



1285th
Engineer
Combat Battalion

One Man's Chronicle

Written by:
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This is a chronicle of the nearly three years I spent in the U.S. Army in W.W.II. Various Veteran and History Organizations have requested these types of recollections as a way of preserving the history of the tumultuous times.

My tale begins while I'm still a senior in High School in the small village of Scotia, New York in the early spring of 1943. In my sophomore year I dropped back one semester to begin a war related course of "Technical Training" consisting of 15 other boys and myself. This may seem to be an insignificant event; but several years in the future it may well be a life or death decision! I'll refer to this later in the saga.

In late winter of 1943, another group of "selectees" (draftees) was being processed to enter the various military units of the U.S Armed Forces, many of these boys were long time friends whom I had grown up with. They had graduated in January of '43, while I still had another semester to go. I wanted very badly to go with these friends, so I went to the "Selective Service Board" and volunteered for induction. They told me that I was automatically deferred until I graduated in June, I insisted that I wanted to go with my friends so they relented and included me in the group. My parents didn't know until after the war what I had done, they thought it was just a "selective service" snafu!

On March 18th, 1943, I took my physical in an armory in Albany, and was sworn in as a member of the U.S. Army! I had hoped to enter the Navy; but the naval quota was filled and I wound up in the army.

We had one week to get our affairs in order and were told to be at the railroad station in Schenectady early in the morning of March 25th, 1943.

The "absentee" list at Scotia High School that morning must have been real long as I believe half the school was at the depot to see us off!

We entrained to Camp Upton on Long Island where I was introduced to life in the Army. In the evening of my first day at Camp Upton, a N.C.O. came around and tossed white towels to random individuals and told them to tie them to the foot of their bed. The towels identified those who were to be on K.P. at 4:30 AM and told to be in the mess hall in ten minutes! Obviously someone who had been selected got up during the night and tied his towel to my bed! What an indoctrination to army life!

I was at Camp Upton only a few days and was soon on a "Troop Train" headed where, Lord knows because none of us did! After several days of stop and go we arrived at Camp Wolters outside "Mineral Wells", Texas. The troops nicknamed the town "Venereal Wells" For obvious reasons.

Camp Wolters was an I.R.T.C. Camp. These initials stood for "Infantry Replacement Training Center". I was assigned to a heavy weapons section where we specialized in the 30 caliber, water cooled machine gun and the 81mm mortar. We were to undergo thirteen weeks of basic training and then be shipped overseas immediately as replacements for casualties suffered by units already in combat.

Just about everyone entering the services in those days couldn't wait to get home on furlough, in uniform, to be greeted by family and friends. It was a huge disappointment to realize I wouldn't get a chance to get home before going overseas!

Texas can get really hot in late spring and early summer. Twenty mile forced marches with full field packs, helmets and weapons can be a very taxing experience!

Having never been away from home before I was one homesick son-of-a gun! The transformation from an 18 year old senior in high school one day and the next, you are thousands of miles from home; being trained to kill-or-be-killed, is quite earth shattering to say the least! To say the army life wasn't exactly what I had expected, was a major understatement! I was amazed at the authority the Cadre of "non-coms" had. A P.F.C. (Private-First-Class) was like a Captain, a Corporal like a General; and a Buck Sergeant like "Christ" himself! Finally our training was nearing an end about the same time I would have been graduating from high School back home.

At a formation one day, we were excited to hear that the army's policy had been changed and at the end of basic, we would all be granted leaves of the five days - plus travel time! What a tremendous morale booster!

The final day arrived and I was all packed and ready to go! At our last formation, where our leave papers would be distributed, a list a names was read of men who were to form-up off to one side, my name was read to join the group off to the side.

The rest of our unit loaded into buses and were whisked off to the railway station. Our group was addressed by a Lieutenant. Rust who stated that we were a "select" group who were chosen to enter a new army program called A.S.T.P. (Army Specialized Training Program). We would not receive leave at this time but; we would be sent to Texas A&M College to attend refresher courses until another college was named for us to attend.

I definitely had mixed emotions as I had my heart set on going home and was really disappointed that I wasn't!

I arrived at "College Station", Texas and was bused to a dorm at Texas A&M College. It was summer break so there were few people on campus. I attended several so-called "refresher" courses and volunteered to help harvest an experiment sugar cane crop for the school. I had never seen sugar cane before. I was at A&M for two or three weeks before my group entrained again to Chicago where we were enrolled at "Illinois Institute of Technology". We were billeted in the Wentworth Ave Armory on the south side of Chicago. This was in the heart of the predominately black neighborhood of the city. We were right across the street from Comisky Ball Park. While here, we had free passes to baseball or football games at Comisky. I saw several ball games and one pro football game.

We got settled into the armory and soon began classes at I.I.T. at first our kitchen was not yet operating, so we were bused across town to the cafeteria at a Chiropractic School for our meals.

I must note here that I was amazed at the hospitality of the city of Chicago! This was especially true if you were a G.I. because the city was close to the "Great Lakes Naval Training Center" and sailors were a dime a dozen while soldiers were few. The service centers by the U.S.O. were fantastic! By going to these centers, you could get all kinds of food from snacks to full meals. Free passes were available for all kinds of shows and entertainment anywhere in the city! I could hop a trolley in front of the armory and shortly be in the "loop" of downtown. I thought Chicago was a wonderful city and I had some memorable experiences while there!

I celebrated my 19th birthday at a bar at 10 N. Clark Street called "Fogarty's Bomb Shelter" where they were not too strict about checking age on your I.D. card! You were supposed to be 21 to even get in the door.

During a long week end from school I was able to obtain a seventy-two hour pass and took the long train ride home for a short but fantastic time with family and friends. We looked forward to the break between semesters as we would receive leaves to go home for several weeks. Classes were fast and furious and we had a lot of time for study. I managed a fair average in some subjects; but some, like chemistry, was all greek to me!

The end of the semester arrived and I excitedly packed for the furloughs to be given out the next day. Once again it was not to be!! At the unit formation where the leaves were to be granted, we were told that the army was cutting back on the A.S.T.P. Program and that only the top 10% of the class continue and that the rest would be shipped out. Need I say that there was no way I was in that top 10%.

Quite frankly, I was devastated, not because I would not be continuing in school; but because once again, I would not be going home on furlough!

I was shipped out once again, and as always, I had no idea where I was going. The military likes to keep you in the dark on these matters. Of all places, I wound up back at Camp Wolters Texas! At this time of my life, Texas was not one of my favorite places! I was assigned to a replacement battalion to await further orders. I was at Wolter's through November and December of '43, when I was again shipped out to an unknown destination. After several days on the train I arrived at Camp "Joseph T. Robinson" in the state of Arkansas. This was just outside of the city of Little Rock.

I was assigned to the 259th Engineer Combat Battalion. Until now, I had never heard of a combat engineer; but I must say this was a very important milestone in my military career! The most important fact to come to mind is how much more warm and friendly were the officers and N.C.O.S. compared to the I.R.T.C at Camp Wolters! Talking this over with others who felt the same, we came to the conclusion that the officers and non-coms at Wolters just trained men and shipped them out. They could be miserable S.O.B.S without fearing that some day they might have to be out front leading these men they had been so miserable to while the men behind then had loaded weapons with their fingers on the triggers!

The difference between the "Infantry Replacement Training Center" and the combat engineer unit was most notable!!

Here in Arkansas we lived in small tar-papered buildings just large enough to hold a squad. We had two small pot-bellied stoves for heat! They

were almost always cherry-red in attempting to warm these small "shacks"! For fuel we had chunks of soft coal that emitted clouds of acrid yellow smoke that made you cough and burned your eyes!

Another memorable occurrence at this time was meeting Eugene C. Hoshall! He was a farm boy from Havre-De-Grace Maryland. We seemed to hit it off right from the start and soon established a close friendship that endured through the rest of our military career and beyond! Another rather "indelible" event happened at this time also. While on "pass" in Little Rock one evening two nineteen year olds, having had one or two adult beverages, happened upon a tattoo parlor! Needless to say, temptation overcame wisdom and soon we each had a small tattoo on our upper left arms! I have regretted ever since!

Here in Arkansas I also had my first encounter with a "wood tick"! I went to shower one night and here was this bugger imbedded in my chest! There was only a portion of his rear-end protruding. I went to the infirmary and the medic tried to get the tick to back out using the heat from a lighted cigarette and several other "old wives tales" to get it out. When all attempts failed, the medics used tweezers and alcohol and pulled until the rear end came out, but the head stayed in! He, the medic, probed until he felt he had it all, but for years after I had a small hole in my chest!

One day the 1st Sergeant called me to the orderly room and informed me that he had been going over my records and noticed that I had been in for almost a year and hadn't had a leave. "Did I want one?" "I sure do" said I, and he replied okay you have a fifteen day furlough! I asked when? He said, as soon as you can pack up your gear and turn it in to the supply room. If there had been "Guinness" records at the time, I would have set a new one for packing and stowing!

It was early on a week day morning when the train sped through my home town, through Schenectady and to Albany before it stopped, twenty miles from home! I had hoped to get home before mom and dad left for work as they didn't know I was coming. I had paid \$7.00, a lot of money, for a taxi ride home, but missed mom and dad by a few minutes! I phoned mom at work and still remember her scream when she heard my voice! She called dad who picked her up and came home for a very joyous reunion!

I feel I should make a comment on an otherwise uneventful train trip home and back to "Little Rock". When the train stopped in Terre Haute

Indiana, many young ladies and women came aboard with baskets of small bags full of sandwiches and cookies. That they passed out to all service personnel. This happened both times I passed through Terre Haute. This really impressed me and was just another indication of the many ways each and everyone in this country was doing their part to support the war effort! "Those who could – did. Those who couldn't supported those who could", thank you Terre Haute. Your effort did not go unnoticed!

Shortly after returning to Camp Robinson, I was promoted to P.F.C.; the next month to Corporal; and the third month to Sergeant! There were several of us who were promoted in this manner; but never the less, it was unusual to say the least! My pay at this time if I remember correctly was \$50.00 a month as a Private, \$54.00 as a P.F.C., \$60.00 as a Corporal, and \$75.00 as a "Buck Sergeant".

About this time, I was learning through letters from home and from friends, that some of my group that left home when I did were killed or seriously wounded in combat. I'm sure that I would have been over there with them had I not been pulled out back in Camp Wolters to be assigned to the A.S.T.P. Program.

I would not have been assigned to this A.S.T.P. had I not had the training obtained in the technical program in high school! It's amazing how some seemingly insignificant events can have very significant effects on your life later on!! I must say that I was much happier as a "Combat Engineer" than I was as an infantryman!

In the later part of March '44, a number of officers and N.C.O.'s from the 259th Eng. were selected to be transferred to Camp Howze, Texas as a Cadre for a new unit to be activated as the 1285th Engineer Combat Battalion Eugene C. Hoshall and I were among those chosen to go. Camp Howze was near Gainesville Texas. There really wasn't much to do while we waited for recruits to be assigned so we could start training them as combat engineers. It was the middle of July when some fillers arrived and we began an accelerated training period. The middle of September, we bivouacked for a week at Lake Murray, near Ardmore Oak. where we practiced building pontoon bridges, rafts, etc.

Upon returning to Camp Howze, we received notice that we would be going overseas shortly!! In October, the battalion moved to a "staging area" at Camp Bowie, Texas. An intensive period of inspections, packing of tools and

equipment began. On the 23rd of November, the battalion entrained for the long haul to the overseas staging area of Camp Shanks, New York. Needless to say, we enjoyed no Thanksgiving dinner while enroute!

We did get a twelve hour passes to visit New York City and we made the most of it, as who knows if we would ever have the chance again!

As we were leaving to go to the city, Jack Shuman, who was my Platoon Jeep driver, asked if we know our way around the city? None of us knew anything about New York City. Jack who was from Boston said that he came to the city often with his parents who were partners in the "Coil-Shuman" women's clothing business in Boston and that they maintained a suite of rooms at the Edison Hotel. If we wanted, he would be happy to show us around. We were happy to have a guide, so a group of five of us headed into "The Big Apple"!

Our first stop was the Edison Hotel to see if Jack's parents were in town. The desk clerk recognized Jack immediately and welcomed him warmly. When told his parents were not in town, the clerk handed him a phone to call his parents in Boston. He told his father that we had just twelve hour passes and he wanted to show us some of the "high" spots. His dad asked to talk to the desk clerk and did so and then the clerk went into an inner office, came out and handed Jack \$350.00! He said his father wanted Jack to show his friends the city – on him! Now \$350.00 was one hell of a lot of money in 1944! I, as a Buck Sergeant, earned \$75.00 a month! Well, Jack did as asked, he really showed us the city! Places we only heard or read about. "The Diamond Horse Shoe", "The 21 Club", Flanders Cocktail Lounge" to name a few. We had our photos taken by very pretty young ladies who were roving photographers in the clubs. We would go into a lounge, have a drink, watch a fabulous floor show and move on to another club. We got to see a number of shows, had a "few" drinks and made it back to Camp Shanks just under the twelve hour limit! An unforgettable evening on the town and the price was right!!!

We sailed on the converted liner T.E.S., Uruguay, on December 8, 1944 for parts unknown. We joined a convoy at sea and encountered no enemy action so the crossing was uneventful. Crowded conditions were tolerated for the thirteen days it took to cross the Atlantic, and we arrived in Southampton Eng. on the 21st day of December, just a few days before Christmas!

We had no idea where we were until some civilian stevedores came aboard to start unloading. We had a difficult time understanding them as it was our first exposure to the "cockney dialect".

We entrained for the trip to Addlestep, Oxforshire. Upon arriving, we encamped on the estate of Lord Leigh, whose castle served as battalion headquarters. Small niesson or quonset huts served as living quarters, orderly room, supply room, etc. The latrines were long "out-houses" with buckets under each seat. Anyone doing time for some infraction, was assigned "honey-bucket detail" each day, a wagon-mounted tanker made the rounds and these buckets were handed up to be dumped into the tank. No one wanted a repeat assignment to the "honey-bucket detail"!

It was close to New Years when Gene and I received seventy-two hour passes to visit London where I knew my sister Marie was stationed. We arrived in "blacked-out" London after dark and were amazed how a city this size could operate in pitch darkness. I had my sister's unit number; but I had no address other than an A.P.O., London. I took a taxi to headquarters of all U.S. forces in Europe to see if I could find where her unit was billeted. The O.D. (Officer of the Day) was reluctant to tell me as it was "classified information". I had a hard time convincing him that I was her brother as her married name was "Anselowitz" – not Moehle.

Eventually he relented and obtained her London address for me. Another taxi ride brought us to a large stone structure where the W.A.C. Detachment was stationed. I climbed the steps and entered to find the W.A.C., C.Q. (Charge of Quarters) seated at a desk in the Orderly room. I asked if Sergeant Marie Anselowitz was available. She stated that she was on pass. She checked the sign-out book only to find that she just put "London"! I was disappointed to think that I had come this close to finding her; but to no avail. We turned to leave when the C.Q. said "Wait a minute", "A lot of the girls frequent a pub that is just around the corner". She suggested I try this pub. She gave me directions to find the pub in the pitch darkness. "Go out the front door, down the steps, and on your left there is a wrought iron fence, follow the fence to the corner, then stay with the fence to where it ends. There is a door at the end of the fence – this is the door to the pub!" We followed her instructions, groping in the darkness until we found the door and entered into a noisy smoke filled room packed with G.I.'s and W.A.C.'s!

I must digress here for a moments. While growing up in the small village of Scotia, we had what we called a "family whistle". Whenever any

member of our family wanted to attract the attention of any other family member, you just whistled these nine musical notes; and you had their attention. Over the years, the number of notes was shortened from the original nine notes to only four!

In this mass of humanity, I tried scanning the crowd, hoping against hope to see her familiar face. About to give up – I spotted her at the far end of the room with several other W.A.C.'s. She was just raising her glass when I whistled the old whistle! She froze momentarily, the drink fell and she let out a scream! Frantically searching the crowd for the source of the whistle, she spotted me by the door. Like a full-back for the N.Y. Giants, she came running the length of the bar, grabbed me off the floor and swung me around while tears of joys filled our eyes, unashamedly! All the time accompanied by cheers and applause from the patrons. Sis explained to all her friends that I was her "kid brother" and we were offered so many drinks we could have been drunk for a week!

When she found out that Gene and I hadn't eaten since early that morning, she insisted that we go back to the W.A.C. quarters and she would fix us something to eat. As "Mess Sergeant" for the detachment, she fed us real well , with some left over cherry pie to top it off!

While we were eating, the W.A.C. C.O. came over and was really upset to say the least for her feeding two G.I.'s in a W.A.C. kitchen. When sis explained that we were brother and sister, the C.O. told her to give us anything we wanted. She then shook hands with Gene and me and then left!!

After eating our fill, we went "out on the town". London's pub closed at 10 P.M.; but private clubs could stay open later. And sis knew where these clubs were! In the wee hours of the morning, the three of us were walking down the middle of a rather main street, in the snow, singing "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas" at the top of our lungs! I believe it was quite evident, even to the casual observer that we probably had one or maybe two too many!!

The next day Gene and I were heading back to our unit in Addlestep and Sis was going as far as the train station with us when all of a sudden we heard and felt a tremendous explosion! All I could say was "What the hell was that?" Sis said rather casually, "Oh just another German V-2 rocket," These "buzz bombs" carried a 2000 pound war head and could level a city block. This was apparently a normal occurrence for London at this time.

Gene and I couldn't wait to get out of London and back to the relative safety of our "country estate"!

It was a somewhat tearful goodbye at the station with not knowing when or if we would ever see each other again!

Shortly after returning to our unit, all our privates and P.F.C.'s were ordered to undergo a crash-course in infantry tactics in anticipation of possibly sending them in as replacements for units trying to halt the Germans in the "Battle of the Bulge". The so called bulge was contained and we resumed command of our privates and P.F.C.'s. It was unusually cold and snowy during this period and all cold weather gear that was available was shipped to front-line troops as it should have been. Our unit trained at Wallingford where we were introduced to the "Bailey Bridge". We worked long hours under difficult conditions and soon became proficient in the fixed and floating Bailey Bridge. It was a marvelous engineering achievement and was put together like a huge "erector set". This training came in handy later on the continent as we excelled in putting floating baileys across the over flowing Rhine River!

I received word one day that there was a message for me at Battalion headquarters from the Red Cross. My first thoughts were, "Oh my God – something has happened to my family at home!" The message was that my older brother, Charlie had been wounded in Germany and was now at a field hospital near "Reading, England"! I was given a twelve hour pass to go see him and did so. He was dumbfounded when I walked into his ward and could not believe it was me! His left forearm had been shattered by a bullet. He was in moderate pain; but otherwise doing pretty well. He was scheduled for surgery so I could only visit for a couple hours. I had to leave to get back to my unit where I immediately wrote a letter to mom and dad to let them know that I had seen him and that he was not in a "life threatening situation". That should ease their fears somewhat after receiving the war department notification that he had been "wounded in action". I also wondered if sis had been notified by the Red Cross too. She had been transferred from London to Paris. Two days later, my question was answered when I walked into our orderly room to see her standing there! She had been notified and had managed to catch a military flight back to England and had gone to see "Chuck". She had visited him for a short time because they were shipping him back stateside for more surgery. Thank God because at least for Chuck, the war was over!! She had two days yet before her flight back to Paris, so she had come to see me!

My company commander suggested that we set up a bunk in the supply room for her and that we hang some G.I. blankets for privacy! It was fantastic having her there for a couple of days before she caught her flight back to Paris! Being assigned to the Army Air Force had its perks!

Our unit received "rush orders" to move to the coast at Portsmouth and immediately boarded an L.S.T. for LeHaure, France. During the crossing of the channel, there was a flurry of activity by our destroyer escorts and suddenly we heard the tremendous explosions of depth charges! Evidently they had detected a German "U Boat" and were dropping a pattern of depth charges. In the L.S.T., the sound was like someone beating a bass drum right next to your ear! Needless to say, queasiness was universal!

We arrived at Camp Twenty Grand and were ordered to move immediately to Julich, Germany. We passed through France, Belgium and into Germany arriving in Julich where we were told to advance into Kempen, Germany. We became operational once and were assigned temporarily to provide engineering support to the 94th Infantry Division, part of our battalion operated the 9th Army Water Point in Kempen, and supplied water to the 94th Division as well as to units of the British 2nd Army.

The first bridge we built was from Rheinhausen to Duisburg, spanning one thousand five hundred thirty-four feet of the Rhein River. This was the longest floating Bailey over flowing water in the European Theater of Operations!

The Rhine River was near flood stage, with high and strong currents. We had to utilize a great many up-stream anchors to keep our bridges in line! It was also necessary to place men on the upstream ends of every other pontoon with instruction to shoot at until hitting anything floating downstream! Luckily they were able to detonate several floating mines before they could do any damage to our bridge!

Another engineer battalion lost its bridge when a large coal barge up river was either cut loose or broke its mooring and floated down and destroyed their bridge! It was then decided to send a demolition team up each side of the river from Duisburg to Dusseldorph with orders to sink anything that could float! We sunk barges, river freighters, tug boats, houseboats and some privately owned yachts! Anyone living aboard was given ten minutes to clear out before we sank these vessels with explosive charges! On this mission we lost a good officer and my close friend Sergeant Ricker, when

their jeep struck a German anti-tank mine and both were critically injured! When returning from this mission, we discovered a large sign erected at our bridge naming it the Gerow Bridge in honor of Lieutenant General Leonard T. Gerow, commanding general of the U.S. 15th Army, and giving credit to the 1285th Combat Engineers for building it. Shortly thereafter the name Gerow was painted over and the bridge renamed "Triumph".

My Company (C) of the 1285th was sent to Cologne to assist the 283rd Engineer Command Battalion in building a class forty floating Bailey Bridge at that point. However the 283rd was completely unfamiliar with the Bailey Bridge! Therefore they could do no more than lend labor support to "C" Company. "B" Company of the 1285th was also sent to help and the next day the bridge was completed!

German mines were scattered by the thousands. Both A.P. (Anti-personnel) and anti-tank mines. One of the most notorious was the A.P. called the "S" Mine. We gave it the nickname "The Bouncing Betty". It was buried with three small prongs protruding above ground. To step on one or all three of these small prongs, a small charge would propel a canister about the size of a Campbell's Soup can, about six feet into the air where it would detonate. These canisters would contain about three hundred-sixty steel ball-bearings. They proved to be quite lethal!

I had never given much thought about "Guardian Angels"; but one must have been with me one day while I was on patrol as I stepped on two of these devilish devices! The first one just popped and puff of smoke rose around my boot. The canister failed to leave the ground. The second one popped, rose into the air, but failed to detonate!! Who was it who said "There are no Atheists in a fox-hole"? These two incidents, in the same day, couldn't but make me feel as though someone was watching over me that day!!

Being exposed was I was, to the dangers that exist in a war time environment, I came very close to my end at the hands of our own troops! These days they call it "Friendly Fire", but I assure you, the fire I was exposed to was far from friendly!! Lieutenant "Nycum", Corporal Royer and I were ordered to do a recon patrol on the far shore of the Rhine in to the city of Manheim. There were plans to build another bridge into Manheim and needed a far shore recon of egress routes from the proposed bridge. We were to determine if there were any road blocks that would obstruct the free flow of traffic away from the bridge. Lieutenant Nycum had checked with Division G-2 (Intelligence) and was assured that all the enemy had been cleared out of

the city; but not to go beyond the city itself. We obtained the nose section of a plywood bridge pontoon and loaded it onto a jeep trailer, got some paddles and headed to the river.

Upon arriving we found units of the 101st Airborne Division dug into defensive positions on a levee-like embankment at river's edge. They were enjoying a well earned break after their heroic stand at Bastogne in the Battle of the Bulge a few months earlier. We were advised that if we were crossing over that we better be back before dark because after dark they fired on anything on the river! At this time, as we were putting the pontoon section in the water, I saw a M-1 rifle laying in the water. The rifle had a leather sling and I wanted to replace the web sling on my rifle. I didn't have time to replace it then so I just tossed the rifle into the trailer until later.

We proceeded to paddle our way across the flood swollen river. We landed on the far shore outside of town, pulled our boat into some bushes, and headed into the town, as on most patrols, we were armed to the teeth with rifles, grenades and extra bandoliers of ammunition. On a combat patrol, you go fully armed and look for a fight, but on a recon patrol you are as well armed but only fight when there is no alternative.! Your mission on a recon patrol is to gather information and get back with it! If you get into a fire fight and are killed or captured, what information you gathered is worthless!

As we neared the outskirts of Manheim, we were surprised to be greeted by a large group of men and women as if we were their long awaited liberators!! We learned later that they were laborers from occupied countries, forced to work in German factories and farms. They were from many different countries. They were screaming, crying, laughing. They hugged us, kissed our cheeks, shook our hands hysterically! Here we were – just three American G.I.'s! We tried to firmly but politely break away to continue on our mission; but we had quite an entourage!

The streets were deserted as most German civilians had fled to avoid the fighting. We soon discovered that not all German soldiers had gone. We saw a small American L-5 spotter plane that was frantically trying to avoid the flack bursting all around it! The A.A. fire was coming from just around the corner from where we were. I ran over some rubble, and up to a large building, peered slowly around the corner and there not thirty yards from me was the A.A. gun and 4 or 5 German soldiers operating it. I removed a grenade from my belt, pulled the pin and was ready to toss it into the gun

emplacement when I felt an urgent tug on my shoulder. It was the Lieutenant, he hurriedly whispered, "don't throw it, come, we've got to get out of here, the building is crawling with Germans!" I understood his reasoning; but I wanted to do something to help the pilot and observer in that small plane, besides, it was entirely possible that pilot was calling for our artillery fire on that gun and here we were right next to it!!

If we were the first allied troops these people had seen, who supposedly cleared this city of Germans? We learned later that many German soldiers had retreated; but that many had remained as had snipers!

We made our way over huge mounds of debris toward the riverfront, to accomplish what we had been sent to do. Frequently we were waved off from using certain streets by the "forced workers" and motioned to follow some of them around pockets of German units. We found our way to the river and found several exit routes from the proposed bridge site that would require minimal efforts to eliminate road blocks and tank traps that had been erected to forestall a river crossing.

When we felt we had sufficient information, we wanted to go back the way we came only to be warned not to; but follow two of the D.P.'s (displaced persons) who evidently had volunteered to act as our guides. It was getting late and we wanted to get back across the river before dark! Instead we were led to the basement of a bombed-out building where there were fifteen of twenty other D.P.'s. There was one elderly woman who spoke halting English and she was able to convey to us that it was extremely dangerous to try to return now as many German soldiers filtered back into the city at dusk seeking food and shelter. She said they could find the best way for us to return to where our boat was left, but in the meantime to stay where we were! We hadn't expected to be gone long so we didn't bring any rations with us. They produced some stale bread and some dusty covered bottles of wine, but we were somewhat uneasy of our situation so we asked them to eat some of the bread and drink some of the wine before we did.

We were hidden several days and moved twice to other cellars before we were told that they had found a way to be after dark. By now we were really anxious to get the hell out of there!! Just after dark, we thanked the D.P.'s and started out, guided by a man and a young boy. They led us via a circuitous route for a long way, then they pointed the way we were to go and then they just disappeared! We proceeded cautiously, not knowing what to expect or whether our boat would be where we hid it!

We finally found the path we had used to climb the bank from the river! We slowly descended to the waters edge. We were trying to be as quiet as possible as noise travels far over water! We didn't want to alert the 101st across the river. We were elated to find our boat; but now we had a decision to make! Should we wait until daylight and risk roving patrols of Germans, or try being quiet as possible and cross in the dark? We decided on the latter. We righted our boat, stowed our rifles and gear, picked up the boat and carried it to the water. I cannot recall just who it was, but one of us stumbled in the dark and dropped their corner of the boat on the rocks along the shore!

The noise seemed to resonate in the stillness! We swore silently and froze in position as a parachute flare arched into the darkness from the far shore! It lighted up the landscape in a brilliant white light! We didn't move a muscle until the flare finally burned itself out. Then we moved the boat into the water and waited. Sure enough, another flare went up and we remained motionless until it was again dark. We timed the flares and found that they were firing them at twenty minute intervals. We figured we could make it across in twenty minutes if we paddled like hell! We waited until the last flare burned out and then jumped into the boat and started to paddle furiously!

We had been paddling for about ten minutes when we heard a "pop" and another flare drifted slowly down, swinging back and forth under its small parachute! They had deviated from their pattern and had caught us in a blaze of light in mid-stream! Within seconds the sound of rifle and B.A.R. fire sounded and bullet splashes walked across the water toward us! Several rounds entered near the bow of the boat, passed between us and exited through the stern. Luckily they were above the water line!

By now Lieutenant Nycom was on his feet screaming and waving his arms frantically. A few more rounds splashed near by and then silence!! A booming voice from shore ordered us to keep paddling and not to forget that we were in the sights of many weapons! Several more flares were fired to illuminate us the rest of the way. A Captain from the 101st Airborne Division gave our Lieutenant holy-hell for trying to cross after dark after being warned not to several days earlier. He also informed us that muzzle flashes from behind us showed that the Germans had been firing at us also! There had to be more than luck involved here!! Needless to say, we were really glad to be back, but scared clear through at the thought that we had come so close to being killed by our own troops!

We made our way to our unit only to find that we had been listed as "Missing in Action". The Lieutenant went to BN Headquarters and was able to cancel the M.I.A. notices from going any further!

The M-1 rifle I had found didn't appear to be in too bad a shape except the stock and upper hand guard were bleached and almost white from laying in the water. Several small parts had some rust so I obtained replacements from our company armorer and test fired it. I like it better than the rifle I had been issued, so I turned in my assigned rifle and carried this one the rest of the war in Europe. My only problem was what to do about the wood portions being so white! Our "First Sergeant" came up with the idea of using some red ink that he had in his field desk. I believe I had the unique distinction of being the only G.I. in the whole E.T.O. using a M-1 with bright red stock!!

The rifle served me well. The irony of the whole thing is that they decided not to build the bridge after all we went through!

During this time, the Army came out with a policy of "non-fraternization" with the enemy. Just what they meant by this I have no idea. The fine if caught fraternizing was \$64.00. A lot of money in those days. I imagine it was meant to discourage interaction between our troops and German women who having been deprived of any luxuries for years, would do most anything for a chocolate bar, cigarette, a bar of soap, coffee, sugar and many other items that would have been easily obtained by our troops.

I can't remember of anyone actually having to pay the \$64.00 despite the fact that these items came into short supply in the unit and were more valuable than money! It's only natural that a great deal of "interaction" occurred!

Soon the day we had looked forward to for years came. Germany had surrendered!! The war was over at last!!!

Our battalion was assigned a large area along the Rhine to maintain the roads, bridges and to clear rubble from the street of Krefeld, Monchengladbach, Muess and several other cities.

At this time, what had been a trickle of refugees crossing our bridges, became a flood! They were either fleeing the Russians or were trying to return to their homes that they had fled to escape the fighting. They

consisted of civilians of all ages, plus some military personnel. To avoid the spread of body lice and diseases, each person had to be dusted with D.D.T. We had assigned men at each bridge spraying down pants, inside shirts, under skirts and inside blouses. For some reason or other, I never had a shortage of volunteers for this detail. Some even staying past the end of their shift. How do you figure?

In mid-May 1945 we were ordered to move our battalion to southern Germany and then to Arles in southern France. Here we learned we were to be redeployed to the P.T.O. We trained in destroying beach obstacles, Japanese Army tactics and related subjects. Needless to say, the units morale was at rock bottom!

It was hot in southern France at the time of the year and we were still in our winter wool O.D. uniforms! We did manage several times, to go swimming in the Mediterranean. And the water was like a bathtub!

Our battalion received orders to send a detail to Paris to pick up one hundred vehicles at a race track in Paris and convoy them back to Arles for deployment to the Pacific Theater. I had to pull some strings to get on that detail as my sister was stationed in Paris and I wanted to look her up if I could. We entrained in Forty and Eight box cars for Paris about 500 miles north. The box cars were called Forty and Eight because they would hold forty men or eight horses, hold over from World War I!!

It took us about five days to reach Paris as the rail system was almost completely destroyed by the Allies to hinder the movement of men and supplies by the Germans. Arriving in Paris, we were given three day passes before we were to embark on the convoy back to Arles. I made inquiries and found out there was a W.A.C. Detachment stationed in "Orly" a suburb of Paris. Our motor pool Sergeant and I decided to spend our time together taking in the sights of "Gay-Paree" so we headed to the metro, Paris's subway system and found our way to Orly. It was easier to get around Paris on the metro than on the "underground" in London even though I did not know a word of French! Upon arriving on Orly I asked where the Air Force W.A.C. Detachment was billeted. A large building was pointed out and we walked into a beautiful ballroom set with small tables with white linen tablecloths set with china, silverware, and crystal glassware. What a change from our living in tents, standing in an outdoor chow line and sipping your mess gear in a garbage can of boiling water!

There were several W.A.C.'s hustling about and I asked if a Sergeant Anselowitz was with the unit. She said that Sergeant Anselowitz was in charge of this dining room and that she would go look for her. I really lucked out finding her so readily! When she came into the room, I heard her scream "Bud" so loud my ears were ringing!

It is difficult to describe the emotion felt at a time like this! Her husband, Sergeant Edward Anselowitz had been killed in action in France on August 8th, 1944. Our brother had been seriously wounded in Germany and here I was, her little brother, standing here in her dining room in Paris!! Wow! After the hugs, after the tears were dried, she had us sit at one of the tables and she had several French waitresses who worked for her, bring us the best meal either of us had since leaving home years ago!

While sis had duties to perform, my buddy and I took in the sights of Paris by day and the night life of Paris, with sis, in the evenings. One day we walked the Champ Elysees, went to the Arc de Triomphe, the Eifel Tower, the Cathedral of Notre Dame, and last but not least, the Follies! That evening when sis found out that we had gone to "Pigalle Place", she gave me hell for going to a nude burlesque show. Typical big sister, looking out for her little brother!

All too soon it was time to say "adieu" as I had to head back to Arles and to whatever else fate had in store for me. The war in Europe was over for several months, but there was a lot more going on in the Pacific! After extended hugs – we reluctantly departed.

Our motor convoy of one hundred vehicles, mostly two and half ton six sixes left the race track, bound for Marseille. The motor pool Sergeant and I were to bring up the rear to be able to assist anyone who needed help. The Quartermaster Corps. maintained fuel dumps spaced about a thankful of fuel apart along our route. Some of the more enterprising members of this convoy soon learned that there was a strong demand for black market petrol, among other items, in the civilian population. These French had been deprived of so many items by the German population for the last four years. A five gallon jerry can of gasoline brought \$30.00 on the black market. That was a lot of money in 1945! Soon we learned that some of the drivers were teaming up and upon leaving a refueling stop, would drive a short distance down the road, stop and drain the gas from every other vehicle, leaving just enough gas to drive into the next refueling stop. They would tow the drained truck to just before the next gas depot, drive in, refuel, drive out and repeat the procedure!

There were French civilians with all kinds of containers who some G.I.'s who were selling their dirty underwear, socks, or anything wanted on the black market.

Some gambled away their ill gained funds on the way back to Marseille either by playing "craps" or porker! Some did not and upon returning to Arles; they sent rather substantial amounts home!

Upon arriving back in Arles, I parked my truck outside a transient mess hall and went in to eat. When I came out, I saw that my duffle bags with all my clothes, gear and souvenirs from Paris had been stolen! I was furious not only about my gear being gone; but so was the name and address of the cute little blonde I had met at one of our overnight stops!!

I had a hell of a time convincing my company commander that I hadn't sold all my clothes and gear! Eventually I was reissued everything I needed from my pal, the supply Sergeant, but that blonde's address was "kaput".

There were several incidents after V-E Day that we found rather puzzling. One was while we were convoying from northern Germany to southern Germany and through France. We noticed the sudden appearance of large hand painted number "88" on walls, fences, buildings, etc. We at first thought that it was referred to the famous or infamous German artillery piece the 88mm. This weapon was extremely powerful and accurate! It was used as artillery, anti-aircraft, anti-tank or fired on a flat trajectory at troop concentrations. We soon learned of another possible explanation of these huge numbers 88. The eighth letter of the alphabet is an H, so 88 could stand for H.H. or "heil Hitler" which had been banned from being used since the war ended in Europe. There were still some die hard followers of "Uncle Adolph". You can draw your own conclusions as to which; if either could be the reasons for the appearance of these numbers!

The other question we wondered about was the appearance through out France of signs saying "Ami go home". The word in French for friend is "ami". These signs were again on buildings, fences, walls, etc. The war in Europe was over only a couple of weeks when these signs began to appear! Why were the French so damn eager for the U.S. to get out after we had just liberated them from four years of Nazi occupation? Believe me, there was no one any more eager to go home than I!!

Evidently this was not to be at this time as my unit was about to be deployed to the Pacific Theater of Operations!

Having survived the devastating war in Europe we were disappointed to learn of our redeployment. The only bright spot to lighten our gloom some what was the rumor of a U.S.O. show coming to Arles! Lord knows, our morale sure could use a boost! Two days later, thousands of us crowded into an open-air amphitheater, in blazing sun, to see the show. Headlining this U.S.O. Troup was none other than Bob Hope himself! In the cast also was also one of my favorites, Betty Hutton! I was close to the route the staff cars would use to bring in the cast members to the improvised stage. The staff car with Betty Hutton drove slowly past with her smiling and waving from the back seat. The show was outstanding!!

It was an event we would remember the rest of our lives! Bob Hope was hilarious as usual. He was a great American for bringing so much joy to millions of military personnel around the world! There is no way he could be adequately honored for his contribution to the war effort!!

As a footnote to the above: Sometime after the war, I was talking to my friend at home and the subject of the U.S.O. came up, and I remarked about seeing Bob Hope and Betty Hutton in Arles France in August 1945. I told him I was close when Betty Hutton was driven in. He asked if I had seen him? Taken aback somewhat, I replied "Where were you?" and he said "I was driving the staff car with Miss Hutton!!" "So near but yet so far". On the fourteenth of August 1945, we embarked from the port of Marseille for the scheduled forty-five day voyage through the Mediterranean, across the Atlantic, through the Panama Canal, and across the Pacific to the Philippines, where we were to stage for the invasion of the Japanese home islands!! We were aboard the USS General Breckenridge troop ship. Also aboard was a detachment of army nurses who were being redeployed also. Morale at this time was at rock bottom for all aboard!

We had been told, while training in Arles, that we would probably be in the early waves of the invasion of Japan. If this were true, we were told our "life expectancy" was less than three minutes!! What a morale booster!!

We passed through the straits of Gibraltar into the Atlantic for the tedious voyage to the Philippines. Suddenly we heard the familiar sound of the ship's intercom "Now hear this"- it repeated "Now hear this, this is the captain speaking. We have just received word that Japan has surrendered and that our destination is now New York harbor".

It would be futile on my part to even try to describe my, or anyone else's feelings at this time! All I can say is that at this moment there was

absolute silence aboard, eerily so, and then almost like on cue, pandemonium!! I swear, you could almost feel the ship rock from side to side as everyone aboard was dancing for joy, hugging, back slapping and screaming for joy!!

Immediately, all war time restrictions on board were lifted. We were no longer confined below decks after dark. This restriction had been in effect so that is you smoked up on deck, lighting up or even the glow of your cigarette could be seen in the dark by lurking submarines! Some of us brought our bed rolls out on deck and slept on the hard steel up in the bow. It was wonderful out in the fresh sea air under the stars!

On the 24th of August 1945, after nine days at sea, our troopship steamed slowly into New York harbor in a drizzling rain. We crept easily past the Statue of Liberty. New York city's fire boats spraying multiple streams of water into the air. Many signs hung from buildings saying "Thanks For a Job Well Done", "Welcome Home" and "God Bless"! I believe every damn ship in the harbor was blowing its horns and whistles! It was a warm welcome home, unhampered by the weather. Everyone aboard was on deck in the steadily falling rain. There wasn't a dry eye in the multitude and I guarantee it was not from the rain!

We disembarked and were entrained to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. Where we were treated to a steak dinner with all the trimmings! We were processed and shipped to reception centers nearest our homes. I went to Fort Dix and received a thirty day rest and recuperation leave which was later extended another fifteen days!

While at Camp Kilmer, I phoned home to let my parents know I was back. My dad answered and he said they knew I was back and were waiting for me to call! I asked how he knew. He said that our local paper was now reporting what ships were scheduled to dock in New York along with a list of units aboard. He had seen the 1285th Engineer Combat Battalion listed!

I arrived home to a joyous reunion with my family and friends! My sister, Marie was still in Europe, but was to return soon. Brother Charlie was in a military hospital on Long Island where additional surgery was to be performed to try to repair his left arm that had been shattered by enemy fire.

By the middle of October 1945, I was back at Camp Bowie, Texas where the 1285th was to reassemble. We were grossly under staffed as many

of our unit were being discharged at their reception centers. At his time I received a promotion to Sergeant First Class and assigned as First Sergeant of Company C. Our unit was assigned to the newly formed "Strategic Strike Force" and a training period was started. By January 1946, it was decided that the 1285th Engineer Combat Battalion was to be deactivated!

Our company commander called us together and stated that he was as anxious as the rest of us to go home and that he didn't want to be held up by paperwork explaining where all the extra weapons came from that we had acquired while fighting in Germany! I don't care what you do with them, just get rid of them! Naturally I had to obey orders, so I built a box and shipped home the M-1 that I had founding the Rhine River and carried the rest of the war. It was a U.S. rifle, caliber 30 M-1, Springfield armory, serial number 2265478. On the bolt – D28287-12SA, S-811 ♦.

Early in February 1946, I received orders to report to Fort Dix, New Jersey to be separated from the service!

I was with the 1285th from its inception and it seemed only fitting that we both should fade into history at the same time!

AMEN

Epilogue

These were indeed trying times! Many young men like myself were forced to grow up in a hurry! One day you're a high school student and the next day you're on your way to become a soldier, sailor or marine. You would be learning various methods of killing and causing destruction! You either grew up fast or you fell by the wayside. Homesickness was often a factor. Especially for young men like myself who had never been far from home.

At one time as a Sergeant and Squad Leader at the advanced age of nineteen, I had several men in my squad who were thirty-eight years old! They were old enough to be my father! I was responsible for their well being, training, to see that they were properly fed, clothed, received medical care. I guarantee that this was an aging factor of major proportions!! There were times when you wondered if you were really up to the task at this age, to live up to what was expected of you!


I had always loved the outdoors. Hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, skiing. When I arrived in Europe and saw the utter destruction of centuries old cities, rivers and streams littered with destroyed bridges and the pollution of war! Forests practically denuded of trees. Livestock and wildlife lying dead and bloated in the fields. This acutely brought home to me the possibility that this could also happen in my hometown if the war were allowed to spread to our shores!!

These feelings became quite evident in a verse I scribbled, over a period of months, in a small notebook. I had to be careful that my men didn't see their Sergeant writing poetry! Many years later, I came across this notebook while going through some memorabilia in the attic. In this sweat stained and dirty notebook were the verses I had scribbled so many years ago. I had evidently called it "A G.I.'s Prayer". In reading it to myself and then my wife, it brought back memories and a little moisture to my eyes! I also recalled the last stanza of the poem and how reciting it to myself when things seemed their worst, sustained me through some harrowing times!!

Going into the service was probably the best thing that ever happened to me up to that time! Many things I learned in the army are still serving me well to this day! When I was promoted to Sergeant, and "old-timer" said to me, "Always remember, you can lead men further than you can drive them!"

and "You can demand respect until hell freezes over, but the only way you will ever get it is to earn it!"

The old saying "necessity is the mother of invention". Well that most certainly proved to be true thousands of instances by G.Is in W.W. II! One example was the way we found to eliminate the coating of grease coating our mouth, teeth and tongues from eating cold "C" rations in the field. We rarely had the time to build a fire or the dry wood needed. We would take a stick of our bayonet and poke a hole in the ground. Then we'd take a clump of explosive composition c-4 and roll it between our palms to a long thin roll. Drop it into the hole in the ground and light it with a match or lighter. It would burn fast and hot and easily warm a "C" ration. G.I. ingenuity!

Refugees were a problem as soon as we completed a floating bridge over the Rhine! Many were civilians who had fled the fighting days or hours earlier and were trying to return to their shattered homes and villages. There were thousands of military personnel also who were fleeing the Russians to surrender to either the Americans, British or Canadians! The sheer weight of numbers were interfering with the free flow of men and supplies. We could only let them cross when there was a break in a convoy. One soldier who was obviously an officer in the  by his insignia, was still carrying his pistol which I relieved him from immediately and sent him to headquarters, under guard, for interrogation. I put the pistol in my pack and promptly forgot it. Weeks later the Germans surrendered!! The war in Europe was over!!

The order came down that even though the war was over in Europe, no one was to leave out billets without being armed! There were some diehards and snipers who were causing problems. Now I remembered the pistol I had taken from that officer! It was now that I wished I had taken the holster too. I found a small shoe repair shop and the owner agreed to make a holster for me. He took some measurements and said to come back later and he would have it made. When I returned he had made a nice shoulder holster with a pocket for a spare clip too. For this he charged the outlandish sum of \$1.00!

Having carried my M-1 Garand, eaten with it, slept with it for so long; it was a pleasure to go about with just this pistol! The pistol was a 7.65mm Mauser, semi-automatic. Serial number 430794. I carried this pistol the rest of my time in Germany. When I became a police officer in 1954, I also carried this pistol while on plain clothes investigations.

I have a military authorization certificate allowing me to bring this pistol home. It is in our safety deposit box at First National Bank of Scotia.

I can't tell you how very proud I am of my family's contribution to the war effort during WW II!

My father, who served in WW I, worked in the General Electric research lab. Although most of his work was classified, I'm sure he was involved in developing and testing projects to aid in prosecuting the war.

Mom had always been a "stay at home" mother for us kids. She also went to work at General Electric in a defense job. She also trained as a nurse's aid and worked another volunteer shift at Ellis Hospital!

My younger brother, Bill, was too young to serve in the military. He worked summers at a near by farm with all the chores that go with plowing, planting, harvesting and marketing truck loads of vegetables.

My sister, Marie, served in the W.A.C.'s in London, Paris and Germany attached to the Army Air Force. Her husband, Edward Anselowitz was killed in action in France shortly after "D" Day.

My brother, Chuck, (C.F. Moehle, Jr.) was wounded in action in Germany when a bullet shattered his left arm.

I remained relatively unscathed after fighting with the Combat Engineers in the battle of "Central Germany". Two minor wounds looked worse than the amount of blood indicated. I came home in one piece with only some loss of hearing.

These are but a few of the memories of but one of the more than ten million men and women who served in uniform during WW II, and the many millions more on the "home front" who worked long hours, went without many rationed items, to aid in the war effort. More than four hundred thousand Americans gave their "last full measure of devotion" to their country! They are the true heroes!!!

My Itinerary WW II

Camp Upton	Long Island	Mar. 1943
Camp Wolters	Texas	April - July 1943
Texas A&M College	Texas	July 1943
Illinois Inst. Tech.	Chicago, Illinois	Aug. - Nov. 1943
Camp Wolters	Texas	Nov. - Dec. 1943
Camp Robinson	Arkansas	Dec. - March 1944
Camp Howze	Texas	March - Oct. 1944
Camp Bowie	Texas	Oct. - Nov. 1944
Camp Shanks	N.Y. P.O.E.	Dec. 1944
At Sea		Dec. 1944
England		Dec. 1944 - Jan. 1945
France, Belgium,		
Holland, Germany		Feb. - June 1945
Arles, France		July - Aug. 1945
At Sea enroute to		
Pacific		Aug. 1945
Home on Leave		Sept. - Oct. 1945
Camp Bowie	Texas	Oct. 1945 - Feb. 1946
Fort Dix	New Jersey	Honorably Discharged
		Feb. 7, 1946

A G.I's Prayer 1943 – 1944

It seems so very long ago,
since I joined the ranks of men.
Who answered our country's call to arms,
maybe never to see home again.

I was barely eighteen the day I left,
I'll never forget that day.
I wanted so much to be a man,
then again I wanted to stay.

It was a tougher job than I ever thought,
to be a man I mean.
But I never stopped to think of that,
after all, wasn't I eighteen?

In the few moments I have to myself,
at the close of each busy day.
I tilt my tired head skyward
and in a silent voice I pray.

Dear Lord, Ruler of all Mankind,
I humbly beg of thee,
to watch over all the folks at home,
and to make a man of me.

To keep the things I left behind ,
the same as they were before.
I left my peaceful home and friends,
and went away to war.

Oh Lord please don't make a single change.
The trees, the fish, the game.
It's the wish of everyone of us,
to find these things the same.

OVER

It may be many months to come,
Before we see that day.
When we can live our lives again,
The quiet and peaceful way.

And so dear Lord, I'll leave thee now,
With confidence anew.
To do my job the best I can,
Cause I know that you will too!

AUTHOR

JOHN L. MOENLE