the progress and unit readiness for service overseas. The largest department in the Status and Inspection Division was that of administration which examined



Bud Crofford and Harve Obenauf standing, me kneeling foreground



“Corky” Webb



A bunch of raw recruits from our basic training days at Ft. Warren



My good buddy, Bob Bartanen

the company records and individual service records of personnel. Other inspectors checked the messes, supply and equipment and other phases of training. Major Danforth was in charge of vehicle maintenance inspection. I never did learn how he got into the motor training program, inasmuch as his civilian experience had been in banking with the Wells Fargo Bank in San Francisco. Of course, I was highly qualified for that department since I had written a manual for vehicle maintenance. Hah!

My job was to write up the results of the inspections and submit a report to Col. Ephraim Jolls, the Inspector General. The colonel was a gruff regular army officer. He liked the reports I submitted and asked me to take all of the department reports and give him a consolidated report periodically. This was good and bad. The colonel liked me and I could get by with a lot of things that no one else could -- like borrowing his staff car and driver if I wanted to go anywhere on the post. The bad side was the razzing I had to take from all the enlisted guys in headquarters for being the colonel's "fair haired boy". The kidding got worse when I made Staff Sergeant, but it was all good natured ribbing.

One thing I learned when I was young -- and that was to be innovative. Trying to keep track of the whereabouts of the various units became somewhat of a problem, as they went on bivouacs at times and other times were on the post. I decided to make it easy to find their location at any given time by posting a large map on the wall and putting the designations of the units on small slips of paper and putting a pin through the tabs and placing them on the map. If anyone asked where a particular unit was located I could look at my map and tell them quickly. I was unaware that the colonel knew about my map, but one day I returned from lunch and found the colonel in my office with a two-star general. The colonel was using my map to point out the location of the training companies. He introduced me to the general, who, it turned out, was the Army Inspector General, General Peterson.

One of my friends who worked in the administration section was a staff sergeant from New Orleans by the name of Robert E. Johnson. Bob had a very deep voice and, for a southerner, spoke loudly. You could hear him all over the building when he was just speaking normally. Bob was quite bright but he had some idiosyncrasies that were amusing. One of these was having his army pay deposited at the Chase Bank in New York. He told me he felt important if

he could write checks on the Chase Bank. When Bob read in the newspaper that William S. Paley, the head of CBS had gone into the Army and had gold dog tags made for himself, he decided that he, too, should have gold dog tags. I don't know how much money he kept in his Chase account, but he suggested several times that we take off for a weekend in Denver, and sometimes I would have to loan him the money to take the trip.

None of us had a lot of spending money, but then we didn't really need a lot. The weekends before pay day when we were rather stretched out, some of us would go up to Laramie. There were a lot of good looking college girls at the University of Wyoming in Laramie and Joe Ciurej and I made friends with some of the Chi Omega girls and would go up to their sorority house and hang out. Joe loved the music of Frankie Carle and would always play his records on the juke box when we were at a restaurant and had an extra nickel or two. I had known Joe for quite some time but didn't find out until one night we were at the Chi O house and he sat down at the Baby Grand piano and played as good or better than Frankie Carle. I was amazed at his talent.

One Sunday night toward the end of the month before pay day I went to the Service Club on post where there was a dance and the place was crowded. I have forgotten just who was with me that night -- I believe it was Russ Powell, but perhaps it was another buddy of mine, Bruce Rascoe. One girl who was dancing by in the arms of a GI caught my eye. She was a "looker". I noticed that she was wearing plastic shoes that looked like glass slippers, so when she was dancing by I made some dumb comment like, "How about the next dance, Cinderella?" All I got in return was a withering glance.

Oh, well!

The next day, back at work, Colonel Jolls summoned me to his office. When I walked in I was surprised -- there sitting across from his desk was "Cinderella". The colonel introduced her to me as Patricia Snyder and said she was a new employee and I should find a job for her. I pretended I had never seen her before. I saw that she did recognize me but she likewise didn't react. When we left the colonel's office, Pat said "Small world, isn't it?"

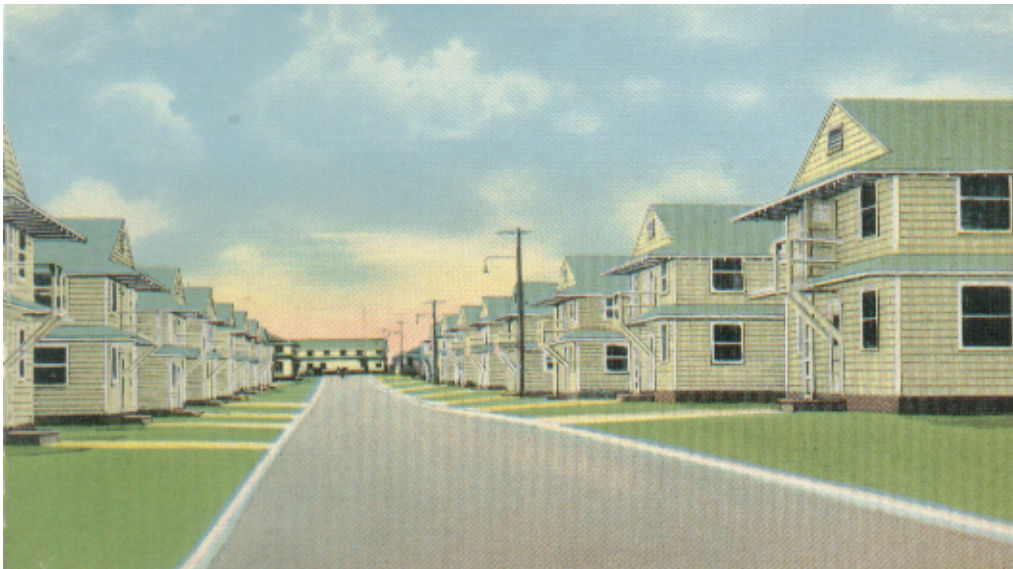
It wasn't easy to find a spot for Pat to work -- she had no office skills -- I guess she could type with two fingers if there was no rush. She had been elected as Miss Wyoming for the Miss America Contest of 1941, the year the title was won by Rosemary



Buddies Ed Pinnell and Bruce Rascoe



The pits at the rifle range



World War II barracks, Replacement Training Center

LaPlanche of California. Pat and I became good friends. She was a lot of fun and had a great sense of humor, but she sometimes chided me for my "Cinderella" remark.

Things move fast in the military. Change is constant -- rumor, more so. It was not long before Col. Jolls was reassigned as the executive officer of the post. Occasionally I was summoned to his office for some reason or another. On one such visit he was discussing with the adjutant the fact that the table of organization was overstaffed with first sergeants and several of them would have to be demoted. I probably shouldn't have opened my mouth, but I remarked to the colonel that there was one first sergeant on his list who I deemed a suitable candidate for demotion.

Now I have met very few first sergeants in the army I didn't like or, at the least, respect -- except for one. When I was in a training company we had a good first sergeant, a regular nice guy, who became ill and the company clerk (a real jerk) was promoted to the rank of first sergeant to replace him. At that time I was on special assignment and was not supposed to draw company duty, but this ex-company clerk, knowing this, put me on KP and tried to get me in trouble on my assignment. Well, it always pays to be nice to people on your way up, because you never know who you'll meet on your way down. The day after I mentioned his name to the colonel he was demoted back to company clerk. I had no regrets.

On the other hand, I occasionally had a chance to put in a good word for someone. One day I went over to the colonel's office and there was a lieutenant waiting to see him. I immediately recognized him as my platoon lieutenant in basic training. I stopped to chat with him and he told me he had been summoned to see Col. Jolls and was afraid that he was in trouble. At an officers' meeting the previous evening he had spoken up and expressed an opinion that was contrary to that of the colonel. Bad idea! I could sense his concern -- he believed that he would be transferred to a "colored" unit. In those days the troops were segregated, and most of the black units had white officers. Any officer who screwed up in some way was faced with the possibility of getting transferred to a company made up of "negro" personnel. It was considered comparable to being sent to Siberia. This was an opportunity to do a good turn, so I went in to talk

with the colonel and told him that I had met Lt. Simpson outside and I wanted to put in a good word for him. The lieutenant later told me that the colonel said that perhaps he had been rash and they had a nice chat and all ended well. It's nice to be able to do a good turn, but it is also satisfying at times to "get even".

On another occasion I was summoned to the colonel's office, and his opening remark to me was "I see you came through the gate after curfew last night." This was true, and I knew my name would be on report, but I had hoped that the Sgt. Major would delete it before it reached the colonel. The colonel must have read my mind, for he added, "The Sgt. Major tried to get your name off the list, but I saw it anyway." That was all that was said. He immediately changed the topic of discussion. He asked for my opinion of Major Spicer. Well, that was a loaded question. Major Spicer had been overseas and returned stateside, and he constantly cautioned everyone within earshot to be "on the ball or on the boat" The major had been assigned to our section and later appointed presiding officer of the "Section 8" Board. The duties of that board were to interview those who had been deemed by their superiors as undesirable for service and had been recommended for discharge under the provisions of Section 8 of the code. After these candidates were interviewed and graded by the board, it was the responsibility of the presiding officer to review and recommend what action should be taken. Major Spicer was a decent guy but somewhat lazy, so he would dump all the paper work on me and ask me to make the recommendations. These were mostly routine -- the most frequent were enuresis (bed wetting) and homosexuality. Some were up for discharge because of personality deficiencies. On occasion there would be something a bit different or more "kinky" which would, at least, keep the board members from going to sleep.

I don't know how the colonel knew that I was making the decisions for the board. I didn't tell him, but he knew it. He commented that I was probably doing a better job of it than Spicer and that afternoon the major received his orders to report to the port of embarkation. I felt rather sorry for him, but I didn't send him off with his "on the ball or on the boat" remark. A couple of junior officers were not so kind.

I have always felt somewhat lucky that I was just 19 years old when I was inducted into the service. Most of us who were in that age group were whipped into condition and we could cope with whatever was thrown at us. Sometimes it wasn't easy but we could handle it. I felt sorry for some of the older guys, though. By older I mean fellows who were in their late 20's or early to mid 30's who were drafted into the army. A few years can make a lot of difference. When I was on cadre duty, I had a great deal of empathy for the "old guys" who after morning drill, double-timing to the obstacle course and back or other extended activities, would fall on their bunks, completely exhausted. The high altitude around Cheyenne also made physical exertion more difficult.

At one time I shared a cadre room with Dozier Butler, a guy in his mid 30's. Dozier was a nice guy -- not very talkative, but congenial. In civilian life he had worked for Howard Hughes as his house manager. Although he was in pretty good shape, the morning workouts took a lot out of him. I could only sympathize.

Meanwhile, while I was spending those months out west in cowboy country, safe and sound, there was a big war going on -- in Africa and Europe and out in the Pacific. We kept up with the news of the war and wondered if we would ever be sent into action. One day Bob Johnson showed me a bulletin regarding transfer, in grade, to the infantry. I am not sure what we were thinking, but we decided to apply. Bob was a few years older than I, so I figured if he could handle the infantry, so could I. No surprise, our applications for transfer were immediately accepted.

A number of people tried to talk me out of going to the infantry. The colonel told me he could have me reclassified for limited service. I didn't want any part of that. I was eager to see some action.

OFF TO THE INFANTRY

Orders were soon received for our transfer to the 103d Infantry Division, in training at Camp Howze, Texas. We were given railroad passes and were even able to wheedle a compartment -- the last bit of luxury I was to enjoy for a long time. Actually I looked forward to some warm weather -- and to be

able to wear suntans (Army warm weather uniforms). I had spent two winters in Wyoming, where the weather was always cold. There were about 3 days each year that were warm enough to be considered summer, and we wore olive drab uniforms the year around. The thing I disliked most about the uniform was the GI-issued overcoats, which were long and heavy -- it was like wearing a blanket. The officers had short coats and were allowed to wear arctic fur-lined hats, but this was not permitted for the enlisted personnel. We just froze our ears in the sub-zero weather.

In the Wyoming winter there was also the threat of pneumonia, and we were given sulfa tablets every day at mess. For anyone who had trouble swallowing an aspirin, the sulfa tablet was a nightmare. They were the biggest pills I had ever seen -- they were as big around as a quarter but much thicker. Taking those pills was as bad as getting shots. I never minded getting shots, but I could never watch the guys in front of me in line being poked with those long needles.

As years go by there are some things that one remembers in great detail and other things fade with the years. I have no recollection of our arrival at Camp Howze. I only recall that I was assigned to a rifle company in the 410th Infantry Regiment for infantry basic training. Bob Johnson was assigned to a similar company in the 409th Infantry Regiment. As hard as I have tried, I cannot remember the names or recall the faces of any of the officers or men in that company. In fact, I don't even remember which company I was in. I do know, however, that many, if not most of the company, were later killed in battle.

One thing I do recall very clearly about infantry basic. It was tougher than the basic training I had gone through at Ft. Warren, but essentially the same -- obstacle course, infiltration course, hand to hand combat -- plus a lot of rifle cleaning and inspection. Because most of the personnel were either newly inducted or transferred from ASTP programs, and probably also because I was a staff sergeant and had been through basic training before, I was called on to lead in most of the activities -- whether it was leading a simulated raid, throwing grenades or crawling through the infiltration course I always seemed to be selected.

When basic was over there was nothing to do other than hang out in the barracks. There is nothing more demoralizing or depressing to a serviceman than just sitting around with no duties assigned. Good commanders know this and make sure that troops are kept busy doing something.

One afternoon when I was just lounging around, Bob Johnson came by. His company had also finished basic training and was just goofing around, so he suggested we go for a walk. We did just that, without any specific destination in mind. In the course of our meandering we came to division headquarters, which was spread out in numerous buildings. One of the buildings housed the Inspector General's department. Inasmuch as we had both worked for the IG at Ft. Warren, we decided to go in and check it out. As I recall there were only about three people in the IG office, two enlisted and one officer, a captain. The captain, Parker Fielding, introduced himself and asked if he could help us. He was the acting IG at that time. We explained that we had worked for the IG, had recently transferred to the division, had completed infantry basic, and were just sitting around. We offered to help if they had any work to do. Before we went on our way, Captain Fielding asked for our names and the units to which we were assigned. The next morning I was summoned to the company orderly room and told I was being transferred to division headquarters and assigned to the Adjutant General's office. Bob was also transferred to headquarters, and we reported to the AG, Lt. Col Alfred Croll, an old timer who had been a Master Sergeant in the the regular army. He told us that his office had been charged with the responsibility for making sure that all of the service records for the division were up to date before the division moved to the port of embarkation for overseas service. Inasmuch as he had no one who was a specialist in service records, he had been informed by the acting IG that we were experienced and available, so he was putting us in charge of that operation. In less than 24 hours we had gone from "dog faces" to super record inspectors.

Bob had worked with service records at Warren -- that was his specialty. I had been exposed to them when I attended Administration and Personnel School. But I had never worked with them. I asked Captain William Dorn, an assistant AG if I could

borrow his AR's (Army Regulations) to check out any recent updates. That evening Bob and I went to the service club and reviewed the subject. The following morning we started the inspection. We arranged to get the company clerks together, a battalion at a time, checked to see the status of their records and pointed out any discrepancies that required correction, and then followed up to see that these corrections were being made. Most of the clerks were competent and cooperative. Although our contact with the company clerks was very brief, I still remember a couple of them who impressed me.

While most of the personnel in the division were aware that we would soon be going overseas, there was a good deal of speculation as to whether we would be going to Europe or to the Pacific. I quickly learned in which direction the 103d Division was headed. We received instructions to earmark any German-born personnel. Their background was then checked out and a number of them were transferred out as replacements to the Pacific. It was obvious we were going to be headed across the Atlantic.

I had no regrets about leaving Camp Howze. It was appropriate that the 103d Division, known as the "Cactus Division" should have trained there for it was hot -- like the desert. The nearest town was Gainesville, not of much note, except that they had a couple of restaurants there that served the best chicken-fried steak I have ever tasted. The nearest metropolitan area was Dallas - Fort Worth. I was there several times, but can't say that it was memorable.

Upon completion of our assignment overseeing the records inspection for the division, Bob and I were given other duties within the AG, Bob in the enlisted section, and I in the officer section. I don't remember how many there were in the AG office, but probably about 30 enlisted. I recall there were four officers and two warrant officers. I liked most of the guys -- although there was understandably some resentment of us because we outranked most of the enlisted men, many of whom had been with the division since maneuvers in Louisiana. I did, however, dislike the ranking NCO, Master Sergeant Sheffield. Perhaps it was not so much dislike as contempt, for he was grossly incompetent. He did a lot of running around -- like a farmyard

chicken. I thought he always looked like he was about to cry.

Within a few weeks the division was aboard a train to Camp Shanks, New York, the staging area for our departure overseas. Camp Shanks was situated north of New York City in the Hudson Valley. I doubt if there is a prettier place in the world than upper New York in September. After several months in Texas it was a refreshing change -- the weather was invigorating, and I yearned to go to a football game -- any football fan will recognize the feeling.

During our brief stay at Camp Shanks we did get passes to go into New York City. I had never been to New York before, so I looked forward to seeing the Empire State Building, Radio City Music Hall, St. Patrick's Cathedral, Times Square, and all the other places I had heard about. Not only did I see those things but much more. At this late date, I am not sure just who I was with in New York City -- possibly Bob Johnson and Frank Hohenadel and Huck Gregory from the AG. We saw the Rockettes and ran into the actress Dorothy Lamour as she was leaving the Pennsylvania Hotel -- that was the only time I had seen Dorothy in person, although one time in Denver we had a penthouse suite at the Brown Palace Hotel next door to a suite occupied by Dorothy. Her husband, Bill Ross, an Army Air Force captain was stationed at Lowry Field, near Denver. We went up to the Village and saw Eddie Peabody, the banjo king, who was performing there. I remember that on one street corner we came across a large group of young girls encircling a parked car. A cop nearby told us that the girls thought the car belonged to Frank Sinatra. I doubt very much that it did. I hope the owner didn't return to find his car stripped by the young souvenir hunters.

BON VOYAGE

The division sailed from New York on three liberty ships in early October, 1944. Our ship was the "Santa Maria" and you can well imagine there were a good many comments as to where the ship had been since arriving with Christopher Columbus in 1492.

The bunks on the ship were so narrow and close that I was almost claustrophobic. Sardines could

not be packed tighter. Oh, well, we were all "in the same boat". Hah!

Before we embarked I made up my mind that I was not going to get seasick. A couple of days out of port we ran into stormy weather and rolling seas and were told to stay below decks. I did feel a bit queasy at times, but I kept my vow not to give in to seasickness.

We knew we were headed for Europe, but we had not been told where we were to land -- perhaps France, England, or maybe Italy. When we finally spotted land and passed Gibraltar it appeared most likely we would land in Italy. Much to our surprise we landed at Marseilles, France. The Germans had bombed the Marseilles harbor and it was generally believed that no ships could use the harbor until it had been cleared of the damaged and sunken ships. It turned out that we were the first of the allied troops from the States to disembark there. It is not my intention to report here on the progress of the division up until the end of the war in Europe. That is well documented in the book entitled "Report After Action" written by Ralph Mueller and Jerry Turk and illustrated by Bill Barker. I knew all of these guys while they were with the public relations office -- actually, I knew Ralph the best. He was a newspaperman from Minneapolis. This writing is of my own experiences as I remember them.

The arrival at Marseilles I will never forget. By the time we were ashore it was late afternoon and we were told we would march (I should say "trudge") to our bivouac outside of the city. Loaded down with barracks bags, gas masks, rifles and all of our gear we started off. The route was all uphill about 18 miles distant. On we marched, and it turned dark, and we still marched. After awhile we saw a light in the sky -- it was a German plane, familiarly known as "Bedcheck Charlie". We had no lights and couldn't see where we were going, just followed whoever was ahead of us. Hours later -- well after midnight -- we arrived at the area where we were to pitch our tents. Most of us ignored that plan and just sacked out on the ground and went to sleep. We were exhausted. We woke to pouring rain.

We were at this camp for only a few days, during which we were inspected by Major General Jacob Devers, commander of the 6th Army Group, to which we had been assigned. With General Devers



A view of Marseilles, France in the 1940's



Lagensoultzbach. a typical village in the Alsace

was Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, who was on an inspection tour of war operations in Europe.

A few days later the division was moved into action at the front -- with the Seventh Army, which was engaging the enemy in the Vosges Mountains. Three divisions who had fought through the campaigns in Africa and Italy, along with part of the Free French forces, were in a fierce battle with the Germans. These veteran U.S. divisions were the 3d, the 36th and the 45th. The Seventh Army was under the command of General Sandy Patch, who had previously been in the Pacific under General Douglas MacArthur.

Our move to the front was a bit easier than the march to our camp the first night in Marseilles. This time we were transported in army trucks. Our destination was Epinal, and about all I remember is that it was cold there -- and it was only October.

The AG was part of the rear echelon. We were back of the artillery and generally out of range of enemy fire, except for occasional strafing by the enemy air force. I was thankful that I was not back with that rifle company in the 410th Regiment, sloggng through the Vosges Mountains.

There is not much paper work for units in battle. At least not until there are purple hearts to hand out and next of kin to notify. Within a very short time I was informed that I was being transferred to the G-2. The commanding general, Major General Charles C. Haffner wanted to establish a war room, primarily staffed by the G-2 (Military Intelligence) and G-3 (Plans and Training) sections., headed by Major Bland West, the G-2, and Major Richard Thomas, G-3. Neither of these sections had adequate personnel to staff the war room.

The war room was the center of command for the division. Every morning the commanding general, chief of staff and general staff met to brief and be briefed on the situation. Our G-2 section collected information about enemy activity as it was reported to us by the Regimental S-2s and other sources, such as our "spies" and some of our attached units who reported to us, such as the interrogators of prisoners we had taken, aerial surveys, etc. All reports were entered into a running log and details posted to large maps. The G-3 section kept a log and mapped the movement of our own troops. We

operated in shifts, so that there was someone on duty at all times, day and night.

Because my duties were with the war room, I had very little contact with most of the enlisted men in the G-2 section. M/Sgt Tim Welch, who was the chief non-com and T/Sgt Lloyd Stalker, who was the second in rank, were both decent guys. Tim was very quiet and serious. I never really figured out what they did except to get maps and shuffle them around. The same was true of other enlisted personnel I never knew or much cared what they were doing. I was happy that I was on duty in the war room -- that's where the action was.

I liked the G-2, Major Bland West, a lawyer in civilian life, who knew his job and kept his cool in all situations. The assistant G-2 Major John Rhea, was one of the good guys, but he was always off with the reconnaissance troops and stayed around only a short time when he reported in. Another assistant G-2 was Captain Anthony J. Drexel. Tony Drexel came from the Philadelphia banking clan. His grandfather had served as U.S. ambassador to France . Tony had gone to school in France and spoke French fluently. We had several duty officers -- Captain Lewis Dickson, a Texas lawyer, Lt. Bill Bruck and a few others who came and went.

Because we worked closely with the personnel in the G-3 section, I became better acquainted with some of the guys there. They had several junior officers who were very competent. Captain Erle Cocke, "a gung-ho" guy from Georgia and Lt. Young are two I remember. There was a very sharp and competent 2nd lieutenant who was a duty officer with G-3 who I really liked and respected. I wish I could remember his name, but it completely eludes me now.

At first our war room was set up in a large tent, but as our troops advanced, it was rather impractical to keep taking down the tent and setting it up again. We soon started using space wherever we could find it in some of the villages, often in a local tavern, the town hall, or wherever there was adequate space.

It has been said that an army division headquarters is nothing more than an enlarged fox hole. We were always located ahead of the artillery, and were often under fire from enemy mortars and air attacks. We might have been safer in a fox hole.



Val Martinez and I



Frank Hohenadel and Huck Gregory



The 103d Division briefly headquartered at this house in Kirchheim, Germany

I very soon learned that a certain rivalry existed between the officers who had graduated from West Point and those who had been commissioned from the civilian world. Colonel Guy Meloy, the Chief of Staff and Major Dick Thomas, the G-3, were West Pointers. Major West was not -- nor was General Haffner, who had come up to his position through the National Guard. The Corps and Army commanders were from West Point and it seemed that our division came under criticism because we were advancing faster than the divisions fighting alongside us. This left exposed flanks -- not the way things should be done according to the training at West Point. Finally the word came down from General Eisenhower, the supreme allied commander that we were to draw back to straighten out the lines to maintain a winter position. Some of that territory had been taken at a good price in lives lost, and much as we disliked giving up the advances we had made there was no choice other than to retreat as commanded.

Of course, no one referred to this as a retreat -- it was just a realignment. But I remember it well. We had set up our war room at Worth and were to pull back some 30 or 40 kilometers. It was necessary to keep our forward position in place until all of the division had made the withdrawal. I got the duty. With only a field phone, a jeep and a driver, I maintained our position until I received the word that all of the troops had withdrawn to the winter line. It was well after midnight when the driver and I pulled out of Worth -- the only ones between the Germans and our troops some 30 kilometers behind us. By day-break the Germans had moved forward and reoccupied those areas we had fought hard to seize.

Our war room was relocated at Imbsheim, a small Alsatian village. We were told this was to be our winter line and we would hold until orders were issued for all armies to advance. General Patton, who commanded the Third Army, apparently didn't subscribe to the theory of maintaining straight front lines. Although a West Pointer, "Old Blood and Guts" as Patton was known, often sent his tanks out far ahead of the foot troops, leaving them exposed from all sides.

The Alsace had been fought over for many years by France and Germany. It seemed strange to find that one village would be German, have a German name and German speaking people, and a few

kilometers down the road the next village would have a French name and all the residents spoke French. It would seem logical that people throughout the area would be able to speak and understand both languages, but that often was not the case.

Although we did not have a great deal of time to get acquainted with the locals, it seemed to me that the German-speaking Alsations were warmer and more congenial than the French, who were somewhat cool and distant. The French amused us at times, particularly the French military who were fighting with us against the Germans in the Vosges Mountains. When the French army moved, it was a laughable thing to view -- their old trucks wheeling recklessly along filled with soldiers and their gear, including some of the wildest things imaginable -- such as bird cages, brooms and who knows what else that couldn't be seen -- I hate to speculate on what other things they may have had in those trucks.

It was only about two months after we had arrived in combat that General Haffner left his command and returned to the States. It was said he was ill, but I am more inclined to believe that he was relieved of his command because he wasn't part of the West Point elite. He was replaced by General Anthony McAuliffe, who had become a hero at Bastogne while he was in command of the 101st Airborne Division during the absence of Major General Maxwell Taylor. Those who remember or have read about World War II will recall that the Germans had surrounded the 101st Airborne and demanded they surrender. General McAuliffe sent back a one-word reply -- "Nuts". The 101st held out and soon prevailed and McAuliffe became a hero. He was promoted to Major General and took over command of the 103d Division, replacing General Haffner.

Tony McAuliffe was immediately accepted and popular with the men of the 103d. He was a "mover and shaker". Where General Haffner moved as if he were wearing blinders, never looking right or left or appearing to see anyone -- particularly enlisted personnel or junior officers -- McAuliffe always was warm, though brisk and constantly on the move. The troops on line were amazed when he would show up unexpectedly to check on what was going on. Most of them had never before seen the commanding general of the division and it was a real "shot in the arm" for their morale to see him



*Val Martinez and
Elmer Lestikow*



*Elmer Lestikow and George Schelhorn
standing in front of General McAuliffe's
Bastogne jeep*



Peter Serino and David Smith



Huck Gregory

out moving among them.

Our headquarters remained at Imbsheim for a couple of months during the winter of 1944 - 1945. The war room was set up in a tavern, and we had found billets with various families in the village. I remember that some of us stayed with a family by the name of Mueller.

The Muellers had a son who had served in the German army on the Russian front. He had been conscripted when he was young, wounded in action, and returned home. They also had a daughter and a small grandchild, the product of an illicit relationship between the daughter and a German soldier. The son was congenial, the daughter a little resistant to amiable relations -- she had already done that with our enemy.

The Muellers allowed us to bunk in an upstairs bedroom, just to the right of a small flight of stairs. If we had made a mistake and turned to the left we would have been in the loft of the adjoining barn where the oxen were housed.

Herr Mueller, a hearty Alsatian, would almost daily harness up the oxen and go to his nearby acreage outside of the village. I don't know what crops he raised, but I do know that he had some vines from which he gathered grapes for making his own wine. Often he would offer us some of his wine which he had to heat on the stove because he stored it outside where it was too cold to drink. From time to time he would offer us schnapps. His idea of offering schnapps to us was to fill up a water glass with the potent stuff.

Frau Mueller was a little grey-haired lady, who always moved on the run, so typical of the German hausfrau. She would sometimes make an apple or cherry strudel on her wood-fired stove and once served us some blutworst and German potato salad. It was not my idea of a great meal, but was better than C rations or the gruel that our mess hall served up -- mostly Spam and fruit cocktail, both of which I avoid even today.

There are several things that I vividly recall from our stay at Imbsheim. One of these was the visit to our war room from General Maxwell Taylor, who was the commanding general of the 101st Airborne. He had been absent at the time of the Bastogne stand, having been called back to Washington for one reason or another. I remember him so well, because he had such a broad smile and greeted all

of us like we were personal friends. This was a guy you couldn't help but admire on first meeting. He went on after the war to become Army Chief of Staff, later Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and after his retirement was the U.S. Ambassador to South Viet Nam. He was truly a distinguished American.

Another recollection of Imbsheim is not nearly as pleasant. As I recall, a German soldier had crossed our lines with a white flag, and it was presumed that he wished to surrender as a prisoner of war. The standard procedure for our troops in such events was that the enemy soldier should be blindfolded and then taken to headquarters POW for interrogation. In this instance, however, the German was not blindfolded and made it known that he was coming to deliver a message from his commander and wished to return to his own lines after completion of his mission. The problem that I had to present to Major West was that the German had not been blindfolded and could return with a great deal of information about our installations. Major West weighed the decision carefully and instructed me to have him retained as a prisoner.

Captain Lewis Dickson, who was the G-2 duty officer that day, nearly went berserk after the Major had left the war room. He exploded, said this was in direct violation of the Geneva Convention and ordered me to rescind the Major's order. I refused. Right or wrong, it was proper to follow the orders of the officer in command, not a subordinate. As I recall there were a good many people in the war room that day, including the G-3, who had just been promoted to Lt. Colonel, the Chief of Staff and a couple of duty officers from the G-3 section, plus a number of enlisted personnel. I can still recall the faces of the onlookers when I told the captain, politely, to take a hike. No one applauded, but the Chief of Staff and the G-3 smiled.

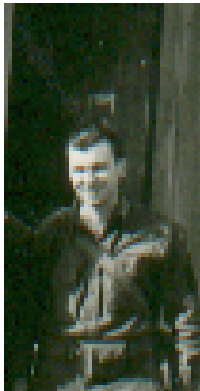
I must add that I liked and even respected Lew Dickson. It was the only time we had angry words between us, and I am sure that he accepted the fact, as I did, that the decision had been made and it was not up to either of us to change the orders. The subject never came up again.

While at Imbsheim I developed a rash on my legs, which was more than irritating, it was painful. It came to the point where if I was sitting down I had a lot of pain when I got up. When standing, it hurt



The G-2 section of the 103d Division at Imbsheim

Back row - M/Sgt Tim Welch, T/4 Everett Bauer, Major John Rhea, Major Bland West, Captain Anthony Drexel, Captain Lewis Dickson, 1st Lt. William Bruck. Middle row - T/5 Karl Wennerstrand, Pfc. Robert Hickey, Pfc Norman Henderson, T/4 George Sandstrom. Front row - T/4 Nick Dalfino, Cpl. George Schelhorn, T/4 Val Martinez, Pfc David Smith.



Lloyd Stalker



General Weygand with Captain Tony Drexel

when I sat down. After several days of this, Lt. Bruck, who was the G-2 duty officer, told me I should go to the medics and have it checked out. I resisted. I had never been on sick call, and I had absolutely no desire to go. I would much have preferred to tough it out. One reason for this was that if you were evacuated to a field hospital, once recuperated you were sent to a replacement depot and sent to some unit where troops were needed -- probably to a front line company to replace someone who had been killed or wounded. Ugh! I did go to the medics but they couldn't diagnose my problem. Inasmuch as we were holding a winter line and things were rather inactive, enlisted men were receiving a limited number of three-day passes to Brussels. In order to be fair, the passes were to be determined by a drawing and there were only a couple of passes available to our section. Corporal George Schelhorn was one of the lucky winners. I was the other. Actually, I felt rather guilty about "winning" because before the drawing Major West told me he thought that a change of scenery would be just the medicine I needed. I am fairly certain he rigged the drawing to my advantage.

The major was a better diagnostician than the medical officer, however, for when Schelly and I returned from Brussels the rash had completely disappeared. It must have been the change of scenery, for we didn't get much rest. We had a blast in that Belgian city.

The Alsatian villages were primitive and quaint. There was no electricity, no plumbing, no automobiles, no paved streets. It was almost like a visit into the past. Most of the Alsations of German descent wore wooden shoes when they were out-of-doors, removing them at the door and then donning felt slippers. Most of their news was delivered by the town crier. I really enjoyed listening to the town criers, crying the news.

Soon we were on the attack again. When we took back the area we had previously occupied, it was particularly devastating to see that many of the places we remembered having visited before had now been completely destroyed, whether by our artillery or that of the enemy. We progressed through the Alsace and part of Lorraine. We passed through many towns and villages -- the names of most of them I have long forgotten.

Wheeling through one town on one day I noted a woman -- a very attractive woman -- dressed in an

army uniform, waving to the troops driving by. It was Marlene Dietrich. This was a real morale booster. We didn't expect to see any movie star this far forward where we were continually subject to enemy fire. We knew from reading the "Stars and Stripes" that some stars like Bob Hope and Bing Crosby had been entertaining troops in the ETO -- but not those in combat. To my knowledge they confined most of their entertainment to Paris or places far from the front lines.

Whatever you may have read or heard about Marlene Dietrich, it is very likely true, but she showed great courage in supporting our troops, and I am sure none of them could ever forget her. I attended her show one night. The lighting was supplied by generator. About half way through her performance there was an air attack -- all the lights were turned off and we sat in the dark until the "all clear" sounded. When the lights came back on, Marlene continued the show as though nothing had happened. She was cheered enthusiastically. Marlene stayed with our division for several weeks. I believe she was attracted to General McAuliffe, who was a handsome and charming man.

During the course of our forward progress, a dachshund puppy had latched on to me and Sgt. Val Martinez, one of the draftsmen in the war room. I don't have any idea where the puppy came from, but it didn't seem to belong anywhere and would follow either Val or myself wherever we might go. We named him "Schnappsie" -- not too original but appropriate.

One day General McAuliffe told me that Marlene would like to have a dachshund puppy and wanted to know if I knew where we could find one. This seemed a ready-made solution, for we couldn't continue to look after this puppy, so Val and I delivered him to Marlene. I hope she loved him and provided a home for him, but I rather doubt it, for a few years ago I read the book Marlene's daughter, Maria Riva, wrote about her mother, in which she commented that her mother did not like cats or dogs. Hmmm!

The Germans were short of fuel and manpower and were drawing back. We were moving forward rapidly. One day a 1st Lt. Joseph Barber was assigned to us as a duty officer. He had been a line officer with the 409th Infantry Regiment, supposedly wounded and hospitalized and then reassigned to us. I wouldn't say I disliked him, but I did find him

abrasive. I just naturally resent people who rush in and take charge when they don't even know what is going on. I well remember the first day Joe Barber drew morning duty. Each morning, upon arising, General McAuliffe would call me on the field phone for a report on what was going on overnight and I would give him a brief summary of the activities. On this particular morning, when the phone rang, I picked it up only to have the new lieutenant rush over and grab it out of my hand. I couldn't hear the General at the other end of the line, but I could easily figure it out from my end where Lt. Barber kept repeating he was the duty officer -- finally he handed the phone to me and said "He wants to talk to you." Later Barber received instructions from Major West never to answer the phone again. It was about this time that the Major received his promotion to Lt. Colonel -- a promotion which was long overdue. I know it would have come through sooner if he had been a West Pointer.

We continued moving ahead -- we reached Ludwigshoffen and Mannheim where there was much devastation from bombing. We crossed the Rhine, spent a brief time at Darmstadt and moved through Heidelberg on our way south toward Munich. I would have loved to be able to spend some time at Heidelberg, for I had read so much about the town, the university, the students and fencing, and so many things that I was curious to learn more about. Lt. Barber was with us only a very short time. One day he brought a German Mauser into the war room. I don't know where he obtained it -- perhaps he confiscated it from a prisoner of war, but I suggested to him that he shouldn't be playing around with a pistol in the war room. Naturally, he paid no attention to me or my admonitions.

A short while later General McAuliffe and his aide entered the war room. The assistant division commander was there, as well as the Chief of Staff, the other staff officers -- plus the usual personnel on duty. Anyway, there were a lot of people there, and as I recall the General was studying the map and conferring with staff, when a shot rang out. I looked immediately for Lt. Barber who was standing holding the Mauser and looking like the kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar. The General said, "Get that man out of here." I never saw Lt. Barber again. In fact, I don't even recall what happened to him.

The service is a structured entity and people are separated by rank. Rank should be respected, but it does not necessarily follow that one respects the

person carrying that rank. I had friends of all ranks, both officers and enlisted. I have known a few privates who could have been generals -- and I have known some high ranking officers who were extremely incompetent. Rank was never a determining factor in whom I liked or enjoyed as a friend. When I was with the war room, my closest friends ran the gamut from M/Sgt Elmer Lestikow of the G-3 section to Corporal George Schelhorn and Private David Smith with G-2. There were two master sergeants in G-3, Les and Peter Serino. "Les" Lestikow was from Chicago and had attended college at Bradley Polytechnic Institute in Peoria, Illinois. I had lived across from the Bradley campus at one time and taken a couple of courses there. I also had some friends, as well as some cousins, who had gone to school there. Les was a quiet, thoughtful, pipe smoker, who had a good sense of humor. George Schelhorn was from a well-established family in Alexandria, Virginia, and was always up for an adventure. Toward the end of the war he got a good deal of adventure when he was captured and taken as a prisoner of war. An account of his adventure was included in "Report After Action", the division history. David Smith who we called "Smitty", of course, was from Baltimore. He was a handsome kid with talent, but was always on the short end of the promotion list. He deserved better.

One guy I really liked was Sgt. Nick Dalfino. An Italian boy from New York City. Nick was short and stocky and one of the most sincere guys I ever met, conscientious and honest. We had very little in common and never associated except on duty. Nick talked slow and used to drive me nuts when he was trying to tell me something in great detail, but I still liked and respected him. I remember well the last time I talked with Nick after the war had ended. He insisted that I had to come visit him and his family in New York City. According to Nick, I had never tasted good Italian food until I came to his home and ate a meal prepared by his mother.

The division moved swiftly after we crossed the Rhine and had entered into Germany. We spent a few days at Garmisch Partenkirchen, on to Oberammergau, which was well known for the passion plays which they produced, and on into Austria where we were to link up with the 5th Army at the Brenner Pass, south of Innsbruck on the Italian border. We all knew that the war in Europe was drawing to a close. The enemy could not hold out much longer.



We set up our division war room at this picturesque hotel at Hungerburg, in the Alps above Innsbruck



Here I am at the Port near Reims with the 45th Division checking the service record of John Bellanti



Les and Ed were with me in Paris on VJ Day

Lots of things were happening fast. Our division had taken over the concentration camp at Dachau, uncovered mass graves and freed prisoners. We had rescued some political prisoners, including M. Daladier, former French prime minister, the French General Weygand and his wife, General Bor, the Polish resistance leader, a nephew of Queen Elizabeth and many others. Lt. Col. West had gone into Innsbruck, undercover, to contact the German command in the hope of arranging for their surrender. The press were swooping down on our headquarters for stories.

I have never had high regard for newspaper reporters. My father often sent me clippings from the Chicago Tribune containing articles written by Seymour Korman, the Tribune war correspondent who was covering the 7th Army. I never saw Korman, and I often wondered if he had seen the 7th Army. His stories could have been written in Chicago, for his accounts were quite often much different from what we were experiencing.

I cannot recall any correspondents who were not somewhat overbearing and obnoxious (but then again I didn't meet all of them). The worst of the entire bunch, in my opinion, was Marguerite Higgins, United Press correspondent. I can still remember her striding into our war room one day, issuing more commands than a general. As I recall, General McAuliffe's aide, Captain Carl Biebers, and I were the only ones there at the time, and the two of us together had a hard time dusting her off. I will say this for her -- she was a beautiful redhead. I don't know whether she was a good reporter or not, because I refrained from reading her articles, but she was certainly a "pushy broad" and I believe she could well have handled the offensive on the front line single-handedly.

When we entered Innsbruck there were armed German soldiers on the streets, but they weren't firing at anyone. They knew the fighting was over and it was the end of their war. Our war in Europe was over as well, but there was still a big battle going on in the Pacific. It was almost certain that some of our military would be moving on to help end the war against the Japs. Our war room was set up in a quaint hotel in the Alps overlooking the city of Innsbruck.

George Schelhorn and I, along with several guys from our MI detachment had taken over a residence apart from the billets that had been provided at the hotel. During combat there were a number of intel-

ligence detachments which were attached to our section. These included POW interrogation, aerial survey, etc. The personnel in these units were mostly young German Jews, many of whom had relatives who had died in German concentration camps. Captain Heid, who headed up POW interrogation was so bitter against the Germans, it was almost frightening to be around him. I liked the guys from the MI detachment, though, and was particularly friendly with Max Erlanger, who had a great sense of humor and didn't carry a chip on his shoulder.

Since hostilities had ceased we were pretty much free to do what we wanted. We figured we would get in some skiing during the day and, having our own house, plus having met some beautiful young expatriate Polish girls in the city, we could party all night. For a couple of weeks this was the life. I did take one day out to go down to the Innsbruck city jail with Dugald Hudson, the head of our CIC detachment. Dugald was a former FBI agent and had some great experiences with counter intelligence. He was responsible for having put a lot of the inmates in that jail -- men and women. They were a sad lot. I was never sure of the rank of a lot of the people who served as intelligence agents. They seldom wore insignia and when they did often changed it to fit the situation. One day Dugald might have been acting as a private, another day he could be a colonel.

So much for the good life. Suddenly I was notified I was being transferred back to duty with the Adjutant General. Now that the fighting was over, those rear echelon people, who I considered loafing out the war far to the rear, were now being swamped with paper work and needed help to handle it. Those personnel in the division who did not have sufficient points for discharge were being transferred to other divisions slated to move to the Pacific to replace older combat veterans who were to be discharged. These divisions would be sent back to the states where home leave would be granted and then they would move out to the Pacific. Those who remained and had enough points for discharge would go later. This sounded like a good opportunity for me to enjoy home leave and go on to see some of the rest of the world. I placed my name on the list for transfer to the 45th Infantry Division.

In the meanwhile I rather enjoyed getting together with some of my old friends from the AG. My buddy Bob Johnson was heading up the enlisted section and had an apartment with Frank Hohenadel and Huck



At the Arch of Triumph in Paris in 1945 -- I am at the far left in back row



*Here I am at the Arch in 2001
56 years later*

Gregory. They allowed me to move in with them. Frank, a T/Sgt., was a devout Catholic from Rochelle, Illinois, where his father was in the printing business. Huck -- his given name was Herold -- was from Utah. He was a Mormon. I had known both of these guys from our days at Camp Howze, although I hadn't known them well. Frank was a laid back guy, Huck was more outgoing and had a marvelous sense of humor. It was no great surprise when he returned to college after the war and edited the campus humor magazine.

After the war I lost track of most of those friends I made in the service. There is only one I still have any contact with and that is Huck Gregory.

It wasn't very long before I shipped out to the 45th Division and was assigned to the AG section under Lt. Col. Henry Roach. Almost immediately we were enroute to LeHavre where we were to embark for return to the States. Before we could leave, however, the personnel and records again had to be processed and once again I got selected to head up the records inspection.

I liked Col. Roach. He told me I reminded him of Bill Mauldin, the great GI cartoonist who had gone from the 45th to the "Stars and Stripes". I didn't understand the similarity until Bill published his book "Up Front" after the war. His picture on the jacket could have been a picture of me. Would that I had his talent. Fortunately, I had some good help from some other guys in the AG section. It takes some real effort to check and up-date some 15,000 service records. While we were working diligently on this assignment all of the other personnel in the division were enjoying 24 hour passes to Paris. Two of the guys who worked with me, T/Sgt. Les Pearson and a T/4 by the name of Ed, whose last name I can no longer remember, except that it was a Polish name, kept at our assignment until it was finally completed.

The day we finished, Col. Roach handed me special orders for the three of us to have indefinite leave in Paris. He told us to stay as long as we wanted but to call him every day to make sure that the division hadn't been loaded on ships, leaving us behind. We were in Paris for about a week. During that week the Japanese surrendered and Paris went wild in celebration of VJ Day. This was good news, of course, but we wondered what might happen. Would we still embark for home, or would we be held back so that those with enough retirement points could return. Fortunately for us, inasmuch as

all of our preparations had been completed we were allowed to embark as scheduled.

BACK HOME AGAIN

When we reached New York, personnel were split into different groups to be sent to a station close to their home. I was with a contingent sent to Camp Grant at Rockford, Illinois, near Chicago. There we were placed on special orders for 30 days home leave. After 30 days we were to report back to Camp Grant. We didn't know whether or not we would be shipped out to the Pacific as originally scheduled. While on leave I received notification that my leave had been extended for two weeks. In the meanwhile, the point requirement for discharge was being lowered almost daily and I hoped that before long I would be qualified to get out of the service.

It didn't happen. When I reported back to Camp Grant I was still a few points short. I learned that our division was being deactivated and I was being assigned as Sgt. Major of the Officers' Separation Center there at Camp Grant. I was also informed that all assigned personnel positions would be frozen until further notice and, regardless of points, they would not be eligible for discharge. Before we had split up for leave, Colonel Roach had entrusted me with the 45th Division seal and certain other items. I didn't know what to do with them or where to send them, so I just held on to them. I may still have them stored away somewhere.

The duty with the Officers' Separation Center was a snap. I had three crews, each working 8 hours, as we had to have someone on duty around the clock. All I had to do was see that each crew was staffed and doing their jobs -- plus giving an orientation talk each morning. At that time I told the officers being processed that day just where to go and how to get there. That was fun.

There are a couple of interesting things I remember from that assignment. One day I had a whole room full of officers seated, waiting to be briefed, but we were being delayed by a full-bird colonel who was wandering around at the back of the room looking for his records. I waited patiently for a few minutes, while many in my audience were turning in their seats to see what was holding up our briefing. Finally, I said, "Colonel, would you like to join us, or would you prefer to circle around in the rear?" He sat down.

Most days I didn't bother to wear any insignia.

Often I dressed in a plain OD shirt, no stripes, no patches, or anything to indicate rank or unit. One day a lieutenant came up and asked me if I remembered him. I recalled that we had, in fact, been in basic training together at Fort Warren. I remembered he had been a teacher in civilian life -- and I believe he was from Michigan. I didn't remember his name but I did recall that he had developed pneumonia while in basic training and had been hospitalized and never completed his training with our company. Apparently he had gone to OCS and obtained a commission and had been a quartermaster officer in some rear echelon outfit near Paris. I would have been happy to see him, except he looked at my bare sleeve and said, "Is this all the farther you got in the service?" "Yep," I replied. I had seen more of the war than he had probably read about. I hope he has had a good life. By this time I had enough points for discharge but was frozen on my assignment. The officer in charge of the separation center told me to plan for the holiday leave, so that each man on all three crews could have leave at either Thanksgiving, Christmas or New Year's. He told me that I could have my choice -- adding I would probably like Christmas. I told him, no, I'd take Thanksgiving because I would be out of the Army by Christmas. He laughed. So did I.

When I returned from Thanksgiving weekend I phoned the Sgt. Major of the Enlisted Personnel Section and asked him why I was not being processed for discharge. I was in transient barracks and every day guys were being processed out with fewer points than I. The sergeant found my records, failed to note I had been assigned, and said he would put me on the discharge list right away. He did and I was out of the Army on my way home on December 3 -- well in time for Christmas.

There are many more things I could tell about my experiences in the service. I have eliminated most of the bad things -- some of the miserable cold and heat and days and weeks without bathing, shaving or even washing. Days without changing clothes, days when all we had to eat were some cold C rations or K rations, if that. Nights sleeping on cold ground or in a hayloft. Days slogging through mud, being shot at -- grateful when they missed.

I long ago put those things aside and remember only the good. One of the most important things I learned in the service was to ask for what I wanted and to do things my way. I can honestly say that I have few regrets.

In his farewell address General Douglas MacArthur closed saying, "Old soldiers never die, they just fade away." Although I have long lost contact with most of those men I knew in the service, many of whom are now gone, I can close my eyes and see and hear some of those great service guys I met so many years ago and will never forget. Some names I have forgotten and some faces are a bit dim, but I well remember "Corky" Webb who was with me from Scott Field all through basic training and was so in love with his girl back home. And Bob Bartanen, my Finnish buddy from Ishpeming, Michigan. After the war, Larry Fobair, a chaplain's assistant whom I knew from the 103d Division was playing the organ at Red Kelly's Lounge in Chicago. I called up my old pal Bud Crofford from basic training days, whose home was in Chicago and we went to Kelly's to hear Larry play. Ed Pinnell and his wife Mildred, old friends from Warren, visited me in Chicago. I stopped in Rochelle to see Frank Hohenadel briefly, and I remember Huck Gregory and his sister coming to Chicago. Through the years I kept in touch with many service friends with Christmas cards -- Bruce Rascoe, who was always falling in love with someone, wrote to me frequently. When I moved to California I, quite by accident, ran across Warren Danforth one day. He was a trust officer at Wells Fargo Bank in San Francisco. Gradually people drift apart -- life goes on. Time Magazine reported that Anthony Drexel had accidentally shot himself while showing a souvenir pistol to a dinner guest. I read in the paper that Bland West was assistant general counsel for the Army. Tony McAuliffe died a number of years ago but there is still a statue of him in the city of Bastogne. I have been back to Germany several times but have visited very few of those places where we were in World War II. In 2001 -- just after September 11, I was in Paris again and found it much more beautiful than it was in 1945. The City of Lights is bright again.