

## LOVE COMPANY

### LOVE COMPANY

At the time I was assigned to an infantry regiment in May 1944, I learned that each rifle company and heavy weapons company had a name besides a letter. This was important when communicating by field telephone, radio, or walkie-talkie, because A Company could be confused with K Company and B Company with D Company.

The names assigned to the 1st Battalion's three rifle companies and the heavy weapons company were as follows:

**A** was Able Company, a proud name.

**B** was Baker Company, a masculine name.

**C** was Charlie Company – it had a swagger to it.

**D** was Dog Company. This heavy weapons company had a growl to it.

For the 2nd Battalion, the three rifle companies and heavy weapons company were:

Easy for **E** Company, which had a cocky flair.

Fox for **F** Company, a sly outfit, of course.

George for **G** Company, a serious group.

Hypo for **H** Company, the heavy weapons company, maybe named for its sting.

In the 3rd Battalion, the three rifle companies and heavy weapons company were:

Item for **I** Company, which may have been named for newsworthiness.

There was no **J** Company in the infantry. (According to a story I have heard, General George Armstrong Custer's unit that was destroyed at the Battle of the Little Big Horn was **J** Company. Because of that, there is no **J** Company, but I don't know for sure.)

King for **K** Company, which is a name to respect.

Love for **L** Company. Love? For tough, hardened, fearless front-line warriors! Couldn't the Army call us Lion or Leopard Company? Probably Lion would not be good because it would sound like Line and all infantry rifle companies are line companies. Nevertheless, we were Love Company and we loved the irony of the name.

Mike for **M** Company, a masculine name for the heavy weapons company.

One particular Saturday, in the summer of 1944, a review of the entire 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was held for Secretary of War Henry Stim-

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son and high-ranking officials from England. The 15,000 men of the division were assembled on the parade grounds of Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Each soldier was checked from head to toe for perfect dress, posture, and alignment by his company commander. We stood in the bright, hot, summer sun at parade rest during the formal exchange of greetings between the officers on the field and the officials in the reviewing stand. We were in full battle gear with full field packs, helmets, and rifles. The division band started to play, and then the command came to "Pass in Review!"

From my position way in the back of the formation, I could hear "397<sup>th</sup> Regiment! A Company! Right face! Forward march!" A Company was followed by 11 more companies in the regiment, 12 more companies in the 398<sup>th</sup> Regiment and 10 more companies in the 399<sup>th</sup> Regiment until we were called to parade before the reviewing stand. Since I was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> squad of the 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon of the last rifle company of the last battalion of the last regiment of the division, I think I was the last rifleman in the parade.

We were proud to strut in perfect precision as a unit to a military march and to line up as we passed the reviewing stand when the command was given "Eyes right!" At the same time, fighter planes swooped in low over the field in perfect formation. Of course, we were not the last to leave the field. The men of M Company followed us. Other soldiers of artillery, anti-tank, ordnance, engineer, and other units followed in vehicles.

By September, the division was at full strength and fully trained for combat. All leaves were cancelled and preparations were made to move out. Nevertheless, I reviewed the situation with my buddy, Skull (Pfc. Alexander J. Lapa), so-named because he always had the shortest possible GI haircut, and decided that we could use additional training before facing the enemy. We went to see our 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Roy Simmons about a transfer to the Rangers, but he refused to give us an application. Several days later, we suggested that the paratroopers could use our services, but again we were rebuffed and told "No transfers and don't come back."

The roster of L Company, 399<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, dated 8 September 1944 is in Appendix A. These are the men who comprised the original unit to be sent overseas.

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### U.S.A.T. GEORGE WASHINGTON

At the end of September 1944 we shipped out from Fort Bragg to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, the port of embarkation. We were the last rifle company to arrive. The place seemed to be in a constant state of activity and disorder. Our equipment was checked and we were given last minute physical examinations.

While we were waiting for orders to move out, one-day passes were issued. I took a pass for a bus to New York City. When I arrived, I rode the subway from New York to Brooklyn to see my family and visit the old neighborhood. Later, I went back to the city and strolled around Times Square, which was crowded with soldiers and sailors. The movie theaters: the Paramount, the Roxy, Radio City Music Hall, the Strand and all the others were operating with big band stage shows and vaudeville acts. Wartime did not diminish the tempo of the area even though the bright lights were out. I had a few beers, and picked up a girl at the USO canteen for company. She was from Hell's Kitchen, the neighborhood between 9th and 10th Avenues from about 40th to 50th Street on the west side of Manhattan. She was just one of the many girls who came there to meet servicemen. When I left, I gave her my APO address because she insisted she wanted to write to me. I thought that would be nice though I really did not know her. Then I boarded one of the last buses back to Camp Kilmer.

Early in the morning of 6 October 1944, we moved out in a motorized convoy from Camp Kilmer through the Lincoln Tunnel to Pier 72 at 42nd Street and 12th Avenue in New York City. We dismounted and assembled on the pier with our weapons and duffel bags. We could see our ship, the U.S.A.T. George Washington, which was the Army's largest troop transport. She was a passenger liner built in Germany in 1909 for the North German Lloyd Line. She was interned at New York in 1914 and seized by the United States Government in April 1917 and converted to a troopship. After World War I, she carried President Woodrow Wilson and his staff to the 1919 Versailles Peace Conference. After several owner-ships she served as a U. S. Lines passenger ship until 1932, when she was laid up and taken out of service. She was refitted in 1942 with the removal of one funnel and her boilers were converted to oil-firing from coal. She

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reentered service to the U.S. Army as a troop transport in April 1943. She was readied for war, again, so that World War II soldiers could follow where others had gone before, just a generation ago.

Red Cross girls were handing out coffee and doughnuts on the pier as we waited to board the ship. Though I did not like those lead sinkers which always weighed heavily on my stomach, I took a doughnut, anyway. ... It seemed to make the girls feel they were helping the war effort.

The L Company Morning Report of that day shows:

*Pvt. Frank W. Pszeniczny Trfd to NYPE Cas Det Cp Kilmer; Pvt. Dominick A. DeAngelo was moved Fr Conf in Qtrs to dy; 186 EM and 6 Off left US for Foreign Service fr NYPE on 6 Oct 44 at 0920.*

*(Translation: Pvt. Frank W. Pszeniczny Transferred to New York Port of Embarkation Casualty Detention Camp Kilmer; Pvt. Dominick A DeAngelo was moved From confined to quarters to duty: 186 Enlisted Men and 6 Officers left United States for Foreign Service from New York Port of Embarkation on 6 October 1944 at 9:20AM)*

It was early that morning when tugboats towed the U.S.A.T. George Washington out into the middle of the Hudson River, cast off our lines, and the ship started our voyage to war. As I stood at the starboard rail looking at New Jersey, standing at the rail with me were Redbird and Mo. The Redbird was Pfc. John W. Howe, Jr., a very young soldier, about 18 years old, who was always happy and friendly. Neither rain, nor heat, nor Army chow nor any hardships dimmed his exuberance. He was the opposite of a griper and he was fun to be with. He called everyone "Old Buddy." Because of his bright red hair and his bird-like disposition, he was called "Redbird."

Mo was really Cpl. Stanley T. Cardozo, who was about 25 years old and had been transferred from an anti-aircraft unit in the Aleutian Islands. He was from Modesto, California and had a calm, easygoing disposition. Nothing seemed to bother him. He had a ready smile especially when we teased him about his not rushing to the mess hall, the movies, or any company formation. Originally, he was called Moping Mo, but later it was just Mo.

We were watching the sights along the river, when suddenly, Redbird started to shout excitedly, "Look! There's my house! I can see my house!" He pointed toward a cluster of houses on top of the New Jersey Palisades and said, "That's Weehawken and you can see my house there!"

Because we had been wondering about our future destination, I turned and asked him, "Since you are so close to home, what are you doing

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on this ship?" He laughed and said, "If I didn't think I was coming back, they would never get me on this ship."

I turned to Mo and asked him, "What do you think about coming back?" With a half smile, he shook his head and said, "I don't expect to come back. I think this is a one-way trip for me." Old Mo was as calm as usual when he said that.

When they asked me, I thought about it and said, "I don't know what's going to happen, but I'm going to do the best I can to make it back." As the last rifle company to board, we learned that the lower decks were full and every bunk was taken. On this occasion, we did better than usual because we were assigned to A deck, which became our company compound. We bivouacked outdoors on the deck in our heavy winter uniforms through cold weather, rain, and storms, and slept on the deck in our sleeping bags.

Below decks, the other soldiers were cramped in bunks, stacked four high, like shelves, with just inches of clearance between bodies. The worst part was the foul air from the closeness. Later the smell of vomit from sick men was overpowering. It was great to be topside where hardly anyone got seasick, but if a man did get seasick he just heaved over the side.

This was my first ocean voyage, as it was for most of the men. The sea air in the North Atlantic in October was cold and brisk, and the ocean was vast with white-capped waves all around. The convoy was made up of dozens of ships of all sizes with our ship, the George Washington, the largest of all. Ships were spread out from horizon to horizon with U.S. Navy ships guarding the convoy. There were cruisers, destroyers, destroyer escorts, and corvettes on the watch for enemy submarines. They did not look very formidable because they were so much smaller than our ship, but they were floating arsenals.

The serious part of the trip consisted of lifeboat drill and air raid drill. The ship was equipped with 20mm anti-aircraft guns manned by the ship's gun crews. We had to clean our rifles every day because of the salt air. I had a bolt-action, five-round, 1903 Springfield with a telescopic sight, which was the army's most accurate rifle. Most of the other riflemen had the new M1 Garand rifles that could fire eight rounds semiautomatically.

As I cleaned my rifle, I thought back to my start in the Army, which began when I joined the Enlisted Reserve Corps (ERC) because its program promised me the completion of my college education before I

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would be called to active duty. I enlisted on 22 October 1942, and after just six and a half months, I was called to active duty. Final examinations at Columbia University were advanced two weeks so that *students could* complete their term before leaving for military service. I had just finished my sophomore year.

On 8 May 1943, I said “Good-bye” to civilian life. My father and my uncle went with me to Pennsylvania Station in Manhattan to see me off. This was very unusual because they had never seemed too interested in what I was doing before. They both went out of their way to make this special trip because they were truly concerned about me. I did not have any particular cares because at 19 years old nothing in life could faze me. But they were much more mature and knew that I was headed into an uncertain world from which soldiers don’t always come home to their families.

I boarded the Long Island Railroad train and waved to those aging men who smiled back bravely at me. Perhaps, they were also thinking of their younger brother who had served in the U. S. Navy 26 years earlier and came back from World War I with a sickness that changed his entire life. The three brothers had come to the United States from what was called “Turkish Syria” around 1905. As teenaged Christian boys they wanted to avoid being conscripted into the Turkish Army. They were all American citizens in 1917 when the youngest brother enlisted to fight for his adopted country. He stoked coal in the engine rooms of two destroyers that patrolled the North Sea.

Now the oldest son had been called to war. Would he be killed or wounded? What would become of him? Their parting words to me were, “May God go with you.”

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### ARMORED INFANTRY BASIC TRAINING

In Camp Upton at Yaphank, Long Island, in May 1943, I received my olive-drab army uniform, boots, mess kit, toiletries and other items. The clothing fit me fairly well even though no alterations were made. My sizes were all in the normal range – not tall or short, not fat or thin.

The accommodations consisted of an eight-man tent with a cot, woolen army blanket, bedsheets and pillow for each recruit. The pot-bellied stove in the center of the tent provided ample heat at night. We had to use paper, kindling wood and coal to start the fire in the stove each night. The order of the day was for every member of the cadre to yell as loud as they could because they apparently thought we could not hear their instructions. As recruits, we were cowed by corporals and even by privates first class. We had to march in a group everywhere: to the mess hall for chow, to the medics for shots or psychological evaluation and to the main building for oral and written tests.

I took various intelligence and aptitude tests while suffering a mild case of diarrhea because the army food did not agree with my digestive system. The meal consisted of some strange tasting meat that caused distress for many of the recruits. I spent part of the time for the test on the line for the latrine. Needless to say, I didn't do as well on the tests as I would have under normal conditions.

After about ten days, all the preliminary procedures were completed and an officer who would assign me to my next unit for basic training interviewed me. When I was asked which service I would like to join, I chose the armored forces. I thought that I would be riding in a tank and blasting away at the enemy. My feeling of patriotism was very high and I wanted to be in the middle of the action. Within a few days, I was in Fort Knox, Kentucky, at the Armored Replacement Training Center (ARTC) where I was to have my basic training. The first thing I learned was that this was an elite corps where you were different from the rest of the Army. You wore your overseas cap on the left side of your head, not on the right side like all the other units in the Army. You were expected to be cocky and proud of being in the armored force.

Our platoon leader was Lt. Davis. He was blond, of medium height, young, slender and from the South. He was the most obnoxious

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person I had ever met. He cursed us. He ran us from reveille to retreat. He nagged us about our haircut, posture, uniform, saluting, shoeshine, marching and on and on. He was never satisfied with anything we did. He told us, "I want you to hate me! I don't want to be your buddy! I don't want you to like me! I am your commanding officer and you do what I tell you! I am going to make soldiers of you! You are going learn to kill or be killed! You are not expected to die for your country! You are expected to make the enemy die for his! That's why you are here!" The message was loud and clear: He loved us!

The training was absolutely the most thorough and intensive I had ever experienced. Although I never got into a tank, I learned to drive almost every vehicle from a jeep to a half-track. The half-track was a lumbering, armor-plated, open-topped truck with wheels in the front and tracks in the rear that could go about 45 miles an hour on an open road and carry a squad of infantrymen. I was also trained on almost every weapon in the Army, including the .45 caliber revolver and pistol, Thompson submachine gun, grease gun, M1 carbine, 1917 Enfield rifle, Garand M1 rifle, all of which I could take apart, clean, and reassemble. I was also briefly instructed on the .30 caliber light machine gun, .50 caliber machine gun, 37mm cannon, 57mm cannon, bazooka, hand grenade, rifle grenade, bayonet, and mortar and learned to use each of them. I think we were trained on all these weapons because as replacements, we could readily be assigned to almost any unit.

In addition to all that, there was the obstacle course of scaling a wall, swinging on a rope over a ditch, and running at full speed. We practiced reconnaissance patrols, did guard duty, studied map reading, worked in the kitchen, exercised the manual of arms, and marched in drill routines.

I had the dubious pleasure of crawling on my stomach, with other trainees, on a muddy field with my rifle cradled in my arms, wearing a helmet and field pack, under barbed wire while machine guns fired over our heads and explosives were set off around us. The feeling of being in actual combat seemed almost real except that we knew it was a training exercise. It was imperative that you did not panic and kept crawling through to the final objective.

We were also taught about explosives - the use of dynamite, cordite, detonators, fuses and how to set them up. This was a specialty for the combat engineers and we might have been shipped to such a unit. We never had the chance to actually set off an explosive charge but it would



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have been a blast. Probably, we would have lost too many men because you were allowed only one mistake in that trade.

Disarming land mines was another specialty we learned. However, the course only covered the "how to" part without any actual practice. That was a specialty of "sappers" who had to be aware of all types of mines that could be booby-trapped.

There was gas mask drill held in an airtight room with exposure to various poison gases: mustard, lewisite, chlorine and phosgene. We had to learn to recognize each of them at the first whiff and don our gas masks plus protective covering in the case of mustard gas because it would burn any exposed skin. The other gases caused choking, vomiting and death.

The training cadre also taught us how to use our bare hands to deliver chopping blows to the neck, throat, nose, and abdomen that would maim, disable, or even kill an enemy. Whether this would actually work in hand-to-hand combat, we had to take on faith. No live demonstrations were offered, but the message was that we were in a deadly business.

We had weekly 5 to 15 mile hikes with full field packs in the full blaze of summer. The ultimate hike of 25 miles took place in the final weeks of training. We started off around 2000 (8 p.m.) with full field equipment, including rifle and helmet. The weather was cooler than during the day but it was still warm and the long march took about 8 hours. An Army ambulance trailed the company to help any soldier who dropped out because of exhaustion or cramps. Except for a few men, we all made it back to the barracks just before reveille, completely exhausted. I, and some others, were so tired that we found it was impossible to lie down and sleep. I took a shower and went to the Post Exchange and then went to the recreation room where I sat in a daze until chow time.

One of the final exercises was a week of maneuvers with the "Blue Army" against the "Red Army" in the field with patrols, attacks, flanking movements, and such. I don't remember which side won, and I never understood what we were doing. I was the driver of a half-track which had heavy armor plate on the sides and the rear. In front, there was no windshield but it had a one inch thick armor-plate shield of steel that was hinged to lift or lower as needed for protection. When it was lowered in place, a four inch square opening in the steel allowed the driver to see ahead. I drove it wherever I was ordered. On the roads, this clanking vehicle was fairly easy to drive, but when it had to go into the woods and open fields, it was slow and cumbersome. It was even more difficult at night, with blackout headlights. I had to avoid hitting trees and driving into a

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gully. I did hit a tree stump and it crunched the running board on the left side. At that point, I wanted to give up the wheel and sit in the back of the truck. However, the lieutenant kept me as his driver. When we stopped to bivouac, I had to check the half-track from top to bottom. That meant checking the engine oil, tires, tracks, gasoline gauge, etc. That was my responsibility as the driver. Then I could eat, pitch a pup tent, or dig a fox-hole and rest. I was told that this was like the cavalry where the rider had to feed and tend his horse before himself. Nevertheless, I liked being the driver because it was a challenge to steer, shift gears, and control this monster.

Basic training ended with a "king of the hill" battle where one squad stood on top of a small mound and had to defend it against an "enemy" squad attacking from below. Both sides wore thickly padded boxing gloves. After a half hour of going up the hill and being knocked back down, a break was called and positions were reversed. There was more laughing than broken noses. That was not an exercise from an Army manual.

By September 1943, I had completed 13 weeks of basic training and received my PFC stripe, a Good Conduct medal and a Marksman medal for firing the rifle. After a two-week furlough, I returned to Fort Knox and was placed in a group that was shipped out to the 14th Armored Division at Camp Chaffee near the small town of Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Even though I had training in many specialties, I soon found myself sitting in the back of a half-track, assigned to an armored infantry company as a rifleman. This did not appeal to me very much, because a nice guy like me could get killed in this outfit. I thought that a more suitable service would be the Army Air Corps, where the glamour of flying into the "wild blue yonder" had greater appeal.

There was an announcement that the Air Corps needed airmen and that they had reduced the requirement from 20/20 vision to 20/30 vision. I applied for a transfer and was given a physical examination. Despite hereditary second degree flat feet, a broken nose from football, a scarred right eardrum from an infantile abscess that was lanced and healed, I was passed on each count.

The critical moment came when I had to take the eye test. I had 20/40 vision and hoped I could read the 20/30 line. A buddy of mine, with the nickname of "Twist" – probably because his name was really Oliver – was in line ahead of me. He could see the eye chart through the small opening in the door and read the 20/30 line to me, which I memorized.

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When I was called in for the test, I read the 20/30 line with the left eye closed and then the right eye closed, and I could have done it with both eyes closed. I passed and was transferred to the Army Air Corps. They issued me my first pair of glasses to correct my eyesight to 20/20. In the meantime, Twist passed every test but was washed out because he was color-blind! I suppose he stayed with the 14th Armored Division.

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### AIR CORPS BASIC TRAINING

The Air Corps was a vacation after the Armored Force. I had a second basic training at the Gulfport Air Base, Gulfport, Mississippi. There were no bivouacs, maneuvers, obstacle courses, or long marches, though the rain came down in torrents almost every day. Short five mile hikes and calisthenics were the most strenuous workouts we had. The weapons on which I had to qualify were a Colt .45 caliber pistol and the .30 caliber M1 carbine which I had previously learned to service and fire. The most difficult part was the week of rigorous physical and mental tests I had to take at nearby Keesler Field, but I was passed for training as a navigator and bombardier. I probably did not make a passing grade for pilot because of my depth perception and less than perfect eyesight.

It was Christmas 1943 and on the Gulf Coast there were busloads of soldiers and airmen from many outfits streaming into New Orleans. At the local USO club, there was a sort of hospitality desk where civilians could offer to entertain servicemen at their homes. Most of them offered a family dinner because they had someone in the service and wanted to have a replacement join them. I was with two other airmen and we asked if there were any invitations for three servicemen. "Yes. We have a request for two tall men and one short." We did not fit the bill because we were of the opposite assortment: one tall and two short. I sometimes wonder what we had missed. Nevertheless, we went on to visit the famous French Quarter where the streets, bars and night clubs were packed with servicemen. There was a non-stop party every place we went.

I loved New Orleans because it was the only place I found outside of New York City where they did not go to sleep at 2200 hours (10 p.m.). Even if you had a slim wad of money you could just stroll the streets and enjoy the sights and sounds of the city. There were several famous restaurants on Bourbon Street in the French Quarter: Antoine's, Arnaud's, the Court of the Two Sisters., etc. After a dinner at Arnaud's, we dutifully returned to the base with the sound of New Orleans jazz echoing in our heads.

In January 1944, there were many thousands of air cadets waiting to start training and the Army Air Corps lacked adequate facilities. I was among a group sent to Mission Air Field in Mission, Texas, to work as

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ground crews until we could start our training. Fighter pilots received their final training there. They had to fly solo in a P40 fighter plane as their final qualification. This plane was used by General Claire Chennault's "Flying Tigers" group in China. It had a very long engine in front of the cockpit, which was situated toward the rear edge of the low-slung wing. The landing gear consisted of two wheels under the wing and a wheel on the tail. Landing this plane was very difficult because the pilot had to judge the distance to the ground by looking between the fuselage and the wing from his seat, where the angle was more forward than downward. As a result, many of the novice pilots bounced the P40 fighter plane like a rubber ball before they were able to roll it down the runway to a stop. When the cadet pilots made that solo flight, they graduated to second lieutenants and received their wings.

The advanced fighter training plane was North American Aviation's AT6, which the Japanese copied for their famed Zero fighter. I learned to ground service the AT6 training plane. I would start the engine by priming it, turning on the magneto, and adjusting the throttle when it had ignition. It was good fun to have that engine roar while you were in the pilot's seat and let it warm up so that it was ready for takeoff. There were rows of these planes wingtip to wingtip being serviced with gasoline and started.

One day another cadet who was warming up an AT6 plane forgot to check to see that the wheel chocks were in place. He revved up the engine and the plane rolled forward. His propeller totally destroyed the tail section of the plane in front of him. He was probably just 18 and did not even have a license to drive a car. Shortly after that incident, we were ready for another assignment.

Orders came in for us to move on for our training as airmen. I was in Mission, Texas only a month and had to remain on the base for the quarantine period of at least two weeks. When I finally received a weekend pass, I toured the Rio Grande Valley towns of McAllen, Edinburg, Pharr and Mission where the air was filled with the sweet smell from grapefruit blossoms. This was the grapefruit bowl of America and there were huge piles of them everywhere. I found these small towns very quaint and more Spanish than Yankee. I would have liked to visit Reynosa, Mexico, just across the Rio Grande River but there were no more weekends left.

My group boarded a troop train from Mission Air Field, in the extreme depths of Rio Grande Valley, and headed northward. The train took

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two days just to pass through Texas because of so many stops along the way. I was in a coach passenger car, where I tried to sleep during the night crunched up in my seat. To get a better night's sleep, I copied another soldier and climbed up into the overhead baggage rack where there was more leg room. It was not too uncomfortable.

I finally arrived at the "College Training Detachment" unit at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio, where all cadets had to take courses to achieve a college level of proficiency. The Jesuit brothers, who ran the university, were conscientious about teaching the courses and did not emphasize religion or try to convert any of the non-Catholic cadets. The courses were not difficult, and the lay professors were very liberal in their marking of homework. I was happy when a professor told me that my writing was very good, which indicates how easy they marked our assignments.

We had formations every morning on the campus, and I was made an acting corporal, which was a promotion from my current rank of Private First Class that I received when I finished basic training at Fort Knox. This placed me at the head of my squad at all formations. My military career was soaring to untold heights.

When several hundred of us would jog around the city streets in sweatpants and T-shirts, the young girls would come out to watch and shout at us. It was a little embarrassing, but all the guys enjoyed the attention. Cincinnati was a great town for young men because we were outnumbered by women who were not shy about approaching a soldier. This was complete role reversal at that time because it was customary for the boy to approach the girl. But most boys got used to it without any loss of their manhood.

Then it was also impossible to buy more than one drink at a bar because civilians would immediately tell the bartender to give us another drink. Sometimes several drinks would be set up at one time. After one or two drinks we would have to leave because we could not possibly accept all the drinks offered. This was Cincinnati in 1944. It was also a time of unbridled optimism. Although it was wartime on a mighty scale, the average American had just lived through a devastating economic depression that sapped his feeling of self-worth. He did not see a future for himself in his work and or in having a family. Not many young men or women could afford to attend college, and if they did, the opportunities were very limited upon graduation. Now, the people had a grand purpose in life: to fight

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for America and show the world how great a people we are. Patriotism was the word, but it hardly described their enthusiasm.

In this euphoric atmosphere, I could not foresee the change in destiny that lay ahead of me. About the fateful Ides of March 1944, the program for air cadets came to an abrupt halt when orders came in that they were no longer needed. Instead, ground units had to be strengthened with more soldiers, and we were to be assigned to ground forces. The cadets on the campus were in a state of deep depression. The life at the college was a lark. The training was fun. The city was a huge party for the cadets, who were the darlings of the town. Now, the party was ending.

Nevertheless, there were still military procedures to be carried out. We still had to do guard duty and carry a sidearm at night. It was one hour of duty and two hours off all night long. I was assigned a tour of guard duty just before the end of March. I had been out on the town and reported for duty at 2000 (8 p.m.). I had had a few drinks, but I was quite sober.

As I marched along, on my post, I passed the windows of the dormitory rooms where there were parties of cadets getting very drunk. When I came to an open window, I looked in and was immediately offered a beer. I thought for a minute that I should refuse, but this was a farewell party so I did have the beer. I had several more beers, and I reeled along on my post. When my relief came on to take over my guard post, I barely remember exchanging orders. Instead of going through the door of the building, I climbed through an open window and joined the drunken cadets. When I had to return for my second hour of guard duty I was sprawled out on a bench completely out. According to the Army code of conduct, I could have been court-martialed and shot for dereliction of duty while on guard duty. The only thing that happened was that I was no longer an Air Cadet and no longer an acting corporal. I was just one of about 100,000 airmen who were shipped out of the Army Air Corps on 1 April 1944. Most of us went to infantry divisions.

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### INFANTRY BASIC TRAINING

I was assigned to the 75th Infantry Division in Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky, which is near the little town of Morganfield. So many soldiers poured into town on weekends that it was almost impossible to find any place where there were no soldiers. It was like being in camp with a few civilians here and there. I never saw a more dismal town for a weekend pass than this one and I had been in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, Bardstown, Kentucky and Poteau, Oklahoma where the local people drove their cars back and forth on the four-block main drag, angle parked, then sat in their cars to watch people pass along on the sidewalk. At nine o'clock it was time to go home. Morganfield was a social disaster after Cincinnati.

I was there only about two weeks when I was ordered to get ready to move out with a group assigned to the 100th Infantry Division. On the day the group was to take the train, everyone was awakened at 0400 (4 a.m.) except the four of us in my barracks, who were forgotten. Two days later, when we four were to leave, the one soldier who had the orders awoke and left by himself. Finally, after several more days of loafing, an exasperated O.D. (Officer of the Day) woke us at 0400 and with the first sergeant escorted us to the train station.

The train went to Atlanta, Georgia, where we had a four-hour lay-over to transfer to another train for Fayetteville, North Carolina, and Fort Bragg. When I read our orders, I found it said that we had to report "immediately upon arrival" to the Commanding General, 100th Infantry Division. Since no particular date or time was mentioned, I thought this would be a wonderful opportunity to visit with the warm and friendly people of Atlanta for a few days. Despite the pleas of two of us, the other soldier, who was in charge, absolutely refused. So we obediently boarded the designated train. We arrived at Fayetteville and were transported to the division, where the officer in charge who greeted us did not even ask why we were one week late. I was then assigned to L Company, 399th Infantry Regiment. No doubt, if I had arrived earlier or later, I would have been in some other unit.

With some exceptions, everyone in L Company was reassigned from some other part of the Army. They came from ASTP, the Army Air Corps, anti-aircraft units, and others. Since we were new to the infantry, it



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was time to go through basic training. Again, I went through the same exercises as before, at the Fort Knox Armored Replacement Training Center, except I did not drive any vehicles. It was obstacle courses, marching, manual of arms, guard duty, map reading, patrols, weapons, bayonets, gas masks, grenades, house-to-house fighting, maneuvers, and more hiking, including the 25 mile hike with full field equipment. I was not very enthusiastic about this third basic training.

When it was time to fire the M1 Garand rifle for score, after having visited the rifle range six times before, I expected the usual results. The test consisted of firing from three positions: sitting, kneeling and prone, at a target from 100 to 300 yards away. I fired at the target, which was then pulled down by the soldier in the trench below. He put a marker where my shot had hit and sent the target back up. Each shot was entered on my scorecard by the soldier next to me. We would later reverse positions. If I fired and missed, the target would be pulled down, examined for a bullet hole, and sent back up without a marker and a red flag – “Maggie’s Drawers” – would be waved in front of the target. When I finished, my generous scorekeeper handed me my scorecard. He had given me a total of 182, which is a top score for expert! I was surprised but when he smiled, I think that he had used a “.30 caliber pencil.” I had the last laugh when I kept his score and made him an “expert,” too. It was our joke on the Army.

About a week later, on the company bulletin board there was a notice that read: “The following men will report to the officer in charge of sniper school for intensive sniper training.” There I was on the list with the other “expert” rifleman. As usual, the Army had the last laugh.

Sniper training consisted of using a bolt-action, five round, 1903 Springfield rifle with a Weaver telescopic sight and firing at various pop-up and moving targets. The sight itself had cross hairs that had to be adjusted so that you were zeroed-in accurately on your target. This meant that you had to be careful with the rifle, because the cross hairs could be knocked out of alignment and your aim would be off. Of course, the rifle I received when I went overseas was not the one I had used in training and I did not know if the sight was zeroed-in. That did not matter, because the Army Table of Organization of a 12 man infantry squad was: 10 M1 (Garand) rifles, 1 automatic rifle (BAR) and 1 1903 sniper rifle. I was the assigned sniper of the squad and considered one of the best “shots” in the company.

While at Fort Bragg I was very disappointed that, although I had been an Air Cadet, I had never flown in an Army Air Corps plane. I had

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been on an airfield and serviced them, but here I was an airman in the infantry who had never been up in the air. On a weekend pass in Fayetteville I stopped at a luncheonette and learned that the owner had a Syrian name. I explained that my parents were also Syrian. He was very warm, friendly, and happy to meet a soldier of the same background and would not allow me to pay for my lunch. Furthermore, he insisted that I accompany him to his home to visit his family. He had two daughters that he wanted me to meet. That almost scared me away. It was Sunday, and he wanted me to enjoy a home-cooked Middle Eastern dinner with his family. Although I thought it best to decline the invitation, he insisted so much that I found myself at his home with all the family gathered around and talking like old friends. The food was delicious, a treat at any time and especially after months of Army chow.

His son, a lieutenant, was also there. He had come home from a nearby airfield where he was a flight instructor. When I told him that I had been in the Air Corps, he was very interested and asked if I had been in a plane. I answered, "Yes." That did not mean that I had flown in a plane. He said that he had come home in an AT6, which is the advanced fighter training plane I serviced in Mission, Texas. "Let's go out to the field and show the family how we fly the plane," he suggested. The family liked the idea.

We went to the airfield and there he gave me a parachute, which I had never before put on. It occurred to me that if I had to use it, I did not know what ring to pull after I jumped out of the plane. I climbed onto the wing and got into the front cockpit as I had done many times before. He got into the rear cockpit and started the engine. When the engine was warmed up, we rolled down the runway and the tail lifted as he gave it more throttle. In a short time, we were off into the wild blue yonder and looking down at the family below. It was beautiful.

Over the roar of the engine, he asked me, "Are you ready to do a few acrobatics for the folks below?" I yelled, "Okay." Then he put the plane into a series of rolls, followed by banking turns, and ending with a rollover and dive toward the field. One minute I was looking up at the sky and then it was on my right and the earth was on my left side. Later, the sky and the earth were rotating in front of me. When he pulled out of the dive, I felt myself being powerfully pushed down into my seat. By this time, I was not feeling too well. The delicious meal I had had shortly before was now in my throat, but I was determined not to get sick and vomit. That took all my willpower. Fortunately, we landed soon after that, and I

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staggered out of the plane barely keeping the food inside. When he saw my blood-drained face, he asked, "Are you okay?" As a tough kid from Brooklyn, I, of course, said, "Sure! That was great!"

Actually, I said to myself, "Thank God I didn't puke in the cockpit!"

And that brings me back to the ship. ...