100th Infantry Division in France and Germany

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I was not a combatting infantryman. More correctly, I was one who was "combated at". Although I was in combat situations, I was not a scout, rifleman, machine gunner, or mortar man -- the guys who really had it rough. I did carry a rifle, the clip for which was loaded at all times, sometimes with a round in the chamber in case I had to fire it. But we were on the receiving end of mortar fire, German 88's, and other artillery. And, of course, there sometimes were areas which had been mined. I can only recall being shot at individually one time. Three or four of us were climbing up an embankment and drew rifle fire -- three or four shots. One hit an empty gas can. And, in one of my notes written in 1945 after the war was over, I mentioned that, when we were near Reyerswiller, we watched our planes bombing and strafing some pillboxes on the hill in the Maginot Line and that it was near there that we were shot at in the jeep. I have no recollection of ever being shot at in a jeep. It could have been the same day that we were climbing up the embankment.

These are some things which I like to remember, even though some were not good, from the time we left the New York P.O.E. until it was time for me to be discharged --

The trip on the U.S.S. General William H. Gordon took two weeks. It was uneventful except that we had a hurricane which lasted two or three days. A great many were seasick and lay in their bunks all day, eating nothing but saltine crackers and sucking on lemons. I rocked when the ship did and rolled when it did, which I think is the way to prevent seasickness. I enjoyed leaning on (hanging onto) the bow and looking straight out and seeing the sky at an angle and, a few seconds later, seeing the water at an angle, without moving my head. When we passed through the Strait of Gibraltar, we saw the rock on the port side and the lights of a town in Morocco on the starboard side.

The harbour at Marseilles was cluttered with some partially-sunken ships, so a boardwalk had been laid across one or two of them for us to disembark. We walked to the staging area near Septems (sp), about 12 miles from Marseilles and were there several days before boarding the 40 and 8 boxcars for the front. While in the staging area, we were assigned to various details. I unloaded ammunition from a ship one or two days. Dick Novak and I pitched shelter-halves together. One night Dick went into Septems and had a couple of beers. Assuming that, after drinking the beer, he would have to crawl out of the tent sometime during the night, he left his steel helmet outside the tent so that he wouldn't have to try to find the latrine somewhere in the dark. Before daylight the next morning, someone -- I think it was Sgt. Carey -- came through the area to wake everyone up. He tripped on something, fell down, and his elbow submerged in Dick's already-filled steel helmet.

The trip in boxcars (around 20 or 25 men in our car) to the front took four days, with the train sometimes stopping for an hour or so at a time. We never knew what for. Neither did we know when it would start again -- in five minutes or over an hour. Sometimes, the engineer blew the whistle as a warning. If not, anyone who had gotten off had to run and grab the side of the large open door and pull himself in, sometimes with the help of
someone inside. One time a guy in the next car didn’t make it, slipped and fell, and one leg got run over and crushed. The other one may have been cut off — I don’t remember. We never knew what happened to him after that. But, after the war was over, someone made contact with him and he was employed and doing well with his artificial leg or legs.

The rest of this is not a chronology, but it’s a few of the incidents which I remember. Some of them are significant, and some are not.

Capt. Meade, C.O. of G Company, stepped on a mine early on. We heard him yelling, but the medics were coming so we didn’t go over. He wasn’t killed, but he probably lost a foot.

Early on, when we were in the Vosges Mountains, we had to make one or maybe two trips along a steep snowy or icy path up a mountain. At one point, the path was particularly steep and slippery, and there was either a tree or just a tree stump at the high end of the slippery place. On the high side of the tree or stump was a dead German soldier lying frozen with his arm outstretched a foot or so into the path and a foot or so above the ground. There was nothing else to hold onto but his arm, so we grabbed hold of it. At that early stage of the game, someone questioned how we could do this. But we didn’t consider it disrespectful. We needed a helping hand, and he was there to give it.

On Thanksgiving Day, we were in Les Vermont. The kitchen came up from the rear and served us Thanksgiving dinner in the rain. After several weeks of K rations, the combination of turkey, dressing, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, gravy, and rainwater all swimming around together in a mess kit was too rich for us, and quite a few got sick.

Around the first of December, we were in corps reserve in Drei Brunen for four days. A portable shower unit came up from the rear, and we got our first showers since landing in Marseilles on October 20. The shower unit was set up in a factory. You left your clothes in one place, showered in another, and then hunted for clean clothes that fitted you in another place. You didn’t get your own clothes back, and you wouldn’t have wanted them. They were sent somewhere to be washed and brought up to some other unit to use.

One day, going down a road to a village called Puberg (our first sergeant, Paul Pugh, claimed it was named for him), the Germans started throwing mortar shells in from the other side of the hill. Major Kirkland was leading the road march. He responded in his South Carolina accent, by telling us all to put a round in “ow chambas”. Maybe he thought we could fire our M1 rifles over the hill.

One time at a road junction, Battalion got word that there were some German tanks in the area and that they might try to penetrate our lines. It wasn’t known on which road they might come — from the left, from the right, or from straight in front. Two-man bazooka teams were sent out for several hundred yards in all three directions. Jack Tkatch and I were one of the teams. Neither of us had fired a bazooka before, but we had seen one fired. We dug a deep hole and decided that, if a tank came down our road, we would take cover in our hole if our first one or two bazooka rounds didn’t knock it out. Fortunately
for us or for the tank -- we didn't know which -- none came through.

During the winter months we had plenty of snow. A time or two, there was no water to wash in, so I washed my hands and face in snow.

Keeping the bore of our rifle clean sometimes was a problem. Rain and snow got into it. We weren't supposed to stretch anything over it because it might cause the bore to sweat. But sometimes we did anyway. Back at Fort Bragg, one guy in E Company was notorious in his squad for having a dirty rifle. Especially on Saturday mornings, we made sure that our rifles were clean because we usually had a Saturday morning inspection. One Saturday, this guy had gone on pass. His rifle, of course, was left in the rifle rack. Just before inspection, his squad leader happened to think that John's rifle probably was dirty. Sure enough it was. There was no time for anyone to clean it. There was a very small guy named Gabriel LaGroteria in that platoon. The platoon leader had LaGroteria change into his fatigues, take John's rifle, crawl under the barrack to as close as he could get to the middle, leave the rifle there, crawl back out, and change back into his uniform for inspection. After inspection, of course, LaGroteria had to go back under the barrack and retrieve the rifle. His platoon sergeant and squad leader at Bragg used to get onto John for having a dirty rifle, telling him that, when we got overseas, he had better keep it clean because it might not fire sometime when he needed it to. It seems like I heard that this did happen one time. He tried to fire it, and it wouldn't fire. He didn't get killed, but he did learn his lesson because of it.

Captain Tom Garahan, CO of E Company, was highly respected and liked by his men. One day he had gone over to coordinate with the CO of whatever company was on one of the flanks of E Company. It wasn't very far to where the other company was. Long after he was expected back, he still hadn't returned. E Company didn't know whether he had gotten captured, killed, wounded and couldn't get back, or just what. Finally he did return, and he was OK, much to the relief of his company. In some companies, the men might have welcomed a replacement for their company commander, but certainly this wouldn't have been true in E Company. Since I had been in his company at one time, I knew him and thought highly of him. When I was in New York in 1948, I made a trip to Brooklyn to say hello to him at his office there.

We had three chaplains in our regiment. Chaplain LeGrone (Presbyterian) was assigned to First Battalion, Father Buckley (Catholic) to Second Battalion, and Sam Tyler (Episcopal) to Third Battalion. But Father Buckley also ministered to the Catholics in the other two battalions, and the other two ministered to the Protestants in the Second Battalion as well as to those in their own battalions. We knew Father Buckley best because he was with us most of the time, and we liked him. But Sam Tyler came over often also. He was an infantryman's chaplain. Sometimes he ignored the fact that a chaplain wasn't supposed to be in the thick of battle and got out of his jeep one time to rescue a man who had been wounded and couldn't make his way back. The story was that Sam picked him up, put him over his shoulder, and carried him back to safety. After the war, Sam was a priest at Trinity Church in Boston and made quite a name for himself -- so much so that a book was written about him.
One time I developed claustrophobia in a foxhole. It certainly wasn’t the first time I had slept in one, and, when I was a kid, Gene Lewellyn, a neighbor, had dug a cave in a vacant lot. To get into it, you had to crawl through a tunnel which made several turns before you got into the “room” of the cave. But, while in the Vosges Mountains, I woke up in the middle of the night one time and had the feeling that I had to get out of there. The foxhole was covered with logs with dirt on top of them. All this was courtesy of a previous infantry company who had been dug in there before we relieved them. There was a hole in one corner, which was our means of getting in and out. I either stood or knelt in that corner with my head outside. Probably I was there about fifteen minutes before I got over the feeling and felt comfortable about getting back in again. And I never had that feeling of having to get outside again when we slept in foxholes later. I’ll bet if a shell had hit outside while I had my head sticking out, I would have gotten over the claustrophobia right quick.

In Reyerswiller, we stayed one night in a barn and a few days in a house with four old maid sisters and their bachelor brother. There was an outhouse out back. To get there, you had to pass their dog, which was semi-friendly, but barely had energy enough to wag his tail. One day, Joe Karn gave him some C-ration stew. The next day, when Joe passed by him, the dog tried to bite him. So much for C-ration stew. Later, in Bitche, we saw one of the old maids. Reyerswiller had been recaptured by the Germans after we pulled;.....2)

Several pillboxes of the Maginot line were near Reyerswiller, and we could see our planes bombing and strafing and a few fights with other planes. Some of the pillboxes had been taken by the Americans, and some hadn’t. The planes were trying to crack them, but with little success. Most of the bombs and shells bounced off with not much effect on them. But yet, the Stars and Stripes carried a story by a reporter who had seen a pillbox somewhere. He said they could be picked apart with a pencil. We wondered where he had been.

I think it was near Reyerswiller where we watched a dogfight between one of our planes and a German plane. Our plane was shot down. It disappeared behind a mountain, so we didn’t see it hit the ground. But we didn’t see the pilot bail out before the plane went out of sight.

After a week in Reyerswiller, we moved to Holbach. One night about midnight, Joe Karn, Leopold Bison, and I were on guard at the same time. Joe thought that he saw several figures moving around on the hill back of the CP. He called Bison and me, and we both agreed that what he saw was people. We watched them for awhile to make sure we weren’t imagining things. Then we got Lt. Olson out of bed to go up and wake Capt. Torbett. But no one was ever found, and there were not even any tracks in the deep snow where we thought we had seen them. We never did figure out what caused it, as there were no trees and it was bright moonlight. Even Lt. Olson thought he saw them too.
A short time -- I think about a month -- after our division got on line, Company A in our regiment was captured -- totally -- except for the cooks, company clerk, supply sergeant, etc., who were back at regiment. We heard several versions as to why this happened. Charlie Holland, a friend of mine, was among those captured. The War Department, for some reason, didn’t notify a man’s wife, parents, or whoever that a man was captured -- only that he was missing in action -- which could have meant killed, wounded and couldn’t get back to his company, captured, or whatever. My dad knew Charlie’s dad, but, since the censor wouldn’t have let it go through, I couldn’t write to my folks about it. Instead I wrote to them in Oklahoma that I had received their letter telling about Charlie’s being captured. Of course, I had had no such letter from them. But they read between the lines and either wrote or called the Hollands in Texas and told them what I had written. That may have been the first that the Hollands knew that he actually was captured and not killed - at least not that we knew about.

Immediately after A Company was captured, our regiment formed a new A Company, pulling men out of other companies to do this. This must have been hard on these men, not having known each other in training and not knowing who was dependable and who might not be. One of these was a guy I knew. He was leading some from his new squad on a patrol one night and encountered what turned out to be a patrol from another company. The password changed each day, and the method it was used changed at no particular time interval. Sometimes the challenger asked for the password and, upon receiving it, gave the countersign. At other times, the challenger gave the password and the man being challenged gave the countersign. The new password and the method of use were handed down by word of mouth each day. On this night, whoever was leading the patrol from the other company challenged the A Company patrol and gave the password. The A Company patrol leader didn’t answer. The other patrol leader gave it a second time and then a third time and still got no answer. So he shot and hit the A Company patrol leader. Someone in the patrol shouted, “Don’t shoot. It’s A Company.” But it was too late. The A Company patrol leader died at the aid station. But before he died, he exonerated the other company’s squad leader. The password was a word which could be pronounced two different ways, like “pe-kôn” or “pe-kan”. By the way the other squad leader pronounced it, the A Company squad leader thought he was a German who just didn’t know how to pronounce it.

Two or three times at night, we heard airplanes going over us, big ones, not fighter planes. Of course they were flying without lights, so we had no idea how many there were. But there were many going over at the same time, and the roar lasted a long, long time. I had no idea there were that many airplanes in the entire European theatre. It was a good feeling to hear them.
One day we heard that the Germans had captured an American jeep and that they might try to infiltrate our line in it, with a German soldier in an American uniform. One night I was standing guard late before the moon had risen, and I heard a jeep coming down the road. I halted it and asked for the password, and the driver called me by name. I said, “Little Red?”, and sure enough it was Dail Davenport, whom we called “Little Red” when I knew him at Oklahoma A&M. From the four words I said, he recognized my voice, and I don’t know how I recognized his as I hadn’t seen him in about six months.

Speaking of passwords, I was standing guard one night in Lambach, a town in which a German patrol had infiltrated and entered one of the houses a night or two before. I heard someone coming down the road, but it was dark and I couldn’t see him. I halted him and asked for the password. He didn’t give one, and I challenged him again, but couldn’t understand his reply. I challenged him a third time, and he said he was trying to think of it. I said, “Well, you’d better think of it quick.”, and his quick reply was, “Don’t shoot. It’s Lt. Olson.” He was my own lieutenant whom I saw every day, but couldn’t tell who he was in the dark. I didn’t even recognize his voice, and he didn’t recognize mine either.

Also, in Lambach, four of us were sleeping in sleeping bags on the floor of a house, one of a dozen or so which had been taken over for our use. Walter Paper was on guard and woke me up in the middle of the night and said that he had heard movement in the cellar. Since that German patrol had infiltrated a cellar in a house a night or two before, we wondered if the same thing were happening here. I listened at the door to the downstairs and could hear movement also. We crept downstairs and threw open a door into one of the cellar rooms to take whoever it was. We “captured” the old lady of the house who had gotten up to make tea for her husband who was ill. We didn’t even know that the owners of the house were sleeping down there. We hadn’t been in the house very long, and there was an outside door to the cellar, so they could have gone in and out without our knowing it.

And – it was also in Lambach where one of our switchboard operators -- I think it was Johnny Morgan -- was sitting at the switchboard one night when a shell burst outside. One piece of shrapnel pierced the wood shingle, came through the glass window and through the wool blanket which was hung over the window as a blackout curtain, and on through Johnny’s field jacket and wool shirt. When he pulled open his shirt to see how badly he had been hit, the piece of shrapnel fell to the floor. It had stopped between his shirt and his undershirt. His undershirt wasn’t even torn.

It is difficult to say that anyone who gets hit is lucky. But, in a way, he can be. If he survives and the wound is not bad enough, it can remove him from combat for the rest of the war. (We heard a couple of stories about guys “accidentally” (?) shooting themselves in the foot. I don’t know whether they were true or not.) I think it was near Jagsfeld in Germany where one of our guys was shot and the bullet went into his body.
and then out, but made only one hole. It went into his mouth when it was open and came out his cheek. How often would that happen?

Lambach took a lot of shelling when we were there. I think it was Lambach where we slept one night in another house and, during the night, the house next to us was hit and we slept through it.

In Petit Rederching a plane flew over the house next to us and strafed the road. And it may have also been in Petit Rederching where a plane strafed us while we were in the street eating chow. I wasn’t facing it when it came in, so, for an instant, wondered what the sudden machine gun fire was about. In another instant, it went right over us. I don’t know how it happened that no one was hit. It was an American plane which had been captured by the Germans.

At Petit Rederching we went down into one of the pillboxes which some engineers had taken over as a CP (command post). It was eleven (I believe) stories under the ground, had its own heating plant, barracks, showers, etc.

Some outfit to the left of us at Petit Rederching had gotten the word that several hundred German soldiers wanted to surrender at a certain place and time and to be on the lookout for them and not to fire upon them. The outfit set up searchlights for the Germans to guide their way in on. I don’t remember hearing how many actually surrendered.

When we were in Meisenthal, units of the 42nd Division were near us. One unit put up a loud speaker at the edge of the woods and announced in German that they would give any German soldier who surrendered a cup of coffee and donuts. I understand that three or four did.

We didn’t know how the citizens of Meisenthal knew before many of us did that we were to leave when we did. We were to be relieved by the 71st Division. Apparently the Germans knew it also as, when their rifle companies relieved ours in Goeetzembruch, the Germans threw well over a hundred mortar shells into Goeetzembruch within thirty minutes. They kept it up for several hours, slackening down at intervals. I don’t recall that we got a lot of shelling in Meisenthal at that time.

We left Meisenthal for Pisdorf for a ten-day rest which lasted only two or three nights. We got orders that the 100th was to participate in the big drive and our outfit was to concentrate on Freundenberg Farms, Bitche, and the land around there. On the afternoon of 14 March, we went by truck to the woods several kilometers from Bitche to spend the night. The rifle companies were to attack early the next morning (the ides of March) and we were to remain back a day or two. Late in the night before the attack, scores of flares went up in the direction of Bitche. They were various colors and went up in lines as if they were tied to a string. They were spaced about the same distance apart and burned for 30 or 45 minutes before finally dying out. The next day, we heard that G-2 still hadn’t found out what they were. I presume that eventually they did, but I never heard what they were.
When we got into Bitche, we were able to see quite clearly the roads and pillboxes and slopes we had been on in December, and it was easy to see how the Germans had had such perfect observation. After about three days in Bitche, we moved into the various ghost towns the other side of Bitche. Our battalion was sent to Lengelsheim. Things were going fast, and our regiment (I guess the entire division as well, but I really can't remember) was in corps reserve. In about a week or maybe less, we moved out again, traveling in trucks what I guessed was around 50 or 60 miles, during which we crossed into Germany and stopped for the night at Delfield. We crossed through the Siegfried Line and saw the dragon's teeth.

Leaving Delfield the next day, we went to Ludwigshafen, just across the river from Mannheim. All along the road, we saw many dead horses, dead German soldiers, abandoned and wrecked vehicles, and quite a few people moving from one place to another, probably because their homes had been destroyed. There were trucks, civilian cars, jeeps, recon cars, volkswagens, motorcycles, bicycles, and some mechanically-pulled as well as horse-pulled big guns. Some of the vehicles had been burned. As Ludwigshafen was still being shelled and we were supposed to be in corps reserve, we went to another town for a few hours and then to Dannstadt. The front was ahead of us, so we were pretty much out of danger. One plane did fly over and dropped a bomb. I've forgotten whether it was a German plane or one of ours that dropped one by mistake.

We crossed the Rhine River from Ludwigshafen to Mannheim under smoke screen. We crossed on a ponton bridge if I remember correctly. (A ponton bridge is the same as one on pontoons, but the Army always used the first alphabetical spelling, with only two o's rather than three.)

The front lines moved fast, and we moved with them. I don't remember all the towns we were in.

At Jagsfeld, there were lots of dead German soldiers. There were two or three flack wagons which had been hit and burned, and the German soldiers with them were coal black.

At one place we met a group of Belgians, each with a bicycle. They had been near a bicycle factory, and each one had borrowed a bicycle from the owner who was absent.

At one place, I was in a jeep with Lt. Olson and two or three others, and, for some reason, we stopped near a pillbox. I can't remember why. From inside the pillbox, out came a German soldier with his hands on his head surrendering. He didn't look like he was over 17.

In one town, we moved into what had perhaps been a gasthaus, but at least it was a tavern. In the cellar we found potatoes, sauerkraut, wine and liqueurs, coffee, sugar, and some kind of meat which we didn't eat. After consuming some coffee and sugar, we learned that the Germans had been poisoning coffee and sugar. One of the guys found
something in a bottle which he took to be a thick brandy sauce. We had found something like that before. No one else would taste it to find out, so he took a small mouthful. It was motor oil. In this town, we heard a lot of German rockets go off. We had heard them going over us before, but I think this was the first time we had ever heard them as they were being shot. Before night came, I learned that a few passes to England were being issued to whoever names were drawn out of a hat. Mine was one which was drawn. I protested because almost everyone in the company was more deserving than I, but my lieutenant said no, that my name had been drawn and that I should go. Maybe he just wanted to get me out of the way. Anyway, I went, and a little over a week later, I got back to the division. The day that I got back was the day after the war in Europe was declared over.

When we left England, several people told us that the war in Europe would be over before we got back to our outfit. We doubted it, but it was nice to think about anyway. At the Red Cross Club in Southampton, where we spent the night before boarding the ship to take us across the channel to Le Havre, we heard an announcement on the radio that Count Bernadotte of Sweden was in Switzerland. It was rumored that he was there to discuss peace terms with representatives of the Allied and Axis powers. This was encouraging. After staying one or two nights at Etretat, outside of Le Havre, we boarded the train for Paris where we were to catch another train for Strasbourg and then go back to the front lines. Our train was late, so we had to spend the night in Paris, then catch a train the next day for Strasbourg. The next day, while waiting at the station in Paris, an announcement in English came over the loud speaker that the rumors about peace terms were false. Count Bernadotte was in Switzerland only to discuss the exchange of prisoners. Our train left Paris about 2:00 in the afternoon. About 4 or 5, as we were passing through some small Alsatian town, we noticed the civilians lined up along the railroad track shouting and waving. From a man at the railway station, we heard that the war was over. Naturally this caused a great deal of excitement among us although we didn't know whether to believe it. Later, as we passed through more towns and saw all the villagers excited, we decided there might be something to it after all. In all the towns we passed through, people were lined up near the railroad track and station shouting, blowing horns, shooting guns, and waving flags. In a couple of towns, there was a band playing the French national anthem, The Star Spangled Banner, and other songs. In towns where they didn’t have bands, the people were singing anyway and shouting to us that the war was over. After dark, we could see flares going up all over and someone was firing tracer bullets into the air. We thought about how the people must be going wild in Piccadilly and wished we could be back there “going wild” ourselves. What an exciting feeling it was, even though we were more or less “confined” to a railroad car and still afraid that the news was too good to be true. About 10 or 11 that night, we arrived in Strasbourg (I really can’t remember whether it was Strasbourg or Saarbourg) and were told by some sergeant in the billet that the war in Europe actually was over. By that time, we had already decided it was true, we had expressed our emotions about it, and we were too tired to do anything but go to bed.
Not many guys can laugh about being court-martialed, but I can. When I learned on short notice that my name had been drawn to go to England, I hastily put my rifle, cartridge belt, field pack, shelter half, mess gear, canteen, etc., in one of our company vehicles so that I could go back with the kitchen truck which had come up to the front to serve us chow. Mark McCullough found me a place to sleep at Regiment, where I would get clean clothes and a shower before leaving the next day for Division. At division I would leave by train for Le Havre, with a several hour layover in Paris. At Regiment I was told to leave my steel helmet and helmet liner there and that I would be given either a garrison cap or a service cap at Division. But at Division, there weren't any caps to be had, so the others and I were told to go on without one. We wouldn't need one until we got to England, and we would be given one at Le Havre. But, in Paris, the MP's, probably having nothing else to do, were on a drive to pick up other service men who were out of uniform. In less than an hour, I was picked up and put in a paddy wagon with several other war criminals whose crime also was not having a cap. (Why would we have caps? They were no protection at all where we came from.) We were hauled somewhere and taken before a lieutenant who was the judge who was to try us. He turned out to be a good guy. When it was my turn, he read the charge against me (being in public without a cap) and asked me whether I pled guilty or not guilty. I said, “Well, I didn’t have one on” and started to tell him why. He said, “Don’t make me find you guilty. Just say ‘Guilty’ or ‘Not Guilty’”. I said, “Not Guilty, Sir”. He replied “Acquitted” and handed me a cap. Obviously he didn’t want to “convict” any of us anyway. A week or so later, on the way back to my company, I stopped briefly at Division, where all the company clerks were. Our company clerk told me that he had gotten the notice about my “trial”. He said, “I tore it up so it wouldn’t go on your record”. So much for the big war trial.
In about a month, after being in three small villages, Schorndorf, Mainhardt, and Steinheim, our company was sent to Waiblingen. Being part of an occupational army was an easy job then. No one really had too much to do. Our battalion commander, Lt. Col. Weisel, was transferred to another outfit. We thought highly of him and hated to see him go. But we were extremely thankful that he had been our battalion commander while the war in Europe was going on. He was replaced by Major Curran who was regarded as somewhat pompous. What few encounters I had with him were certainly on an amicable basis. He was referred to as “Major Hoople”, who was a comic strip character of those days. The battalion CP was in a large house with a concrete wall between the sidewalk and the house. Someone had painted a nonflattering face on the wall and had written, “Major Hoople” under it. There were some other things, which I no longer remember, written on the wall. One day, when I was standing guard in front of the CP, he came out, glanced at the picture and other things, and said, “That Major Hoople who was here with the [whatever division that had been here before us] must have really been a son of a bitch.” I said, “Yes sir. He must have been.”

We had a 10 o’clock curfew, and it was assumed that, if you were out of your own company area after that, you were fraternizing with a German girl. Of course the medics maintained a pro station, and, if I recall correctly, it was required (although not easily enforced) that anyone who had been having relations with a girl must take a pro afterward. One time when I was CQ (charge of quarters) in our company orderly room, the phone rang about 11 o’clock at night. It was Major Curran. He wanted to know who the sergeant of the guard was. I said, “Sgt. Bison, sir.” He told me to get him and tell him to get to the aid station immediately, armed. He didn’t say why. I told Bison that I didn’t know why, but, since the major had emphasized armed, I was going to go with him. So we both hurried down there, both of us armed, and there was Major Curran and a meek-looking PFC who claimed that he didn’t need a pro because he hadn’t been with a girl. He had just been visiting friends in another unit. The officer of the guard, making his rounds, had picked him up in a jeep and brought him to the aid station and then had notified Major Curran. Why he had notified the battalion commander, I don’t know. Pat Pironi, the medic in charge, told him that only he knew whether he needed a pro or not and to go in another room and take one if he needed it. If not, stay long enough to have taken one, and come back out. Bison and I couldn’t figure out why we needed to be armed on a mission like that.

With the war in the Pacific still going on, we were scheduled to be sent back to the states for furloughs, after which we were to go to some army camp for training in jungle warfare and then sent to wherever in the Pacific Theatre we were needed. Then came the big drop in Japan, and it wasn’t long after that that those plans were canceled. We were scheduled to remain as occupational troops. Shortly after that, it was announced that the 100th Division would be filled up with high-point men and sent back to the States for discharges. Those of us who didn’t have the required number of points would be transferred to other outfits in the European Theatre. After being with a bunch of guys in the situations we had been in, you develop close ties and you hate to see them broken -- unless its to go home yourself. Points were based upon number of months in the service, number of months overseas, ten points for the combat infantry badge, and other points for
the bronze star, silver star, and purple heart. Maybe there were points for children also -- I don't remember. We had been overseas less than a year, and many of us were only 19 years old when the war in Europe was over, so those factors didn't add up to a lot. In an infantry company, virtually all of us had the combat infantry badge. But I didn't do anything to warrant any decoration, and I wasn't wounded, therefore didn't get the purple heart. So a great many of us were transferred to other outfits in Europe, and our 100th Division was sent back to the States, made up largely of men who didn't come over with us. Of course we didn't begrudge them the right and privilege of getting to go home.

Our company commander, Capt. Torbett, was transferred out and was replaced by Lt. John Visser from H Company who later was promoted to captain. John Visser was very well thought of and, according to friends in Grand Rapids, was equally well thought of in civilian life later. A number of my friends had been transferred to various units in Heidelberg, and I decided that I wanted to be there also. Alex Rotko, our battalion sergeant major was there, so I wanted to see him to see if he knew of any outfit there that I could be transferred to. I rode up with Lt. Peter Bayes, our battalion S-4 (supply officer) who had to go there for some reason and had borrowed a car to do so. Peter Bayes was a laid-back guy from Locust Valley, L.I., New York, whose mother, Nora Bayes, had at one time been a well-known actress -- stage or screen, I don't remember. On the way back, we picked up a lieutenant who was hitchhiking to Stuttgart. About six miles south of Heilbronn, we were rounding the corner on a narrow highway and had slowed down to meet a convoy of trucks. The last truck in the convoy swerved over toward us to avoid hitting a German on a bicycle. He sideswiped us, and it blew out one of our tires. After he changed it for us and went on his way, we thought we could go on to Waiblingen okay. But when we started, something kept dragging and we were afraid an axle was broken. Whatever it was, we couldn't drive the car on in. It was about 6 p.m. then and getting dark. The hitchhiking lieutenant and I finally caught a ride into Waiblingen (about 30 miles) after waiting a half hour for a car to come by. After promising the civilian driver a can of gas when we got to Waiblingen, he consented to take us there. Pete Bayes stayed on the road and watched the car, and I was to try to get a wrecker from the motor pool and also to explain to Major Bowen why the car wouldn't be back by 8:00. (He wanted to go to Stuttgart by 8:00.) Lt. Pittman, motor officer at that time, said the wrecker would have to come from regiment and they wouldn't send one out at night. The only thing to do, he said, was to leave the car where it was, with one of us in it, of course, until morning and go after it then. Col. Curran who had recently been promoted to lieutenant colonel, said no. It was a borrowed car, and he didn't want anything to happen to it because the regimental commander, Col. Williams wouldn't like it. (We found out later that Col. Williams didn't know that Col. Curran had borrowed it from Military Government.) So I was to take Lt. Bayes a K-ration, a couple of blankets, and a pistol and tell him to stay there all night. Snake Neighbors, Lt. Bayes's jeep driver, took me back up there, and we got there about 9 p.m. Pete said he wasn't going to stay there all night and would go back to regiment and drive the wrecker back himself if necessary. So he left me the blankets and pistol and he and Snake took off for regiment, which was ten miles the other side of Waiblingen. It wasn't a heavily traveled road, and only three or four cars and a couple of bicycles passed in the whole three hours, so I slept part of the time with the door locked and the park lights on. At one point
during this period, sirens went off at a prison came near there, and I wondered if I was going to be confronted by escaping prisoners. About midnight Lt. Bayes came back by himself. He said that Snake was coming back with the wrecker — at a slower pace. One of the regimental mechanics had been good enough to get out of bed, get the wrecker, and come to pull us back. About 1:20 the wrecker arrived, and we finally got back to Waiblingen about 2:30 a.m., still sleepy and pretty cold. The colonel didn't like it because the axle was bent, but, since it wasn't Bayes's fault, there was nothing he could do about it. The next morning I encountered Col. Curran somewhere in the company area, and he asked me if I had been to Heidelberg to try to get a transfer there. I told him yes, and he asked me if I had had my company commander's permission. I told him yes, which wasn't true. Lt. Visser didn't even know I was going. Then I hunted up Lt. Visser and told him what I had told Col. Curran. He laughed and said that, if the colonel asked him, he would tell him that I had had his permission. Two days later, a TWX came down requesting that I be transferred to Heidelberg.

I wasn't a stranger for long in Heidelberg as a large percentage of the guys from the 100th had been transferred there — to 7th Army Headquarters, military police units, an ack-ack battalion, an engineering battalion, and other outfits. My job there was in a three-man office reporting to Capt. Aaron MacCoon, a former school teacher from upstate New York. He was a good boss. Our office coordinated the licensing of German newspapers, magazines, and radio stations, all of which had been shut down when Germany surrendered.

Heidelberg was a great place to live, but the only two things of significance that I can think of while there were that I got a ten-day pass to Switzerland and the wreck which caused the death of General Patton a week or so (I don't remember how long) after. The wreck was on the autobahn between Heidelberg and Mannheim. We heard that Jack Parrish, whom some of us had known at Oklahoma A. and M., was the first sergeant of the MP company who investigated the wreck. General Patton died in the 130th Station Hospital in Rohrbach, just a few blocks from Seventh Army Headquarters. The day of the funeral, the city was full of visiting, high-ranking officers. There was an honour guard on both sides of the street at intervals of about fifteen yards, all the way from the church where the funeral was held in one end of town to the railway station in the center of town. The funeral procession was headed by ten or twelve tanks, followed by cars and cars of generals and colonels. A large crowd of civilians and soldiers lined the sidewalks to see the procession from the church to the railway station. I think we saluted every rank that day, from a WOJG to General McNamey. When General Burress saw the 100th patches on our shoulders, he threw a special salute and put on a big smile.

Finally it became time for those of us with the number of points I had to be redeployed to the U.S. and given a discharge. I was not sure that I was ready for that, as I was enjoying my job in Heidelberg and wasn't sure I was ready for civilian life again. But the only alternative was signing up for another year or two and I wasn't ready for that either. So, along with others, I was sent to a staging area in Schwaebisch Gmund for a few days and then to Le Havre for redeployment. The trip back to New York took only one week, as compared to two weeks going over, partially because the distance was shorter than to
Marseilles, and we had only one hurricane, during which, again, many became seasick. Ken Howard had to carry a WAC -- or maybe it was an army nurse -- up a ladder (stairs) because she was too seasick to make it by herself.

Our payments overseas were made in occupational money printed by the United States -- francs in France and marks in Germany. But I had missed two payrolls before being redeployed. One was because I was in Switzerland at the time, and I don't remember the reason for the other. But on shipboard coming home we were paid in U. S. money, and I got my regular monthly payment plus two months back pay. Pay officers had some means to determine how many $50, $20, $10, $5, and $1 bills to order, as well as how much in coins. This must not have been an easy thing to figure, but it had always worked out before. This time it didn't -- as far as the last of us alphabetically were concerned. Heretofore, payment had always been alphabetically by rank, master sergeants, first sergeants, and on down to privates. But on shipboard it was alphabetically -- period -- regardless of rank. When they got down to the S's, they had run out of all paper money higher than one-dollar bills. My three-months pay totaled $342.50, of which I was paid $300 in one-dollar bills and $42.50 in quarters. That's 170 quarters. There wasn't any place to keep 300 one-dollar bills and 170 quarters the rest of the way to the United States other than on my person. Fortunately fatigue pockets were deep. I must have rattled when I walked. I slept the rest of the way with my fatigues on because it wouldn't have been safe to keep it in my duffel bag or leave it in my fatigues unless they were on me. If we had anyone named Zweiger on ship, that poor guy must have gotten paid in pennies.

My army career ended on 1 May 1946, when I received my honourable discharge at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas.

Although I wish that it had not been necessary, all of the above was an interesting experience, and I feel privileged to have had it and to know the many fine people I encountered along the way. And of course I am thankful to have come back with all of my body parts present and accounted for.
The USNS General W. H. Gordon, operated by the Navy's Military Sea Transportation Service, was built in 1944 by the Federal Shipbuilding and Drydock Co., Kearny, New Jersey, and was named in honor of Major General Walter Henry Gordon who served in the Philippines, China, and France.

Following construction the Gordon operated out of New York as a troop transport and during her many voyages in the Atlantic reached ports at Cherbourg, Plymouth, Marseilles, Oran, Mers-el-Kabir, Gibraltar, Naples, Casablanca, Le Havre, Southampton, and Trinidad. Shifting to the Pacific she sailed to Ulithi, Batangas, Manila, Leyte, Yokohama, Pusan, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Manila, Singapore and Bombay. The first American ship to stop at Shanghai after the Communists took over, the General Gordon evacuated more than 1200 Americans, Britons, and Jewish refugees caught in China. On a following voyage the Gordon stopped at Tientsin for the evacuation of all American consular officials from north China.

When the Military Sea Transportation Service was set up under the Navy, the Gordon was among the many transports turned over to MSTS in March, 1950.

During the conflict in Korea the Gordon carried thousands of United Nations troops between the West Coast and the Far East, and between ports in Japan and Korea.

A P-2 type ship, the Gordon is 623 feet long, 75 feet wide, has a gross weight of 17,833 tons, and a cruising speed of 19 knots. She is equipped with modern navigational devices and life saving gear, and her up-to-date facilities enable all to follow recreational, religious, and educational pursuits while at sea.

Crew members of the Gordon are civil service employees and members of the military department are personnel of the U.S. Navy.

over
Enlisted passengers compartment. Troops put gear on bunks and get settled into the routine of life in a confined world aboard in a seemingly endless sea.

Not exactly the Waldorf, but at least a piece of the ship to call home.
TRANSPORT GENERAL W. H. GORDON

Built at Kearny, N.J., she was delivered to the Navy on 27 July 1944. The Gordon carried more than 5000 officers and men, including the 398th Regiment, of the 100th Infantry Division to France in October 1944. The ship is 622 feet in overall length and has a gross tonnage of 17,833. Speed is 20 knots (23 M.P.H.)