

Small-Town Boy Visits New York City on War Bond Drive

by John Courter, 399-D

I had a very pleasant surprise when I got back to the outfit when I walked into the barracks the guys said I was going to New York and that I was sure a lucky dog. I was totally confused until I learned that three privates from our platoon, Bob Fair, Nick Cigrand, and I, had been chosen to be a part of a select battalion from the 100th Division in an Army Day parade to help sell war bonds.

I returned from my furlough on June 1 and on June 7, I wrote from Camp Shanks, an hour and one-half from New York City where we were billeted. We had gone by train on Pullman cars—quite a treat! At one of the stops on the trip we learned that D-Day had arrived and our troops were invading Normandy. We were excited to hear that news because we knew it was very relevant to our future.

Those days in New York were sort of an exciting blur. We were able to get passes into the city and took advantage of them “big time.” We looked over Times Square at night (with our mouths agape) and saw a major league game at Ebbets Field between the Brooklyn Dodgers and the Boston Braves. We got discount tickets to Radio City Music Hall where we saw the Rockettes and a fantastic stage show, as well as the movie, “White Cliffs of Dover” (which I napped through).

On another day Nick Cigrand and I got 36-hour passes to the city. This was a prophetic coincidence as I was to travel during combat with Nick. We stayed all night in a USO downtown, went up in the Empire State building, attended a Broadway play. Nick left to visit a cousin so I took a sightseeing tour for \$2. I saw the highlights of the “town”—Times Square, the financial district, the Italian sector, and Chinatown including a Buddhist temple. We toured the Bowery including an inside look at a mission which cared for the “down and out.” We took an elevated railroad to the far end of New York where we could plainly see the Statue of Liberty. We visited Trinity Church and its cemetery where many famous men are buried.

Then came the “big day.” The battalion made up of 1,000 men paraded down people-packed streets with confetti and ticker tape showering down on us from skyscrapers. My letter home said, “We really looked good that day, if I do say so myself.” We marched up to City Hall and stood in formation at “parade rest” while some men were awarded the Silver Star, among them the famous (at that time) “Commando” Kelly. Then the well-known Mayor Fiorella La Guardia spoke. Our last march that day was around the Battery where we did an “eyes right” for the dignitaries on the reviewing stand.

In our second appearance, the battalion marched in the Army Day Parade for 49 blocks down Fifth Avenue with people lining the street all the way. A real thrill for a small town boy! That was it for the New York visit.

On the way back to Ft. Bragg we traveled on railroad troop sleepers, which were reasonably comfortable, and went through Washington D.C. during daylight so we got a view of the Capitol building and the prominent monuments.