

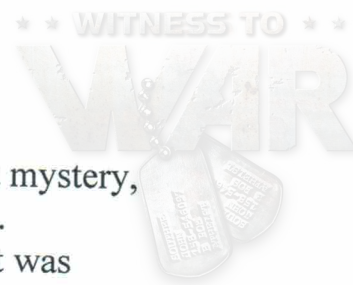


MY TRAVELS IN ETO – 1945 – by Pfc. Sidney E. Otto, 17116442

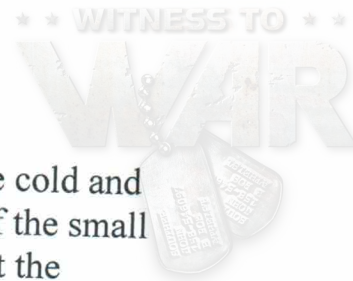
January 20 – 21 The 65th Armored Infantry Battalion, 20th Armored Division, left Camp Campbell, KY and traveled to Camp Myles Standish, MA via troop-sleeper trains. We arrived in Camp Myles Standish on the evening of January 22. We were greeted by snow, and more snow, and a blast of crisp, cold, New England air.

January 22 – February 4 We were quartered in old type barracks in which space heaters provided warmth, such as it was. We had to brave the dangers of a slippery, snow-packed path to gain access to the latrine which was housed in a separate building where we could also shower in water that was just above freezing. Everyone ate in huge mess halls where companies worked KP a day at a time. The food was excellent and there was plenty of it. Days were spent in seeing movies to prepare us for our shipment overseas, clothing checks and various preparatory classes. We also received shots and our final physical examination which consisted of stripping to have our throats probed by a medic. Jack and I were lucky enough to get two passes during our stay in Standish. On one pass we went to Providence, RI with one of our squad members, Toni Pacia, and were graciously entertained by his married sister, Sylvia. She served a delicious Italian spaghetti dinner and her husband, Byron, furnished a seemingly endless supply of beer and/or bourbon. Later in the evening we visited a service club downtown where another of Toni's sisters was a hostess. We also had a few drinks in one of the bars in the swank Biltmore Hotel. The other pass was spent in Taunton, MA where we enjoyed a nice steak dinner and good ale. We spent that night in a small hotel and the room was so cold we had to use our overcoats as additional blankets. We were due for a pass to Boston, MA but were restricted to camp pending our movement to the port of embarkation.

February 5 – 18 On this eventful day (February 5) we boarded the train to Boston, MA loaded down with packs, rolls, duffel bags and rifles. After an uncomfortable ride of almost an hour duration, we were not disappointed (considering our carry-ons) to find that the gangplank sloped down into the ship instead of up, as we had surmised. The Red Cross treated us to coffee, doughnuts, Hershey bars and gum. A band entertained us with snappy military tunes before we boarded our transport, the Thomas M. Barry (said to be the sister ship of the fated Moro Castle) which before becoming a troop carrier, sailed the run between New York City and Cuba. Once on board we scrambled for bunks (no reservations) –four tier affairs. How we ever

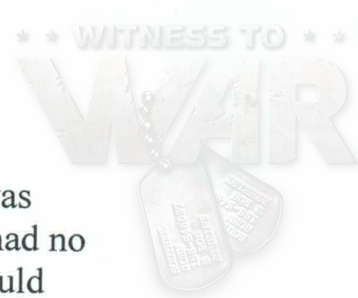


managed to sleep on these canvas bunks with all our gear is still a mystery, although truthfully I never had a good night's sleep on board ship. Nevertheless, we were lucky to be quartered on "B" deck where it was possible to get a whiff of salty sea air now and then. I pitied those poor boys who were cramped into the hold three and four decks below. There were approximately 4000 men on the ship. I'm certain we all dreaded the thought of what would happen if the ship were hit by a torpedo. We spent several exceptionally rough days at sea and from the very first day many were afflicted with miserable "mal de mer". It was almost impossible to find an empty space at the rails, but with the exception of a headache the first day at sea, I managed to avoid stomach queasiness. The greasy food served in the hot, smelly, mess hall twice a day only aggravated the sea sickness. Every man had a meal ticket which was punched for each meal eaten. Standing (no chairs) to eat was challenging. It required a real sailor to maintain balance and keep from lurching with the ship. Additionally, the floor was often messy and slippery with spilled food and drink. I won't mention what else might have been on the floor. Church services were held every day either in the mess hall or on deck "A". Movies were shown in the mess hall every afternoon and evening. Jack, who bunked above me, was so sea sick he dreaded the thought of having to make a return trip on a ship. He didn't have an appetite, lost weight and developed a far from healthy palor. We played chess quite often, roamed the decks and talked about good food and our future. We almost had a falling out once when playing chess and the argument led to some blows. Several hours later we both apologized. One night while standing on the blacked-out top deck we were shaken by the concussion of depth bombs which our destroyer escort were dropping several miles away. Apparently they had detected an enemy submarine. The charges were dropped all that night and at dawn all of our convoy, which numbered fifty ships, was intact and sailing smoothly onward. On February 17 we arrived in the harbor at Le Havre, France. The decks were crowded to capacity with GI's straining to get their first glimpse of this foreign land and the damage of war was clearly evident. That night after the ship had docked, five shadowy figures were visible amidst the ships rigging at the bow, consuming a treat, a No. 10 can of sliced pineapple which John had smuggled out of the infamous kitchen. With a splash the empty can hit the surface of the water as the echo and ripples faded into the darkness of the night. On February 18 we debarked at nine o'clock in the evening. I again struggled with my duffel bag and equipment and this time I did have to walk an upward grade. The floating dock erected by the engineers had been lowered by the outgoing tide so it was necessary to ascend the gangplank to



reach land. There we were packed into semi-trailers and began the cold and painfully bumpy trek to the Chateau Bout-Leve on the outskirts of the small village of St. Andre sur Cailly where we arrived on February 19 at the uncivilized hour of 3 a.m. Little did we realize that this was to be our home for the next six weeks, our longest stay in one spot during our time in ETO. I was most impressed during the trip to this destination when, in the middle of the night, we stopped and a Red Cross woman appeared out of nowhere and served doughnuts to the tired, cold and cramped GI's in those trailers. And she apologized for not having coffee.

February 19 – April 11 will always remember “our” small chateau as a relic of the glamorous, glorious days of pre war France. Though not in good condition (it probably had been used by the Germans) it managed to retain its stately grace and the estate still showed signs of having been well cared for. Spring had arrived early and on our first day there, Jack, George, Steve and I wandered down the quaint, hedge lined roads, marveling at the fact that we were actually on French soil, seeing many things that we had only seen in pictures. In a few days the immense space in front of the chateau was spotted with bright yellow jonquils. Their gayness seemed a bold defiance in face of all the tragedy that had befallen the soil that mothered them. We ate Ten in Ones during our first few days there, as it required some time for our kitchen to be set up. When hot meals began, we were amazed at the good food we were receiving. Quite often we had pie for dessert and “cherry” which was my favorite. Our motor pool was situated on an abandoned German rocket launching site in a woods several hundred yards from the chateau. We took turns pulling motor pool guard and squads rotated the pulling of a “wire” guard, which we considered foolish, but which Battalion Headquarters felt necessary for fear that saboteurs would cut our communication lines. Training was not difficult and our first week was spent cleaning our cosmoline-packed machine guns, drawing our vehicles, (we named our half-track “Tracer”) and getting our equipment in shape for the day when we would be called to the front. Due to rain and a bad drainage system for an outdoor water faucet which was frequently used, the driveways around the chateau soon became a sea of mud. To remedy the situation the entire company donned overshoes and began to shovel mud and water. Crushed lime was obtained and spread over the driveways and paths and other work was done on the surrounding landscape. In a matter of days, we had conquered “old man mud” and the chateau had assumed a much improved appearance. Several trips were made by our vehicle drivers and volunteers to deliver much needed jeeps to Metz which then was very close



to the front lines. These trips were routed through Paris and Jack was accepted to make one trip. I was not a good stick-shift driver. We had no difficulty finding a French woman to do our laundry. When we would deliver or pick up our laundry her husband would always insist we have a glass of cidre (cider) or some other liquor in a decanter on their table. We often purchased long loaves (baguettes) of French bread which was a novelty to us. Some evenings we would visit a small bar in St. Andre where we could buy cider, (Normandy is apple country), cognac, dry wine and occasionally rum or beer. The franc was new to us, and though we knew we were being overcharged for purchases, we really didn't mind, knowing what the French had suffered. One evening several of my squad mates and I walked to Rouen, a distance of approximately 10 miles, and once caught a ride on a British semi-trailer, just to go to the Red Cross Canteen there. You could mingle with British, French and American servicemen while having coffee and doughnuts and even take a hot shower. George and I went to Cailly one day where we purchased postal cards of our chateau and other scenes in the vicinity. With the exception of "Bon Jour" and "Merci", I learned little French.

April 1 There were no April Fool's pranks this day as we were travelling in convoy. This also was Easter Sunday but no time for religious services. We drove a distance of 115 miles and arrived in Cambris, France about 4 p.m. We bivouacked just outside of Cambris. The field we chose was soon filled with tanks, half-tracks and other army vehicles of our unit. It was a windy day and before long toilet paper from the latrines was flying everywhere.

April 2 We traveled 106 miles today and bivouacked near Neerlanden, Belgium. Though the scenery was similar to that in France, we were impressed by the modernistic buildings, including houses, which seemed fairly common in this area. The residents we came across along the way seemed exceptionally friendly and gave us eggs, bread and cognac. I will always remember the peasants who came out to watch us pitch our pup tents and prepare our meal over small, one-burner, gasoline stoves. They wore colorful wooden shoes.

April 3 – 9 We traveled about 63 miles and reached our destination, Baesweiler, Germany at 12:55 p.m. We were billeted in a large school building which had been cleared of desks, equipment and supplies. We found many pamphlets and books about Hitler Youth activities. We slept on the floor but considered the shelter better than pitching tents. We took



showers at one of the many coal mines in that district. Baesweiler had been the scene of bitter fighting during the winter months. Most of the buildings were beyond repair and we leisurely wandered in and out of numerous homes seeking souvenirs, forgetting our instructions about booby traps. We often went on the roof of the school building and watched hundreds of our planes heading to inner Germany where they would unload on their targets. We were surprised to find such a great quantity of American ammunition: mortar shells, bazooka shells, machine gun ammunition, grenades, etc. which had been left behind, sometimes stacked behind a hedge, sometimes in a hole. Much of this ammunition we loaded into our already bulging half track. We spent a great deal of time on roving patrols. One town which we patrolled was Geilenkirchen. All of the towns in that area were a mass of ruins with very few signs of life, human or animal. Not only were we to guard against saboteurs, but we were to keep on the alert for freed Poles, French and Russians who were terrorizing the few Germans who remained. We had our first captured wine, a red sweet wine which proved to be quite potent.

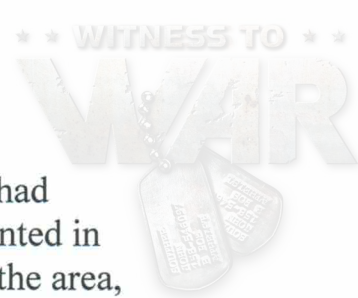
April 10 – 12 We left Baesweiler and later that day we crossed the Rhine at Bonn, Germany. This famous European river is picturesque with its high banks on which are located quaint towns and villages and those famous castles which have been the subject matter of songs and legend for centuries. We arrived at Weitefeld, Germany at 12:25 a.m. on April 11 after travelling a distance of 125 miles. We bivouacked in a field on the outskirts of the village. It was here that I first used my scant knowledge of German for we wanted to find a house with bathing facilities as all of us were badly in need of a shower or bath. I also found a woman who consented to do our squad laundry. She refused to take money for washing our clothes but was delighted to get the candy, gum, oranges, soap and cigarettes which we gave her. All of these things were more welcome than cash we soon learned. We maintained check points at road crossings in the vicinity of Weitefeld. At that time fighting was occurring in the Ruhr pocket, which was not far from us, and we were expecting to be sent there. We heard rumors that German soldiers had escaped in American uniforms and vehicles. With all this uncertainty, we realized the importance of staying alert. In the attic of the school house in Weitefeld, we found a vast number of German uniforms of all types, bayonets, helmets and other equipment. Here I found a Nazi armband, a Volksturm armband and a small vase which I kept as souvenirs. Our Anti-tank platoon was sent to Hof, a small nearby village where they maintained guard. It was there that Lt. Mott was killed on April 12 by the



accidental discharge of an M-3 which his driver was cleaning. Another ironic incident came to our attention here. The Staff Sergeant in charge of our company kitchen was demoted and sent to another unit when it was discovered that a wooden box, which had been used for hair cuts in the field, had been used by his staff for packing sandwiches on which traces of hair were found. That particular unit was engaged in some heavy fighting and he was killed.

April 13 – 15 We left Weitefeld and traveled to the outskirts of Marburg, a distance of 62 miles. Again we bivouacked in an open field along a highway. During our three day stay there, we saw thousands of German prisoners, members of the “super race” being taken in trucks to rear areas and Allied Prisoner of War Camps. This highway was a “bee-hive” of activity, day and night, with prisoners being transported to the rear and convoy after convoy of trucks, with ammunition, rations and other supplies, heading to the front. Here was ample proof of American production enabling the flow of supplies to the troops at the battle front. We made a trip into Marburg to take a hot shower at a Quartermaster facility where clean OD’s were furnished to each bather. Then we saw two movies at the theatres which had been liberated by Americans. While in this area we learned that President Roosevelt had died. This was shocking news.

April 16 – 18 We traveled to a small village near Dreihausen which was our company command post. Here our squad (2nd Rifle) was billeted with the mortar squad in one large room in the rear of the Burgermeister’s house. German Luftwaffe personnel had been quartered there and we took over the bunks with straw filled mattresses. Each platoon was stationed in a separate village so lacking our company kitchen, we had to eat Ten in One and C rations. Outside of the village we found a dead American soldier lying by the side of the road. He had been lying there for several weeks according to the villagers who had not buried him. They insisted that American officials had promised to send someone back to perform a burial. It seemed disgraceful to us to leave his body there, so several men were detailed to dig a grave, one of them read a few appropriate lines from the scriptures and they marked his grave with a cross. One of his dog tags was sent to military authorities so that his parents could be notified and his body moved to a permanent resting place. A letter found on his body was written by his mother indicating that she had not heard from him for some time and naturally was worried about him. Near the village, in the middle of the road, there was an American tank which had been hit by a German 88. In a nearby



wooded area we came across a number of German vehicles which had received hits and were burned and several 88's, one which was pointed in the direction of the demolished American tank. During our stay in the area, we searched the homes in the surrounding villages for weapons and German soldiers who were known to discard their uniforms and seek refuge as civilians. We gained useful information from liberated Poles, French and Russians who had been forced to work as farm laborers for three, four and five years. In our squad, George spoke Polish, Steve spoke Czechoslovakian, Toni spoke Italian and I knew a smattering of German, so we usually found a way to communicate with them. Our searches also turned up pistols, field glasses, cameras (which Germans were prohibited to own), champagne and wine, although the latter were usually well hidden. One day the machine gun squad of our platoon (1st) gained information, from one of the Polish laborers, that two German officers were hiding out in one of the villages and, while following up this lead, stumbled across them fleeing to hide in the nearby woods. Shots ensued and one of the officers was wounded. Both surrendered. Several times we went to Dreihausen to take hot showers in one of the mine buildings. Although it seemed like fun at the time (I later considered it stupid) we pushed ore carts to the end of their rails and watched them go crashing to the bottom of a deep water filled pit. I found a good German helmet in our quarters and kept it for a souvenir. One day a member of our mortar squad shot a deer and that evening we had venison steaks and champagne for dinner.

April 19 We left our village near Dreihausen and traveled 15 miles. We bivouacked just outside the town of Staufenberg which is dominated by an old castle on top of a hill. We pitched tents on another hill and were able to look down upon a large American evacuation hospital in the valley.

April 20 – 23 We left Staufenberg and traveled 153 miles to Gnotsheim. We passed through Wurtzburg and our convoy was strafed there by a lone plane. Several men in another company were wounded. We bivouacked on the edge of Gnotsheim and spent most of the time inside our tents trying to keep dry and warm. A drenching rain made life miserable. It was here that we were ordered to turn in our overcoats and wool knit caps which up to that time had proved their worth in gold. We hated parting with them and some of us did ignore the order and kept those items we felt might still be useful. Our kitchen was set up here and we received several hot meals which were welcome after days on army rations. The anti-tank platoon was taken from us to form a new company and, as we cheerfully waved goodbye, we little



realized they would bear the brunt of the warfare we were destined to see. On the 23rd our squad was given the task of guarding a German Aerial Photo Lab. in the village while the remainder of the company moved to another area. About six o'clock we were relieved of our guard duty at the Photo Lab. and given the directions and instructions which would get us to our company's bivouac area near Schmalenbach. As darkness began to descend it became difficult to observe landmarks so getting lost was the natural result. About ten p.m. we located our company which by that time had begun a frantic search for us. Our squad was not put on security guard that night much to our relief.

April 24 - 26 We traveled 53 miles to Laub where we arrived late that night. Roads, shoulders and the area around Laub were heavily mined, so we were especially cautious. The next day we were able to see which fields were mined as they had been marked by the engineers who had gone through that area. Several nights while at Gnotsheim we were close enough to the battle front that we heard the firing of the big guns and saw their flashes. "Bed Check Charlie" became well known to our unit. This was the name given to the lone plane that appeared almost every evening about the same time to strafe and harass us. Fortunately, he never did any serious damage. Our squad was stationed near a barn filled with straw which provided a luxurious bed and more shelter than a pup tent. Our squad leader, Sgt. Charles Fitch, whom we affectionately called "Mother Fitch", was always seeking indoor accommodations for his "boys" whenever possible. The days there were sunny and warm. We took sunbaths, wrote letters and received mail, got haircuts and took baths in a metal tub which we borrowed from one of the villagers. We heated water over an open fire and enjoyed a warm dip in fully two inches of water. Blankets were haphazardly hung around the tub for some semblance of privacy, but more than once some passing fraulein may have gotten an eye full. George and Steve struck up a conversation with a Pole who was forced to do farm work. He gave us eggs for cigarettes and invited George and Steve to dinner one day at the home of his "overseer" whom he said was good to him and even bought him beer (Poles and other forced laborers were forbidden to buy beer).

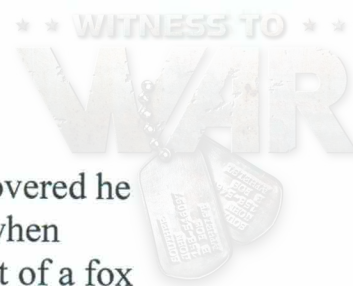
April 27 We traveled 16 miles to Keinberg. Arrived there about 9 p.m. Tanks, half-tracks and other vehicles were lined up in a field. We did not pitch our tents for we were expecting to move on a moments notice to cross the Danube. Jack and I made a double sleeping bag with our shelter halves



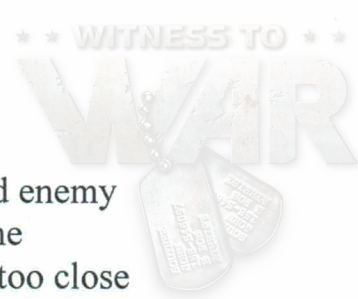
and blankets. We each stood guard for an hour. Also we consumed a jar of potted meat which Jack had received from his mother.

April 28 We left Keinberg at 6:45 a.m., crossed the Danube, and arrived in Weich that evening. Again we spent the night in an open field where we lined up our vehicles. Jack and I made another double sleeping bag, but I still could not stay warm. The night was extremely cold and frosty. We received gas for our half-track.

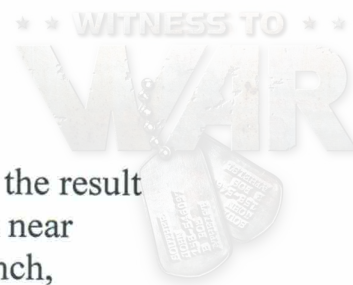
April 29 – May 1 This day (29th) I will always remember. We left Weich about 6 a.m. and rolled down the road with an occasional scatter of machine gun fire from our column. This so-called “firing by reconnaissance” had been done for several days previously as we were told we were in combat. However, we had seen no enemy and villagers who lined the streets were frantically waving white handkerchiefs and other white objects, and white flags were displayed from buildings. It was hard for us to believe that we were the first American unit to pass through this territory. Later we learned we truly were. Nevertheless, we continued to fire into wooded areas, haystacks and other spots that would conceal the enemy. There were rumors that some German soldiers had left their units and were hiding in these small villages. About 8 a.m. we approached the town of Biberbach and, as usual, the light tanks of the mechanized cavalry unit with us went ahead to check out the town before the remainder of the column was permitted to pass through. We stopped to await the order to proceed and, as the morning was chilly, several of us climbed on the hood of our half-track and began to make coffee over our one-burner stove. Suddenly gun fire erupted ahead of us and the column started to move. I grabbed my cup of coffee which was barely warm and jumped into my seat. We were stopped again just within the town and told to dismount. Although the town was displaying white flags, one of the tanks had been fired on by a German panzerfaust, their equivalent of our bazooka. Jack and I were assigned the left side of a medium tank, George and Charlie the right side. Toni and Sparky manned the 50 caliber machine gun on our half-track. Experiencing that “bottomless stomach” feeling, we slowly moved through the town. The tank gunner fired his bow machine gun at every possible hiding place and occasionally the tank’s 75 belched a round that would tear a huge hole in the side of a house or barn. Those of us on foot were to keep on the alert for Germans armed with panzerfaust, good anti-tank weapons. As our armored column continued to blast its way through this town in which SS troops were hiding, its ruin was inevitable. During our advance, we passed a German lying by the side of the road,



feebly waving one arm. We assumed he was injured, but later discovered he had been faking being wounded and could have fired at us. Then, when another German wearing a long black rain coat suddenly sprung out of a fox hole beside the road and began running to our rear he was shot by our company Captain who was riding atop a half-track. When the fighting had ceased, our squad and a squad of the Third Platoon were sent on a patrol as enemy anti-tank guns had been reported to be in the vicinity. Our squad took to the open field, the other squad headed for the woods. Seeing three German soldiers madly pedaling bicycles down a road, we opened fire. They took cover in a ditch and returned our fire with a "burp" gun. We advanced across the field with rifle fire and sent a runner back to the company to request our half-track to move up so we could counter their automatic fire with our machine gun fire. But then as we approached their location, two of them fled to a nearby farm. The third, however, had been hit in the chest by our fire and could not follow. At this time two tanks came roaring down the road with our CO riding the lead tank. We all moved into the farm yard, the tanks riddling the buildings and nearby woods with machine gun fire and several 75 rounds tore gaping holes in the house. A tracer from one of our rifles set the hay afire and in seconds the barn was a blazing inferno. Just as we were about to leave, thinking we had caused enough destruction for two Germans, three came running out of the house wildly waving a bed sheet and shouting "Kamerade". In the excitement, we failed to notice two more Krauts who had crawled into bushes by the side of the road. They pretended to be injured when they were noticed, but proved to be uninjured and armed with pistols. These five Germans were taken to join other prisoners in Biberbach and our Medics arrived to care for the soldier who had been wounded in the chest. He looked to be about 18 years old. As we departed this skirmish area that afternoon, we left behind a village of smoking ruins and a burning barn. That day Germans died, Germans were wounded and Germans were captured but our Company did not have a casualty. We arrived in Teutonfon about 4:30 p.m. There we learned that the battle for Munich had begun and the fighting ahead was fierce. We saw ambulances taking wounded men to the rear and learned that Colonel Jones our CCB (Combat Command "B") Commander had been killed by a sniper and that our Anti-Tank Platoon which had left us at Gnotsheim to form another fighting team, had suffered heavy losses. It was here in Teutonfon that an AAA unit provided us with beer which we were not in a mood to enjoy. That night we traveled a long distance to reach our assembly area. We passed through villages which were still burning and heard the artillery barrages that were keeping Munichers awake. Traveling was slow, the night was cold



and dark, and confusion seemed to mount as we neared Munich and enemy territory. About 1 a.m. on April 30 we drove into an open field at the outskirts of a Munich suburb. Our own artillery shells were falling too close for our comfort. Attempts were made to contact our artillery and inform them that their rounds were falling short, but failed. Jack and I again made a double sleeping bag, took off our shoes but kept them in the bag with us to keep them warm. Despite the artillery bursts I was so weary I pulled my blanket over my head and went to sleep. But not before saying a prayer. The next morning our platoon brought up the rear of the column. We had been the spear head the previous day. The third platoon took the lead, but we remained on edge with all the firing in the city ahead of us. We watched P47's circle overhead and occasionally zoom down to strafe some target within the city. Advance was slow and it was about 4 p.m. when we reached our objective, Oberweisenfeld Airport, having traveled a distance of 8 miles. SS troops had put up stiff resistance in the suburbs of the city, but once their line of defense was broken the city was taken without too much difficulty. Although the doughboys of the 45th Infantry Division went ahead then to finish mopping up, we still experienced a few German mortar rounds exploding around us as we neared the airport. It seemed as if from nowhere hundreds of liberated foreigners crowded around our vehicles, some crying, some laughing, all overjoyed at the sight of Americans. Pilfering started as soon as we entered the city and civilians could be seen scurrying into their homes with boxes of food which they had taken from a warehouse or shop. We pitched our tents in the airport with intentions of spending the night there, but then received orders to move into an office building of BMW (Bayerische Motor Werken). Russian and Polish slave workers provided us with German Army blankets stored in a nearby barracks. The office building was furnished with modern fixtures and furniture. Souvenirs from here were a small box containing German postal stamps, a copy of "Mein Kampf", a small chrome tray embossed with the BMW logo and a German typewriter with the umlaut "o and u" which I could carry in our half-track. On the lower level of this building there was a modern, well equipped dental and medical center for employees. Most of the BMW plant was located on five underground floors. From a large warehouse we obtained cases of Lowenbrau beer, the best I drank while in Germany, plus boxes of canned cheese, bottled catsup, stationery, fountain pens, woolen socks and a keg of schnapps. On May 1 a wet snow clothed Munich in a blanket of white which covered some of the ugliness wrought by war.

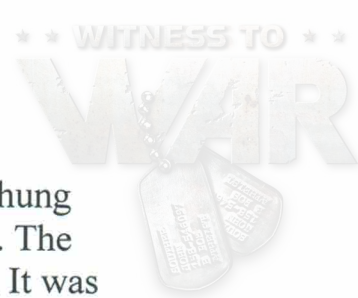


May 2 – 4 We took leave of war torn Munich, much of the damage the result of U.S. Air Force bombing. We traveled 30 miles to a small village near Hintsberg. 150 prisoners were taken and two million dollars of French, English, Russian and Indian money were found by our company. Platoons were stationed in separate villages. Our platoon requisitioned one house for our use, but our squad was unlucky in drawing the attic. Our stay here was uneventful except for taking a few more prisoners, German soldiers hiding in a nearby wooded area. On May 4 we headed for Salzburg although the city was taken before we arrived. It had become obvious that the war was winding down fast and only small pockets of resistance remained. Along the way we stopped near Traunstein where hundreds of Germans came pouring out of the woods to surrender and several cars filled with German Army "brass" surrendered to our Battalion Commander. Approximately 3000 prisoners were taken that day in the Traunstein-Chieming area. We bivouacked in a field near Schaiding that night and slept easier with the knowledge that the fighting would soon be over.

May 5 – 7 We traveled 22 miles to a small village near Pirach. Our platoon again took over a large house and this time our squad fared better. We were given the large living room which contained a radio. When not listening to the news, hoping for an announcement that the war in Europe had ended, we wrote letters and cleaned our clothes and equipment. On May 7 we heard that May 8 would be the official VE day. The news was received calmly but everyone was extremely happy.

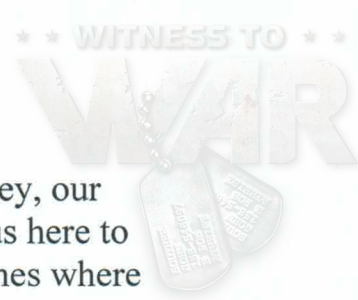
May 8 – 11 We traveled a distance of 21 miles to Baierbach which is located near lake "Simsee". Here we were one of two squads billeted in a house. It is common in some rural areas in Germany for the barn to be attached to the house and such was the case with "our" house. We disliked this arrangement because of the always present "barn odor" in the living quarters. Refugees from Munich were living with the family that had occupied this house. One room of the house was filled with exceptionally nice furniture which the people from Munich probably had brought with them. It included a photo album filled with snapshots of a young man in Luftwaffe uniform and hundreds of colored slides of pictures taken in Italy, South America and the Alps. We enjoyed viewing the slides on a projector and assumed the owner of this collection was wealthy or at least "well-to-do".

May 12 – 19 We left Baierbach and arrived in Isen about 9 a.m., a distance of 10 miles. We were billeted in a Gasthaus. Jack and I had twin beds with



sheets in one of the choice rooms in the inn. A lace curtain canopy hung over the beds and the walls were dark blue with pale yellow stripes. The room had a lavatory and hot water. Isen is a picturesque little town. It was clean and untouched by the war. We found a keg of not too good beer. On the morning of May 13 we learned we were in the wrong area and moved to Kraiburg where each squad was billeted in a modern house. These houses were near a displaced persons camp where hundreds of Poles and Russians, mostly women, were living. Our squad was given the task of guarding the Deutsche Sprengchemie, a huge powder plant. George, Jack and I were stationed at the main gate. We had telephone communication with the other gate posts and the houses which were about a quarter of a mile from our gate. We used two German civilian cars to commute between posts and go sight-seeing on the plant grounds. The area was heavily wooded, concealing the underground powder storage bunkers. In one building we found a large assortment of guns, probably used for testing purposes. A firing range had been set up nearby. The plant had been bombed but there had been little damage because the buildings and bunkers were so well dispersed and concealed. In a very attractive dormitory-like building which may have housed the chemists and top ranking personnel, Jack and I used one bedroom which had modern blond wood furniture, twin beds, desk, chest, three cream colored upholstered chairs, a large glass top coffee table, orange and brown striped drapes and a lavatory. We were sleeping in this room on the morning of May 19 when we were rudely awakened at 4 a.m. and told we were moving.

May 19 – June 4 On May 19 we traveled 124 miles into Austria where we bivouacked in a field in the Austrian Alps between the towns of Oberhaus and Schladming. We had been ordered to head for Trieste, Italy where it appeared there might be some sort of trouble brewing. Marshall Tito and his Yugoslavian troops seemed reluctant to allow Allied troops to occupy Trieste. This incident was settled peaceably so we remained in this location until June 5. On clear days we enjoyed the scenery in this valley, the snow capped mountains, the winding streams, the flowers, etc. but on rainy days, which were quite frequent, our enjoyment of nature's beauty turned to gloom. We took several hikes which convinced me that I would never be a mountain climber. I was astounded that people actually lived at unthinkable heights in lonely, seemingly inaccessible spots. We attended church services several times in a beautiful little church in Schladming. John, who was with CCB Headquarters located there, supplied us with excellent champagne and wine which he obtained from a well-stocked wine cellar. We also consumed

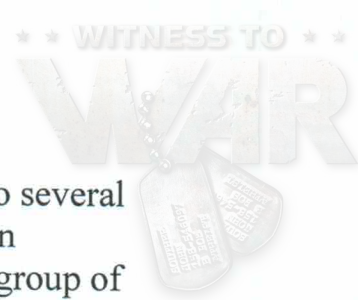


several kegs of beer which was not that great, but it was beer! Kegley, our platoon sergeant, and Sgt. Cahall, both having over 85 points, left us here to be discharged. We envied them. We went into Oberhaus several times where we could shower.

June 5 – 6 We headed back to Germany, travelling 110 miles to Frabertsham where our platoon was quartered in a Gasthaus. Our two days here were uneventful. We had another keg of beer.

June 7 – 17 We left Frabertsham and traveled to Ubersee, a distance of 47 miles. Here each squad was assigned a separate house. Our house was a pretty white stucco building. A second story balcony which extended on two sides of the house had boxes of red geraniums attached to the balcony railings. Jack and I had a very nice room with modernistic twin beds, dresser and night stands. Many flowers, especially roses, bloomed in the yard. Several cooks were assigned to each platoon so we could maintain our own kitchen. Several checkpoints were established at crossroads to check passes of civilians and vehicle permits. Our squad's responsibility was to guard paintings and other art treasures, valued at millions of dollars, which had been taken from a museum in Budapest. I was designated to be the typist for our platoon, as there were many reports which were required every day by the Company Command Post located in Marquartstein. One day an elderly woman, who spoke excellent English, came into the office to inquire if she was still an American citizen, having married a German and lived in Germany for 37 years. I believe she was informed that she did not have dual citizenship and was quite distraught. Many Germans, of course, told us they had never been Nazis and hated Hitler. Some were being truthful, but many were not. On June 10 (my 22nd birthday) Jack and I visited one of the castles of King Ludwig II of Bavaria. We traveled to Prien and took a launch to reach the island in Lake Chiemsee where the castle is located. It is astoundingly beautiful with rooms featuring fabulous marble, gold, crystal and murals.

June 18 - 24 We left Ubersee, much to our regret, and traveled 13 miles to Camp Jones which was set up near Chieming on the shore of Lake Chiemsee. Here we pitched our tents and went back to sleeping on the ground. Training was kept to a minimum; afternoons were set aside for athletics and recreation. We always went to the lake where we could get a row boat or rubber raft, take a dip in the chilly water or just sun ourselves on the docks. During this week I acquired a good tan. We received our Combat



Infantry Badges, our battle star and our combat blouses. We went to several movies in Traunstein. The weather was perfect during this week. On Sunday, June 24, Jack and I made the trip to Berchtesgaden with a group of fellow soldiers. The road through the mountains was an exceptionally good one. The scenery along the way was beautiful. Berchtesgaden is a lovely and quaint town high in the Bavarian Alps. From the town we began the drive up the mountain on which Hitler's aerie "Eagles Nest" is located. About half way up this 6000 ft. mountain we saw remains of Hitler's home, Goehring's home, a large hotel and the many SS barracks and installations located there. All had been damaged extensively by bombings. The huge living room in Hitler's house was still intact with its enormous picture window minus the glass. A parking lot was constructed about 500 ft. from the top of the mountain. An elevator shaft was hewn out of the mountain here for access to the hideaway, although there also is a winding path that leads to the summit. The elevator opens into a hallway of the grey granite building. The oval shaped living room is dominated by a huge fireplace of rose marble and four large windows from which there is a spectacular view of the snow covered mountains and a sparkling lake in the valley below. A large round table occupied the center of the room and at least 30 or more upholstered chairs were placed around the perimeter of the room. A floral design carpet covered most of the smooth stone floor and there were several coffee tables with highly polished tops. It was in this room that Hitler entertained Chamberlain in September 1939. A small den off the living room was paneled with wood. The dining room had a table that would easily seat 36 people. The chairs were upholstered in a cream colored fabric. The white tiled kitchen was very modern, equipped with electrical appliances and aluminum ware. A small breakfast room had Nile green furniture. The other rooms and chambers on a lower level were not available for viewing. I was most impressed with the location of Hitler's aerie and could easily imagine when the man was on the premises, overlooking much of Germany and Austria, he might well have entertained delusions of grandeur and dreams of conquering Europe.

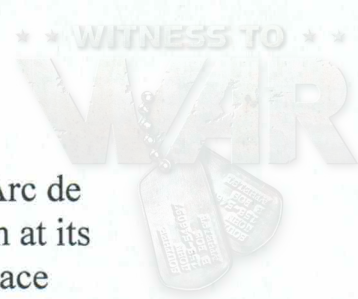
June 25 – July 10 We left Camp Jones and traveled 20 miles to Ruhpolding, a picturesque village located high in the mountains. Once again, each squad was billeted in a separate house. Ours was modern, chalet style with a lovely green lawn. The bathroom, a luxury, was black and white tiled. For several days we provided security for two hospitals located in the village. We made preparations to return to The States by turning in clothing and equipment we no longer needed. The company ate in a Gasthaus. Children and a few old



women would gather around us as we came out of the dining room, hoping to get any coffee or food we had not consumed. I bought a water color of a local scene and some post cards of the area, a ski resort in the winter. I was summoned again to type reports for the platoon. We had a lot of leisure time for sleeping, playing casino, rummy, bridge and solitaire, reading, working crossword puzzles, etc. I had a box made for the German typewriter I was allowed to send home and Jack made a box for sending my water color. The night of July 14 we found over 1000 bottles of liquor stashed in the cellar of the Gasthaus in which we had been having our meals.

July 11 – 15 We left Ruhpolding by train about noon on July 11. We traveled in box cars. Wooden bunks, which looked like large shelves, had been constructed at each end of the cars. Hardly first class travel, but we were so happy to be starting the trip home there were almost no gripes about our accommodations. Twenty four men were assigned to each car. On July 13 about 3:30 a.m. our train ran into an oncoming train near Weingarten. Two box cars were sort of telescoped together and six men were killed and twenty eight were injured. Our train was rerouted and, in spite of a tragic and miserable trip, we did enjoy some beautiful scenery. We arrived at St. Vallery, France about 6 p.m. Sunday July 15.

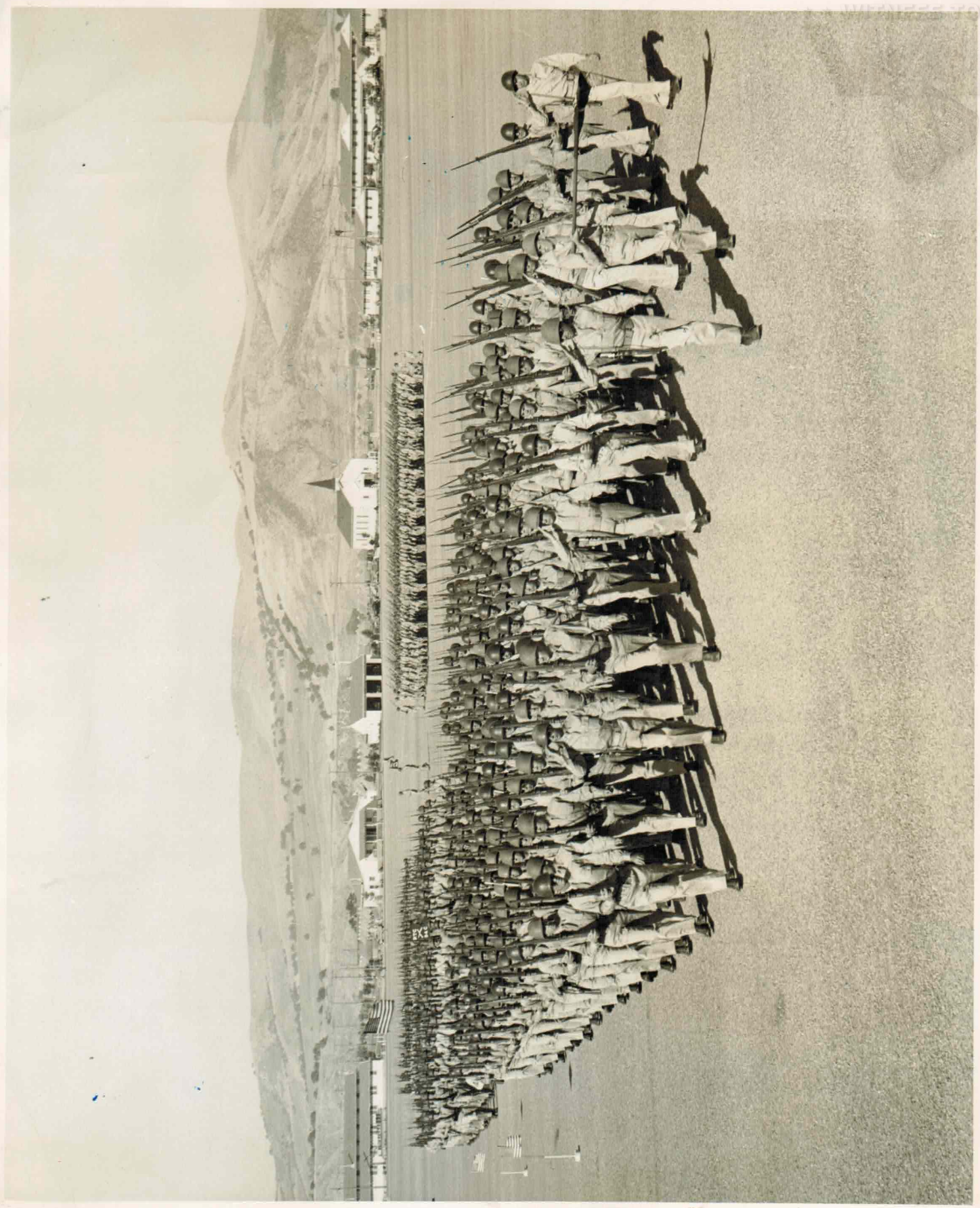
July 16 – 27 We marched to Camp Lucky Strike which was about four miles from St. Vallery and about one mile from the coast of the English Channel. We were housed in large tents. The wind always seemed to be blowing and dust flying. Thousands of German prisoners of war did the work in the camp including KP. An unusual, bizarre experience occurred here when I had to see a dentist. He was located in a tent and his drill was powered by a foot treadle operated by a prisoner of war. Jack and I went to the coast several times and saw the many installations the German's had constructed for the invasion. Many of the fields were still mined. We spent a great deal of our time in the coffee and doughnut lines. They were always terrifically long. Met Carl Proch who was my next door neighbor growing up in Pierce, NE. What a small world! Also ran into Elton Tekolste a fraternity brother at the University of Nebraska. On Wednesday, July 25, George, Steve, Slim, Broderick, Jack and I went to Paris. We left camp about 6:30 a.m. and arrived in Paris about 10:30 a.m. The black market for scarce items was thriving in Paris and American GI's were a source of supply. We sold cartons of cigarettes for \$14.00 each and candy bars for 50 cents each. We ate lunch and dinner at the Arcade Club, one of the many restaurants taken over by the Red Cross. We paid 20 cents for a meal, served by French

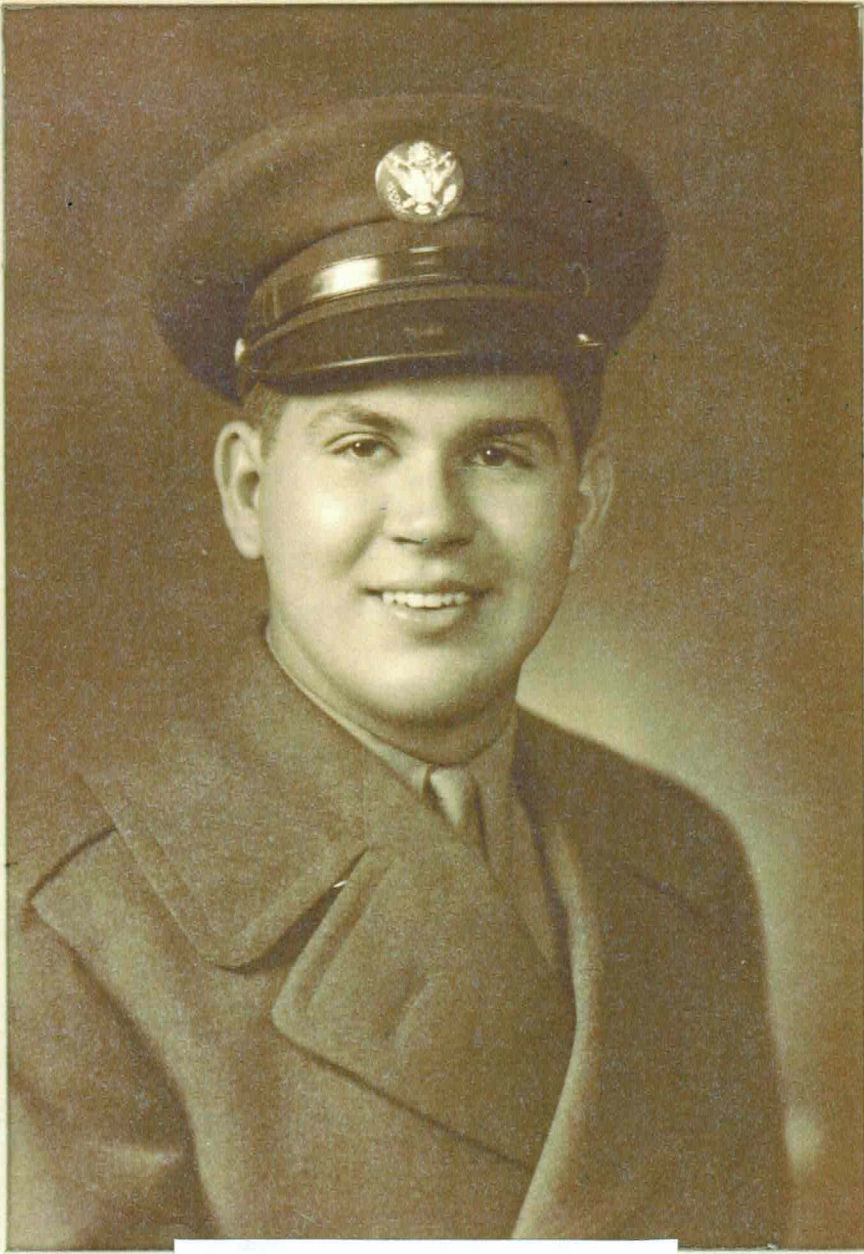


waitresses. An orchestra provided background music. We saw the Arc de Triomphe, went to the Eiffel Tower and the American Air Exhibition at its base, Trocadero Museum, The Invalides (Napoleon's Tomb) and Place Pigalle with its carnival atmosphere, prostitutes and, of course, GI's. We drank beer and citronaden in colorful sidewalk cafes. We also attended a performance at the Casino de Paris with its revue of beautiful girls, lavish costumes and scenery. Travel by subway was free for military personnel.

July 28 – August 6 We rode to Le Havre in semi-trailers. We boarded the ship M.S. John Ericsson about midnight. The ship was overloaded – about 9000 souls on board, including several hundred nurses and Red Cross girls. We spent one night sleeping on deck, then inside on cots. The voyage was calm and nice except for several days of rain. Jack was sea sick only one day. We saw flying fish, porpoises and a whale which surfaced beside the ship. To pass the time we played casino, rummy, and read. Time seemed to drag; every day seemed like an eternity. On the foggy morning of August 5 we sailed into New York Harbor, thrilled to see the Statue of Liberty and the New York City skyline. A small excursion boat, gaily painted and decorated came out to meet us. It was filled with girls and a WAC band. Many of the tall buildings and piers had WELCOME HOME or WELCOME HOME, WELL DONE signs. Thus, amid the tooting of boat whistles, blaring music and a display of red, white and blue, we arrived back in the good old U.S.A. From our debarking pier, where Red Cross women gave us cold milk (our first in six months) and doughnuts, we took a ferry across the bay to board our train to Camp Shanks, NY. We arrived there about 5 p.m. on the evening of August 6, amid a downpour of rain. We were treated splendidly, not accustomed to such attention in the army. Our first meal consisted of a huge steak, tossed salad, hot rolls, peas, green beans, French fried potatoes, cold milk, apple pie, ice cream and an orange. We were issued a suit of suntans.

August 7 – 11 I called home on the morning of the 7th. About 5:30 p.m. I boarded the train that would take me to Ft. Leavenworth, KS where I would receive a 30 day leave. Fortunately our accommodations were in Pullman cars. The train traveled through St. Louis and Kansas City and arrived at Ft. Leavenworth about noon on August 9. Again we were made to feel like returning heroes though few, if any, were among the group. We had an excellent lunch and the processing only took six hours. I drew another suit of suntans, exchanging my dirty ones for clean ones. I received my allotment of 5 cartons of cigarettes (I was not a smoker but my father was) and called home. My train for Omaha left about 1:30 a.m. on August 11 and arrived in





Sidney – A.S.T.P. cadet at the
University of Indiana



Jack – Sidney
Camp Cooke, CA



Sidney
Camp Shanks, NY



Carl Proch – Sidney
Camp Lucky Strike, France



Squad Mates L to R Back row:
Sidney, Hoffman, George, Slim,
Jack L to R Front row: Sparky,
Steve, Champagne, O'Neil (Toni
Took the picture)



. . . loading their mobile home

Squad mates loading our vehicle for departure from St. Andre sur Cailly, France. Jack and I were in Paris when this picture was taken.

As morning neared noon, the Artilleries hit the road. The 414th churned up Buchy again, the 413th left their bomb-scarred area with its V-1 rocket launcher platform and the 412th waved goodbye to their age-worn, overgrown, drafty Chateau, musty memento to mellow moments.

The next day, while French villagers pulled out their only sets of best clothes to attend Easter Sunday Mass and smiled their "au revoirs" and "bon chance," the remaining units also "moved out."

We named our vehicle "Tracer" and it was our means of transportation in France, Belgium, Germany and Austria. This was taken at the chateau where we were billeted in St. Andre, France. Jack and I were in Paris when this picture was taken.



. batten the hatches





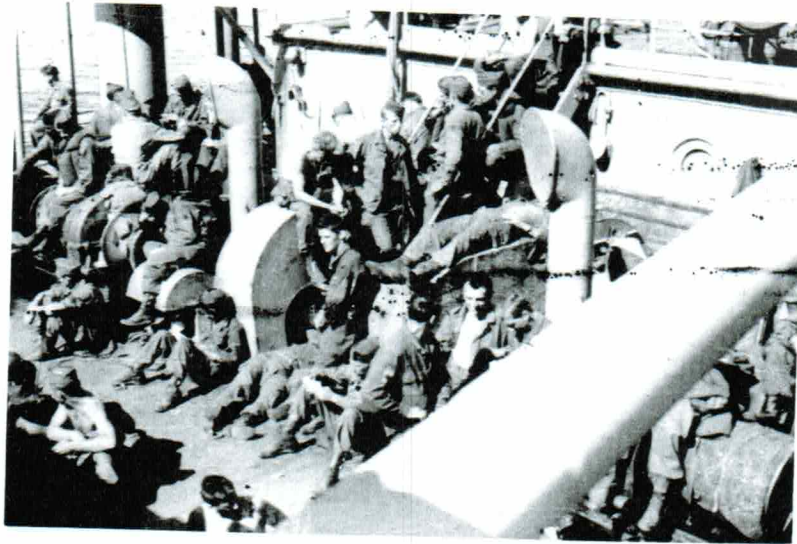
Left rear: Steve
Jack – Sidney
Right rear: George



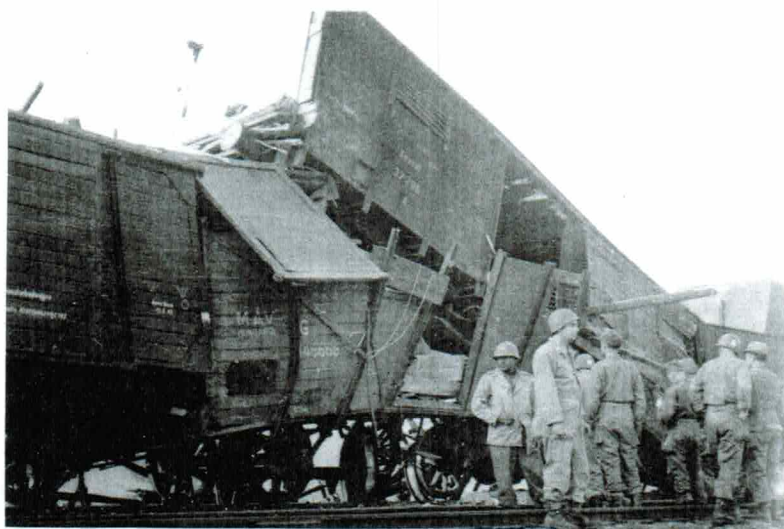
Jack – Sidney
Camp Jones on Lake Chiemsee,
Germany



Sidney – Jack
Gatehouse at Deutsche
Sprengchemie, Kraiburg,
Germany



Top deck – M. S. Ericsson
sailing from Le Havre, France to
New York City



Our troop train wreck on way from
Germany to Camp Lucky Strike in
France (6 men killed and 28 injured)



A SOLDIER'S PRAYER

“God, if by my hand a man should die,
and by this death a Mother cry,
and if his death takes a Father from a child,

I pray, will you forgive?

I do not want to kill a man,
I want to help him if I can,
while on some far flung battlefield.

Will you forgive?

If I must take another's life,
by bullet wound or stab or knife,
if I should take a life away,
my God in heaven, hear me I pray.

Will you forgive?

It's not for hate I bear this gun.
I bear it for it must be done.
It's not for hate I kill a man,
not for my life, but for my land.

Can you forgive?

You know the pain that's in my heart,
that pierces like a sudden dart.
God, since you know just how I feel,
when I am called upon to kill,
my God in heaven, I know you will

Forgive”