PREPARING FOR JAPAN

10 August 1945 was the date set for the 100th Infantry Division to be on alert for deployment to the Pacific Theater via the United States.

Hoppy (Capt. Hopkins) had come back to the company on 9 May 1945, and though the war was over in Europe, we had to train for combat in the Far East. Out came the U.S. Army Training Manuals on infantry tactics, reconnaissance patrols, combat patrols, care and cleaning of weapons, map reading, and on and on. We also became the jogging company that ran double-time all around our assigned area. For those of us who had just finished a long period in combat, our enthusiasm for this return to basics was less than minimal. While we were jogging one afternoon around Bavaria, I was near the tail end of the company with another laggard. Bringing up the rear was a new lieutenant who had just joined the company and had not seen any combat. He shouted at us, "Let's go! Keep up with the platoon! We have to get ready for Japan!" My buddy, who had little reverence for raw shavetails, replied, "I don't see any medals on you, lieutenant!" Normally, that would have called for some disciplinary action, but the times were different and the young officer just let it slide.

We were being taught again the basics of being an infantry soldier. We were outfitted in clean uniforms, with clean weapons. We were cleanshaven, and it was spit and polish again. Much of the reason for this was that we were performing for the German civilians who wanted to see how the American Army compared with their army. We were based in a Wehrmacht barracks, and the company, which was at full strength, fell into formation and marched in close-order drill. It may have seemed a little ridiculous, but it was necessary to prove that we were a well-trained and disciplined company. It also gave us a challenge to show that we were really terrific soldiers and proud to be in the American Army. I think that impression came across to the civilian population.

There were souvenirs in those barracks, such as Nazi flags and other Nazi paraphernalia, pistols, rifles, swords, and uniforms. Much of it was sent home by the GIs. As a lark, I sent the largest Nazi flag I could find to a classmate from college who was serving on a U.S. Navy ship in the Pacific Theater. To my surprise the U.S. Post Office delivered it. When

he received it, he wrote back that the whole ship's crew was stunned when he showed it to them fully opened.

As time went on, we got to know some of the local people, even though we had orders not to fraternize with the German people. Since we had free time to patronize the local beer hall, it was difficult not to get to know the people. Many of them wanted to talk to us about relatives in Chicago or Milwaukee or Brooklyn. The young women who had no contact with any young men for a very long time were not bashful and easily approachable, so that non-fraternization was observed with a blind eye.

We were strangely drawn together. They were not the hated enemy, but rather nice, ordinary, friendly people. And we were not the hated Amies (American soldiers), but only young, polite, fun-loving men. To me, it was a ludicrous farce. Only a few days ago, we were killing their soldiers and their soldiers were killing my buddies. Except for the Hitler Jugend, who scowled at us because they thought they were a superior Aryan race, we found little animosity from the older civilians. I felt like the Hitler Jugend, however, and had to hide my feeling of scorn for these "docile" ones who had started the war. Though that feeling has diminished over the years, it has never completely gone.

Bartering with American cigarettes was active between the civilians and the GIs. For a pack of cigarettes, we could have our picture taken in a studio by a professional photographer. Cigarettes were traded for beer, wine, and schnapps. American cigarettes were highly prized by the Germans with the smoking habit because they had been smoking ersatz cigarettes made of a leaf that tasted awful and reeked badly. Lung cancer was never considered a problem then and most people smoked. We even had our laundry done by a hausfrau for a bar of soap. Real soap was in short supply then. Despite all these minor things, it seemed that the worst of times was behind all of us.

I missed bed check one night, because I was having a good time at a local hofbrau. There was beer, music and dancing and I forgot to get back in time. As a result, I was demoted from Acting Sergeant to Private First Class. Since I had never been given the actual rank, stripes or pay, my December 1944 non-promotion was a non-demotion. My feeling was one of indifference, because it had been such a long time, I suspected that the promotion was not coming. After all, I had been rejected for OCS at Fort Knox and grounded as an Air Cadet by order of Gen. Arnold in earlier times. I felt very comfortable as a PFC.

14 August 1945 was V-J Day. The Japanese had unconditionally surrendered. Training for Love Company and the 100th Division to go to the Pacific Theater was ended.

GOING HOME?

The time had come to return home to the U.S. The order in which soldiers were to be repatriated depended upon several things, such as length of service, time served overseas, and number of medals. We had scoffed at the idea of getting medals or "tin badges" or "fruit salad" during combat. Of what use would they be if they were pinned on your grave? We never thought of much more than living from day to day and killing as many of the enemy as possible so that we could go home.

It seemed that most of the citations for medals were written up by officers for fellow officers and they usually deserved them. However, most dogfaces performed heroically, and occasionally when an application for a well-earned medal was submitted, it was returned with the letters "LD" (Line of Duty). Now that a medal earned points toward an early return home and a discharge, it had some value. Fifty-five points or more entitled the soldier to that bon voyage. I, and many others, had 54 points or less and had to bide our time until the Army could assign us to other duties.

At headquarters, orders were being cut for soldiers who were not going home with the division. They were to be assigned to other units that became the U.S. Army of Occupation. The country was under the control of a military government and had to be administered by the Army in the U.S. sector. There were displaced persons from many countries in factories and slave labor camps. Allied prisoners of war from many countries had to be cared for and repatriated. Concentration camps with victims of Nazi barbarism were in dire need of medical help and nourishment. German prisoners of war had to be interrogated before release into civilian life. The task was mind-boggling, and the help of the German civilians was needed to handle the work.

I was transferred to a Military Government unit in Kassel, Germany – the only one from my company. It was in September 1945 that I said "good-bye" to Love Company and the few old buddies that were still there. From 6 October 1944 to 8 May 1945, according to the Morning Reports of that period, 398 men and officers had been in the company for varying periods of time. That was twice the original number who went overseas.

With the exception of those who were cooks or clerks, not many were still there at the end. Some had been in the company for only a few days or a few weeks, and it was impossible to get to know them. Perhaps we spoke a few civil words on a chow line or when we were in reserve or when we were marching from one sector to another. The only time for a long conversation was in a foxhole, but you seldom got to know your buddy very well. Then, of course, he was gone and you had another green replacement in the foxhole. That is when you began to wonder when you would be wounded or killed. I was very fortunate, but I missed all those good buddies who were gone. Since I could not say good-bye to them before I shipped out, I did not feel too badly about leaving. It was not the same Love Company anymore.

Besides the memories, I had one small souvenir to remind me of my old buddies. I received a set of winter uniform ODs (olive drab trousers, jacket, and overseas cap) to replace the ones I turned in back in Marseilles before we entered combat. These were issued to us when the war ended. Of course, they were not the same ODs I had before. Inscribed in the overseas cap I received was the name "Zilliox." At first, I felt uneasy wearing the cap that once belonged to Pfc. William G. Zilliox who was killed at Lemberg on 8 December 1944. He was a BAR man who died firing his gun at the enemy. I remembered him as a tall soldier who was pleasant and just another nice young guy. I thought of asking for another cap, but decided that I could not do that. I wore it proudly in his memory until I was discharged.

U.S. ARMY OF OCCUPATION

Kassel is an important city in the province of Hesse and the home of the Hessian soldiers who fought as mercenaries for the British during the American Revolution. This city suffered great destruction during the war. Rubble was piled high along the sides of the road. Yet in many sections of the city there was only minor damage.

I was assigned to a Military Government unit on the outskirts of the city where there was a supply depot consisting of four large warehouses inside a walled compound. The personnel operating the depot were two officers, three or four noncoms and about eight enlisted men. I was placed in charge of one warehouse where I had a crew of German civilians to do the work of moving and storing the food we received by railroad freight cars and by truck. The warehouse had a rail siding and platform for the boxcars to be loaded and unloaded. Cartons of canned goods, tins of biscuits, bags of flour, barrels of lard, and assorted other goods were in our warehouses for distribution.

One older German man was selected to be my assistant and foreman of the crew. I was to fill orders for DP (displaced persons) camps from the stocks in the warehouse. It was an easy assignment, and I only had to give orders and see that they were carried out. If I found any sign of theft or pilferage, I was to report it to S. Sgt. Virgil K. Lancaster, who was our top noncom in charge of discipline. When a thief was apprehended, he was sent to S. Sgt. Lancaster for instruction on the evils of dishonesty. This took place in a basement room of the office building, where the culprit was soundly beaten by the heavy fists of our massive sergeant. Then the thief was fired from the crew. This method of communication resulted in a minimum of pilferage, so that the food and supplies in our care went almost entirely to the needy and not to the black market.

The compound was under guard at all times. However, we did not have to do any guard duty. This was done by a small detail of Polish soldiers, which gave us a lot of free time. On one weekend, a 500 pound barrel of lard which was on the end of a loading dock mysteriously disappeared. This was no small item because a truck was needed to haul it away. The guards were closely interrogated but they claimed complete ig-

norance. Some disciplinary action was taken but the culprits were never found.

Occasionally, a young worker who had formerly been in the Hitler Youth Movement – the Jugend – would act somewhat surly and make remarks or gestures to show his disdain for me as an American soldier. Since I was in charge and carried a .45 caliber automatic pistol in the holster on my belt, I did not accept such behavior. Once, I pulled out the pistol and explained to the foreman that I had been in the front lines, and I had no qualms about shooting anyone who threatened me. He took to heart my meaning and thereafter, the crew was very cooperative and respectful.

This kind of arrogance reminded me of the situation in Fort Bragg during the summer of 1944 when I was in training to be an infantryman. There was a large group of German prisoners on the base from the Afrika Corps who were being guarded by civilian soldiers like me. They were detailed to do minor work around the base such as loading or unloading trucks or road repair and so forth. They would do everything at the slowest possible pace and add jibes and laughs at guards who could not respond in any way. It seemed that they were the battle-hardened veterans to be admired by the raw recruits watching them. Even our officers seemed to defer to them and allow them to smirk and laugh at us – the poor, weak, hapless American soldier who would be destroyed by their comrades still fighting for Germany. I never forgot their grinning arrogance while they were the prisoners and we were the intimidated guards. How different it would be now if I were guarding those prisoners.

In our motor pool, we had four Jeeps, two 2½ ton GMC trucks, two Harley-Davidsons and one Indian motorcycle, two 1½ ton Dodge trucks and some German vehicles. I was curious about the German-built Ford truck, which was of medium size, and decided to drive it. It started easily, and I drove it slowly, but when I wanted to make a turn, I had to spin the steering wheel like a top before it would change direction. I never drove it again.

The motorcycles were a challenge to ride because I had to learn by doing. The Harley-Davidsons were larger than the Indian motorcycle. They were painted in the army's dull O.D. color, with a white star, and had large windshields. I had to learn to twist the left handle for the spark and the right handle for the throttle. The left pedal was the clutch and the right pedal was the brake. The gearshift, which had neutral and first, second, and third gears, was by my right hand in front of my seat. The kickstarter was by my right foot. To practice, I had to negotiate the motorcycle around

a small open area in the yard. This small clearing was situated between several piles of British hardtack biscuits in metal tins that rose about fifteen feet high.

My first attempt, after starting it and shifting into first gear by using the clutch, resulted in my crashing into a pile of biscuits. I fell off the bike as it toppled on its side and scraped the inside of my left leg. No damage was done to the machine and my injury was very minor. After several more attempts, I managed to concentrate and coordinate the intricacies of steering, manually shifting gears using the clutch, controlling the speed with the right hand throttle, braking with the right foot, and shifting into neutral when stopping. I felt that I had accomplished a tremendous feat when I could handle a motorcycle with ease.

It was exhilarating to ride out into the country where there was no traffic and speed up to 70 miles an hour. Of course, it was also rather stupid because if I had hit a rock in the road, I would have been thrown off the bike into the next world. Protective helmets were not in vogue then. The farm country air was heavy with the aroma of liquid cow manure fertilizer. Whew! It was perfume to the flying bugs of all sizes that infested the area. My face, arms, and legs were splattered with them as I sped along. I had to keep my mouth closed, too. This cooled my enthusiasm for motorcycling on a recreational basis. Incidentally, I rode all of our motorcycles and found that the Harley-Davidsons were heavy and powerful but the Indian seemed to be a peppier and faster machine.

For our small installation of about 12 men, we had a young man from Holland as an interpreter, an older German woman as cook, and a young Ukrainian woman who helped and served the food and cleaned the quarters. We had our laundry done beautifully. Our uniforms came back spotless and pressed perfectly. Even our boxer shorts had been pressed with a crease in the legs. Our food was requisitioned from the commissary of the Army Air Corps, because they had the best quality. Also, rations were ordered for 40 men, not 12, so that there was always plenty of the best food. Our cook made many German dishes: sauerbraten, beef roulade, wiener schnitzel, dumplings, potato pancakes, etc., and it was all delicious. There were also desserts and beverages. There was no chow line with the food slopped into our messkits. We had clean napkins, dishes and flatware at every meal. They were taken away afterwards to be cleaned. There was no K.P. To a civilian this would not seem to be very unusual, but for a dogface it was a bit of paradise.

Tanya, the Ukrainian D.P., was a young, pretty brunette who was subjected to teasing and flirting at every meal but she never responded to any of the passes. She was efficient and aloof. Eventually, she responded to our teasing when we learned to say "I love you" in Russian but that was all. Perhaps, she longed to go home to her family just as most of us did.

On our time off, we went to the local hofbrau where there was beer, a German band, and dancing. The Germans did not know how to jitterbug, but they waltzed furiously. The men and women spun each other around at a dizzying pace. I danced the waltz with a fraulein, and it was not anything like the Blue Danube, which is graceful and smooth. This was just brute force as we spun round and round, faster and faster until the music stopped. It was exhausting and exhilarating.

During the breaks when the band rested, Don (Pfc. Manson Allerton Donaghey) would sit at the piano and play the popular songs from back home: "I'll Be Seeing You," "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree With Anyone Else But Me," "I'll Be Home For Christmas," "I'll Walk Alone," and others. We would sing along and feel very sentimental. One evening, a soldier came in and told Don to stop playing because he didn't want to hear it. I became incensed and stuck my face into his and said, "I want to hear it!" That was the end of his objection.

I had a date with a fraulein that was quite unusual. She invited me to attend a concert in a garden or auditorium where everyone was dressed in formal civilian clothes. With my uniform, I was also in a sort of formal attire. The classical music program was performed by an accomplished group of musicians. They were excellent and the audience applauded them enthusiastically. How did these people conduct such a destructive war and maintain the appearance of culture in the bombed-out city of Kassel? It seemed unbelievable to me, but I learned that some Germans love the boisterous beer halls and others do not.

Back at the warehouse, we were kept busy filling orders for food and supplies to DP camps. One day I was ordered to pick up a load of coal from another warehouse in Kassel. I was sent out with an army 2½ ton truck (also called a 6 by 6 because it could be shifted into gear to drive all six wheels). The canvas top of the truck was removed and the wooden benches on each side of the back were locked in an up position, so that there was an open area to receive the coal. I drove to the depot to get the load of coal. When the loading was completed, I started my return trip to our depot. The truck was now moving more slowly under the load, which may have been about five tons of coal. I had no trouble handling the truck

until I started down a hill that led into the center of the city. The truck was in gear for level ground, and as it rolled down hill it picked up speed as gravity took over. I could not drop shift into a lower gear to slow down the truck, because to double clutch I would have to shift into neutral first before I could gun the engine and shift into a lower gear. The moment I shifted into neutral, I would never have been able to shift it back into gear and I would have lost control of the truck. My only option was to apply the brakes and hope that this would slow the truck as I was careening down the hill.

In the meantime, ahead of me was the main street of the city and I had to make a right turn. A crowd of civilians was waiting on an island for a streetcar to arrive. As I turned, I was afraid I would swerve into them. I was blasting away with my horn while I was using all my strength to hold down the brake pedal and praying all the time that the streetcar was not coming. What a relief it was that my prayers were answered! I slowed down the truck on the level road and drove slowly all the rest of the way. When I got back to my warehouse compound, my heart was beating rapidly and I felt completely exhausted. Never again would I forget to shift into a lower gear before I drove a truck down a hill.

Meanwhile, at the warehouse when a train arrived with freight cars loaded with cargo for different warehouses, we had a switching engine that was used to move the cars from one area to another. A few of the soldiers learned how to operate this small diesel engine and were able to hook up a freight car and deliver it to the correct loading platform. The engine had a shed at the end of one of the lines where it was sometimes housed when not in use. At the rear end of the shed where the rails ended, there was a bumper to stop the engine from going out the back of the shed and over the edge into a gully. One morning we returned to the yard and found that the switching engine had been driven into the shed and beyond. Somehow, the engine hit the stopping block with such force that it went right through it and landed on its side in the gully behind the shed. Someone had accidentally or deliberately put the engine out of commission.

Without this engine, we had the problem of moving the freight cars to the right loading platforms as trains arrived. At first, we used brute strength in the form of the German crews, who were told to push a freight car into its proper place. This did not work out very well. The best solution we could devise was to attach one end of a steel cable to the coupling of a freight car and attach the other end to the trailer hitch of a Jeep. I was assigned to the task of pulling the freight car while driving the Jeep. This

worked very well when a freight car had to be moved to a loading platform. However, when we had to move a freight car so that it was coupled to another freight car, it became a very exciting maneuver. A freight car would have a cable connected to the trailer hook of my Jeep, and I would then pull it along the tracks toward the stationary freight car. At the last moment, I would sharply steer the Jeep off the tracks and let the freight car I was pulling slam into the stationary freight car and connect to it. This was like playing a game called "chicken."

Toward Christmas 1945, there arrived at our compound an Army Quartermaster Corps coffee-roasting truck. I did not know the Army had such a piece of equipment. At the warehouse, we had hundreds of burlap bags of green coffee beans from Central America, probably Honduras. The detail had come to roast the beans in our inventory. When the roasting began, the aroma of real coffee wafted over the entire neighborhood. The Germans went crazy. They had been drinking ersatz coffee for so many years that they had almost forgotten the aroma of the real thing. For Christmas, we made bags of about half a kilo of fresh roasted coffee and gave one to each of our workers. They were delighted and could not thank us enough.

Christmas was a great time. We had presents from home and there was a feeling of thankfulness. The wife of my foreman had knitted a white muffler, and he presented it to me as an expression of good will. What a contrast to the Christmas of 1944!

Right after Christmas, I was given a furlough and chose to go back to the Riviera. No one else from our small unit was going at that time, but I did not mind going alone. It was winter and two weeks in the sun would be a treat.

RETURN TO THE FRENCH RIVIERA

On the civilian train, there was a U.S. Army officer who was the "train commander" whose assignment was to see that the soldiers were orderly and to handle any problems that might arise. As the train neared Lyons, I had the brilliant idea to stop off and visit Natalie. However, I had to get permission from the officer in charge. I went to him and feigned motion sickness. I said that I had to get off the train because I did not feel well and that I would be all right if I could stay overnight in Lyons and catch the train to Nice the following day. He listened with a skeptical look and gave his permission for me to leave.

From the station, I telephoned Natalie and was told that she was not at home and that I should call later. I went to a U.S. Army social club in the city and was set up with a bunk for the night. When I called later, I was told that she was away and would not be back for several days. My brilliant strategy was a failure, so the following morning, I boarded a train for Nice.

I went to the Hotel Ruhl again, and everything was almost the same as it was the first time I had been there about six months earlier. Since the summer crowd was not there, it was not as exciting. The weather was fine, but there were no beachgoers. Winter and the holiday season cast a serious mood on the resort. Perhaps it was just my feeling that was restrained. I had not seen Natalie. I was alone. I had been to the Riviera in the bright summer and not the gloomy winter. It was now New Year's Eve 1945. I thought of New Year's Eve 1944, of the battle, of those who were killed, and of how I had survived. I bought a black market bottle of White Horse Scotch for $20.00, and I sat in the lobby of the hotel from dinnertime until after midnight and slowly drank the entire bottle by myself. I had never done that before and have not done it since. The liquor did not boost my spirits because I was feeling very depressed and sorry for myself. Since there was nothing much to celebrate I said, "Happy New Year" to no one in particular and went to bed.

During my stay, I had noticed that there were some married couples in the hotel on their honeymoon. They were mostly American soldiers with French brides. I was curious about them and observed how they were relating to each other. As I studied them, it struck me that at mealtime and

in the lobby, they seemed to be very distant toward each other. There was very little animated conversation or laughing. They seemed somewhat bored with each other while all around them the GIs were joking, laughing, and having a good time. I wondered: "Would that be the same with Natalie and me? What would we talk about? We hardly spoke each other's language well. Would it be a mistake to get married? We don't know each other very well. I haven't met her family and I don't even know anything about them. Are we really suited to each other?"

I was not yet 22 years old and I thought that it was too soon to try to work out all the problems in my life with the added responsibility of a wife. After all, marriage was always a permanent commitment. Divorce was never a consideration. My doubts became a final decision. I was not ready to get married!

BIDING TIME

The furlough was over and I returned to Kassel, where I was living a life of luxury for a soldier. Letters from Natalie were there also. I had to answer them, but I did not have the heart to write that I wanted to break the engagement. Should I write to tell her of all the doubts that I had about this marriage? Should I care if she became angry and hated me? What should I do? I was a coward and did not write at all.

In the meantime, my military government unit in Kassel was being disbanded. I was assigned to drive S. Sgt. Lancaster to Wiesbaden where he was to join a group that was going home. It was mid-January, and we took a 1½ ton army truck for the 100-mile trip. We started early in the morning on the Autobahn. There were no civilian automobiles, with coal-burning tanks for fuel, on the road. Only army vehicles were using the Autobahn. We arrived in time for lunch in Wiesbaden. After saying good-bye, I started back to Kassel.

It was late afternoon, but there was plenty of time until the dinner hour. There was very little traffic on the road and I was not rushed. However, dusk was at hand and I put on my headlights. As I looked at the road, it seemed to be somewhat whitish and some snow was falling. Nevertheless, I was cruising along at about 45 miles an hour because the truck had a governor on the engine so that it could not go any faster. Suddenly, the truck skidded to the left, and I cut the wheel into the skid and straightened it out. "It must have been a patch of ice," I thought as I resumed speed. Shortly thereafter, the truck skidded again and I cut into the skid to straighten it, but it skidded in the other direction, and when I cut the wheel again, the back end of the truck passed the front end and it went off to the right side of the road. It had made a 360 degree spin and landed with the right side of the truck hitting the ground and bouncing back up. I was in a daze and took some time to calculate what to do. The truck seemed to be undamaged because the engine started again after it had stalled. I put it in gear to climb out of the slight embankment, but it was stuck. The right rear wheel was in a foxhole. The Germans had dug foxholes about 2 feet wide and 6 feet long all along the shoulders of the Autobahn for miles, and my truck was trapped in one of them. Using four-wheel drive, the truck could not pull out of the hole. I was stuck.

I stood by the side of the road trying to get another truck to pull me out, but there was no traffic at all for more than an hour. Finally, an army ambulance came by and stopped. The driver saw the problem and said that he would send help later. At that moment, he was rushing to an accident. A 2½ ton truck with a load of soldiers had driven off the Autobahn from a temporary bridge. It had plunged 50 feet down an embankment.

I remembered the temporary bridges the U.S. Army engineers had put up where the Germans had dynamited them along the Autobahn. Those "Bailey" bridges did not have high sidewalls to them. You had to drive slowly across them, especially on a bad night like this.

Army trucks did not have heaters, and I had been sitting bundled up in the driver's seat trying to keep warm. It was probably about seven o'clock when I was rescued. An Army truck came with a winch, attached a cable to my truck and pulled it out of the ditch. I followed the guys in the rescue truck back to their quarters and was given a meal and a bed for the night. I sat up and talked with them about the roads and the accident. It was sad that it had happened to those GIs while they were on their way home. Later, we learned that several men were killed and many others were injured. Again, I felt that there was some guardian angel watching over me. After breakfast the next morning, I thanked my new found buddies and drove back to Kassel. When I arrived, I learned that I had not been expected to return the same day!

Our work at the warehouse depot had slowed to a minimum. I, and the other soldiers who remained at the depot, had the luxury of doing whatever we wanted. We had hardly any duties to perform. It was a delightful vacation as we waited for further orders.