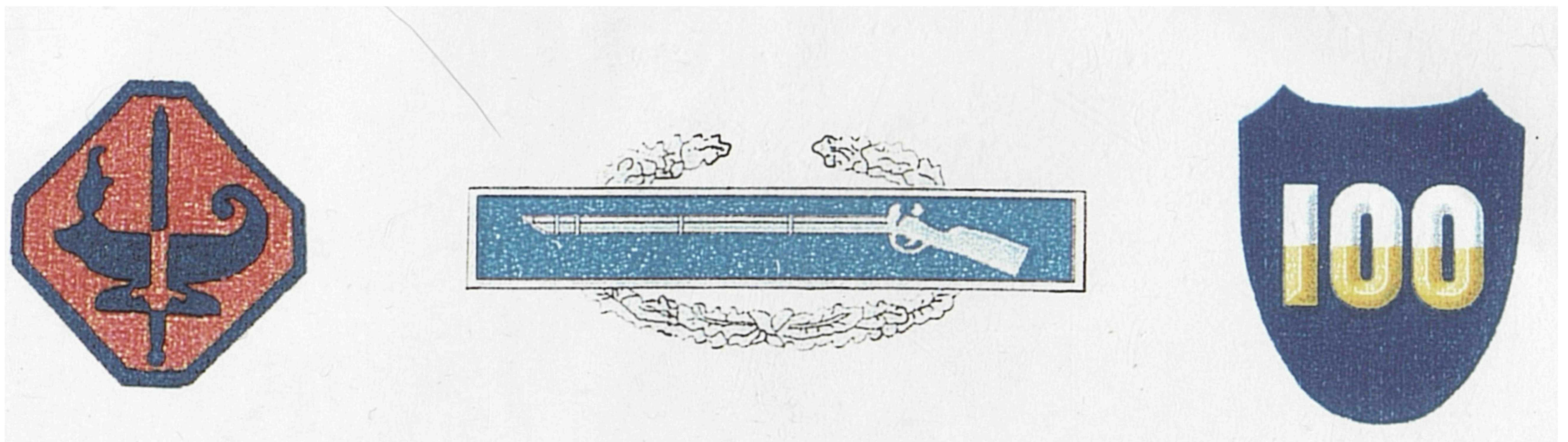
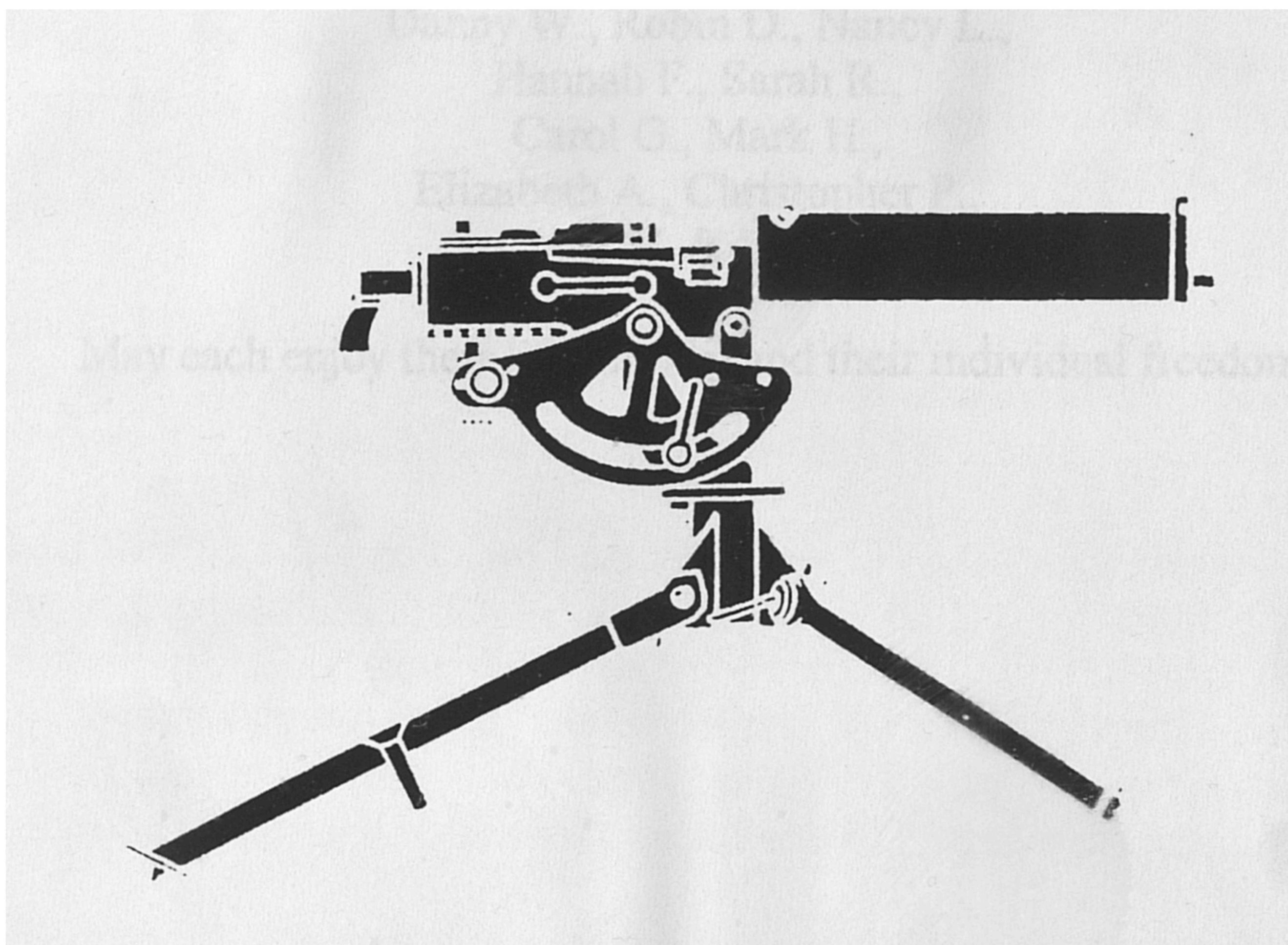


**VISITING EUROPE ON \$ 2.17 PER DAY:
MEMORIES OF A WWII HEAVY
MACHINE GUNNER**



**William E. Eckard
Co H, 397th Infantry Regiment
100th Infantry Division
US Seventh Army**

**VISITING EUROPE ON \$ 2.17 PER DAY:
MEMORIES OF A WWII HEAVY
MACHINE GUNNER**



William E. Eckard

**ERC Reservist, Basic Infantry Trainee, ASTP Engineering Student,
Advanced Infantry Trainee, Heavy Machine Gunner, Occupation Duty,
Military Government Mail Clerk, Inactive & Active Reservist**

**EUROPEAN THEATER OF OPERATIONS
Campaigns: Rhineland, Ardennes-Alsace, and Central Europe**

DEDICATION

This story is dedicated to my wartime comrades in Company H, 397th Infantry Regiment

And

To the children who share my life:

Danny W., Robin D., Nancy L.,
Hannah F., Sarah R.,
Carol G., Mark H.,
Elizabeth A., Christopher P.,
Izick W. & Bre A.

May each enjoy their life journey and their individual freedom.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This story is true to the best of my memory. But my memory has been flawed by emotion and colored by the events of the intervening 56 years. Therefore there may be some family members, 397th Infantry Regiment Infantrymen and other WWII veterans who remember particular details, characters and events differently.

In preparing this material I am particularly indebted to five men from the 100th Infantry Division; each has written about his experiences during WWII. I have used small pieces of their story to add additional background to my small part of the story of the 100th Infantry Division's history. Each has my grateful thanks.

Corporal (later 2nd Lieutenant) Rufus Dalton, from Charlotte, NC, an 81-mm mortar section commander with the 3rd Platoon, Company H, 397th Infantry Regiment.

Sergeant Frank E. Hancock, from Baltimore, MD, a Heavy Machine Gunner who served with Company M, 399th Infantry Regiment, 100th Infantry Division. I recommend to anyone reading my story that they read Frank's story. He remembers so many rich details not included here. A copy of his story is filed in my WWII papers.

Corporal (later 2nd Lieutenant) James W. Henderson, from Lumberton, NC; a member of the 81-mm mortar platoon, Company H, 397th Infantry Regiment. Jim provided me with photographs and maps of the Bitche attack in March 1945.

Captain (later Major) Anthony (Tony) Maiale, from Wilmington, DE, was the Company Commander of Company H, 397th Infantry Regiment during our training at Ft. Bragg, NC and for most of the war period. In 1987 Tony and his wife, Jeannette lead several Company H men and their wives to our battlefields in France. My wife, Joëlle, was our interpreter with the French people. We have many memories of Captain Maiale's background stories relating details about our battles in France and Germany.

Corporal Clarence M. Rincker, from Lyman, NE, an 81-mm mortar 1st Gunner, 3rd Platoon, Company H, 397th Infantry Regiment. Rincker kept a diary of his training experiences while at Ft. Bragg, NC. I have woven some of his dates and scheduled training into my story to improve continuity.

To add the "big picture" I have used background material from "*The Story of the Century*" (History of the 100th Infantry Division) and "*The Regiment of the Century*" (History of the 397th Infantry Regiment). The authors of these manuscripts had access to the Official Records of the Division in 1945. I thank the authors for their detailed effort to record our story.

My wife, Joëlle Yven-Eckard was a great help in proof reading this manuscript. She was a 9-year old French citizen in 1940, when Germany attacked France. We continue to trade memories of the early part of the war, America's late entry into it, the liberation of France and our ultimate victory.

AUTHOR'S NOTES & COMMENTS

An infantryman on the "Line" has a very limited understanding of what is happening about him. Some say they had a clear idea of "the war" only 10-20 yards or so directly in front, depending on the situation. To fill out my story I have included excerpts from a variety of sources at my company, battalion, regiment, division and army level. Events discussed with and related by former "Combat Infantrymen" at 100th Infantry Division conventions and those presented in a few books on various phases of the WWII conflict are also included to add more detail to my personal story.

I have included a short statement of randomly selected WWII events to give the reader some sense of the flow of the war. As an example, a sentence about these events begins with: *On June 24, 1944...* these short statements are presented in Italics to indicate I was not present. Other events are included to explain what was happening on the "World Scene" or material concerning WWII battles in Europe. They also are presented in Italics to indicate I was not present.

During WWII about 132 million people lived in the USA. The US Military drew into service 16.3 million persons or about 12.3% of the population. Probably no more than 800,000 took part in extended combat. In numerous theaters fighting men comprised 10% or less of the full military complement. Infantrymen, constituting 14% of American troops overseas, suffered 70% of the casualties. I have read that for every Infantryman on the line four other soldiers provided support for him.

INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET

I urge the reader to visit the Internet Web site dedicated to the 100th Infantry Division at: www.100thww2.org/. (w/o the last period). This award-winning web site, through it's 25-menu items, presents a detailed history and photographs of the division, it's internal and supporting units, both large-scale and detailed maps of combat operations and honors earned. For a quick oversight click on the menu item: "What Makes Us Special". For a pictorial review, click on "Photos". The "Links" menu item will take the reader to many web sites associated with the 100th Infantry Division. Of particular interest are the sites posted by the City of Bitche, FR; the Maginot Line; the Army Specialized Training Program; and other American and German military units.

I have referenced some of the 25-Web site menu items at appropriate pages in my story to give the reader greater depth of understanding of the situation. I thank the 100th Infantry Division Association and it's contractor for their creativity in creating the Web site.

A web site dedicated to the Army Specialized Training Program is located at: www.astpww2.org/. (w/o the last period). The Citadel web site is located at: www.citadel.edu/. (w/o the last period). A map of the campus is presented at the "News & Information" menu item.

PROLOGUE

The time now is June 1999; WWII has been over since September 1945 - almost 54 years.

I am visiting my son Robin and his wife, Denise in Charlotte, NC. In a couple of days my first Grand Daughter Hannah Eckard will graduate from High School. Two of my children (Danny and Robin) and both granddaughters (Hannah and Sarah) live in the Charlotte area. During this visit, over a lazy Sunday breakfast Robin asked me to tell the story of the battle at Rimling, France, during January 7-9, 1945. As I neared the end, when my battalion was ordered to withdraw from the destroyed town, Robin sat up, stiffened and pointed his finger at me and said, "If you had not returned from the war, none of us would be here for Hannah's graduation". I replied, "That's correct". Robin and Denise encouraged me to "write it down". They were not aware that I was reviewing references and accounts at various libraries. To encourage me Robin loaned me his laptop computer and his desk during my stay at their home. During the next few days I began to "write it down", writing to Hannah, and all the children who are an important part of my life.

1. MY EARLY YEARS

The year 1925 was an excellent year for our family. For me personally because I was born in West Penn Hospital, Pittsburgh, PA at 10:45 AM on April 29. For my parents (William Emil Eckard and Sarah Evelyn Churm Eckard) because they moved into a new, large, two story home in Pittsburgh, PA. My father's radio repair and automobile repair shops were doing very well. My mother told me they were paying \$400 a month on the mortgage for the home. My sister Marilyn was born on May 14, 1928, just before the stock market collapsed and the Depression began. In a short time Pop's businesses and the home had been repossessed - he had no income. Our family suffered during the 1929 – 1935 Depression period. We moved each year or so around Pittsburgh, Beaver, and Erie, PA. We stayed with my parent's sisters and lived near mother's brother (George) in Beaver, PA. Our relatives helped us through that trying period. The highest paying job my father could find was collecting glass milk bottles for the Otto Milk Company, Pittsburgh, PA. He worked for Otto Milk for several years in the early 1930's and was paid 1/4 of a cent for each empty glass milk bottle collected. Mother told me his paycheck averaged \$25 per week. We hit bottom during that period. We were not alone; most families were struggling at that time.

Despite the tensions that remained in Europe after the Treaty of Versailles, which ended World War I, the first act of aggression that led to World War II occurred not there but in the Far East. In 1931 Japan invaded Manchuria.

During 1934 we lived in the East End section of Pittsburgh. In addition to attending grade school, I sang in a church choir. Because we did not have money for an electric street car ride, my buddies and I walked 2-3 miles (it seems now like 10 miles each way) to the Highland Park area to fish for catfish. Mother usually made me a lunch of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches - to this day I have trouble eating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Each Saturday mother sent me to the movies with a dime in my pocket for admission and a sandwich for lunch. My friends and I watched the cowboy feature and Flash Gordon adventure serials in the morning, then a double feature in the afternoon.

On August 1, 1935, my father was hired as a watchman at a US Steel Company Coal Mine in southwestern Pennsylvania. He worked the night shift, leaving home about 10 PM and returning about 7 AM. He slept during the day and ate breakfast about 4 PM just after Marilyn and I returned from school. It seems to me that mother was always in the kitchen cooking meals or washing our clothes.

Within a month after starting the new job, we moved to the Beechview section of Pittsburgh. Marilyn and I were both were taking piano lessons and playing in Sunday recitals. I passed my Tenderfoot examination and was inducted into the Boy Scouts. If I was not involved in weekend Boy Scout activities, I rode my new bicycle or went hiking or exploring in the nearby woods. Our life was getting better.

During March 1936 Hitler moved his German troops into the demilitarized Rhineland area of Germany on the East Side of the Rhine River, in violation of the WWI Peace Treaty.

In the summer of 1936 my Mother's Uncle, John Fitzsimmons, a retired 30-year US Army veteran, gave our family a new 1936 black, 4-door, stick shift Chevrolet automobile. He paid \$900 in cash! What a wonderful gift! My father worked almost every weekend making needed repairs; he kept the car running for more than a decade. (The car is in the background of two pictures taken a few days after my discharge in 1946. These photos are included in the 11 pages of snapshots and documents section that begins on the next page.

In mid 1936, at age 11, I was circumcised for health reasons; the surgery healed rapidly. More on this part of my story later.

In 1937 Japan invaded China.

In June 1938 (and again in 1939), after the school year was completed, my parents drove me to a farm owned by mother's sister, Ruth and her husband Ted Cahall. It was on 100 acres, located near Blooming Valley, PA, which is 6 miles northeast of Meadville, PA. I herded their 10-12 milk cows to and from their pasture, fed their pigs, learned how to plow a (very small) part of a field behind a horse, and removed bugs from potato plants. Sometimes I tried to milk a cow. Every Friday we picked and cleaned vegetables and prepared chickens for the Saturday morning trip to market in Meadville, PA.

In August 1938, after Pop was promoted to Policeman, we moved from Beechview to Oakdale, PA, which was closer to his work. Oakdale was a small town with a population of 2,500 people located 15 miles southwest of Pittsburgh. It was mainly a bedroom community for people who commuted to Pittsburgh each day via the Pennsylvania Railroad.

Our family regularly visited mother's older sister Esther & her husband Walter Quigley and their daughters Claire and Jean. They lived the Wilkinsburg area of Pittsburgh. Walter had a steady job with the Westinghouse Corporation as a Clerk throughout the Depression era. Their income was always higher than ours. To help me make some extra spending money Aunt Esther usually had some kind of a job for me, washing walls or cleaning floors.

In September 1938 I entered 8th grade, the eighth public school that I attended before completing grade school. In addition to my studies I played basketball on the Junior Varsity.

On September 30, 1938, England's Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and France's Premier Daladier signed a peace agreement with the Nazi Dictator Adolf Hitler. Chamberlain announced this meant "peace in our time". Less than 12 months later Hitler attacked Poland starting WWII.

Japan continued to move south through East Asia. The United States exercised sanctions, refusing to sell Japan raw materials such as petroleum, or scrap metal and then finally freezing all Japanese assets in the United States.

In March 1939 German troops marched into Czechoslovakia and annexed the country to Germany. France and Britain did nothing.

During the 1939 summer school vacation my parents drove Marilyn and me "way out west" - to southeast Michigan to visit Pop's sister Nettie and her husband Alfred King. I stayed with them for several months working on their 200-acre farm near Addison, located northwest of Adrian. When my parents picked me up near the end of August we drove north to Detroit and crossed into Canada, my first visit to a foreign country. We traveled through Canada to observe the Niagara Falls before returning to the USA.

On August 23, 1939, Stalin stunned the world by entering into a non-aggression pact with Hitler.

2. WAR BEGINS IN EUROPE

Germany attacked Poland on September 1, 1939 to start World War II in Europe. Before it was over in 1945, about 61 countries were involved and some 50 million people had died.

Most Americans followed the rapidly deteriorating situation during the summer of 1939 with confidence that we were safe behind the Atlantic Ocean. On the day WWII started in Europe my parents, Marilyn and I visited Aunt Ruth and Uncle Ted, in their small rental home near Mars, PA – they had recently sold their farm. After the evening meal we sat around the radio listening to an announcement from London describing the rapid destruction of the Polish Army and Air Force by the German Forces. Ted and Pop talked about what they expected to happen to the USA and the effect on our family.

Ted and Pop were in France with the US Army during WWI. Ted was in an Infantry Regiment with the 80th Infantry Division and was injured in a German gas attack. Pop served with the 521st Motor Transport Company; his US Army Serial Number was 2737718. Soldiers in that company assembled trucks and other vehicles, which were shipped from the USA, and delivered them to other units. According to documents in the company file at the National Archives in Suitland, MD, Pop was promoted to sergeant four times and "busted" down to private five times. The various offenses were not noted. I regret that I did not ask him about his service before he died in 1965.

I enrolled in Oakdale High School for my freshman year, after the Labor Day holiday in September 1939. My entire high school experience was overshadowed by the war in Europe and in the Pacific.

On September 17, 1939, Warsaw, the Capital of Poland, was surrounded by German troops. On September 28 Germany and Russia partitioned Poland. On November 30, Stalin unexpectedly attacked Finland.

On May 10, 1940, Germany invaded France and the Low Countries. Winston Churchill became Britain's new Prime Minister. The English Royal Air Force lost half of its bombers in three days. By May 24 about 380,000 French and English troops were encircled by German forces in a 60 square mile land area near Dunkirk, France. On May 26 about 861 ships and boats of all sizes pulled off 225,000 British and 113,000 French troops from the shore. The Germans sank 231 rescue ships by artillery, aircraft, mines and submarine attacks.

Incidentally, my wife, Joëlle Yven was 9 years old when Germany attacked France. Her father commanded a French ship that saved some 600 English soldiers from the Dunkirk beach under German artillery and aircraft fire. In his log, dated June 1, 1940 he wrote that his ship, the Hebe, loaded with 600 British soldiers, was the last ship to leave the port of Dunkirk. His anti-aircraft guns shot down several German planes while he navigated to England through the German underwater minefields.

On June 10, 1940, Italy entered the war against France and England.

Joëlle has a letter dated June 10, 1940, written by her mother to Joëlle's Grandmother. In it her mother explained that because of the expected German armor attacks into France she gave her children, Joëlle, age 9 and Gerard, age 6 to the family maid. The group was to travel from their home in Caen, France, southwest through the city of Rennes, then generally west to Concarneau, in Finistere, away from the main German attacks. She gave a copy of the letter to their maid and bid her children goodbye. They would walk a distance of about 200 air miles in several weeks time. They and many thousands of other women, small children and old men walked ahead of the attacking Germans to some distant destination. These people carried what they could on their back or in a cart, slept in the fields at night, were under attack from German aircraft by day and ate only what they could find in the fields beside the road.

During the summer of 1940, when I was 15 year old, I was selected as a Councilor at Camp Kon-O-Kwee, a YMCA camp for 9-10 year old boys. The Camp was located in the vicinity of Zelinople, PA, about 30 miles north of Pittsburgh. I enjoyed teaching them the lessons learned during my three years of Boy Scout training. At night most of the Councilors and I harassed the girl Councilors at a near-by YWCA camp.

On June 14, 1940, the Germans marched into Paris. During June 16-17 the Germans poured through the Maginot Line. French troops in Alsace and Lorraine were completely enveloped by Panzer units.

On July 10, 1940, President Roosevelt asked Congress for 15,000 new planes and a 2.1 million-man army. On July 16 the Japanese cabinet resigned and the military forces took over the Government. By August 6 American aircraft production reached 500 per month. On August 16, German aircraft bombed southern England. On August 23 the German Luftwaffe began bombing London. On August 27 the US Congress authorized induction of National Guard units into the US Army for 1 year.

I began my second year at Oakdale High School in early September 1940. My interests centered on basketball, football, Boy Scouts, tennis, church, building model airplanes, singing/playing the guitar and the trombone in the swing band, strutting as the drum major of the marching band and, of course, girls. Can you picture me smartly marching ahead of the Oakdale High School Band, twirling a baton at football games and at the Saturday night volunteer fireman parades all over southwestern Allegheny County, PA? Without much effort, I maintained about a 90% average; ranking about 3rd or 4th in my class of 25 students. I took courses in as many technical subjects as possible.

On September 9, 1940, US Navy Destroyers began to operate with the English Royal Navy in the North Atlantic. The same day the US Navy awarded contracts for construction of 210 ships including 12 aircraft carriers and 7 battle ships. On September 15 after losing major air battles, Germany postponed the invasion of England.

During the late fall of 1940, I was offered a job in Oakdale; the owner of the Thomas Funeral Home asked me to setup duck pins in their bowling alley in the basement of the Funeral Home. That was a difficult decision for my mother because she wanted me to restrict my after dark activities. I usually worked each weekend at local farms picking vegetables and fruits, but this was my first in-town job. After much discussion Mother finally gave her reluctant approval. I set up pins for the local bowling leagues on Friday and Saturday nights for 10 cents a line. Some of the bowling games continued until after midnight.

On April 29, 1941 I celebrated my 16th birthday. Mother baked my favorite chocolate cake. The next day with Pop's approval I applied for an automobile learner's permit. Pop taught me how to drive in our 1936 Chevrolet automobile. He was a very strict teacher and allowed few mistakes. Several weeks later, in McDonald, PA, I was tested by a burly PA State Trooper sitting at my side and passed. I could now legally drive but Pop refused to allow me to drive our car because he needed it for the 17-mile drive to his work. My only time behind the wheel was to drive mother, Marilyn and me to church on Sunday. I was angry!

In September 1941 I enrolled as a junior in the Oakdale High School. I was tall, over 6 feet, thin and weighed about 160 pounds - more than most of my classmates. The high school football coach asked me to try for the team. He assigned me to the position of left tackle. Several weeks later, during a practice session, our fullback ran the ball over my left tackle position, as I blocked the opposing tackle out of position. The fullback tripped over my foot and fell on my right shoulder, driving my left shoulder into the ground. My left collarbone splintered. The injury knocked me off the team. I spent about 6 weeks walking around with my left arm in a sling and missed about half of the basketball season.

3. PEARL HARBOR

On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor.

On that Sunday morning after Presbyterian Church services in Oakdale, mother, Marilyn and I rode a train and an electric streetcar to the Carnegie Museum in the Oakland section of Pittsburgh. After completing our visit to the museum we boarded another streetcar to return to downtown Pittsburgh. Late in the afternoon, as we stood under the clock at Kaufmanns Department store at Smithfield Street & 5th Ave. – a favorite meeting place - we heard nearby

paperboys selling an Extra Edition of the newspaper by yelling “Japs Bomb Pearl Harbor”. I turned to my mother and asked, “What’s Pearl Harbor? She replied that it was the main US Naval Base in the Hawaiian Islands.

That evening, we sat around the radio listening to reports of damage and military casualties. The next day we listened as President Roosevelt asked the Congress to declare that a state of war existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire. The United States was finally in the war! Three days later Hitler declared War on the USA - his greatest mistake. As a 10-year old French girl, Joëlle remembers the quiet celebrations in occupied France. The people of France knew that eventually the Americans would come to liberate them.

Dick Thomas, the owner of The Thomas Funeral Home in Oakdale, PA had the contract for removing coal ashes from the schools in Oakdale. He asked me if I was interested in cleaning out the furnaces, loading the ashes into his dump truck and hauling the ashes to the dump. As I was unable to convince Pop that I could safely drive the family car, I jumped at the opportunity to drive the dump truck. That part-time job later expanded into helping Dick Thomas with his ambulance service, driving coalmine or automobile accident victims and sick people to the hospitals in Pittsburgh. Later, Dick asked me to help him with the Funeral Home business - assisting with the embalming and layout of bodies and helping with the funerals, either in local churches, local homes or at the Thomas Funeral Home. I worked for him until I left for the US Army in 1943. After my military discharge in 1946 he hired me again. That part-time job continued until I graduated from the University of Pittsburgh in 1949.

On January 8, 1942, England began to ration food and the first US troops landed at Noumea, the capital of French New Caledonia in the southwest Pacific. On March 14 US troops landed in Australia. On April 9 Bataan fell to the Japanese. On April 18 Japan was bombed by 16 B-25 US bombers.

On April 29, 1942 I celebrated my 17th birthday.

During May 4-8, 1942, Japan and US fought the Battle of Coral Sea - the first naval battle in which the participants never saw their enemy. Japan suffered its first set back of the war. On May 6 US forces on Corregidor surrendered to the Japanese.

In late May 1942 I graduated from the third year of high school. I began to work full time for the Thomas Funeral Home during the summer vacation. My best friend in high school was Dick Bragg. (A picture of Dick Bragg and me, taken in 1942, is included in the snapshots and documents section). He owned an early Ford automobile with a rumble seat. We were dating twin sisters from Rennerdale, PA. My date and I rode in the rumble seat. I insisted on paying my share of the gas and oil. Dick asked his father, who owned the local A&P grocery store, to hire me as a grocery clerk. Now I had two jobs, When money became short, I hiked into the woods across the street from our house, at 234 Union Avenue and “liberated” a quart of oil (or more as needed) from an oil well storage tank. That crude oil worked OK without being refined. Later, after the war, while enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh, taking their Petroleum Production Engineering course I studied the famous McDonald, PA oil field and its high quality crude oil.

By June 1, 1942, the Germans ordered all French and Dutch Jews to wear the Star of David ID badges. The turning point in the Pacific war occurred during the June 4-6 Battle of Midway Island. On August 7 US forces invaded Guadalcanal Island and the Solomon Islands - the first US offense in the war.

In early September 1942 I enrolled for my senior year at Oakdale High School. Gradually, since Pearl Harbor was attacked nine months before, those of us in high school began to realize that the war would not be over soon and we were going to serve in the armed forces.

In early October 1942, President Roosevelt recommended the induction of 18 & 19 year olds into the US Military. On October 23 US forces sailed from Hampton Roads, VA for the November 8-12 invasion of Africa. On December 2 the first nuclear chain reaction was achieved at University of Chicago.

In late 1942 the US Congress dropped the draft age from 20 to 18 years old. On February 4, 1943 General Eisenhower was given command of all Allied forces in North Africa. On February 9 all organized Japanese resistance on Guadalcanal ended.

During this period Dick Bragg and I talked about his car, the war, our impending involvement in it and, of course, girls. Dick was about 6 months older than me and had decided to register with the local Draft Board. I had a different idea of my future. I wanted to become a US Army fighter pilot, however my parents refused to sign for an early enlistment. They insisted that I first graduate from high school.

They did encourage me to take a physical from our family doctor to determine whether I would qualify. I remember thinking - they hope I will fail the physical. Our family doctor reported "I was in excellent condition" and suggested a full eye examination from the family ophthalmologist. He was the surgeon who removed Pop's right eyeball and the melanoma cancer behind it in 1942. Mother took me into Pittsburgh for the appointment. I passed the examination. As he concluded his discussion of the examination, he turned to the table behind his desk and picked up a thin book. He opened it and showed me a 6-inch diameter circle filled with various colored dots and asked me to identify the number in the circle. I told him that I saw no number. He opened another page with the same results. After several more pages he turned to my mother and explained that I was blue-green color deficient and would never be accepted as an Air Cadet. He commented that this color deficiency is passed down from the mother to son. I was crushed! My dream of becoming a fighter pilot evaporated.

4. ENLISTMENT IN US ARMY

The family discussions concerning my enlistment continued into late March 1943 without resolution. Several of the young men in my senior class decided to enlist before they turned 18 and were later granted their high school diploma. My 18th birthday was April 29, one month before graduation. I pushed for a decision.

In late April 1943 the turning point in the Battle of the Atlantic occurred as new US anti-submarine measures began achieving results.

My parents finally agreed to my enlistment if I would accept a deferment until after graduation. With that agreement I took the necessary mental and physical tests on April 28, 1943 – one day before my 18th birthday, the day I was required to sign up with the draft board. I remember thinking - I have never seen so many naked male bodies in my life - little did I realize how many I would see while on active duty. Another vivid memory is standing naked in a long line of fellow enlistees and feeling the breath from the fellow in line behind me, striking my bare back. These were the first of many, many lines that all of us would stand in for the next few years.

The local enlistment center was in the Old Post Office building (now a 4-story parking lot on Smithfield Street) in Pittsburgh. Much to my dismay, the US Army Air Corps was not open for enlistment at that time. I was not interested in signing up with the US Navy or Coast Guard. As I signed the papers to serve in the US Army “for the duration of the war plus 6 months”, the Enlistment Officer showed me my Serial Number - ER 13133139 – noting that it had three 13’s. He commented that the three 13’s would bring me good luck. I was assigned to the Enlisted Reserve Corps with a deferment until high school graduation - one month in the future. (A copy of the front page of my original enlistment record is included in the snapshots and documents section).

On May 12, 1943, all Axis forces in North Africa surrendered.

5. HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

Graduation ceremonies for 23 Senior Class members took place in the Oakdale High School auditorium on May 25, 1943. Among my other achievements - marching band (drum major and played the trombone), swing band, vice-president of junior class, basketball, lead actor in senior play, etc., our senior class yearbook listed me as the best dancer. I was the “King of Swing” in my senior year, dancing to the music of Glenn Miller, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Duke Ellington, Harry James and many other “Big Bands”.

On May 30, 1943 US forces secured Attu Island, Alaska; the Japanese invasion of the North American continent was over.

6. FORT MEADE, MD – REPORT FOR ACTIVE DUTY – JUNE 16, 1943

On the first day of June I received a letter from the US Army with orders and a railroad ticket to report for induction at Fort George G. Meade, Maryland on June 16, 1943. On the 15th of June I packed a few toilet articles in a bag; said my last good byes to my latest girl friend and my family - they were crying, I was excited - and boarded a train in Oakdale for the Pennsylvania Station in Pittsburgh. There I changed trains for an overnight ride to Union Station, Washington, DC. Nobody would ever guess how scared and excited I was inside. At Union Station I boarded another train for the short ride north to Ft. Meade.

As hundreds of new recruits walked off the train, we were separated into smaller groups and met our new leader – a young corporal. He marched us to our two-story wooden barracks. Both floors were filled with double bunks. We were assigned to bunks. The corporal told us to drop our overnight bags on our bed. None of us had any privacy in the barracks or the toilets without stalls or gang-showers. Most everyone used profanity in every other word. The

corporal ordered us to meet outside – now! As the gang of us filed outside he showed us how to form into a platoon and marched (if you could call it marching) us off to an immense hall where we joined a long line of new soldiers waiting for food. We picked up a stainless steel compartmented tray; the kitchen helpers filled the tray with food.

That afternoon we marched to a huge warehouse. Once inside, at various stops, a different item of army clothing was tossed into our outstretched arms: olive drab (OD) shorts and tee-shirts, a small towel and wash cloth, shoes, leggings, kakhi (tan) shirts, pants and a tie, one set of green fatigues, a plastic helmet liner, an OD wool blanket, two white sheets, a pillow case and a duffel bag. We were ordered to stuff every thing into the duffel bag and meet outside. The corporal ordered us to sling the bag over our left shoulder and then marched us back to our barracks.

The corporal gave us instructions on how to make our bed, where to store some of our clothing and how to hang the rest with the left sleeve showing, how to polish our shoes, and stow the duffel bag. There was a specific place for everything.

The rest of the afternoon was spent listening to the corporal instruct us about rank from privates (I believe we were ranked lower - as recruits) to master sergeants and then the officer ranks. He seemed to imply – no, I remember he said that corporals, with two stripes and sergeants, with 3 stripes were one step under GOD. Any orders from them would be instantly obeyed and they would be treated with respect, obedience and courtesy. They did not rate a salute and were not to be addressed as “sir”. All officers, from Second Lieutenants to Generals were to be addressed as “sir” and given a salute.

Later that first evening, when “lights-out” was ordered, I could not sleep. So much had changed. I heard snores, then someone walked to the latrine and bumped into something on his way back to bed, then some muffled sobs. I felt like crying. This was like Boy Scout camping, but with more, many more strange and different people. I was too tired to be homesick. My last thought was how long was “the duration of the war + 6 months”.

The next day we were given shots for typhus, diphtheria and small pox. All of us took a series of physical and mental tests. One of the tests had questions on arithmetic and number series, opposite and similar items, figures and verbal analogies. I was sure I had failed. Later in the day we marched to a barbershop and my hair was shaved completely off. Back at our barracks we were told to send everything civilian home and then were issued identity tags (dog tags). I took advantage of the offered \$10,000 life insurance policy for \$6.50 a month deducted from my \$50 monthly pay. I listed my parents as beneficiaries in the event of my death.

I also spent the better part of the next 3 days scrubbing pots and pans and peeling mounds of potatoes in the kitchen because I refused to shine the corporal’s boots. I was ordered to report to the kitchen at 4:30 AM and did not complete my “kitchen police” duties until about 10 PM. I learned that “Rank Had Its Privileges!”. But that’s another story!

During the 5th day at Ft. Meade I was ordered to attend a meeting at a nearby movie theater. About 50 new recruits were sitting in the theater when I arrived. An officer came on the stage; he told us that we had been selected for The Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP). We looked at each other wondering what that meant. He explained that the US Congress had

established the program in December 1942. It authorized the US Army to select 150,000 men for an accelerated course (the usual four-year course presented over a period of one and one-half years) in engineering, medicine, dentistry or foreign languages at more than 200 colleges and universities around the country. This program was estimated at the (then) enormous cost of \$127 Billion. Before the war, college entrance was largely closed to anyone in the bottom 2/3 of the economic ladder. This program was the first step in lowering that barrier to a college education. The officer also commented that all men selected for the ASTP must attain standing in the highest of five groups in the Army General Classification Test. He explained that to be considered for ASTP a soldier must receive a score of 115 or higher. Then he remarked that selection for Officers Candidate School only required a score of 110. We eventually were referred to as "Whiz Kids".

Well, that sounded better than being assigned to the Infantry. However, the officer continued, before we were officially assigned to the ASTP, we must successfully complete a 13 week Basic Infantry Training Course. One day later about 200 of my fellow recruits and I boarded a train and headed south toward Union Station, Washington, DC. A short time later our railroad cars were detached and moved to a siding. As darkness fell, our cars were connected to other cars. We asked our detail commander, who carried our official papers - Where are we going? He had no information. We were all going along for the ride - somewhere! The train just sat at the station. I tried to sleep but the excitement and lack of room kept me awake.

About midnight the train pulled out of Washington, DC. I was unable to see the name of the small towns we roared through. Most of us wanted to know which direction we were headed; some fellows just fell asleep. As dawn arrived, I noticed a sign - Horseshoe Bend. Now my knowledge of Pennsylvania came into use - Horseshoe Bend on the Pennsylvania Railroad was near Altoona - We were going west toward Pittsburgh. Several hours later we stopped at the Pennsylvania & Lake Erie Station to service the train and eat breakfast. I wanted to get off the train and call my parents. Our orders were to remain on the train. I tried to convince the detail commander that a phone call to my parents would not jeopardize our security. To make a very emotional story short, the train pulled out, solving my problem. About 45 minutes later the train roared toward Oakdale at 60 miles an hour. I opened a window and stuck my head and arms out. I yelled and waved at the Stationmaster, who was standing outside the station watching the troop train go by. He was the father of two of my high school basketball team members. He did not hear or see me. I felt like crying! I was getting homesick!

OK, we were going west, but to where? We passed through Columbus, OH, then Cincinnati. During the evening the train stopped and our cars were detached. The next morning we left Cincinnati and turned south into Kentucky, through Louisville, to Nashville, TN and crossed into Alabama. Now I was far away from home and into "The South" for the first time. I had not been further west than eastern Michigan or south of the Mason-Dixon line.

I walked to the last car on the train and stood on the platform watching the single set of tracks pass out from under the train. I wondered what was happening to me. I was so homesick! During the afternoon we passed through Birmingham and turned east for about 60 miles. Late in the afternoon of the 4th day of the trip we arrived at the Infantry Replacement Training Center (IRTC), Fort McClellan, northeast of Anniston, AL.