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DRASS-TIC MEASURES

By: A. Edward Pierce, A/56



School in Schlosberg, Germany in which the 56th was billeted after having moved from the Dillingen area. Schlosberg is adjacent to Bopfingen, Germany.

The time is either late May but more likely early June 1945. The 56th has departed Dillingen for the Bopfingen/Schlossburg area and has taken up residence in an unoccupied grade school. Only remnants of the 56th remain because many have moved on to other units for ultimate redeployment to the Pacific Theater and to eventually battle the Japanese.



Captain Francis "Fritz" Drass who was Able Company's Commander when we were in training, sailed from the United States for Europe, and engaged in the various E.T.O. battles remained with us. He supplied his charges with some most sage advice relative to the no fraternization issues and he deserves everyone's praise for having been so forthright. Captain Drass was an inspirational leader who was wounded at least three times. Thanks be to God that although his injuries were more than just scratches, none were life threatening. He was able to rejoin the unit after each occurrence.



Now to the gist of the narrative that has waited so long to be unveiled. About a week or so after our settling in to our new surroundings, Captain Drass announced that he would be scheduling an inspection and that he wanted everyone spic and span with shoes shined. One must bear in mind that the combat boots that we were issued had the rough side of the leather on the outside and were not to be shined

or polished. After learning of the scheduled inspection and the order to have shined shoes (little or no shoe polish was available), what began as minimal grumbling among the troops turned into outright rebellion. One man stated that he was refusing to comply with the shining edict. The next said he wouldn't either until it became unanimous that none would be in compliance.

Well, the inspection day and morning arrived. Captain Drass called those assembled to attention. He took one glaring look at everyone's footwear at which time his eyes visibly teared-up, and he said, "I have trained you well. You sure as hell stick together and support one another. God bless you. Dismissed!!!!"

He respected us and we certainly respected and revered him. He was an outstanding individual, a dedicated officer and a gentleman, and what is known in today's vernacular as a class act.

Captain, we salute you.

FESSIN' UP
By A. Edward Pierce, A/56

It has been said many times that confession is good for the soul. I subscribe to that philosophy. It has also been said that the truth will set you free. I subscribe to that philosophy as well. In view of the foregoing statements, I want to let you in on a little known set of facts as they relate to me.

While I am currently a motivated proponent of our Memorial Museum situated in Abilene, such was not always the case. It wasn't a matter of being opposed to a 12th Armored Division Museum; it was the area and location that was chosen by its founders. I felt that since the division's birthplace and activation was at Camp Campbell in Kentucky, the logical and ideal place for the Museum would have been in that vicinity.

As time passed rapidly by, I came to realize that many of the men who saw combat with the division in Europe had never seen Camp Campbell, but were rather familiar with Camp Barkeley and the city of Abilene. Taking this into consideration plus having met Dale Cartee and Bill Lenches in 2011 at the Reunion in Arlington, VA provided the impetus for my being a whole-hearted, all-out supporter of the Museum in Abilene Dale and Bill or Bill and Dale, if you prefer, in my opinion moved the Museum from mediocrity to a first-class entity.

Credit in large measure for having the foresight to envision a Divisional Museum and to spark plug its becoming a reality, in large measure, goes to Robert Hoeweler and the late John Critzas and George Hatt among a small number of others.

At the time of this writing, the "Hellcat News" shows that there are only 85 veterans of our once prestigious division. I urge the 85, if humanly possible, to give the Museum your fullest moral and financial support. The Museum is your honest-to-goodness legacy.

Getting very close to my 98th birthday, I believe this epistle will be my final one. I want it to accomplish a modicum of good. Seeking your support of the Museum is just that.

God bless each one of the 85 of you veterans and the members of the leadership and support staff that keep the Museum running and operating so efficiently and effectively.

It's great to be a Hellcat; likewise, it is great to have a first-rate Hellcat Memorial Museum.

FLASHBACK: REMEMBERING WELL THE EMPRESS

By A. Edward Pierce A/56



The truth of the matter is that I never truly met or knew an honest to goodness empress. Of course in this recollection, I am alluding to the troop ship, Empress of Australia, an extremely large converted passenger ship, whom I met back in September 1944 at what I believe was pier #13 in Brooklyn, NY. The members of the division had just been transported from Camp Shanks for its trip to the European Theater of Operations.

I remember well waiting at the pier and walking up the gangplank to board the Empress for our ultimate joining with other oceangoing vessels that made up our convoy to what was to have been France but ended up for us to be Liverpool and thence to Tidworth with a few days stop off at Hungerford Air Base.

Upon boarding the Empress, the second platoon of A company of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion was assigned to F deck which was situated well below the ship's waterline and just above the ship's inner bottom where the vessel's fuel is situated. To put it succinctly, we were situated in the ship's lowest point of habitation. For sleeping purposes, we were given hammocks that we could hang from the floor of the deck just above us. Most just opted to sleep on the metal deck because being cramped in the hammocks was most uncomfortable. We received just two meals each day on this British owned and operated ship. The food was about as palatable as our sleeping quarters were comfy and cozy. Despite the many negatives, the Empress was the largest vessel in our convoy and it took us safely with the splendid assistance of our navy's destroyers and destroyer escorts to our ultimate destination.

While it would be foolhardy to speak for others, I do know that my return trip to the United States on the M.I.T. Victory afforded me three very adequate meals each day, better than average three-high bunks with mattresses, and a crew that very much appreciated us and our accomplishments.

Yes, it definitely is good to be an American and it's great to be a Hellcat!

From Pesky Blisters to Total Bliss
By A. Edward Pierce, A/56

As a result of our weekly twenty-five mile marches in the later stages of our rigorous training, we all seemed to end up with a series of bothersome water blisters, not a serious condition by any stretch of one's imagination. All of this changed in mid or late August of 1944 just prior to the Division leaving Camp Barkeley for the train ride to Camp Shanks in the state of New York. It was then that my life was transformed from a regimen of blisters on the feet to one of extreme and total Bliss.



To make a somewhat hazy statement more clear, it was then that I was placed on detached duty and transported to Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas for two weeks of anti-aircraft gunnery training. Those receiving the training did not remain on the base, but rather spent all the time in the field on the Fort's reservation, part of which is in New Mexico and in, if I remember correctly, the Franklin Mountains. The temperatures through the daylight hours exceeded one hundred degrees by far each and every day of my tenure. We slept on cots and were housed in pyramidal tents. We were involved from early morning until very late in the afternoon from Monday through Friday firing fifty (50) caliber

machine gun shells at airplanes pulling sleeves connected to the tail of the airplane by very thin wire. The sleeves were situated significantly far from tail of the airplane in order to avoid any chance that the plane might be struck by errant aiming and firing. The planes were flown by members of the Women's Air Force. The pilots were eminently qualified and did an outstanding job of providing the targets necessary for us to practice our aircraft gunnery skills. The spent shell casings that we had to police the area of were often times as hot as the weather. One could easily burn his hands picking them up too quickly after they were fired.

The first weekend all of the anti-aircraft gunner trainees were free and on their own. El Paso was all right, but it had little at the time to offer a stranger to the area. Juarez, Mexico was just across the Rio Grande from El Paso, but a trip there to one unfamiliar with the surroundings was analogous to playing Russian Roulette.

Just prior to the second weekend, the two weeks of training ended and I was on a train heading back to Camp Barkeley to rejoin my comrades in the first rifle squad, second platoon, Company A, 56th Armored Infantry Battalion. It was good to see the small group of men that fate had put together and that God was watching over.

It wasn't very long thereafter that we made our train trip to Camp Shanks for a brief stay, and then headed off to the European Theater of Operations aboard the Empress of Australia. The bliss was gone for the duration, and it was a rapid return to those pesky blisters!

I'm Not There Yet. I'm Still Here.

By A. Edward Pierce, A/56

Honestly, I am still walking around, fit as a fiddle, able to thoroughly digest food and drink, and sleep like the renowned Rip Van Winkle despite the Veterans Administration having classified me among the dearly departed. Why do I make this seemingly asinine statement? Well, just permit me to enlighten you.

I suspect that at age 96, the Veterans Administration must rationalize that all veterans should be dead because on August 31, 2018, the V.A. issued a check drawn to my order for the full proceeds of my National Service Life Insurance policy that I retained since my days in the military. I erroneously believed that it would have been paid to the named beneficiary on my honest to goodness demise. I am absolutely 100% certain that the beneficiary believed the same.

Since I am now in possession of the proceeds, I plan to deposit the sizable balance in a Money Market Account held jointly with my daughter, so the funds will be available at my actual passing. In the meantime, the balance will be earning the meager interest that most financial institutions are currently paying.

Quite frankly, I am enjoying life to its fullest, and I take one fabulous day at a time. The Lord has been and continues to be more than good to and for me; far, far better than I ever deserve. I have a small, but wonderful family and some truly marvelous friends. The friends are not only in New Jersey, but they range as far away as Texas, California, and our great neighbor to the north, Canada. I am aware, too, that there are some who aren't in my corner, but I accept that with amazing grace.

So, unlike the Veterans Administration, look for me to be around for a while. That'll be a boon for some and disheartening to others, I am sure.

May God bless each of you who are reading this vignette. It's not plausible to bring this story to a conclusion by using the words "the end" or "finis" at this time because it really isn't the "Swan Song" for me, at least not yet.

It Was a Gigantic Salary Increase
By A. Edward Pierce, A/56

The date was June 1, 1942 when the base pay for army privates was increased from \$21. a month to \$50. This was one of the largest percentage salary increases in modern times. It was an increase of 138%, and it most certainly had a positive effect on a very large number of individuals who had been relocated from civilian life to that of the military. It was a morale boost of the first order. Our men and women serving today would welcome a much more modest increase, I am sure. I am even more certain that they merit a raise in pay because of what they are doing to keep us safe and secure.

Since the 12th Armored Division was not activated until September 15, 1942, it is not a stretch to say that all of those with the rank of private were the recipients of this windfall. While the June 1 salary increase was granted, I believe, to all enlisted men, I can't say with any degree of certainty that the increases at all levels of rank amounted to 138%. In all probability, they didn't.

Money has been called filthy lucre. It has also been dubbed the root of all evil. Nevertheless, it has purchasing power, so I know that all members of the military who received the increases were appreciative and thankful.

As an aside and on a totally different subject, in many cases having to resort to the use of a walker or a four-pronged cane to do so, the men and women who served in World War II, Korea, Viet Nam, and other more recent military engagements are more than pleased to stand for the National Anthem. They resort to taking a knee only when scrubbing their floors or when saying their nightly prayers. May it ever be thus.

God bless those that defend us and God bless America now and forever more.

Let It Be Known to All, I Served With the Varsity
By A. Edward Pierce, A/56

Very much like the late commissioned officers Floyd Van Derhoef, Charles Willis and others, I too, saw action with the varsity team in that we all participated in combat situations at Herrlisheim, Colmar, Speyer and many other villages and hamlets in France, Alsace, and Germany.

It was my honor also to have served as a member of the occupation troops in Germany being stationed in Schlosberg, Bopfingen, and Gerstetten prior to being transferred to the 2nd Armored Division for a tad more occupation duties prior to making my return to the good old U.S. of A.

I began with the 12th Armored Division at Camp Campbell in late October 1942, and remained with the division almost to its deactivation.

The 12th was a great division, but it was the officers and enlisted men who made it that way. I can attest that I served with some of the finest men that our God ever placed on this earth. They are all heroes and should be looked upon as thus.

With that statement, my story has arrived at its conclusion.

NOT A HERO, MERELY PATRIOTIC

By A. Edward Pierce, A/56

In early 1942 while gainfully employed by the New York Shipbuilding Corporation in Camden, NJ, a teenaged friend named Earl Fisher and I journeyed to Philadelphia where it was our plan to enlist in the United States Navy. The navy at the time was not a participant in the draft system. All navy recruits were volunteers.

Earl and I arrived at the downtown recruiting facility where we were immediately subjected to some paperwork followed by the customary physical examination. Earl passed with flying colors and within a few days after was headed for Great Lakes Naval Training Station. As for me, I didn't fare quite so well with the physical examination. I was born with the less serious type of heart murmur, so when the doctor examined me, he picked up on this. He had me hop on each leg twenty times after which he used his stethoscope.

He then had me sit on a nearby bench for a few minutes and shortly thereafter, the same procedure was duplicated. The doctor then said to me, "I am sorry son, but your heart is not good enough for the U.S. Navy." While I felt horrible with the doctor's statement, I knew full well that I had given it my best shot. There was some solace in that I believed when my draft notice was received, a similar litany would follow and that the army would reject me or select me for limited service.

About five or six months later when the first twenty year old draft had its beginning, I received my draft notice. A brief time later, I had my pre-induction physical and subsequently my induction physical examination. I passed both and was happily passed for general military service. I spent forty months in the military having served in combat in France and Germany as a combat infantryman with the 12th Armored Division.

To make a long story a bit more brief, after 97 years of inhabiting the earth, I am still in possession of the heart murmur and in all of those years, it never has been a problem of major concern or presented any problems for me. This is proof positive, once again, that the ever living and true God is indeed exceedingly gracious. May it ever be thus.

Oh Yes, It Was A Gas
By A. Edward Pierce, A/56



It is an incident that I remember exceedingly well, although it happened on the reservation at Camp Campbell back in early 1943, seventy-four long years ago when times were certainly different for all of us. At the time, I was a proud private in Headquarters Battery of the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion which was an integral part of the 12th Armored Division. Except for cadre members, everyone was quite new, only having arrived at Camp Campbell in very late October or early November of 1942. At the time, the 12th Armored Division had just been formed and it was made up almost entirely of new recruits, fresh from lives that totally differed from the military. The new recruits in many cases were out in trivial ways to short-circuit or circumvent procedures or systems that were long-established by the military hierarchy, made up of men who had long preceded them. Permit me to write here and now that their efforts met with very little success. The old saying is that there is a right way, a wrong way, and the army way!

Now, it is time to move along with the narrative. The battalion was taken by army trucks to a location on the reservation. Here we were to engage in a field problem that was to be part of our basic training.

Before departing, each man was issued two cans of C-rations. The dress for the operation was our fatigue uniform, field jacket, helmet liner, and gas mask. Since we were not carrying our Musette bags, most men chose to put the issued (-rations in their field jacket pockets, which was a bit cumbersome. Believing to be much more sage than the others, I decided to stow my rations in the gas mask pouch where there was ample room for them and they decidedly would be out of the way. This arrangement worked very well for me for a rather long period of time, and until such time as I heard Sergeant Bill West shout in a very loud voice, "GAS!" I was deterred in removing my gas mask from the pouch and properly installing it in the prescribed manner because the (-rations were a decided obstruction. The result was my eyes were flooded with tear gas prior to my getting the gas mask properly in place. To say that I was taught and learned a valuable lesson that day is spot on. It also brought to mind that a word that is spelled identically can carry two different sounds and two entirely different meanings. For example, the word "tear" can be a droplet of moisture from one's eye when the word is used as a common noun or it can mean to rip or to move very quickly when used as a verb. Obviously this is why Sergeants Bill West and Walter A. Emeola, when we encountered it in training, at the top of their lungs, shouted "tear gas, tear ass!" Here endeth the epistle for the day.

Addendum: While we carried newer style gas masks (than the kidney-shaped one I am wearing in the photo) overseas with us in our duffel bags, never once were they removed. We never wore the masks in combat situations or otherwise.

OK, SO I AM SQUARE
By A. Edward Pierce, A/56

I believe in and worship the ever living and true God. I believe in and subscribe to the sanctity of marriage.

I love my country dearly and will serve in any capacity to make it an even better place to live.

I believe in the tenets inculcated by the Masonic fraternity and try daily to fulfill and honor my obligations.

I believe that our children are the hope of the future and that we should be good role models for them.

I truly believe that it is good and right to walk uprightly before God and man.

I believe that being a good husband to one's wife and father to one's children is a distinct honor given to us by our Heavenly Father.

I cherish my family and friends. It wouldn't be much of a life without them.

There are many more things in which I believe passionately, but the foregoing are the key items. If they earn the term "square" for me, I shall wear it proudly as a badge of honor.

Family, America, friends, my occupation and the Masonic fraternity have been my life, and it has been an exceedingly good one

The Three Old Barts
By A. Edward Pierce, A/56

Most of you who know me are aware that I have been living alone in the family home here in Yardville, NJ since the passing of my late wife, Rita, on November 24, 2009. It's been a somewhat lonely existence, but my son-in-law Gene and my daughter Joann, friends, and my trusty computer have made life a great deal more than just bearable. Unfortunately, on September 13, 2014, I lost my older daughter, Margaret Elizabeth (Peggy to all), to colon cancer. My son-in-law John, while living in a distant portion of the state, keeps in constant touch by email and telephone. So all in all my life is a rather good one and I continually praise the Lord for that.

Among my friends is the trio who provided the title for this episode. Each is a veteran of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion of the 12th Armored Division and each is a member in good standing of the Association. They are Bill Georgov who lives with his wife Connie in Bear, DE. Bill has a son and daughter who adore their dad and who see that he wants for nothing. Bill was a member of Able Company as was I. Then there is Art Kinney who lives in Stockton, CA. Art is also a widower and living alone, but has two daughters who keep him on the straight and narrow, and last but by no means least is Art Wagenknecht. Art, too, is a widower who also lives alone in York, PA. Here again, Art has sons and a daughter who keep watchful eyes on him. Both Arts were members of Baker Company.

The word "Barts" is derived by using the first initial from Bill, and the "arts" portion comes from the first name of the others. In actuality and I am certain that they would all agree that they are three old Barts. Damn, that was close. I almost typed in another fitting word.

Although they are not part of this narrative, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that I have two faithful friends who both reside in Abilene, TX and were associated with the 12th's Museum there. They are Dale Cartee and Harry Dhans. Both keep in constant touch with me via email. Each is a Legacy member of the 12th Armored Division Association and each is a veteran. More importantly each is a valued and trusted friend.

Returning to the three old Barts, I hope and pray that they remain in good health for a long time to come and that they continue to frequently email me. In addition and far more importantly that they continue to tolerate me and accept me as I am and as their good friend.



I just have to say I am a very fortunate individual, indeed, having these assets that no amount of money could buy.



Reminiscences Of The Big One

By

A. Edward Pierce



ABOUT the AUTHOR

My name is A. Edward Pierce. I entered the United States Army on October 12, 1942 at Fort Dix, NJ. After a few days, I was shipped to Camp Campbell, KY and became a member of Headquarters Battery of the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion of the 12th Armored Division. After the Tennessee Maneuvers and a brief time at Camp Barkeley, Texas I was transferred to A Company of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion where I became a member of the first rifle squad of the second platoon.

I sailed with the division to Europe on the Empress of Australia. I served in combat as a rifleman with Company A of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion. After the hostilities, I remained with the 12th Armored Division until its deactivation. I was transferred to the 2nd Armored Division for the journey back to the United States. I was honorably discharged at Fort Dix on February 7, 1946.

I am a lifetime member of the 12th Armored Division Association and I have served as Unit Representative of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion from June 2010 until the present date. I am also beginning my seventh year as Treasurer of the Association.

The vignettes in this book took place both in the United States and in Europe. The writings were and are a labor of love. I confess that I served with some of the finest individuals that God ever placed on this earth and I considered each of them as a friend. They all deserve a place in Heaven.

A. Edward Pierce July 27, 2012

This book is dedicated to my very best army friend, Harold K. Wells, who was killed in action in Germany on April 26, 1945, and to my late loving wife, Rita C. Pierce. Both enriched my life and made me a better person.

REMINISCENCES OF THE BIG ONE
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Chapter 1: When A Password Just Doesn't Work

I remember a happening that occurred while in a defensive position just outside Herrlisheim in the area of Rohrweiler. All of our men were in foxholes in the frozen ground, two men to a hole. In this location, I shared a foxhole with David Kronick.

Two men whose names I do not recall were situated in listening post foxholes about a quarter mile ahead of our location. We had telephone line running from their position to ours. In subsequent shelling by German artillery, these men were injured by shell fragments, one in the leg, the other in the arm.

Eight of our men (I was one of those selected; I can not recall the others) were given two litters and at dusk were to go out to bring them back for medical treatment. Their injuries, although serious, were not life threatening. I spoke with First Lieutenant Clyde J. Blair as to what the current password was that would enable us to get back within our lines. He emphatically stated that it was "Philadelphia."

Out we went for the two wounded men using a circuitous route. We found them without difficulty, put them on the litters, and started our trip back. Again we used a circuitous route to avoid sniper fire.

We headed back in the correct direction, but instead of arriving by the 56th line, we arrived where the 119th Armored Engineer Battalion had set up their front.

By the time we approached them carrying the two litters, it was extremely dark. I was on the right-hand side of the front litter when I heard the words, "Halt--Password." I immediately saw that weapons were pointed at us, so I said quite clearly, "Philadelphia!" The next thing I heard was a young soldier saying, "That's not right. What do I do now?" Instinctively I said, "Oh! Jesus Christ, what next?" With that I was asked to come forward and tell them what unit we had come from. The engineers let us through their lines and instructed us where they were situated in relation to Company A of the 56th AIB.

It was a scary few moments. I was always taught that one should not take the Lord's name in vain, but I honestly believe that had I not reacted quickly, we might have been in far worse shape than the two men on the litters. The engineers were edgy as were the men of the 56th.

I talked with First Lieutenant Blair after the experience, expressing my displeasure at having been given the wrong password. He assured us that shortly after we left our lines, the password was changed. Later in the war, Lt. Blair was killed in action leading his men. He was shot in the head after turning to his men and giving them the signal to advance. While I am familiar with the area where he was slain, the name escapes me. That is another outward sign of advancing age.

Chapter 2: Wise Beyond His Years

After the Herrlisheim engagement, we moved to the rear area where we were billeted in abandoned houses. Our duty there was to get our equipment into top condition and to await replacement of men and supplies.

In the wee hours of the morning, replacements came in fresh from the United States. Among them was a Private Stephen Stavisky. He informed us upon his arrival that he was from Scranton, Pennsylvania, and that the number one tune in the U.S.A. was Bing Crosby's rendition of "Don't Fence Me In."

Steve's baptism of fire came in the area around Colmar. Had he not had a two-way radio strapped to his back, he could have literally been severed in twain by a huge artillery shell fragment that instead imbedded itself into the casing of the radio and its battery. He received only small abrasions to his back.

Private Stavisky was a bit strange in that instead of seeking out cameras or other items of value when searching houses in communities that we had taken, he would look for intimate ladies apparel such as bras, panties, stockings, etc. Many of us wondered if beneath his rough exterior that he might be a closet cross-dresser.

This idiosyncrasy got the better of me, so I asked him one afternoon straight-out his reasons for taking and storing these items in our half-track. He looked directly at me and said, "Pierce, one of these days the war is going to be over. You fellows will have the cameras, mechanical drawing sets, etc., but I'll be in possession of what will be a scarcity for the young frauleins who we will all want to make time with. This will be bartering material!" Then it hit me—this guy has wisdom far beyond his years.

The irony of the story, however, is despite his large and varied stash of female attire; Steve never had the opportunity to utilize any of it because he broke his leg jumping from the mine-rack on the side of our half-track to the ground. It was late enough in the war that a broken leg meant a trip to the States. His combat days were over.

Many of us who saw the war end and were part of the occupation forces were more than pleased and grateful that Private Stavisky had the foresight that he possessed!

Chapter 3: Even The Boldest And Bravest Soldiers Have A Breaking Point

Soldiers, particularly infantrymen, are supposed to be brave, bold, and sometimes fearless. In times of strife, this is what is expected of them. In most instances, they are called upon to "fill the bill," and they do so with dignity and honor. However, even the most heroic soldiers have a breaking point. A glowing example of this is Private First Class Miller Sylvester. Miller was an excellent garrison soldier; and in combat, he performed in an exemplary manner.

While I do not remember the exact location where this occurred, most of us abandoned our vehicles because we were being relentlessly strafed by German aircraft. We found shelter in evacuated buildings, and watched as the bullets from the airplanes riddled the street and buildings. Suddenly in the middle of the street appeared Miller Sylvester. He was looking skyward and repeatedly saluting the aircraft. Without a moment's hesitation, machine gun squad leader, Sergeant Cole, ran to the street, enveloped Sylvester in his arms, and pulled him out of harm's way back into the building. One could readily see by the look in his eyes and the way that his face was contorted that Miller was very, very ill.

Shortly thereafter, Sylvester was taken to the aid station. He was then tagged for evacuation to a field hospital. Suffice to say that he never returned to the 56th.

Much later, word filtered back to us through our Commanding Officer that Miller Sylvester was dead. It seems that from the field hospital he was put on a train for transport to a Base Hospital Facility. Enroute while the train was halted to take on water, Miller slipped off the train, placed his head and neck on the rails, and when the train started---Miller was decapitated.

I knew Miller well. At Camp Barkeley, we often played "catch" throwing a baseball back and forth to one another. Miller was keenly interested in baseball. He was always extremely neat in his appearance, always upbeat, and was a prime example of what an infantryman should be.

It has been proved that each individual has a different level for pain tolerance. This tragic event also serves to prove to me that soldiers have different levels of tolerance for combat stress, and few if any of us know just how closely we were to our individual breaking point. Miller was one of the many heroes of the 56th, and I believe his story should be told.

Chapter 4: The Allotment

It was June 1945 in Schlossberg, Germany. The sun was shining brightly. I was feeling great knowing that the war in Europe was over even though there was a great likelihood that at some point I would be redeployed to the Japanese Theater of Operations. For the time being I was safe, had very little in the way of duties to perform, and was enjoying the good life immensely.

Sometime just before noon, I was advised that I was wanted at Division Headquarters. No reason was given to me for why I was being summoned. Soon thereafter, a jeep driver whose name I can not remember drove me to Division Headquarters. All during the trip I was trying to figure out in my mind the reason they wanted me. At first I thought that somebody had gone through my file and noted that I had a clerical background. That had to be it. They wanted to put me in Division Headquarters as some sort of clerk. I hated this thought with a passion! I didn't have a "cushy" job during the hostilities. Why would I want one now?

When I arrived, the person that I was to see was at lunch. I was told he would be gone for about an hour. I waited, and I waited. In about an hour's time, the Warrant Officer who wanted to see me returned. He sat behind his desk, and I sat in a chair in front of his desk. He fanned through some papers on his desk, and said, "I have it here."

He then said, "Pierce, why aren't you sending an allotment to your wife?" In all sincerity, I thought he was joking with me, and I said to him, "If you provide me with a wife, I'll be happy to see that she gets an allotment!" I was smiling, but he definitely wasn't. He said rather adamantly, "I have a wire here with your name on it, and it says that you aren't providing your wife with an allotment." "Show me the wire," I responded. He took the wire and handed it to me. It most definitely had my name "Amos E. Pierce, Jr." as the subject.

Then my eyes focused on the army serial number. I can not remember what it was, but it began with "37 or 38." I then said to the Warrant Officer, "The name is correct in every detail, but that is not my serial number." "My serial number is 32366344!" He paused for a moment and said, "Then, it is not you that we want. Leave it with me, and I'll get the matter straightened out."

Almost immediately, I was put back in a jeep and returned to my outfit. I never heard any more on the subject. It was interesting, however, to learn that someone in this world had the exact same name as I have and that he too was in the military service.

After this brief fiasco, I once again looked up to the sky. The sun continued to shine, the war in Europe was history, and I vowed to go on enjoying the days of occupation to the fullest!

Chapter 5: A Superb Officer And A Real Gentleman

The following is a tribute to then First Lt. Salver G. Gagliardi who later lost his life in Germany, slain by a German civilian sniper as he was standing in the turret of a medium tank, riding down a country road in a small town that had just been wrested from the Germans. At the time, he was our infantry liaison officer serving with a supporting tank battalion, and had, I believe, attained the rank of Captain. He was a tall, well-proportioned individual, and he was always particularly neat in appearance.

Now back to the beginning of the story. It was Christmas Eve 1943 when Harold K. Wells of Service Company (killed in action on April 26, 1945) and I picked up class "A" passes, and headed for Abilene. When we got there, all of the hotel rooms were filled, so we decided to go to the bus station and go elsewhere. We saw a departing bus marked "San Angelo," and not knowing just exactly where San Angelo was, we purchased a ticket and boarded the bus. When we arrived in San Angelo and departed the bus, we were greeted by Military Police from I believe the 8th Army. Wells showed them his pass and was waved on. I showed my pass and was asked to step aside and wait. After waiting a matter of a few minutes and noticing that my best army friend was continuing to walk onward, I asked the M.P. why I was being detained. He said that I was under military arrest for having been 75 miles from base on a 50 mile limit class "A" pass! I said that he had to be kidding, that it was Christmas Eve, and that we didn't know how far San Angelo was from Camp Barkeley. My explanation didn't faze him one bit. After an exchange of words and some minor shoving, I was put into an olive-drab Plymouth sedan and taken to the local police station and put into a large barred room with all manner of civilian prisoners. In police jargon, it was the typical drunk tank! It was approximately 5:00 p.m. when I was incarcerated. I was given nothing to eat or drink the entire time. During the evening several other military personnel received the same fate for similar infractions, and were confined to the same quarters.

I stayed awake all night, standing with my palms against the wall. The bunks were too seedy to lie upon. It was a filthy, filthy place, indeed. At 5:00 a.m., I was given my personal belongings, a return ticket to Abilene, and placed on an awaiting bus. Believe it or not, my friend Harold K. Wells was waiting at the bus station to return with me. He had obviously ascertained when I was to be released and in what manner. I have no grievance with the M.P. He was doing the job that he was assigned to do, but I do feel that he could have been a trifle more lenient on Christmas Eve.

About three months later on a day that I had K.P. duty, someone came into the mess hall to advise me that I was wanted immediately by the Company Commander. First Lt. Gagliardi was the acting Company Commander at the time, because our Company Commander was away at Advanced Officers' School. I entered the office, walked up to Lt. Gagliardi's desk, gave a right-hand salute, and awaited to hear why I was called in. He snappily returned my salute. Looking very serious, indeed, Lt. Gagliardi said, "I have a communication from the 8th Army here stating that you were in the San Angelo lockup last weekend." I said, "No sir, that was back on Christmas Eve." He said, "Oh yes, that's when it was." He explained to me that I

had a choice of a summary court martial or that he could mete out company punishment. He quoted the article from which this information came, and told me that the choice was mine to make. I told him that I'd accept the company punishment, but that I thought a night in the San Angelo lockup was more than adequate punishment for such a minor infraction.

He agreed with my statement. He also agreed that my choice of company punishment was a good one. After pausing momentarily, he said you will be confined to the post (all of Camp Barkeley) for one week's time and be reduced in rank from P.F.C. to Private. I said, "Thank you, sir." Then I stepped back, gave another hand salute, did a right about-face, and was about to leave when Lt. Gagliardi said, "Oh, by the way, you don't have to take the punishment immediately. It's going to be a long war, so you may take it at any time!" I said, "Thank you sir, but I'll begin the week's punishment starting tomorrow morning." Lt. Gagliardi was certainly firm, but he also was most assuredly fair in meting out punishment.

Now I ask you, wasn't that the humane act of a superb officer and truly fine gentleman? The answer to this question is a resounding "yes!"

Chapter 6: My Doodling Faux Pas

The following is a factual incident involving the members of the first rifle squad of the second platoon of "A" company.

The company was in a rest area on Lake Dieuze. We were awaiting replacements of men and equipment, and at the time were billeted in abandoned homes. Our squad leader at the time was Staff Sergeant William C. Amason who replaced Staff Sergeant John Plawecki who was wounded in the area around Herrlisheim.

I have always enjoyed doing crossword puzzles and cryptograms even at an early age, but having none available and being somewhat bored, I spotted a small notebook in the room in which I was sitting. I picked up the notebook and began doodling. I remember having made a caricature of a man whose nose and mustache resembled a man's private parts. Something occurred and I put the notebook down and forgot about my drawings. Soon afterward, Sgt. Amason came into the room and advised me that I had been chosen for a five day rest and recreation trip to Nancy, France.

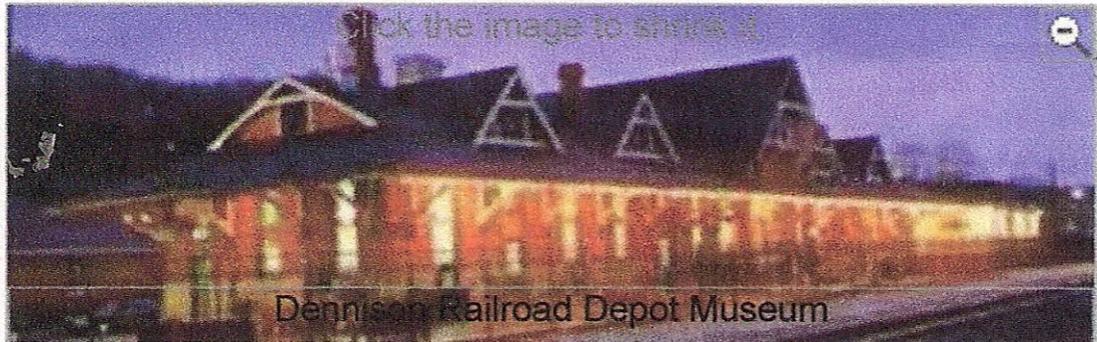
After having spent five enjoyable days in Nancy, I returned to the unit. The fellows were all excited to see me, and commenced telling me about a rather serious altercation that took place while I was away between Private Forrest Fowler and Sergeant Bill Amason. It seems that Sgt. Amason found my drawings in his notebook and immediately accused Private Fowler of making obscene drawings of him. The inference taken was that Sgt. Amason was a pr---! When I heard this I said, "Oh my heavens-I've got to apologize to both men. It was I who drew those ugly characters!"

I confronted Private Fowler with my apology, and he blew me off with a "who cares" or some other fast answer. I made my way to Sgt. Amason, and explained in detail what had happened and how sorry I was to have caused any undue trouble. There was no ill-intent. I was just trying to emulate Bill Mauldin. Sgt. Amason grinned and said to me, "Don't feel bad about it. I never liked that arrogant (anything you can do, I can do better) S.O.B. anyhow, and it gave me an excuse to let him know it!"

Bill Amason was later killed in action in the same engagement, I believe, that took the lives of my sidekick, Private Joseph A. Irak, Lt. Clyde J. Blair, and others.

Chapter 7: Dennison, Ohio

Dennison, Ohio is a very small community through which the mainline of the old Pennsylvania Railroad from Cincinnati to Pittsburgh passes. During World War II, every train (Day or night) regardless of the hour stopped at Dennison. All service personnel were permitted to exit the train, go onto the station platform where they were given a brown bag containing a piece of fruit and sandwiches. A beverage was also provided, and if one was a smoker---he or she could avail themselves of cigarettes.



All of this was done at no charge to the serviceman or lady. If I live to be a thousand years old, I shall never forget this community. I remember it vividly because coming home from Camp Campbell, Kentucky on an emergency furlough because of a death in the family; I had practically no money for food, having spent all of the money for train fare.

I was hungry, but could not afford a snack or the dining car. Then came the emergency stop or so I thought at Dennison. Talk about divine providence. This was it for me.

Chapter 8: Pete, The Medic, The 56th's Unsung Hero

Everyone called him Pete, the Medic. He had a last name, of that I am certain, but few if any of the members of the 56th A.I.B. knew it. Just how many lives he saved in the various battles or skirmishes in which he took part is also unknown, but it had to be several.

Pete was a slightly built individual who stood about five feet seven or five feet eight inches tall. He was full of nervous energy, and it was his job to take care of everything from a boil or splinter to the most severe gunshot wound. Yet with all of this responsibility, Pete was a modest, unassuming person. He made friends easily, but seemed to prefer to keep to himself until such time as a critical situation arose.

He wore the Red Cross on his helmet and he had a white vestment with the Red Cross emblazoned on the front and back of it. We used to caution him about his heroics, and about his being so naive as to believe that no German would shoot him because they would always honor the Red Cross emblem that he wore. We asked him to be more careful of himself, because we were not as confident as he that the Germans would always respect the Geneva Convention and not take shots at him. We certainly did not want to lose Pete, because we were never certain when we would be availing ourselves of his services.

I remember one particular day in the Speyer area where I saw Pete working feverishly over 2nd Lt. Frank Deeds. Deeds was propped up against an embankment. His one eye was hanging out and the opposite leg was turned in the reverse position from normal. The Germans were using anti-aircraft guns to fire directly at our troops, and I believe that Lt. Frank Deeds took a direct hit by one of the shells or its fragments. I knew Frank Deeds quite well. We were enlisted men together. Frank had received a battlefield commission as did Frank Flaugh. At any rate when I came upon Pete and Lt. Deeds, I did not recognize Frank because he was so severely wounded. Pete had put a shipping tag on him, and I was able to read the name "Lt. Frank Deeds." This was the first time that I had cried since I was a very young boy. I was just overcome seeing Frank Deeds so terribly and horribly wounded. Frank was someone that I admired very much for his leadership, for his intelligence, for his wit, and for his friendship.

To the best of my knowledge, Pete was never awarded the Bronze Star or Silver Star for his heroic efforts on behalf of so many infantrymen, but there is no doubt whatever that he more than merited being so honored and decorated.

Pete was a true hero in every sense of the word, and I feel a bit embarrassed that I never knew or remembered his last name.

All of our Medics were first-rate, but Pete, the Medic, was most assuredly a cut above the rest!

Chapter 9: Why Not Try Me And See?

This incident took place in Dillingen, Germany shortly after we began performing occupation duties. The date would have been either mid or late May 1945. At the time, we were billeted in private homes. Despite the no fraternization ruling passed down from Supreme Headquarters, being virile young men who had the good fortune to survive the conflict, many were ready to discuss peace, particularly with the young, attractive frauleins. One such young man was my squad leader, Staff Sergeant Troy B. Criss, who had his eyes on a young lass who lived just down the street from our quarters.

One day when Troy was talking with the young lady, Private Frank J. Krug, Jr. made a disparaging remark to Sgt. Criss about being a Nazi lover. Troy immediately and rightly so took umbrage to the remark, and an argument of some proportion ensued. Krug challenged Criss to engage in fisticuffs. Criss no doubt could have whipped Krug's butt, but did not want to take a chance in losing his stripes after he had fought so hard to earn them. Since Criss declined the invitation, Krug called Troy a "A no good chicken sh-- son-of-a-bit--." Troy just continued to walk away. He really wanted to slap Krug silly, but he did the correct thing and returned to our billet.

Moments thereafter, Krug came into our quarters as did Private Wayne C. White. I must digress for a moment to tell you something about Private White, or Whitey as we knew him. He was of medium height and weighed between 160 to 170 pounds. I believe he was from Oklahoma or Arizona where he claimed to have been a rather good amateur fighter. He did not look the part because his face bore no scars, his nose had not been broken, he was fair-haired, extremely neat in his appearance, and no one ever saw him engage in an argument let alone a slugging match. We had heard his stories several times, and most of us thought him a Walter Mitty, particularly when it came to his so-called boxing acumen.

Now back to the main theme, Krug was telling everyone about his challenging Criss, and Criss walking away from him. He reiterated what he had called Troy. He then said to Whitey, "I think Criss is yellow; what would you do if I called you a no good chicken sh-- son-of-a-bit--?" Whitey said, "Why not try me, and see!" Krug said, "Well then, you are a no good chicken sh-- son-of-a-bit--!" No sooner had the last word come from Krug's mouth when Whitey unleashed one of the most vicious attacks that I have even seen.

Krug was a much bigger individual going almost 200 pounds and nearly six feet tall. The height and weight meant very little. Whitey gave Krug the thrashing of his life, cutting him and bruising him quite thoroughly. I don't believe that Krug hit Whitey more than once. He was too busy covering up, attempting to fend off Whitey's short jabs and hooks. The Krug whipping took place in exceedingly close quarters. It began in the living room, and wound up in the vestibule where Whitey ejected Krug from the building.

For all of us who thought that Private White was fantasizing about his prowess as a pugilist and lived the life of Walter Mitty, we sure had our eyes opened. He was the real Mc Coy in every sense of the expression.

After the drubbing, Criss said to Whitey, "I owe you one." Whitey said, "You don't owe me anything." Whitey went on, "I asked him to try me and see, and he did. I don't think he'll ever do it again!"

Whitey, wherever you are, you certainly made believers out of all of us!

Chapter 10: Clap -Trap

This vignette concerns a Second Lieutenant who was assigned to Company "A", 56th Armored Infantry, in the waning days of the war and for a very, very short period during the occupation. I do not presently remember the individual's name, but I knew it at one time. I do know that he fancied himself as a premiere lover vastly more than a combatant. The truth of the matter, I feel, is that he was neither!

At any rate, in the final month or so of the war, we liberated a Polish displaced person by the name of Walter. He had been used as slave labor by the Germans, and upon his being freed was very bitter toward his captors. We clothed him in military garb, and he rode along with us acting as an interpreter on many occasions. He was very helpful to us, and there were some who promised to attempt to see if he could be made a United States citizen for his efforts.

The above mentioned Lieutenant heard about Walter, and decided after the war's end to use Walter as his personal interpreter and full-time procurer of women. Walter filled his assignment quite well for he knew many of the people in the Dillingen-Heidenheim area since he had worked as a slave laborer in these parts in the past. He procured for the Lieutenant a very voluptuous young lady of perhaps 22 years of age. She was not a raving beauty, but she could sure attract one's attention because she was built like the proverbial brick sh--house!

To make a long story short, she gave the Lieutenant all that he wanted, and something that he would rather not have had. She gave him a first-class case of gonorrhoea. While he was not a politician, he continued to run long past Election Day! The upshot was that he was silently and mysteriously transferred to another unit far from the 12th's assigned area.

All of this occurred at the time "no fraternization" was supposed to be in effect. Captain Francis Drass, one of the finest officers ever to wear an American uniform, told us all that he would turn his head when it came to the unenforceable no fraternization ruling so long as we used good judgment and did not make a spectacle of our activities. He cared only that we were particular with the company that we kept and that we were discrete and stayed indoors. Obviously, the Lieutenant gave little credence to Captain Drass's admonition!!

Chapter 11: The Purple Heart Gift

Shortly after crossing the Rhine River into Germany, most members of the first rifle squad, second platoon of A Company of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion were seated in the back of our half-track. All of our rifles were arranged on top of the twin gasoline tanks. We had a young man with us who was a part-time medic. Fiddling around being a highly nervous individual, he inadvertently put his finger inside the trigger housing and squeezed off a round.

Everyone sat erect and quite still. It was quite a strange feeling hearing the spent shell caroming around the inside of the vehicle. I finally asked, "Is anybody hit?" The answer miraculously was a resounding "no!" Then a Private Harry Gaumer rubbed the back of his neck where there was a minuscule amount of blood. He was only very slightly grazed. A Band-Aid would have more than handled the wound.

In any event, Harry went to the aid station. A small dressing was put on the nick, and he returned promptly to the group after having been awarded the Purple Heart! It most certainly could have been far more serious.

I found it unnecessary to berate the individual who squeezed off the round, because the look on his face was punishment enough, indeed!

Chapter 12: The Company Barber

Shortly after we arrived in France, Captain Francis Drass authorized a company barber. It has been so long ago that I do not remember the individual's name who was given this assignment, but I do remember that he was permitted to charge each soldier the amount of five cents per haircut for his service.

His equipment consisted of a small stool that served as his barber chair, a comb, scissors, a hand-clipper, a mirror, a straight razor, and an abundant supply of toilet paper. His early haircuts left much to be desired, but as time went on he became a rather proficient barber. It was rudimentary on-the-job training at its finest!

A somewhat humorous incident occurred in the early days, however. Armando T. Macioci showed up for his haircut, and as the barber was combing, cutting, and talking incessantly; he nipped the upper portion of Armando's right ear. Armando yelled aloud, said a few expletives, and jumped off the stool. Our barber, being a typical infantryman, took immediate evasive action. He put a wad of toilet paper on Armando's bleeding ear, pressed it firmly, and said to Armando, "You are done, and there is no charge for your haircut!"

Armando vowed that he would never again allow this individual to give him a haircut, but I know full-well that in less than a month's time that Armando was seated firmly on our barber's stool!

It is hard to believe that all of this took place over sixty-seven years ago. Where has the time gone, and how did we get so old so quickly?

Chapter 13: A Keen Sense of Humor In The Most Adverse Of Times

If my memory serves me correctly, it was approximately mid- January 1945. We had just completed our tactical withdrawal after spending two days and one complete night of horror in Herrlisheim. Thanks in large part to our Division artillery and the intense fog, our withdrawal was a complete success.

No sooner had we successfully crossed a makeshift footbridge over the Zorn River, we began digging foxholes to establish a defensive position. Again, if my memory is still intact, David Kronick and I shared the foxhole. The ground was frozen solid making digging conditions almost impossible. I remember S/Sgt. Troy B. Criss going back to a motor vehicle to secure a full sized shovel.

After our holes were dug, the partners in the foxholes took turns staying awake in order to protect our turf. While Dave was sleeping, nature proceeded to take its course. I had the most intense feelings that I was in need of relieving myself. No area had been set up for a latrine, and I did not want to make a deposit in my steel helmet. Therefore, I exited the foxhole, went a few feet behind it, and promptly proceeded to make a different type evacuation. Everything went well, thanks in large measure to the brown toilet tissue from our daily supply of K-Rations. I then made my way back to our foxhole.

When daylight approached, I looked from the foxhole to where I relieved myself. The dropping had frozen and was sitting erect because of the intense cold. 2nd Lt. Frank Deeds (he may not have received his battlefield commission quite yet) was walking from foxhole to foxhole checking on everyone's well being when he spotted the deposit. His question was, "Who in the hell did this?" I answered, "Frank, it was a dire emergency and I did it!" Without the slightest hesitation and to my extreme surprise, he replied, "How about walking down forty feet and dropping another just like it. Then we can all play quoits!" Here, I thought that I was about to catch all kinds of hell, and Lt. Deeds found humor in the situation. Believe me, this is what separates the real men from the boys!

Later in the war, Lt. Deeds was severely wounded in the area around Speyer. I noted in a recent issue of the "Hellcat News" that Frank had died. I also noted that he was not a member of the Association. In my humble opinion, his service to his country and his heroic leadership with a unit of the 12th should have made him an Honorary Member of the Association. May his soul rest in peace.

Chapter 14: The Bewildered Oberst

While I can not actually pinpoint the date or community after all these years, I know that it followed the campaign for Colmar. We had just taken the small village, and the various rifle squads were seeking out stragglers.

The first rifle squad was proceeding along a winding path with riflemen patrolling both sides of the pathway. Suddenly we saw someone approaching on a bicycle. We all took cover, and just as the bicycle was about to pass our location, we all jumped out with our rifles at the ready and collectively shouted "halt!" The individual was so shocked by our actions that he almost fell from the bike. It happened to be a full Colonel who was obviously left behind as his troops retreated. He was quite bewildered as one soldier took his sidearm, another commandeered his field glasses, and another removed his elegant wristwatch. I remained standing at a distance with my rifle pointed in his direction. He uttered something in German that I later took to mean that one has my pistol, another my field glasses, and another my watch. You might as well have this. It will not be of any help to me now. With that, after removing certain personal items, he tossed me his wallet filled with German currency.

I was wondering to myself what I would be able to do with German Reichmarks. There was nothing available to purchase. At any rate, I kept the wallet and currency. I felt like someone special since the Oberst decided to toss it to me. Minutes thereafter, a jeep rolled up with a First Lieutenant accompanying the driver. The Lieutenant endeavored to question the Colonel who spoke limited English, but the Colonel refused to answer citing the rules of the Geneva Convention. The Lieutenant ordered him to sit on the hood of the jeep with his hands extended behind his head for a ride to headquarters. The jeep then sped off.

Much later at the war's close, our mess sergeant, Albin J. Smajd, said that he could procure fresh fruit and vegetables if he had some German currency to make the purchase from local farmers. I overheard these comments, and said, "Sarge, I have some currency that I came about honestly. I went back to the schoolhouse and retrieved it. I then went to the mess sergeant and handed him the money. I told him to take it and use it for whatever you can purchase in fresh produce." The sergeant never asked how and where I got it, but took it and made the purchases! Just goes to show that what goes around comes around in war as well as in peacetime!



Chapter 15: Opel Olympia

The fierce battle for Speyer was all but completed, and the various rifle squads were mopping up, so to speak, by going house to house seeking out stragglers. The first rifle squad of the second platoon was very much involved in this process.

As we were going about this task, we came upon a house that had a carport, and parked in the carport was a shiny tan 1941 or 1942 Opel Olympia. The vehicle was in remarkably good condition. It very much resembled our 1941 or 1942 Chevrolet except that the gear shift was on the floor instead of on the steering column, and it was smaller in size. The car was manufactured by General Motors of Germany.

At any rate, the automobile fascinated us. We asked the lady of the house to whom the vehicle belonged. She told us that it was owned by a Captain in the German Army. We asked if she had access to the keys for the automobile. She advised us that she did. We then asked for them to be given to us. She replied that the keys would do us no good because the vehicle's gasoline tank was very close to being empty. This did not deter us for a second. We went to our half-track, secured a five gallon can of gasoline, and poured it into the gas tank. The vehicle started immediately, and we all took turns driving it for very short distances. I remember that it had four forward gears and a reverse. The shifting sequence was identical to that of our half-tracks except it was not necessary to double clutch the Opel.



We tinkered around with the Opel for a few hours before turning it over to our Medical Detachment. They took this perfectly shiny tan vehicle, and brush painted it olive drab. They put a hand-painted white star on each of the front doors, and I believe that they

painted a red cross insignia on the top.

The last we saw of the Opel was its being driven off by our Medics after the paint had dried sufficiently.

I have often wondered what the lady of the house told the German Captain as regards to what happened to his shiny new automobile. That is assuming that he ever returned home only to find that his prize possession was missing.

The French have a saying regarding such situations. "C'est la guerre!" The doughboys had an expression covering them too. I am sure you have heard it once or twice in the past... I believe it was a resounding "T.S.!"

Chapter 16: A Real Slow Burn

It was an unusually warm Saturday at Camp Barkeley. Most of the troops had gone to Abilene, were visiting the camp's swimming pools, or enjoying a movie at an air-conditioned theater. Some of us more unfortunate ones remained on the sweltering base. This tale of woe is about one of the more unfortunate individuals.

A sergeant from the 56th A.I.B., who shall remain nameless, decided that it was a perfect day for sunbathing, so he took the mattress from his bed, stripped to his shorts, and proceeded to climb to the roof of his one-storied plywood barracks. He was doing quite well at his roof-top spa until he made one very serious mistake. He fell soundly asleep and remained so for several hours.

When he awakened, he was severely burned. So much so, that he was incoherent and hallucinating. After being helped from the roof, he was first taken to the dispensary, and then transported to the base hospital where he remained for several days. He suffered severe burns to over 85 percent of his body.

While the sergeant survived his ordeal, the upshot of the story is that he was demoted to the rank of private for his poor judgment and decision making. At the time, it seemed a shame to most of us, because the sergeant was a really nice person, considerably older than most of us, and it appeared doubtful that he would ever be able again to attain the rank of sergeant.

To most of us, the individual was twice burned as a result of his one foolhardy action!

Chapter 17: It's A Small World After All

The year was 1968, and the place was Atlantic City, NJ. This was long before Atlantic City became the Las Vegas of the east. We were there with Trenton Forest No. 4, Tall Cedars of Lebanon for the purpose of parading. Sam and I were part of Trenton Forest's Tuxedo Unit. I had known Sam for about two years at the time, but I knew little about him excepting that he was married, had children, took his obligations seriously, and was a delight to be around.

Sam and I had never discussed our military experiences.

Mostly our previous conversations consisted of Tuxedo Unit business, our occupations, or our immediate families. At any rate, as we were standing around in our assigned spot waiting for the parade to begin, Sam was talking with another individual and I was just standing off to the side with some others of our group. Then out of Sam's mouth came the words Fort Campbell, Tennessee Maneuvers, Camp Barkeley, Tidworth, Herrlisheim, Colmar, Speyer, and on and on. I said to myself, "I don't know what Division he was with, but he's been about everywhere that I have been!" I walked over to Sam, and told him that I overheard his conversation, and asked what outfit he had served with. He said, "I was in the 12th Armored Division, and I served with the 23rd Tank Battalion." I told him that I, too, was with the 12th, but that I served with the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion.

From that point on, we chatted until our time to march, and later we continued our conversation about the war years well into the evening.

Sam, as I knew him, was Silas S. Mackey. After our chance conversation in Atlantic City that afternoon, Sam and I became rather close friends. Sam passed away about forty years ago. I do not know whether Sam ever joined our Association, but I do know that he would have been proud of the fact that we have a Memorial Museum in Abilene, Texas. He and his wife, Kathryn, resided in Abilene prior to his being shipped overseas.

This once again points up the fact that it's a small world after all, and it's great to be a Hellcat!

Chapter 18: Saye Hey!

As I remember it, the weather was nice and I was feeling quite well, particularly after just having been transferred from Headquarters Battery of the 494th Field Artillery to Company A of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion. I had just finished settling with the Supply Sergeant of the 494th for all of the gear that had been issued to me while I was a member of that unit, and I was wending my way to the area in which the 56th A.I.B. was housed.

Having located the company area, I was trying in vain to find out just where the first rifle squad of the second platoon of Company A was situated. While meandering through the area, I saw this soldier who had obviously just come from the shower room because he was wearing only a robe and had wooden flip-flops on his feet. I shouted to him, "Buddy, can you tell me where the first rifle squad, second platoon is located? He retorted, "You don't call me 'buddy.' You address me as Sergeant Saye!" I meant him no disrespect, but there wasn't a chevron in sight---only his robe and flip-flops. How was I to know that he was a Technical Sergeant? Clairvoyance has never been one of my more valuable attributes. Sergeant Saye did, however, after dressing me down, direct me to the proper barracks where I met Staff Sergeant John Plawecki and the other members of the first rifle squad.

I still remember this as though it happened yesterday.

Sergeant Saye was a rather handsome individual, extremely neat in appearance, and ordinarily a very nice person, just a trifle vain when it came to his standing in the Company.

It becomes frightening to know that all of this happened in excess of sixty years ago at a place then called Camp Barkeley, Texas, just a stone's throw from Abilene.

Chapter 19: The Empress

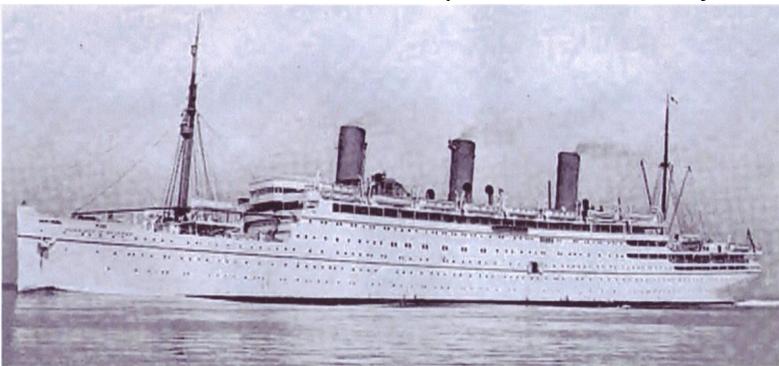
The title refers to the Empress of Australia, the liner that took most of the 12th Armored Division overseas. The Empress was a luxury liner owned by the Cunard-White Star lines that had been converted to a troopship by the British government. We were supposed to go from New York City direct to France, but due to much of our equipment being commandeered by other armored divisions already in Europe, we were re-routed to Liverpool, England.

On this very large English ocean liner, we were provided with two meals daily, and I must add that the quality and quantity of the food left very much to be desired! Company "A" of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion was quartered in a compartment on "F" deck. We were completely below the water-line, and were just above the inner bottom of the ship.

We were supplied with hammocks in which to sleep; but some of us taller individuals who found the hammocks extremely uncomfortable, opted to sleep directly on the steel deck. Because of the constant threat of German submarines, we were required to keep our life jackets at the ready at all times.

As part of a many - vessel convoy, we were by far the largest ship in our group. It was most reassuring while on the promenade deck in the daylight hours to see the destroyers and destroyer escorts forming a protective ring around the convoy.

We were on the Atlantic for ten days before disembarking from the ship at Liverpool where we were promptly put on railroad cars for a trip to Hungerford Air Base. Our stay at Hungerford was short-lived, and after a couple of days, we were transported to Tidworth where we stayed in a large tent-city until it was time to be dispatched to France. Tidworth is situated between Salisbury and Andover, and just a short distance from Stonehenge.



The Empress of Australia

I will wager that all of the smokers who were aboard the Empress remember where we had to go to have a cigarette in the evening hours. It was in a rather small compartment on the promenade deck, the opening of which was covered by a large sheet of canvas in order to keep any light from escaping. The smoke was so thick in this compartment that one could never be sure whether it was

first-hand or second-hand smoke that one was inhaling!

The voyage was rather subdued until the afternoon that the crew decided to test-fire the five inch gun that was mounted on the aft end of the ship. When it was fired, it caused a shock wave on the Empress, and immediately some jackass (the term is most befitting) shouted that we had been hit by a torpedo. This caused immediate bedlam until our cadre of officers got the situation under control.

Despite a rather smooth sailing assisted by the Empress having been equipped with a gyroscope, a few of our men became seasick. There was one individual who was a member of the 17th Infantry Battalion named Liberto M. Romano from Camden, NJ who was violently sick for the entire crossing. He tried eating the Lorna Doone cookies that were provided us, but he lost them with gusto. Perhaps this is where the expression, "tossing one's cookies" originated!

So much for our crossing the Atlantic Ocean in September of 1944. It was over 67 years ago, but it was an experience that has lasted a lifetime and is permanently etched in my mind.

Chapter 20: The P-47 Fiasco

Herrlisheim was behind us, and we were situated at Lake Dieuze awaiting replacements and getting our equipment in top-notch working order for whatever eventuality that lay ahead. Information was circulated that the Germans had captured two P-47 airplanes intact and were in the process of using them against American ground troops.

Because of the time of year and the extremely cold temperatures, Lake Dieuze was frozen solidly, so much so, that one could drive a jeep from one side of the lake to the other.

One afternoon, two P-47's returning from the front swooped low to drop their wing tanks on frozen Lake Dieuze before returning to their base. We were not aware of what they were doing, because we had not seen them do this before even though this had been their standard operating procedure.

At any rate, someone shouted that these were the two captured airplanes, and everyone immediately commenced firing at the swooping aircraft. There were 50-caliber machine guns firing from the half-tracks and tanks. Then all of a sudden, the attached anti-aircraft batteries opened up with their 40-millimeter guns. It was bedlam for a few minutes. It was not very long before we were commanded to cease fire. Someone was informed of what the planes were actually doing, and that the release of the wing tanks was not a release of under-the-wing bombs!

It would be more than fair to say that our weaponry never had such a rapid and complete cleaning in the time that I was in the service. We wanted to leave no visible evidence that our weapons were involved in the firing at these two friendly aircraft.

I will wager that if these two pilots could be interrogated today that they would tell the embedded reporters of the Iraq conflict that friendly fire was a phenomenon long before they became embedded! Sometimes, too, soldiers are unintentionally slain or severely wounded as a result of such action!

The P-47 aircraft piloted by our skilled airmen were most certainly a trusted friend of the foot soldier, particularly when the weather was favorable. They made our jobs easier for us by strafing the towns and hamlets just ahead of our having to enter them. Because of their actions, the resistance encountered was far less than it would have been otherwise.

The fly-boys are a significant part of the equation when it comes to the formula for ensuring victory!

Chapter 21: Scared Stiff

The time was January 1945 and the place was an area close to Rohrwiller and Herrlisheim. Able Company was moving forward in two distinct single-file columns up the tree-lined road. One column was on the left side, the other on the right. All men were carrying their M-1's at port arms.

Our approach must have been spotted by a German artillery forward observer, because it was not long before artillery air bursts began to rain down on us. Our platoon situated on the right side of the road ran down the incline and took what little cover there was. The ground was covered with about two inches of frozen snow, and we lay on our stomachs one man behind the other with about a six foot interval between each other.

The observer was right on target, but the elevation that he gave the firing batteries was much too high and the air bursts were at tree-top level or about 40 or 50 feet in the air. Had the bursts been at an elevation of about 18 or 20 feet above us, many would have been killed or seriously wounded.

The barrage lasted about 10 to 15 minutes, and other than scaring the hell out of most of us it was not all that effective in stopping our advance. There were no appreciable casualties that resulted from the shelling.

When the barrage lifted, the command was given for us to move forward. The man ahead of me arose as did those ahead of him. When I tried to push myself up, I had feeling above the waist, but my legs felt numb and I could not get to my feet. The individuals ahead of and behind me asked what was wrong. I said that I could not get my legs to move. Each took one of my arms and lifted me to my feet where upon my legs began working like a proverbial charm.

I have never experienced this feeling before or after this incident. I can only attribute my inability to arise to being scared stiff by the artillery barrage. Having been in the Field Artillery prior to becoming part of the 56th, I knew full-well how efficient the artillery pieces can be, particularly if the forward observer gives the proper information regarding coordinates, elevation, fuse, and type of shell to the firing battery.

While I left no visible stains on my G.I. underwear, I know full well that my problem was complete fear, and had nothing whatever to do with the frozen earth on which we had been lying.

You have my word on it. I was just plain scared stiff!

Chapter 22: Hero One Day, Goat The Next

It was late May or early June 1945. We had been living on the second floor of the grade school in Schlossberg for a week or ten days with little or nothing to do except perform checkpoint duty at a road junction in Bopfingen on a relatively infrequent basis. I remember vividly serving at this spot with David Kronick. He and I asked permission to use the bathroom facilities of a family directly across from our post. We were given permission, and he and I entered the premises. After relieving ourselves, we thanked our hosts and noticed that there was the most tempting cheesecake situated on the kitchen table. We both remarked, "Cheesecake!" Where upon, the lady of the house (frau) and her daughter gave each of us a king-sized slice of cheesecake. It was probably the best tasting morsel that Dave and I had for many, many days. So much for the no fraternization policy!

I learned that they were looking for volunteers in a community about ten kilometers from Bopfingen in the direction of Aalen for the purpose of assisting in getting displaced persons returned to their areas of origin. Needless to say that I volunteered along with some others whose names I do not remember. We were transported to the compound, and arrived in the early evening.

The next morning, we arose and were given our assignments. Our assignment was guarding various entrances to insure that no unauthorized individuals came into or departed from the compound. About eight of us armed with loaded M-1 rifles boarded a half-track for transportation to our assigned locations. One individual decided not to sit inside the half-track, but rather sit on the armored side of the vehicle with his feet dangling in the attached mine-rack. This went well for a time, but as the driver was maneuvering through a rather large stone gate, the individual slipped from his perch and became wedged between the side of the half-track and the huge stone gate post. When someone alerted the driver to this fact, he panicked and did not know how to proceed. I asked the driver to get out of the vehicle and attempt to regain his composure. I jumped into the driver's seat, put the half-track in first gear, and pulled the vehicle through the gate. The trapped soldier, fully conscious, fell to the ground, and was apparently rather seriously injured.

After having put the injured G.I. on the back floor of the half-track, I requested all but one soldier exit the vehicle before we headed at full speed to the field hospital. On the way to the hospital, traveling at maximum speed, the half-track hit a small crater in the road. Other than making the steering wheel jerk somewhat, the crater did no harm to the vehicle. I did notice, however, that after hitting the crater, I was having difficulty with my right-hand when attempting to shift gears.

We got to the hospital, and the soldier was admitted with cracked ribs and other minor internal injuries. We stayed long enough to answer some questions as to what happened and so forth. The soldier who accompanied me and I returned to the compound, and reported the incident to the Lieutenant in charge. He had already been notified by some of the other soldiers who witnessed the occurrence.

I slept quite well that night knowing full well that I had helped in an emergency situation. The next morning when I arose, however, my right wrist was very badly swollen. It resembled a fist more than a wrist. I reported my plight to the Lieutenant, and he immediately had a jeep driver return me to the field hospital where I had been just the previous day. When we arrived, the doctor asked me, "Wasn't I speaking with you yesterday?" I said, "Yes." I reminded him of the G.I. whose ribs were cracked. The doctor told me that he would be all right, but that he would be uncomfortable for quite a while after his hospitalization.

The doctor proceeded to tell me that if my wrist is broken that it means a trip home. If, however, it is only a sprain, it means returning to limited duty with my unit until the healing process is concluded. I was then taken for X-rays where two views of the wrist were photographed. As my good luck would have it, it was only a very severe sprain. The doctor chuckled when he gave me the good news. He proceeded to place a metal splint on my wrist that he bound quite tight with gauze. I was then returned to the compound for the evening. The following morning, the Lieutenant explained to me that in my present condition I was of no use to him, so that I would be returned to my unit in Schlossberg for regular duty.

The assignment for which I volunteered never came to fruition, so I was returned to Schlossberg where some of the finest days I spent in the army were about to begin for me. I was dropped off at the Bopfingen checkpoint where I once again encountered the lady and her daughter who gave Dave and me the servings of delicious cheesecake. We engaged in very fruitful conversation about my injured wrist. Our conversations continued the entire time I was in Schlossberg and in Gerstetten.

Again, so much for the no fraternization policy.

Chapter 23: Tigers Win

It was in late July or early August that Robert "Bobby" Konopa and I entered into a \$5.00 wager concerning the 1945 World Series. It seemed that the Chicago Cubs were having a very successful season thus far, and since he was from the Chicago area, Bobby was an ardent Cubs' fan who was absolutely certain that the Cubs would win the National League pennant and go on to be victorious in the World Series.

Being a natural born needler, I said to Bobby that I was equally as certain as he that the Cubs would never win the World Series and that they probably would not even win the National League pennant. Thus, the sizable wager was on. All of the odds favored me, because the bet went like this. With a little persuasion, I got Bobby to agree that any other team in the American or National League that won the World Series was my team. He had only the Cubs as his team. The odds were decidedly in my favor, and I figured that I had won \$5.00 from Bobby even though the World Series was still months away.

Before the World Series began, Bobby and I were separated and we never saw one another again. He did not have my home address, and I did not have his.

To make a long and uneventful story short, the Cubs won their league, and went on to lose the 1945 World Series to the Detroit Tigers. There was no way except for divine intervention that Konopa could have won this bet.

Despite his good intentions, Bobby never paid off the wager, because he had no way of getting in touch with me. Heaven only knows the dollar equivalent in today's money were Bobby to have settled for the \$5.00 wager of 1945.

It was a so called sucker bet that almost backfired on me, because the Cubs lost to the Detroit Tigers by only a four games to three games margin! Wherever you are Bobby, you very nearly pulled it off!

Chapter 24: Temporary Driver

The following is a narrative on how I became the temporary driver of half-track A-10 in which the first rifle squad of the second platoon of Company "A" was transported.

It was a dark and dreary evening somewhere in Alsace, and T/5 John C. Toomey, our assigned driver, had been given a carton of K- rations to distribute among the squad members. The carton was secured with banding wire that was exceedingly hard to break. John was having great difficulty in getting the carton open, so he decided to use his bayonet in order to pry open the carton. In so doing, the bayonet slipped thereby penetrating the palm of John's left hand. He was in immediate pain, bleeding rather profusely, and on the verge of going into shock. He was taken to the aid station, and my memory as to what happened to him afterward is a bit fuzzy to say the least.

At any rate, I became the driver of record in John Toomey's absence. It was on the job training in its most rudimentary sense, but I weathered the storm. I became rather adept at double-clutching, and knowing when it was the correct time to change gears. I even received compliments from the squad members as to how smooth a ride I gave them. No herky-jerky shifting, little or no rough stopping, and extreme consideration for those riding in the back was what they put on my score card. I was pleased, indeed, because they were not the easiest bunch in the world to keep satisfied!

I remember that an ambulance in which John Toomey was riding was captured by the Germans, and John became a prisoner of war. Whether his capture was a result of the bayonet injury or something else and at a different time, I am not absolutely certain. One has to keep in mind that all of this occurred more than 60 years ago, and in a time when our minds were much keener than they are today.

John survived his imprisonment, is a member of our association, and resides in the York, Pennsylvania area. I salute John, and all of the other A-10ers. You truly are part of the greatest generation, and I am mighty proud to have been associated with you.

Chapter 25: The Box Of Chocolate Peppermint Candy

The time was the later part of March 1944. We had crossed the Rhine River and were moving well into Germany. The P-47's flying overhead are our greatest ally. They certainly make our assignment quite a bit easier by strafing and selectively bombing enemy strongholds. Things were moving quite rapidly as we continued to press forward. We had moved at such a rapid pace that we had just about outrun our supply line. To give them a chance to catch up with us so that we would have an adequate supply of rations and ammunition, we stopped, parked our vehicles and took refuge in abandoned houses in a small town somewhere in the German countryside.

The abandoned home in which the first rifle squad, second platoon of "A" 56th was billeted was very well constructed and it was furnished rather nicely. You might even say that it was extremely comfortable for us. We had no idea how long we would be able to enjoy the luxury, but even a day in these surroundings was more than welcome and appreciated by us.

To get the gist of the story, upon our arrival, on the dining room table was a box containing what turned out to be chocolate peppermint candy. I remember it well as having been chocolate sticks in which trace amounts of peppermint had been inserted. The taste reminded one of our peppermint patties, although one could not see the peppermint in these chocolate sticks, but one certainly could taste it.

I believe that it was I who discovered the candy, and being somewhat of a chocoholic, it was my intention to dig into the newly found treasure. One of our more logical squad members reminded me that the candy was probably laced with poison and left for us as a booby trap. This made sense to all of us, but the temptation to devour the chocolate candy was still quite prevalent. We kept looking at the candy every time we passed the dining room table, but no one made the slightest effort to lift the lid, remove the contents, or take a bite.

As our squad members cleaned and oiled their rifles, took baths, washed socks and underwear, caught up on correspondence, and did various chores that had been neglected for such a long time while we were on the move, most still unconsciously had their minds on the dining room table and the ever present chocolate peppermint candy. No one more so than I. To say that it weighed heavily on my mind would be the understatement of the century.

Finally several hours after discovering the chocolate treasure, I said aloud to the assembled squad members, "One can only die once, and what better way to go than from an overdose of chocolate!" With that statement, I made my way to the candy box, opened it, and devoured the first chocolate peppermint stick. The others waited in anticipation for about ten minutes, and when I did not hold my stomach or fall over and cease breathing, they commenced to munch on the candy with gusto.

Suffice to say that the box of chocolate peppermint sticks was completely consumed in close to record time. No one became ill as a result. A search was begun to ascertain if any more candy had been stored away, but the search proved fruitless.

Early the following morning, we boarded the halftracks and continued our advance into the heartland of Germany, flushing out village after village, and following in the path of our P-47 escorts. War was then, and continues to be hell!



Chapter 26: Predestined For P.F.C. Status

For all of these long years since the end of World War II, I have been soul-searching in an attempt to ascertain why I never rose above the rank of Private First Class. It couldn't have been that I lacked the intelligence, the proper demeanor, the leadership qualities or the seniority. As a matter of fact, at the war's end in Europe, I was recommended for the rank of Staff Sergeant by Lt. Frank Flaugh and such a promotion was in the works.

However, we received a replacement from an Engineering Outfit outside of the 12th who held the rank of Staff Sergeant. Because of the limitations mandated by the table of organization, my promotion was not acted upon. It meant very little to me at the time, because the war in the Pacific was rapidly winding down and the return to civilian life for most of us was imminent.

I had not been aware that any promotion for me above the rank of Private First Class was preordained not to become a reality. The fact really hit home the other day when I was printing the Pierce Crest or Coat of Arms onto some stationery. You will observe as did I that our crest which was designed by my ancestors many, many years ago has but a single chevron. It is hard to believe that the fate of a soldier in World War II was predestined hundreds of years ago insofar as his rank attainment is concerned. Wow!!!

If you will gaze at the Coat of Arms at the top of this stationery, you will observe what it is that I am writing about. Oh well, an unresolved mystery that has haunted me for some sixty odd years has now been unraveled to my complete satisfaction, and it all had to do with the heraldry designed by Sir Lancealittle Pierce!

Chapter 27: The Good Shylock of Company "A"

How many of the remaining stalwarts of "A" Company of the 56th A.I.B. remember our own personal shylock? I know that I do because for a \$20.00 fee I performed many of his weekend K.P. assignments for him.

While he shall remain nameless in this vignette, he was also from New Jersey in a community about fifty miles north of my home. Before entering the military, he was employed by a shirt factory as a supervisor of many lady garment workers. By night, he was employed by the New Jersey mob as a professional gambler, and it was in this enterprise that he earned most of his money much, if not all tax free.

Private Doe used to lend money to other members of the unit.

His arrangement was that he would lend \$4.00 anytime during the month for \$5.00 that would be repaid on pay day. His collection procedure was quite effective and to the best of my knowledge, no monies were outstanding past the deadline. He would wire money back and forth from his home via Western Union and/or Postal Telegraph. Our money lender was a godsend to many of the individuals who ran out of currency during the month or those who were "red-lined" on the company's pay registers. Had it not been for our beneficent shylock, many of our number would have been unable to avail themselves of furloughs, three-day passes, or other worthwhile endeavors.

It was humorous to others to hear him complain about almost everything military. He'd carp about the food, the bunks, the barracks, taking orders from officers and non-coms, reveille, taps, you name it! His favorite day in the military was the one on which the Inspector General visited our Battalion. Despite this, he was a very neat, mild-mannered individual. Even if feigned, he treated everyone with respect.

I lost sight of him while overseas. I know that he shipped over with us on the Empress of Australia as part of our Anti-Tank platoon.

I regret that I never heard any of his rants about foxholes, C and K-Rations, facing enemy fire, forced marches, evacuations, tactical withdrawals, and so on. Of this you can be sure, someone did!

Chapter 28: T/5 John Ninivaggi

There is an old saying that goes something like this “They also serve who sit at home and wait.” The same could very well be said about some of our company members whose job it was to perform their assigned duties in the rear area of a combat zone. This story may well have gone by the board if it were not for Mike Woldenberg having sent me material that he had gleaned from the National Archives. While reviewing the information sent to me by Mike, I came across the name of T/5 John Ninivaggi. It revealed that he received a Certificate of Merit posthumously on 31 July 45.

It seems that John Ninivaggi prior to our going overseas as a unit was assigned to the advanced detail that arrived in Europe somewhat before the main body. John’s assigned duties were to remain in the rear area and to see that the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion received its proper allocation of food, ammunition, and other supplies that are necessary in waging war with the enemy.

While I am not sure of the time and place, we were advised through official channels that John had been killed in an unfortunate accident. It seems that John was assisting a truck backing up to the loading dock when for some unexplainable reason John was crushed between the rear of the truck and the warehouse loading dock. While John’s death was not combat related, he most assuredly died performing his assigned duties.

I knew John rather well while we were in training. He would have been elated to know that he is being recognized and accorded the honor that he so justly deserves. May he rest in peace.

Chapter 29: Following Orders To The Letter

Although I am now 90 years of age, I remember the occurrence as though it happened a day or so ago.

The year was early 1943 at Camp Campbell, Kentucky. I had not yet been transferred to the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion, and I was still a member of Headquarters Battery of the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion.

A sergeant's wife had just given birth earlier in the week and he wanted to visit her again at the local hospital. For some reason, his request was denied. Instead of remaining on base as directed, he ignored the order and visited his wife and newborn. When he returned, he received a summary court martial that resulted in his being reduced to the grade of private and a brief period of incarceration in the Camp's Stockade. He was released during the day to do chores in the Battery area under the surveillance of an armed member of the Battery.

Early one evening prior to his being returned to the stockade, he was seated in the barracks when he said to his guard who was armed with a Thompson sub-machine Gun, "What would you do if I made an attempt to escape?" The relatively new soldier who was not long out of Basic Training replied, "I guess I'd have to shoot you." No longer had the recruit given his answer to the question when the ex-sergeant for some foolhardy reason ran from the barrack. Just as though it had been rehearsed, the guard aimed his Thompson and fired off three or four shots that hit the ex-sergeant in various parts of his leg. He dropped, bleeding profusely, and shortly thereafter was rushed to the base hospital.

We never again saw anything of the ex-sergeant but do know that he recovered from his injuries. As for the private who reacted to the situation exactly as instructed, he was transferred out of the division, no doubt with a commendation for following orders to the letter.

Over sixty-nine years have passed since this incident took place, but it is etched forever in my mind.

Chapter 30: How Many Of These Do You Remember?

1. Doing close order drill at Camp Campbell in 20 degrees weather, then entering a Base Theater with the temperature AT 75 degrees to watch a "WHY We Fight" Film and falling sound asleep.
2. The name that was given to the cold cuts and cold cocoa drink that was usually served as weekend lunch in the summer months.
3. Policing of the Company area, picking up cigarette butts and other assorted debris.
4. Getting prepared for a full field inspection by dusting all areas and mopping the barracks floors late into the evening.
5. Taking all parts of the Expert Infantryman's Test at Camp Barkeley.
6. The train ride from Camp Barkeley to Camp Shanks, our port of embarkation camp.
7. Cutting one's fingers attempting to open a can of C-Rations.
8. Putting on your gas mask improperly and getting a good whiff of tear gas.
9. The name of the orifice that you were told to blow it out.
10. The item that the sergeant in the morning said you were to grab after having dropped your socks.

If you answered most or all of these in the affirmative, you are deemed to have been a most astute infantryman.

Chapter 31: Another How Many Of These Do You Remember?

1. The first time you heard the expressions snafu and fubar.
2. Lining up in alphabetical order in the pay line.
3. Your first session as latrine orderly.
4. Seeing "Maggie's Drawers" waved at you from the target end of the Rifle Range.
5. Attempting to remember your General orders in proper sequence.
6. Your first K.P. and/or Guard duty assignments.
7. At Roll call, the sergeant mispronouncing your name.
8. Field stripping your assigned weapon for the very first time.
9. Getting your first pass to visit the metropolises of Hopkinsville, KY or Clarksville, TN.
10. Filling your canteen with water drawn from a Lister bag.
11. The many times you heard the word "improvise" in basic training and thereafter.

There are more, I can assure you, but if you answer in the affirmative to all or most of these, you qualify for immediate promotion.

Chapter 32: The Army Term For It Is Horse Play

The war in Europe was only over for a very brief period when this unfortunate occurrence took place that had repercussions throughout the Division. The incident involved two individuals with whom I had become well acquainted while I served with Headquarters Battery of the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion.

One of the individuals involved was from New Brunswick, New Jersey just about 50 miles from my home. The other was from the Detroit, Michigan area. It seems that the two were in their billet fooling around with captured enemy pistols that they had acquired.

The two decided to have a feigned duel with the weapons, both feeling that they were dealing with empty pieces. What a shock it was when the lad from New Jersey's pistol fired a round of live ammunition that had been inadvertently left in the chamber into the body of the lad from Michigan, killing him almost instantly.

The lad from Michigan was a halftrack driver and a damned good one. He used to operate, states-side, the halftrack in which I served as radio operator.

The army's version was that the two individuals were engaging in horse play. Call it what you want, in my point of view, it was just an unfortunate accident that ended the life of one soldier and had a severe adverse effect on the surviving individual.

The military has a term used when one is killed accidentally by members of his own unit or by others in support of the mission. It is called 'friendly fire.' The individual that lost his life in the incident cited was killed by the most friendly fire, because he was slain in a horrific accident by his friend.

Summary: One soldier dead; another scarred for the rest of his life. What a sad, sad day it was for all of us.

Chapter 33: Freedom Of Choice?

The time was either very late in 1942 or early 1943 while in basic training with Headquarters Battery of the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion at Camp Campbell in Kentucky.

Private Ross MacAfee and I were assigned K.P. duty and we reported quite early in the morning to Mess Sergeant Luther Tramell, a southern gentleman of the first order. Our assignment after helping serve breakfast was to wash the large number of dirty cups, dishes and silverware that had accumulated.

Ross and I jumped into the dishwashing assignment with gusto and soon began singing some of the currently popular songs ("Tangerine," "Amapola," and "Green Eyes") as a duo. Since our repertoire did not include any country-western selections, this must have aggravated Sergeant Tramell no end because he anxiously approached us and in a most degrading manner said, "Either you two stop singing immediately or you'll have to get out of here!" Being rather new recruits and believing that we had been given a choice, we quickly dried our hands, removed our aprons, and left the mess hall and returned to our barracks.

Upon our departure, Sergeant Tramell went to the orderly room and told First Sergeant John W. Thompson, a native Kentuckian and the epitome of what a First Sergeant should be, about our leaving our post in the mess hall. Sergeant Thompson came to our barracks and confronted us about the situation. We explained to him what Sergeant Tramell had said and our reason for the departure.

Sergeant Thompson, after lecturing the two of us, escorted Ross and me back to the mess hall where he had a discussion with Sergeant Tramell. He instructed Sergeant Tramell that we should be permitted to sing all that we wanted so long as we performed our K.P. chores to his complete satisfaction.

It was obvious to Ross and me that Sergeant Tramell had a tin ear when it came to listening to Crosby-Sinatra type crooning, but he somehow managed to tolerate it for the balance of our day's K.P. duty. I should add that Ross MacAfee and I never were assigned K.P. duties together again!

Chapter 34: Halt! Who Goes There?

Again, it was in December 1942 as a member of Headquarters Battery of the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion that I was ordered to perform guard duty for the first of many times. The assignment for the others and me was to guard our motor pool area for a twenty four hour period, alternating by serving two hours walking our post and spending four hours at rest in the guard house.

Lieutenant Tuxford was the Officer of the Guard this particular evening, a cold, clear wintry night. Lt. Tuxford enjoyed immensely being able to sneak up behind the individuals walking their posts in a military manner, and after surprising them, requesting that they recite a specific general order.

As I was walking my post during the very late hours of the evening in a counter clockwise manner as prescribed with the rows of parked army vehicles on my left, I heard an adjacent guard challenge Lt. Tuxford. I neglected to mention earlier that as guards we were armed and our weapons, although in a safety position, contained live ammunition.

Shortly thereafter, I heard Lt. Tuxford approaching my assigned area. Instead of continuing on the counter clockwise path, I ducked into a row of the parked vehicles until he reached and slightly passed where I was situated. I quickly moved out, raised my weapon to the firing position, and shouted in a most authoritative manner, "Halt! Who goes there?" Lt. Tuxford, a gentleman whose height was about 6'5" actually leaped about three feet into the air. Instead of surprising me, it was he who was taken aback. After he regained his composure, instead of requesting a general order, he said meekly, "Good job, soldier---continue as you were." With that, Lt. Tuxford, more than a trifle embarrassed, went on his way to the next guard post.

I lost track of Lt. Tuxford after being transferred to the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion, but I do find it strange that his name and the names of many other Headquarters Battery members are not listed among those in the online listing of the 12th Armored's 17,000 members.

Chapter 35: The G.I. Who Came To Dinner

It was in Bopfingen, Germany and the time was early July 1945. There was a no fraternization ruling handed down by the high command, but its implementation was less than vigorously enforced. The hostilities had ended in early May and things were getting around to a degree of normalcy for most of us.

We were housed in a grade school building in Schlossberg, a small hamlet abutting Bopfingen. There was little for us to do, so we had loads and loads of free time on our hands. Many of us had established contact with attractive young ladies (frauleins) in the area and spent a large portion of our free time with them. In their company, we attempted to master the German language and we taught them as much English as possible. Of course, it wasn't entirely a survey course in foreign languages.

Just as in any other blossoming relationship, I had been invited on several occasions to their home by her father and mother and we often listened to big band music on the radio provided by the Armed Forces Network. Often, they would offer me goodies such as homemade cheese cake, strudel, or other dessert items. The father also made certain that I had a drink or two of cognac, but if I was in the company of Joseph Mucko or other members of the first rifle squad, we were only offered potato schnapps.

As the relationship continued to grow by the proverbial leaps and bounds, one afternoon I was invited to an elegant dinner at their home. The dining room table was beautifully adorned with their finest silverware, china, and crystal stemware and in front of each dinner plate was a small covered silver salver. When I lifted the lid from the silver tray, I saw that it was some sort of fowl with which I was unfamiliar. It was too small to be a chicken and the meat was much darker. I asked, "What is it that you are offering me?"

The reply in unison was, "Taube." Since I didn't bring my wordbook along on this visit, I was unable to decipher the word 'Taube.' As it turned out, it meant 'pigeon.' I graciously refused to eat the bird but opted for two fried eggs, sunny side up, as a substitute. My hosts, albeit a bit non-plussed, honored my request. Despite my obvious lack of social grace in this and other instances, they continued to think highly of me and treat me well.

Although all of this took place over sixty-seven years ago, I still remember the young lady and her parents with extremely high regard because they certainly made my time in Germany most pleasurable, indeed.

Chapter 36: The Doggie Is Not For Sale

We are back in June 1945 again in a German town named Bopfingen. The war in Europe has ended and we are striving to get back to a degree of normalcy. On one of my many visits to the home of a young lady on Aalaner Strasse, this factual incident took place.

We were sitting on her parlor sofa this particular afternoon when a knock came to the front door. As the young lady responded to the knock at the door, I observed that it was an elderly German man who appeared to be making some very serious inquiries of my hostess. They conversed for a short time after which she closed the door and returned to my side on the sofa.

Curious by nature, I asked "What did he want?" She answered, "He wanted to purchase our dog." I began to chuckle because their dog was an old, lethargic, beagle-like animal that appeared to be only a short distance from euthanasia. After I regained my composure, I inquired, "What would he want with an old dog like that?"

She responded in a serious manner, "He wants him for meat. He wanted to take him home for slaughter." I said to her, "If he needs meat that badly, you probably should have sold the old mutt to him."

She countered, "I probably should have but we are saving him only because we might have to resort to using him for the same purpose!"

If you have any doubts that some of the German citizenry found it necessary to put their pets to death in order to have meat in their diets, this should prove conclusively that the practice did exist.

It is a good feeling to be able to convey to all that the natural or unnatural demise of the family dog did not take place prior to my leaving the Bopfingen area. After that time, it is anybody's guess.

Chapter 37: The Alpine Tour

In June of 1945 while we were still billeted in private homes in Dillingen, Germany, an Alpine Tour was offered to the enlisted men of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion. It most certainly was not nearly as close to the top of the tour list as were trips to Paris and the French Riviera; however, the availability of the Alpine Tour offered far less competition so I opted to apply for it. I have never been sorry for arriving at such a decision because the tour was fabulous.

I might add at the outset that this tour cost those taking it absolutely nothing. Whether it was afforded the other units of our division, I can not say, because I only can recall seeing members of the 56th. A sergeant who was quite fluent in the German language acted as our tour guide. He was quite able to field most of our questions with the assistance of some of the local citizenry. We slept in hostels provided for us during the three and one-half day trek. Our food, as I recall it, consisted primarily of K-Rations. Being combat infantrymen, this was nothing new to us.

We left Dillingen in a small convoy of six by six army trucks and our first stop was Augsburg. The city was founded in 15 BC by Augusta Vendellicorum. The city is well known for its glass paintings, some of which date back to the 12th century.

After Augsburg, we journeyed to Landsberg and visited the prison that had been liberated by the 12th Armored Division. It was in Landsberg Prison that Hitler wrote "Mein Kampf." He was confined there after his 1923 Munich Beer Hall putsch failed. The next stop was Schongau, founded in 1224. It is known for paper and leather manufacturing. It is also recognized as a farm and dairy center.

Approaching the Alps, we arrived at Ober Ammergau which is world famous for its annual Passion Play that was first held in 1634. The Catholic Church here is one of the most beautiful churches in Germany despite its outward dull appearance.

Our next stop was Schloss Linderhof where we toured Linderhof Castle. It was the 19th century palace built by the mad king of Bavaria, King Ludwig II. Ludwig endeavored to imitate the style of France's King Louis XIV by having his palace built along the style of the palace at Versailles.

It was then on to Partenkirchen, the site of the 1934 Winter Olympic Games where the ski jump and other features of the Olympics were very much intact. Partenkirchen is the mountain paradise of Germany.

It was off again to Innsbruck. We rode a tramway and then cable cars to reach an Alpine mountain top where people were skiing and sun bathing. The crest provided an excellent view of the Brenner Pass. Innsbruck was founded in 1180 and became a city in 1239. We also visited the museum and some churches while in Innsbruck.

We were then off to Schwaz and St. Johann in the Tirolian Alps.

Our next stop was in Berchtesgaden, Hitler's home town. We toured the ruins of his once luxurious home and mountain retreat. We spent the night at the ultra-modern Berchtesgaden Railroad Station which had been converted to sleeping quarters for such tours.

In the morning, it was off to Salzburg, the birthplace of Mozart. We visited several public buildings and the "festspielhaus," the theater in which music festivals are held.

We then began our return to Dillingen with a long ride on the Autobahn to Munich. We visited the site of the beer hall where Hitler launched his failed civil insurrection in 1923. We also toured some churches and public buildings. Munich is the capital of Bavaria.

Our trip ended as it began in the town of Dillingen. It was an extremely worthwhile experience even though a bit tiring due to having ridden in the back of an army six by six truck. Such a trip today from the United States would cost one several thousands of dollars.

Chapter 38: Flashback: K-Rations

For you old combat infantryman like me, I ask, "How many of you remember the contents of the breakfast, lunch, and dinner K- Rations?" You should remember them, because as you know, they were our primary food supply during our combat operations during the big one in Europe.

For those of you that are uncertain during this period of life, the breakfast ration consisted of a tin of eggs with chopped ham, a fig bar, four cigarettes with matches, brown toilet paper, crackers, sugar, and powdered coffee.

The lunch ration was made up of a tin of processed cheese with chopped bacon, a candy bar, four cigarettes with matches, brown toilet paper, crackers, sugar , and powdered lemonade.

Finally, the dinner ration was composed of a tin of corned pork loaf. a candy bar, four cigarettes with matches, brown toilet paper, crackers, sugar, and powdered coffee.

If I erred slightly with the contents of any of these packets, please bear in mind that I, too, have reached 90, so my memory of things in the distant past may be a trifle hazy. By the way, doesn't the thought of this haute cuisine just make your mouth water.

Chapter 39: Heroes All

The previous short stories that I have written have all been factual but for the most part they have dealt with the more humorous occurrences that I experienced while serving as a rifleman with the first rifle squad, second platoon of Company "A," of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion. This endeavor, however, is my recollection of some of the more horrific moments during our time in France and Germany.

It all began with the death of 2nd Lt. Neville L. Dillon on December 21, 1944, the first officer of the 56th A.I.B. to be killed in action. Lt. Dillon was the second platoon's leader. A few days later, I do not have the exact date, PFC James E. Hogue was very seriously wounded by rifle fire. We could not attend to him right away, and had to wait until nightfall to get to him for evacuation. Jim never returned to the unit, but he did survive his wounds after a long period of hospitalization both in Europe and in the U.S.A.

The war truly hit home with me on January 9, 1945 when S/Sgt. James A. Sillery was killed just about ten feet in front of me in Herrlisheim. He was on the opposite side of the street from me when he spotted a sniper firing from the second story window of a home. He was in direct sight of the sniper, so he attempted to cross to my side of the road. He made it across but as he was running back to where I was located, the sniper shot him in the back and killed him. A short time later, PFC Troy B. Criss sneaked up to where the sniper was situated. Criss fired one shot into the sniper's neck and killed him outright.

On January 16th in the area close to Herrlisheim, PFC George C. Dawes, our assistant squad leader was killed in action and T/Sgt. John J. Plawecki, our squad leader, was seriously wounded.

On February 4th at Colmar, Pvt. Arthur J. Lopresti, a recent replacement, was mortally wounded and died a short time later. A portion of the shell fragment that killed Lopresti also went deeply into the casing and dry-cell battery of the walkie-talkie radio that was on the back of Pvt. Stephen Stavitsky. Stavitsky, too, was a recent replacement. God was definitely with Steve because the exceedingly close call only resulted in a few minor scratches to Steve's back.

March 23rd was a particularly dark day when in the vicinity of Speyer I witnessed S/Sgt. Charles Trusty lose an arm as a result of enemy fire. I was less than ten feet to Charlie's right when he was hit. To avoid being hit, I jumped into an open sewage ditch. When I emerged from the ditch, I smelled rather bad, my handy-talkie radio would not function, but my M-1 rifle was very much intact. In a matter of minutes, I came upon Pete, our medic, working feverishly over 2nd Lt. Frank H. Deeds who had been very seriously wounded. Deed's one leg was turned in the opposite direction from normal and one eye was completely out of its socket. I did not even recognize Frank. It was only the shipping tag that Pete had attached to Frank that gave me any indication as to who he was. When I learned it was Frank, I could not control myself and immediately began crying. It was the first time I had shed tears since I was a very little boy. Continuing on my way, I ran across a small group of our men standing over a face- down, prone,

lifeless body. I asked who it was, and learned that it was 1st Lt. Charles M. (Chuck) Willis.

Our squad leader T/Sgt. William C. Amason and Pvt. Joseph A. Irak, our squad sniper were killed in action on April 4th in an engagement where we were definitely overmatched by a well-dug-in enemy with superior troop strength. Then on April 5th, S/Sgt. William E. Lieser was wounded. After a brief hospital stay, Bill recovered from his wounds and returned to "A" Company.

My very best army friend, T/5 Harold K. Wells of Service Company, was killed in action on April 26th when an enemy artillery shell bounced off the hood of the half-track he was driving. Harold was the last person killed in action in the 56th A.I.B. and may well have been the last K.I.A. in the Division.

Thanks to the extensive research of Mike Woldenberg, I was able to supply the dates on which these events occurred.

The person that coined the phrase "War is hell" was right on the money. The individuals mentioned in this narrative whether living or dead are truly part of the greatest generation. I proudly salute them all.

Chapter 40: The Impasse

The Tennessee maneuvers thankfully were behind us and it was a short time after we had settled into Camp Barkeley that I learned that I was being transferred from Headquarters Battery of the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion to Company A of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion.

Part of the transfer process required turning in certain items, which were issued for specific purposes by that particular unit, to the supply room. When I reported to the supply room to turn in my shelter half, canteen, mess kit, etc., Staff Sergeant Joseph C. Peterson, our Supply Sergeant and a native of Louisiana, asked me why I hadn't turned in my flashlight. I answered that I was never issued one. Sergeant Peterson produced my supply sheet that showed I had, in fact, received a flashlight. In addition, he showed me that my initials were affixed showing that I acknowledged receipt of the item.

I agreed that they were my initials, but I countered that the initials were not in my handwriting. He said that if I did not return the flashlight that he would have to prepare a statement of charges and that I would have to pay for the item. I told the Sergeant that if I had received said flashlight and not returned it, I would be more than happy to pay for it, but since this was not the case, I would not pay. This haggling went on for a lengthy period with no satisfactory resolution in sight. The sarge insisted I'd pay. I vehemently opined that I wouldn't!

Our Battery Commander, a captain whose name escapes me, walked up and inquired of Sergeant Peterson what the problem was that was holding up the others in line. Like shoppers in the express lane who have recognized that the person in front of them has well over ten items, those in line behind me were beginning to become restless because of the inordinate amount of time it was taking to resolve my issue. The captain and the sergeant talked for a few seconds when the captain asked if there were a shrinkage allowance for flashlights and if the amount had been exceeded. The sergeant said there was and he was below the allowed amount. The captain then said for the sergeant to write off the disputed item and get this man transferred.

Thus the impasse was resolved and the captain's Solomon-like reasoning moved this soldier on to the 56th A.I.B, where the rest, as it is said, is history.

Chapter 41: The Star-Studded U.S.O. Show

Please return with me in time back to mid or late May 1945.

We were billeted in private homes in the town of Dillingen and one of our major duties was monitoring a displaced persons slave labor lager there.

One day while there we learned of a fantastic U.S.O show that was being presented in Heidenheim. Several members of the second platoon's first rifle squad made plans to attend. Among the group were Staff Sergeant Troy B. Criss and I.

When the day of the show arrived, our half-track filled to capacity left Dillingen for the trip to Heidenheim. As I recall, it was a most beautiful, sunny day. The site of the show was an outdoor amphitheater, and upon our arrival every seat was occupied. Not to be denied, Criss, others, and I climbed to the roof of the seating area where we were able to look down at the stage area to see and hear the entire presentation.

The star of the show was none other than Jack Benny who incidentally played "Love In Bloom" for us on his violin. Along with him were actress Ingrid Bergman, former Benny Goodman vocalist Martha Tilton, Harmonica virtuoso Larry Adler, and some other lesser lights. Members of the 12th Armored Division's Dance Band provided the music for the program. Jack Benny and the other troupe members put on an outstanding show for the members of the 12th.

They did not short-change us in any way, and the applause that they received was deafening!

I am not aware of how many of you remember this event, but I know that it is indelibly etched in the back of my mind even though it happened all of sixty-three years ago.

Despite the fact that our segment of the war was over at the time, the U.S.O show headed by Jack Benny was a real morale boost

Chapter 42: THE TELEFUNKEN TABLE RADIO

The year was 1945. The month was either late May or early June. We had just been relocated from living in private homes in Dillingen to living in an elementary school in Schlossberg. What a downer! It meant giving up beds with feather-filled mattresses to sleep on wooden bunks with straw-filled mattresses. It was a decided decline in the mode of living of the so - called victors.

In the two or three days that we had been in our new digs, I had befriended the lone police officer in Schlossberg. He was an elderly gentleman who resembled one of our local crossing guards rather than a member of the police. There was little crime in such a small community, but he was there to see that the conditions remained safe for all of the local citizenry. The town did not even have a police station. I believe that the chief, as I referred to him, worked from his own home.

In a conversation we had, I asked if he could secure for us a radio, so that we could be entertained in our schoolhouse barracks. He assured me that he would procure one for me if I vowed to see that it was returned to him upon our departure. I made him the solemn promise that I personally would see that it was returned to him.

The next day the chief delivered to me a Telefunken table model radio. It was a Godsend and we spent many hours listening to the Armed Forces Network where we heard the world news and lots of recordings of the big bands of Glenn Miller, Artie Shaw, Les Brown and Stan Kenton. Everyone enjoyed the radio particularly those who were not involved in any other extracurricular activities.

To make a rather long story short, there was someone in our company who, like the rest of us enjoyed having the use of the radio, but longed to confiscate it and have it shipped home. Fortunately, he made these desires clear to all who would listen to him. He and I had a confrontation about the matter and I made it abundantly clear to him that he would never filch the radio so long as I was able to take a breath of air. I told him that I didn't care what he did after I returned the radio to the chief as I had promised.

Suffice to say, that upon our departure from Schlossberg to Gerstetten, I returned the Telefunken table radio and thanked the chief with a handshake and a package of American cigarettes.

It has always been a quirk with me that promises made should be promises kept. And to think, all of this happened almost 64 years ago. Tempus fugit!



Chapter 43: The R. & R. Pass to Nancy

Few people except the serviceman himself realize the extreme importance of letters from home and R. & R. passes while serving abroad, particularly after having been and continuing to be involved in combat situations.

After having survived the Herrlisheim hostilities and while having been placed in reserve status at Lake Dieuze, Staff Sergeant William Amason, our newly assigned Squad Leader, advised me that I had been given an R. & R. pass to Nancy, France. To say that I was elated at the news would be putting it mildly.

The ride from Dieuze to Nancy was made in 6 x 6 GMC army trucks. It was a bumpy ride and fortunately for us it was of rather short duration. Upon arrival at our billet, we were shown our quarters, advised when mess would be served, and given a small map of the area that outlined the points of interest, the most significant of which was the local U.S.O. building.

Culturally, I have always enjoyed visiting museums, zoos, art galleries, cathedrals and the like, but after the rigors of Herrlisheim and Steinwald, I opted to be entertained at the U.S.O. for most of my stay in Nancy. At the U.S.O., I remember vividly an 18 piece big band made up entirely of African-American soldiers who played arrangements of music by Count Basie, Erskine Hawkins, and Duke Ellington. They were excellent musicians and they enjoyed immensely entertaining the troops.

In another area of the U.S.O. facility was a middle-aged Frenchman who was a skilled sketch artist. He drew charcoal portraits of any G.I. who would sit for him, and the portraits were entirely free of charge. He was a consummate professional and the likenesses he created were truly remarkable.

While the trip to Nancy most certainly did provide a modicum of rest and relaxation, when the pass time elapsed, I was quite happy to return to my unit and rejoin some of the best individuals that God ever placed on earth. True, they were definitely not angels, but in many respects, they came awfully, awfully close.

Chapter 44: A Tribute To Theodore O. Blostein

Although I never actually met Ted, as he was affectionately known, I considered him a very close and treasured friend. We spoke occasionally on the telephone, but mostly we communicated by way of e-mail. Ted had a magnificent sense of humor and always could offer a good joke or the willingness to listen to one. He and I most certainly shared a few.

Ted, as you know, passed away on Saturday, August 2, 2008. He put up a valiant battle with a life threatening illness, but in the end became too weak to win the fray. He was a devoted husband, father, and grandfather. The apple of his eye, I believe, was his granddaughter, an Annapolis graduate, whom he dubbed "the future admiral."

His heart and soul were in the 12th Armored Division Association and other veterans' organizations. He served as the Association's president in 1998. During his time in service, he was a master sergeant with Headquarters Company of the 23rd Tank Battalion, and I believe his field of expertise was intelligence.

One of Ted's finest accomplishments on behalf of our association, one of which he was enormously proud, was almost single-handedly raising funds for the creation and placement of a monument dedicated May 30, 1997, honoring and listing by name each of our fallen comrades killed in action. It fittingly sits directly in front of the Pratt Museum at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, the birthplace of our division.

I know full well that Ted is looking down on us, smiling, and wondering when his fellow Hellcats and Hellkittens will be reuniting with him.

While Ted and I professed different faiths, both of us were fervent believers in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. No doubt, that is what linked us. Despite never having met Ted, I have a strong feeling that in the not too distant future, Ted and I will meet, shake hands, exchange a few jokes, discuss the Association's progress and renew our friendship well into eternity.

Chapter 45: Honesty Is The Best And Only Policy

All of this occurred on Tennessee Maneuvers while I was still a member of Headquarters Battery of the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion. The maneuvers were going along rather well and we were situated in an area just outside of Nashville. Pay day had come upon us.

Being a Private First Class at the time, my army salary was \$54.00 less deductions for National Service Life Insurance and laundry when applicable. As is customary, everyone lined up in alphabetical order by name to receive his monthly pay. I remember quite vividly that on that particular day First Lieutenant Joseph A. Zanetta was the officer who was dispensing the payroll currency. I remember, too, that a three day pass was one of the few things that had eluded me for the entire period I had been in the army.

I moved forward in the pay line until I reached and was paid by Lt. Zanetta. All of the currency that constituted our pay was made up of crisp new bills. As I walked away and fanned the brand new currency, I noted to my extreme surprise that I saw three twenty dollar bills instead of two. The pay I received was correct in every way except for the fact that I was given one twenty dollar bill too many. Momentarily, it went through my mind that I could keep the windfall and no one would ever know who received the extra twenty. My conscience and the manner in which I was raised by my parents did not allow me to be part of any such act of dishonesty.

Back to the end of the line I went. When I finally wended my way to the head of the line, I told Lt. Zanetta that I had received \$20.00 too much in my pay. He showed a look of great relief and thanked me for my integrity. I asked Lt. Zanetta if I could talk with him further. He said, "Ok, shoot." I told him that it was in no way a hold-up by me, but that I'd like to apply for a three day pass to make a trip to De Rossett, Tennessee. De Rossett is midway between Nashville and Knoxville and is near Sparta, Tennessee. Lt. Zanetta said, "Pierce, a three day pass is yours whenever you want to avail yourself of it."

Shortly thereafter, I spent my three day pass in De Rossett visiting a very nice young lady and her family. Honesty, as it is said, is assuredly the best policy!

Chapter 46: Some Interesting Statistics

This article is dedicated to the true heroes of the 12th Armored Division, the ones who gave their lives in what was to have been the war to end all wars. Much of the information for this writing was gleaned from the booklet "Casualties of the United States Twelfth Armored Division, World War II, Second Edition" prepared by Raymond O. Collier, Jr. and F. George Hatt, Jr.

Of the 814 individuals who made the supreme sacrifice, 470 or 57.8% were members of our infantry battalions. Our tank battalions lost 218 members representing 26.8% of the deaths.

The number of deaths and percentages of the total for the other units follow:

92d Cavalry Recon	45	5.5%
Field Artillery Bns.	32	3.9%
119th Engineers	25	3.1%
All other Units	24	2.9%

The statement "There are lies, damned lies and statistics" was ascribed by Mark Twain to Benjamin Disraeli. Yet there can be no misrepresentation presented by statistics when the raw data are furnished along with the percentages.

The important thing to bear in mind is that each of the individuals who gave his life, regardless of his specific unit, had dreams and aspirations that were never fulfilled. Eight hundred fourteen American families were adversely affected by these casualties some sixty-seven or sixty-eight years ago. And whether they are buried here in the United States or on foreign shores, we should never forget them.

They are the true heroes who were taken from us far too early in life. It is not a stretch to say that many of us have rightfully said, "There but for the grace of God go I!"

Chapter 47: Hiney Ablaze

This vignette was brought to mind by our Unit Representative Otis Shull in his telephone conversation with me yesterday when he spoke about my old friend, David Kronick. Dave and I were members of the first rifle squad, second platoon of "A" company.

The story goes like this:

We had been in Schlossberg just a day or so when the members of our squad were given the assignment to monitor a road junction in Bopfingen, the neighboring town. Our instructions were to stop all vehicles either entering or leaving unless they had the proper pass. This was a two man operation with the others just sitting around until it came time to replace the two on active duty.

Even though it was June, the evenings became more than a trifle cool and damp. The children who enjoyed immensely watching us perform our tasks would gather twigs and kindling wood for us to maintain a small bonfire. For their hard work, we would reward the children with Wrigley's chewing gum or assorted candies. We also used to have the children sing for us. While we could not understand what they were saying, many of the melodies were familiar and the children had remarkably good voices.

On the very first evening of this enjoyable assignment as it began to get dark, we assembled our bedrolls around the bonfire and prepared to sleep until it was time to resume our two man shift of monitoring the motor traffic.

During our sleep time, the bonfire waned to a point where some of us rolled in our bedrolls to get closer to the flames to enjoy the warmth. Suffice to say that "yours truly" rolled to a point where the bottom of my bedroll actually began to burn. I felt the heat, awakened, rose to a sitting position, and dragged my behind until the fire was extinguished. Fortunately, we slept in our clothes and only the outer shell of the bedroll was charred. I have heard of people being given the hot foot before, but this incident affected a different part of my anatomy.

I believe that only three of us remain who would remember this occurrence. They are George Turnbull, David Kronick, and me.

Chapter 48: Following Orders A Bit Too Literally

This is a story that I look back on and chuckle at because it ended somewhat well, but it could just as easily have had a very serious conclusion to say the very least.

The event took place while I was a member of Headquarters Battery of the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion. We were on one of our early field problems in the area of Bumpus Mills on the Camp Campbell Military Reservation.

On the second day of our stay in shelter halves, just after dinner, First Sergeant John Thompson said to me, "Pierce, there's a sump hole down close to the stream that is filled with our garbage. Get a 5-gallon can of gasoline off the nearest halftrack, pour it into the sump and light it with these wooden matches."

Following his instructions to a tee, I got the 5-gallon can of gasoline and carried it to the sump. I proceeded to pour its entire contents into the hole and attempted to ignite it, but the matches that I threw into the hole kept going out. I moved closer and closer to the hole and continued to light the matches and toss them in. Finally with a loud boom the gasoline ignited, so much so, that I was blown backward onto my back, my eyebrows singed. Everyone came running to where I was lying, some thinking that I had been killed by the blast, since the flames from the fire leapt thirty feet into the air.

When it was determined that I was not injured, First Sergeant Thompson said to me, "How much gasoline did you pour into the sump?" When I told him that I had emptied the entire contents, he said, "You took me too literally. I only meant for you to pour a little bit into the hole to get the fire started. With the volume you poured, you could have been killed!"

I was never again given a similar assignment, but had I been, I would never have repeated my earlier performance.

Chapter 49: The Very Near Tragedy

Excellent training serves one well, it is said. In my case, that proved to be true without a shadow of a doubt. This is a true narrative of how very close I came to needlessly slaying a young German fraulein and a squad member who was also a close friend. The war was over for a very short period of time and we were billeted in Dillingen, a small community in the vicinity of Heidenheim. In this town was a lager that housed so called 'slave labor' both male and female. The lager population was made up primarily of middle Europeans. It was part of our duties to monitor the facility.

We were enjoying the good life by occupying private homes and sleeping in honest to goodness beds with feather tick mattresses. On this eventful afternoon or early evening, we were called upon to put on our rifle belts, grab our rifles, and to make haste by halftrack to the lager where a melee and riot were taking place. Without hesitation, the first rifle squad of the second platoon under the leadership of S/Sgt. Troy B. Criss stormed away from our billet headed hastily for the lager. As customary, we left one member of the squad behind to make sure that everything remained secure.

Our arrival at the lager at break-neck speed found everything peaceful and serene with no traces whatever of an uprising of any sort. After making absolutely certain that everything was normal and that we weren't being snookered, we took the return route back to our billets, but far more slowly this time.

On our return as we entered the home, the soldier who was left to guard our personal belongings was seated in a parlor type chair with a young German fraulein seated in his lap. He looked a tad chagrined when he saw us. Obviously, he thought that our time at the lager would have been far longer. At any rate, in jest, I pretended that I was going to shoot both of them and I portrayed the part quite seriously. Before taking aim at them and to make it more dramatic instead of extracting the entire clip, I proceeded to pull the bolt on the M-1 eight single times and each time I believed a shell was extracted. Again God was with me because before aiming the rifle and pulling the trigger, I aimed toward the ceiling and squeezed. No one was more surprised than I when there was a large bang and the bullet whizzed through the parlor ceiling. The fraulein and my army squad member buddy must have thought I had lost my mind.

Squad leader Criss looked at me with daggers in his eyes, but being a good and loyal friend, he said sternly, "Clean that rifle immediately and go for a good long walk." Both of which I did and ever so thankfully. Nothing further was ever said about the incident.

Nothing that I would normally do could have averted the incident. Two things I learned from it, however. One is that it doesn't pay to engage in so called 'horse play.' The second is that there is no substitute for proper training. Had I not been trained properly in the manner of handling a rifle, two perfectly innocent people would have perished and I would have been filled with guilt and remorse for the rest of my life. God indeed is good.

Chapter 50: The Two Very Different Sides of Staff Sergeant John Plawecki

Staff Sergeant John Plawecki, our squad leader, was an enigma to say the very least. Outwardly, he was a very tough individual whose job it was to take a group of rookies and to make them into a first class fighting team. Inwardly, he loved and respected every member of his squad and wanted the very best for each of them. The latter view was much harder to comprehend, I must admit, than the former one.

John was a task master and required that each of us give every undertaking our best efforts. He wouldn't ask anyone to do anything that he would not do himself. Sometimes he had difficulty verbalizing just what he was trying to communicate to us, so he would show us a visible example of the situation. John was a leader in the truest sense of the word. Seemingly it didn't concern him one iota whether or not one liked him. His true concern was that he had your respect and attention.

Sergeant Plawecki trained us very hard until he was absolutely assured that we had learned the lesson and that our reactions to a situation would be instinctive. In combat situations, one's actions or reactions had to be immediate and it was imperative that the action or reaction was the correct one.

In late December of 1944 in a community or area around Uttwiller, our squad led by Sgt. Plawecki was on a reconnaissance mission. During the end of the mission, PFC James Hogue was hit by rifle fire and wounded in the arm and leg. We were unable to recover him, so we departed the area without him. After we returned to our assigned area, I confronted Sgt. Plawecki about leaving Jimmy behind. Sgt. Plawecki didn't give me an answer at the time, but scowled at me for expressing my vehement opinion. In about three hours when it had become dark, Sgt. Plawecki and a few men hand-picked by him went out and brought the wounded PFC James Hogue back to our aid station from which he was evacuated to a base hospital. Sgt. Plawecki had planned to do the rescue mission after dark from the very outset, but he said nothing to anyone. He was so miffed at me for a very short period that he did not include me in those who went with him on the recovery mission.

Unfortunately for all of us, Sgt. Plawecki was seriously wounded on January 16, 1945 in the vicinity of Herrlisheim. He was evacuated, hospitalized, and never returned to our Battalion or Division. To me, John was a friend, a mentor, and a damned good soldier and squad leader. Had John been a mite less rigorous in our training regimen, this narrative may very well never have been written.

Epilogue: After lengthy hospitalization, Sgt. Plawecki survived his wounds and returned to civilian life in the Dearborn, Michigan area where he and his wife Angie raised a wonderful family. John was a proud life member of our association. I remained in communication with John up until the time of his passing. His two daughters always write to me at Christmas time, so after all of this time, there is still a Plawecki-Pierce connection.

Chapter 51: The Rain Of Howitzer Shells

This is a story that involves 2nd Lt. Spitzberg, T/5 Emil Lamuth and me. It happened at

Camp Campbell Kentucky shortly after my basic training with Headquarters Battery of the 494th A.F.A. Bn. was completed.

It was on the first live firing exercise in which Emil and I participated. Lt. Spitzberg was the Forward Observer, Emil was our halftrack driver, and I was the radio operator. The exercise was conducted on the Camp Campbell reservation in a community that I believe was named Bumpus Mills.

It was an exceedingly clear day with a slight chill in the air and all was going quite well as Emil drove us to our assigned destination. We finally stopped at a somewhat open area with a stand of trees to our immediate front but they were situated 300 to 500 feet ahead of us. Lt. Spitzberg had his map case in his hands and was studying it intently as our halftrack with Emil at the wheel idled. Then it all began. Lt. Spitzberg then called out grid coordinates to me which I relayed to the firing battery by radio. I believe he then specified the type of shell which I likewise relayed and ultimately the order to fire for effect.

All of a sudden Lt. Spitzberg in a frenzied voice yelled to Emil Lamuth, "Get us to hell out of here. The coordinates I sent to the battery were for our location and not the ones for the target!" Needless to say that Emil put the vehicle in gear and headed at breakneck speed in an easterly direction from where we had been parked.

It was a fortunate thing for the three of us that Lt. Spitzberg became aware of his faux pas when he did because the firing battery was right on target that day and the consequences could have been quite dire. Little or nothing was ever mentioned about the incident, but I do know that all three at the time collectively uttered a sigh of relief. This occurrence took place very close to seventy years ago in the Blue Grass State

Chapter 52: How An Experienced Shop Steward Might Have Been Helpful

Please bear in mind that this tongue in cheek narrative enumerates experiences that negatively impacted the writer quite directly during the period October 12, 1942 through February

7, 1946, the period in which I was a member of the United States Army. One might say, "That's the way the ball bounces," but things could have gone the other way if I had an effective, experienced representative as my advocate. The proverbial Philadelphia lawyer comes to mind.

I entered the military service as a Private, but attained the rank of Private First Class long before the time of my being honorably discharged. In the armored infantry, the squad leaders merited the rank of Staff Sergeant. Assistant squad leaders held the rank of Sergeant. However, if one was a member of the first rifle squad, the squad leader was a Staff Sergeant, but the assistant squad leader carried the rank of P.F.C.

Ironically, the squad's half-track driver held the rank of T/5, and as a result earned more money than a first rifle squad assistant squad leader. Who dreamed up this arrangement is anyone's guess, but it made absolutely no sense whatever. Our assistant squad leader lost his life on January 16, 1945 as a P.F.C. Had he been in another rifle squad other than the first, he would have died as a sergeant, a significantly higher pay grade.

How did all of this impact me? Let me tell you. During the fighting in Europe, our half-track driver, a T/5, was captured and never returned to the unit. I became the driver, but I did it without any promotion to T/5. I stayed a P.F.C. Later, I became the assistant squad leader.

When our squad leader was promoted to platoon sergeant, I was made the squad leader, but never received a promotion from P.F.C. because we received a replacement from an engineer outfit who held the rank of staff sergeant. Our table of organization, I was told, only allowed a specific number of staff sergeants, so once again I did the job of squad leader without any advancement of rank or monetary remuneration.

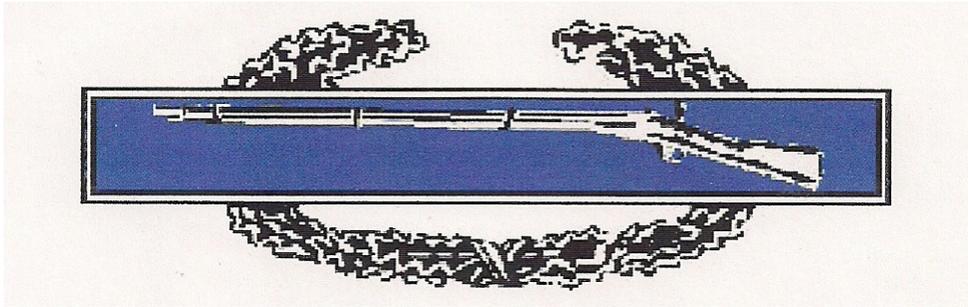
Much of this information would be explained away by the army term of "TOUGH FECES," a sanitized translation! Was I the only one who received the renowned wristwatch, the highly prized Gruen? Certainly not! Even after all of this time, I believe that I was denied the proper promotions accompanied by the increase in monthly pay, but I am thankful to the good Lord in Heaven that I came through the hostilities with merely a miniscule knee nick from the Speyer engagement. I truly am one of the lucky ones.

It most assuredly wasn't at all easy to find an advocate while the fighting was taking place because it was far more imperative to save one's posterior. To be entirely fair and balanced a la Bill O'Reilly, 2nd Lt. Frank Flaugh, a battlefield commission recipient, tried to intercede on my behalf on several occasions, but Frank didn't have a great deal of clout with the decision makers. Nobody ever said that life was fair. The same could very well have been said of the Division's Table of Organization and the manner in which it was administered.

LIST OF CHAPTERS, PLACES, DATES AND ACTIVITIES

Chapter	Place	Date	Activity
1.	Herrlisheim, Alsace	Jan. 7, 8, 1945	Combat
2.	Colmar	Feb. 1945	Humor
3.	Germany?	Spring 1945	Combat
4.	Schlossberg	June 1945	Occupation, humor
5.	Camp Barkeley, TX	Dec. 1943	Training, humor
6.	Alsace, Lac Deuze	Feb. 1944	Resting, humor
7.	Dennison, Ohio	1943	Home front
8.	Speyer, Germany	Mar. 23, 1944	Combat
9.	Dillingen, Germany	Mid-May 1945	Barracks life
10.	Dillingen, Germany	June 1945	Fraternization
11.	East of Worms	Mar 28, April 1945	Combat
12.	France	Nov.? 1944	Behind lines
13.	Herrlisheim, Alsace	Jan. 1945	Combat, Humor
14.	Western Germany	March/Apr 1945	Combat, Occupation
15.	Speyer	Mar. 24 1945	Combat lull
16.	Camp Barkeley, TX	Summer? 1944	Training, humor
17.	Atlantic City	1968	Reunion
18.	Camp Barkeley, TX	1943 or 1944	Training
19.	HMS Empress	Sept. 1944	Atlantic Voyage
20.	Dieuze, Lorraine	Feb. 1944	Combat, resting
21.	Near Herrlisheim	Jan. 1945	Combat
22.	Schlossberg/Bopfingen	May/June 1945	Fraternization
23.	Perhaps Schlossberg	July/August 1945	Occupation
24.	Alsace	Feb./March 1945	Combat accident
25.	East of Rhine R.	Late March, 1945	Combat
26.	Sn. Germany	Summer, 1945	Occupation

27.	Camp Barkeley, TX	1943 or 1944	Training
28.	France (at port)	Fall of 1944	Accident, supply transport
29.	Camp Campbell, KY	Early 1943	Barracks shooting incident
30.	Camp Campbell, KY	1943 (and 1944?)	Training
31.	Camp Campbell, KY	1943 (and 1944?)	Training
32.	494th in Sn Germany	Summer, 1945	Barrack shooting incident
33.	494th Camp Campbell	Dec. 1942-Jan. 1943	KP Humor
34.	494th Camp Campbell	Dec. 1942	Guard duty, humor
35.	Bopfingen, Germany	July 1945	Occupation, fraternization
36.	Bopfingen, Germany	June 1945	Occupation, hunger
37.	Dillingen to Alps	June 1945	Bavarian and Alpine Tour
38.	Europe	1944-1945	K Rations Menu
39.	Alsace & Herrlisheim,	Dec. 44, Jan. 1945	Killed and wounded
“ “	Speyer, Germany	March 23, 1945	Killed and wounded
40.	Camp Barkeley	1943	Transfer to 56th AIB
41.	Heidenheim	May 1945	Jack Benny USO show
42.	Schlossberg/ Bopfingen	Early June 1945	Occupation, barracks
43.	Nancy, France	Feb. 1945	USO show
44.	Yardville, N.J.	2009?	Eulogy, Ted Blostein
45.	Tennessee	1943	Maneuvers
46.	Yardville, N.J.	2011?	K.I.A. Statistics
47.	Schlossber/ Bopfingen	June 1945	Occupation, humor
48.	Camp Campbell, KY	1943	Maneuvers, accident
49.	Dillingen, Germany	May 1945	Almost an accident
50.	Uttwiller, France	Dec. 1944	Combat
51.	Camp Campbell, KY	Early 1944	Training exercise
52.	France and Germany	1944-1945	Promotion not forthcoming



More Reminiscences of The Big One by A. Edward Pierce

This book is dedicated to my best army friend T/5 Harold K. Wells and to my late loving wife Rita, my late daughter Margaret Elizabeth (Peggy), and my daughter and guiding star Joann. Each was and is an important part of my life and has assuredly made me a better person.

Time continues to march on for all of us old veterans. It is not so strange that the lyrics to the old song "My Buddy" become more meaningful as the days go by.

In many, many ways we are members of the greatest generation.

*"...My buddy, my buddy, Your
buddy misses you..."*

"My Buddy "

by Henry Burr (1922)

ABOUT the AUTHOR

My name is A. Edward Pierce. I entered the United States Army on October 12, 1942 at Fort Dix, NJ. After a few days, I was shipped to Camp Campbell, KY and became a member of Headquarters Battery of the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion of the 12th Armored Division. After the Tennessee Maneuvers and a brief time at Camp Barkeley, TX, I was transferred to A Company of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion where I became a member of the first rifle squad of the second platoon.

I sailed with the division to Europe on the Empress of Australia. I served in combat as a rifleman with Company A of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion. After the hostilities, I remained with the 12th Armored Division until its deactivation. I was transferred to the 2nd Armored Division for the journey back to the United States. I was honorably discharged at Fort Dix on February 7, 1946.

I am a lifetime member of the 12th Armored Division Association and I have served as Unit Representative of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion from June 2010 until the present date. I am also beginning my ninth year as Treasurer of the Association. In 2009, I was honored by the Association by being named "Mr. Hellcat" for the year, and in 2011, I was honored by receiving the Association's highest award when I was named "Distinguished Member" for the year. On May 8, 2012, I received an Honorary Master in Military Arts Degree from Cumberland University for participation in the Tennessee Maneuvers in 1943 with the 12th Armored Division. Again in 2013, the Association honored me by awarding me the title of "Mr. Hellcat." I am a recipient of France's highest military award, the French Legion of Honor.

The vignettes in this book took place both in the United States and in Europe.

The writings were and are a labor of love. I confess that I served with some of the finest individuals that God ever placed on this earth and I considered each of them as a friend. They all deserve a place in Heaven.

A. Edward Pierce October 15, 2014



Ed Pierce

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Chapter 1: Exodus from the 12th to the 2nd Armored Division

Upon the deactivation of the 12th Armored Division, good friend, David Kronick [A] and I were among the members of the Division transferred to the Second Armored Division for occupation duties and the subsequent journey homeward. David and I were transferred to Headquarters Company of the 41st Armored Infantry Regiment that was billeted in a Castle Estate owned by a Baron and Baroness and located in Sterbfritz, Germany. It was located in the vicinity of Frankfurt, Germany. Actually, we were situated between the cities of Frankfurt and Fulda. Our First Sergeant was a Californian whose last name was Racies and he was the real power behind the scenes of Headquarters Company. The 41st had been awarded the Presidential Unit Citation and the Belgian Fourregere which we were able to wear as newly assigned members of the unit.

David and I had some very nice visits to Frankfurt while we were members of the Second Armored Division and we also had a wonderful five or seven day pass to Brussels, Belgium. While we were in Brussels, Sir Winston Churchill was visiting there, too.

Do any of you remember our canteen cups? Well, the originals were made of honest-to-goodness aluminum while the later issue was made of an inferior alloy of some sort. The aluminum ones would not rust whereas the other type would and did. Let me preface this by saying that we had not used our mess kits or canteen cups in many, many months. Keep in mind, the war in Europe ended officially on May 8 and this is now the month of October. Well, on one Saturday morning those of us with passes to Frankfurt were preparing to board our six by six trucks. Just as the convoy was about to depart, First Sergeant Racies decided to call for a mess kit and canteen cup inspection. Needless to say, I was giggered for a rusty canteen cup. No trip to Frankfurt for me unless I could produce a rust-free canteen cup to Sergeant Racies. My friend Dave fortunately for me had one of the old aluminum ones, so after a brief time, I borrowed Dave's cup and took it to Sergeant Racies. I am certain that he knew he was being snookered, but he okayed my pass to Frankfurt, so off Dave and I went to the big city and had an exceedingly great visit.

While with the Second Armored, I went by motor convoy to Berlin allegedly to see the 2nd's football team play the team of the 82nd Airborne Division, but this is a story for another time.

Before closing and to clear up any pipe dreams, the 2nd Armored Division was the division that met up with the Russians at the Elbe River in the vicinity of Magdeburg, and they resent any member of the 12th attempting to take credit for this singular feat. That's it. I am done for this time.

Chapter 2: Berlin, the Divided City

The time is November 1945; the location is Sterbfritz, Germany where Headquarters Company of the 41st Armored Infantry Regiment of the 2nd Armored Division is billeted in a beautiful, picturesque Castle complex. The Second Armored Division of which I am now a member has a football game scheduled with the 82nd Airborne Division at a converted soccer stadium in Berlin, Germany. A truck convoy of the 2nd Armored members is scheduled to make the trip to Berlin to support our team. It must be borne in mind that the Second Armored Division occupied Berlin before being relieved by the 82nd Airborne Division.

Carl Jenkins from Tampa, Florida and I signed up to be members of those going on the trip. Our destination in Berlin was Templehof Airdrome where we were to be billeted during our brief visit to Berlin.

The truck ride from Sterbfritz to Berlin was rather uneventful, but I do remember our convoy having been stopped at a Russian checkpoint some miles before actually entering Berlin and arriving at Templehof.



Templehof Airdrome circa 1945

Upon arrival at the Airdrome, we were assigned a cot for our night's sleeping comfort. Shortly thereafter, we were on our own. Rather than attending the football game, Carl and I opted to see the sights of Berlin. The city's subway system was still intact, but because of the way the city was divided as a result of earlier agreements by the British, French, Russians and the United

States, it was not possible for an American Serviceman to exit the subway in the Russian Sector and vice versa. There were certain things that Carl and I wanted to see that were situated in the Russian Sector, but were unable to do so. We did, however, ride the subway.

Subsequently, Carl and I met two young ladies who were gracious enough to show us around the city. We spent the evening with them until it was time to return to Templehof for a good night's sleep before our return trip in the morning to Sterbfritz.

The morning ride from Berlin to our home base was likewise uneventful. Carl and I saw no football game, but we saw much of Berlin and met some rather nice people in our very short stay in the divided city. Both of us were glad we had signed on for the trip.

Chapter 3: By the Hair on my Chinny-Chin-Chin

This is a very brief story about the very early days in my military life. The time was November 1942. The place was Camp Campbell, Kentucky and at the time I was a proud member of Headquarters Battery of the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion of the 12th Armored Division. I was just twenty years of age and had been a member of the military only since October 12.

It might be wise at this time to say that I had light blond hair and my skin was described as fair. Assigned to our battery was a likeable Second Lieutenant named Joseph A. Zanetta from upstate New York. Lt. Zanetta, I believe, attended Officers Candidate School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where many of our Field Artillery Officers were trained.

Now that the background material is out of the way, permit me to relate the story. On a somewhat brisk November morning, Lt. Zanetta was inspecting the men of headquarters battery as we were lined up in formation. Down each row he went along with First Sergeant Thompson, a native Kentuckian, eyeing the men intently. When he came to my location, he stopped, looked me directly in the eyes and said, "Pierce, when is the last time you shaved?" Remaining at rigid attention, I replied, "Sir, I have never shaved in my life." The Lieutenant then asked, "Weren't you issued a razor and blades?" I answered, "Yes sir." With that he said, "Well, you'd better start using them!" He then walked on as did Sgt. Thompson.

Immediately after the episode, I ferreted out the razor and supplies and commenced my first experience at shaving. I have been doing so ever since. Now at age ninety after having this flashback, I've been pondering just how many razors, blades and Norelco Electric Razors I have dealt with and all because of Lt. Joseph Zanetta's earlier admonition.

Lt. Zanetta was a great officer and very well respected by the men who served with him. Despite being one of his admirers, I put the blame on him every time I experience a razor nick.

Sorry, Joe.

Chapter 4: The Long Voyage Home II

There was a 1940 film titled “The Long Voyage Home” that starred John Wayne. I was part of a sequel titled “The Long Voyage Home II” while a member of Headquarter Company of the 41st Armored Infantry Regiment of the Second Armored Division. This is a tongue-in-cheek title that has to do with the lengthy time it took to get us from Sterbfritz, Germany by way of Marseilles, France to the good old U.S.A.

We left Sterbfritz by truck convoy for Marseilles in ample time that would have insured our being home before Christmas 1945. As bad luck would have it, we spent Christmas and the New Year of 1946 in a very large military camp just outside the city of Marseilles. We were permitted to visit Marseille daily from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. At any other time, the city was off limits. It was a very dangerous port city, much of which was off limits even at the hours we were permitted to be there.

Prior to our arrival, most of the ships carrying troops home were sailing into Marseilles. Because of a clamor about this situation being raised by the troops sent to Le Havre for redeployment, a large number of the ships suddenly were rerouted to that port. This resulted in our being in Marseilles for a far longer a period of time than originally contemplated. Many of us collectively sang “I’m Waiting for Ships That Never Come In.”

Finally on or about January 20, a group of us boarded the M.I.T. Victory, a brand new Victory ship, for an eleven day north Atlantic crossing. We sailed on the Mediterranean Sea and through the Strait of Gibraltar out into the Atlantic Ocean. While a couple of the days were exceedingly rough, we were most assuredly headed in the right direction. On this crossing, we had three rather good meals each day along with three-high bunks for sleeping. This can be contrasted to the two poor quality meals a day that we received on the Empress of Australia when we were being transported to Europe. Add this to the fact that many of us slept on the deck of the Empress rather than utilizing the hammocks that were provided.



The M. I. T. Victory

On arrival in the United States, we sailed into New York Harbor past the Statue of Liberty and docked at a pier in Brooklyn. From there, we were transported by ferry boat to New Jersey where we boarded trains to Camp Kilmer. Camp Kilmer was situated in New Brunswick, NJ. After a two-day stay at Camp Kilmer, the men were dispatched to Camps close to their homes. I was shipped to Fort Dix, NJ for processing and ultimate separation from military service. I was honorably discharged at Fort Dix, on February 7, 1946. Thus, my long voyage home was ended.

Chapter 6: Lieutenant Snead, Yes, Indeed

Even in war time and in the heat of battle, humorous things often do happen and in many respects such occurrences help one retain his sanity. The ability to smile and even chuckle at times tended to boost morale. That having been said, I remember an instance involving Lt. Kenneth C. Snead and me that I thought humorous because the outcome did not result in any of us being wounded, captured or killed. I might add that my good friend, Floyd C. Van Derhoef who was a Captain at the time, although not present when this took place, is aware of this occurrence.

The time was late March 1945, the place was somewhere in Germany, and the cast of characters was those occupying half-track number A-10, the first rifle squad of the second platoon of A Company of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion and Lt. Snead. It was a moonlit night at which time we were driving in convoy without headlights on. Lt. Snead was standing in the front of the vehicle as I was driving. We were moving at a relative good pace when suddenly the convoy came to a halt. I applied the brakes and brought the vehicle to a smooth stop. We were stopped for a considerable period of time when Lt. Snead said to me, "Pierce, you've been driving for quite some time. Put your head down on the steering wheel and take a snooze. When the convoy begins to move, I will tap you on your steel helmet." I followed Lt. Snead's order to the letter and fell sound asleep. What seemed a very long time later, I felt a rapid tapping on my steel helmet, I awakened, looked ahead and there was no vehicle to be seen. I said to Lt. Snead, "Where did the rest of the convoy get to? When did they leave?" Lt. Snead on occasion and this was one of them, was known to stutter or stammer. He answered me by saying, "How the hell do I know, I fell asleep too!"

With that I put the half-track in gear, took off as fast as the vehicle would go, and attempted to catch up with the portion of the convoy that was somewhere ahead of us. Luckily, within one-half or three quarters of a mile ahead, the convoy was halted again. We linked up with them without any difficulty. Lt. Snead and I both heaved great sighs of relief.

This has nothing whatever to do with the just related narrative, but rumors circulated throughout "A" Company that Lt. Kenneth C. Snead was related to 'Slammin' Sammy Snead, the golfing legend. Whether this information was authentic or just another of the many latrine rumors that circulated from time to time, I do not have the answer. I do know that Lt. Snead was a good officer and that he had the respect of his men, and that was far more important to all of us. I last saw Lt. Snead at a battalion party held in Gerstetten, Germany just prior to my being transferred to the Second Armored Division.

Chapter 6: Our Battlefield Angels

I have heard it said that the Garand Rifle is the infantryman's best friend, and I have no qualms with that statement, but the infantryman had another loyal and wonderful friend as well. It was the combat medic. How many lives they saved by their heroism and on the spot medical procedures is unknown even to this day.

From my own personal experience at the Speyer, Germany engagement, I know full well that Lt. Frank H. Deeds and Sergeant Charles Trusty would never have survived their wounds were it not for Pete, the medic, and his counterparts. Both would have undoubtedly bled to death or died as the result of going into shock.

Our army surgeons also did remarkable work, but had it not been for the combat medics, our surgeons would have had far less seriously wounded but still alive servicemen on which to perform their miracles.

I very well remember talking with our medic, Pete, one afternoon after we had been engaged in a brief fire fight in which one of the men of another squad lost his life. Pete said to me, "He really didn't have to die. His wound was really superficial. The bullet entered one side of his leg, missed the bone entirely, and exited the other side. Instead of lying down and using his morphine syrette, he got up, ran about 25 feet, and fell over dead. He simply went into shock and died as a result."

Most all of us old combat infantrymen can tell you that our combat medics were outstanding and that many, many more lives would have been lost had it not been for the dedication, excellent training, and valor of our medics. God bless them all. They were our battlefield angels.

Chapter 7: A Too Brief Encounter

The year is 1945, the place is somewhere in Germany, and the Mystery Division, is making its mad dash toward the Rhine River and Ludwigshafen. We are in a lengthy motor convoy, but I am not at this time behind the wheel of our halftrack. Rather I am seated among the other members of the first rifle squad of the second platoon and my position is on the right-hand side of the vehicle.

Prior to our departure, we had just received a rifleman from the replacement center. He introduced himself and in the conversation, he mentioned that he was from Philadelphia, PA. Being from just across the river in Camden, NJ and having been born and raised in Chester, PA, his comment piqued my interest. I said to him, "Great to have you with us. I am from Camden. I am going to doze off now, but I'll talk more with you in the morning." He said, "Okay." That was the end of our conversation.

What seemed like a very short time later, the convoy stopped abruptly and I was aroused out of my abbreviated slumber. It seems some enemy resistance was encountered, so we were ordered to dismount and take care of the situation. As we exited the rear door of our halftrack, I remember the new man going to the left with some of our other members. I exited and went to the right with some other members of the squad. There was considerable rifle and machine gun fire for a rather brief period. The enemy scattered leaving a few of their dead and wounded behind. I returned to our halftrack as did the others who exited to the right. When the men who exited to the left returned, our new replacement was not among them. When I inquired about him, I was told that he was badly hit with rifle fire and probably had died. I felt really bad about the situation and I knew then that we'd not be able to have our talk in the morning.

No doubt, the individual was wounded. Just how seriously, I shall never know. I do know, however, that he was not to the best of my knowledge killed in action, because our killed in action records for the 56th A.I.B. do not show anyone, as far as I have been able to determine, from Philadelphia, PA. I do hope that he survived his wounds, was able to return home, got his life in order, and was a very productive member of society. He seemed like a very likeable young man in our very brief encounter, so the least that I can do is to wish him the very, very best.

War, as we all know is a dirty, dirty business, but I suppose someone has got to do it.

Chapter 8: The Shrinking of the Shrink

After having had a very lucid flashback to my pre-induction physical exam that was given at the Induction Center on Wright Avenue in Camden, NJ, I'd like to relate this story.

The series of events took place on October 12, 1942 at about mid-morning. After having undergone a series of physical check-ups, it became my time to be interviewed by the psychiatrist on duty. He welcomed me by saying "Sit down, Amos. How are you feeling today?" I responded by saying that I felt well but a bit apprehensive. He then said to me, "Do you get very much?" I asked him while looking him directly in the eyes, "Get much of what?" He said, "Oh, you know." Where upon I answered, "Not enough to share with anyone else." He then said, "Amos, do you like boys or girls best?" I said, "Boys socially, girls sexually." With that he said, "Get the hell out of here. You are too normal."

Following the frivolous exchange of words with the Head Doctor, I was accepted for General Military Service and sworn into the United States Army.

In all honesty, before this instance, I never saw a psychiatrist and I have never to my knowledge had any need to see one since that time; although, I am certain that there are those who know me who would disagree with my assessment.

Chapter 9: John W. Thompson, a Remarkable First Sergeant

The brain is a very unique part of the body. It can hide events from an individual for long periods of time only to return them to one's memory at some future point in time. The condition is frequently caused by trauma and in rare cases it is selected memory on the individual's part. Of late, I frequently have these flashbacks of my time in the military and one I had recently concerned Headquarters Battery of the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion and more particularly one, John W. Thompson, our First Sergeant, a native of Morganfield, KY.

Let me relate the incident that recently came to mind. It would have been late January or very early February of 1943, when I was given an emergency furlough from Camp Campbell because of a death in the family. I remember going to Hopkinsville, KY to catch the train homeward. My train ride took me through Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and finally terminated in Philadelphia. I was home in ample time for the viewing and the funeral service with a few days to spare.

On my return to Camp Campbell, I ascertained that my canteen cup, canteen and mess kit were missing, so as a very green young soldier, I went to our Orderly Room to speak with First Sergeant Thompson. Permit me to digress from the story briefly to tell you some things about Sergeant Thompson. John was one of the finest First Sergeants in the 12th or in my opinion, in the entire army. His problem solving ability was uncanny. He was astute and observant and rarely missed anything that was happening, particularly in Headquarters Battery or to the men under his care. Now back to the story. Upon seeing Sergeant Thompson, I said, "Sarge, I am just back from my emergency furlough and the first thing that I observed is that my canteen and mess items are missing. John looked me straight in the eyes and asked, "Pierce, what do you think happened to them?" Being as honest and sincere as I was able, I replied, "Sarge, I believe they were stolen." He again looked me in the eyes and said, "Get 'em back the same way!"

Other little and other not so little things that I remember from my days with Headquarters Battery of the 494th are as follows:

1. The accidental drowning death of Virgil Hammond.
2. The accident with an illegally procured Duck when Lester Gibbons and a few others decided to go on a fishing and boating expedition. One of the individuals was injured so badly that he required hospitalization. The proper penalty was meted out to all concerned.
3. A former Sergeant who was found guilty of being AWOL being shot for attempting to escape from his prison guard. This occurred inside the barracks.

4. A new recruit who was obviously homesick and depressed attempting to commit suicide in the neighboring Post Exchange bathroom by slashing his wrists and ingesting the contents of a bottle of Iodine. On recovery, he was immediately given a Medical Discharge.

Then there was the time at the Owensboro, Kentucky railroad station when Monthy A. Lis, two young ladies and I were saying our goodbyes for the weekend. I planted a couple of my finest kisses on one of the young ladies before boarding the train. Little did I know that Sergeant Thompson was watching from the train car window. He had a few choice things to say to me when I boarded the train, all of which he said in his own inimitable manner.

There are lots of others but the main thrust of this story is to get across what a fine First Sergeant the late John W. Thompson was. I feel certain that if asked, Alfred R. Tyler, a battlefield commissioned officer and former Staff Sergeant James H. Sheridan will echo my sentiments.

Chapter 10: The Fish and Chip Episode

There was an earlier short story about our trip across the Atlantic Ocean via the Empress of Australia. The earlier story did not tell about our being diverted from the port of Le Havre to Liverpool. Our awaiting military vehicles in Le Havre had been commandeered by the Fourth Armored Division to replace many of their own lost in combat.

On our arrival and debarkation at Liverpool, "A" Company of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion was marched to an awaiting train and we were transferred to Hungerford Air Force Base for a stay of two or three days' duration. During our brief stay there, we were billeted in pyramidal tents.

After the short stay at Hungerford where I saw my first jet propelled fighter plane, we boarded a train for Tidworth, England. At Tidworth, we were again housed in a large pyramidal tent complex. Tidworth is situated on the Salisbury plain and lies between Salisbury and Andover.

While in Tidworth, Troy B. Criss of the first rifle squad, Harold K. Wells of Service Company and I discussed going to either Salisbury or Andover for one of those famous English Fish and Chips dinners. As it turned out, on our first free time, the three of us took a double-decker bus to Salisbury where we entered a very nice but quaint English restaurant. Troy and Harold ordered a typical fish and chips dinner whereas I opted for a sausage and chips dinner. When the meal was delivered to our table, we each dug in as though we had been suffering from starvation. Very early into the meal, Troy began to choke and at first, Harold and I began to laugh because we thought Troy was joking. Soon his color changed and he took on a purplish hue where upon Harold arose from his seat and gave Troy a hard punch just below his shoulder blades. The result was that Troy egested a rather large fish bone. Following the episode, Troy said, "I didn't realize the fish had bones in it. I thought they all had been removed." For the balance of the meal, I can assure you that both Troy and Harold were on the lookout for fish bones. On the contrary, my sausage was tasty and completely bone free. The three of us agreed that the meal had been a good one, but it certainly was not without a frightening few minutes.

While still in Tidworth, we were also given overnight passes to London, but I was unable to make my trip to London with any of my close buddies. On my return from my London trip, the following morning I was hospitalized due to a high fever and chills caused by acute tonsillitis, but that is a story for another time.

After our few weeks stay in Tidworth, we were off to Southampton for our trip across the English Channel to Le Havre.

Chapter 11: A Friend in Need

Looking back on it, my best guess is that this all took place in the early part of the year 1944 at Camp Barkeley, Texas. At the time, we were living in those beautiful plywood, one-story barracks on the military reservation. In the same building that housed the first rifle squad of the second platoon of "A" Company of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion, were members of our 60 mm. mortar squad. One of the mortar squad members was named Ernest J. Munoz from New York City, New York. Ernie bunked at the far end of the barracks.

In our barracks as well was Charles W. Burns who hailed from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in the neighborhood of 23rd and Wharton in the southern part of the City of Brotherly Love.

While not at all unfriendly, it never appeared to me that Ernie and Charlie were very close friends. This is all introductory material that leads in to the gist of the narrative.

As additional background material, Charles W. Burns was an early inductee having been drafted prior to Pearl Harbor and our entry into the war with Japan and Germany. His original term was to have been for a year and one day's duration; however, once war was declared this was changed to the duration and six months. This change never sat well with Charlie and it preyed constantly on his mind. In addition, and this is only conjecture on my part, I never felt that Charlie relished the thought of serving in combat situations. I know that Charlie was married, but whether there were any children involved, I just don't know.

When it became quite apparent that we would soon be preparing to serve overseas in either the Pacific or European theaters of operation, Charlie began to conjure up various methods to secure his release from the military service. He could not avail himself of reasons of health because he was hale as a horse. Somewhere along the line, the idea came to Charlie to feign horrific nightmares, sleep walking and various other violent tendencies. Each waking hour in any spare time, he worked on fine tuning his nefarious plan. It became abundantly clear to him that in order to act out his scheme dramatically and for full effect, he needed an accomplice. Who could have been a better one than the proverbial barracks clown, Ernie Munoz? It would be a serious role for Ernie, but Charlie knew that Ernie would play it in the Barrymore style. The two with their heads together constructed a very simple but thoroughly workable scenario.

The plot scheduled for some hours after bed check called for Charlie to have another nightmare, walk in his sleep with a machete in hand to Ernie's bunk, shouting "C. W. rides again" while all the time swinging the machete toward Ernie's head. Ernie would then feign awakening to this frightening scene, jump from his bunk, begin running from Charlie while at the same time screaming, "My God, someone help me. He's trying to kill me!"

A few nights later the plan was executed to perfection, so much so when the authorities heard of it and were given eye witness descriptions and depositions, it wasn't many days before Charles W. Burns was separated from the service.

Ernest J. Munoz, on the other hand, shipped to Europe with the rest of us when it became time for our departure. Very little was ever said about the prize winning performances and there were just a few of us who were privy to what actually had taken place. Nothing further was ever heard from Charlie. Perhaps that was a good thing.

Please know that before releasing this story that I made absolutely certain that the statute of limitations had taken effect and that both men who were involved are no longer living.

Chapter 12: I Too Received a “Dear John” Letter

To the best of my recollection, it occurred sometime in August of 1945 while “A” Company of the 56th was billeted in Gerstetten, Germany. My friend and fellow Bopfingen devotee, Staff Sergeant Edgel Stambaugh and I just returned from an especially nice weekend visit to Bopfingen where we had spent time with persons with whom we had become particularly close during our stay in the area.

On my arrival at our quarters, David Kronick gave me the mail that he had collected for me while I was away. Among the letters was one containing familiar penmanship, but with a strange name and return address. When I opened the envelope, I found that it was from the young lady that had vowed to be true to me and wait for me until the war was ended and I was able to come home to her.

Suffice to say, when I learned from the letter’s content that she had married a sailor who had been stationed at the Philadelphia Navy Yard and whose home was in upstate New York, after the initial shock wore off, I burst into uncontrollable laughter. When I related the information to Dave and some of the others that I believe included Troy Criss, they asked how I could laugh about something of that importance. I explained to them that for a few months my conscience was full of guilt because of the relationship with the young lady from Bopfingen with whom I was most assuredly smitten. Now at last I was free of the guilt because the one that I felt I was betraying has, in essence, betrayed me! Isn’t it remarkable just how problems have a way of solving themselves? Now if someone would have just abolished the “no fraternization” policy in Germany, all would have been right with the world!

I tossed the letter aside and began reading others that I had received. Shortly thereafter, I wrote my ex-paramour a letter of congratulations and thanked her for being so candid with me.

The sordid end of the tale is that within less than a year after their marriage, with his wife being with child, he began to cheat with a local girl that he once dated. This girl, likewise, became pregnant with his child, despite being unmarried. It was a real kettle of dead and decaying fish, and it reeked to high heaven. A rather speedy divorce ensued, and I believe he subsequently married the other young lady.

I’ve been told there is an old saying that in part states when one lies down with dogs one sometimes get fleas. In my humble opinion, there were enough fleas for everybody and I thank the Lord that I was not part of the infestation.

Sometimes the “Dear John” emerges the winner. I know full well that I did.

Chapter 13: No Meat for Me

Joseph E. Halfmann, one of the former A.S.T.P. members who joined "A" Company, related this story to me about another A.S.T.P. classmate who also joined the 56th, but with what Company I am not at all certain after all of the intervening years. Again this story came to me second handed, but I never found any reason to doubt the word of Joe because he was always very upfront with everyone, particularly his fellow bridge players. Since the story was merely related to me, I will not use the principal's name. Rather, I will just use his initials which are E. L. B. It seems that this person was quite brilliant with an exceedingly high I.Q. and a very extensive vocabulary.

E. L. B. was quite happy while in A.S.T.P. because academia was far more his element than being a member of an armored infantry company, particularly one that was nearing the time for shipment overseas into prospective combat situations. I believe that while E.L. B. was attending A.S.T.P. classes that he ate everything and anything, but when becoming a member of an infantry company of the 56th A.I.B., he opted suddenly to become a vegetarian. This was all part of his nefarious scheme to extricate himself from membership in the armored infantry or any part of the armed forces.

E.L.B.'s plan did not work that well so long as we were in camp and eating our regular menus in the mess hall because we always had a variety of vegetables and one did not have to eat meat if they chose not to, but his plan worked exceedingly well as we began to spend more and more of our time in the field simulating battlefield conditions. Performing field training activities for days on end required our eating K-rations entirely for extended periods of time. If you recall, the breakfast ration consisted of chopped ham and eggs; the lunch ration was made up of a solid wedge of cheese, but it too contained flecks of meat; and the dinner ration was corned pork loaf; all great items just tailored for one feigning to be a vegetarian. To make the charade all the more real, E. L. B. refused to eat any of the K-rations allegedly because of their meat content. He did lose appreciable weight, and after a sufficient period of time, he collapsed and was ultimately hospitalized.

As I understand it from Joe Halfmann's account, after E. L. B.'s hospitalization and meeting with a battery of military physicians, he was given a full set of civilian clothes and supplied with his Medical Discharge.

Whether E. L. B. remained a vegetarian enroute to his home or if he had a filet mignon dinner in the Pullman Dining Car, I shall never, never know. I suppose that a person has to do what he has to do, but I have little or no respect whatsoever for a person of that ilk. He assuredly avoided having to dodge the bullets in combat, but if he possessed any conscience whatever, pangs of guilt must have frequently haunted him in the very quiet hours.

To sum up the entire set of circumstances, I am very pleased that E. L. B. was not a member of our rifle squad. Surely, the army lost an individual, but the 56th lucked out in the long run! Someone that spineless, we certainly didn't want or need.

Chapter 14: The Mop Wielder Got Wrung Out

The place is Camp Barkeley, Texas, and the time is June 1944. It is just after evening chow when my very close friend Harold K. Wells from Service Company came over to my barracks and suggested that we go into Abilene for the evening. Since I had no other assignment or anything better to do, I readily agreed. Soon thereafter, Harold and I were on a bus enroute to Abilene.

While we were gone, word was passed along that in the morning there would be a barracks inspection performed by the Commanding General and his staff, so the individuals still in camp began performing the chores necessary to get each barracks in tip-top condition for the next morning's important inspection. That meant mopping the floors, cleaning and dusting, and all of the other elements that precede a barracks inspection, particularly one conducted by the Commanding General.

After our evening in town, Harold and I returned to camp and more particularly, our barracks area. I noticed as we approached my barracks that all of the lights were on and all of the single beds were outside of the barracks. This should have been a tip off for me. I said "goodnight" to Harold and he headed off in the direction of Service Company. Suddenly, I noticed all of the lights in my barracks go out. That should have been another tip off. As I opened the barracks door and started to enter, something very wet with dirty water hit my face and chest with a resounding swish. With that all of the lights came on, and there was John Toomey, a member of our squad and our halftrack driver, standing before me holding a wet mop in a port arms position. I was so disappointed that a member of my own squad would hit me like that and soil my khaki uniform that I just plain and simply lost it! Although all of the single beds were outside the barracks, our wooden foot lockers lined the floor. In my rage, I grabbed the mop which John held on to quite tightly. I wrestled John to the wet floor knocking his head and neck against one of the foot lockers. I then proceeded to put my knee on his neck and exert pressure. John's eyes bulged out, he gasped for breath, and I could have very easily broken his neck because of the way he was positioned. It was then that I gained my composure and removed myself from him. While all of this was happening, I was verbally telling John that he had better never ever do anything like that to me again. He got the message, and some of the others got it as well.

John made a very poor decision. I reacted badly, but decisively, and the whole incident was over rather quickly. There were no repercussions or hard feelings between us. We had been friends before the altercation and we remained friends; but we undoubtedly knew, understood, and respected one another more than prior to the incident.

The next morning came. The barracks inspection insofar as we were concerned went off without a hitch, and John Toomey and I went on with life in the army as members of the first rifle squad of the second platoon of "A" Company of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion.

Chapter 15: A Quick Glance Backwards

In my earlier book “Reminiscences of the Big One”, there were two stories in which I had planned to put pictures, but for some unknown reason I neglected to do so. One story was titled “The R. & R. Pass to Nancy.” In it I spoke of a middle-aged Frenchman at the U.S.O facility in Nancy who was an extremely skilled sketch artist. He made charcoal sketches of the American soldiers entirely free of charge. Below is a sketch he did of me back in late January or early February 1945.



In another story titled “The P-47 Fiasco,” I had planned for a picture of a vintage P-47 airplane. That, too, fell by the wayside. The omitted photo of the P-47 is shown below.



World War II Vintage P47 Thunderbolt

It is said that to err is human. I know that in my case that axiom is all too true.

Chapter 16: A Farewell From All Of Us, Frank

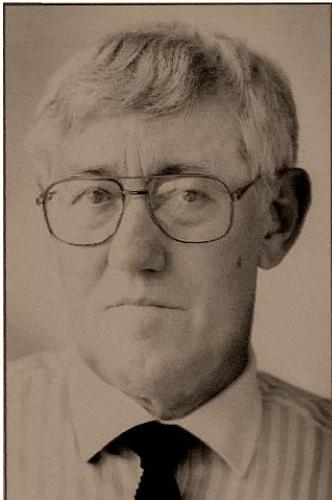
The 12th Armored Division lost a stalwart upon the passing on July 11, 2011 of Frank W. Barndollar, Editor Emeritus of the "Hellcat News" and past Unit Representative for the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion. Frank was 87 years of age and he resided in Keene, NH. He was a true "Live Free or Die" individual and to say that he was well respected and well-liked would be an under-statement.

On his discharge from the service as a corporal in A Company of the 56th, Frank continued his college education after which he began his newspaper career with Foster's Daily Democrat in Dover, NH in 1950. Frank joined The Sentinel in 1959 and two years later he was appointed Managing Editor. He retired from The Sentinel in July of 1989. In essence, Frank had a 39 year career in print journalism. It is not surprising with all of his experience that he made such a great Editor of this publication.

In his final years, Frank was stricken with Alzheimer's disease, but he was a true soldier to the very end.

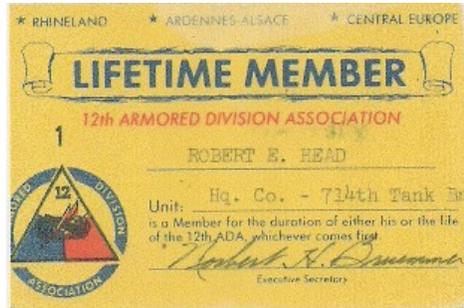
Frank was predeceased by his loving wife, Rita, and by a daughter, Heidi. He is survived by daughters, Linda and Sherry, and a son, Steve.

We all feel the loss of Frank and extend our most sincere condolences to the members of his family. Truly, another seat in our halftrack is left vacant with Frank's passing.



Chapter 17: The 12th A.D.A. Lost a Great One

When Robert Edward Head passed away on March 24, 2012, the 12th Armored Division Association lost a great one. Bob, as he preferred to be called, was born on April 28, 1924. He was the association's president in 1983 and he also served the association as its Executive Secretary and Editor of the "Hellcat News." Bob was the first Lifetime Member of the association as the pictured dues card show.



Bob was number one in many other ways as well. He was a very proud, dedicated member of the association, but he was plagued with major health problems in recent years that kept him from active participation in an organization that he loved so dearly.

On January 12th, the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion proclaimed Bob as a beloved and trusted friend and honored him by issuing a certificate bearing this information. A picture of Bob's certificate appears in this month's column for the 56th A.I.B.

Bob served with Headquarters Company of the 714th Tank Battalion after joining the 12th at Camp Barkeley, having first attended the A.S.T.P. at the New Mexico School of Mines.

After the war, Bob returned to college to complete his education. Upon graduation, he entered the field of education and made it his lifetime career.

Robert Edward Head is survived by his beloved wife, Betty, and a daughter, Lynette, and a son, Mark. Bob was a member of the local Masonic Lodge in Kingman, AZ.

Though Bob, very much like me, had his share of detractors; even they had to admire his honesty, loyalty, and strength of purpose.

I am fully confident that Bob is now with our Lord in that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens and that he is shaking hands and chatting with other members of the 12th who passed on before him. I know that I lost a true friend, and that we all shall miss him.

May he rest in peace always.

Chapter 18: The Relocation of Father Cherry

Father Cherry was a Roman Catholic Chaplain in the 2nd Armored Division and a rather revered one I might add. He was, I believe, a native of the Chicago area. When the 2nd Armored Division was making definite preparations for leaving Germany and redeploying to the United States, Father Cherry was reassigned to a Base Hospital situated in Goppingen or Geislingen. I do know that it was in rather close proximity to Bopfingen where many of us former members of the 12th Armored Division had vested interests of the amorous kind.

A soldier whose last name was Dillinger was assigned to drive Father Cherry to his newly assigned area. Learning in some manner unknown to me that I would be interested in making a trip to the Bopfingen area for perhaps the final time, Dillinger contacted me and asked if I would like to accompany him as assistant driver in seeing to Father Cherry's relocation. Needless to say that I seized upon the opportunity and I shall always be most grateful to Private Dillinger.

The day arrived on which we were to make the journey. The peep was gassed up and the mini-trailer that contained the Father's footlocker and other possessions was attached. Private Dillinger started off as the driver with Father Cherry seated next to him. I sat in the back of the peep along with the SCR radio and its auxiliary wet cell battery. Off the three of us went. The autobahn was not utilized because we opted for secondary roads through a myriad of small towns and hamlets. Each hour or so, Dillinger and I exchanged places.

I do remember vividly as I was seated in the rear of the peep that Private Dillinger made a rather sharp right turn after almost having missed the route we were to have taken. The result of this action saw the auxiliary battery, still connected to its cables, leave its housing and strike my left leg mid-way between the ankle and knee with a mighty force. When this occurred and quite instinctively, I yelled something truly not meant for a clergyman's ears. I immediately apologized to Father Cherry for my thoughtlessness. He replied, "Son, I think if that battery had struck my leg in a like manner that I would have blurted pretty much the same thing." This brought the entire episode to a close, and I emerged with the slightest of cuts but with a rather distinct bruise.

We drove on and on, and at about 6:30 p.m., we arrived at the hospital. The trailer was unloaded and Father Cherry was greeted by the hospital personnel. He was invited to the officers' mess hall, but he refused to accept the invitation unless we were permitted to accompany him. Finally, permission was given and we were all adequately fed. Father Cherry wanted to make arrangements for our evening's lodging at the hospital, but we declined. We said with thanks that other arrangements had been made. After saying our goodbyes to Father Cherry, Private Dillinger and I made a beeline for Bopfingen.

Upon arrival in Bopfingen, Private Dillinger dropped me off at my destination on Aalener Strasse. He told me that he'd pick me up in the morning at 6 a.m. for our return trip to Sterbfritz.

After a most wonderful evening on what turned out to be my final trip to Bopfingen, I was picked up promptly at 6 a.m. by Private Dillinger and we were on our way to the location from which we started our trek.

It is really difficult to believe that these events took place back in November 1945, and in a country that had just lost its war with the allies.

Chapter 19: Chicken What?

The story that you are about to read took place in the Alsace region of France in February 1945 at the height of World War II and when the weather was snowy and quite cold. We had just completed the Colmar Pocket campaign and were situated in a small, rural community resting a bit for what would be our next encounter with the enemy. Most, if not all of our World War II veterans, have heard the expression “chicken shit.” It is defined by the urban dictionary as behavior that makes military life worse than it need be.

Before I arrive at the gist of the narrative, permit me to say that the commissioned and non-commissioned officers of A-Company of the 56th were exceedingly well-trained and performed their duties and made most of their decisions professionally and quite well. There were exceptions and I will now cite one for you that inspired the ire of all in the first rifle squad, second platoon of Able Company. They aired their gripe, had the Acting First Sergeant back down and literally swallow some of the chicken droppings that he intentionally and unwisely created. Our regular first sergeant John H. Becker for reasons unknown to me was not currently with our unit. He was replaced by T/Sgt. Stephen A. Thompson. It was Sergeant Thompson who caused the ruckus.

Here is what went down. Our squad members were situated in an abandoned home with company headquarters billeted in an abandoned home just across the street. We were working on our weapons, catching up on correspondence and doing a myriad of things that needed to be done. I remember having on a pullover knit sweater that was not Government Issue, but rather was knitted by someone on the home front for the troops overseas. It was made of olive drab yarn and it was quite warm and comfortable to wear. I believe that it was S/Sgt. Bill Amason who had an urgent message that was to be delivered to company headquarters. He asked me if I would be the runner to deliver it. Since the delivery point was just across the street and since its delivery was urgent, I took the envelope, dashed out the front door and headed for company headquarters hatless and with only the sweater as outer covering.

I arrived at my destination rather quickly and handed the envelope to Acting First Sergeant Thompson. He began lashing out at me that I was being put on report because it was against army regulations to wear a sweater out-of-doors as an outer garment. I responded by saying, “My God, Sarge, I was just attempting to get this message to you as quickly as possible, but by all means, do what you have to do.” With this, I departed for the building from whence I came. Upon arrival, I told my tale of woe to S/Sgt. Bill Amason and the rest of the squad members who were present. A resounding cry of “CHICKEN SHIT” ensued after which Bill Amason said, “Do not concern yourself with it, Pierce. I will talk with Sergeant Thompson and get the situation resolved.” While I cannot say so with any degree of certainty, I strongly suspect that First Lieutenant Charles “Chuck” Willis likewise counseled Sergeant Thompson on the subject.

Obviously, Bill did just what he said he would do because I heard nothing more about the incident. That sweater became so endeared to me that I brought it home with me after being discharged from the service.

Squad leaders like Bill Amason do not come along every day. Unfortunately, Bill was killed in action on April 4, 1945 while leading the first rifle squad of the second platoon of Able Company. May he rest in peace always.

Chapter 20: Major William G. Raoul

Does the name Major William G. Raoul mean anything to you? Well, if you were a member of A Company of the 56th, were in Herrlisheim holed up in the basements of abandoned homes, and were looking for an escape route out of the area to keep from being captured, seriously wounded or killed, you've likely heard the name but perhaps forgotten it. Major Raoul, I believe, was the Executive Officer for the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion. It was he with others who designed our escape route on that overcast, extremely cold night in January 1945.

I remember well the 494th laying down a smoke barrage that enabled us in single file and in complete silence, each man holding on to the other's rifle belt so as not to become lost, to cross the partially constructed foot-bridge over the frozen Zorn River. The bridge was quite hastily set up by units of the 119th Engineer Battalion, but despite its incomplete assembly, it did the job of getting us across the narrow Zorn River without incident. Along with the smoke shells, fired as well were some high explosive shells, so it was extremely important that we all followed the route that was designed for us. It was a well-drawn up plan and it enabled the remnants of A-56th to make what I believe was its initial tactical withdrawal. The word "retreat" was never part of our vocabulary. I honestly don't believe a single man was lost or injured in this well-planned and well-executed operation.

Those who survived those few days of complete isolation, and I am one of them, owe Major William G. Raoul a deep debt of gratitude. He made it possible for us to regroup and to fight another day. To put it quite succinctly, Major Raoul, the men of the 494th and the men of the 119th got us safely out of an extremely dire set of circumstances and literally brought us back from hell.

Chapter 21: An Honor Truly Merited

New York City has its Museum of Modern Art, Washington, DC has its Smithsonian, but Monett, MO has its own national treasure. Monett has Floyd C. Van Derhoef, a First Lieutenant and Captain of A Company, 56th Armored Infantry Battalion where he served as Executive Officer and Company Commander during World War II both in training exercises and in combat situations in the European Theater of Operations.

Floyd was feted on Thursday, March 28, at which time he was presented with a framed certificate proclaiming him an Honorary Board Member of the 12th Armored Division Memorial Museum in Abilene, TX. Floyd's certificate fittingly reads in part "for his devotion and his many generous contributions to our Museum and for his service to our country during the World War II conflict." Floyd, incidentally, retired from the military service as a Lieutenant Colonel.

A photograph taken at the event by Sharon Van Derhoef follows. The Patriarch, as I sometimes refer to him, looks as though he could still command an infantry company without too much outside assistance.

On hand to honor Floyd on this special occasion and pictured are standing: Tom Van Derhoef [L/56], Monett High School Jr. ROTC cadets, 1st Sgt. John Marbut, Instructor and U.S. Army Viet Nam War Veteran, K. C. Caldwell of the Monett Senior Center and World War II U.S.N. Veteran, Mike Van Derhoef [L/56] U.S.M.C. Viet Nam War Veteran and Aaron Oberman, Monett High School History Instructor. Bottom row: kneeling are more Jr. ROTC cadets and Dan Van Derhoef, Agent with the Missouri Department of Conservation and seated is the honoree Floyd C. Van Derhoef proudly displaying his well-earned certificate. Present at the ceremony but not pictured was Ken Gauthier, U.S.N. Ret., a Korean War Veteran.



Few people know of all of the good things that Floyd has done and continues to do because Floyd C. Van Derhoef is a doer and not a talker.

Floyd's grandson, Dan Van Derhoef, made the presentation on behalf of the 12th Armored Division Memorial Museum of Abilene, TX.

While in the service, I addressed Floyd as "Sir," "Lt. Van Derhoef," or "Captain Van Derhoef"; nothing, however, gives me greater pleasure than having the opportunity to call him "my friend" and that he most certainly is.

I last had the honor and pleasure of saluting Floyd back in 2011 in the lobby of the Hyatt Hotel in Arlington, VA at the annual reunion. Whether he is aware of it or not, I am saluting him today on this singular occurrence. Welcome to the Board, my friend. You have added a distinct touch of class to an already august assemblage.

Chapter 22: This Is Your Life William Georgov, Jr.

According to information gleaned from the internet, the 2010 census population of Bear, DE numbered 14,873. Among that number is one named William Georgov, Jr. I have the honor and privilege of knowing Bill; and with the hope that you will get to know him better as well, I am going to tell you a few things about him. Don't duck down and shudder, Bill, it'll all be the good stuff.

On April 22, 1926, William Georgov, Jr. was born in the city of Newark, NJ. He was the youngest of four, two boys and two girls. Bill's father was a barber, and while attending school, Bill helped in the barber shop as the clean-up person. He also delivered milk. Bill always had a fondness for baseball, and was an aspiring major league pitcher. He almost wound up at New York's famous Polo Grounds because he had a tryout with the old New York Giants. As you know, they now reside in San Francisco. Giant management told Bill to come back to see them after his return from military service. Unfortunately, Bill was wounded in the arm and leg as a member of A Company of the 56th A.I.B.'s third platoon on March 23, 1945 at Speyer, Germany. As a result, he lost velocity in his pitching arm which ended any dreams of a career in major league baseball.



Bill was graduated from college in New Jersey, and on June 24, 1956 married Concetta Maria Pulitano. Bill and Connie have two children, daughter Luisa and son Bruce. Bruce is married to Diane and they have two sons, Matthew and Ryan. Thus Bill and Connie are the proud grandparents of two grandsons.

Bill and Connie moved to Bear, DE in 1967. Bill has had a remarkable career in industry that spanned many years. He was employed by E. I. DuPont, Harshaw Chemicals, and J.M. Huber. He was a Technical Service Representative and later became Industry Manager for Coatings. The business required him to travel extensively both nationally and internationally. Bill has had a paper published in the Journal of Coatings Technology and he has twice been guest lecturer of a paint course at the University of Missouri. Upon his retirement from J.M. Huber, Bill was a sales consultant for Sullivan

Associates/Scott Bader Ltd. He is a past president of the Philadelphia Paint Society and a past president of the Washington Paint Technical Group.

In addition to an illustrious career in industry, Bill and Connie found time to be involved in their children's education. They have been involved in PTA, been band parents, etc. You know the drill. Presently although supposedly fully retired, Bill manages to find time to help his son Bruce with his business endeavors and he likewise assists daughter Luisa with deliveries for her travel business. In addition Bill looks closely after his 96 year old sister and is there weekly for shopping and bill paying.

As for other items of interest, Bill is an ardent reader of both fiction and non-fiction (I do hope he's read "Reminiscences of the Big One"). Bill has helped with renovations of our Museum in Abilene and he is past president and a current member of Glasgow Lions Club. He is a member of the Masonic Fraternity and a member and the current Commander of his Purple Heart Chapter.

Sara Lee's slogan is "Everybody doesn't like something, but nobody doesn't like Sara Lee." This could be Bill Georgov's as well.

William Georgov, Jr. epitomizes the Boy Scout Law in that he is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent. For all of these reasons and many, many more, I am pleased to call Bill my brother and my good friend.

Chapter 23: Some Additional Interesting Statistics

A vignette has already been written and published as it related to the killed in action members of the 12th Armored Division, broken down by specific unit. This writing is an attempt to present the same basic information, but as it relates to the members of the 12th Armored Division that became Prisoners of War and were so classified. The information was gleaned from our Museum's website.

There is a total of three hundred twenty-seven (327) individual names listed, but it was noted that one individual's name is duplicated, so only three hundred twenty-six names were used as our base.

Following is the total number of prisoners by unit and the applicable percentage of the total.

Unit	Number of Prisoners	Pct. of total
17th A.I.B.	93	28.5
43rd Tank Bn.	72	22.1
56th A.I.B.	10	3.1
66th A.I.B.	126	38.7
All Other Units	25	7.6
<hr/>		
Totals	326	100.0

A sizable number of our men were taken prisoner on January 16, 1945 in the Steinwald area near Herrlisheim and held until April 13 or 14, 1945. The division is credited with 102 days of combat operations. Through their being captured, these fighting men missed a goodly portion of the division's time in battle situations, but the condition in which they found themselves was certainly no day at the beach. According to information received from Charlie Fitts and George O'Bryan both of C/66 and themselves prisoners, they know of only one man who died of wounds sustained at Steinwald while being held as a prisoner of war. That man was PFC Carl Beisman [C/66]. He died on January 20, 1945.

Although many are no longer with us we do have quite a few former POW's who are active members of our association. One of those is Museum Board Director Charles Middleton Fitts of Jackson, Mississippi. Another is Robert F. Hoeweler, Treasurer of our Museum Board of Directors.

As of the August 2013 edition of the "Hellcat News," we are credited with having three hundred eighty- one veteran members of our historic association. This is a fact of which we are exceedingly proud. We have never forgotten our fallen brothers, and we never shall



Chapter 24: Our Pact

Harold K. Wells and I had been friends ever since the days of our inductions, he from Michigan and I from New Jersey. We met in November of 1942 at Camp Campbell, Kentucky as members of Headquarters Battery of the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion. Shortly after participating in the Tennessee Maneuvers and moving to Camp Barkeley, Texas, he was transferred to Service Company of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion and I was transferred to "A" Company of the 56th. Despite being members of different companies, our friendship continued.

In August of 1944 at the Camp Barkeley parade grounds, we were awarded the Expert Infantry Badge together from the hands of Major General Douglass T. Greene. Prior to being shipped overseas and while stationed briefly at Camp Shanks, New York, Harold and I received 24 hour passes that enabled us to visit my home in Camden, New Jersey and for him to meet the members of my family and my girlfriend at the time. To digress for a moment, while still at Camp Berkeley just prior to our leaving for Camp Shanks each member of the Battalion was asked to make a cash contribution toward the purchase of a 16 millimeter sound movie projector and a short wave radio. The solicitation was a success and the items were purchased.

Harold and I were able to see one film on the new projector. It was prior to our initial assault on Herrlisheim. We were in a small town in France and the picture that was shown was "Rhapsody in Blue." It was about the life of George Gershwin and it starred Robert Alda, Alan's father. After the film ended and Harold and I were on our way to our billets, he said to me, "I would like to make an agreement with you that if either of us does not survive this war that after the war ends the survivor will visit the other's family for the purpose of explaining to them just exactly what happened." Jokingly I retorted, "Do you really want to make another visit to Camden?" He assured me that he was quite serious, so I agreed and we shook hands to make it official.

To make a somewhat lengthy story a bit shorter, Harold was killed in action on the 26th of April 1945 when German artillery bounced a shell on to the hood of the half-track he was driving. After the war's end, I performed occupational duties with the 12th and 2nd Armored Divisions. I was mustered out of the service at Fort Dix, NJ on February 7, 1946. I was somewhat reluctant to make the trip to Michigan, but my parents insisted that I fulfill my part of the agreement so before returning to work, I took a train trip to Holly, Michigan where I met Harold's mother, dad, brothers and sisters. It was a very pleasant and comforting visit and I have remained a close friend with the members of the Wells family right up to the present time.

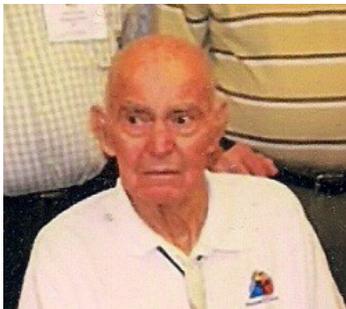
Harold was a wonderful person, a good soldier, and a remarkably loyal friend. I shall never, ever forget him.

Chapter 25: Meeting My Former Company Commander and Executive Officer for the First Time in 66 Years

Both Floyd C. Van Derhoef and I would be attending the 2011 reunion held in Arlington, VA. We hadn't seen one another since the year 1945 and under entirely different circumstances. At various times both in training in the United States and in battle situations in France and Germany, Floyd had been either our Executive Officer or Company Commander. Both jobs, I might add, he did exceedingly well. Floyd, as many already know, was definitely a firm officer, but he was a most fair one as well. Permit me to add that while we hadn't seen one another in all of that period of time, we had corresponded with one another for several of the more recent years.

Unbeknown to Floyd was the fact that as soon as I saw Floyd at the reunion, I planned to favor him with one of my better hand salutes. Unbeknown to me was that Floyd, his son and daughter-in-law, Tom and Sharon had planned to meet and greet me as quickly as I entered the hotel lobby doors.

To my very great surprise when entering the hotel accompanied by my trusty walking stick, I saw seated in a lobby chair in front of me one that I knew while in the military as either First Lieutenant or Captain Van Derhoef. Despite being seated in the chair, he rose. Floyd had a very strong grip and he immediately latched on to my right hand and seemingly was never going to release his grip. He was so elated to see me and the feeling was reciprocal. Finally, and Tom and Sharon can attest to this, I said to Floyd, "Will you please let go of my hand?" Floyd looked a tad surprised and complied with my request. Then I took a step backward, straightened my posture, and gave Floyd the best hand salute I could muster. He gave me a big smile and with a tear in his eye, he returned my salute in a most military manner.



Needless to say that Floyd and I along with other members of the Van Derhoef family spent as much time together at the reunion as was possible. Although Floyd is no longer with us, I think of him quite often and I must say that I miss him very much. It pleases me to say that I remain in contact with Tom and Sharon and Bill and Gwen Van Derhoef, most certainly each chips off the proverbial old block.