

A Light Story

by Frank Menza, 398-D

Most stories that come out of war are heavy stories, this is a light story.

To begin with, Adolph Hitler and his propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels were liars. They told the German people that the Americans were not to be trusted and that they are a bunch of gangsters, crooks, rapists, and robbers. All a bunch of lies.

The 100th Infantry Division went overseas the last six months of the war. After we had taken the city of Stuttgart, Germany's third largest city, the division was ordered out of combat and to begin the occupation of Germany, while the war continued down through Bavaria and Austria.

We ended up in a small town outside of Stuttgart, its name right now slips my memory. We were only there three days. The house we were in had an in-ground pool, naturally. The order of the day was to fill up the pool. I never got to use the pool. I thought I'd let the sun warm up the water first. In the meantime straws were drawn—our company, Company D, 398th Infantry ended up with the short straw. So we loaded up our twenty-one jeeps, fourteen trailers, one three-quarter-ton truck and two two-and-one-half-ton personnel carriers and drive twenty-five miles south of Stuttgart to a small town called Hechingen. Our orders were to guard a one-story brick building twenty-four hours a day and no one was to enter it.

When the MPs came we were to turn the building over to them. After a couple of days two of our men went into the building and found out they made black leather navy uniforms. Everyone was asking each other what the hell are we doing here, guarding a factory that made naval uniforms. We found out later.

In the meantime our company commander had ordered a block of homes cleared. His order was, "Tell the German people they have 15 minutes to clear the homes, take whatever they want, but leave the beds."

The house we were in had an elderly man and woman, they also had a daughter. I believe she was nineteen years old. They also had a son, he was a prisoner in Russia. This woman pleaded to let them stay up in the attic. They would not bother or interfere with us. Our company commander agreed. After a couple of days, they came down from the attic for some fresh air. We got into a conversation with them. The woman was so amazed to find out that of the ten guys occupying her house four of us were of Italian-American decent. Of course, the rest of us were Irish-American, English-American, German-American and Polish-American, a typical American group. She was so amazed that she went back up in the attic and made some handmade spaghetti out of brown flour. Something I had never had before then, and haven't had since then. Of course her supplies of the condiments to make a good sauce, like garlic and onion, were limited. After we ate the spaghetti, I went to our Mess Sergeant Eddy Ellis. I told him what they did. I told him I would like to replace the flour the woman used. He said, "that's a good idea" and filled a small brown bag with flour. He handed the bag to me saying, "I don't have to worry about feeding that house today." I handed the bag of flour to the woman. She stood there for a couple seconds with her mouth open. When we asked her what was wrong, she said it's been years since she had seen white flour.

After two weeks the MPs finally arrived. They had with them some men in civilian clothes. We thought they were congressmen and senators. We found out later they were not.

With the arrival of the MPs, as ordered, we headed back to the Stuttgart area. We ended in a small town called Schorndorf, just outside Stuttgart. We had to turn in our vehicles, our weapons, and equipment. The 100th Division was slated to go to the Pacific and help with the war against Japan.

In the meantime, atom bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, killing and maiming thousands of soldiers and civilians and causing a lot of destruction. Everyone felt Pearl Harbor had been revenged. I understand a third atom bomb was scheduled to be dropped on Tokyo that never came about because the Japanese had agreed to an unconditional surrender that brought the end of WWII.

As for the atom bomb, everybody was asking each other, "What the hell is an atom bomb?" After two weeks the US Army newspaper *Stars and Stripes* printed a story about the atom bomb. In order to make the atom bomb, heavy water is needed. That one-story brick building back in Hechingen where they made black naval uniforms, also had a laboratory. In the laboratory the Germans were working on heavy water.

As a matter of fact, back in the States I remember reading about a large bright white explosion in Southern Germany that killed a group of high German scientists. The Germans were working on the atom bomb. Those civilian men who arrived with the MPs and who we thought were congressmen and senators were actually atomic scientists.

To celebrate the end of the war we had a pass in review of the troops for some high-ranking generals and some people from Washington.

Again Hitler and Goebbels were liars, like back in the town of Hechingen. Nobody made an attempt to touch that 19-year-old-girl, as for robbers and crooks, as far as I know the only thing that was taken from that town of Hechingen is a large Nazi flag which I pulled off the Town Hall and have among my souvenirs.

The 100th Division, like our commander, Major General Withers A. Burress, were perfect gentlemen.

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