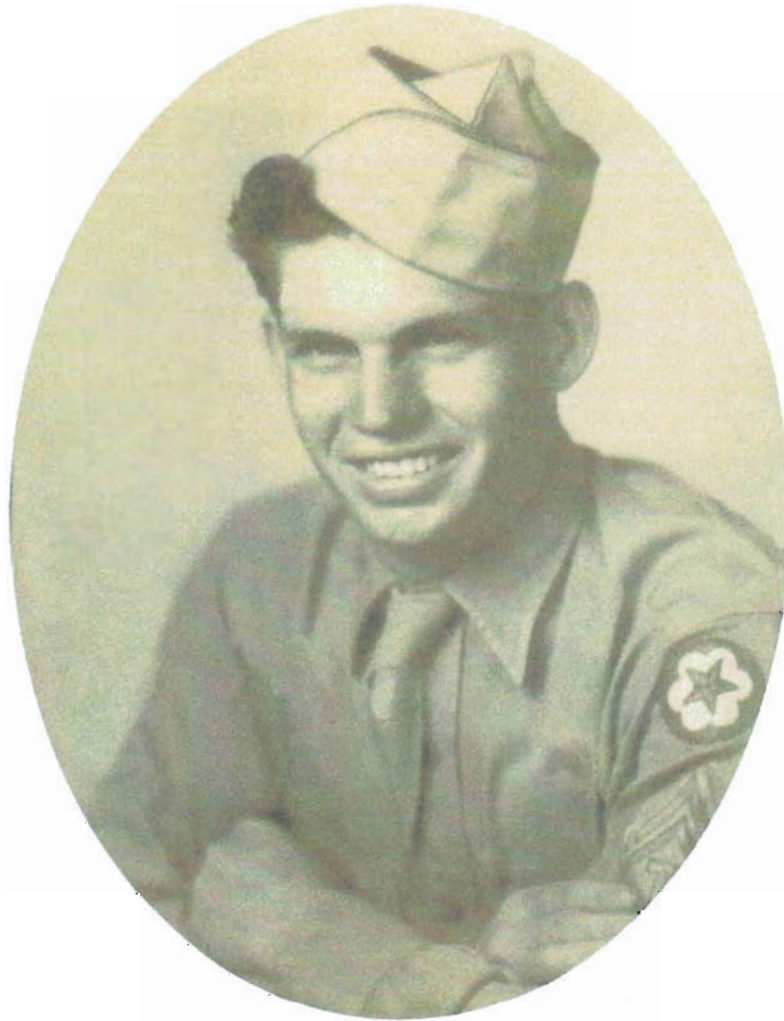




# **CECIL'S STORY**

**Cecil Herman Robinson**

**JULY 20, 1924 - SEPTEMBER 5, 1998**





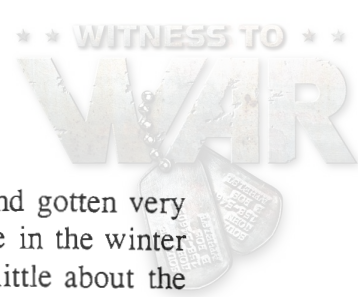
Before I left for the service my dad kept my car sitting on blocks for my return all through the war. So here I was with a bicycle and a good car. I felt pretty lucky.

During the Spring of 1943, the war effort was in full swing and all able boys eighteen years old and older were being drafted into Military Service. There were no exceptions other than health, age, and the number of dependents you may have had. There were war sensitive positions that could defer one when proven and requested. Many of my friends, coworkers, and many of my cousins were volunteering or being drafted. So I was actually looking forward to it. And on the fourth day of June 1943 I would receive my draft notice. It would read, "**Your friends and neighbors have selected you**". I would have two weeks to report to Ft. McClelland Army Base, for my physical examination. My friend Charles Shipp, being one day older than I, had received his notice about a week or two earlier. I went to my supervisor and presented the official draft notice to him so that he would be advised and therefore prepare for my replacement.

So on my last day at work my supervisor called me into the office and presented me this letter to give to the Draft Board. He had talked to the Lt. Colonel who was in charge of the Dept. and he had written the letter, requesting that I be deferred in order to continue my duties in the Defense Job, or be drafted into the Army Air Force and be assigned back at Brookley Field under his command. I left the job with more decisions. On the one hand, I hated to disappoint him and my supervisor by not taking their request to come back, as they had been so nice to offer this consideration and support, yet on the other side I knew I would feel guilty receiving a deferment. I had to live with these thoughts throughout the week. I had been given a week off before reporting.

The **President, Franklin D. Roosevelt**, was doing a great job of glorifying all service men, States-wide and abroad. The American Labor Forces were also being praised for their outstanding accomplishments. Bill-boards depicted heroic Americans in war. The American people would see and hear the winning side of the war, where most of the losses would be suppressed. Television would not come until a few years after the war. Most restaurants and night clubs would have the juke-boxes blasting such songs as, "A Star Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere." All the soldiers stationed at Brookley Field and the sailors from nearby naval bases would be dressed in their dress uniforms, and wearing any medals of which they may have earned.

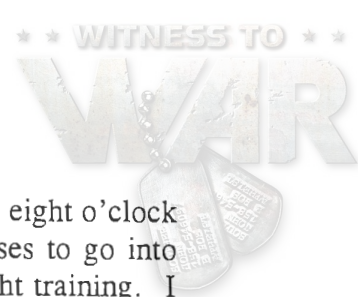
I would leave home on a special Greyhound Bus with nearly a bus load of young boys going to the same destination and purpose. The week off had been little help in my decision on which service I would ask for, or whether to present the letter which I had taken from the Colonel. I do not remember how many days I was at Ft. McClelland, it could have been a few days, or it may have been a week. I do remember they kept all of us recruits very busy going from one building to the next. There were Navy Recruiting, Army, Army Air Force, and Marine Recruiting Offices. They would have recruiters coming into your barracks asking us to come to their respective office. I had



made up my mind not to join the Navy. I had been deep sea fishing and gotten very seasick, I also did not want to be on a sinking ship, especially in Europe in the winter time. Little did I know what would be in store for me. I knew very little about the Marines, and what I did know didn't excite me. Another thing, we were being run from one bldg. to the next, not knowing what we would be doing at the next. I kept hesitating about asking where and to whom I would give this letter. Before I knew it, we were in a long line to receive our Physical Examination. There was a doctor who was examining my heart, he would have you breathe certain ways and listen. He did this a couple of times, then asked if I had been treated or experienced any heart problems? I told him no. He then told me to move on. I guess this sort of stunned me, thinking I was going to fail the examination. I just let nature take its course and before I knew it, they were swearing us in for the Army. I would have felt bad going back to Brookley Field for everyone to ask "what are you doing back here"? Many times later I would think, "what a fool you were." I never presented the letter to anyone, and did not tell my parents about the letter. I knew they would be very disappointed. I would be very busy going to the dentist; they filled teeth for two days. We also went to the barber shop. The barber didn't ask how you wanted your hair, they had only one tool, clippers. It took only about four to five minutes to make your head bald. We were issued both winter and summer clothing. I was given orders for assignment to the Transportation Corps. to be assigned to a Railway Battalion at Camp Harahan, LA. My mother and father were taking it pretty hard that I would be going off to war, especially when my only brother had died at eleven years old. I was actually looking forward to it, as I had already seen many of my cousins and friends leave. I just felt like it was the heroic thing to do.

I was sent by train to **Camp Harahan, LA**. This camp was across the Mississippi River from New Orleans. This was during summer in the middle of a swamp. The weather was extremely hot and humid. Here I started basic training with hundreds of other recruits. I would meet three people from Mobile, **Joe McAleer**, **Warren Breneman**, and a large young man by the name of **Chipalich**, another fellow by the name of **Wallace**. We would continue to stay together during the war and even see each other after the war. I, and the other newly assigned men, would stay here at Camp Harahan, for about three months. During these three months we would go through some very grueling basic training. We would be marching with extremely heavy clothing, during very humid and hot weather. And if this wasn't enough, the mosquitoes were adding their torture also.

Many of the soldiers were from the north and not used to hot, humid weather. They were faring much worse than the people from the Southern States. One soldier only three bunks from my bunk came in one day to lay down after a long march. He was dead within fifteen minutes. We were later told that he had suffered a heart attack. Each Saturday morning we would drill for parades with full dress uniforms. The ambulances would stand by, picking up the soldiers who would fall out while standing at attention. About every fourth day I would be assigned **KP**, this was "**kitchen police**".

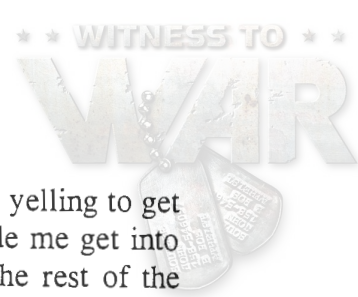


This duty would start about four in the morning and continue until seven to eight o'clock that night. Only about twenty percent of each company were issued passes to go into town each night. And this was only if your company was not having night training. I remember going into New Orleans, maybe three or four times. I remember one Sunday going into town and riding a street car. It was a beautiful wide street and must have been "Canal Street". I do not remember where, or what I did while in town, though I do remember riding a ferry across the Mississippi River to get into town. I also remember riding an Army Bus from the Army camp to the ferry crossing each way.

Some of the things I did while in basic-training at Camp Harahan is not very easy to tell as I look back on it. The training was extremely tiring and did not seem necessary at that time. So all my friends and I began to see if there was any way we could miss some of the activity without getting punishment. We realized we were so new, and there were so many of us that the Drill Sergeants did not know our names as yet. We also saw that when it was time to leave the barracks and fall out into formation for the drill duties, there was no roll call. Some of the sergeants would come through the barracks to see that everyone was going outside for the formations and no one was crawling underneath their bunks. One of my friends realized that the barracks were built pretty high off the ground and the ground underneath was clean with nice sand. The front and sides had lattice work which protected the underneath from view. To enter this area we could crawl through an opening underneath the back steps.

So three or four of us started casually disappearing from the barracks, one at a time, each day after lunch break. We would bring a deck of cards or cribbage board. We would sit underneath and listen to all the other Soldiers walking out while whistles were being blown for formation. Sometimes it would seem like an eternity before lectures would end and orders were given to **forward march**. We were careful to look at the bulletin board each day to make sure that we were not missing a formation of which we would be called out of formation to report to some special duty. (I felt pretty much at home underneath the barracks, as I had a lot of practice staying under the house from childhood). We had probably got by with this for a week when the Company had a "roll call" while out on one of the drills. The next day, special care was given in assuring that me and my card friends were escorted from the barracks to the formation area.

We would continue trying other tactics in order to avoid many drills, five mile hikes, and midnight exercises. Two other friends and myself got so well known that each time a formation was called, there would be a sergeant assigned to personally check that we were there. We were also becoming regular household names in the kitchen. I began to think the drill training was better than the K. P. We had been awakened one night about midnight, ordered to get in full dress and fall outside immediately. We had to march on the Mississippi River Levy for about two hours before returning. About a week later we were awakened for the same late night march. I was tired, sleepy and lay there hating to get up so bad. The first thing I know things are very quiet, I realize they have gone without me. The lights are on and I am the only one in the barracks. I turn



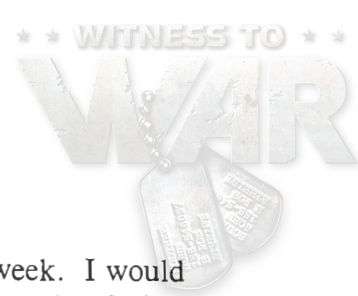
the lights off and go back to sleep. I was awakened by a big mad sergeant yelling to get up. I started getting my clothes on, he said “come as you are.” He made me get into formation with my shorts and socks on. I was ordered to march with the rest of the troops for another thirty minutes. The mosquitoes were eating me up, and other troops were laughing at me. It was much easier to awake and get dressed after that.

Some of the training consisted of lectures on railroad operations. We would ask questions of our duties with railroads and what type training we would receive. It appeared that the people we asked didn’t know or were reluctant to answer. We were even told that, “in case of a strike by the Railroad Union, the trained Army troops would take over the operation”. We had all sorts of thoughts running through our minds. Soon we would be told that the Railroad Battalion we were to be attached to would be shipping out for Europe, and due to us not being able to finish training soon enough, we may be reassigned. We were left in limbo, wondering what next. We would find out later that the Railroad Battalion we had been assigned to would be shipped to Europe and come under heavy enemy attacks, suffering nearly fifty percent casualties.

About August 1943 we were instructed that we would be shipping out to an Army Base at **Charleston S. C.** and assigned to the **350<sup>th</sup> Boat Company** at the Charleston Port of Embarkation. I do not remember how we traveled, probably by Army Troop Train. When arriving there we were also told that we would also begin basic training again. We had thought our basic training was finished. It was called basic training, though it wasn’t near as bad as Camp Harahan. We would drill to and from training areas, though the drill Sergeants were not as “gung hoe” as in Camp Harahan.

For training lectures, we would go to an open area where a platform would be erected for the Sergeant or Officer to climb onto, and we were instructed to sit on the ground, in a position to hear and see the instructor. We would be lectured on “The Rules Of The Road”, pertaining to rules on the water that **boat operators** must follow and obey. We would also get oral training on engine maintenance and operation. We were told about the **Army Boats**, what kind, what their duties were, even down to technical operations (though it didn’t help most of us, as no training aids, or charts were used). We would also be lectured on navigation, communication, and cable splicing. We had to learn all the proper knots used aboard boats and ships. Samples would be handed out, and we would practice tying these knots. We were taught the “Morris Code”, few of us became proficient with it though.

Along with this training we were also going through Basic Training Obstacle Courses. This consisted of climbing over high walls, swinging on ropes over pits filled with mud underneath. What made this hard was the ropes were hanging inside the mud pits, which could only be reached by running and jumping some distance, in order to reach the rope, hanging on and letting the momentum carry you far enough to reach a dry landing. We had many obstacles which were pretty challenging. We had some troops where these obstacles presented no challenge, but to others, they would be unable to make it at all.



I was able to make them all, though I found some very challenging.

While in Charleston we were given off camp passes two to three times a week. I would go off camp a lot with one friend, **Robert Pannell**. We would date a couple of girls quiet a few times. I was beginning to like one, her parents had invited us to their home, of whom we found very nice. There were many sailors and soldiers stationed around Charleston, causing service people to be disliked by the civilian community. Some establishments even had signs in the windows or doors reading, "**Sailors and dogs not allowed**".

Before completing Basic Training we would have to go through the Infiltration Course, located at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. I remember **Robert Pannell** and myself were together on an Army Truck, it was hot weather and we had full field dress, consisting of heavy fatigues, helmet, and our rifle. It was quiet a long ride from our camp to Ft. Jackson. When we arrived, there were sergeants overseeing the people getting off the trucks to get in line for the Infiltration Course. The troops who had finished the course were walking toward the empty trucks to board and return to their respective camp. Robert and I could see the condition they were in, and also see the soldiers in the distance crawling on their belly, through and under bob-wire, hearing and seeing explosives going off all around them. There was also machine gun fire blazing over their heads. The guns could have been shooting dummy rounds, I do not know for certain. Robert and I could see the condition they looked to be in. It looked like nothing we had seen before. We could also see the troops who had finished, looking as if they had been through a tornado. It was then apparent why names were not being taken as they completed the course as it was very easy to tell the arriving troops from the completing troops.

I do not remember which of us decided there must be an easier way. There were small pine trees to the opposite side of the truck and dirt road and the Infiltration Course. The ground was very dry and sandy, and it appeared that the undergrowth had been burned, due to the black ashes on the surface. There was some pine straw on the ground. We walked away from the truck and towards these trees, I also remember it was down a slight hill. We continued walking until we were out of sight from all the other troops. "We would say, if we were seen and questioned, that we had gone down there to relieve ourselves". With our heavy clothes and the heat, we could easily provide the sweat. We decided to start wrestling in order to get very dirty and grimy. We took our time to put our rifles down and proceed with the wrestling. We would look each other over to see if we looked bad enough to pass the test. We even rubbed smutty dirt on our faces, then waited for the noise to die down, thinking the troops arriving with us were finishing. We started walking out toward the trucks, trying to look as tired as we knew how. We mingled in with some getting on the same trucks as we had rode there on and got aboard. We thought some looked at us, as if in question. We said few words all the way back to camp. We did not know any of the troops on our truck, this making it easier. The course was completed, though I sure did not brag about it. This was one of the times



I beat the system, though never feeling proud of it.

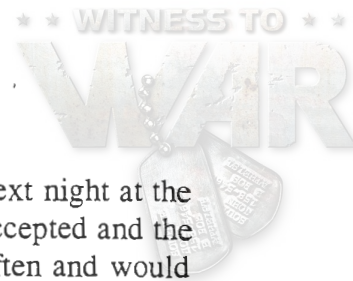
Approximately half the 350th Boat Company would be reassigned to **Fort Hamilton, New York**. I do not know why they chose this half to go to New York, unless it was to get a broader field of training. This would separate me from most of my friends. Only one of the fellow troops from Mobile would be transferred with me, his name was Chipalich, I cannot remember his first name. He had graduated from Spring Hill College, and had worked with the U. S. Post Office before being drafted. Warren Breneman had also graduated from Spring Hill College. We arrived in New York in November 1943. Fort Hamilton was located in Brooklyn, in the Bay Ridge area. It was a very pretty area, with street-car service right out the front gate. Many of the troops with me were from New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, and even Brooklyn. These troops would love it, as they would be able to go home many of the week-ends.

We were told that we would receive on-the-job training on large tug boats, as well as training on some of the ferry boats. We were also told that we would be going to **Sheeps Head Bay**, which was a training school for the Merchant Marines and was within walking distance to Fort Hamilton.

We started training each day which consisted mostly of learning boat operations. Each morning after breakfast we would pick up a pre-fixed lunch bag, and be driven on trucks to the boat docks where we would be assigned to different types of harbor tugs, or passenger ferries. I had been assigned to the engine rooms, and all of my training would continue to be learning how to start, stop and reverse the large tug boats, and sometimes I would be assigned to the **Staten Island to Brooklyn Ferry**. The weather was cold at this time of year so I was in the engine rooms where it was always warm. Many of these boats had engines which required hand oiling very often. To do this I would have very little free time, as some of the machinery would require oiling every fifteen minutes. This training would cause me to know that I would not want engine room duties if ever I had a choice. I could also see when working in very cold conditions, when the deck would be covered with ice and the lines would be frozen, a deck-hand job would not be my choice of work.

After being stationed at Fort Hamilton a few weeks, one of the fellows in my barracks asked me to go skating with him one night. I had never skated in my life, but thought "why not, I can always learn." The first night I was on my rear-end most of the time. Then the next time I went, I would meet some girls who would hold onto me, keeping me off the floor, most of the time. One night I met **Mary Trecoستا**, and one or two of her cousins. Her sister **Lena** was also there. I did not get to skate with her the first night, and she appeared to think that I was too bad a skater to be stuck with. Mary invited me to come to her house one night, I do not remember the occasion, though I did go. I had been given directions, and believe it or not, was able to find the house. All I can remember of the evening is that Lena was there and she played the piano. I thought she was very good at playing and was also very pretty. Again I do not know

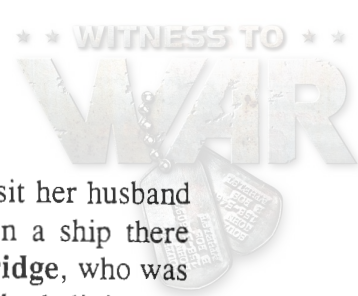




how I managed to let her know that I was very interested in her. The next night at the skating rink I went directly to her and asked her to skate with me. She accepted and the night passed very quickly. From this night on I would see her pretty often and would let her know that I was very serious.

One morning I would read the bulletin-board and see where my company asked if anyone was interested in being the **Company Mail Man**. I thought about it and decided it would probably be better than going to the docks each morning and returning late in the afternoons. I went to the Company Orderly Room and asked about the job. They took my name and some other information and said they would let me know. Sure enough I was given the job and was instructed of what the duties would be. One thing I liked was that I would have one of the two rooms in the barracks, giving me privacy and less restrictions. I would still have to fall out each morning for reveille, listening to all the duty assignments, and any information the Company C.O. wanted announced. When the formation was over I was free to go back into my room, where I had my cot, as well as where all the mail was kept. My duties consisted of going to the Battalion Mail Room twice daily, collecting all mail which had been dropped into the mail outgoing boxes in each of our barracks, taking it for mailing, and picking up all mail received for our company. I had a large pigeon-hole contraption on one wall where I sorted out and placed all letters and cards of the enlisted men in our company. Packages were kept on, or under, a large table. Mail-call was twice daily, right after lunch at noon, and after work formation in the evenings. I had a lot of idle time in the day time, though I would be giving out mail in the evenings after all the other troops were released for the day.

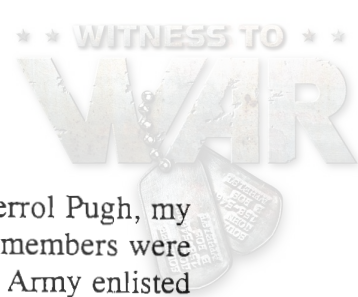
Later when my friend Chipalich, from Mobile, found out I was the Mail Man, he could not get over missing the job, he had worked as a postal clerk for the U. S. Postal Service, and also had a college degree. He said he never saw the announcement on the bulletin board. This was just one of the many cases I would later see, where people would get jobs in the Army, when there were other people much more qualified who should have been chosen for the same job. Within about one month the First Sergeant would tell me that they were assigning another man to work with me in the mail room. His name was **Ted Bartnicki**. There were two bunk-beds in the mail room, I would sleep on the bottom and he would sleep in the top bunk. We would get along very well together, this would also allow one of us to get a day off, or leave on time in the afternoon when we could get a pass. He had one **bad fault**, he would stay up very late most nights and be extremely hard to awake in the mornings. Many times I would practically drag him from his bunk in the mornings. He would keep saying, "OK, OK. I'm getting up". I would go on out and attend whatever duty I was getting up for, if it was for roll-call and they called his name, the sergeant in charge would ask me "where is Bartnicki?" I would have to tell him that Ted was getting up. Many times the sergeant would send someone in to knock on the door and call him again. Later while overseas he would receive a **court martial** for not getting out on time for some duty.



While I was stationed in New York my sister, **Berniece** came there to visit her husband **Jerrol Pugh**, who had joined the U. S. Navy Sea Bees, and was on a ship there awaiting orders for an overseas assignment. I also had an uncle, **Joe Ethridge**, who was a Lt. Commander in the U. S. Coast Guard and his wife **Georgia**, both living on Staten Island. My sister was staying with them. Some way she found out how to get to Ft. Hamilton and came to see me. That night Ted Bartnicki had already put in for a pass to be off post that night, therefore I could not get a pass. I told Ted my problem and he suggested that he would go through the gate, showing his pass and walk on down the sidewalk to a given location. I would immediately walk inside the fence to this location, he would hand me his pass through the fence so I could use his pass. I got ready and met at the given location. He handed me the pass and I took off for the exit gate. There were two M. P.s on the gate. One of the M. P.s took my pass, looked at it, then looked at me. He said "you don't look like five foot ten inches to me." He told me to stand-by and he picked up the telephone, while other people were going through, being checked out by the other M. P. To my bad luck one of the men walking through was in my company and knew me. He said, "anything wrong Robinson?" The M. P. who had picked up the telephone heard the man call me Robinson. He immediately said, "this pass says Bartnicki." I tried to explain my situation and how my sister was waiting outside the gate for me. He immediately called the Patrol and sent me to the guard house. (This was the Army jail.) This was still early, before the time of which I was to meet my sister. After being locked up, I asked if I could call my first Sergeant. I explained my situation to him, and the fact that my sister from out-of-state was waiting for me, and that I had been denied the pass due to Bartnicki receiving one earlier. He said he would think it over.

Pretty soon a couple of M. P.s drove up in front. Coming in they talked to the M. P. in charge who told me he was sending me back to be released to my First Sergeant. They told me to get into the jeep and I was driven back to the orderly room where the First Sergeant was waiting. He chewed me out for quiet a while, he then asked if my sister had been notified of my misfortune. I told him no, I had no way of letting her know I would not be meeting her. He told me that he was going to give me the pass this time but it had better not ever happen again. I grabbed the piece of paper and ran nearly all the way to the Guard-Gate. The same M. P. was still on duty. As soon as I handed him the pass, he could not believe I had a legitimate pass. He picked up the telephone and called my office, asking for the N. C. O. in charge. He then explained over the telephone what had happened and wanted to know how I could have a valid pass? I could not hear what was being said, though I could tell he was listening, he finally said O. K. and looked at me and said, "I must let you through, but I can't believe it". I am now unable to remember exactly where I had promised to meet my sister, although she was still waiting for me when I got there.

We then took the ferry to Staten Island and visited my Uncle Joe and Aunt Georgia. I believe this was a week-end pass and we would go into New York City the next day and sight-see. I had no idea where we would all sleep, because my Aunt Georgia had invited

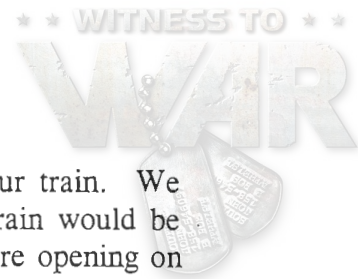


one of her nieces to come from New Orleans. Also my Brother-in-law, Jerrol Pugh, my sister's husband, was there for the week-end. During the war all service members were required to wear their uniforms when going outdoors. I was wearing my Army enlisted uniform, Jerrol was wearing his Navy seaman uniform, and my uncle was wearing his Navy Coast Guard officer's uniform. We would get many questionable, hard looks from other service men. Sailors and soldiers were seldom seen out together, and it was against military rules for enlisted men and officers to socialize in public.

Although Lena was the only girl I was seeing while in New York, I had been writing to three or four girls while in service. One of them was a girl I had met in Charleston, and another one was a girl I had gone out with while working at Brookley Field. She was then living in Newport News, Va. This night I was unable to get a pass and decided I would answer their letters of which I had received many days prior. I wrote the letters, then after addressing each envelope, I put each letter in the addressed envelopes. Within a couple of weeks I received a letter from the girl in Charleston. It was short and to the point. I had sent her the letter of which I had written to the girl in Newport News. It was like a "Dear John" letter, to the point with no love at all. The other girl didn't bother to answer at all. I never heard from either girls again. It taught me a good lesson about putting letters in envelopes.

My sister would travel back to Mobile where she was living and my brother-in-law would ship out to Europe. I would see Lena more often. We were getting more serious when I received orders for transfer to **Camp John T. Knight, Oakland, CA**. This was March 1944. I do not remember how I broke the news to her, or how many times I would see her before departing.

I remember we would take a Troop Train and it would take eight days to arrive there. The troop train was very slow and would be side-tracked for long periods of time while other trains would pass us, or meet us. I do not remember exactly how we were seated or slept, though I do remember the porter coming into each car and sending us out, or to stand by while he would change the seats into sleeping bunks. We would also receive bag lunches for meals. I do not remember what the meals consisted of, although they must not have been very tasty, as I was always wishing I could get off and buy something to eat at one of the stations. I remember one time when the train pulled into Salt Lake City, snow was on the ground, and it looked as though we might be there for quiet a while, as other GIs were getting off the train and standing around. I and two other fellows could see the Station House and decided to try running across quiet a few rail tracks to the building. We jumped off the train, ran across the tracks and rushed to the door entrance. Down came a half ton of ice and snow off the roof right onto our head and backs. We started picking up our caps, brushing snow from each other's backs and clothes. We went on in and could see many other GIs were ordering and waiting in line. We were trying to decide if we should also get in line, when we noticed through the windows, another train coming into the station between our train and the station. It appeared to be quiet long, and we were thinking how are we going to get across the



tracks to our train? We decided to forget the food and head back to our train. We stopped and looked, wondering which way around this newly arrived train would be shorter. We could see no end. We could see that some of the doors were opening on these cars and decided to try going through it. We had a time doing this because there were no doors open on the side near our train. We then started looking for a porter to open one of the doors that would put us through. It seemed like an eternity before doing this. And when we did get through our train was blowing and slowly moving out. We were running to jump onto the steps, doors were still open and some of the GIs were holding their hands out to assist us on. Even though we got no drink or food, it wasn't a dull wait. We didn't attempt to get off the train again.

Another day we were stopped on a side-track, and after waiting a long time we could see out the window where some small boys were selling bottles of beer to GIs through their windows. We waved for them to come where we were. Pretty soon a couple did come to our window and we asked if they had more beer? They said they could go after more. We asked how much, they told us how much a case would be, they also told us we would have to pay now. We collected enough for one case between four of us, and off they ran. We kept looking and waiting for their return; no boys, no beer. Finally the whistle started blowing and the train started slowly moving ahead. We would hang out the window and look back toward where we last saw the boys and our money. We wondered how many GIs had lost their money, as we had. This trip from New York to Oakland CA. had taken us eight days. I do not remember taking any type of bath, so you can imagine how dirty we must have been.

I do not remember whether I knew at this time that we would be joining back up with the troops we had left in Charleston S. C. or not? Although we would, and it would be a very pleasing reunion. I do not remember exactly where we first came into physical contact with them. We would have much to talk about, asking what they had done after our leaving for New York. Then filling them in on all our activities while in New York.

John T. Knight was near Oakland CA., the weather was very nice, we would get a lot of leave, the training wasn't bad, and I think most of the troops enjoyed it there. We would get leave to go into San Francisco for a weekend. There would be so many Sailors and Soldiers on the streets that you could hardly walk. We would usually go back to camp on Saturday night, due to not having enough money for a hotel. One weekend I remember going with Warren Breneman, who was also from Mobile. We had been to many bars, trying to do as much as we could with only a few dollars each. As the night got later and we got to wondering what we should do, stay or go back to camp, we saw this movie house which advertised **all night movies**. We went there and decided to watch the movies as long as we could, then sleep the rest of the night in our seats. We did, although before daylight the bench seats got so hard, and there was not enough room to lay down. We were more than happy to get out of there and walk for awhile. We had drank quiet a number of beers that night and probably looked like bums, although when Warren saw a **Catholic Church** he insisted on going to Mass. I was not



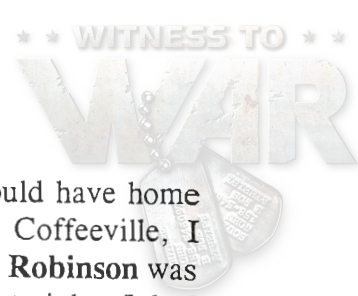
a Catholic so I waited outside until Mass was over to join him. I do not remember any other things we did while on leave. I guess the painful night cramped in that wooden seat, and him going to church in the condition we were in, was enough to remember.

I also remember going to a park in Oakland with Robert Pannell. The park had a large lake with rental paddle boats. The boats were only large enough for four people, and that was four small people. He and I met two girls at the park and took them rowing in the boats. From there we were able to take them home. I guess we rode a bus. I remember their mother treating us very nice, and we would go see them another time or two before leaving Oakland.

Our training at John T. Knight was more boat training. Here we would go on small boats in the San Francisco Bay. I remember one evening after dark, our skipper got lost and was trying to tie-up at **Alcatraz Island**. We heard horns blowing, then heard loud speakers telling us not to come ashore! We had been warned to stay away from this place, although it being dark and unable to see well, we were coming very near shore. We went astern as fast as we could and got away as quick as we could. We finally found the proper direction and then located the docks we were to dock at. I would not be on boats many more times before we would get word that we would be given home leave. We did not know at the time that this meant we would be shipping overseas soon.

Sure enough the entire company would get orders for two weeks **home leave**. There were six people in my company from Mobile, we would all ride in the same car the entire trip. The troops from Mobile were Joe McAleer, Warren Breneman, Little, Chipalich, Wallace, and myself. I do not remember Little, Chipalich, and Wallace's first names. None of us were married. Little had been in the Army about two years, he had worked on the Mobile River, running a dredge before being drafted. Wallace was a few years older than Warren, Joe, and myself. He had worked with his family running a fishing business. The Wallace family and fish-house was on Broad Street, near Brookley Field. Chipalich lived with his mother on Spring Hill Ave., near the Providence Hospital. He had finished Springhill College, and was working at the Mobile Post Office as a Postal Clerk, before being drafted. Breneman had also finished college at Springhill, and was working for Allbright & Wood Drugstores. Joseph McAleer had just finished McGill High School. At this time Troop Trains were taking priority, along with freight trains carrying military equipment. The Passenger train we would take was the slowest train, having to be side-tracked while other trains passed us, or met us. This train even stopped to pick up school children at various points, then stopping to let them off near a school building. It would take us four days coming to Mobile, and four days returning back to California. This being our first leave home since being inducted into the Army, we were all excited and happy to arrive, even though we were tired and dirty.

My father had parked my car and put blocks under the wheels while I was away, I guess this was to keep the tires from rotting. Tires were rationed, making them very hard to get. I could hardly wait to get the tires pumped up, get the engine started, and get the



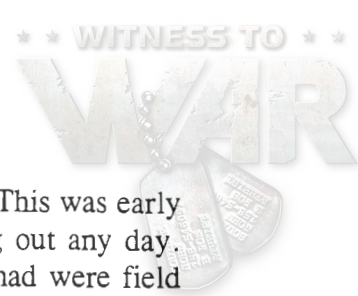
blocks from under it. I do not remember much about the six days I would have home before the long trip back to California. I do remember driving to Coffeerville, I remember visiting **Uncle Gail** and **Aunt Annie**. I remember **John Larry Robinson** was home on leave at that time and him riding back to Mobile with me the next night. It had rained while I was there, and while coming back I slipped into a ditch, and bent one of my fenders. I do not remember how we got out of the ditch.

I went to Brookley Field to visit any of the people left that I had worked with. I also went to the Box Factory to see the people I had worked with there. All the ladies and girls I had worked with was there, doing the same job as when I left. I was so busy trying to catch up on lost time that I was on the run most of the time. Later I would think, **why didn't I spend more time with my mother and father?** They were the ones who loved me more, yet at the time I thought life was forever, and friends were forever. **How dumb you can be, when young.** I know the days passed very fast and it was time to leave before I realized it. The trip back must have been uneventful, as I remember none of it. I was probably catching up on my sleep. Then again I was probably, for the first time, wondering what might be awaiting me.

Returning back to Camp John T. Knight we were again told that we would be going to **Camp Stoneman** soon. Camp Stoneman was an embarkation point east of us in the mountains. I do not remember how we traveled there or how long it took us to reach Camp Stoneman. I do remember the nights getting very cold, yet the days were hot. Here we would receive training on using grenade-launchers and I believe we would also be trained on light machine guns. One week we would go into the mountains where no shelter or accommodations existed. We were required to sleep outdoors in our pup-tents. Doing this, each person had one-half of a tent in his back-pack, he would join up with another soldier, furnishing the other half of the tent. The tent would be very small, and without a floor liner. Each person was issued two wool blankets. I do not remember the toilet, or food provisions, though I do remember that it got very cold at night.

We would go back to the barracks and start our preparation for overseas shipment. Here we would receive overseas shots, uniforms for both warm and cold weather, steel head liners, and the appropriate fire arm, according to what position you had been assigned for battle ground conditions. I remember being assigned as a **sharpshooter**, and was issued a large eight shot Enfield rifle. It was a .30 caliber bolt operated rifle. Most of the other troops were issued carbines. The carbine was a semi-automatic, short-barreled gas-operated, fifteen shot rifle. The gun was smaller and lighter than the Enfield. I am assuming that I was classified as a sharpshooter and issued the larger rifle due to the fact that I had scored as **sharpshooter** on the rifle range. I would soon regret this, due to having to carry this larger and heavier weapon, along with my full-field pack, mess kit, gas-mask, bayonet and a large duffel bag containing all clothing, blankets, rain poncho, and all personal items.

This camp was very large, and from what I saw, and was told, all soldiers being



assigned to the **South Pacific** were processed and shipped out from here. This was early July 1944, we were given a briefing and told that we would be shipping out any day. Our dress uniforms had been taken away and the only clothing we now had were field uniforms with leggings. These were not to be worn away from the military camp. Three or four of my friends went to the canteen this night and had a few beers, then decided to go off post to a small town near-by, I believe it was Pittsburg, California where soldiers and girls would meet and dance. Usually when a soldier would stand on the side of the road, any car or truck coming by would stop to give them a ride. We waited on the road for a while and two of the soldiers walked back to camp. As soon as they left, an old, small truck came by and stopped, it was nearly full of farm supplies but the fellow driving told us to hop aboard if we wanted to ride. We climbed on the back and away we went.

We weren't going very far but the truck was running hot, steam was coming out of the radiator spout, and the driver would stop about every mile or so to add more water. We finally got to a nightclub which was all lit up with neon lights. We told the driver we wanted to get off there, he pulled over and stopped, we thanked him and walked in to have a beer and see if any lonely looking girls were there. We had not finished the first beer when three or four MPs walked in. We did not realize MPs would be coming into this place, being ten or twelve miles from camp. Two of the MPs walked over and asked to see our pass. We told them we did not have one, we had stopped in looking for a ride back to camp. They then told us we were out of uniform and off Military Property without a pass. We immediately had the feeling that we would not have to worry about a ride back to camp. Sure enough we were led out and put into a patrol car heading back to camp and to the MP Station. After getting our name, rank, and serial number we were released and told to report back to our Company Orderly Room. We did just that. The sergeant on duty told us to go to our barracks for the night, he would let us know what action would be taken the next morning. At that time I was a T4, (Technical Corporal). The next morning I got up and went straight to the bulletin-board. I didn't have to look very long until I would read that I had been busted back to **Private**. I do not remember the soldier's name of whom I was with that night, though he had been demoted also. I would not go off post again in California.

The night before we were to ship-out, a number of us who bunked near each other decided to go to the PX and drink some beer for the last night in the U. S. We probably drank many more than we expected to, and on the way back to the barracks, got disoriented. This was not hard to do as there were so many buildings, looking just alike. When we discovered where we were, we realized that we would have to go down a pretty steep hill and then up another in order to put us on the proper street where our building was. (We thought this would be easier than going all the way back to the PX). The steep hill had a lot of straw-like grass, which looked like dead oats, or wheat covering the ground. We started sliding on this straw as we descended, and little did we know a bob-wire fence ran along the deep ditch at the bottom. A boy by the name of **Norris** was ahead and would be the first one to slide into the wire fence. We would

climb the fence and continue our climb up the other side and onto the street where our barracks was located. We all went into the latrine where the lights stayed on all night to clean up from the slide down the hill and to see if we had torn our clothes on the wire fence. Norris had already begun to feel blood on his pants leg. We now looked at his leg where a deep gash was bleeding on the front part of the leg, between the knee and hip. It was now early morning, so we found a bandage in the firstaid kit which was kept on the wall near the latrine. He did not want to report it to the medics so we all went to bed, knowing we would soon be awakened for inspection. **Norris would come back from overseas eighteen months later with this scar and a limp of which he walked with.**