PART II - SERVING MY COUNTRY

I Become a Soldier

On December 18, 1943, I reported to the army induction center on 8th and Broadway in Little Rock. It was in a building that had been the Pontiac dealership. All eight of the ASTRPers from Arkansas and LSU reported there. We were taken to the induction area at Camp Robinson late that afternoon. The next day we took tests and physicals, were sworn in, and were issued uniforms. We were in the army!

From December 18 to January 2 we remained at Camp Robinson. We had no time off for Christmas and, in fact, I was awakened at 4:30 Christmas morning for KP. Mother and Daddy came out in mid-afternoon. My present from Santa Claus was a Gruen wristwatch. Brother Jim also came out when he was home for Christmas.

On the afternoon of January 2 the eight of us were delivered to the Union Station to begin our trip to Fort Benning, Georgia. We left on the Missouri Pacific for Memphis where we transferred to the Frisco for a night ride to Birmingham. The next morning we rode the Central of Georgia to Columbus where we were met by an army truck for transport to Benning.

Our training area was very plain. We lived in double tarpaper shacks, 20 soldiers in double bunks with a coal stove in the middle. In the middle of each four companies was a huge latrine that all 400 of us used. It was quite a sight in the morning.

I am sure we did just about all the usual things that are done in army basic training such as close order drill and familiarizing ourselves with army procedure and protocol. We were ridden hard by both the officers and the noncoms. When nothing else worked they would remind us that we were supposed to be so smart—we were "whiz kids."

The several things I remember most about basic training are 1) the long, hard days; 2) how cold it was that winter—and in central Georgia too!; 3) how poor the food was and how little we got—most of us made a bee-line to the PX after dinner to buy ice cream, candy or just anything to eat; 4) the week we spent on the rifle range; and 5) the closeness that gradually developed over the seven and one-half weeks.

In early March of 1944 the U. S. Army announced that the ASTP program was being discontinued and that all participants would be sent to combat infantry units. We could not believe it. After a day of rumors our company commander announced that the rumor was true and that we would be shipping out within 48 hours. The next day we packed and the following morning we marched to a siding near our area where a troop train was waiting to take us to join the 100th Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. We left around eight o'clock that morning and arrived at Fort Bragg the next morning around seven. It took 23 hours to go about four hundred miles. We were crowded three to every four seats with full duffel bags in the overheads and in the aisles. Old cars and no heat made the overnight ride miserable.

The 100th Infantry Division

When the train arrived at the main post area of Fort Bragg the 100th Division Band was playing and a very smart looking detachment of officers and noncoms greeted us.

We were trucked over to Division Area where we were served a hot breakfast of chipped beef on toast, among other things. I thought I hated chipped beef, but it tasted so good that day! A number of us from the ASTP Training Company B, which included all the Arkansas-LSU contingent, were assigned to a rifle company, E Company, 399th Regiment. We were only with that company for a couple of days when we were split up to other organizations. I went to D Company, a heavy weapons company. Most of those first two days were spent resting and getting acquainted with the area. Also we were given 100th Division patches to sew on our sleeves. We were proud to do that, even though the whole break up of ASTP left a sour taste in our mouths. Most of us quickly forgot that and started thinking about how we could fit into our new unit.

Everyone in D Company seemed glad to see us. The division had just returned from three months of Tennessee maneuvers and was in the process of reorganizing after sending a number of their officers and men to Europe as replacements. Many of the non-coms had just been promoted into their jobs and were enthusiastic and proud. They welcomed us and immediately started integrating us into their outfit. In addition to a warm and welcoming spirit, all of us felt good about being in a permanent situation with seasoned comrades in good facilities and good food.

One of the first things that happened was our assignment to platoons. The first and second platoons fired water-cooled 30 caliber machine guns. The third platoon's weapons were 81 millimeter mortars. The company commander, Captain Condee Nason, had all the newcomers come to his office and give their assignment preference. The first ASTPer said "machine guns". I was next in line and I said "mortars". Captain Nason smiled and said "you want to be as far behind the front lines as possible". Everyone laughed but he was right. Also, I had spent the previous day or so with the third platoon and had gotten to know a few of them.

The mortar platoon was organized into three sections of two squads each. Each squad had eight men; a squad leader, a gunner, an assistant gunner and five ammunition carriers. I was in Staff Sergeant Tony Pasquale's squad. I thought he was an excellent squad leader; he knew his business and he looked after his men. Joe Roina, my Section Sergeant, was also very helpful.

It was about this time that I started calling myself "Bob". Robert seemed a bit too formal for the army and more than anything else I wanted to be one of the guys. I have been known as Bob by just about everyone, except the immediate family, since that time.

Our basic training had been abbreviated so we first had to complete basic and then move to advanced infantry training. Actually, we had another six weeks of basic and then one-week furloughs were granted. I went home at the end of April.

My travel home was another odyssey of sorts. It wasn't easy to get to Little Rock from Fayetteville, North Carolina, under any circumstances, and the earliest I could leave by train was in the late afternoon. My furlough started at eight o'clock in the morning so I went over to the Air Base to see if I could hitch a ride somewhere nearer Little Rock and be on my way. I was offered a ride to Aiken, South Carolina, in a two-seated artillery observation plane. I took it but it was a three hour trip and very rough. I fought air sickness the whole way. The Major I rode with took me by car to Augusta, Georgia, where I caught a bus to Atlanta. There I rode overnight by bus to Memphis and then by bus to Little Rock. I had a pleasant week in Little Rock. I was now a soldier and I got a certain amount of attention which was nice. My return to Bragg was by train to Greensboro, North Carolina, and bus to Fayetteville.

We were in the midst of advanced infantry training in June 1944, when a "show" battalion of the 100th Division was formed to go to New York City as a part of the Fifth War Bond Drive. One thousand of the best soldiers in the division were selected to form the battalion. I was not selected until the last minute when someone in the mortar platoon of the heavy weapons company of the battalion dropped out. I was greatly excited about being selected and going to New York.

The battalion formed the evening of June 5, 1944, and entrained for New York. When I awoke the next morning in New York I was immediately told of the June 6, 1944 invasion of Normandy. The news of the invasion occupied our minds for the next week, almost as much as our "show" battalion activities.

We stayed at Camp Shanks, North York, which was just north of New Jersey on the west side of the Hudson River. This was a Port of Embarkation camp, and the facilities and food were extra special. I think the idea was to give the soldiers leaving for Europe the best of everything. The first two days there were less than pleasant as I had the worst case of poison ivy I have ever had. I went on sick call the first day and was given something to apply to it, but was not dismissed from duty.

During the week we had three principal appearances. The first was at Times Square and then to the different boroughs of New York City where we took part in the formal ceremonies kicking off the War Bond Drive. The group I was with went to Westchester County. We made about five or six stops where we set up our mortars and listened to speeches to crowds in the central part of the downtown area.

The second appearance was to march from the Battery to City Hall where we formed and listened to Mayor LaGuardia give a speech and recognize a Congressional Medal of Honor winner, Charles "Commando" Kelly. It was extremely hot, and a couple of soldiers standing at parade rest around me collapsed. When one just a few feet from me fell with a great clatter the rest of us remained rigid and the poor guy just lay there until the ceremonies were over.

The last big event was to march up Fifth Avenue. I had seen pictures of the army marching up Fifth Avenue and have seen many since, and I can only say that it was a real thrill. We formed around 38th Street and finished around 80th.

In addition to the various duties we spent a lot of time taking in the sights of the city. Sergeant Charles Stone showed me around quite a bit. We went to 99 Park Avenue for free theater tickets and saw shows and movies in the big Broadway Theaters. There was a 100th Division Day at Coney Island where we could go anywhere for half price. The whole New York trip was a wonderful experience.

The rest of June, July and August was spent going over and over our training routines. There were two highlights during this period for me; I qualified as Expert on the carbine—using Sergeant Steinman's weapon—and I was asked to be the gunner in Sergeant George Chestnut's squad. This was a promotion and that was always good.

On My Way to War

Most of us were tired of training but were not anxious to go into combat. Nevertheless, in early September we were notified to get ready to ship out for overseas service. This resulted in a couple of weeks of packing gear and completing records. One of my best friends from the ASTP, John Courter, had been promoted from the platoon to company clerk and he asked that I help him with all the paper work required. That was fine with me so we worked together for about ten days to get everything in proper order. We worked under some pressure, into the evenings as a rule, but finished the job in fine style. Captain Nason was quite pleased with what we had done and, unexpectedly, gave us each a three-day pass. We spent the three days in Washington, D.C.

Neither of us had ever been there, so we spent the entire time sightseeing.

On September 25, 1944, the division left Fort Bragg by train for Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. On September 30 we left Kilmer for Hoboken, New Jersey, where we were ferried across the Hudson to a pier around 40th Street where we boarded transport ships. The 399th Headquarters Company and the First Battalion boarded the USS McAndrews.

Life on a troop transport in World War II was difficult at best. We were on a very small pre-war Gulf of Mexico passenger and cargo ship. It carried 90 passengers in its civilian life. We were over 1,000 strong and packed in. Fortunately, Company D was assigned guard duty which allowed us to be housed on the promenade deck instead of in a cargo hole. Each of us was assigned guard duty outside on deck for eight hours a day—four hours in the morning and four hours in the afternoon or evening. It gave us something to do and kept us out of the hot and stinking housing areas.

As on most troop ships we slept in four-tiered bunks. Being tall and thinking it would make sleeping a little more pleasant, I took the top bunk. It was probably hotter up there close to the ceiling, but I was neither on the floor or wedged in between other bunks.

My guard station was aft at the top of some stairs leading down from the promenade deck to the main deck. My "job" was to see that no one loitered on the stairs but kept moving. It was practically no job at all. It was one of the best stations, as something was always going on there. A loud speaker played popular music most of the

time. For an hour or two during the day the speaker system was used to give French lessons to the mob that filled every available space. We each had received a small do-it-yourself French language booklet and someone, acting as the instructor, would slowly go through the words and phrases. I am afraid I didn't learn very much. My foreign language ability left much to be desired. It still does.

In addition to the canned music and French lessons there were evening talent shows led by a member of Headquarters company. There were a few musicians, singers, and other very amateur performers on board. The shows were pretty corny but they did help to pass the time.

We were on the McAndrews for 18 days—two in New York harbor and 16 at sea. We ran into two tropical storms—a hurricane off the Florida coast and a storm in the Mediterranean. Both times a lot of people got seasick, including me. We were kept off deck for a day or two and the living conditions became terrible.

We were in convoy the whole time en route. There were two divisions (30,000 men) and all sorts of cargo ships. There was one aircraft carrier full of airplanes, (i.e. it was not being used as a launching or landing carrier). There were three destroyers or destroyer escorts continually weaving in and out of the convoy. We had a lot of pretty days and the convoy presented an unusual sight, just like we saw in the movies.

We took the long way to Marseille, France. We went south out of New York to Cuba and followed the islands southeast to the Azores and then the African

Coast. We went through Gibraltar at night but sailed along the North African coast for the next day or two, then up past Sicily to the French Riviera and west to Marseille. We were the first convoy to dock there. Our ship was one of the few which actually docked. We tied up to a sunken boat, walked down a gangplank to the deck of the other ship and across and up to the dock. The whole area was in a shambles, having been destroyed by Allied bombing and the Germans.

We docked around mid-afternoon and started a hike with full field pack to the northern outskirts of the city, about 10 to 12 miles. Interestingly, as we fell in near the docks we passed a group of veterans who were being shipped home. They were very impressive, some wearing a number of decorations. We assumed that they were being rotated back to the States to help form new divisions. In any event, they were going home!

After stopping en route to have dinner (K rations), we arrived at the bivouac area around midnight. We were guided to the company area and told to pitch pup tents. Sergeant Chestnut and I did and went to sleep. Others didn't but just fell exhausted on the ground. We all woke up to a steady rain, with those who hadn't set up their tents racing around trying to do so as fast as possible.

We stayed in this assembly area from October 20 to October 28. The first full day there, October 21, was my 19th birthday.

During our stay in the Marseille assembly area we did very little. We sent details to unload our materials and weapons from the ships and spent time cleaning and

setting up our hand guns and our mortars. We drilled some and rested waiting for orders. I took two trips that were interesting. One was to the division's Army Post Office (APO). While the APO was interesting, I enjoyed the one or two mile walk through the outskirts of Marseille and the chance to browse through the shops. The other side trip was to Marseille itself. Paul Modlish from the platoon was with me on both visits. Paul was a graduate of Oberlin College and had minored in French. He could converse with the natives, so I stayed close to him.

After three or four days half the regiment was given passes to Marseille. The next day the other half received passes. Several of us went into the city together. We walked a mile or so to a streetcar line and took the car to downtown. As soon as we arrived we went to the nearest bar. As we were drinking our wine several women appeared and very shortly Paul Modlish, who had married shortly before we went overseas, and I were the only two left. We left and went sightseeing.

The highlight of the day was taking a bath. As we walked around town we noticed that several places advertised baths, massages, steam rooms and the like. Since we had not had a bath since we left the States three weeks before, it seemed like a good idea. And it was! I had a good hot bath with lots of soap and big towels. I passed up the massage and the other good things.

We ate dinner in town. This was somewhat of a joke because the restaurants had very little food, were very crowded with soldiers, and were expensive. After dinner, and before returning to camp, Paul decided to take some wine back with us. He bought four bottles and

gave me two to carry. I put one in each pocket of my field jacket and made a run for our streetcar. As I swung up on the steps to enter the car the momentum threw me against the side whereupon one bottle of red wine smashed, getting wine all over me and my clothes. It was funny at the time but I had the smell and the stains with me for weeks afterward.

On October 28, 1944 the 399th Regiment left Marseille for the front lines. We went by truck convoy up the Rhone River valley past Aix-in-Province, Lyon, and Dijon. We camped the first night in a field near Lyon, the second night in a city park in Dijon (we were cautioned not to dig holes or otherwise disturb the flora or fauna), and the third night in a woods near Rambervillers. That night we could hardly sleep for the noise of U.S. artillery near by.

The next day, November 1, 1944, the 399th went on line relieving a regiment of the 45th Division. The 45th had fought through Sicily, Italy, Anzio, and the Southern France invasion. It was the division of WWII cartoonist Bill Maulding. We were a little in awe of these battle-hardened veterans.

We went on line in a wooded area, south and west of the town of LaSalle, France. Our mortar platoon set up in the positions of the platoon we were relieving, using their base plates and aiming stakes. We even took over their foxholes. The move was completed by mid-afternoon and from that time on we were on our own. It was an unsettling feeling.

Baptism by Fire

After supper our platoon leader, Lieutenant Schrader, selected our squad to move forward and engage the enemy with harassing fire. There were reports that the Germans were active in an area to the front, and there had been a request that we lay down intermittent fire on the woods where it was suspected that they were assembling. It was very dark in the surrounding woods as we moved up the dirt road to our new position. I think everyone was as scared as I was. As we moved through the reserve company of riflemen we could hear but not see the men on either side of the road. All at once, very close by, a rifle shot rang out followed immediately by screams from one of the infantrymen. The screams persisted with cries of "medic" and "mother" and "God." It seems one of our men had accidentally shot himself getting in or out of his foxhole. This happened more than once during the next six months.

We continued on until I was sure we would walk right into the German lines. Finally, we turned off the road and into a small clearing where we set up our gun and fired a number of rounds as directed. The gun made so much noise and there was so much light coming out of the barrel every time we fired that I was sure a German patrol would seek us out and kill us all.

We were in position all night. We didn't have tents or blankets and were very cold and tired when we returned to our position the next morning. After it was all over we felt pretty good about ourselves. We had fired the first shots in the war for the 399th Regiment.

Two days later we moved up following the infantry's capture of LaSalle. I slept in a barn that night. Early the next day the First Battalion attacked down the road leading to St. Remy, about two miles away. The attack stalled until Lt. Colonel Zehner, the Battalion Commander, personally took the lead. The Battalion took its first heavy casualties of the war but at the same time captured territory and enemy soldiers. Colonel Zehner was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his act.

Our platoon moved by jeep to St. Remy that afternoon. A few hundred yards before we got to the town my squad started digging in behind a fence row just west of the highway. We were digging as fast as we could as hostile fire, both artillery and small arms, was coming in all around us. Six of the soldiers in the mortar section digging in just north of us were hit by artillery fire. At that point a jeep and trailer pulled up and we piled in and headed for a house in St. Remy. We stayed in that house for about three days until the town and the area was completely cleared of enemy.

On November 7 the 399th was pulled off line and we began a two-day movement west and north through Baccarat to a reserve position facing east and about five miles from the city of Raon L'Etape. The first night of the movement we bivouacked in a woods between LaSalle and Baccarat. There was no level ground so it was impossible to find a spot to pitch a tent. So we went to sleep wrapped in blankets and shelter halves. During the night it started to rain and it became impossible to sleep. It was typical of the many miserable nights we spent while in combat. The next morning we were all exhausted.

Shortly after daylight we took additional casualties from personnel mines. The explosions were just a few dozen feet away from me and it caught everyone by surprise. Other than the medics who went to treat the wounded, no one moved until the engineers had used their mine detectors to clear pathways for us to walk through.

Our regiment's assignment was to capture Raon L'Etape. The city was protected by a series of heavily fortified hills just to its west. The larger of these, Hill 409 (height in meters), was the main objective. The First Battalion stayed in reserve for the first few days of this attack. When the attack was launched on November 15 the battalion moved forward in close support. Within two days we were committed. The next ten days saw some of the heaviest fighting of the war.

The first day we were on line we set up our guns, zeroed them in, and dug fox holes during the late afternoon and in the cold rain. The guns were in a small clearing in the usual dense woods. Every night, whether we were on line or not, we had guard duty. There were always two to four men assigned to each two-hour interval. One of those assigned was asked to awaken the relieving group. That night I was the one who was to find our relief. I thought I had located where they were sleeping before dark and could find my way back there in the dark. Three of us were on guard from midnight to 2 am. About a quarter of two I left to find our relief. I wandered around, thoroughly lost, for almost two hours before I found the next group. It was raining and so dark I couldn't see anything and of course we were not allowed to use matches or flashlights. I was sure I would never find my way until daylight and even then I wasn't

sure that I would. I felt sorry for the two guards I had left behind but I was more worried about wandering into our own or the enemy's lines. Finally, I found our relief. They were happy that I had gotten lost as their shift was over and one of them just had to go wake up the next shift. I was wet, tired, embarrassed, and thoroughly disgusted with myself, for our relief were sleeping within 20 yards of our guns all the time.

The next three days we moved three times, each time zeroing in our guns but doing very little firing. Also during this period the company suffered its first fatality. One of the ASTPers, a machine gunner, was killed and his companion, also an ASTPer, was severely wounded by artillery fire. I knew both of them. This shook us up quite a bit.

Our regiment was making progress and approached Hill 409 on November 18. We attacked in force that day. One of our company, Technical Sergeant (later Lieutenant) Rudolph Steinman, killed one of the enemy and forced 18 more to surrender during the attack. Two of our machine gunners led the charge up the hill firing a water-cooled 30 caliber machine gun from the hip. Sergeant Steinman and the two gunners were decorated for valor.

While the battalion, led by A Company, fought up Hill 409, I participated by carrying ammunition and supplies to the front. On one occasion my load was a case of rations. We carried the cases of rations, ammunition or other supplies, including cigarettes, through the forest to the bottom of the hill where we deposited them in a large former German dugout. When I got to the dugout there were about ten GIs crowded into

a rather small space. They were delighted when it turned out that my case contained cigarettes and immediately lit up. This didn't make me too happy as there had been artillery fire and other hazards along the route. I felt put upon to risk those hazards to give the soldiers a smoke. Ammunition yes, cigarettes no. Surprisingly, this was the first time I had walked by dead GIs and German soldiers. Also, surprisingly, they had very little effect on me.

The fighting continued for the next few days. It was heavy at first as the crest of the hill was contested by attack and counterattack. By the third day our regiment had moved on to clear isolated pockets of resistance before closing in on Raon L'Etape. Finally, on Thanksgiving Day, November 23, the city was captured.

"Thanksgiving"

Prior to Thanksgiving the third platoon had moved to the top of Hill 409 and had dug in. We spent two plus days there, and all of that time without food or rations of any kind. In fact, it had been a week or more since we had anything to eat other than C-Rations or K-Rations. We roamed through old foxholes trying to find anything to eat. Finally at noon of the last day we were there, Thanksgiving Day, hot rations came up. We were joined for lunch by two or three GIs from graves registration. They drove up in their truck and asked if they could get something to eat. We were all served together and I, and two or three others, used the tailgate of the truck to put our messkits down on. In the bed of the truck were the bodies of about ten GIs, their feet only inches away from where I was eating. Again, this didn't seem to bother me, probably because I was so hungry.

In the afternoon we loaded up our gear and went to the village of LaTrouche where we enjoyed our first mail call in two weeks and Thanksgiving dinner with turkey and all the trimmings. After dinner we went into Raon L'Etape.

The city was a mad house. Trucks, tanks, jeeps, and men were all over the place. We went upstairs in a building right on the square to get some sleep. Unfortunately, just as we were lying down, orders came to pack up and move out. It was about midnight and all of us were exhausted—as usual. I couldn't believe it but move out we did. On to trucks, thank goodness, and into the night. As was always the case we would go for a little while and then stop for a much longer period. We tried to sleep but it was impossible. Finally, we disembarked and started moving up both sides of the road. There had been a break-through and once the Germans lost their defensive line around Raon L'Etape they pulled out. Our concern was to take advantage of this retreat; therefore, the emphasis was on moving rapidly with or without sleep. We spent the next night in Rathau and the following night in Schirmeck.

After the first day we began to enjoy the "rat race" and indeed had the unique experience of liberating several French towns. It was extremely exciting to be greeted by happy Frenchmen waving flags and offering wine, hugs, and kisses as we walked along. After three days we reached the town of Oberhaslach, about 30 miles from Strasbourg. The next day the 3rd Division took over and we were reassigned to an area around the city of Sarreburg.

During our stay in the town hall in Oberhaslach I witnessed a frightening incident. After coming off guard duty around midnight, I saw two German soldiers walk into the big room where we were all sleeping. I was about the only one awake and was getting ready to lie down. The Germans in steel helmets and full uniform looked scary in the light of the one candle I had burning. I didn't know what was happening and quickly awakened Sergeant Chestnut who was sleeping next to me. Before we could grab our rifles or do anything, in walked Sergeant Levy. The two Germans were his prisoners. Levy was a medic—not supposed to be armed—and a German Jew who had been brought to the States a few years before by his parents. He had been out in town and was very proud that he had captured the two Germans.

The 399th spent five days in Division reserve. Our battalion was housed in Schneckenbusch, a small village about five kilometers from Sarrebourg. The village is located on a canal in a very pretty section of the Alsace. The first full day we were there the engineers set up their portable bathing facilities and we had hot showers using water from the canal. This was our first real bath in a month and was greatly enjoyed even though they ran us through rather quickly. (They had a battalion of about one thousand men to accommodate!)

One day we went into Sarrebourg to see a movie. It was a lovely late fall day so I walked back to our house in Schneckenbusch. Most of the time we just sat around—typical of a great many days in combat.

After five days we were loaded on trucks and jeeps (I usually rode in a jeep, which was a lot better than an enclosed two-and-a-half ton truck) and went to the

town of Schalbach, about 20 kilometers northeast of Sarrebourg. There we relieved the 44th Division. Over the next three days we advanced over very poor secondary roads to the town of Wingen. The morning before we went into Wingen we sat on the side of the road for hours while jeeps with the "Top Brass" hurried back and forth. It seems that it was discovered that morning that an entire company of the 398th Regiment had been captured in Wingen the night before. Apparently a detail of German soldiers surprised the company's guards and forced them to round up the rest of the company, officers and all—in total about 200 men! All of this was confirmed by the French residents. By the time we got into town, and for a long time thereafter, you can be sure we had enough guards out every night and all night. The Division Commander, General Withers Burress, immediately relieved the commander of the 398th Regiment, a Colonel, and the battalion commander, a Lt. Colonel, and sent them back to the States. One of the eight ASTP LSU enlistees from Arkansas, Charles Robinson of Cabot, was captured. I didn't know this until later but when I found out I was concerned and a little upset. It reminded me of the real possibility that I might have serious problems before this thing was over.

From Wingen we went north to Gotzenbruck and on to the outskirts of the town of Lemberg. The Germans had decided to make a stand at Lemberg and had some artillery to back them up. We were caught in some heavy shelling in the towns of Petersbach and Gotzenbruck and spent some time inside houses and even in the cellars of houses, together with the French residents, as the shells came down. In the late afternoon our platoon started digging in behind a house on the road to Lemberg. The

house was being used by our company and perhaps a rifle company as their headquarters, and there was a great deal of activity. The house was being hit periodically by German 20mm artillery fire, and activity soon turned into chaos.

A decision was quickly made that we should move out of there, retrace our steps back to Gotzenbruck, and go to the town of St. Louis. We set up our guns there and remained for three days. The fighting at Lemberg was difficult and casualties were heavy. One of the ASTP Arkansas eight, Bill Pondrum from Texarkana, was killed in action with Company A. I was shocked at Robinson's capture, but Bill's death really hit home: within the week two of the Arkansas eight were casualties.

After securing Limberg we moved into town for one night and then on to Reyersviller, just "around the corner" from Bitche. We spent one night in Reyersviller (the French woman in whose house some of us stayed gave us fresh cookies) before moving up to the mountain above Bitche. There we set up the guns, dug holes, and prepared for a long winter's stay. Our stay, however, lasted only about two weeks; we had to abandon the area, including Reyersviller and the nice French woman, in the face of the major German offensive, "Northwind".

Early in our stay on the hill overlooking Bitche, Captain Nason, D Company commander, was at our observation dugout. He decided to direct fire on Bitche from our gun. He phoned the coordinates and directed fire. Apparently the fire was quite accurate and drew rave reviews at the time and was even mentioned in the 399th Infantry Regimental history. I was later awarded the

Bronze Star for this action. The award mentioned enemy artillery fire, and there was some occasionally but not a lot. The Bronze Star medal was authorized that winter, and I was in the first group to receive one. Three of us from the company were notified just a few hours before a brief ceremony was held at battalion headquarters. The regimental commander, Colonel Tyson, personally pinned the Bronze Star ribbon on each of us. I was extremely proud of the recognition.

We were in a pretty dull routine until Christmas Day. The day was preceded by a lot of Christmas mail and packages. Most of the packages contained small gifts, such as socks and gloves, and all had something to eat like cookies, pretty stale and crumbly but good! I was pretty upset because I didn't get any packages while everyone else seemed to be receiving one-a-day.

While the 399th wasn't doing much fighting except for patrols every night, our sister regiment, the 398th, was very busy clearing out former Maginot Line forts. The forts were well defended by the Germans which made the 398th's job very difficult. This offensive effort ended when the Division was required to cover more territory after the Third Army (Patton) wheeled north to attack the southern fringe of the German's Battle of the Bulge lines. At that point—just before Christmas—we went completely on the defensive.

"Merry Christmas"

Christmas Day was surprisingly beautiful. Chilly but clear. We had an excellent dinner with turkey and all the trimmings. It tasted good even though we ate standing up or on the ground and out of mess gear.

Shortly after dinner Sergeant Roy McVicar, our Section Leader, came slowly up the hill to tell us that we were to act as infantrymen and take over some foxholes on the front lines. We could hardly believe it, but the shortage of manpower necessary to cover the area dictated it. So up we went.

Our area was between A and B Companies and really out in the open. As soon as we got there we were hit with artillery fire. One of the men in the section was wounded.

Our squad was located in five foxholes in a small line of bushes and small trees about 100 feet in front of the woods that circled the top of the mountain. We felt a little isolated out there and had to stay pretty much in our holes during the day. Hot food came up before dawn and just after dark. We moved rapidly across the open space to the woods and the road that ran through it to get to the kitchen's jeep and trailer.

Our biggest problem was the weather. The first few days it was cold, especially at night, and then it snowed about six to eight inches and turned bitter cold. One of the two of us in each hole had to be awake at all times. Sergeant McVicar and I shared a foxhole. We decided to go on four-hour shifts, twenty-four hours a day. At least that way we could lie down long enough to get some sleep.

Keeping warm was a problem. I wore a lot of clothes, layering one thing on top of the other. I wore regular GI underwear plus long underwear. Then I had on my wool shirt and trousers, wind-breaker trousers, a sweater, and my field jacket or overcoat. I wore regular

cotton socks underneath heavy wool boot socks and boots. I had a wool stocking cap and my helmet plus a scarf and gloves. Surprisingly, I could still move around rather quickly when the situation demanded it. When we were sitting outside our hole on guard duty we put our legs in a fleece-lined German sleeping bag.

Another problem we had was not having any place to carry things. I kept my few possessions in my shirt pocket. There I had my wallet, a spoon to eat with (some soldiers kept their spoon tucked in their boots), my extra pair of glasses, and a new testament. In my helmet liner I kept a small role of toilet paper—a valuable commodity.

The only good news during that week was that we had qualified for the Combat Infantry Badge. This was not only a mark of distinction—at least we thought so—but it gave us a ten-dollar-a-month raise. I was also formally promoted to corporal on December 31 and that added sixteen dollars to my pay. I was now making eighty-six dollars a month including the ten dollars overseas pay.

We were in this position until New Year's Day when we joined the battalion's "strategic withdrawal" back to Sierstal, about two miles. Prior to January 1 we started having trouble keeping men on line. We started with ten in the five foxholes and by the time we left there were only six of us. Butinsky left with trench foot, a very serious problem caused by having wet and cold feet over a long period of time. Some of us avoided that problem all winter by having an extra pair of socks and changing every day. I would put my wet socks inside my shirt so they would be dry the next day. Even Sergeant McVicar

went on sick call on New Year's Eve but his place was taken by Sergeant Chestnut who had been away sick.

"Happy New Year"

At midnight of December 30/31, a series of shots rang out just after I had come off guard duty, removed my boots and overcoat, and crawled into my sleeping bag. McVicar had fired one of the shots outside our hole and had come tearing in with the phone to call the company command post. He shouted at me to get out there to intercept a German patrol with which we had exchanged fire. I was scared to death! I grabbed my rifle and went outside expecting a German to shoot me or at least sneak up on me at any time. I looked as hard as I could—and quietly I might add—but I couldn't see anything. In the meantime McVicar was screaming into the phone asking for flares so we could see what was going on. Shortly after that the flares started coming down but again I couldn't see anyone. Actually, I was afraid they could see me and that bothered me no end.

I stayed outside the rest of the night. I almost froze to death for the first hour or so as I had no boots or overcoat on. Finally, McVicar handed those out. It was a terrible night.

The next morning we could see a dead German about ten yards in front of our position. Ken Smith and McVicar had both fired on the patrol and one of them hit the young German. During the morning our graves registration people came up and removed the corpse. I thought at the time how young the soldier was—probably my age—and how good looking, with long blond hair that blew in the wind.

The rest of that day was spent trying to get some sleep. It was a good thing, for we pulled an all-nighter on New Year's Eve. We had lost another squad member due to sickness so Sergeant Chestnut decided that I should go over to the next foxhole by myself. There were so few of us that he felt we had to spread out. I got myself settled there and tried to stay awake. At midnight the Germans fired some rockets on us and one hit the end of my foxhole. I was in the hole huddled down and covering my ears when suddenly there was a loud noise and dirt came down through the logs all over me. The next morning I could easily see in the snow where the round hit.

Shortly after the artillery barrage on our's and other positions, the Germans attacked. They went up the slopes just south and west of us and directly into A Company's lines. They also attacked down the Bitche-Lemberg road and west of the road where the 117th Recon outfit was dug in. The attack went on most of the night. All of this was happening only a few hundred yards away! There was all sorts of racket, with white (German) and red (American) tracer bullets whipping up and down the mountain. By morning the Germans had not broken A Company's line on the hill but had swept through the Recon outfit and up the road through B Company. They captured B Company's headquarters, including Captain Altus Prince, the company commander.

We got no hot chow that morning. In fact, we didn't even know what was going on. There was firing, but it was far away and behind us. We had lost our phone contact with B Company headquarters (we didn't know it no longer existed). As the day went on, all of us began

to wonder what to do. Shortly before noon Sergeant Chestnut told me to go back to the woods and try to tap in on any of the phone lines that we knew were back there. I was not having any success when our battalion commander, Major (soon to be Lieutenant Colonel) Lynch and an aide burst out of the woods and asked me what outfit I was with. When I told him, he said to tell my Sergeant to take the squad and "defend the draw (just to our right about 100 yards away) at all costs." When I said there were only a few of us he dismissed that and said to follow his orders "now." With that he hustled off. I immediately told Sergeant Chestnut and he reluctantly gathered up our little group and headed for the head of the draw. We had to leave almost everything, including our sleeping bags. I was distressed for I had to leave three Christmas packages—two unopened—that had finally been delivered two days before.

When we got back to the draw we joined Company A, which was retreating along the ridge line. We stayed with them, following orders on where to stop and what to do. After a few minutes Sergeant Chestnut spoke to the lieutenant and asked that we be relieved. Surprisingly, the lieutenant gave permission and we took off. We went along the one road just behind the top of the mountain for a short distance, before going on down through the woods to the valley below. While on the road an airplane came out of nowhere, strafing away. I swore it had German insignia but some said it was U.S. After that split-second scare we hurried down through the trees and bushes to the valley and across some fields to the Sierstal-Lambach road. There was a lot of retreating going on and we joined right in. It was surprisingly festive. We walked for quite a while and were finally

picked up by a truck and taken to Enchenberg where we found the rest of the platoon.

I, for one, was relieved, happy to see the rest of the platoon, and dog tired. As expected, we had no food except rations, no sleeping bags, and as it turned out, no sleep. We set up a road block, and I was with the first group on duty. When I was finally relieved, around midnight, we were ordered to march back up to the front and reestablish our positions. So we walked almost all the way back to where we started. It was the worst march of my life. The night was freezing cold, the road icy, and we were all exhausted. This was the third night with practically no sleep. But march we did down to Lambach, Sierstal, and out on the Reyersviller road where we set up our guns in a little valley to the left of the highway.

Digging foxholes was always a difficult job. On the morning of January 2, it was almost impossible. We had a pickaxe and our entrenching tools, but it was extremely difficult breaking through the snow and ice. Everyone was about ready to give up but of course, we couldn't. We spent all day digging, logging over, and firing our guns. We got some return fire for our trouble but none of us paid any attention to it.

The night of January 2 was another killer. It was again cold, in the teens, and we had no blankets or sleeping bags. Finally, someone brought up about eight old bags. That meant we could each sleep for about two hours before we had to vacate so some one else could occupy the bag. It was a wonder any of us were alive by the next day.

The German offensive continued for another week. We held a "shoulder" of their penetration by digging in and initiating small counter-attacks. The mortar crews fired every day in support of the infantry as they neutralized activity on our front. The enemy drove on to Wingen, recapturing Lemberg and other small towns for which we had fought so hard just a few weeks earlier. By the seventh or eighth of January the fighting slowed on our front, and from that point until mid-March each side was involved primarily in patrolling and gathering intelligence. Life in our little valley improved. We had all received bedrolls and our foxholes and dugouts had been made more comfortable. Most importantly, we began getting hot food and mail deliveries again. I can't overemphasize how much we looked forward to mail call. Nick Cigrand was the mail orderly and it was his job to bring the mail to us wherever we might be.

One constant remained throughout my combat experience: never getting enough to eat. On the morning of January 7, I discovered a large can of hot chocolate mix and made some. I used my helmet to heat spring water over a Coleman stove. It tasted great, and I shared it with some of the others. By mid-afternoon I was sick. I ran a fever and had a severe pain in my side. I was actively sick and thoroughly miserable. The medic sent me back to the battalion aid station where I was examined by the doctor. The medic and the doctor were both concerned that I might have appendicitis. I was sent to a hospital in Rambervilliers, far behind the lines. By the time I was put to bed around midnight I didn't care whether I lived or died.

The next morning I felt better, and after an examination it was decided that I had a touch of dysentery. I stayed one more day in that ward—which was crowded with men with no obvious wounds or sickness—and was then moved to another room in the factory that was being used for the army hospital. By the third day I felt fine. I was in no hurry to leave, and they didn't seem to be in a hurry for me to go, so I spent another couple of days there. I felt like I was goofing off, but it was warm and safe so I didn't complain. One good thing about the hospital stay was that I got another bath—that was number three in three and a half months. Also I was given clean clothes!

After five days in the hospital I was sent to a replacement depot in Epinal. This was even further away from the front than the hospital. This was a perfectly awful place. It was very cold, we slept on hard bunks, and the food was terrible. We were given rifles to clean and taken to the rifle range to zero them in. I think they kept the place uncomfortable so when the replacements were sent out to their new units they would be glad to leave. Most of the men there were new to Europe and were literally replacements for the front-line infantry regiments. I was insulted as I was a "combat veteran" and practically the only one there.

After three days I was sent to the 100th Division rear in Sarrebourg. I had one night there and then went up to D Company's rear where I spent the night with John Courter, Nick Cigrand and the kitchen crew at company rear. Finally, after ten days I was back with the platoon.

While I was in Sarrebourg I happened to meet Lieutenant Chestnut. My former squad leader had

received a battlefield commission and was spending three days at division headquarters, being trained to be an officer. He told me that my new squad leader was Charles Claffey. Also that my first squad leader, Tony Pasquale, had been killed and Sergeant Chuck Stone had been severely wounded.

From late January until March 15, 1945, we rotated on-line and off-line every ten days. We went on-line either in our little valley on the Siersthal-Reyerviller road or at another location up on a hill overlooking Siersthal-Lambach in the town of Glasenberg. We stayed in a house in Glasenberg, sleeping on the floor. Our amusement there was card playing. We had played poker now and then in other locations. In Glasenberg we played a lot of four and six-handed Pinochle. During one ten-day stint in our valley location we built a rather sizeable log cabin under the direction of Ken Smith. We cut down a lot of trees for which the U.S. government had to pay after the war. The French are very protective of their forests.

On two occasions I was charged with taking a small detail of men and a 50-caliber machine gun to a position where we could deliver harassing fire on the Reyersville area. It bothered me a little as we were firing into a town that we had once occupied. I worried more about the townspeople who had been so nice to us than I did about the German soldiers who were now there. On March 15 all the U.S. armies launched an offensive. The day before we could see hundreds of bombers flying toward Germany. Back in December we had watched as one of our bombers, badly damaged, flew very low trying to reach friendly lines. It barely cleared our hill and we watched with concern as it continued out of sight.

Usually we were not concerned about the Air Force. They never seemed to do us much good, and we were sure they all had high rank and, above all, clean clothes and clean sheets. Jealousy!

Our attack was very successful and by mid-afternoon we had captured Bitche, the city that had been our objective since late December. Late in the day we moved through the city to Camp de Bitche, a French and then German army camp just north of town, where some fighting continued. The next three days we moved up to the German border. We were excited about being so close to Germany. At the same time we had heard so much about the Siegfried Line—Germany's fortifications opposite the French Maginot Line—and the Germans' determination to defend their country, that we were a bit nervous about what might happen once we crossed the border.

A Pass to Paris

On the morning of March 18 I was told that I had received a three-day pass to Paris. In January the division had started giving passes every week to division headquarters in Sarrebourg where there was a rest center in a former hotel. Not too long after that, passes were given to more exciting places like Nancy and Paris.

I was excited but was concerned because I had practically no money. Platoon members who had been on passes said not to worry, just take cartons of cigarettes. There were a lot of those around so I gathered five cartons, my toilet articles, and a couple of other things, put them in my pack and got in the jeep for the trip back to the company headquarters in Bitche. There I took a

bath and was issued a clean uniform before going on to Sarrebourg to meet the group going to Paris. When the 10 or 12 from the division were assembled that evening someone said we should leave right away instead of spending the night at the Sarrebourg rest center. By driving all night it would give us an extra day in Paris. So away we went.

We arrived in Paris early the next morning. We went to the American Express office near the Place de Opera where we were assigned hotels. I was assigned to the Grand Hotel near the Gare St. Lazaire. Fifty years later, the American Express office and the hotel are still in business at the same locations.

The first day in Paris was busy. I walked around and went to the Red Cross headquarters to try and get in touch with my sister, Mary Nance (who was a Red Cross Clubmobile worker with the First Army near Aachen, Germany), listened to the Glenn Miller Band of the AEF, and went with the group to Place Pig Alle. The Glenn Miller concert in the ball room of the hotel was one of the best musical experiences of my life! The Place Pig Alle experience was exactly like the one in Marseille. We went into the first bar we saw after exiting the subway, and each of the six or so of us ordered a glass of wine. Within fifteen minutes the other five had disappeared with women who had stopped by the table. I went back to the hotel.

That day I also stopped by the main post exchange to pick up my cigarette ration of six packs for my three-day pass. I sold them to a distinguished looking gentleman at the Red Cross headquarters. He stopped me on a beautiful winding staircase and asked if I had any

cigarettes for sale. I sold him the six packs for about ten dollars.

Paris was completely blacked out at night. It was a little scary walking through the streets by myself. For one thing there were people all over the streets and it was impossible to see them. Each night I was approached by several women who wanted to trade their charms for money, or better yet, cigarettes.

The next day I got word at my hotel that my sister was being flown in by the Red Cross. I met her at Red Cross headquarters in the afternoon and we were together for the last two days of my visit. That morning I had taken a sightseeing tour of the city. The bus was an old one—we weren't sure it would make it—and there was very little traffic. We saw most of the sights, including a number of buildings that had bullet holes that were left over (according to our very proud guide) from the uprising shortly before the city was liberated.

Mary Nance and I went to the Lido Club one night. There were only two things on the menu, champagne or white wine. No food. I ordered a bottle of champagne. Mary Nance drank most of it. The floor show was great—beautiful women nearly nude. The next night we went to the hotel where Mary Nance was staying to hear Glenn Miller again. During the day we visited and went for long walks in the parks. The last day was Sunday and we went to the American Cathedral services.

Invading Germany

Late on Sunday afternoon the 100th Division truck picked us up. We drove through the night to catch up with our outfit. We didn't actually find it until late Monday afternoon. We went to Bitche and everyone was gone, then up to Premisens, Germany, but the Division had passed through that city three or four days before. Finally, we found them in Ludwigshaven, Germany.

We spent the next few days in Maudach near Ludwigshaven waiting for the Third Army to sweep down the east side of the Rhine so a pontoon bridge could be built across the river. We crossed the Rhine at Mannheim on Easter Sunday, April 1, and started our drive through southern Germany.

The first night we stayed in a hospital on the outskirts of Mannheim. Interestingly, there was a huge bomb crater in one of the two buildings, right through half of the big Red Cross painted on the roof.

The next day we moved to Waldorf, a small city southeast of Mannheim. We arrived about noon and were housed in the second and third floors of a bar or pub. There was a tremendous amount of wine and other spirits in the cellar and most of the platoon was determined to liberate it. In the two rooms my squad occupied there must have been 30 bottles of wine. By the end of the day almost everyone was drunk or sick or both. That night I went on patrol back to division headquarters because there were so few people sober enough to go.

The next day we were trucked to the town of Sinsheim where we started to walk. While we were going

through the town we were shelled rather heavily. Gene Buonanno and I dashed into a building that housed a bunch of women. They were from other countries and had been brought to Germany to work. They were very glad to see us, but we had to move on after the shelling stopped.

It was obvious that the Germans had stepped up their resistance. The rifle companies were held up time and again by roadblocks and small groups of soldiers who would defend the roadblocks and then fall back. We finally stopped in the town of Schwaigern. There I had two embarrassing experiences. The first was to go outside to the toilet. I dug my little cat hole and took my pants down. Just at that time a German shell came screaming in and I instinctively threw myself on the ground. I must have looked funny, spread out on the ground with my pants and underwear down around my ankles. The other experience was breaking into a hen house near where we were staying. I discovered the hen house and saw fresh eggs. The only problem was the hen house was locked. The door looked flimsy so I put one foot on the ground, the other on the wall next to the door, and pulled on the top of the door with both hands until the lock broke. The problem was that the door came back with such force that it broke my big toenail, which bled profusely. It hurt for weeks, and to this day the nail still shows the effects of that door. I did get the eggs and Gene Buonanno cooked them. They were great.

On April 5 we moved up to Bockingen, a suburb of Heilbronn. We moved into houses and set up our guns in backyards. We stayed in these positions for several days, sweating out intense shelling. We were rather close to where our engineers had built a pontoon bridge across

the Neckar River during one of the first nights. The bridge was destroyed by artillery fire the next morning and several of the wounded engineers came into the house where we were to get first aid. A shell hit one of the houses that part of the platoon was occupying, showering the men with dust and wall covering, but not hurting anyone.

For two days I accompanied Lieutenant Nageotte across the Neckar River to company headquarters and to the machine gun platoons. Our walking tour of the front was interrupted several times by artillery. Since I was the enlisted man and he was the officer, I had to row the boat across the river. I felt we were terribly exposed but nothing happened.

On April 9 we went across the river on a pontoon ferry that the engineers built. We moved up to a neighborhood on the southern edge of town. Again we dug in in a backyard and fired our guns from there. During the day some shots were fired up the street and a little later an old man and a young boy were marched down the street with their hands behind their heads. Apparently they were sniping at our soldiers.

Goodbye to the Front

On the night of April 10 we were ordered to pull back about eight or ten city blocks. There were rumors of a counterattack and a feeling that we should set up a little further from the front. At dawn on April 11 we were busy digging our guns in. After ours was dug in I went to the back of our jeep and trailer to get some rations. My driver, Bill Huntley, was there and we kidded around a bit. I had gone into the basement of the house where we

had spent the night to see if I could bring some rations back for those who wanted to eat but who were trying to get some rest. As I was looking through the trailer we heard the sound of Nebelwerfers, or "Screaming Meemies," coming in. Everyone took cover. Bill and I dove under one of the jeeps. All of the shells hit in our area, and two of them hit on the jeeps that were parked on the concrete driveway. I felt some blows on two occasions and was sure I had been hit, but it didn't hurt so I wasn't positive. As soon as the shelling stopped I tried to get out from under the now burning jeep. When I moved the pain was severe, so I shouted for a medic. Several of the platoon came running to get me out from under the jeep and to carry me into the kitchen of one of the houses. I was completely conscious and was deliberate in my instructions as to what part of me hurt the most.

The medic gave me a shot to reduce the pain and started dressing my left arm, then the right. In doing so he cut off all my clothes above my waist. He then saw the bleeding all along my left leg and he cut off my pants and underwear. While all of these wounds hurt, the biggest problem I was having was with my left foot. There was no evidence of a wound there except the laces of my boot were broken. At my insistence he cut off my boot and found the worst wound where a piece of shrapnel had gone through my foot. All of this took quite a bit of time and left me on the floor without any clothes on. Very embarrassing.

One of my worries during this dressing of the wounds was my few possessions. I kept them in my uniform shirt pocket. The medic used his scissors to cut out the uniform pocket and placed it on the stretcher with

me. I was alert enough to see that my wallet wasn't there and I asked Lieutenant Chestnut to get it for me. He found it on the ground under the jeep. As always, I was concerned about money!

Eventually, all my wounds were treated and I was wrapped in a blanket, placed on a stretcher, and loaded onto a jeep. John Gordon, a member of our squad, was also wounded and was evacuated with me. Bill Huntley, who had been lying next to me under the jeep, was killed.

John and I were taken to the company command post (CP), which was in a house close to the river. The CP was set up in the basement. I was handed in through a small basement window and placed on the floor. I was there for a while, during which time Captain Nason and others came over to talk to me. From there I was taken by jeep to the battalion aid station on the other side of the river. At the aid station the doctor took a look at my bandages and the tag the medic had attached to me and left me on the floor for a couple of hours. I was the only one in this store-front building when I was brought in. Within about two hours, four or five other wounded First Battalion soldiers were there. We were then loaded into an ambulance and taken about 15 miles to a field hospital.

I didn't realize it at the time but that night was my last with the 100th Division. I had been with the outfit for 13 months and had formed some wonderful friendships. I feel sure that a war-time experience such as mine is something one doesn't forget. There is a bonding with your comrades that is strong and lasting. Everyday we depended on each other. We had some good times but we knew that danger was ever present. The division lost

almost one thousand men killed and three thousand wounded. Some of these were good friends of mine and I missed them.

About nine or ten o'clock the night of April 11 I was taken into the field hospital's operating tent. I was still wide awake and a bit chatty. The last thing I remember saying before I was put to sleep was asking them not to amputate my foot.

My memory of the next day, April 12, is non-existent. I may have been awake from time to time but I don't remember it. I definitely remember the next day, April 13. I awoke very hungry and had one of my favorite breakfasts, French Toast. I was in a tent-ward with a grass "floor." Next to me was a wounded German soldier. Most of all I remember the hushed atmosphere. President Roosevelt had died the day before, and everyone was talking about it.

England

The next day, April 14, several of us were loaded into an ambulance and taken back across the Rhine to an airfield where we were flown to the Southampton area in England. The ambulance ride was very painful. It would be hard to explain how much I wanted it to end. We spent the night in a Quonset hut hospital before being loaded onto a hospital train bound for the 45th Station Hospital in Bedford, England.

I was at this hospital for five weeks. I was in a receiving ward for one day and then transferred to an orthopedic ward for the rest of the time. This ward was a Quonset hut with about 30 soldiers in it. All had been

wounded, some worse than others. I was in the second bed from the entrance. I liked that location as there was always a lot of activity there. I had two operations while at this hospital. The first was to open and clean the wounds, the second was a follow up which included getting me ready to travel back to the USA.

During the first afternoon I was at Bedford, a Red Cross Gray Lady came by to talk to me. I asked her to help me write a letter home because I was afraid Mother and Daddy would hear about my being wounded and be worried. She got the stationery and pen and helped me write the letter. She offered to write it for me but I wanted the V-Mail letter to be in my handwriting. I still have a copy of that letter. I later learned that Mother got the letter the day before Western Union delivered the War Department telegram to our house. Apparently the women of Little Rock had talked about this one man who had the terrible responsibility of delivering all the killed, missing and wounded-in-action telegrams around town. I was glad that I saved Mother the panic that she would have had when she answered the door bell and saw the Western Union man standing there.

After the first operation at Bedford the treatment was to allow the wounds to drain during the day. The routine was to pull off the blood-soaked bandages in the morning and apply wet compresses to my arms and leg. Then at night the nurse would redress the wounds. The pain of pulling off the bandages in the morning can hardly be described, especially on the left arm and left leg and foot where the nerves had been exposed.

The ward had several nurses and orderlies. The head nurse was a captain and quite attractive. She had

recently married an army air force officer who flew out of a nearby airbase. One of the other nurses was much older—probably around 40 or so—and quite tough. She gave everyone a hard time in a good-humored way. For instance she would tell me not to be a baby as she would tear off the bandages. After a couple of weeks she had me sit up so I could soak my foot in a bowl by the side of the bed. I argued that I was too weak to sit up. She would have none of that so I sat up. I immediately fainted and awoke with blood dripping into my veins. Altogether I received four blood transfusions, two then and two when I was first wounded.

Toward the end of my stay I was in a wheelchair for some time every day. That allowed me to go to the movies (once) and move around the ward a little. One day a Colonel came by and presented a number of us our Purple Hearts. That was a thrill.

I started getting mail from the guys in the company, from home and from Mary Nance who had been informed by the Red Cross shortly after I was wounded. We were entertained a couple of times by the English locals. We eagerly read *Stars and Stripes* and celebrated the end of the war in Europe on May 8. I liked to listen to the Armed Forces Radio Europe, where there were regular 15-minute programs by the Glenn Miller Band led by Sergeants Ray McKinley and Jerry Gray.

At the end of May I was sent to a hospital near Southampton where, after about three days, I boarded the Santa Rosa for the trip home. The ship was much bigger and faster than the one on which we went to Europe the previous October, and the hospital ward was located in

nice quarters on the promenade deck. After five days we pulled into New York harbor.

Return to the States

I was pretty excited when we arrived in New York. We came into Staten Island around mid-afternoon. Most of us were up and around. I navigated on crutches all day waiting to see the sight of land, the Statue of Liberty, and the USA. As we steamed into the harbor several boats were waiting for us, and there was a big crowd, an army band, banners, flags, etc. on the pier as we pulled alongside. In due time I was carried out on a stretcher to a waiting ambulance, which took me to Halloran General Hospital on Staten Island.

I was in Halloran for most of the month of June. It was an excellent place, but far from home. Normally, soldiers stayed there only a few days before being shipped to a hospital in their service command. At least two wards full of soldiers came and went while I stayed there. Although this disturbed me, Halloran and New York were not bad places to be because there was always something going on. At least once a week, sometimes twice, a major entertainer came from the city. I saw Eddie Cantor and Bob Hope plus the Harry James Orchestra broadcasting on NBC. I also went into New York one Saturday. I was on crutches with bandages on my arm and leg. This attracted attention wherever I went. A couple of taxis gave me free rides, and I was moved to the front of the lines at the movies and at restaurants.

At the end of the third week in June I went to see the people who arranged for the transfers from Halloran to other hospitals. I was told that I would be leaving

within a day or two for Bruns General Hospital in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I couldn't believe it and said so. The answer was that New Mexico, like Arkansas, was in the 8th Service Command so that was it. My argument was that Santa Fe was 800-900 miles from home while New York was only a couple of hundred miles further. Either way I couldn't get home, and my folks couldn't come to see me. I was unhappy, to no avail.

Two days later several of us were taken by ambulance across the Bayonne Bridge, through Manhattan via the tunnels, to Floyd Bennett Field, Long Island. The next morning we were loaded on a C-47 for the trip to New Mexico. The plane stopped in Indianapolis for lunch and refueling and in Topeka, Kansas for an overnight stay. Two or three patients left there, and two or three more in Oklahoma City the next day. We arrived in Santa Fe in the afternoon where I was the only one to deplane. The flight went on to the West Coast with its other passengers.

When I was carried from the airplane all I could see was desert. I couldn't believe I was going to spend months in such a desolate spot. The hospital didn't make me feel any better. It was small, with a series of wooden wards connected by enclosed walkways, and located about five miles from downtown in the middle of the desert. No trees, just sand and sagebrush. I was taken to an orthopedic ward, not unlike the one in England. Again it held about 30 wounded soldiers.

My first two days at Bruns were miserable. I really felt sorry for myself. On the third day one of the Red Cross women came into the ward to tell me that I would be picked up that afternoon for a tour of Santa Fe.

I said I wasn't going. She said I was going and, if necessary, that was an order (Red Cross workers had some sort of officer status). So I went! An older woman picked up three of us and gave the tour. Before we left the hospital area I said that I didn't understand how anyone could live in such an awful place. Her answer was great: she said her parents had brought her to Santa Fe from Chicago when she was seventeen, deathly sick and on a stretcher. The doctors thought that if she didn't find a better climate she would surely die. In her opinion, Santa Fe was a pretty nice place. I felt terrible.

I spent three and a half months at Bruns and it turned out to be one of the best experiences of my life. The doctors operated on me shortly after I got there. A few days later I volunteered to work on the hospital's radio station. I was welcomed and given something to do right away. Shortly thereafter I was trained to help with the broadcasts. Then I was given my own radio show. It was a one-hour record show and I had a good time with it. By September I was recruited to be the master of ceremonies at a monthly talent show in the auditorium. By the time I left on October 18 I was well known around Bruns. For one thing I was awarded my Bronze Star by the Commanding General at a Friday afternoon parade.

On the weekends I went into Santa Fe, twice to Albuquerque, and once to Alamosa, Colorado. I was on crutches the entire time at Bruns so these trips were real adventures. One of the best experiences I had at Bruns was spending Sundays or weekends with the Alexander family at their Hidden Valley Ranch near Taos. Again the Red Cross suggested it, and again I didn't want to but did. As with the tour of Santa Fe these visits were wonderful. The Alexanders were very wealthy oil people

from Texas. They had a beautiful house in a private valley. The family came out to New Mexico in the summer to escape the heat of South Texas. The mother was a delightful, down-to-earth person. She was there with her daughter, Helen, and her daughter-in-law, Margaret. Helen and Margaret were married to Air Force officers who were stationed in Europe. They were both about 25 years old, much older than I was, and were a lot of fun. Among other things, they introduced me to rum and coca-cola.

In mid-October my doctor thought I needed nerve surgery on my left leg. That could not be done at Bruns so he suggested that I go to Kennedy Hospital in Memphis. I thought that was fine as I would finally get to go home. Within days I was taken to Albuquerque to catch an overnight train to Amarillo, Texas, where I transferred to the Rock Island's Choctaw Rocket for the ride to Memphis. I was still on crutches and had bedroom accommodations. We arrived in Amarillo in the early morning and I crutched around downtown until the Rocket left at noon. During the train ride the porter approached me about selling the upper berth in my bedroom to a major. I did for forty dollars.

I had received a letter from Daddy a week or two before saying that he had tickets for the Texas-Arkansas football game on Saturday, October 20. I wrote back asking him not to sell my ticket as I might be there in time to see it. I did not tell them that I was arriving that morning. I didn't know it myself until just a day or two before. The train arrived in Little Rock at 4:40 am on its way to Memphis. I took a taxi home and rang the doorbell at 5:00 am After several rings Daddy answered the door. He immediately woke Mother up and we had a

tearful reunion that morning. It had been 18 months since my furlough in April the year before. We saw the football game and celebrated my twentieth birthday on Sunday.

At Kennedy Hospital the doctors decided that an operation wasn't necessary, and after a month they gave me a 45-day furlough. This started in late-November and lasted until early January. They also decided that I didn't need to use my crutches and could wear a shoe on my left foot. This was good news and set me up for the holidays.

As soon as I got to Kennedy I called Aunt Nance. She and her friend, "Aunt" Evalina Harris, came to see me immediately. I spent some time with them when I had the opportunity. Aunt Nance took over, as usual, and started worrying about what I was going to do after I got out of the army, where I would go to college, etc. One thing she was especially concerned about was my complexion—it had gone from bad to worse. She got in touch with her doctor friends and they recommended "the best specialist in the United States." The only trouble was that he was in Chicago. She persevered and arranged an appointment for me on the Friday after Thanksgiving. So I went to Chicago.

I started for Chicago on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. My idea for another adventure was to get a ride on an air force plane (at no cost). I went to the air base in Little Rock and after waiting around all morning I finally got a ride to Cincinnati. Then I was advised to go to Wright-Patterson Field in Dayton, so I got transportation to the Dayton highway and hitch-hiked to Dayton where I spent the night. The next morning I waited around all morning and finally decided to hitch hike all the way to Chicago. An army staff sergeant and

I got a ride to Indianapolis and another that evening to Chicago. We arrived around midnight and I spent the night at the home of the man who gave us a ride. The next day, Thanksgiving, he took me to the downtown USO on Michigan Avenue where I spent most of the day and night. I had a lonely Thanksgiving dinner at the USO.

On Friday I kept my appointment with the dermatologist and then went out to Northwestern. I spent several hours in the admissions office hoping to see someone. Since I didn't have an appointment I never did get to talk to anyone. I tried and tried to get by the secretary; it didn't do any good and it made me mad. After that frustrating experience I caught the night train to Memphis and arrived back in Little Rock around noon on Saturday. The whole trip was a waste. It was a struggle to get there, I was lonely, and the trips to the doctor and Northwestern didn't do any good as far as I could see.

At Christmas we had a big family reunion. Jim and Mary Nance came home, and Uncle Rob, Aunt Nance, and Aunt Evalina came for the holidays. Along with having a good time I spent my holidays thinking about college, writing letters, sending transcripts, and talking to a number of people. I applied to the University of Arkansas, LSU, Princeton, Kansas, and Oklahoma State. I thought I wanted to be an architect so I only applied to schools that had an architecture program. At Christmas Aunt Nance suggested I apply to the University of Virginia. She knew a number of Virginia alumni in Memphis and thought it was a good school. More to humor her than for any other reason I applied. During the month of January I was accepted at Arkansas,

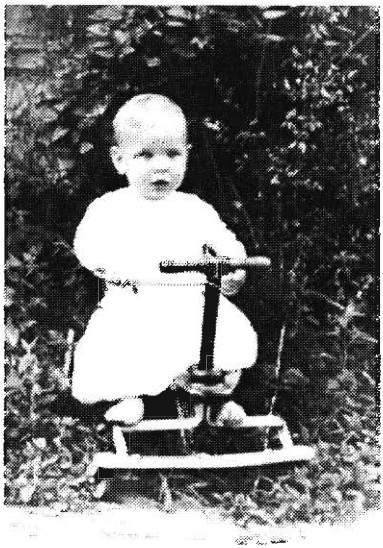
LSU, and Virginia. I like to think the others turned me down because, as they said, they were overwhelmed with returning GI's.

Both Arkansas and LSU were on the semester system and they cautioned me that I would not be accepted after a certain time in the spring semester. The semester started around the first of February so I would have to get discharged pretty fast in order to go to those schools. On the other hand, Virginia was on the trimester system and the spring semester started on February 26. With all that information in hand I went back to Kennedy Hospital the second week of January.

During the last week of January I was the subject of a meeting of several doctors. They told me that they had decided to fuse the bones in my foot. The operation would be scheduled within the next week or two. This frightened me and I mentioned it to Aunt Nance. She immediately suggested I go to Campbell's Clinic in Memphis for a second opinion. She and Aunt Evalina knew some of the doctors there. Within a day or two I had an appointment and I met the aunts at the clinic. I had gone into the nurses' station in my ward and taken my x-rays, thinking that the doctors would surely want to see them. Apparently taking another hospital's x-rays was not done in proper medical circles. In any event, a doctor examined me—using the x-rays—and advised me not to have the operation. His reasoning was that such a procedure would not allow me to bend my foot for the rest of my life, and this probably was too big a price to pay to avoid the pain that would be there without the operation. He also suggested that if the pain became too intense I could always get the operation at a veterans hospital at no cost.

A few days later I had another meeting with the army doctors. There were at least four present, all captains or majors. This was preliminary to the operation that was scheduled for the next day. As soon as I got the chance I told them that I would not have the operation. They were aghast and tried to tell me that it had to be done. I said "no" every way I could, and they finally gave up with the remark that "there was nothing else to be done but to discharge me." That suited me fine. I was discharged from the army on February 11, 1946.

Serving in the army and with an infantry division in combat was a defining experience for me. I was not anxious to be in the army but at the time, and especially now, am glad I was. I think I found certain values that helped set my future. I learned that I was never really alone because others were there to help me whenever I needed them. I also learned that a survivor of difficulties in life has payments to make to others. I feel that I was a pretty good soldier and I am very proud to have served.



Robert Fair, 1926

Robert Fair, 1935

1524 Schiller, Little Rock, AR

Corporate Robert Fair
US Army, France, 1944

Camilla, Ann, Drayton, and Robert Fair, 1969

Camilla Fair, 1980

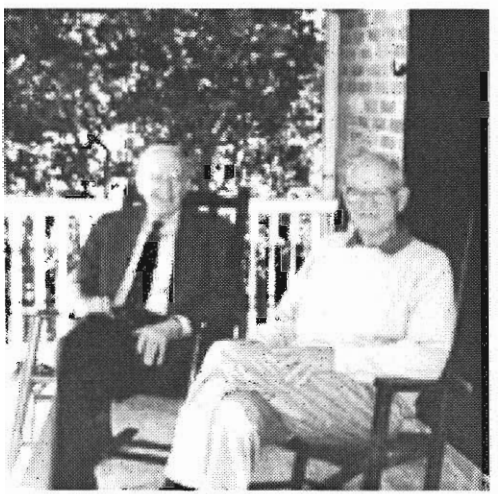
Mother, Georgie Fair, 1960

Adelade and Richard Starr, 1955

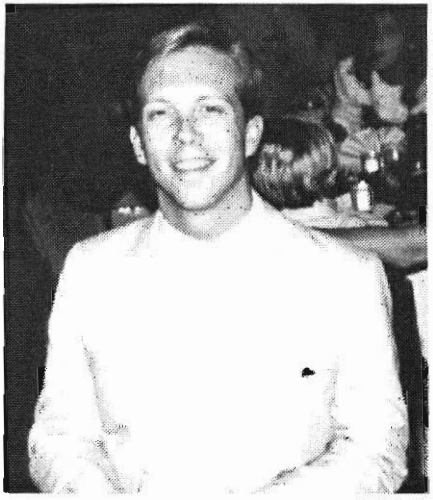
Rud and Georgie Fair, 1967

Bill and Mary Nance Fair Stramm, 1980

Mary Nance and
Merle Fair, 1988



Jim and Robert Fair, 1997



Drayton Fair, 1967

Robert, Camilla, Rick, Ann Fair, Caroline, and Robin Burns, 1995

Robert Fair in Class, 1979