

Army tests that spring.

At this same time I met my future wife, Mary Slee, who had graduated from high school in May at the same time I did. I subsequently enrolled in St. Ambrose College as a freshman and attended my first classes with Navy V12 students. I had not heard from the Army on their program and would not discern my status until July when I received word of my acceptance on the premise that I enroll in the Army Reserve given that I was only 17 years old at the time. I took time off class to go to Chicago to enlist but was told to come back later because they were too busy to take me that week. When I came home and spoke to my father he said he would see what he could do to help me. The next week I was called by a civilian of Rock Island Arsenal to report there to take my physical exam and be sworn in. My father had talked to an affluent business associate and family friend (after whom I was named) and he had arranged for me to enlist at the Arsenal. When I was assigned my serial number, the log from which it came had the last date of 1939 for an enlistment at the Arsenal.

I continued my studies the rest of the summer and in September received my orders to report to Michigan State College on or before October 10 of 1943. The good-byes during this period were many and when the end of September arrived many of my friends had already enlisted or been drafted.

The first two weeks of October were filled with anxiety and final good-byes. Another old friend, Dick Kipping had enlisted in the Air Corps and the days before I left we went out often. I said my good-byes to him and spent my last evening with friends who had not yet left for the services. As I looked forward to a new chapter of my life, I wondered what was next, and what the future would spring upon me. It was a blustery October Saturday and I anxiously awaited to start out on that future. Now I finally was facing my mother; I could see that she was hiding her feelings. She gave me a hug and softly said good-bye. My father drove me to the Rock Island Lines station in Moline. As the moment came to board the train, Dad said his good-bye, shook my hand and wished me good luck. As the train pulled away, there was that seventeen-year old boy (quickly becoming a man) going off to war, apprehensive and a little afraid of the unknown.

## **Chapter Two**

### **ASTP, Michigan State College**

I arrived in Chicago that windy Saturday afternoon and left the LaSalle Street Station for the Dearborn Station to board the train for Michigan and the future. That night on the train I mused about what the future would bring. My thoughts were filled with anxiety, wonder and exhilaration-replete with the adventure conjured up by a

seventeen-year old. The station clock read 4:00 AM when I arrived in Lansing, Michigan, in the still, dark hours of October 10th, 1943. I disembarked from the train, looked at the empty streets and realized I had no idea of where Michigan State College was located on route to East Lansing. Luck was with me. The station master's office was open and I was able to get a cab to take me to the college. It was around 6:00 AM when I finally reported to the office of the Commandant of the 3655th Service unit at Michigan State College of Arts and Agricultural Sciences to pick up my orders and find my assigned quarters.

It was Sunday morning and things were just beginning to stir around campus. I presented my orders at the unit orderly room and awaited my assignment to quarters. Early as it was, I managed to get my assignment and moved to Ward E in Wells Hall one of the old dormitories on campus. After taking my luggage to my room, I was told where to eat breakfast, given a schedule of the Army Program for the next three months, and issued instructions about hours, classes, and attendance requirements.

I roamed about the college, left the campus and found a church to attend Mass. An hour later as I was leaving the church I spotted a drugstore across the street from the campus. It had a soda fountain and lunch counter so I sat down and ordered a cup of coffee and a doughnut. I watched the students who came into the store and noticed most were either girls or GI's with very few young people in their groups. I was later to learn that there were around five thousand GI's stationed at the school, very few civilians and about six thousand girls on campus. This was an excellent ratio of the sexes for dating and companionship for all GI's who were stationed on campus and this did not include girls in the towns of Lansing and East Lansing.

I spent the rest of that Sunday unpacking and meeting other reservists as they arrived. Earlier arrivals were processed from Friday on and were assigned the NYA Barracks on campus near the stables and equestrian arena. Arrivals continued all during the day filling the dormitory wing by evening.

On Monday morning we were awakened at six o'clock and fell out for reveille, our first in the Army. We then proceeded to the cafeteria for breakfast and were told to fall out at 7:30 am. We assembled and marched to an auditorium for indoctrination and assignment of schedules for classes. We were all in civilian clothes and informed we would be issued ROTC uniforms later in the week. The schedule given us was quite regimented with time assigned for the entire day. Classes would start at 8 am and last one and a half hours each. 11 to 12 would be study in our rooms, lunch would follow until 1 pm. We would then have classes until 4:30 pm. We would start retreat at 5 pm then be free to eat supper and have free time until 7:30. From 7:30 until 9:30 would be study and bed check would be at 10 pm. This schedule would be through Friday and Saturday we would have classes until 12 noon. After lunch we were free until Sunday at 7:30 pm. We would then be in our rooms and study until lights out at 10 pm. This schedule would be in effect until December 31 with Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays the only free days in the ensuing three months.

Classes were three hours per week and laboratory sessions for three hours including History, Geography, Physics, Chemistry, Algebra and Calculus, English and Military Science-a total of 22 semester hours with the remaining hours in the thirty hour schedule devoted to study in our rooms. Actual credit hours were nineteen. This accelerated schedule would have completed the requirement for a degree in two years and a commission after graduation. With the war progressing as it was, we were told we could be in the Army, including the entire program for up to ten years. This, at our age, was taken as part of the great adventure though it seemed an eternity. Tuesday saw us beginning the rigorous schedule which we would be engulfed in the coming months. We began to make friends and began the studies in earnest. Books were issued, we received the uniforms with blue lapels, and learned the rudiments of military training, i.e. close order drill, basic military tactics, army regulations, etc. The sergeant in charge of our dorm asked if there were any of us who had previous military training in high school such as ROTC. A fellow student said he had and was made the section acting NCO. His name was Karl Ratzsch, a redhead from Milwaukee who had spent his high school at a military Academy, It turns out his parents owned a famous restaurant in Milwaukee called Ratzsch's. He was a cocky kid, who from his actions one could see that he had been spoiled and thought he was the king of the walk. After my discharge when the war was over, life magazine featured the restaurant in a Heinz 57 ad in its issues.

The time at MSC was typical in many ways of a College environment but the time restrictions put on the students for study did not make it as carefree. It was there I met many long-lasting friends some of whom were in combat with me, with one, Art Byrnes in the same company, platoon and squad until we were separated in September 1945. Others were in the same platoon as I, Childers, Jason Colbath, Pyne, Binder and others such as Roy Brunhart Co. A and Louis Locsmondy Co. D were in the same battalion. The life-long bonds were begun during this time and some have lasted until today. Time at MSC passed quickly, we would spend our free hours in the evening at the soda fountain in the town drugstore. On weekends we found various means of entertainment. The Newman Club would hold dances at the student union, other times we would go to a night club on the outskirts of East Lansing to drink beer and dance. We met town girls who provided transportation out to the club and provided dance partners other times, trips within 50 miles were allowed, we would go to Detroit. I had met a girl, Hope Lee Livingston, at the Newman Club dances who lived in Detroit and invited us to come to Detroit and visit. We never knew when we would be able to go but three of us took a bus to Detroit and called her that we were coming; we were told that she had made plans but that we were welcome to visit. Her mother invited us to stay in their home and be able to go to Mass the next morning. The three of us were able to sleep there that night and with the girl and a couple of friends of hers we went to Mass that morning. We were well fed and escorted by the girls to the bus depot to return to the campus that afternoon. Other times I went to Detroit arriving early in the afternoon to shop and returning that night. It was soon Thanksgiving and those who could make it home did; some of the fellow went beyond the 50 mile limit to get to Chicago, but the distance for many of us from home was too great to even attempt it. We spent the holiday and following weekend on campus eating

our Turkey Dinner at the cafeteria. This was the first Thanksgiving I had ever spent away from home, though I didn't miss the work in the store my folks ran, but I did miss my parents and friends. With Christmas in sight and the fact I would be going home on leave shortly after, I needed money to carry out my plans. Christmas gifts, etc During this period at MSC we did not receive pay from the Army. All had to rely on money from home. My parents sent me \$10.00 per week plus sending me cigarettes and incidentals such as tooth paste and other goodies. We all sent out laundry home each week to save money. The college cafeteria asked those who would work if we wanted jobs

during the meals to serve food and clean the cafeteria during and after each meal. We would work six hours a day for seven days for thirty dollars. This was great and some of us who weren't as endowed as others with wealthy or fairly wealthy parents jumped at the chance to make the extra money Included in this group who worked in the cafeteria, were personnel already in the Army but needed the dollars to send home to wives and family.

While at MSC, my parents did supply me with the money to buy a field jacket which we could wear to augment our "Blue Lapels". My mother also bought some OD pants and shirts to augment my wardrobe. She also sent me the money to buy a Blouse which I found at Hudson's in Detroit, which was custom fit. These clothes would suffice me until I was called to active duty and issued the necessary clothes by the Army.

Classes were great except for the Chemistry lecture held twice a week in a large room with a balcony. There were 500 of us in the class and we were told by the professor that he was the author of the text and we had better be well prepared for his tests. Actually the lectures were boring and put half the class to sleep at all sessions. His tests often meant that if you did not do research of his footnotes, you would have a difficult time passing the course regardless of your laboratory marks.

The time passed swiftly and friendships extended beyond the troops in your own area, though interaction between Wells Hall and the CYA barracks was difficult, we often would meet on weekends to socially interact. In the dorm I was assigned this led to

practical jokes, teasing and camaraderie. In my room a friendly verbal rivalry between Eddie Bazelon and Willie Mayrent was in constant action. Eddie would tease Willie incessantly. Both were of Jewish descent but while Willie was strictly Kosher, Eddie was not. This was a constant battle of wits even after lights out on some days.

The days after Thanksgiving were busy preparing for exams, looking forward towards going home and keeping warm and dry from the snow fall that was quite heavy on some days. Marching between classes was becoming routine during which time we became proficient in close order drill. We became at ease in military discipline and for 17 and now some 18-year olds was quite a feat. Gradually all of the contingent of the ASTP reserve unit was becoming 18 and by New Year's Day we would all be that age. A restlessness developed in the unit with the knowledge of what lay ahead. In some cases homesickness developed but did not show itself in great proportions. By my birthday on Dec 18, we were beginning to prepare for final exams and there settled a

calm. The week between Christmas and New Years was to be exam week and we were told we would be put on a train to go home on a delay in rout before reporting for duty and integration into the Army. All of us had already been inducted into the Army reserve before assignment to MSC. When we would report to the receiving Center we would receive our inoculations, clothes, final physical and wait for assignment to a basic training center. Christmas was upon us and those of us who could not get home and back would celebrate the best we could. On Christmas eve a bunch of us went to midnight Mass together, we went to eat earlier in town and those of us who were Catholic could not eat meat that day. That evening we went to a restaurant in Lansing to eat. One by one our orders went out. One fellow would order pasta, one would order steak, another would order fish. That evening I order fried oysters and as the food was delivered Eddy Bazelon made a big issue about his steak, which we (the Catholics) could not eat. His 'Oh boys' and 'Don't you wish you had this' was taken in jest considering his teasing personality. We had a good time that evening and all regardless of their beliefs went to midnight Mass. After Mass we went to our billets and after wishing Merry Christmas we all went to sleep.

The next day we all called home and quietly passed Christmas at the school. This was really a lonely first Christmas away from home. The rest of the week went quickly as we finished our exams, returned the uniforms we were using, turned in our supplies (books, etc.) and packed. New Years Day we were given our orders and put on a train for home. There were two set of orders given us on the 29 and 30 of December. The first was a twenty day delay en route home, and the second was the orders to report to Fort Sheridan on Jan 20, 1944. That was issued in sections so that the only orders you received were the ones on which your name appeared.

I got to Moline on the evening of January 1, 1944 and my father met me at the Railroad Station. It was about 6:30 pm and when I got home Mom had dinner waiting for me and the guests. At this time we had a combined Christmas and New Years celebration in which we unwrapped presents. The next day I found out that Dick Kipping a close friend since kindergarten had not been called to active duty but was due to report on Jan 17. The days went quickly, I tried to call my girl, Mary, but she was not in town. I didn't get to see her at all during my time home. (I later found out she had been very sick and was sent to her aunt's home in Keokuk, Iowa, about 100 miles south of the Tri-Cities. Though we corresponded while I was in Camp, I did not see her until my furlough in May.

Though we all were still kids, the maturing would come next . We thought we all were grown up and ready for anything. So ended the introduction to the Army such as it was. The great adventure was about to begin.