THE WORLD WAR II YEARS

Recollections of William J. Wayne

Co. K. 398th Inf, 100th Infantry Division
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December 7, 1941. The event that precipitated the United States into World War II happened near the end of the first semester of my second year in college. Announcements of what was happening at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii were broadcast over the radio, and during the afternoon and evening that day, I, along with many other students, was in the Indiana University Memorial Union building, listening to the broadcasts. Like all male students at Indiana University, I was enrolled in ROTC. I was also a member of the Pershing Rifles drill team. The following semester I applied for admission to the advanced military program, and, soon after acceptance, on July 6, 1942, became a member of the enlisted reserve of the U.S. Army.

In 1942, Indiana University began a “trimester” schedule, in which students remained in school throughout the year rather than having the summer months as a vacation from classes. For the first time that year, advanced ROTC students no longer attended a summer camp and received commissions as second lieutenants upon graduation. Instead, they took classes until graduation—or until they had completed four semesters of advanced ROTC—and then went to the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia for 17 weeks of officers training school (OCS) in order to become commissioned officers. The trimester schedule went into effect in the summer 1942, so rather than having a summer to earn money for the next semester, all of us who were in the Advanced Military program as well as many other students, remained at the Indiana University and took a regular schedule of classes. In addition to the advanced military class, I completed the last five credits I needed to complete a major in Spanish, as well as a couple of courses in linguistics. The fall semester 1942 I took only a single course in addition to the military one—Turkish. The American council of Learned Societies had given Dr. Carl Voegelin a grant to develop a rapid-learning course in the Turkish language for use by the armed forces. I was one of 10 students selected to work out a grammar and dictionary for English-speaking people in the language. During that semester, I managed to become moderately fluent in Turkish, a language that I lost completely in the following years through lack of use.

By the second semester of that year, I had decided that I would like to return to school after the war and undertake a program in geology. To start to get ready I took classes in algebra, trigonometry, map making, and celestial navigation. During that semester, I met
Naomi Liebl, a Physical Education major, whom I married after the war had ended. She completed the work for her BS degree and graduated in December 1943.

In the summer of 1943, not long after the start of the third semester of the 1942-43 year, all of us in the advanced military program were placed on active duty and moved into Forest Hall, which had formerly been a women's dormitory. The trimester schedule meant that, rather than graduating in June 1944, I completed the work for my AB degree and graduated in August 1943. I didn't attend commencement; rather, immediately upon completing the final exams for the semester, we were transferred to Fort Benjamin Harrison near Indianapolis for testing and further processing. We remained at Fort Benjamin Harrison for perhaps 10 days while we underwent a battery of tests—the Army General Classification test and others. I learned afterward that I had done extremely well on some that many entering soldiers had trouble with: one involved spatial relationships, and the other was the ability, at that time, to understand speech through a mass of static. I also learned that my AGCT score was 135.

While we were at Fort Benjamin Harrison marking time and waiting for further orders, we were put into a detail with the purpose of placing sod on a bare slope. Blocks of sod about 12 by 15 inches in size were stacked on one side of a field and the slope to be sodded was about 100 yards away. Our job was to carry a chunk of sod in each hand from the pile to the slope, put it in place, then return for two more pieces of sod. After 3 or 4 trips, I noticed an old wheelbarrow at the side of the field. I wheeled it to the sod pile and loaded about 10 pieces of sod onto it, then began the trip to the slope. When I was about midway across the field with the wheelbarrow of sod, a sergeant yelled at me, "Soldier, what do you think you are doing? Put that wheelbarrow down!" I explained that this would speed up the process of getting the slope covered with sod. He told me that this job had only one purpose, to keep us occupied. He said that when all the sod had been placed on the slope, the next group of recruits would be given the job of carrying the chunks from the slope back to the pile. Thus began my introduction to Army thinking.

After being processed at Fort Benjamin Harrison, our orders were cut and we were loaded on trains headed for Fort Benning, Georgia. The nearest town to Fort Benning is Columbus, near the Chattahoochie River, which forms the state line between Georgia and Alabama. We unloaded at the railroad station and went by truck to the army post. After
more than 60 years, I no longer remember much about our first few weeks there, except that we attended classes much of each day. One thing about Fort Benning surprised me—the entire kitchen staff consisted of black soldiers, and the officer candidates did no KP duty. I learned later that at that time, few black soldiers were placed in any except service units.

The officer candidate program was 17 weeks long. Each candidate underwent a review after 7 weeks, after 13 weeks, and at the end of the 17 weeks. At any one of the reviews a candidate could be terminated, for various reasons—or arguments. At the first or 7-week review, I was told that some aspect of my performance—I don’t recall what—wasn’t adequate. But rather than being terminated, I was dropped back to join the next class and start over. Evidently what didn’t go well the first time was ok at the 7-week board the second time around. One other problem I encountered between the 7th and 13th week was my inability to score better than barely qualifying on the M-1 rifle range. When I saw my target after the session I discovered that the bullets had passed through it sideways. I complained that the rifle issued to me had to be defective, but I was told that it didn’t make any difference, that there was nothing wrong with my rifle, I was simply a lousy marksman.

Fort Benning, in fall and early winter, is generally chilly and moist. Snow rarely falls, but on one occasion it did. Perhaps a half inch came down during the night. A few of the cadets in my company had come from Puerto Rico and had never seen snow before. Were they excited! One of them lay down in it and waved his arms in it, just like a child might do. One other aspect of my second run at OCS: the candidates that I was going through the program with the second time were mostly National Guard members from the New York area. They spent their evening spare time playing bridge, so I learned to play bridge with them.

At the 13 week review, this time, another “problem” came up. I was told that I had been observed “coaching” another cadet on how to handle some of the parts of the obstacle course that were giving him trouble, and that I was reported to have helped a few other cadets learn how to read a map. I said yes, I had done that. I had had a little gymnastic training and the obstacles I was helping with were easy if one knew how to approach them. And as an undergraduate I had taken a course in map making, so I could read maps pretty well, too. The response of one of the officers on the board was: “candidate, if you ever become an officer, you will be qualified to teach; until then, you are a student.” I was terminated.
I recall that soon after telling my parents about leaving the officer candidate program, I received a wonderful and encouraging letter from my Dad, the only letter he ever wrote to me. I no longer have the letter, but he reminded me that no matter how hard we try, sometimes we just aren’t successful. That even though I did not complete the OCS program, I mustn’t feel too disappointed; and that in whatever happens next, as long as I do the best that I can, I probably will be successful.

The time between my leaving the OCS program and my arrival at Fort Bragg, North Carolina to join the 100th Infantry Division is pretty blank now. I don’t remember whether I had a furlough then or not; if I did. I don’t recall it. I think I reached Fort Bragg sometime in January or February 1944, soon after the division had completed winter maneuvers in Tennessee. I reported to Capt. Randolph Jones, commander of Company K, 398th Infantry Regiment. All OCS candidates are given the rank and pay of Corporal, unless when they arrive at the Infantry School they already hold a higher rank. Capt. Jones told me that there was no position in the company table of organization for a Corporal. He would try me as an assistant squad leader for 6 weeks. If I could do the job, I would become a Sergeant and gain a stripe; if I couldn’t, I would become a PFC (Private First Class) and lose a stripe. I didn’t want that to happen, so I did my best to succeed. Six weeks later I became a Sergeant, the assistant squad leader in a squad of the second platoon led by S/Sgt. Bill Zucconi of New York City. My platoon sergeant was T/Sgt. Albert Campbell, the only man in the company who had been a member of the regular army before the war began. Sgt. Campbell was a little older than most of the rest of us—perhaps 35 or so—and those of in our early 20s and younger affectionally called him “Pop”, a name he said he didn’t like. I no longer recall the name of the lieutenant who was our platoon leader at that time.

The 100th Division had been activated in November 1942 in Ft. Jackson, South Carolina, and in late December that year the men assigned to that division began basic training. During the summer and fall of 1943 the division trained in South Carolina. In November, it moved to a maneuver area in Tennessee. After two months of field maneuvers, the division headed for Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, arriving there in mid to late January, 1944.

Not long after I had arrived at the 100th Division, in March 1944, we began qualifying runs with the M-1 rifle on the “known-distance” range. We fired from 4 positions at 200 yards: prone, sitting, kneeling or squatting, and standing, 3 positions at 300 yards, and only
prone at 500 yards. The best possible overall score was 210 points. I scored 205, the best in the regiment. It was very gratifying to me, because only a few months before, the officers at Ft. Benning had been so emphatic that I was a “lousy marksman.” (With a good rifle, a capable marksman can do pretty well.) As a reward for posting such a high score, I was given a 3-day pass on a weekend in late April nearest my birthday. I had just enough time to spend a day walking around Washington, D.C. when the cherry trees were in bloom.

In early March, Capt. Jones asked if anyone in the company had any experience making charts or posters. I had had some practice in college making posters for the dances at the IU Union Building, so I said I could do that. Everyone laughed and reminded me that “only a fool volunteers for a job in the army.” Well, Capt. Jones wanted someone who could not only make posters or training charts, but could also prepare lecture notes to accompany the training charts for his presentation at the regimental officers training the following Monday morning. Fortunately I had a couple of lettering brushes with me, bought some lettering colors at the post exchange, and spent the weekend reading, making notes, and preparing a chart on a 3’ x 6’ strip of light brown wrapping paper. I no longer recall what that first lecture and chart were about, but over the following two months or so I prepared notes and training charts on the Browning automatic rifle, both air cooled and water cooled 30-caliber machine guns, mortars, antipersonnel mines, antitank mines, and two or three other topics for presentation at the officers class and at the company. And I heard that when Capt. Jones was done with them, some of the charts and notes were borrowed by other officers in the regiment. That job of preparing charts freed me from Saturday morning inspections several times, as well as a couple of training marches. To try to keep in shape, though, I ran a mile or two after dinner several times a week.

During March and/or early April, many of the well-trained men in the 100th Division were transferred out to become replacements in units going overseas at that time. Most of the non-commissioned officers, though, along with Capt. Jones and Lt. Hodge, the company executive officer, stayed. After they left, the ranks of the division were refilled with men who had been in the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), and the division again began serious training. During the spring of 1944, the army developed the Expert Infantryman Badge, and men of the 100th Division were among the first in the nation to go
through the tests to earn it. On successful completion came a five dollar increase in pay. I completed the tests and was awarded the EIB on 21 April 1944.

One of my best friends—buddies—at company K-398 was one of the cooks, Guido ("Jimmy") Sgambellone. (Some of the guys in the company called him "Scrambelone" because almost always, when he was on breakfast duty, we could count on getting scrambled eggs for breakfast.) Jimmy was a singer and songwriter who told me that had come to the U.S. from Italy when he was about 12 years old as a stowaway on a ship. He wanted to become a U.S. citizen but, because he had entered the country illegally, was not able to do so. Now more than 40 years old and beyond draft age, he enlisted, hoping that he would be assigned to a unit that went overseas and he could go with it, then return with it legally after the war and could apply for citizenship. Jimmy and I often talked about music, and he gave me a copy of a couple of songs he had written and published.

Among our training exercises were several marches with full (25 pounds) field pack. On one such march, one of the men in our company used bricks in his pack to make up the required weight. Bricks aren’t soft, like blankets and clothing, and by the end of the march he had a mighty sore back! On another march one of the men in the second platoon filled his canteen with beer the night before so he could sip on beer rather than water during the march. Imagine what will happen to a quart of warm beer after an hour or so of hanging on an ammunition belt during a march. Eventually, after a good laugh, some of us took pity on him and shared our water. The culmination of these training marches was a 25-mile march, full packs and rifles, in 8 hours. And everyone in the company had to make it. A few of the guys just didn’t have quite enough stamina or strength. As I recall, S/Sgt Bill Zucconi carried another man’s pack and rifle for several miles; I carried one of the men in my squad for the last couple of miles, and Pfc Lawrence Procter, a BAR man in another squad in the platoon, carried another soldier, his pack and rifle, as well as his own load. But everyone in the company finished the 25-mile march in the 8 hours. On one of our training marches, during a break, Pfc Procter demonstrated something I had never seen before—he lowered his hand into a small stream and a few minutes later came up with a fish in his hand! He was a "fish-tickler".

During these training marches, we often sang marching songs—particularly Anchors Aloaigh, the Marine song, and the field artillery song. During a break in one of our marches
in May or June 1944, one of the men in my squad asked, sort of rhetorically, why, since the infantry marches, isn’t there a good infantry march that we can sing? I thought about it and decided to see if I could write a song we could sing while marching. So with the encouragement of Jimmy Sgambellone, I tried to do just that. The result was an “Infantry Marching Song” that I, with the men in my squad, sang a few times on marches that summer.

The Post Exchange was staffed by local girls, mostly probably in their early twenties. They had a wide range of dispositions: a few were unfriendly, but most were nearly always cheerful. One of the most cheerful was a mulatta. One Saturday afternoon, while a group of the men in the company were just standing around, we saw her walking toward the bus stop about a block away. I remarked that I wished that all the girls in the PX were as cheerful as that one. As soon as I had said that, one of the men in the group, a tall South Carolinian, jumped up, saying, “You have just insulted southern womanhood! I’ll kill you for that!” It took four guys to hold him back until he calmed down.

Our company day room was equipped with a pool table, a ping-pong table, and a shelf of books. A large part of the book shelf was the complete works of Guy de Maupassant. Between the time I discovered them and the end of the summer, I had read every one of the volumes in the de Maupassant collection. I also found time to play a little ping-pong and pool.

During the summer we held several 3 to 4 day field exercises that involved digging foxholes after dark. As we picked sites to dig in one night, Pvt. Steven Kedves, one of the men in my squad, found an unfilled-in foxhole left from some other unit’s earlier exercise. (We were supposed to fill in our foxholes when we left them.) He dropped into it, expecting to be able to avoid the labor of digging a new hole, only to discover that he was sharing it with a copperhead snake. By the time we got him out and to the base hospital, his arm had begun to swell; he spent about a week in the hospital recovering from the bite of that snake.

On one of our night problems that summer, I evidently dug my foxhole in a patch of poison ivy. I had handled poison ivy many times as a nature counselor at Boy Scout camp, and I thought that I had a natural immunity to it. I found out that I didn’t. A day or so later my left arm and shoulder were completely covered with blisters. After that, I really watched out for the plant during field problems. That loss of immunity stayed with me the rest of my life.
During the summer of 1944, I began sketching cartoons on the left side of the envelopes of the letters that I sent to my fiancée, Naomi Liebl, who later became my wife. In the cartoons, I made jokes about some of the things that were happening at Ft. Bragg during the previous week or so. A few of the men in my squad saw the cartoons and asked me if I would sketch similar cartoons on envelopes for them. Between June and September I put cartoons on 25 of the envelopes to Naomi, and perhaps a dozen more for other guys in the unit.

The invasion of Normandy took place on June 6. After that, our training became more serious and it was evident that we were preparing to become a combat division. At first, we didn’t know which theatre of operation we would be sent to. In late August, 1944, though, we were alerted for shipment to the European Theatre of Operations. At this time, more than 60 years later, some of the events that took place during August and September 1944 have become a blur in my memory. We began moving to Camp Kilmer, NJ our port of embarkation, in late September. We knew only that we would be crossing the Atlantic, but didn’t know yet where the division would enter a combat area. We all went through a “last minute” physical exam at Camp Kilmer. It included a dental exam and any teeth needing repair were fixed. The dentists there were very encouraging: while I was in the dental chair, I heard one of them say: “Don’t worry about doing a first-rate job on these guys; in six months they’ll all be dead”. On October 5, we hiked, with full pack and carrying our duffle bags, from the rail depot in Jersey City about a quarter mile to the ferry that would take us to Manhattan where we would board a troop transport. The 398th Infantry Regiment, or at least the third battalion, boarded the USS General Gordon, a newly commissioned troopship.

Our journey across the Atlantic Ocean and to the port of Marseilles, on the south coast of France, took 16 days. Bunks in the troopship were stacks of three; we ate twice a day. The General Gordon was equipped with a gyrostabilizer, which some of the ships in the convoy didn’t have. The weather was pretty rough on part of the trip and we were happy that we weren’t on one of the ships without a gyrostabilizer. We watched the destroyer escorts pitch and roll in the heavy sea. Our ship tossed around some, but not like they did. Several of the soldiers in my platoon became very seasick and couldn’t leave their bunks, so on some days I used one of their meal tickets to get an extra meal. The sea became very calm while we passed through the Strait of Gibraltar, then it became rough again in the Mediterranean.
became a bit queasy that time, but didn't toss my cookies. After we had landed we were told that we had passed through the edge of a hurricane in the Atlantic.

We debarked at Marseilles on October 20, then marched all night in nearly complete darkness to reach a staging area, where we remained until October 31. It was dry when we started, but began to rain by morning. The rain continued much of the time we were in the staging area. Among our jobs there was to unpack our weapons and remove the Cosmoline they had been packed in for protection. We were also provided with some winter clothing, including shu-pacs, rubberized foot coverings to protect our feet from the wet and cold. Overall, I recall the time we spent at the staging area as wet, muddy and disagreeable, but at least, no one was shooting at us there.

Although a few of the regiment started north on September 28, most of us loaded onto rail cars—"40 and 8's"—box cars designed to hold 40 men or 8 horses, a few days later. We rumbled northward to a rail terminal at Epinal in the Vosges Mountains in east-central France. There we loaded into trucks for further movement to the front lines. In the first week of November, Co.K-398 moved into a position to relieve men of the 180th Infantry Regiment, 45th Division, who had taken part in the landing in southern France a few weeks earlier. With foxholes already dug and covered, we settled in for our first night on the front lines. We learned from the men of the 45th Division that we replaced that to be protected from tree bursts we would have to cover our foxholes. We dug them about 3 feet wide, 5 to 6 feet long, and about 2 feet deep, then cut trees, 3 to 6 inches in diameter, to lay across the hole, covered them with pine branches and then a cover of soil 6" or more thick. This kind of foxhole protected us from tree bursts of high explosive shells and from air explosions. The weather was wet and even though our foxholes were covered, we lived in mud. That night we experienced our first enemy fire. Several high-explosive shells hit the tree tops near us. One thing that every infantryman learns quickly when he enters a combat area is to be able to head for cover whenever he hears shells coming in or when he encounter small arms fire. That instinct to dive for cover lasts long after he leaves combat and no longer needs to find cover quickly. After the war ended, it took me about two years to stop wincing when I heard an explosion.

We remained in this position for 3 or 4 days, from Nov. 9 to Nov. 13, from time to time receiving German artillery fire. During that time, a half-track from one of the units in
our division took a wrong turn and drove out into the plain below us, where they nearly drove into a German machine gun emplacement. The men in the half-track returned the machine gun fire, but eventually the vehicle caught fire. A couple of the GI’s in it were able to tumble out into the ditch beside the road. S/Sgt. Bill Zucconi led our squad down the hill under cover of darkness to try to rescue the wounded men. One, perhaps two, died in the vehicle, but I believe we were able to get two others out safely.

On Nov. 13, we left the position on the hill and moved into position to prepare for the crossing of the LaPlaine River and the assault on Raon l’Etape. We assembled in a wooded area and dug in for the night on Nov. 17, prepared to launch the attack on the next morning. It was still wet, cold, and foggy when we got up about 5 am on Nov. 18. We had been warned to be quiet and to make no lights of any kind, but one of the men in the 2nd platoon, Pvt. Lloyd Conrad, lit a cigarette as soon as he got out of his foxhole. A few minutes later a barrage of 88 mm high explosive shells hit the treetops around us. Everyone dived for a foxhole. I had left my rifle leaning against a tree about 25 feet from my foxhole, so after 10 or 15 minutes of quiet, I jumped out and ran over to it. As I knelt beside it to pick up some other gear, another shell exploded in the top of a tree above me, and my right foot felt as if it had been hit by a sledge hammer. I grabbed my rifle and hobbled back to the foxhole to discover that another fragment of that shell had hit Pfc. Silas Wright, who shared the foxhole with me and had started to get out behind me. It punched a hole through the back of his helmet. The chaplain put both of us in his jeep and took us to a place where we could be loaded into an ambulance. On the ride to a field hospital, I pressed an artery in Wright's neck to slow the blood flow so that he wouldn’t bleed to death before getting to help. I learned later that he had died in the hospital.

When the MD treated me, he told me that he wouldn’t need to use any anesthetic because I was still in shock and wouldn’t feel anything. He reached into the hole in my foot with a forceps and pulled out an angular, squarish piece of steel about ½ inch on each side. Only minor bleeding showed that no major blood vessels had been broken, and the MD found that none of the bones in my foot had been broken. He sprinkled Sulfanilamide powder on it and dressed it, then gave me a handful of Sulfanilamide tablets to swallow. About 3 days later, he discharged me to return to Co. K, with directions to “keep it dry and to get to the kitchen area every couple of nights to soak the wounded foot in warm Epsom salt.
water.” I walked with a limp, because I couldn’t put all my weight on the injured foot. The shell fragment had made a hole in my shu-pac so it was unusable. I wasn’t able to get a replacement for it, so I was issued a pair of standard leather combat boots. Keeping my foot warm and dry in them was impossible, but I did manage to get back to the kitchen every couple of days to soak the injury in warm water with Epsom salts and to dry my boots.

I had caught up with Co. K near the end of the pursuit of the Germans after the fall of Raon l’Etape. We then returned to that area to prepare for the Bitche campaign.

In the drive northeastward toward the fortresses at Bitche, I recall a few situations, but can no longer put them into sequence. One of the more awe-inspiring things I remember is the total quietness of being in a pine forest with snow falling. In one of these forests we found several dead German soldiers lying scattered around on the ground. Another situation was preparing for an assault across a small valley after preliminary rifle fire toward the German position on the ridge across the valley. As we crossed the open land on the creek floodplain we could hear rifle fire hitting the ground around us as we ran—I couldn’t run very well because I was limping on my injured right foot. After we climbed the slope and began firing directly toward the German position, an explosive charge landed very close to my head. I wasn’t wounded, but was unconscious for a few minutes. When I came to, I saw that the rest of my squad was running back across the field in a retreat. I started down the hill and ran into the men in the squad that had been on my right, carrying Pfc. Lawrence Procter, who had been wounded, in a raincoat as a litter.

On another occasion during this period, I was out of water, so I filled my canteen with water from a small creek, then dumped in some Halazone (chlorine) tablets to kill any bacteria that might be in it. This was a real mistake! A couple of days later, I came down with very severe diarrhea—and it smelled extremely foul. Halazone may have killed the bacteria, but it didn’t affect the amoebae that evidently were in the water. With the diarrhea plus my injured foot, I began to feel very stressed and afraid. On another occasion, near Reyersviller, I think, I recall that my feet were so cold and wet that it was difficult to walk. I stayed awake all night in my foxhole, massaging my feet to try to get them warm and remaining alert for a possible German attack. Naomi had sent me a couple of extra pair of wool socks that I kept in my shirt so that they would stay warm and reasonably dry when I
needed to change them. On occasions like these, I prayed that I would be able to keep control of myself and not become too frightened to do my job.

We marched much of the distance to the area where we were to engage the Germans near Bitche. Cold rain had fallen almost daily and the ground in the hill country of east central France was saturated. Reddish-brown clayey soil clung to our shoes so that after a few steps we were carrying what must have been an extra 10 pounds of mud on each of our feet. Sometimes we could get part of it off by kicking; other times we had to stop and use our bayonets to scrape it off.

As we prepared for the assault on the fortresses at Bitche, we were given training in the use of “suitcase” charges. Suitcase charges are blocks of explosives taped together to resemble a suitcase, then with a handle added, we were to carry them up to the slit opening of a pillbox and slide it in through the opening.

On December 17 we were in position, dug in, near the pillbox at Fort Friedenburg. The ground was snow-covered. I had been getting back to the kitchen area every two days or so to soak my injured foot, then after a couple of hours, hiking back to my foxhole. On one of the evenings that I was in the kitchen area soaking my foot, Jimmy Sgambellone received a letter from the Immigration and Naturalization service, telling him to report to Ellis Island for deportation as an enemy alien. Capt. Jones took the letter and answered it that Jimmy was at that time delivering a hot meal to the troops on the front line, but that as soon as the war ended and we had returned to the U.S., he would direct Jimmy to report to them. As far as I know, that was the end of it. When I visited Jimmy at his home in Brooklyn some years after the war had ended, he had become a U.S. citizen and was still writing songs.

About December 21 or 22, while I was soaking my foot, the battalion medic looked at it and asked me how long the red streak had been on my leg. I hadn’t been aware of it, but he said I had blood poisoning (septicemia) and that if we didn’t get it stopped soon I probably would lose my leg. He had me evacuated for treatment. The doctors at the hospital, which I think was near Epinal, began treating me with Sulfanilamide tablets, two, as I recall, every four hours. About a half hour after taking the first dose, I developed a very severe headache, so severe I couldn’t stand up. The headache lasted three hours, and went away about a half hour before the next dose was scheduled. I took it and the severe headache came back as before. After the third dose I told the physician that there had to be some other treatment,
because I was so badly knocked out by these pills. They stopped the antibiotic and started me on a whirlpool treatment. Twice every day for the next four weeks I spent about an hour soaking my foot in the warm water in the whirlpool; the infection finally did go away and the wound healed.

On Christmas 1944 I was in the hospital; I don’t recall much about it, but that is about the time that there was an air raid by German planes. All lights were put out and we waited to see what would happen. There could not have been very many planes involved, because the air raid was over after a few minutes.

Not long after I began the whirlpool treatment, the hospital put out a request for a patient who could play either a clarinet, a flute, or a French horn, and who could meet and play with a small ensemble composed of German prisoners of war. The ensemble performed at the officer’s mess each evening. I volunteered. The group wanted a woodwind to add “body” to the sound of a string quartet. Even though I hadn’t touched a flute for about two years, evidently the group thought I would do. An army Pfc who had been a violin major in college before he was drafted was in charge; the rest of the ensemble consisted of a 40-year-old violinist named Willi, who had played in the Bremen symphony; a cellist who had played with the Vienna orchestra; a pianist who had been a cabaret performer in Vienna, and a viola player, about whom I remember little. The army arranged to get me a beautiful grenadilla wood open-hole French flute that I would have loved to keep.

For nearly 4 weeks, until my infected wound had healed, I rehearsed 2 hours each afternoon with this ensemble and played for about an hour or so each evening. We played mostly music by Franz Lehar, the Strausses, Victor Herbert, and some of the popular songs of the time, including Lili. Marleen. We had written music for some of it and some was played from memory (or by ear). Music we were asked frequently to play were Lehar’s “Gold und Silber waltz” and the “Merry Widow waltz”. During that month the music absorbed my attention. At the same time, with the help of Willi, I made a start at learning to speak German. I had located a small German grammar book in the hospital library and started to learn the basic grammar of the language. I copied the fundamentals of the grammar of the language into a small pocket notebook so I could study it when I didn’t have the book available. It was illegal for U.S. soldiers to talk with Germans, either POW’s or civilians, and meant a $65 fine if we were caught, so Willi and I met in a latrine for a hour or
so each afternoon, after rehearsal, to help me learn German and to help him start to learn English. German really didn’t seem a lot like a foreign language to me; when I was a child I heard my Dad and his parents speaking German (“Pennsylvania Dutch”) at their home, so the intonation and a few of the words came quickly.

While I in the hospital I asked to be treated for the diarrhea—I wondered if I might have contracted dysentery—but nothing was done then, so when I was discharged from that hospital, I complained about it again and was sent to another hospital for the diarrhea. There I was given paregoric repeatedly without really stopping it. Finally one of my stools was examined and the report was that some dead amoebas were found, so evidently my body had thrown it off and would eventually get well without further treatment. I started back through the replacement depot route to rejoin my company, K-398. When I went to the hospital with the infected leg, I had been depressed and very afraid. But after the physical healing, the music served as real therapy and I was able to continue as a riflemen and squad leader with the fear reasonably well controlled. I also returned with a modest fluency in German.

On the way back to Co.K, I saw Capt. Jones in one of the replacement depots—he had been hit in one wrist by a shell fragment. His wrist and hand were badly crippled, but he remained in the Army and was reassigned to a job he could do with the injured hand. In another I met Pvt. Conrad. He evidently had left the company and gone to live with a French family. He was now on his way back to the USA to serve a term in a military prison.

I was taken across the Neckar River on a boat and reached K-398 on April 5, the day after the company had crossed the river near Heilbronn. At that time the second platoon, my platoon, was being reconstituted with replacements, because most of the men in it had been captured a few days earlier after the initial crossing of the river. Since I had been an assistant squad leader earlier and had some combat experience, I became one of the squad leaders. We spent the next few days and nights in a defensive position in a glass factory between Heilbronn and Neckarsulm, getting reorganized and preparing for the attack on Neckarsulm. During the nights, our engineer unit trained searchlights on the cloud cover to produce “artificial moonlight” and make the area light enough that we could see any German troops that might be trying to counterattack our position. Those nights I recall having made several trips, crawling, across a field next to the glass factory to drag back the bodies of fallen US soldiers, so that the Graves Registration personnel could take care of them.
At this time, nearly 60 years afterward, I recall few incidents during our attack on Neckarsulm and the ensuing march toward Stuttgart. After the 3rd Battalion had taken Neckarsulm, we proceeded southeastward across farmland and through some small towns. By this time I had become proficient enough in German that I was able to ask questions of the few people who emerged from basements of houses as we passed through. I was able to find out how long before we arrived the remnants of the German army had left, and how many there were, and sometimes the name of the Wehrmacht unit we were chasing. I also questioned the few prisoners-of-war that we took. We encountered little resistance, but each night we could hear the eerie sound made by rockets—the “screaming meemies”—that were thrown toward us and the explosions when they landed. The sound they made in the air was frightening at first, but I don’t remember that we had any casualties from them. During this time, I recall going through the towns of Wimmental and Murrhardt, but don’t remember anything about them.

Near the end of April, I began feeling weak and had trouble keeping food down. I was able to eat green onions that I found in some of the small gardens we passed, but not much else, though. The battalion medic looked at me and told me that I had jaundice; he told me that the whites of my eyes were yellow, and although I didn’t realize what it meant, I knew that my urine was coffee colored, and my feces were gray. I had also lost a lot of weight. I left my rifle with Lt. Hodges, the company executive officer, and was taken away to a military airport, then was evacuated by air—in a C-47. The plane carried about a dozen badly wounded German soldiers who were on litters, and I, plus a couple of other GI’s, were given buckets to sit on. This was my first trip in an airplane.

This time I was in a military hospital, near Nancy, I think, for about 3 weeks. I had lost around 30 pounds; my treatment was mostly rest with a high sugar diet. The war in Europe ended on May 7, while I was in the hospital. Of the 185 days that the 100th Division was in combat, I had been with the division only about 55 of them. When I rejoined K-398 around May 20, the company was stationed in Gschwend. A few days later we moved to Welzheim. My squad, along with the rest of the company, conducted patrols through some of the smaller communities in that region, including Kaisersbach and Kirschenkinberg.
Pfc. Ted Benjamin and Sgt. Bill Wayne in Welzheim

Around July 7, the company moved to Plochingen am Neckar, where our duties included processing and guarding “displaced persons”, young people from Poland who had been brought to Württemberg as farm labor, and who were to be repatriated. Plochingen, like most of the other small towns in Württemburg, had suffered little damage from the Allied bombing of Germany. Stuttgart, the largest city in the province, was hit several times, but most of the bombing was intended to damage either the railroad, an industrial complex not too far from it, or the Degerloch airport just outside the city.

Damaged Luftwaffe aircraft, Degerloch airport.
During the months we were in Plochingen, I was able to improve my conversational German and served as a substitute interpreter at company headquarters when the regular one, S/Sgt. Steve Sedillo, was not available. The houses we lived in were at the top of a slope in the town and were equipped with holding tanks for waste water from toilets and baths. The holding tank filled more rapidly with several soldiers in the houses than with only a German family. They were emptied by a man with a dipper and a tank wagon; the waste water was then taken out to the vegetable gardens on the edge of the town and spread on the fields. Our guard station was the gymnasium of the Plochingen turnverein, and I along with another GI used the gymnastic apparatus to practice and keep ourselves in good physical condition when we were on guard duty. During this time I tried a couple of times to quit using cigarettes and was to able to almost quit, then when I went on guard duty I started again. We also began training for taking part in the invasion of Japan. This training ended when we received news of the surrender of Japan and the end on the war in the Pacific on August 7.

Second squad, second platoon, K-398 in Plochingen

After the prohibition on talking to German civilians was lifted, I began to improve my German by talking with some of the local townspeople. One family, that of Albert Kurz, lived about midway between our billets and the gymnasium, which we used as a headquarters for guard duty, and I was able to talk to them when I walked between the two places. The children of Albert Kurz were two teen-agers, Bertle (Albert jr.) and Gretl. They told me that just before the Burgomeister of Plochingen left the town, ahead of the U.S. troops, he told the people to expect us to be vicious and cruel. They were relieved to discover that we weren’t. They also told me about the first atom bomb dropped on Japan a day before we learned about it from official sources. We had no idea what an “Atombombe” was, but soon after we found
out about the damage at Hiroshima, we learned about the information. Bertle and Gretl told me that they had to become members of the Hitlerjugend, a Nazi youth group, and that in the weekly meetings they were expected to tell whatever their parents were discussing at home. They said that they had to be very careful, because their father was a communist, not a Nazi sympathizer, and would be in big trouble if the leaders learned about his thoughts.

During the Fall 1945, I was given a short furlough to visit Nice, France. I really remember little about it except that I did visit and tour the Fragonard perfume factory, where I bought a bottle of perfume for Naomi, and was able to spend a little time on the beach. At the beach, I saw French girls wearing what may have been early “bikini” style bathing suits. They seemed to have been made from bandannas by cutting them from corner to corner, stitching the square corners together, then tying the other corners at their hips to make the bottoms of a brief suit. I also ate some meals at French restaurants in Nice, and was amazed at what French chefs were able to do with Spam. It was delicious, not at all like the meals prepared from it by army cooks.

A few weeks following VJ Day, the 100th Division was designated to be one of the organizations to return to the US. To be in this first shipment home, a GI had to have accumulated 65 or more service points. Points were awarded for time in service and for decorations earned. I had about 55 or so points, not enough to be included with the first group, so I was to be transferred out to some other organization, and other GI’s who did have enough points at that time were transferred into it to return to the US. Because I had gained a pretty good working knowledge of the German language, I was transferred to the First Military Government Detachment at Stuttgart. I was assigned to the billeting office, which at the time was staffed by a Major and a First Lieutenant. The Major was out of the office most of the time on trips to Berlin and to Switzerland. On the Swiss trips he returned with watches strapped to his arm from his wrist to his elbow, which he then took to Berlin and sold to Russian soldiers. As a field-grade officer, he could enter this money on his own currency-control card and then send it to a bank in the US.
Sgt Bill Wayne (photo taken in Plochingen)

The job of the billeting office was to make sure that all personnel assigned to the unit had adequate quarters and that we had space to put up all military visitors who came to the city. It also included supervising the personnel who cleaned the billets and maintained the heating equipment as well as obtaining fuel to heat the offices and quarters used by the Military Government detachment during the winter. Military Government was allocated only about half of the fuel needed to keep two large office building heated as well as the several buildings used to house troops and officers. To get more, we had to “find” it. Coal and coke used to heat the buildings came in by railroad, and rolling stock was still in short supply after the war had ended. So when a rail car filled with either coal or coke, designated for a US Army unit that was no longer in the area had sat unclaimed for four or more days, I was notified to do what I could to get it emptied so that the coal car could be put back into service. I had a dump truck with a driver and a crew of 4 German men with shovels on call
who could be at the railroad within an hour or two, so we unloaded the cars and took the fuel to whatever building was most in need of fuel at that time. We unloaded a lot of coal and coke during the winter of 1945-46.

The major left the unit about a month after I joined it, and a few weeks later the Lieutenant (Yost) also shipped out. That left me as the only person in the office that had been operated by two officers before I arrived. Evidently I did the job well enough to impress Colonel William Dawson, who commanded the unit, so he promoted me a rank to S/Sgt. Later, when the Army Commendation ribbon (later, medal) was created, he awarded me that, too.

Not long after I became the Billeting Officer, I was asked to attend a conference in Heidelberg to discuss the fuel needs of the various units. Because everyone else attending the meeting was a commissioned officer, Col. Dawson sent along with me a letter that said that even though I was a noncommissioned officer, I was doing the work formerly done by a Major; therefore I was to be treated as though I held a commissioned rank.

S/Sgt Bill Wayne as Billeting Officer
As Christmas 1945 approached, the Kurz family I had met in Plochingen invited me to spend the holiday with them. I took the train from Stuttgart to Plochingen. For Christmas dinner Grandpa Kurz, who lived in the ground level part of the Kurz home, killed a rabbit for the meat of the meal. Many of families in Plochingen, as well as in other small towns in Württemberg, kept livestock on the ground floor of the house (the Kurz family had only a rabbit hutch), and they had gardens just outside the edge of the town. The only other part of the meal I recall was “Spätzle”, boiled dumplings, but I’m sure that there were other vegetables.

Around February or March, I was able to take advantage of an Army-provided tour into Switzerland. With another GI from the unit, we drove through the Black Forest to Basel, then we went by train to Luzern and surrounding regions. At one place on the tour we were provided a lunch at an alpine restaurant that included several kinds of cheese. One of the cheeses had a strong flavor; I liked it, but most of the other GI’s on the tour didn’t—so I had an extra helping of it. While in Switzerland I found and bought an old camera—Goetz, 9 x 12 cm glass plate camera. This is a camera that I used for several years to photograph many of the outcrops that I visited later as a geology student. Glass plates were available in Germany, but in the US were hard to find; I was able to convert it later to use cut film.

One of the jobs I had to do as billeting officer was to take over private residences from German civilians for use as billets for U.S. officers or enlisted men. While I held the position of billeting officer, I had to do this only one time. Even though I was sure my German was fluent enough to do the job I was pleased to be able to draw on the help of a young man from Strassburg, Gaston Rimlinger, who was equally fluent in French, German, and English. Attached to our unit, his principal job was to serve as interpreter for the officers of the Military Government detachment. He and I had become friends, so I asked him to go with me. I was glad that I did, because he was enough more fluent than I that he was able to do the job with more finesse and diplomacy than I would have been able to muster.

When I joined the Military Government unit, I was assigned to use the Opel auto that had been used by the two officers who made up the Billeting office at that time. A month or two after both of them had left, and I was the only person in the office, one of the other field grade officers in the organization complained why did he have to use a military Jeep, while a
S/Sgt had the use of the much more comfortable Opel. Shortly afterward, I was told to exchange vehicles with him; he took the Opel and I had his Jeep.

Rubble of bombed buildings in the streets of downtown Stuttgart

In the winter of 1945-6, many of the streets of Stuttgart were still blocked with rubble from the Allied bombings during the war. Even though only the railroad station and the factory had been targets of bombing, not all bombs hit only their intended targets. Because blocked streets make traveling difficult, especially for visitors who didn't know the city, I prepared a map of Stuttgart that showed all the streets that were still not passable. The map proved to be invaluable to the military people who visited Stuttgart and who had to find their way around the city.

In May 1946 I received orders to start to return to the USA; I boarded a train to the port of Bremershaven, where I climbed on board a Liberty Ship that was being used as a troop transport. Our trip back to the US was much quieter than the trip to France had been—the weather was warm and the winds were calm. The trip to reach the port of New York took around three weeks, most of which I spent either reading a book, playing cards, or playing chess. After processing there, I was sent to Camp Atterbury, Indiana for discharge. My Honorable Discharge is dated 23 June 1946. During my nearly 3 years of active service I earned the following awards: Expert Infantry Badge, Expert Rifleman, Combat Infantry Badge, Purple Heart Medal, Good Conduct Medal, American Theatre Medal, European Theatre Medal with two bronze stars (Rhineland and Central Europe), Distinguished Unit Badge and oak leaf cluster, World War II Victory Medal, Army of Occupation Medal, and Army Commendation Medal.
After discharge, I went home to my parents' home in Elkhart, Indiana for a week or so. While I was there I helped Dad finish some cabinet work on one of the jobs that he had. After that, I went to Buffalo, New York, where Naomi and I were married on July 9, 1946. After the ceremony, we took my parents to visit Niagara Falls. This was the first and only time that either Naomi or I ever visited the Falls. We spent much of the summer at the Liebl cottage on Cattaraugus Creek, near Silver Creek, NY. We were able to enjoy swimming on the beach there, and we canned a lot of vegetables harvested from the Liebl garden and fruit that we were able to buy to take with us when we returned to Indiana University in August to start graduate programs.

After she graduated from Indiana University, Naomi taught physical education in the Buffalo, New York school system and at the same time worked a shift in a war plant, the Douglas aircraft factory. She was able to save about $2500 during that time, and I had managed to save about $1500 from my military pay. Those, plus her teaching assistantship, my GI Bill funds, and my employment first at a sign painting shop and later with a teaching assistantship, allowed us to live comfortably though frugally without having to take out any loans for our graduate studies.