

# Forgotten Memories of World War II

by Sam L. Resnick

## Incident 14: Hey! Watcha Doing?

We had recently taken a town and moved into a small farmhouse during a dark, dark night in a pouring rain. There was no moon and the doorway entrance was at ground level. Woody had gone out to get his bedroll from the jeep trailer parked right outside the doorway. Leandro Sivieri inside the farmhouse suddenly felt the urge to relieve himself and stepped to the dark doorway. He simply directed his stream to the right side, of course not knowing Woody was out there. Within a few minutes, we heard Woody exclaim, in his high-pitched squeaky voice "Hey! Watcha doing?" Sivieri realized that someone was out there and turned to his left, continuing his stream. Woody, realizing too that someone had pissed on him, walked around the trailer to the other side, where he again was the victim of that dreaded stream. He came running into the doorway dripping from the rain and smelling from urine yelling at Sivieri and I doubled over with laughter. What a classic scene! Especially because it was Woody and his "squirrel-like" features and behaviors that made it even funnier.

## Berlin

The 78th Division relieved the 82nd Airborne Division and my recollection of the MP unit of that division, insofar as my contacts with them are concerned, is that they all left Berlin as wealthy GIs. The black market was wide open in Berlin, cigarettes which cost \$2 (or was it \$4) in the PX could be sold on the black market for \$200. Other items such as candy were being sold for \$5. There were no restrictions on sending money home nor how many cartons of cigarettes could be bought at the PX. I personally saw one individual with several stacks of \$100 money orders, 3 or 4 inches high.

Thousands of dollars were being transferred home weekly by many of the MPs. They had had a good life in Berlin and with their loot were happy to be going home.

Upon the arrival of the 78th, tight restrictions were imposed on all financial dealings. Only the amount equivalent to one's salary could be sent home, only two cartons of cigarettes could be bought weekly at the PX, only one sheet of stamps could be bought at the Post Office and other restrictions of a similar nature were imposed to keep black market dealings down among the troops.

It was very satisfying being an MP. It meant power, authority, and unrestricted movement among the soldiers and German civilians. Generally, our work consisted of patrols around the city, especially the nightclubs, bars, and other likely trouble spots. We had jeeps and could go anywhere we wanted, although we did have our scheduled routes. At times, we participated in four-power patrols with the French, British, Russians and Americans and these were generally amicable and fun. The Russians were always impressed with medals and loved to drink. They also loved Mickey Mouse watches and would pay exorbitant black market prices for them. You see Mickey Mouse had red hands (or gloves). I had a fairly nice room in an apartment complex, ate well, and was very satisfied with the situation and position. On weekends, however, to keep up some semblance of military order, we were made to do close order drill in the streets—that is, march up and down—to the snickers of German civilians in the area. This seemed stupid to me, to make guys who had risked their lives in combat, lived with death, and now had to march in the streets, what has that to do with anything? I wrote to the *Stars and Stripes* griping about this and within a month

or so, the order was rescinded and we didn't have to do it anymore. I choose to believe it was my letter.

We had a lot of time off, and in the evenings would spend it in our local GI club. We had all the drinks we wanted, we had American and German music as well, a favorite being "Lili Marlene." The music was commonly known in German, France, and the US with somewhat different lyrics. At that time I knew the lyrics both in German and English. After six months or so in Berlin, I had managed to pick up enough German to make myself understood for daily conversations and socializing.

I once had in mind to see if I could get more cigarettes than I was entitled to at the PX, two cartons a week, with the intent of selling them on the black market. I must admit that it did make me stop and think of the illegality of it all, but it was also very easy to rationalize about our deserving whatever we could get. We had been issued a card with black grid lines on a green background and when we received our cigarettes, the appropriate box was checked off in ink. Now if I could only remove that ink, I would be a winner. I tried erasers of all types, but they only smudged everything. I had a brilliant thought, why not get ink eradicator and simply wipe it clean. I trudged around to the public offices in Berlin trying to get someone to understand what I wanted and to get a supply. Evidently such a liquid did not exist and no one seemed to know what I was referring to. Just as I was about to give up, a German told me he knew where I could get such a liquid and, of all things, it was called "Tinten Todt," or dead ink. He instructed me to take the subway into the Russian sector of Berlin and find a certain pharmacy. Germans readily traveled between zones in Berlin, but soldiers generally did not; I was a bit apprehensive about

going. My greed got the better of me so I found the shop, and obtained a small bottle of *Tinten Todt*. I hurried back into the American zone eager to test it out. It did work because it was simply a bottle of bleach. And here I had to travel into a restricted zone to get it. I tried it a few times, but it didn't work well at all since the green lines also bleached out.

As an MP, one of the frequent stops during my night tour of duty was at a nightclub called the "Femina" located near the border of the Russian zone. It was a delightful place modeled after a previous one that had existed before the war and probably also during the war. The club was well lit, each table contained a lamp and a telephone as well as a large prominently displayed number. The idea was that initial contacts were visible and could be reached via the phone lines and thus asking for a dance was an easy affair. If one was rejected, it was simple and no one knew, as compared to the usual way of physically approaching a girl, having her say no, and returning to one's seat sheepishly. All one had to do here was to dial up the number of the girl you wanted to dance with or have a drink with and chat away with gentle persuasion until she hung up or assented. Of course, being after the war, there were many more girls looking for men and it was always a pleasant sight. It was here, too, that frequent fights and disputes arose during the heat of the competition and the consumption of alcohol. Although there were GIs, Britains, French, and Russians, the club was mostly attended by the Germans themselves.

My night tour was to visit some of the more difficult areas to show our presence as well as to nip any anticipated troubles and fights and to send drunken servicemen on their way. I enjoyed my time in Berlin tremendously, having many opportunities to visit various sights, officially and unofficially. I did not mind staying there, but I was anxious to get home; I had enough of the Army. I learned that

I was to be shipped out in two weeks and looked forward to it eagerly.

### No Purple Heart

One day, sitting on a bed opposite a friend who was cleaning his gun, it happened. To clear the gun, he, quite naturally, pointed the gun down at the floor and pulled the trigger. The sound of the shot and the hot searing bullet penetrating my foot occurred simultaneously. I sprang up in pain and started hopping to the first aid station. My friend and others in the room at the time were stunned and sat there in shock. Soon they ran to help me to the first aid station. The bullet had passed through the big toe and imbedded itself into the floor. What a mess! Here I had gone through a goddamn war being shot at by small guns and large artillery, with many, many near misses, and survived. Now a week before my scheduled return, I get shot by a fellow GI. No purple heart now. My foot was put into a cast, I was given crutches, and hobbled about for a few more weeks. I did get sympathy and that was nice, but that was something I could have done without. Soon the cast came off; I was rescheduled home and returned on the *Kokomo* Victory ship in April 1946.

### Back to Civilian Life

My return to civilian life was at times traumatic but manageable if I avoided certain situations. I was discharged from Fort Dix, and soon I found myself walking toward Chester Ave. along Church Ave. from the subway at McDonald Ave. in Brooklyn. As I approached my home, I saw two children playing with toy guns. My senses could not adjust to the fact that the guns were toys and not real and that children played with such things of death. To me, the sight of a gun would mean that I would duck for some cover, drop to the floor, or pull out my weapon, be it a pistol or rifle, and get ready to shoot. I stopped in my tracks, dropped my duffle bag and squatted behind it, watching the on-going scene

play out. I was in a different world, how could this transformation happen? How could this culture be so different from the one from which I just came? Don't those kids know you don't play with guns? How could they make toys and exact look-a-likes of these dangerous weapons? I picked up my duffle bag and hurriedly crossed the street to avoid the battle. I realized I was sweating when I got home. I'd have to avoid that kind of a situation.

Sylvia lived in Brighton Beach and every Tuesday evening they had fireworks which could be seen from the boardwalk. The first time that happened, I dropped to the floor when I heard the explosions, the whistles of the rockets, and the lights of the explosions. From that time on, I never visited Sylvia on Tuesday evening. Similarly, if we went to see a movie and they had sharp sounds of any kind that sounded like a gun going off or a shell coming in, I dropped to the floor, terrified. Any loud sound, even outdoors, caused me great fear and apprehension, even though I realized it was something other than a threat to me. It was a reflex action instilled by months of survival and behavior pattern.

These reactions also caused my eyes to tear and my body to assume an almost cowering crouch, anticipating an explosion. They lasted perhaps a year or more before I could easily accept them without the physical reaction. The emotional aspects I guess took much longer and, perhaps in some small way, still persist. My attitudes toward life and death were surely affected by the war as well as my relations to people. The wounds have healed, but the scars remain.

*Omission:* In the Holiday 2001 News, Sam Resnick's "Forgotten Memories of World War II, Incident Eight, It Can't Work This Way" the Tech Sgt who came to pick up the machine gun and to relieve him of his assignment was Rudy Steinman, a career soldier who later was awarded a Silver Star and DSC and received a battlefield commission.