

MULFORD MARTIN, JR.

MILITARY SERVICE

In the

**ARMY OF THE UNITED STATES
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by

Mulford Martin, Jr.

DRAFTED

October 31, 1942 I reported to the draft at Springfield, Vermont to be inducted into the Army of the United States. I stripped to my shorts and underwent a thorough medical inspection including a dental inspection. When the dentist looked in my mouth he yelled to his compatriots to come and look at this mouth. What he had seen was the recently completed extensive job done by the dental student at the Columbia Presbyterian Clinic who took his final exam on my mouth and had polished all the fillings so they shined, a practice not normally done.

Having passed the testing I was then escorted with all the other inductees to the Boston and Maine train station for the trip to Fort Devon, Massachusetts for outfitting and the final transformation from civilian to GI. They lined us up at the supply depot and we walked through the line, cafeteria style, to receive each article of clothing. At the shoe station the clerk measured my feet and hollered, "nine and a half Charlie." I had never worn anything smaller than a ten shoe and I pleaded with him to measure again and get it right. All I got was, "Move it, Soldier." So there I was, stuck with two pairs of new boots a half size too small and no one to appeal to.

There was so much work involved with getting my gear in order that I was ready for the hay as soon as I got it done. Reveille sounded all too soon and I was dressed and crammed into my boots and assembled in the dark and raw morning that seemed like the middle of the night ready to shout "here" when my name was called. This process took an interminable length of time, it seemed. We were marched to the mess hall to stand in a very slow-moving line a long way from the bright light shining through the door.

Finally arriving at the door the aroma of the food was too good to be true. That was my introduction to SOS (Sh. on a Shingle) the famous Army hamburger concoction that made it all worthwhile, even the boots. The next few days were a blur, getting ready to ship out to our basic training site. We were given our booklet containing the General Orders, which we were told to memorize and we were introduced to close order drill. This was a cinch for me because I had learned it in Boy Scouts not that many years ago.

BASIC TRAINING

We loaded into the coach class railroad car of the train we'd spend the next three days riding in. It's November and cold outside and the seatbacks in this railroad car could be moved to the reverse direction. The two guys in front of us and my seatmate and I decided that we'd be more comfortable if we had the seats facing each other, but we didn't know how to reverse the seatbacks. We commandeered the conductor and asked for help. He lifted the back of the seat and in doing so broke the window next to where I was sitting. We did the best we could to seal the hole with what we had at hand, but it was a constant source of cold air from Massachusetts to West Texas. I caught a bad cold which made me feel miserable for many days as I tried to perform my duties as a new recruit trainee in the 1st Platoon, Company A, 101st Combat Engineer Battalion of the T & O (Texas & Oklahoma) 90th Division of at Camp Barkley, near Abilene, Texas.

I was assigned to the Tool Keeper, Cpl. Hank Morth, from Fingal, North Dakota, as a tool clerk. Hank was a bear of a man with hands the size of hams. He'd been a carpenter before he was drafted, had a very soft spot in his heart for his family, especially

his mother back in North Dakota and became my mentor and protector and my friend. At mess call he'd say to me, "C'mon Martin, let's go wash patties; it's time to eat." We both had an intense dislike for Sgt. Gilliland, our boss, the Supply Sergeant, a chain smoker who left butts to burn out on the edges of all the furniture in whatever room he visited and who incessantly cracked his gum. But I learned a lot from Hank who was a stickler for properly cared-for tools. When the tool chests came back from a training operation he'd almost be in tears the way the tools had been mistreated. So he'd sharpen the saws, polish the shovels and get everything ship shape for the next outing.

I wasn't happy at Camp Barkley, what with the increasing pain of the blisters from my too small boots. The only thing that sustained me was that when I had a chance to rest I could think of the wonderful summer I had had falling in love with Loraine Neil and the time we spent together riding her horses in the beautiful Vermont countryside. On the next forced march with full pack I simply fell out of formation after a mile or so because my feet hurt so much. After showing the Sergeant the condition of my feet, I was allowed to leave the march and report to sick call. As soon as the doctor saw what I had been enduring he gave me an order for new boots in my size, 10D. Finally I had relief.

I took my training seriously, made expert marksman in machine gun, got proficient in rigging and demolition and understood the erection of Bailey bridges. In due time I decided to apply to OCS (Officer Candidate School) and did so in the hope that I would be in the states longer and would be in a better position both in the service and afterward. My father sent me a book; being a librarian he had a book for everything, called "I Give You Texas". It was a compendium of mostly derogatory sayings about Texas and the people in it. We used it to taunt the cadre of Texans and Oklahomans who were training us, much to their distress. And since the batch of trainees I was in consisted mostly of New Englanders and Tarheels from the Carolinas the Civil war was fought over and over on a daily basis with the Cadre.

ASTP

One bright day I read an announcement on the bulletin board about ASTP (Army Specialized Training Corps Program) and the program it offered qualified candidates. One could attend college under the program and receive a commission upon graduation. I grabbed this whole-heartedly and applied. In due time I took a qualification test, passed and was accepted into the ASTP. I then withdrew my application to OCS and embarked on a new adventure. I was shipped through Paris, Texas, one of the hottest places I've ever been, on my way to Texas A&M University in College Station. I shared a room with a fan of Frank Sinatra's music, which, as a purist classical enthusiast, was hard for me to take. The routine settled in with formations, marching to class and greeting resident Aggies. The greeting was always an enthusiastic extending of the right hand for a shake accompanied by, "Howdy pahdner, name's Tex."

One of the men who lived on the same floor, down at the end of the hall was Bart. Bart, whose full name was Clifford Cornish Bartholomew grew up in Branford, Connecticut and was in the ASTP because he'd washed out of the Army Air Corps on his final test flight by cracking under the purposeful stress he was subjected to and told off the instructor. Bart became a fast friend. He worked in the mess hall for some reason

and when we had fried chicken he would always bring back to the dorm a whole bag full of legs and wings for later in-room dining. The walls adjacent to the trash can in the corner took on a different hue from the color of the rest of the room, possibly due to the grease deposited by bone bank shots from across the room. Command inspections always questioned this anomaly to no avail.

One of Bart's friends, Staff Sgt. Ken Cross, was a member of a reconnaissance outfit before coming to ASTP and was regular at the after hours shindigs. At some point the three of us, Ken, Bart and I became an inseparable threesome. When the opportunity came for some of us to move to the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana we three jumped at the chance to get out of Texas. We were accepted into the group to move and were soon headed north.

What a difference Champaign-Urbana was and how welcome. The air was pervaded by the aroma of soft coal smoke as we headed to the fraternity house where Bart and I were billeted. Ken went elsewhere close by. We got together for meals at the converted gym, but for the rest of the time at class we were pretty much on our own. Each student was given an acting rank. Ken was appointed Acting 2nd Lieutenant, I was appointed Acting Staff Sergeant and Bart was appointed Acting Corporal.

There were activities on campus like mixers at the Student Center and at one of these I became acquainted with Jean Moberly, a very pretty freshman who lived in an independent house with several other girls. Of course I took every possible opportunity to be with her, staying sometimes later than curfew, which required that I sneak through back alleys and back yards in order to avoid the MP's in getting back to the frat house. On one of these visits to Jean's digs she told me that she and the girls simply couldn't handle my name as Mulford and I would henceforth be Mel to them. Except for my time in the service, when I was called Martin, that nickname stuck with me my whole career until 1982 when I met and married Carol, who would have no Mels on her job. Back to Mulford.

8TH ARMORED DIVISION

All too soon, and with no regard for scholastic progress, the ASTP was severely curtailed and engineers were superfluous. Before I knew it I was sitting on my duffle bag, in my class "A" uniform, in the middle of a former pine forest, now stumps, in Louisiana. I was issued the 8th Armored Division patch and became a member of the 2nd Platoon, 315th Armored Engineer Battalion on maneuvers. Bart and I were in the same squad riding around in the same Half-Track all during the maneuvers and back to Camp Polk. We were billeted in the same barracks and were doing the same duties while we were at Polk. There was more training aimed at what we'd need to know to accomplish our mission to get the tanks through.

Mail Call was always a time of expectation and joy or disappointment depending on whether one got mail or not. One rainy day I got a letter from Loraine and went to find a dry place by myself to open and read it. The back of a 2-ton truck filled with bags of dirty laundry headed for the wash house fit the bill. It didn't smell too bad and it was dry and soft. Consternation overcame my joy when I read her complaints about my not having given her a ring and having sent back for safe keeping the delicate watch she had

sent me earlier. I decided then and there to send her a 'dear john' letter of release from our engagement. It was apparent that she had no clue about what I faced and didn't care.

Both wives of Bart and Ken followed us to Louisiana and found a room together in De Ridder, a dry town down the road in the opposite direction from Leesville, the wet town. When we could get a pass, the ritual was that Ken would get off early, head over to Leesville to stock the cooler with beer, liquor and ice, pick Bart and me up at the camp gate and off we'd go to De Ridder. We'd squeeze the girls in the car and head a short way out of town, to avoid confrontation with the local constabulary, find a convenient spot on the side of the road and party hearty. Bart's wife was dying to get pregnant and continually asked if she was showing yet. Mig, Ken's wife always gave her the bad news that no, she wasn't showing. In the wee hours, we'd head back to town, find an all-night eatery and try to sober up before the drive back to Camp.

A transcript of a Diary from Memory of Overseas Duty from October 20, 1944

I was chosen to be on the advance party of the 8th and the first hint of that fact was announced to me by my being ordered to the Battalion motor pool for a class on first echelon maintenance of vehicles preparatory to my receiving an Army drivers permit. My clothing requisitions were handled separately and carried top priority over those of the other men in the company.

Confidential meetings were held at Battalion Headquarters at which I was required to be present. Clothing and equipment was checked and rechecked and the confidential advance cadre number was painted on my duffle bag. (2881AX)

Late one evening, right after supper I piled my luggage into a 2½-ton truck and [we] pulled out to the meeting place in the camp gymnasium. The same night 69 officers and 121 enlisted men comprising the 8th AD advanced cadre boarded the special train and departed for the New York POE.

By a circuitous freight route through Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama and up through Washington DC we finally arrived at Pennsylvania Station in New York three days after departure from Camp Polk. We stayed on the train however until we reached a side station in New Rochelle, New York where we got off and were taken by truck to the ferry to Ft. Slocum.

The stay in Slocum was short, four days, I think, during which time we were lectured on military security, inoculated and given a chance to make out additional allotments and otherwise attend to our financial affairs.

We were a rather curious-looking outfit to those who had time to look at us as we marched to our various meetings. Every other man, it seemed to them, was either a T/Sgt. or a Master. We, however, were instructed on our honor not to give so much as a hint of the outfit to which we belonged or the camp from which we came.

The thing uppermost in all of our minds at the end of the first day was passes. Passes were granted from 6 that evening to 7 A.M. the next morning, but for some reason, I can't remember, it was better for most of the men to go the following day. Perhaps it was the fact that the next day passes would start at noon, 6 precious hours more, and only one pass was allowed. I took a pass the first night, however and struck out for New York as fast as I could go. I phoned Father, but he was at a

meeting and could not be reached. I did, however, leave a message for him at his office saying that I'd try to be in again the next day, but that I couldn't be sure. The next day, due to some mix-up in details I got another pass starting from noon. I went with two friends I knew slightly, T/4 Hamilton from the Message Center and T/5 Marsh from B Company. Neither had been in New York before and I consented to show them around. I had a dinner appointment with Father and the boys and I went along. We spent the afternoon looking around New York, seeing this and that, including a trip to the top of the Empire State Bldg. In the evening we saw a movie and I saw the boys off on the train back to camp. I then went with Father and spent the night with him until about 4 A.M. the next morning. I just barely made the last train back to New Rochelle.

The following night we were restricted and no one could leave camp. That day I phoned Mother over the monitored phones on the station and upset her quite a bit. I also tried to phone Jean but the call never went through. Disappointed I went to bed. Late the following afternoon we boarded a ferry for the dock on the North River. [the Hudson River]

After a four-hour squally trip down the East River, around the Battery, we finally pulled up to the dock at which HMT Aquitania was still loading troops and TAT supplies. A transportation Corps band greeted our gloomy bunch and Red Cross girls came around with hot coffee and doughnuts and a Hershey bar for each of us. I was very tired but not too sad. When our turn came we filed past the checker's booth and responded with our first names to his calling of our last names.

We were birthed on B deck aft and on our bunks we found each a Red Cross gift bag containing candy, cigarettes, a book and a bar of salt water soap. Exhausted, I flung myself, bag and baggage on my bunk as required and stayed there until everyone was settled. I then prepared for the night and turned in.

THE TRIP

At daylight on October 20, 1944 tugs were pulling the big Aquitania into the North River and heading her for the Narrows, the Atlantic and our unknown port. No one was allowed on deck except guards and portholes were jammed for a last look at the good old U.S.

Once past Ambrose light the ship announcement came over the PA system in the rasping English voice that the decks were now open. Everyone swarmed on deck for a breath of air, a smoke and a look around. The ship was rolling slightly and I had my first feeling of inner detachment. Off the port bow a ship appeared in the distance pitching, rolling and generally having a rough time of it. As we caught up with her and passed her, I and many other potentially green-faced GIs thanked our lucky stars that we weren't on that freighter. That was the first and last ship we ever saw during the whole 6-day trip.

For our party there were no details whatsoever. Boat drill was the only requirement of each day. The chilling sound of the horn came at 11:30 each morning and we all double timed to our prearranged places on the deck. Every day the record of the previous day was broken and by the end of the journey we had

tied the record for the war. I never much enjoyed boat drill, especially the first few days, but it was good for me to get out in the air once in awhile.

I must admit that, though my first ambitions lay with the Navy, I'm not much of a sailor. I lay in my bunk almost all the time except for some meals, boat drill, and an occasional trip to the rail.

Meals were especially nauseating. The mess hall stank and the coffee served was weak and insipid, hardly sweetened at all. When it was time to eat I'd jump weakly off of my top bunk, grab my mess kit and fall into line. Going through the chow line I'd pick out what I thought I could eat, and there wasn't much choice, dash to the table, wolf down my food before I thought of getting sick and rush to get in the wash line before the crowd. The smell of the steaming wash room made me especially sick and I would hold my breath as I quickly gave my kit a going over, rinsed it and made a bee line for the stairs to my compartment. Within 15 minutes after leaving my bunk I was back in it again. I had discovered that I was least likely to retch if I remained in a horizontal position. Along about the fourth day I began to get used to it, though and spent more time on deck.

There were various recreational functions on board. Every day there were two USO shows for the EM in the mess hall put on by the USO troupe which was on board and featured Irene Manning the singer. There were also movies which I didn't have the stomach to attend. About the fourth day, being nice, a boxing tournament was staged on deck, aft between the Promenade and Welin decks, featuring all comers including members of the British crew.

We had the run of the ship's decks except the fore parting front of the bridge and the Welin deck aft which were off limits to everyone and the Promenade deck, off limits to enlisted men. On board besides ground forces, officers and men were many officers from the Air Corps, Nurses and civilians on various missions.

The only untoward incident occurred on the fifth day. The ship was heavily armed, traveling as she did without escort. I was quietly reading that mid morning when I was startled by an explosion. Shouldering my way on deck I inquired what was up and was told that the ship had fired one of its big guns on the afterdeck. No one was sure why it had been fired, but rumors were rampant. It seemed that it had been a mistake on the part of the gunner who heard his orders wrong.

On the morning of the sixth day we sighted land and the rumor floated around that it was Ireland. This turned out to be true and during the day we passed several points where land could be sighted as we pushed up the Irish Sea. I noted at the time that the Irish Sea was a lot greener than the ocean, bright emerald or shamrock green. The Isle of Mann came into sight on our right and drifted aft. Toward mid afternoon we were steaming up the Firth of Clyde and patrol planes were passing overhead from time to time. One daredevil U.S. P-47 came out of nowhere close to sea level, roared over us, did a barrel roll perilously close to the water and disappeared in the direction he came.

The picture painted by the afternoon sun on the snow-topped mountains and steep, rich brown heather-covered hills lining the Clyde was something out of a Geographic Magazine. Little clusters of houses perched on the hillsides, the hazy bright orange of the top of the mountains [reached] up to the snow line and the dazzling white cap of such mountains as Loch Loman. As we drew nearer the

harbor, the submarine nets were drawn open for us and we steamed through in the wake of a Canadian cruiser which had passed us.

No sooner had the ship anchored than an oil tender tied along side and started her pumps. All night the pumps were drumming and at first the ship listed slightly to one side and then later righted as the other side was pumped full. We waited all day of the 27th of October to disembark, watching the activity of the harbor, snapping pictures and throwing cigarettes to the boatmen in the tenders alongside. Although troops were getting off all that day our turn did not come until about five o'clock that evening. By the time the tender cast off it was already getting dark. Again we had to wait our turn to get off the tender once she was docked at the railroad pier. We filed past a baggage car and deposited our duffel bags. We then boarded the train. I got in an exceptionally comfortable first class compartment with Hamilton and four other men. A rosy-cheeked Scots girl smiled a welcome and chatted amiably in her winning brogue as she passed us doughnuts and coffee from the Red Cross wagon.

Quarters were cramped for sleeping that night and the next morning we passed through London and continued westward arriving in Bournemouth in the mid afternoon of the 28th of October.

PREPARATION

"Boy, are you guys lucky," said the cadre sergeant as we lined up on the station platform. "You've got mansions for billets."

"Aw, bull," came the grumble from the crowd of unshaven men, "Don't give us that old stuff." We were in no mood for jokes just then. But we filed out of the station and followed the sergeant to our billets. To our surprise he led us to a mansion on top of the cliffs overlooking the Channel.

The week we spent in Bournemouth was quite pleasant for me, in spite of the fact that I was on KP or table waiter detail at the officer's mess every day, mainly because I was so happy at being back in England once more. We began getting vehicles in and the ranking non-coms were drivers. We got mostly ¾-tons and command cars.

At officer's mess we made the mistake of "dog-rubbing" Col. Colson to the extent of asking him if he preferred tea or coffee for his meals. He preferred tea and it was my job to make it for him even though he had no teapot to make things simple. My first attempt at it produced tea strong enough to tan the old guy's insides and stand what hair he had on end. My technique improved as time went by and I graduated to first cook for the enlisted mess for the last two days. In that capacity I had my fun and my headaches. I had never cooked for 121 men before and wanted to do the best I could. The rations were plentiful and good though the facilities were not so good. On the whole I had pretty fair success especially one night when the menu called for spaghetti and meatballs. Remembering all I had learned from sniffing Mother's pots, I cooked a savory meal very much to the taste of the Italians in the crowd. The spaghetti was long, not chopped up the way the Army teaches you to do.

At the end of the week we packed and loaded into the ¾-tonners for the cold ride to Tidworth, about 50 miles to the north. On arrival there we were billeted in cold, red brick houses at the north end of camp. We remained in these houses for about a week while the 12th Armored Division moved out. As the various units of the 12th moved out of their areas, men from the corresponding units from the 8th Armored Advance Cadre moved in to the vacated areas depleting our ranks and increasing the number of days per week those of us that were left went on KP at officer's mess.

Finally the 12 AD engineers, the last to move, were preparing to leave and we moved to our area not so far away. We received several 2½-ton trucks and I was made a driver. I hauled coal most of the time until the rest of the division docked at Southampton and started to arrive by train at Tidworth.

The artillery was the first to arrive and all night I met the trains as they came in and hauled the men and baggage to their area about two miles away on top of a muddy hill. They had tents to live in. Driving on the left hand side of the narrow road, blackout was a new and tiring experience for me. For all the next day and the following night I lived in the truck meeting the trains and taking the men to their areas. The engineers finally arrived and walked to their area.
[End of Diary from Memory]

ENGLAND

We were loaded, with many other troops on one of the Cunard Liners for a solo trip to the British Isles. I inhabited the top of a three tier bunk, right under the ceiling (deck) with a 24-hour light burning. The Red Cross had supplied me with salt water soap, cigarettes, a couple of novels, toothbrush and toothpaste and a comb. As the ship rolled from side to side I found that the only place I was free of the queazies was flat on my back in my bunk. So that's where I stayed until the very end of my section called to mess whereupon I'd hop out of the bunk, grab my mess kit, dash down the gangway to the galley where the line was hopefully very short, receive whatever it was they were dishing out. I'd sit at a table gulp whatever I could stomach, none of the English cooking was ever worth eating, jump up, wash my mess kit and make a dash back up the gangway to my top bunk. This to avoid a trip to the rail. Boat drill was compulsory and required donning one's life jacket and standing on the deck with all the other seasick GIs until they sounded the all clear, whereupon it was back to the bunk.

The trip up the Irish Sea with the Emerald Isle on our left (to port in navy lingo) was simply enchanting. Disembarking in Edinborough, Scotland we were met by rosy-cheeked Scots girls who helped direct us to the train. We rode all night arriving at Bournemouth on the south coast of England in the morning. Billeted in one of the lovely English country houses seemed a luxury. The town reminded me of my days in England as a youngster for the three years we were stuck there between 1929 and 1931. We had all the food supplies we needed except salt. We had to send out trading envoys to the local housewives to trade cans of fruit for a quantity of salt. I heard stories that more than salt changed hands on some occasions. The mess was divided between officer's mess and enlisted mess even though we had but one mess sergeant. He, of course drew

duty at the officer's mess. That resulted in my finding my name listed on the duty roster one morning as: Pfc. Martin, M. – First Cook Enlisted Mess. Apparently I had bragged to someone how I had learned to cook by watching my mother in the kitchen. In any case there I was. I had no idea how to deal with powdered eggs, partly thawed whole chickens complete with innards, powdered milk, quantities of anything. The job was daunting without expert detailed help from the mess sergeant. One evening the menu included Italian spaghetti and meat sauce. Now there was something I knew something about. Not the Army way, which broke up the pasta into short lengths, mixed it with the sauce and served the pasty mixture by the glop. My way prevailed. Eyes brightened when the men in the chow line spotted first the pot of long spaghetti then the meat sauce and then the cheese and then whatever else was on the menu. I got compliments as they came back for seconds. I was a hero for a day.

Soon enough we moved to Tidworth Barracks, a grimy group of buildings with coal stoves and not much else. Here we made our home waiting for the rest of the Division. I was assigned a 2½-ton truck with a governor on the engine and a coal hauling route. I had to learn to drive the narrow high-crowned English roads on the left side with my left mirror scraping the hedge, hauling coal one way and empty the other. I remember competing for road space with double deck busses and trucks and cars of all sorts. And, of course, lights other than the cat's eyes were not permitted at night. A very interesting experience, indeed.

It wasn't long before we learned that the Division had arrived and convoys of trucks, mine among them, were lined up to receive them and transport them to their areas. I had my gas pedal to the floor, but the truck had only one slow top speed, which my load of GIs didn't understand or appreciate, blaming me instead. There wasn't much to do except stand formation, do first echelon maintenance on our weapons and attend meetings about our upcoming assignment, whatever it was to be. We found a spindly Christmas tree and decorated it with what we had on hand and the Army did it up right and served an ample and cheery Christmas dinner. We listened to Bing Crosby sing "White Christmas" and "I'll be Home for Christmas" and other songs and we thought about home and speculated on how long it would be before we could again hug our loved ones.

FRANCE

The order to move out came in the middle of the night. We loaded our vehicles onto the LST and boarded for the trip across the Channel. Our landing at Le Havre was routine and we were moved along so as not to hold up those coming behind us. We had not heard about the Battle of the Bulge at this time; we knew only that we were headed for some battle front. The weather had turned bitter cold and as we made our way southeast huddled in the open half-track we were occupied mostly with keeping warm. We had a bivouac along the way and pitched tents in the snow. The equipment we had been issued really didn't meet our needs. The GI boots were the coldest footwear and the long woolen overcoats, though warm, restricted our movements and were cumbersome. The only shelter we carried was a shelter half, one pole and two wool blankets. We were finally issued a padded parka-like garment without a hood that worked better than the overcoat and had lots of pockets.

I was told that the town we arrived in was named Nennig. I did not know it was just inside the border of Germany. It had seen a lot of artillery shells and it had the air of a battleground. I learned that it had been taken alternately by the Germans and the US troops several times. Later I learned that Nennig was the southern anchor point in the Battle of the Bulge and was important in keeping the bulge from expanding southward.

In a corner of the town square sat a burned-out US Sherman tank that had backed into the corner seeking shelter and had activated a double anti-tank mine that had been buried beneath the cobblestone street. It had been turned red hot by the resulting explosion, killing the crew. The road east out of town had been mined with the same anti-tank mines that had been placed in two rows in the snow. The snow had melted slightly exposing the tops of the mines. Our job was to get rid of those mines so that our tanks could move forward to challenge the nest of Germans holed up in a chalet in plain sight of the town and who were lobbing artillery shells into the town at will.

We connected together two sets of four Bangalore torpedoes end to end with the intention of placing these next to the two rows of mines and set them off, thereby causing the mines to explode. I carried the front end of one of these assemblies with a buddy on the rear end. I ran through the minefield and set the torpedo as close to the mines as I dared and then ran for cover. Although I was in full view of the chalet not a shot was fired, and heaving a sigh of relief I arrived back safely. We detonated the torpedoes, but the mines remained intact. I was not a part of Plan B, to my relief. The explosion alerted the Germans that something was afoot and soon the bombardment from the chalet resumed. I dived into the adjoining barn, found a concrete feed trough and jumped in. It seemed secure even though it had no top. I laid there during the firing, along with many others lying on the barn floor near me for the several hours the firing continued. When it finally stopped we exited the barn for safer quarters.

The narrow road just inside town was blocked by a burned out German Panzer tank with a couple of burned corpses lying nearby. There was not enough room between the tank and the building across the street to allow our tanks to get through. Our orders were to move the German tank. We gathered everything we could get our hands on in the way of explosives and packed them at the base of the German tank with the intention of moving the tank out of the way. We called "Fire in the Hole" and set it off. The explosion was noticeable, but the result was that the building across from the tank collapsed and the tank moved about six inches.

There was no good place to come in out of the bitter cold. Our mess truck was nowhere to be found. A large pile of cases of 'C' rations occupied the middle of the road entering town, there for the taking. Early birds rifled through the cases and cleaned out the cans of good stuff, like beef stew, beans and hot dogs and others I can't remember, leaving cans of scrambled eggs, plain beans, and the like. All of this food was frozen solid and had to be eaten that way or somehow thawed. Hunger overcame frozen and I ate many a can of frozen scrambled eggs, jamming my knife into the food and melting each bite in my mouth. We found intact rooms in bombed out buildings to get in out of the wind. We improvised heat by filling a gallon food can half full of dirt, soaking it with gasoline and lighting it. Warmth, combined with black smoke was at least some relief. One sees today pictures of GIs all smeary and dirty – they got that way trying to stay warm.

HOLLAND

It wasn't too many more days before we were ordered to load up. We headed north through Belgium and into Holland. One of the towns had a bathing facility with a pool and showers with hot water. Our convoy waited for hours on the side of a narrow road forcing vehicles headed the other way to use part of the ditch, splashing mud on a white picket fence in front of the house across the road. Not to be defeated, the lady of the house carried a pail of water to the fence and washed the mud off each time it got splattered. Finally we had our turn at the bath house. It would have been much better if we hadn't had to put the dirty clothes back on. We moved on to a temporary location near another town where we were billeted in a farm house close to a wood. It was a peaceful place in the early spring except for the drone of US and German planes overhead at night. At the nightly sound of the guttural roar of the ramjet engines of the V-1 rockets we could look up and sometimes spot them as they flew overhead on their way to England. A local housewife contracted to do our laundry, so for a couple of packs of cigarettes I got all my clothes washed and she ironed everything, socks and underwear included.

While we were at this location passes to Maastricht were made available. I got one and rode into this historic town in the southern appendix of Holland. My buddies and I sought out the USO as a start of our visit, but the passes were for a very short time and we didn't know anything about the town. As a result I remember very little of my visit.

We moved eventually to a town where we took over from a British outfit. After we waited until they had their tea we were able to move into a part of a house occupied by a farmer, his wife and teenage daughter. We were supposed to have them move out while we were there, but we allowed them to stay. That was nice of us since it was their house. The Germans had confiscated nearly everything, mercifully leaving them their pregnant cow which was about to freshen. One evening the farmer came rushing into our end of the house motioning for one or more of us to come and help him, indicating that his cow was in labor. I volunteered to do whatever he wanted. The hoof of the calf appeared and he tied a rope around it, handed me the other end and commanded, "Trac, Trac," (Pull, Pull). I pulled and he helped ease the calf's birth. As soon as it came bouncing out he spread its legs to determine the sex and was overjoyed to see that it was a heifer and not a bull.

We waited in this location while Gen. Montgomery, the overall commander in chief in this area, carried out his attack strategy against the Germans at Aachen. He lined up all the artillery he could commandeer, aimed it at Aachen and fired for days on end. That there was little need for this overkill strategy made little difference to Montgomery. From the scuttle-butt going around we felt that Montgomery had always been peeved that Eisenhower had been chosen Supreme Allied Commander instead of him. In any case we finally moved toward Aachen to find a dazed and bewildered populace. It was on this move that the spring had thawed the roads so much that they fell apart under the weight of the tanks and had to be repaired constantly. Finding rubble in the ruins of Aachen was not a problem, we simply backed a truck up to a bombed out building and loaded it with

bricks, by hand. I worked forty eight straight hours throwing bricks on trucks, catching cat naps on the brick piles between trucks when I could.

GERMANY

In Aachen we encountered townspeople who looked at us in a daze, so shell-shocked were they from the bombardment. We were ordered to mop-up duty consisting of inspecting the towns and countryside through which we passed for Wehrmacht stragglers, Nazi deserters and other suspicious characters, confiscate arms and munitions and otherwise secure the area. Inspections of homes and cellars often turned up drinkable results. One place did indeed reveal a treasure trove of wine and champagne. We couldn't pass up our good fortune, found a small trailer into which we loaded most of our gear so we would have room for the cases of pink champagne in the half-track. We were hauling this trailer during our ordered search in the Black Forest for Franz von Papen, the high-ranking Nazi officer who was one of Hitler's advisors, when an officer ordered a change in this arrangement of gear and beverages. We certainly hated to say good bye to our treasure trove. We heard that some other outfit captured von Papen, so we broke off the search and moved on.

We visited one town after another, searched and secured. The lieutenant in command lost his way and we ended up on a road fully exposed to an unsecured area. We received fire from anti aircraft guns manned by die-hard remnants. We were sitting ducks, lined up on the road as we were. I dived for the nearby ditch and tried to bury myself, but it was mostly rock and I got nowhere. Some others ran to the "shelter" of a stone barn in the field adjacent. My buddy Jackson decided at the last moment that it was not safe there and was in the process of running back to the road when a blast went off at his back. He was mortally wounded, the back of his head blown off. This was one of the saddest days of my life. Jackson and I had furloughed in England together and I had helped him back to the barracks when he was so drunk he could hardly stand up. We were able to get turned around and out of there without further incident.

The German countryside, even in war was beautiful in the early spring. One place I visited on some time off was Wartburg Castle. I saw the location where Martin Luther wrote and worked by the window overlooking the valley below. We entered the town of Sudheim, where the Germans had built a prison comprised of tiered cages about four feet wide by four feet high and four feet deep, in which they had locked up some of the men of the town. Obviously there wasn't room to lie down or stretch their legs under these conditions.

These men had been released before we got there and were busy searching for their captives. We heard that when they found a likely Nazi guard they would stand him with his toes and face against a wall and interrogate him. They knew he was a Nazi guard and if he answered, "Nein" when he should have confessed, "Ya" they'd hit him in the back of the head and thus smash his nose against the wall. The cruelty was apparent on both sides. Nazis could be identified by the Nazi tattoo (the swastika with eagle wings) they all wore under their arms.

May 8, 1945 arrived with the good news that the war in Europe was over. I had watched my 24th birthday come and go the day before and was both happy that a ceasefire had been declared and a worry that I might be redeployed to the Pacific theater.

While we were in this town we searched nearby and found a German colonel hiding in one of the houses. With drawn weapons we faced him and I forced him to disarm. I had a right to his 7.65 Cal. Mauser automatic pistol so I confiscated it and we took him prisoner.

Another amusing incident this narrative would not be complete without is about the German plane. About 300 yards from the edge of town was a large barn. Bart and some others went down there to explore and discovered an intact German airplane, a single engine monoplane probably used for reconnaissance. Bart would not be dissuaded from trying to get the thing airborne. He hadn't undergone all that flight training for nothing. He didn't read German, but knew enough about planes to decipher the instruments. We had no aviation fuel, so he put regular gas in the tank and cranked the motor until it finally sputtered to a smoky start. Bart was in his glory sitting at the controls. He had someone open the barn doors and gunned the engine to maximum. The roaring plane rolled out of the barn and down the field faster and faster headed for the hedges, but it could not get higher than the top of the grass. Guys were yelling at him to cut the engine before he killed himself, but of course he couldn't hear them. At the very last minute a very disheartened Bart throttled down and swerved to avoid crashing and taxied back to the barn.

AFTER THE WAR

We learned of the breakup of the 8th Armored division only after arriving in Zbuch, in the Sudetenland area of Czechoslovakia. Zbuch is a mining town which lies about twenty five miles west of Pilsen and we were billeted in a school building. We were afforded the use of the showers in the wash house of the mine and were told that further orders would be forthcoming. In the meantime, Officers and higher ranking noncoms were commandeering the jeeps and command cars for trips to Pilsen, leaving the trucks for the rest of us. Passes were generously given out and we made the best of it.

The Sudeten Germans had to wear yellow arm bands to distinguish them from the regular Czechoslovakians. And we were quick to find out that Czech girls were well chaperoned while the Sudeten girls were not. Also I tried to tune the grand piano with the tuning hammers I found in order to play it. A piano tuner I was not.

My orders came soon enough and, since I didn't have enough points to be eligible to be shipped home and discharged, I found myself in Linz, Austria. I was ordered to remove the 8th Armored patch and replace it with the YD of the 76th, Yankee Division. Although I was not happy with the order I sewed my 8th Armored patch on my right shoulder and the YD on the left in accordance with regulations. There was some sort of festival going on in Linz at the time. I was billeted in a house a little way out of town and my room had a view of the valley and the town. I could hear the tweet of the train engine and could see the train snaking its way on the other side of the valley. If I wanted to bathe, I had to light a fire under the water heater and wait while a couple of gallons of water heated enough for a shallow bath.

While I was there I got a pass and went looking to see if I could find my old outfit, the 90th Division which I had heard was close by. I was able to find my old unit and see one or two of the men I'd trained with. I learned that many of my friends had

met their fates at Omaha beach almost a year previously. This made me very sad, but thankful that I had not had to go through that hell.

A notice appeared on the bulletin board one day that anyone interested could take an exam to qualify for acceptance to one of two American Universities to be established, one in northern France and the other in Shrivenham, England. These schools were to be staffed by professors from U.S. colleges and universities and would offer college level courses for credits transferable after the student returned home. I applied, took the exam, passed and was soon on my way to Shrivenham. I enrolled in engineering courses which would be helpful once I returned to the University of Illinois, which was my intention. After all, that was where I could find Jean also.

One advantage I availed myself of were frequent passes to London where I went with friends or by myself. On one of these trips I made my way to the Covent Garden dance hall. The Covent Garden Opera House had been converted for service men and women for the duration and was purported to be the one place in London where a guy could meet a decent girl.

The big band was playing and boys and girls were out there jitterbugging and slow dancing with a crowd of guys on one side of the room and a crowd of girls on the other. I screwed up my courage and went across to ask a very pretty young lady if she'd like to dance. To my delight she said yes and we were just starting to get acquainted when the whistle blew. I thought, "what now." The dumpy little Englishwoman was directing that everybody form two circles, girls on the inside, boys on the outside. I looked at my partner and she seemed to want to participate so there we were. We circled on opposite directions until dumpy blew the whistle again whereupon we were to dance with whoever was in front of us. The girl in front of me was not very attractive and kind of tweedy, but I offered my hands and we set off. I was quite disgusted and when I finally looked down at her I saw she was studying my disgusted looking face. We both broke into laughter, introduced ourselves and a friendship was born. Margaret Shore made up for looks in personality, interest and friendliness. We made arrangements to meet again and so we did, several times while I was at Shrivenham. If I had not promised to return to Jean I probably would have considered a closer relationship with Margaret.

One pass I got on Labor Day of 1945. Since it's not a holiday in England and Margaret was working, I set off for Cambridge to see if I could find my old home on Sedley Taylor Road. I was able to find it and arrived around four thirty in the afternoon to find a very friendly couple occupied the house and the good doctor had just finished clipping the tall hedge that my mother had planted those many years earlier. They invited me for tea, but I declined, deducing that they had already had theirs. I asked about some of the friends with whom I used to play and learned that some still lived down the street. I bade them goodbye and went down to knock on the door of one of them, Audry Clay, who used to steal peas from Mother's vines. They asked me in, sat me on a chair and faced me, all in a row. I was never so uncomfortable in my life and made my visit as short as possible.

I retreated to London and my billet only to find a message that I'd had a phone call from Margaret that she would wait for me at the entrance to a tube station. I raced to that station, bounded up the stairs to find her talking to an Englishman who was trying to change her mind. I guess it could be said that I'd taken a liking to Margaret.

With the semester over I bade so long to Shrivenham and headed back to Austria. No sooner than I'd arrived than I found I had accumulated enough points to be shipped home. I soon was on the train to Marseille POE and on board the troop ship bound for the U.S. After the ship passed through the Straits of Gibraltar the ballast shifted and the ship took on a slight list to port which lasted for the whole trip. I found that I could avoid being seasick if I could see where I was going. So I found a place on the foredeck up against the bulkhead of the bridge where I could sit on a rolled-up tarp right amidships facing forward and watch the pitching and rolling of the ship. On Christmas the mess served turkey and dressing and all the fixings, but by the time I got to the mess hall they had run out and were serving greasy pork. So much for holiday fare.

As we approached the Gulf Stream the weather got warmer and men were shedding their shirts to soak in some sun. But it wasn't long before we were approaching the waters off Cape Hatteras, some of the roughest of the trip. We made it though and on New Years Eve 1945 we could see some lights on the coast, a thrilling sight for war weary GIs. We docked at Newport News and disembarked on January 1. I remember greeting the smiling nurse at the bottom of the gangplank, but I cannot remember carrying the heavy duffle bag on my shoulder so glad was I to be finally home. We really didn't much care where we were billeted just so we could join the long line at the PX for a milkshake. I was soon processed, received my discharge on January 6 and was on the train to Bellows Falls, Vermont.