



29th Infantry Division
Germany, 1945



Basic Training 1944
Camp Wheeler, GA



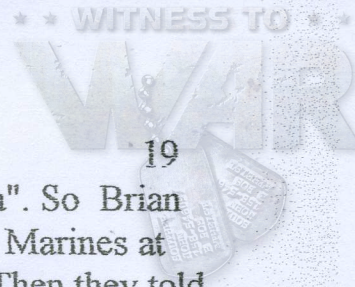
Germany 1944
I Company, 29th Division, 175th Regiment

A month before I entered the Army, in June 1944, I was called down to Grand Central Plaza, the induction center in New York City, to be examined for induction into the Army, Navy or Marines. I went there with 2 friends Joey Herman and Brian Tanzie, who were also called down for their induction examinations.

When we arrived we were given physical examinations to see if we were physically fit to be inducted to serve our country. Joey Herman failed his physical examination, and they rejected him, he would not have to be drafted. Brian and I passed our physical examinations easily, and were directed to go to a room where Army, Navy and Marine officers were waiting to interview us. They would ask each draftee what branch of service they would like to serve with. After listening and questioning them, they would assign the draftee into either the Army, Navy or the Marines. If it was possible they would assign you to the service you requested, but their decisions where to assign people was determined by the manpower needs of each service branch at the time of your induction. When my turn came to speak to them they asked me, "What branch of the service would you want to serve with, the Army, Navy to the Marines?" I replied. "I'd like to go into the Navy." They asked me why? I told them, " I live near Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn, and I love to watch the ships come and go. I've been doing that since I was a little boy. My hobby is building model ships and planes. I love the sea. Sailors on all our ships have clean quarters to sleep in, clean clothes to wear, and good food to eat while they're fighting the war. Sailors also got a chance to see the world." They listened to what I said and then said, " Soldiers have clean clothes and eat well, and see the world also, we're placing you in the Army" Oh well!! I tried. Brian asked to be placed into the Marines and they put him into the Marines. They told us to go home and to come back in 30 days. because this was just a pre-induction and, and when we return we'll be formally inducted into our assigned services.

Thirty Days later Brian and I, after bidding our families goodbye, went back to Grand Central Plaza to be inducted into the service. When we got there they told us the assignments we received at pre-induction were no longer valid. The manpower needs of the three services had changed, and we would have to be re-assigned according to their needs. We had to go back to see the three officers for re-assignment. Brian said to me, " Let me go in first, they'll put me back into the Marines. Then you follow me and ask for the Marines

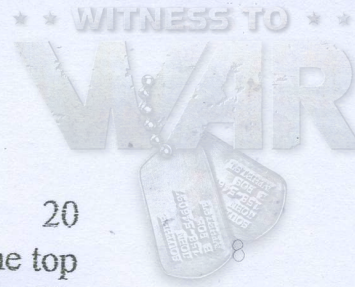




also. Then we'll be together, OK?". I said, "That's a great idea". So Brian went in first and when they asked him why he had picked the Marines at pre-induction. He replied, "Because they're a fighting outfit" Then they told Brian, " You're right, but so is the Army, and they need men now.", and they re-assigned him into the Army. When I went before them and they asked me where I wanted to be re-assigned I said, "What's the difference, you'll put me in to the Army, anyway" They all laughed and said, "You're right, we're putting you into the Army. After we were all re-assigned they lined us up and swore us in. Now we were in the United States Army. They gave us 6 hours off before we had to report to Penn Station to catch a train to Camp Upton, in upstate New York. Brian was very angry and said he wouldn't report to the train station with me.. I befriended another inductee and we took Brian to a bar near Penn Station, to wait until we had to catch the train and to have lunch. We tried to talk him into coming to the Camp Upton train with us, but we couldn't, so we got him drunk, and between the two of us, we managed to carry him onto the train, He awoke just before we reached Camp Upton, and he was furious with me but he was stuck, he was there in the induction center with me.

Camp Upton was one of the Army induction centers on the east coast.. We spent a week taking all types of aptitude tests so they could determine what part of the army they thought would be best for us. When the testing was completed I was sent to Camp Wheeler, Georgia an Infantry Training Center, where I was given sixteen weeks of Basic Training. As it turned out Brian and I never served together. After testing at Camp Upton He was sent to a camp in Florida for Basic Training. Then he served with a Grave Registration Outfit. His unit followed the combat soldiers, and after combat, they took care of the bodies of the soldiers that were killed in battle. That was a tough assignment, but someone had to do it, and Brian's outfit had that job. I didn't see Brian again until after the war, when I returned to America. I was glad to see that he came back home and he was OK. We always liked each other and it's too bad we never got to serve together, as we had planned. But, as someone once said, "The best laid plans of mice and men, oft times go astray"

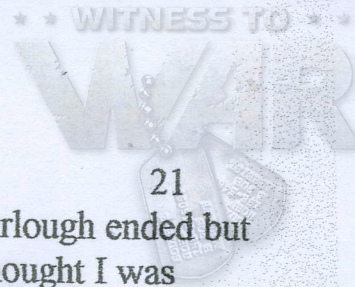
At Camp wheeler they tried to prepare you for combat as an infantry rifleman When we finished our 16 weeks of basic training they would shipped us out to Europe to fight Hitler's German Army or to the Pacific to fight the Japanese



Army. We lived in a two story barracks building, My bunk was on the top floor of the building. Sergeant Keller, who was a ballplayer in civilian life, Corporal Egelston, a southern good old boy, and our captain,, Captain Hunter, a born leader all rode us very hard for 16 straight weeks trying to prepare us for combat. My buddies during Basic Training were Jerry Garet a giant of a man from Rhode Island who was as gentle as he was big, and bunked right next to me, Ben Hochberg from the Bronx was the only other Jew in the barracks, and had been married just before he got drafted, Johnny Jacobson from up state New York was a Norwegian American and taught in school in civilian life, James Dunn a hillbilly who loved the army clothes and the army food, Gene Haltoffer, from Memphis, Tennessee was an engineering student, and Johnny Freedman, a lawyer from Philadelphia who was older than most of us. We trained together and had fun together. That year, during the Jewish New Year holiday I received a 3 day pass to go to services in Macon, Georgia. When I returned to camp I found my buddies had made my bunk, prepared my bed area for inspection and cleaned my rifle while I was gone. I was deeply touched that my buddies had done that for me. I felt it showed I was liked and accepted by my peers and it made me happy to be training with them.

The Army made Basic Training very intense because they intended to prepare you for combat, although there is nothing that can really do that. I had to learn to shoot a M-1 rifle, how to take it apart and clean it and put it back together again in record time. I also learned how to shoot a carbine , a light machine gun, the rapid firing gun called a BAR, a 45 caliber pistol, a bazooka, and a grenade launcher. I learned to throw hand grenades, and use a bayonet. But the M-1 rifle was my primary weapon and on it my life would depend. The cadre officers, whose job was to train us, took us on forced marches, put us through obstacle courses, gave us night training, gave us lectures, and tried to toughen us so we could function in any combat situation. We graduated Basic Training after we completed a 25 mile force march with full field pack., and then we were given a ten day furlough before we were to be sent overseas, either to Europe or the Pacific Theater of Operation.

After Basic Training I had intended to apply for parachute training school to become a paratrooper, but when I told my parents of my intentions my mother fainted, and my father had a "fit", so in order to keep peace in the family I decided not to apply.



I knew that I would be going overseas to Europe after my furlough ended but didn't tell my parents. When they kissed me goodbye they thought I was going to be assigned to an outfit in the United States for a while before I'd be called to go overseas. After I left to go to Camp Meade, Maryland, for assignment, someone at home told my mother I was going overseas. Ten hours before I was to leave for the debarkation center, while I was going through my final inspection, I was told to report to the Company Command Post. When I entered the office there stood my little Jewish mother. I was dumbstruck, where did she come from and how did she find me amongst thousands and thousands of soldiers at that base? It seems that a friend of my mother knew the commanding officer of the base, and through her persistent pleas that she had to see me before I leave for overseas he helped her find me. It was amazing that she could accomplish that. The Captain at the office asked me, "Soldier, do you know this lady?" After saluting him I replied, "Yes sir, she's my mother". He said, "Well kiss her hello, and then you have 5 hours off to be with her. Dismissed !!!!. I kissed my mother, and her friend who was with her, and took them to the PX building on the base where we soldiers went to spend our free time., I spent the hours off the captain gave me with her there, and I tried to allay her fears that I would not come back ,and tried to assure her I would be OK. It's funny that even though I was now a soldier she was still trying to overprotect me. She never outgrew it. She was a remarkable lady.

That evening I left Camp Meade to go to the debarkation center, Camp Miles Standish, in Massachusetts. This base was a secret debarkation base for sending troops to Europe. I spent 36 hours there, then went to Boston to board the USS Barry Barton a luxury cruise ship, that had been converted to a troop transport for carrying troops to Europe. I vividly remember standing on the ship's deck the next night as we left Boston, watching the lights of Boston harbor silently fade away, and wondering if I'd ever see America again. That night, on that dark quiet deck I watched until the last bit of light faded into the horizon, and prayed that I would return home safely, someday.

We were one ship out of many that formed a convoy going to Europe. We had Navy destroyers and cruisers assigned to protect us from German U-Boat attacks as we crossed the ocean. Half way across the convoy split-up because

they thought U-Boats were tracking us and some of the Navy ships tried to sink them while others stayed with our ships. We also went through a North Atlantic winter storm, and that was really rough. Soldiers were throwing up all over that ship, but I'm lucky I don't get seasick and I easily withstood the rocking and the rolling of the ship. The storm was so strong it raised the front of the ship high up out of the water time and time again, then the ship would come crashing back down with a resounding bang. It was really something, and we were all relieved that the ship survived that storm. It was a whopper!!

On the way overseas some of the officers on the ship formed a band to entertain the men. A buddy of mine, Joe Barbrowski was an entertainer in civilian life and he put on shows every other day while we were crossing the ocean. He knew I could be funny and put me in the shows, and we entertained the troops all the way overseas. We didn't have to pull any other duties since we had to rehearse during our off-time. No KP and no guard duty or cleaning the bunk areas for us. We tried to get permanently assigned to the ship, putting on shows, but we were told "No Way," you guys are infantry replacements, and that's it"!! Oh, well, we tried.

One day we saw seagulls flying close to the ship so we knew we were close to land. The next morning we were all up before dawn to see where we would be landing. Some guys were betting it would be England, other said it would be France. It was foggy that morning and we had to wait for the fog to lift to find out where we were. When land was sighted we all ran to that side of the ship and it tilted so far downward, because we were all leaning over one side, I thought it might capsize, but it didn't. We finally got our first sight of Le Harve, France. Finally we were in Europe.

When we disembarked from the troop ship we didn't stay in Le Harve at all. We were marched through the city to the railroad station, where we were placed into box cars. The Europeans called them "40 and 8's" because they could transport either 40 men or 8 horses. We called them "cattle cars". This time they were being used to transport 40 men. We were being taken to an army replacement center at Leon, France, to wait to be assigned to our infantry outfit. The night before I was to leave for the 78th Infantry Division with the rest of the men I had trained with, I was taken to a hospital in Liege,

Belgium, with a bad case of bronchitis, I never saw the people I spent 16 weeks in basic training with again.

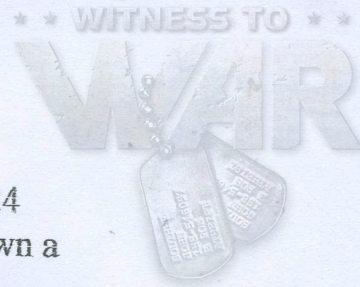
I spent about a week in the hospital and then was sent back to the replacement center in Leon. From there I was assigned to become a replacement for the 29th Infantry Division, one of the divisions that hit Omaha Beach on D-Day, June 6, 1944. During 11 months of combat in Europe 45,000 men had been assigned to this Division. 15,000 men usually make up an infantry division in the United States Army. Due to the large number of casualties incurred by the 29th Division 3 times as many men served with it during World War II. All of my life I have always been extremely proud that I had the opportunity to serve my country as a member of 29th Division. I was now:

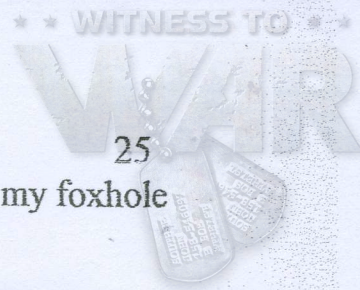
Here I was, shortly after my 18th birthday, riding in an army truck down a beautiful tree lined road (the trees were majestic and must have been hundreds of years old) somewhere in Germany, heading for the Command Post of I Company in the 3rd Battalion of the 75th Regiment of the 29th Division, where I would, as a infantry rifleman replacement, become a member of this famous D-Day Infantry Division.

When we reached the command post I met my new company commander, my platoon sergeant and my new squad leader, Sergeant Jose Johnson, a Mexican-Swedish American from Los Angeles, who was a seasoned combat soldier, wise to the ways of combat. He took a liking to me and made sure during my months in combat I didn't make impulsive or foolish moves that might have gotten me seriously wounded or killed. I will be forever grateful to him for showing me the little things that helped me survive in combat where each soldier's goal was to survive each and every new day.

That first day Sergeant Johnson took me out through a mine field. The only way one could safely cross it was between two white line markers. There in a foxhole was another soldier waiting to stand guard in the foxhole with me. I spent that first night in that foxhole guarding our company's position along the front. Our division's task at that time was to "hold" the same front line position we had before the "Battle of the Bulge"(a Germany offensive that was successful for a short time), until our forces were able to push the German soldiers back to the original positions they held before their attack. We had to wait until our forces completed their task, keeping German outfits from crossing the Ruhr River and attacking us, and waiting until the front line was re-established once more, then our plans for crossing the Ruhr River into the Ruhr Valley would be re-activated.

During combat I had two foxhole buddies. When I first joined the squad I was teamed with Tommy MacGlaughlin, a soldier from Erie, Pennsylvania. Tommy was 25 years old and his hair was all gray. I couldn't decide if combat had turned his hair gray, or if it was genetic. He and I were the "scouts" for our squad. Just before we fought in Munchen-Gladback Tommy was promoted to Corporal, and a new replacement became my new foxhole buddy. Richard (Dick) Rheel was a young kid from Youngstown, Ohio and we stayed paired-up till the war ended. I was in combat a short time but Dick





looked at me as if I was a veteran. I got along well with both my foxhole buddies.

Lieutenant Leo Phieffer, from Peoria, Illionis was our Platoon Leader. Each night he'd give us our orders for the next morning's fighting. If we were attacking he'd tell us what our objective would be, and who would be helping us achieve our objective. During combat we called him Leo, afterward we had to address him as Lieutenant Phieffer, or Sir. I liked him, he was a good officer.

My platoon sergeant, Sergeant Phil Horn, and the Platoon Staff sergeant, Sergeant Phil Jackson, were two guys from Texas, They were friends from home, and both of them were absolutely fearless. It was very reassuring to know they always knew what to do in combat situations. Sergeant Connie Ryan of Ithaca, New York led the squad next to ours and worked closely with Sergeant Johnson. He was a big good looking Irishman, who took the job of trying to keep his squad and his men as safe as he could very seriously. He taught me to just try to make it from one day to the next, one day at a time. The goal was to end this war as quickly as possible. and to get home in one piece, if you could.

In February 1945 we launched an offensive to cross the Ruhr River, and we entered the Ruhr Valley, fought our way across it to the Rhine River, where we hoped to cross into the German Heartland and complete the defeat of Hitler and his Nazi government.

Our army engineers built a platoon bridge across the Ruhr River while under enemy artillery fire, and my company and I crossed that platoon bridge into a town call Jurlich, which was an enemy stronghold on the rivers edge. A picture of this platoon bridge , with our company crossing it appeared in Life Magazine following our attack.

That is where I first saw, and heard, my first wounded American soldiers, and where the ugly face of war became a reality to me. Some of our wounded lay in a large courtyard and we could not get to them because of the intense firing of the Germany mortars and machine guns that covered the courtyard. We had to wait through the night, until dawn, before we could launch a



successful counter attack against the German positions on the other side of the courtyard. So we sat through that first night listening to the wounded moaning, and crying and screaming for help all night long. We just couldn't wait till daybreak when we would have enough forces and fire power to attack and get those wounded men the help they deserved. We attacked at dawn and we drove the enemy out. We got our wounded the help they needed and took care of our dead.

It was here that I saw my first dead American soldier. He was about my age and he was lying upside down on a pile of bricks that had been dislodged from a wall by artillery fire. His mouth was open, the blood that had flowed out of it was still drying. The look of amazement that this could happen to him could still be seen in his wide opened eyes. As I ran past him, I realized, for the first time, that I could die, that it could be me lying there instead of him. I felt glad it wasn't me lying there on the pile of bricks, and then I felt a feeling of guilt, because I was alive and he wasn't. I think feeling this way is very common to most soldiers, the guilt feelings when they first realized after a battle that they're alive and some of their buddies aren't. We learned to deal with it and move on.

At that moment the ugliness of war became a reality to me, and I never forgot him. There are many days when I see him in my mind's eye, and I imagine what kind of person he was, and what kind of life he might have made for himself if he had been spared and had returned home safely. To me, he has always been my personal "eyes of war", and he'll always be with me, and I often see him, just as if it was yesterday when I first saw him..

We pushed across the Ruhr River, captured Jurlich, fought across the Ruhr Valley to the Rhine River, where the 78 th. Division captured the Remegen Bridge before the Germans could destroy it. We were able to send many Americans .across that bridge into the German Heartland without having to fight our way across it. The Germans had blown up all the bridges crossing the river, but somehow they never completed blowing this one up before our soldiers arrived and stopped them. This saved many American lives. After it's capture our army engineers built other platoon bridges beside it so we were able to ferry troops and heavy equipment over the Rhine without suffering huge casualties.

One morning during our drive towards the Rhine River the Jewish soldiers were called off the front lines, taken back to the city of Munchen-Gladback, the city we helped capture, to attend a Passover Service in the captured home of Joseph Goebbles, the number three man, and propoganda minister for Hitler. We had our Passover Service, and then we all were returned to our respective outfits The army had made 30 to 35 Jewish soldiers very happy by doing that for us during Passover.

After we crossed the Rhine River the 29th Division was ordered to clear the Korst Forest in Germany of enemy troops. Upon completing this task, we were sent to the Elbe River to wait for the Russians, who was driving what was left of the German Army towards us. The German soldiers wanted to surrender to us instead of the Russians because they thought they would be treated better by the Americans. We were ordered not to allow the Germans to cross over to our side of the river to do that. We'd shoot at them when they tried to come across, and if they got across by boat we'd send them back. We met the Russians at the Elbe River 3 days before the war ended, and we celebrated because we knew the war would soon be over. It ended May 8, 1945.

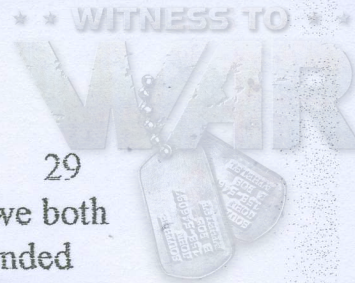
The Division was next sent to set up camps for displaced persons and former German slave laborers that had just been freed by us. We got them new clothes and good food, and helped them get ready to go back to their own countries. Some of them were away from their home a very long time and were apprehensive about going home. We tried to allay their fears and tried to get them healthy for their trips home. it was sad to watch them trying to adjust to their freedom.

The 29th division was also given the task of organizing the Bremen and Bremenhaven Areas of Germany until the Military Government could take over. We did this for a few months, then the Military Government people took over and the 29th Division was sent home.

Writing about my days with the 29th Division during the war brought back flashes of combat events that have lain hidden all these years within the deep recesses of my mind, and now they've come rushing back into my head. I remember ... Private Eddie Hessing, kneeling down on an embankment by a river, waiting for the American artillery shelling to stop, so we could start

our attack across the Ruhr River into Julich.... Running across the platoon bridge toward Julich while German artillery exploded around me...Running across an open square in the rain, hearing German bullets fly pass my head as other bullets splashed in the puddles near me as I ran. How they never hit me I'll never know.... Marching across endless open fields that connected many small villages in the Ruhr Valley and driving the German soldiers out of them.... Capturing one of those small villages ahead of the rest of the American forces, and being shelled by our own people, because they never expected us to be there at that time... Watching American and German planes engaged in dog-fights to the death in the skies above Munchen-Gladback as we were street fighting in that city. We took refuge in hallways as we watched the dog-fights for we didn't want to get hit by shrapnel falling from the sky.... Hiding from a German tank that turned into a street we were securing in that city, lucky for us it went by without seeing us. Up close those things were so huge, it scared the hell out of the whole squad, ...The horrible smell of death that you never forget... Calling for flares at night, so we could see if they were trying to sneak-up on us. The flares lit up the whole area in front of our foxholes so we could see what was out there... Shooting grenades off the front of my rifle at windows that held German soldiers shooting a machine gun at us... Hearing V-bombs flying overhead on their way to bomb England and looking up to see if we could spot them.... Hordes of defeated German soldiers rushing to surrender to the American troops before the Russians got to them... Being called off the front lines for 3 days of R&R in the rear, we all got drunk, we laughed and fought with each other for 3 full days.. Having our first shower in months in deserted German houses.... In April 1945 we learned about the death of President Roosevelt, many of us cried when we heard the news, he was the only President most of us had known... The war ends!!! these memories, and, oh, so many more.

I did not go home with my division because I was too young and did not have enough service time to get discharged from the army, so I was placed into the Occupation Army in Europe where I held many different jobs. As a truck driver I drove in, and later, helped lead convoys of trucks across Germany to bring supplies to army units stationed around the country. I was a night duty driver at SHAEF Headquarters in Frankfurt, Germany, and finally, shortly before I came home I became the dispatcher of vehicles at the motor pool. My buddy while I was a truck driver was Private James (Jimmy) Driscoll,

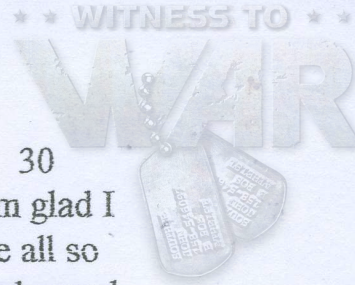


from Yonkers, New York who came to see me in Brooklyn after we both were discharged from the Army. At SHAEF Headquarters I befriended Private Freddy Nunez from Los Angeles, California. They were my main friends after I left the 29th Division, and we did our best to be there for each other. I went home before Jimmy did, and I never heard from Freddy after I left Germany. I hope their lives back home were happy ones.

While I was in the Occupation Army, I took as many tours as possible that went to different parts of Europe. I figured I would probably would not get back to Europe, and I might as well see some of it while I was there. The Army ran tours for GI's and I took advantage of them. If a tour came up to a place I wanted to go, even if I had no money, I would borrow some till payday, so I could go on the tour. I went to Switzerland three times, to different section of the country, and I went to Paris. I loved Switzerland so much that when I married I promised my wife I would take her there someday, and I did. It wasn't too long after I became dispatcher that I was sent home to be discharged from the service and I was discharged in October 1946. My time in the army was about to come to an end.

While in the service I fought through two battle campaigns, earned two battle stars, a combat infantry badge for being in combat for over 30 days, and experienced things I will never forget. I will always be thankful I was able to serve my country during it's time of need. They took a wild young boy and made a man out of him, and taught me so many things that served me in goodstead through out my life. As I sit here on my 78 birthday I thank God for returning home from the war and Europe with only a hearing loss. I had injured my back during the fighting in Munchen-Gladback, and got bits of shrapnel on my lip. I removed the little pieces of shrapnel myself and I went to our company medic, Gabe, for my back. He wanted to send me back to the hospital, but I didn't want to go. I asked him to strap up my back and I went back to my squad. I didn't want to go to the hospital because when you got better they often sent you, as a replacement, to another division that needed more soldiers, and you'd never get back to your division and your company. Your best protection in combat was with your own squad and with people who you knew and who you could rely on. I thought going to a strange outfit was dangerous, so I didn't want to go unless I absolutely had to.

I'm no hero, but I served with men who were and they helped make me a



better person than what I was. America is a wonderful country and I'm glad I could serve it in it's' time of need so long ago. I'll love it always. We're all so lucky to be Americans. As an American Jew I'm especially pleased and proud of the part I played in helping defeat the Nazis and Aldolph Hitler, the worst monster the world has known .

As my life is winding down I look back on my time in the service as a defining time in my life and I'm forever grateful I was able to serve.

We're at war once again, and, while I think it is an unnecessary war, having seen and known the horrors and ugliness of war I pray that all our boys come home safely to their loved ones. That there'll be no more wars for old men like me to send young men to fight and die in, and may God continue to Bless America and its people. As I write this I'm a proud member of the Disabled American Veterans and the Jewish War Veterans organizations, and I recently joined the American Legion, and I support them all. We veterans have to ban together to help each other, just as we did when we were soldiers I know all these fine organizations will be there for the veterans that return from the present Iraq War, just as they were for me and my fellow veterans.

** Written as the nation is about too commemorate the 60th anniversary of D-Day June 6,1944.