

## REMEMBRANCES

22 March 1943

Today I left my home at 760 North Broadway, Saratoga Springs, NY, to go to war. Said goodbye to mother at top of side stairs. She was crying. Grandmother stood at the foot of the side stairs holding on to the banister post crying and shaking all over. I never saw her alive again. I kissed her goodbye as I had my mother, gave her a long hug and was gone. Van (Lysle VanWagner) drove me to the bus at the corner of Lake and Broadway where I boarded it with some dozen other boys, many of them classmates from Saratoga High. As I recall the time was 11 AM.

Camp Upton, NY--While awaiting orders I was told to take a bucket of soapy water and a mop, go over to a walk way between some wooden barracks and scrub it down. It looked like the easiest way was to wet it down and then mop it dry so I threw the bucket of soapy water up the ramp just as a second Lieutenant opened the door. I caught him knee high. His screams brought people running from all directions, including a couple of WACS who stood there giggling. After what seemed like an eternity of verbal abuse as I stood at attention the Lieutenant left talking to himself and leaving large soapy foot prints behind him. I had to get another bucket of soapy water. This time I put the mop in the bucket and then did the floor.

Basic Training was at Miami Beach. Our quarters were in a hotel on the corner of 33rd and Collins, across the street to the east was the Cadillac Hotel and then the ocean. My GI shoes were to big and rubbed my feet raw. At night I had to soak my blood soaked socks off my feet. One of the other guys got me sent to the medics who worked on my feet and got me a pair of GI shoes that fit.

My first real realization of war came one night when I was on guard duty walking the beach when a flash followed by a red glow on the horizon indicated a ship had been torpedoed out there off shore. A heightened sense of awareness came over me-- people really were killing each other and I was now going to be a part of it. The glow drew quite a crowd and I had to keep yelling at them to stay off the beach as those were my orders. On one of my days of KP in the hot part of the afternoon a negro civilian asked me if he could have a drink of water. He was working there for the military. I said sure and gave him a drink. Before he could finish it I heard a scream of rage behind me and was shoved violently aside as the mess sergeant smashed the cup from the black man's hand. I could not believe the terrible crime I had committed--I had given a "god-dam nigger" a drink of the white man's water. The "nigger" took off running and I was berated and given another 24 hours of KP on top of the 15 hours I was presently doing. He made sure that every minute of it was pure hell. It was my first exposure to the Southern Philosophy of "all men are created equal". I was too scared to say or do anything but I have never forgotten it.

Chanute Field, Ill.--- Up at 4:30 AM every morning, calisthenics, chow and go to Heavy Equipment Operators School. MOS 931. First lesson was by a buck sergeant who put me in an autocar tractor with trailer. Showed me the gears and said "let's go". So far so good. Then he said "stop". I jabbed my right foot straight to the floor. We went from 20 MPH to zero in one second. The sergeant stopped in three seconds after the windshield refused to give. Nobody told me air brakes worked differently than hydrologic. A bloody nosed instructor with a growing lump on his forehead explained it all to me in the most glowing expletives.

Our barracks were two story wooden frame buildings. I was put on the second floor about half way down. Our Permanent Party Barracks Chief was a real SOB who came in nearly every night drunk and relished getting everyone up before he passed out. One night he had just finished getting the first floor awake when some guy near the top of the stairs on our floor cursed him out. Up the stairs he came --we all watched as the guy who had yelled at him caught him in the face with a football kick which sent him flying back down the stairs and right thru the screen door out into the street just as a jeep with the Officer of the Guard (OG) came by. It was a long night. No one saw or heard a thing other than the Barracks Chief who fell down drunk as he had nearly every night. We had a new Barracks Chief the next day. True or not the word was the old one had lost the end of his tongue when he bit it off by the teeth he lost when he fell coming up the stairs.

Graduation Day ceremonies were on 20 June 1943. My grandmother died 19 June 1943 and I went home for the funeral. When I returned a week later my class and all my friends were gone. I never saw or heard of them again.

Kelly Field/Duncan Field, San Antonio, Texas---A chance of a life time. The B-17 Memphis Belle landed at Kelly Field and we were allowed to see it and talk with its crew. First B-17 to complete 25 missions in the ETO. All this on Monday 19 July 1943.

El Paso, Texas--Twelve hour lay over in El Paso en route to Albuquerque, NM. Six of us went to town, none of us had any money to speak of. One of the guys had spent time in El Paso and said he knew how to get some money and we all went along. He and "his buddy" left us and went into this park. A little later they came back walking real fast and said "Let's get out of here fast". We did and went to another part of town. They had two hundred dollars. He and his buddy kept fifty dollars each and gave the rest of us twenty-five each. They had rolled a queer and taken his money. It seemed perfectly alright at the time as he really wasn't another 'person'. Had a real good time the rest of the lay over and got back to the train on time.

Albuquerque, NM--Kirkland Air Force Base--arrived on Friday 23 July 1943. Got chewed out by an old second Lieutenant for not standing at attention when I was being spoken to. Later I was talking to another GI and was telling him about that "dried up old prune faced son of a bitch" that had chewed me out. He was standing on the other side of the truck I was standing next to. Boy did I get put on report. Got threatened with everything from Court Martial on down.

Albuquerque, NM--Kirkland Air Force Base--continued

Got to know some girls in town. One named Jackie Shockley came from a family that owned a ranch along the Rio Grande river. Four of us used to go horse back riding. One starlit night we forded the Rio Grande on horse back and rode around in Mexico. On the return fording my horse stepped off the sand bar and we both went swimming the rest of the way across the river. The girls got a big kick out of drying my clothes while I sat next to the fire we built to keep warm. Found out for the first time Jackie is the daughter of Major Shockley Base CO. of a nearby field.

Went to town one night on pass with three other guys. Hit a bar in the "Spic" section. One of the guys switched signs on the Mens and Ladies rooms. These guys walked in and all hell was to pay. When they came running back out our guy was the only one laughing his butt off. It only took a second for them to figure out who had done what and they waded right into him. You don't leave a buddy so we joined the battle. The guy I hit went down and I jumped on him before he could get up. I was doing fine until the lights went out. When I came around two of my guys were dragging me down the street and I was bleeding all over myself. I had been hit across the back of the head with a bottle. I have the scar to this day. A couple of girls took us their place where we avoided the MP's that were now all over the place and I could get patched up and wash the blood off my uniform. Went to the Medics when we got back. Told them I fell off the truck and hit my head. They said "yeah, sure" but wrote it down as such.

Learned how to drive 'blackout'. Go by the 'cat's eyes' I quickly learned. At the rear of each vehicle on the extreme left and right are lights. Each light has two groups of two tiny lights. When you are the proper distance behind the next vehicle you see only two lights on each side. If you are too close you see four lights on each side and if too far away you see only one light on each side.

We used to love to switch the ignition on the trucks off and on as we went under the overpass going into Albuquerque. The backfire would make the girls scream who were walking on the sidewalks.

I believe we boarded our troop train on 7 September 1943 in Albuquerque and headed East according to the sun. At any rate we arrived in Camp Kilmer, NY on 10 September 1943. In between, we crossed the country on our troop train, drawing the shades on our cars everytime we came to a town. An officer posted a guard at each end of the cars with a Thompson sub-machine gun with orders to shoot anyone who tried to jump off the train. Guards were changed with each stop that required their presence. I believe it was in Ohio when my turn came. As the train slowed to a halt I put on my helmet grabbed my machine gun and swung off the platform to the ground, right in front of a little old lady carrying a bag of apples. I was standing in the middle of a RR crossing. The gates were down and people lined the gates waiting for the train to move. Her mouth flew open, the bag of apples fell to the ground spilling the apples. She grabbed her chest and the man next to her grabbed her.

The way I had landed had placed the muzzle of my machine gun only a few feet from her face. I had been forbidden under threat of Court Martial to even speak to anyone. A younger woman started to pick up her spilled apples and come under the gate. She froze when I swung my machine gun in her direction and quickly backed up. I then began to push what apples I could with my foot over to where she stood. People were trying to talk to me, offering food, cigarettes even money. All I could do was shake my head and form the word "no" with my lips. At last the train began to move and I quickly jumped back on the step of the platform. As we moved away I smiled, blew her a kiss and waved goodby. She started to cry and I heard someone say "he looks so young" then we were gone.

My last night in NYC with my mother and Aunt (Rita Knapp) was 17 September 1943. We went to a show after a nice dinner. We met at the Commodore Hotel where they were staying. As time grew short we retired to their hotel room to just talk and say goodbye. I called Bob Knapp, my cousin who was in ROTC working on getting his Navy Wings. We talked odds and ends, old times, etc. Finally it was time to hang up so I told him I would send him "a couple of pickled Krauts ears" when he got his wings. Now it was time to go for what might well be for the last time. We all ended up crying and hugging a lot. When I got to the door I turned around managed a smile and a wave and was gone.

We went over on the Queen Mary. One day the ship started taking violent evasive action and as many of us as would fit were put on deck with our life preservers. Standing in the row behind me was an Italian boy praying aloud. Finally I turned to him and said "I got a guy that owes me ten bucks. Nothing is going to happen to me until I get my money. Just stick close to me and you'll be safe." Would you believe he took me serious. I couldn't get rid of him for two days.

Sent to Wethersfield, England to pick up a P-38 that had landed there with one engine shot out. It had rained steady and I was driving a C-2 (crash truck) with a 40 foot trailer. Weight in excess of 14 tons. The P-38 was parked off the hard pan and when I picked it up with the crane and put it on the trailer it added another 8 to 9 tons to the load. We promptly sank into the muddy ground. I needed help at that point to get to firm ground. So--in the pouring rain, covered in mud from head to foot with water running off the brim of my hat I walked up to a British officer (he had two pips on his shoulder) who was standing in a hanger, saluted and asked him if he had a cat I could barrow. The look of shock and near panic on his face as he backed away from me clued me in he thought I was one of those maniacal Yanks he had heard about and probably was very dangerous. It took awhile. Finally I got it thru to those who suddenly showed up I wanted a caterpillar tractor (or a cat) to help me get to the hard pan with my load. And no, they didn't have a "cat". They did have some strips of steel matting that I used leaving a trench for them to repair you could drop a jeep into.

Two expressions from the ride over on the Queen Mary. "Hot stuff, comming thru" when the pots of hot coffee were brought out from the galley and over the loud speakers as the sun set from the ships Bridge "All Officers and troops will prepare to bed down for the night." Ah yes!

This is another addendum. I thought I had pretty well covered any events that might be of interest but a conversation with Don Summers of Grove, England at the reunion of the 45th Air Depot Group held from September 11 thru 14 of 1997 at the Harley Hotel in Cleveland, Ohio brought up one more. We were talking and he asked me if I was aware that the English lorry drivers brought many supplies to the American Bases. My memory took a jolt and yes I was aware that they did. Anyway, here it is.

It would have taken place in the late Fall of 1943 as I was on guard duty looking after some newly erected Quonset Huts pending the arrival of more troops. There was a cold rain falling, it was late at night and every step sloughed in mud. As I slowly walked around the four Quonset Huts in total blackness with rain pelting on my helmet and flowing in torrents off my slicker I heard voices and people approaching. The voices were English not American. As I had been trained to do I challenged with my rifle at the ready. It brought an immediate response to the effect to "hold on Yank we're lorry drivers and just got here". As I really didn't think they were German paratroops I said the usual "advance and be recognized". They came forward very slowly and very quietly. There was one that seemed to be in charge and spoke for the rest. As they got close their leader saw my rifle still pointed at his chest and stopped again saying words to the affect to please be careful with that thing. I lowered my rifle and even in the blackness could sense a 'whew !' on all their parts. There were some ten to fifteen of them and they had just arrived and were looking for some place to get out of the rain and rest for the night. Some of them had no rain coats and were getting soaked.

My orders were to guard or protect those four Quonset Huts. Protect from what? Damage ? Looting ? Anyone needing shelter from the storm ? My definition only covered the first two.

I pointed to the nearest hut and told them to go in there, build a fire in the stove and spend the night. At first they thought I was 'putting them on!'. Then there was a mad scramble to get out of the rain. Just in time to see the pin points of light heralding the arrival of a Jeep and the Officer of the Guard making his rounds. He was not pleased with my interpretation of guard or protect and promptly ordered everyone back out of the hut. Standing at attention he chewed me out royally from bad judgment to dereliction of duty. Flatly stated for all to hear they were a bunch of thieves who would strip the building down to the bare walls. "Request permission to speak, sir" Permission denied. As the lorry drivers finished coming out of the building I again requested permission to speak. This time the Lieutenant came around and stood looking me squarely in the eye. "Permission granted." We were barely a foot apart peering into each others face thru the pouring rain and blackness. "Sir, I thought they were on our side."

Silence. We just stood there staring into each others eyes. "Sergeant, get this man's name and unit." "Yes sir." Which he did as the Lieutenant sloughed over to the Quonset hut and went inside. It seemed like an eternity, standing there in blackness and pouring rain before he came back out. "Alright, they can stay the night but I want that building to be as clean when they leave as it was before they used it. Further, every item that is missing when they leave is going to come out of your pay, is that clear soldier?" He was starting to turn away when I replied "Yes sir, I accept that responsibility." He stopped, half turned to look at me and stared trying to decide if I was being smart but the rush of men back into the Quonset hut broke any tensions and he left in a shower of mud thrown up by his jeep's wheels.

Shortly after dawn the first of the lorry drivers began to emerge from the hut stretching and staring up at the clouds from which the rain had nearly stopped falling. During the night they had built a fire using "yankee" coal, warmed the hut and dried their clothes. They looked about as respectable under the circumstances as a bunch of lorry drivers could look. They had just about all gathered outside the hut when up comes the jeep with the Lieutenant in it. Without a word he went into the Quonset hut, emerging a few moments later to announce the floor was dirty and an axe was missing. I was not to be relieved from duty until the hut was swept clean and the axe was coming out of my pay unless I found it. Where upon he climbed back into his jeep and departed. The drivers gathered around me and their leader took off his cap and announced "everyone put something in it for the Yank". That I stopped real quick. Their leader urged me to take it but I was very firm about not wanting money for what had taken place. I did tell them that if they really wanted to show appreciation for the nights happenings they would clean the hut so I could get off guard duty and find the missing axe. 'Boss man' picked out several of the men and sent them back into the Quonset hut to give it a good cleaning. Which they did. The others were told to look around and find the missing axe. Which they also did. Now it was time for them to go and the sun was beginning to find holes in the clouds. They stood in a group around their head man getting instructions, when that was done they came over to me and one by one shook my hand. Some said "thanks Yank" some just nodded but everyone looked me straight in the eye as they shook my hand. Something passed between us that morning, I'm not sure what it was but we all felt it and were better off for it. They had not been gone long when a 6X6 came along picking up us guys on guard duty and took us back for breakfast. I wonder what they got to eat, if anything. I wonder if the Lieutenant ever went back again looking for the axe?

It was a warm sunny day in early October 1943. I was in London with time on my hands and ended up standing along the river Thames, leaning on a chest high parapet across from the Parliament buildings and just day dreaming. Was I really here in England? Or just dreaming? So much had happened in the last six months. Wonder what is going on back home right now? Wonder what lies ahead? Wonder if I will live to go home again? If I do, where will I be ten years, fifty years from now? But the Parliament buildings are real so is this parapet so is the water I'm looking down at and so is the warm sun on my back. I must be here in London, England.

In the late Fall of 1943 and the winter of 1944 we used to make runs from Grove to Coventry with 6X6's for fuel. Fuel being coal brickets compressed from coal dust. After the first trip I dreaded all the rest. Coventry was a city completely destroyed. Only thing I remember standing was the front part of a church. Living in the rubble were its people--and its children. When we picked up our load of coal inside this huge barbed wire compound and formed up the convoy to exit the gate this Master Sergeant came down the line of trucks and gave each of us drivers orders to floor it and stop for nothing or the kids would strip our load of fuel by climbing on the truck and just throwing it to others below. He also told us the little boys and girls would run out in front of us to try and make us stop so the older kids could get on the trucks and just keep throwing off the coal as long as they could--right on out of town in fact. The sergeant went on to say at the last minute the kids would jump aside if it looked as if you were not going to stop. The obvious question was asked over and over and answered over and over--what if one isn't quick enough and we hit one? Keep going was the order, we'll take care of things here. I remember my eyes filling up as I looked at all these little boys and girls lining our path with the older boys and girls standing just behind them waiting for us to start. And I wasn't the only driver who was having a hard time handling this. I saw one little girl maybe six or seven kneel down a few feet into the road put her hands in the prayer position and stare at each driver as they approached. They destroyed us, but we kept going. I've known drivers to go on sick call rather than make that run. But, as usual, we drivers pretty much solved the problem. On later runs we would load the coal so that by rolling the wheel violently as we came to the children coal would fly off on both sides and they would keep out of the road. We always caught hell for doing this but no disciplinary action was ever taken that I know of and no child was ever run over that I heard of. When ever I picture that little girl kneeling in the road my eyes still fill up and I hold my breath.

Stayed over night in Stratford-Upon-Avon when sent to Tiddington a couple of different times. On one trip found Shakespeare's house. Sat out front in my truck and just stared at it--gee, I really am here! This is really where Shakespeare lived! Who would have ever thought I would have ever seen let alone been to Shakespeare's home. Incredible!!



From 25 October to 11 December 1943 I was put on Detached Service (DS) from Grove to Thatchm to aid in the assembly of Gliders for the D-day Invasion. I made a number of friends and one very unforgiving enemy.

It all started innocently enough when one evening I went to Thatcham and walked into a Pub. There were a number of others there, mostly GI's. Over to my right was a scuffle between a very young looking English girl and a very drunken second Lieutenant. As I stood there just inside the door the girl broke loose and ran over to me. I can't remember all the exact words but it was to the effect that I was late for our date and she was glad I was here. The way she hung on to my arm and the look on her face said the rest. Now the Lieutenant was on his way over and was telling me to get lost. I heard myself saying words to the effect that I was sorry sir but she was my date. He came back with words to the effect that she wasn't my date anymore and tried to push past me. I gave him a shove and he doubled up his fist--I raised my arm with fist doubled to protect myself and another Lieutenant came rushing over and grabbed this guy before any blows were struck. As he was being escorted away he kept shouting words to the effect that he would get me for this, etc. etc. The rest of the evening was peaceful and I had the company of a very nice young lady named Hilda. I remember her name because my buddy's fiancée who lived in Oxford was named Hilda.

Two days later I was told to take a 6X6, pick up a Captain, drop him off where he wanted to go and then pick up some supplies on the other side of the field. I was to pick him up on the way back. No problem. After dropping him off part way around the airfield I picked up the supplies and started back. I was on the opposite side of the airfield from where I was going when I passed some buildings and standing in front of one was my unforgiving Lieutenant. He saw me and I saw him. I kept going but watched in my rear view mirrors. I had just picked up the Captain when I saw a jeep start up from where I had seen this Lieutenant standing. And it was coming fast. My instincts told me I was in trouble. I stopped at the intersection of the next runway and taxi strip as required and then asked the Captain to please look at my speedometer which was registering 30 MPH--the legal speed limit and to please keep track of it. The look I got was a 'what the hell is wrong with you?' I then told him of the events of the other night. And the Lieutenant's threats. And I believed he was in the jeep that was closing fast behind us. Probably going to charge me with speeding or reckless driving or something that would be cause to go on my record. My instincts were right. The Lieutenant and his driver closed up tight to my tail gate and then came quickly around to the cab where the Lieutenant screamed at me to pull over. Which I did. He was still shouting when he said 'I told you I'd get you for the other night. You're going to be one sorry soldier.' Up till then I don't believe he realized there was someone else in the cab or just didn't care but he sure wasn't ready for the volcano that erupted next to me. I have never seen or heard one officer verbally abuse another in the presence of two enlisted men as that Captain did to that second Lieutenant. He had him standing at attention. Then marched him around the front of the truck 'at attention' then peeled him like a ripe banana. The jeep driver put his head down and looked the other way. I just sat quiet and looked straight ahead. It ended with the Captain telling him he was giving me his name and how to contact



him in case he ever bothered me again for any reason. If he did he promised he would prosecute him as he was a disgrace to his uniform and to the officer corps. DISMISSED !!!!! The color had not returned to the Lieutenant's face as the jeep did a 180 as it left and the color had not left the Captain's face as he tried to calm down. He said he wanted to apologize to me for that officers conduct and if I ever had a problem with him again he ment what he said about contacting him and he would take care of it. At that moment if he had asked me to go to Hell for him all I would have said is 'yes sir' and gone. When we got back and he started to get out I said 'thank you, sir. You ARE an Officer and a Gentleman'. He nodded that he had heard me and walked away. I never saw either one again.

One day while at Thatcham I walked into a machine shop where several GI's were grinding the belt buckles on their san-brown or dress belts. I quickly found out it was being done for self-defense. The dress belt was of leather about aninch and a half wide with a large brass buckle that could be ground from the under side to a razor's edge. It was easy to take off and wrap around one's fist leaving several inches of belt free. Used like a mace it could do terrible damage to a person. It sounded like a good 'secret weapon' to have so I went and got mine and they did it for me. You just had to be careful when putting it on and off not to cut yourself.

On one of our numerous trips to London we stayed over night. Another driver (who I shall leave nameless) and I were walking around Piccadilly Circus and being propositioned by 'ladies of the night' when my buddy decided to take one up on her "suggestion". I laughed as I listened to them haggle over price. "I have to make it before me vagina wears out"--"I only want to rent it not buy the damn thing"etc,etc. Finally they agreed on five pounds. Now my buddy wants me to go along and stand guard so he wouldn't get rolled. The moon was full, the room small with only a single bed and dresser. Also a chair in which I sat by the head of the bed. As they were fulfilling their agreement the moon light streaming thru the open window kept catching his bare bottom everytime it rose and fell. Finally I could contain myself no longer and started chuckling. This infuriated the girl and everything fell apart. She was mad, he was mad and I was a SOB. He finally cooled off and we went into a Pub for some warm beer.

In early December 1943 we "lost" a convoy of 6X6's for most of one night. There were five trucks, no moon, black as the inside of a coal mine. As the convoy reached an intersection the passenger in the lead truck flipped his cigarette out the right side of the cab. The next truck being a little to far back thought it to be the lead truck turning right followed it. The lead truck arrived back to base safely. Several hours later the other four trucks finally arrived. They took a lot of kidding like 'here's my cigarette butt--do you want it or go fetch!'. So much for blackout driving.

On 15 September 1944 at shortly after dawn we started our engines and began our trek from Grove to our Port of Embarkation and France. I was assigned a 6X6 loaded with rations for the Squadron. I also was pulling a two wheeled trailer loaded with more rations. Ahead of me were the tractor-trailers including the C-2 or Crash Truck pulling a 40 foot trailer loaded with four crated aircraft engines. We passed thru Newbury and headed south to Whitchurch. Shortly after leaving Whitchurch we arrived at this small village whose name I do not recall and the convoy ground to a halt. After a few minutes I could hear shouting up front so I climbed out of the cab and walked up to see what the problem was. Rybcinski (John) was driving the C-2 and it was firmly wedged in a Zig Zag in the street. Try as he might there was no way he could get thru. As I stood there a Major came back in a jeep and after some discussion asked Ribby what he needed to do to get moving again. Take that corner off that building sir he replied. Then do it soldier, you're holding up the war, the Major replied. Ribby engaged all ten wheel drive, put it in low low and proceeded to drive thru the corner of the brick building. As the bricks came crashing down the windows all shattered and some furniture came tumbling out of this gapping hole. Bricks mashed down the hood broke the head lights and windshield but we were on the move again. I couldn't help but feel sorry for those poor people living in this quiet little English village. We had again done more damage to them than all the Germans put together.

Our POE was Southampton. We arrived late in the day and went straight to the docks. Before we left Grove we all had been issued 60 rounds of ammunition for our M2 carbines and for us drivers to leave our weapons in the weapon racks in our trucks. When the crane picked up my truck and put it in the ships hold my rifle went with it.

As darkness closed in our ship began to move. The crossing was to be at night. Stories still abounded of mines in the Channel, both theirs and ours and of sneak raids on shipping by the Germans. While most went below I decided it was safer to stay on deck--just in case. I was standing on the Port side about mid-ships in total darkness when out of the night came the bow of another ship coming straight at us at a 45 degree angle to our Port side. Suddenly our transport heeled over hard to Starboard and almost at the same instant the other ship did the same. All I could do was clutch the ships rail with both hands and watch the ships sliding sideways in the water as they came at each other. As we started to slide by each other I saw two men on the other deck clutching their ships rail with mouths wide open and then oblivion as this giant wall of water shot up between us tearing me loose from the rail and sending me sliding down the deck grabbing widely at anything. Then it was all over. I lay there choking and gasping for breath and soaked to the skin. Below decks things were a mess as well. Fortunately no one was seriously injured altho many had bumps and bruises and some equipment was banged up. The rest of the crossing was peaceful.

At dawn we lay off Omaha Beach and LST's were coming along side. First the deck cranes off loaded our equipment into the LST's (Landing Ships Tank) then rope netting was flung over the side. We scrambled down the rope netting into the LST's and they moved off and began the run to the beach. I climbed up on my truck to see over the ramp. As I watched Omaha Beach come toward me all I could do was wonder how many of our guys had watched the same sight on D-Day. And for how many it was the last thing they saw.

The LST headed for the end of a pontoon dock that ran around 150 yards or so out into the sea. It was made up of large rectangular metal floats tied together two wide and bouncing up and down with every wave. The trick was to stay exactly in the center with the weight distributed evenly or suffer the consequences of sliding off sideways into deep water. One 6X6 belonging to someone who had preceded us lay on its side in the water with its cargo still on board. Hard rubber tires on wet metal that rose and fell with every wave was like driving on ice but we all made it safely to the beach. We crossed the beach and continued till we hit a small road behind the beach where we turned right; they stopped to form up our convoy before proceeding. We had only gone a short ways when we came to a tiny hamlet named Grandcam where we turned inland. When we reached St. Lo I thought I had seen destroyed cities like Coventry but this place did not have a pile of stone any higher than my head. It simply did not exist. A road had been bulldozed thru the piles of stones that had once been a village. We continued inland. Suddenly I realized something elce--my rifle and ammunition were missing. I had just invaded Europe without a pot or a window let alone a gun.

At our next break I reported it to a Lieutenant who promptly gave me hell for not taking better care of it. I was advised that if I didn't find it it would be taken out of my pay. The first rifle I saw without its owner holding it turned out to be my lost weapon. Later I found out I was not alone. Other drivers had the same thing happen. The best thing we could figure out was that when we left our rifles in our trucks the English sailors acquired them as souvenirs. So much for following orders. My bad day wasn't done with me yet. The road we were on had been pounded to pieces and some efforts had been made to fill in the bomb and shell holes but not very effectively. I managed to drop a trailer wheel into one as we zig zaged down the road. Over it went. Rations were scattered for half a mile and the trailer lay on its side. Again I caught hell for doing a lousy job of driving and costing the convoy time. The latter part of the afternoon we stopped at Argentan and were told we would bivouac there for the night. A little later Johansen (Edmund E.) our motorpool Corporal came to me and said an Officer had told him to send some one to check out a report that one of our aircraft was down up toward Falaise. For the life of me I couldn't understand what the difference was, we were in no condition to do much about it. I took a jeep and took the road that was pointed out to me as going to Falaise. As I neared Falaise I could see that one hell of a battle had taken place. I went thru Falaise and a mile or so north saw what was left of a C-47 off to my right. I decided to walk over to it. Part way over the smell of putrefying flesh became real strong so I followed my nose to a small brush filled riven. Down in there was the body of a dead German soldier. He had taken a large caliber bullet right thru the head. It looked like a .50 caliber round and he had been overlooked in the clean up after the fighting. I took his helmet off what was left after the round had exploded his head in pieces, shook out the mess and still have it as part of my World War II memorabilia. I reported back what I had found. It was just 'ok, just forget it'. I've often wondered if that man's bones still lie at the bottom of that riven. I have since read newspaper articles that French farmers still turn up skeletons of soldiers killed in World War One.

Our second night on the Continent was spent in Chartres, France. It was getting dark and raining hard. We were at the western edge of town and the word came down "find shelter for the night". There was this big beautiful old home off to my left with a wide verandah that looked undamaged so I headed for it. The front door was a double door with another set just inside the vestibule. A spacious main hall and a large living room or parlor with a magnificent fireplace were on the left. Also a sign stating in big bold letters 'ROOM BOOBY TRAPPED STAY OUT!'. And there over the fireplace hung a large Nazi flag. A small room with a spiral staircase to the second floor was across the hall from it. There were GI's from a number of different outfits already there seeking shelter for the night. In fact, the house was crowded.

I kept staring at that flag and saying to myself 'you just completed a course in booby trap neutralization, if you can't handle this---'! So after carefully examining the door way and floor for "replaced" flooring I went in. I immediately had guys hollering at me to get the hell out of there--couldn't I read? I brazenly told them I was a 'specialist' and was there to clear the room. The first thing I cleared was everybody from any where near that room, when I turned around I was alone. Checking as I went I approached the fireplace. Examined for loose stone, new mortar, freshly disturbed anything. Nothing. Next came the mantel. No evidence of removal and replacement. Now we were up to the flag itself. It was held in place by four fasteners to the wall--anyone of which could be the trigger. Standing on my duffle bag I could reach the two top fasteners. The top left one appeared to have a thin wire running into the crack between two boards that made up the wall behind the fireplace. The boards did not show any evidence of having been removed and replaced and the wire sagged. There was no tension on it. Using the tip of my knife I carried in my boot I carefully worked at the wire. Out it fell from the crack. It was not attached to anything. One by one I did the other three fasteners. No wires, no positive or negative attachments. One by one I undid the fasteners holding the flag and took it down. Nothing. I had my souvenir. I did check out the rest of the room. Dampers in the fireplace, up the flu for charges that were fused that a fire in the fireplace would ignite, windows, baseboards (the lights were on already in the room). Nothing. There was no booby trap.

I left the sign on the door and proceeded to settle down with a room all to myself. One problem. A lot of guys, I have no idea who they were or what outfits, were getting pretty well drunk and yelling and arguing over everything from who had what spot to the card games that were going on. As the stairs were right across the hall I could hear this one guy on the second floor ranting about the war, his officers, going home and wanting out, period. A few guys ( I assumed from his outfit) stood at the foot of the spiral staircase and discussed what to do about him. Finally a buck sergeant in the group said he was going up and get him before he hurt himself or someone else as he did have a gun. He hollered up to the guy and told him it was an order to put down his gun and come down stairs. The response was "I'll kill you if you come up." The sergeant started up and was met with a burst of fire from this guy's tommy gun. The burst hit the steps in front of the sergeant who cleared all the steps to the first floor in one jump. I never saw a bunch of drunks sober up so fast in all my life. Now this guy is screaming he is going to kill himself--then he is going to come down and kill everybody and then kill himself. By now everybody has a round in the chamber of their weapon and pointed at the staircase. The sergeant is trying to keep order as some of the guys want to open fire on him. Again the sergeant called to him that he was coming up and to put his gun down. It was greeted by another burst of fire from this jerk and more threats to kill everybody. His voice this time sounded as if he had about had it and was ready to pass out. The sergeant would call to him from time to time. I propped myself up next to the fireplace and parallel to the door of the room I was in with a round in the chamber and the safety on and dozed. Toward dawn I heard a ruckus on the stairs and slipped off the safety but it was only the sergeant dragging

this jerk down the stairs. I had to hand it to that sergeant he not only kept a bunch of drunks from going on a shooting spree but kept risking his own life to bring this guy down without anyone being killed or wounded. Somebody's beautiful staircase now needed work done on it. The most important thing to me, however, was that I now knew I could handle this mine and booby trap assignment. It did wonders for my own self esteem and self confidence. A little after eight o'clock we formed up our convoy and began day three in France.

Day three ended with us arriving at our next base, Melun, France. We arrived without incident by way of Mereville and Malesherbe. Our first job was to erect six man tents to live in. Next there were details made up to dig latrines. I saw them coming and took off in a truck to check out the area. The latrines were small holes completely inadequate. One evening as I was walking around I passed a guy relieving himself in a hole outside his tent. After I had thought about it a while I went back to look at the hole. At the bottom of it was an unexploded American bomb. I reported it and was told some Engineers would be called to remove it. Till then just leave it alone. Several days later some Combat Engineers that were just back from the front and living on the other side of the field were called in to remove the bomb; dig larger latrines for us Air Force guys. This did not set well, but orders were orders. Dig large holes they did. Using a post hole auger drill on the back of a truck they drilled a deep hole, packed it with explosives and presto we had a hole big enough to drop a tank into. The blast also panicked the place and the temporary latrine nearby collapsed into itself, current customers and all. Several tents also suffered. Our officers were quite upset but the Captain from the Engineers was nonplus. Orders were for them to go dig big holes for the Air Forces latrines and they had done just that.

One interesting note. French girls were hired to work for the Squadron. They were completely at home sharing our latrines. You could walk in and find yourself sitting on a hole next to a female--and chatting with her. It took a little getting used to but before long it got to be quite acceptable.

Driving began immediately. Maps we did not have. In doing some local driving mostly just to get the lay of the land I noticed in the Corbeil-Essonnes area a little north of us what appeared to be a site of a battle. I told the guys about it and several of us took a 6X6 in late September to check it out. It wasn't a battle, it was an ambush and our guys were wiped out. This according to what we found and a French farmer who claimed he witnessed it. There are a number of photographs in my scrap book of the ambush. There were two wheeled armored recons, a half-track a jeep and a 'grant or lee' tank. The tracks showed the patrol had come from the west across two open fields and had stopped in a small grove of trees. It looked like this was what the Germans had guessed the Americans would do as only the tracks of one recon and the jeep indicated any effort to move before being hit by the German 88 located in a depression across a distant road indicated by a line of trees.

The tank was parked a hundred or so yards to the north of the ambush and showed no signs of having made any effort to move. An 88 shell had gone right thru it and it had burned. The 'grant' would have made a first class machine in world war one but was pathetic to send against German armor let alone an 88. It didn't even have a revolving turret. Not one weapon those guys had could have touched that 88 at the range it opened fire. Those guys paid with their lives for the 'peace at any price' mentality America had prior to Pearl Harbor. As we walked and poked around the ambush I spotted something white and picked it up. It was what was left of a photograph of a long haired girl standing on the back steps of a house wearing a coat with a corsage pinned to its lapel and a big smile on her face. I started to pocket the photo when something more caught my eye just under the photograph in the dirt. It was the vertebra of a man. I picked it up and just stood there looking at the photo and the vertebra. I'm not sure why, only at that time it seemed like the thing to do---I dug a shallow hole next to the recon placed the partial photo thru the hole in the center of the vertebra and buried some girl's dreams where her man had fallen.

The French farmer had pointed out where the German 88 was located so we drove over to its location. There is also a picture of it in the photo album. It had been knocked out of action by a hit to the recoil mechanism--a shell still in the breech--at some later time.

The identification numbers on all the ambushed vehicles indicating the outfit to which they belonged was USA 6032541-S.

One thing I quickly learned was that 20 miles from Paris the French language I learned in school was hardly recognizable. That proved to be true all over the parts of France I was exposed to. The blending of the pronouncements of words varied from Normandy to what ever countries bordered France. Unreal.

One thing we quickly realized after we settled in was if we wanted to keep warm we would have to forage for our own fuel. Arrangements were supposedly being made with the local French populace to cut wood and supply our needs. This was far from satisfactory so we drivers decided to take matters into our own hands. One of the men who had made an official run to Fontainebleau from which the fuel supply was to come told us about the forêt de Fontainebleau. It was full of cut wood all ready to go. Late one afternoon I took a 6X6 out of the motor pool. The guy on guard was to get a share of whatever we were able to steal for not missing the truck. Five of our guys and myself drove the eight or nine miles to the forêt de Fontainebleau and quickly loaded up before anyone came along. As the motor pool drivers made up two tents we of course got the Lions share. Enough to keep the tent from which the motor pool guard came from warm and happy went to them. This worked a number of times as needed until on one trip the truck broke thru the surface of the swampy forest floor with its load and we were unable to leave quickly. By the time we did get out a number of French wood cutters had arrived and they were not happy. Not that I blame them. They were doing all the work, not getting anything for it and we were stealing them blind. Our position was we were liberating their country from the Germans and it was a small price to pay by supplying us with wood for the winter.



It might have ended there but one of our guys shoved a wood cutter hard enough to make him fall down. It quickly went from confrontational to physical and a donnybrook followed. It ended with me on the ground bleeding profusely from being struck on the head with the blunt end of an ax and one of our guys firing his carbine. They left and we left. I was suffering from a mild concussion I was told back at the medics and the scalp wound made it look like it was a lot worse than it was. I know I couldn't concentrate and felt like the world was on a stage around me. I was off the duty roster for two days. Word also got up the chain of command what was going on. We caught hell and were told if we went back again without proper authorization we would all be court martialed. I think we got off as easy as we did was because 'the brass' also realized we were not getting enough fuel to keep warm. Fuel supplies for the whole Squadron improved after that.

As an 'aside' on all this--Fontainebleau was the King of France's summer estate (see pictures of his summer home) and the Roi du Bois we were stealing wood from was his private property. His summer home had been turned into an Infantry OCS school by the Americans and the most gorgeous brothel you ever saw. The German Officers had private use of it until the Americans came, then it was everyone's. The brothel was separate from the King's home but conveniently nearby.

Liberty runs to Paris once we had settled down and got operational were a couple of times a week. That did not include liberty runs just for Officers. I don't know if it was our CO's idea or if it was some standing order but while drivers for enlisted personnel (an officer could go also and ride up front) going on a pass could be scheduled, drivers of an Officer(s) only going on pass could not order any driver to take him anywhere. They could only ask if someone would volunteer. These 'officer runs' were generally 24 hour passes and as the officer didn't care what you did as long as you got him where he wanted to go and got him back to base on time were 'good deals'. Especially if it was one of the younger officers who had a Red Cross girl with him. The Red Cross girls were 'off limits' to enlisted personnel but 'fair game' for the officers. Still, any romantic relationships were kept quiet. We soon had our 'working relationships' with our 'own' officers who knew they could rely on our discretion when we returned to base not to reveal the overnight happenings. Whether it was London or Paris or pick a city 'our' Officer(s) would give, in this case, me, the hotel and room where they could be found in case they did not show up at the appointed time and place for the return to base. It was not unusual later in our 'working relationships' to go to the hotel room and literally roust them both naked out of bed and get them going before retiring from the room while they finished getting dressed. Whenever possible I always brought coffee for them. In return I could always count on a quart of good American whiskey and once in awhile, two. That was the only legal way we were able to get 'the good stuff'. Of course we learned how to steal a lot but that is another story. In those days it was referred to as filling a 'moonlight requisition'.

The trips to Paris were numerous. On one, another soldier and myself were walking on the Champs-Elysees enjoying the sights and sipping wine in various Cafes when we hooked up with two French girls about our own age. They spoke quite good English having studied it in school before it was banned by the Germans. They also spoke German. They talked quite freely about what it was like during the German occupation. What the Germans wanted they simply took. That included girls. They both acknowledged having to had sex with German soldiers. To have refused was to be beaten and forced to anyway. The older appearing of the two said she had been taken with a girl friend by the Gastopo for questioning regarding the French underground. She said they burned her with cigarettes and pulled up her sweater. Under her sweater she wore nothing. Her breasts, chest and abdomen were all red pock marked where lighted cigarettes had been pressed against her flesh.

She asked us if we would like to see Gastopo headquarters where she had been tortured along with her girl friend who had died there during questioning. We said yes. We continued down the Champs-Elysees to the Palace de Concorde and bore left to the exit at that end. Next we turned right at the next intersection and several buildings down on our left she took us in and down to the basement. Leading us along a hall way we came to the room where she and her girl friend had been taken and told to strip. There were two bath tubs in the room, one filled with steaming hot water, the other filled with cold water that had ice floating around in it. She described how they were told to lie down and a German soldier would take their hands and feet, lift them up and immerse them first in the steaming hot tub and then in the ice filled tub. This was repeated as questions were shouted at them regarding what they knew about underground activities. She told us she actually did not know any information and therefore could not tell them anything. They began to hold them under for longer and longer periods of time and she began to lose consciousness. She said she regained consciousness and was tied in a chair while the Germans continued to question her. They would blow on their cigarettes and then press them against her nipples and breasts. While tied in the chair she watched two Germans trying to revive her friend. Finally a doctor was called who pronounced her dead. They all caught hell for going to far. She thought that was what saved her, for a short time later she was allowed to dress and leave.

She asked if we would like to see the rest of the basement interrogation rooms. We said yes. There were several but the worst was the one she pointed out that was used to interrogate known FFI collaborators or members. The room was about 10'X10' square with cinderblock walls, metal floor and bars on the front. Prisoners, male and/or female would be striped and put in the room and the floor would begin to heat. The bars were electrofied with high voltage. As the floor grew hotter and hotter those inside would try to climb the cinderblock walls. Blood was visible where people had clawed at the walls to escape their burning feet. Eventually those inside would fall to fighting among themselves. The weaker would be knocked to the floor as the others tried to stand on them. All the while they would be encouraged to talk. If they said yes they were released from the room. We spent the rest of the day together. The mood was somber. We bought them dinner and talked long and earnestly about the war. Sex never entered the conversation.

Most of the runs to Paris were very enjoyable. We would go sit around the Arc de Triomphe and just watch people. Visit the tomb of the unknown soldier, stroll on the Avenue de la Grande Armee, the Avenue des Champs Elysees, the Palace de Concorde, explore the Trocadero and at times just get on the Metro and ride. Half the time we would get lost and just wander around not knowing where we were. Somehow we always managed to find our way back. Of course, none of the above should be construed that we were not side tracked when we met friendly young ladies who offered to be our guides. Which was often.

'Action' was always available where ever you went. As the sun set one could return to the Cafes or go to the Moulin Rouge over Montmartre way. The Moulin Rouge had a large windmill on it and the live shows that went on were completely uninhibited. Six MP's were always stationed there with more on instant call if needed. And the need was frequent. Take all these GI's, some just back from the front on an R&R and were going back in a few days, all the booze they could drink and a lot of young naked girls running around on stage and it doesn't take long before the audience wants to join those on stage. Some nights were complete chaos. Others were just chaotic.

One night four of us hit a nudie show. All the performers were female and it was a big rape scene. This one girl came out wearing a large artificial penis. The rape scene concluded the show and the performers were taking their bows. This one girl was holding the artificial penis in her hand and waving it out over the crowd when Ned Loscinto jumped up and grabbed it right out of her hand. All hell broke loose. Ned ran for a side door to the cheers of the guys and the screams of the girls. It was locked. Back he raced across in front of the stage toward the other side as the girls jumped off the stage in pursuit. It was a bad decision on their part. Naked girls jumping into the midst of a bunch of GI's was all it took for complete chaos. Particularly after just watching a big sexy rape scene. We lost track of Ned but knew the screams and yelling that was going on would soon bring the MP's, we got out. Later we ran into Ned and he had his 'souvenir'. He had gotten out a side window in the melee. He had a lot of fun with it back at base.

On another Paris run three of us had wandered around the city all day. Toward evening we decided to go to the Enlisted Men's Club on the first level of the Eiffel Tower for drinks and a bite to eat. It was really living. The sun was setting, the sky was crimson and gold. Below the lights of Paris were coming on as darkness enveloped the city. We spent the evening up there eating and drinking and 'wondering what the peasants were doing tonight'. We wondered what Paris looked like from the next level in the tower. It was off limits and the staircase was enclosed with a heavy wire mesh for some thirty or forty feet at the bottom. The door was padlocked. I decided if they would watch for the MP's I could climb that mesh until I could get on the staircase and go up and see what it looked like. I climbed up hand over hand until I reached the open stairs and proceeded to the second level. After walking around awhile and enjoying a most fantastic view I started back down. It was fine until I reached the point where I had to leave the staircase and climb out and over the side onto the wire mesh. Going up I never looked down. Going down there was nothing between me and the ground but me and my fingers as I crossed onto the mesh. I did it but I don't know how. My hands were

sweating so badly I was afraid I couldn't hold on. There were no foot holds, just hang by your fingers as you let yourself down the mesh. Few times have I known fear as I knew it on that decent. I can't remember everything I promised the Lord if he would get me down safely but it was a lot. Finally I felt hands on my legs and I was down. "How was the view?" I was asked. "Fantastic" I said. "How was the climb?" they asked. "Oh, not bad" I replied. We were lucky. The MP's came by a few minutes later. That particular trip took place at war's end. AT the time we were stationed at Laon, France.

Just before leaving on another Paris run I heard via the grape vine I was up for another stripe. We were stationed at Laon, France, a run of about 80 or 85 miles one way. All went well on the way in until we got to Paris. I was driving down the Champs Elysees at 30 MPH (speed limit was 20 MPH) and didn't see the MP come up behind me. I got a speeding ticket. I knew this was enough to cost me my new stripe. A bad mood I was in. In a Cafe I ordered a couple of cognacs and was just sipping my third when I was jostled, spilling my drink. I said words to the effect of watch what the hell you're doing. And was told if I didn't like it to get the hell out of the way. That did it. I threw the rest of my drink in his face and hit him as hard as I could. He sat down, shook his head and got back up. At that point I knew I was in big trouble so I grabbed a chair and let fly. He ducked and it hit the MP coming thru the door. My day continued down hill. In a way the arrival of the two MP's probably saved me from a beating. On the other hand I was taken in and booked for fighting and striking an MP. I apologized for the latter but defended my actions regarding the former. They took it all down and kept me there until it was about time for me to pick up my truck and passengers. When we got back I reported it all to the First Sergeant Jones. When the MP's report came in I was given Company Duty and 30 days restriction to the base. And, of course, my stripe never came thru. A few days later I was sent back on the road.

One other Paris run was memorable. This one also from Laon, France. This one was before the end of the war, requiring blackout driving. We usually left Paris around mid-night and would get in between four and five AM. This time a convoy of maybe ten or 15 trucks got ahead of me and I was following it. As we passed thru this small village and started up a hill a French truck came out of a side road from the left and broadsided the last truck in the convoy, turning it over and scattering its load of GI's all over the road. The next to the last truck stopped to help so I took off to catch the head of the convoy and let them know what happened. Those poor guys in the back of my truck had the wildest ride of their lives as, driving blackout, I laid on the horn and started passing truck after truck on this narrow two lane road. Finally I reached the lead jeep and got them to stop. I hollered who was in charge of this convoy and this angry Lieutenant said he was and what's YOUR problem soldier. When I told him what had happened the mood changed dramatically. They tried to contact the last truck on the walkie-talkie--no response. They hollered 'thank you's' as they took off in the jeep going like hell back down the line of trucks. I took it real easy the rest of the way back as I had a bunch of real shock up and nervous guys in the back after the wild ride I'd put them thru.

On 10 December 1944 was told I would be leaving in the next day or so on Detached Service. Sergeant Cook (Travis R.) and two others besides myself were to proceed to Laon (the Airfield was actually at Couvron a few miles northwest of Laon). There we were to secure and prepare a designated section of the airfield for the later arrival of our Squadron. Ration for thirty days were to be taken. Find your own place to live after you get there. Sergeant Cook (Cookie) was in charge, a good man. My responsibilities were to be twofold. One, to provide the 6X6 truck and transportation as needed and two, be responsible for clearing the area of all enemy ordnance, mines and booby-traps. I also quickly found out I was the only one who spoke any French. By this time we had also acquired 'tourist' maps, pre-war, of the part of France we were in as well as part of Belgium. Next morning we left. We went by way of Meaux and Soissons to Laon. We found Laon to be a city situated on top of a hill that stuck up out of the surrounding area like a sore thumb. A fact I was to realize later that made it a perfect reference point for aircraft. Theirs and ours. It was around a hundred miles from Melun. Nobody had said just where the airfield was except 'at Laon' so we wound up in Crecy-sur-Serre before getting specific directions where to go. Again, I was having a hard time understanding the French they spoke as it was again 'different' from that around Paris. One piece of luck came out of it. The men I talked with were familiar with the airfield, having worked on it during the German occupation. If we needed help they would come work for us. They wrote some names down for us to ask for and we left.

The rest was easy. Some three or four miles down the road was the airfield and the tiny village of Couvron. Working from the sketch and information 'Cookie' had we located the area we were to stake out and prepare for our Squadron to occupy. More luck. There was a solid cement building about 150 yards from the taxi strip. It contained two rooms and one outside door. The first room had a stove init and a sink. The other room was empty. My buddies all sat outside in the truck while I went thru everything. It was clean so we set up housekeeping. We had two windows, one in each room. No glass but they were windows, both on the left side of the building as you walked in the door. The door faced the large concrete apron and the hangers. The hangers showed damage but for the most part were usable. Now the bad part. Scattered all over the area was live German ordnance. The worst were the anti-personnel mines and bombs. The next day 12 December was spent from dawn to dark clearing the immediate area around the building. While I found no booby traps everything had to be treated with great respect. Only a few of the AP mines had fuses in them but were not burried. It all spoke of great haste in departure. I used a bomb crater some distance away from the building to throw the neutralized mines into as a good collection point. Also the live ammunition. Next day, 13 December I went back at it. By mid-afternoon the concrete and other hard pan areas were cleaned off except for the aerialbombs. The HE's were not fused so we rolled these into bomb craters. As good a collection point as any. The aerial anti-personnel bombs were something elce.

These presented more of a problem. There were two kinds. Both were dispensed from a single shell. As the bomb was dropped its sides opened up like the pedals of a flower or the skin on a banana as it is peeled. As it rotated in falling tubes inside the bomb's skin flare out and the tubes dispense grenade size AP's. One kind would explode on contact. These weren't too bad to handle. In fact, we all had fun throwing them like a hand grenade and either dropping to the ground as they hit and exploded or throwing them into bomb craters to detonate. We stopped the bomb crater bit when we discovered a large unexploded HE bomb at the bottom of one of the craters into which we were pitching the AP's. The second kind were murder. These were 'butterfly' AP's. They came out the same way from the 'mother bomb' as the other ones did but then the clam shell casings popped open and rotated. This armed the device by rotating a gear with teeth. At the end of one revolution it was fully armed and would explode if touched. Even vibration from a passing vehicle would cause it to go off. There were 60 teeth or clicks on the arming gear. If the clam shells were fully extended as they lay there, was the wheel on one click or fifty-nine? If the clam shell was closed or only partly open then it could be carefully closed, locking the timing wheel and effectively neutralizing the device. These, like the others, were scattered all over the place. I decided to approach the problem by doing the easy ones first. Any that were closed or the clam shell did not appear to be fully open I would close, pick up and carry over to the 'mother bomb' for future disposal. We used the rest for target practice. Most we exploded, a few would not. If they did not detonate after four or five rounds I was pretty sure the mechanism was jammed. At any rate none of them went off when I put them with the others. A rather obvious statement. I still have my little book on Mine and Booby-trap neutralization. It was now late afternoon and coming around the airstrip's perimeter was a C-2 with a trailer. It was Tex (Dawson S. Jeter) and he was looking for us/me. He had been all day finding the dammed airfield and was one relieved guy when he finally spotted us. Orders were cut for him to find us at Laon, pick me up and proceed to Vielsalm, Belgium. Locate downed aircraft (P-47) and leave it at Laon to await the Squadron's arrival. I asked Tex where Vielsalm was, he shrugged and said "in Belgium". Fortunately the map I had had Vielsalm on it, about 140 or 150 miles. We figured one day up, one day to load and one day back. Three, four days at most. As long as no one wandered off the hard pan there really wasn't too much danger anymore. 'Cookie' said he could drive the 6X6 if need be and they would see about getting local labor while we were gone.

14 December. Tex and I took off for Vielsalm at dawn. We arrived late in the day and discovered we were almost to the Front lines, their laying some twelve or fifteen miles to the East. We located our aircraft shortly before sundown and set up for the night. It was just East of Vielsalm across the Salm River on the left side of the road. The next day, 15 December we salvaged what we could and loaded it on our trailer and debated whether to start back (it was late afternoon) or get an early start in the morning and try for it in one day. 'Try for it in one day' won out so we just relaxed and got things ready for an early departure in the morning.

16 December. We awoke before dawn to the sound of artillery in the distance. Decided we were really giving those Krauts hell this morning and it was too dark to get up yet as all we needed to do was have breakfast before starting back. Sometime later traffic was moving on the road and it was getting light. Also the sound of gunfire was incessant. We were getting ready to cook some breakfast on our little stove when a jeep and some GI's stopped long enough to holler that the Germans were attacking and coming down the road. Where? How far? Tanks? We decided to forgo breakfast and just get around and start back. We had some trouble getting back to the road with our load and this took time. Meanwhile more traffic was going past headed away from the sound of the guns. We were sure every motor we heard was that of a German tank by this time. And us with only our M2 Carbines. No place for us to be, besides our orders were to pick up this P-47 and return to Laon in France. On our way to Vielsalm we had come by way of Givet, Rochefort, Champion and La Roche en-Ardenne. We planned to return the same way. At the intersection of the road we were on and the north-south road running from Liege to Houffalize there was a road block. I explained to the Lieutenant that we were Air Force and bringing back a P-47 that had come down just the other side of Vielsalm. This failed to impress him. We were told in no uncertain terms he was acting under the rule of Combat Emergency that superseded any orders we might have. If it turned out not to be we would be allowed to continue on back to our own outfit. In the meantime we were Infantry. We had to dump our load and pull off out of the way as others were coming down the road behind us.

We did have one break. They needed the truck and trailer to move men and equipment so we got to stay in and with the large cab of the C-2 and not have to stay and sleep in the open. For the next several days we moved men and equipment up to the front and wounded back. There seemed to be a conglomerate of units arriving as those first days passed. Infantry, some armored, Engineers and later some Airborne were showing up. On the 21st of December we ran head on into the Germans. It had also snowed. We had passed thru Vielsalm on the road to St. Vith with a load of supplies and Infantry. The Lieutenant and his Sergeant driver who had stopped us at the beginning were in the lead jeep, then a 6X6 and then us. As we crested a rise a German Panzer tank hit the jeep. All hell broke loose. Fortunately the German gunner was trigger happy. Had he held his fire he might have gotten all of us. As it was, the rest of our column was partly below the rise we were going up. Tex went out the right side. I went out the driver's side. I ran to the jeep. The sergeant was missing from the waist down. The Lieutenant's legs were still in the jeep. His head and shoulders were nearby on the ground and his guts were strung out between. Some buck sergeant was yelling orders to run across a field to our right and into some woods. We crossed the field under fire losing a few guys in the process. Again, following shouted orders we went down a wooded slope and took up a line inside the tree line. We didn't have long to wait. German infantry came over a low hill and slowly advanced on our position. I'm sure they never knew we had stayed to fight as they were almost to us when the order came to fire. I doubt whether more than one or two made it back. I counted twenty plus bodies before orders came to pull back--fast. As we ran back up the wooded slope German fire began to pound our position. I heard



yell

someone for drivers to get their vehicles out of there. I hollered to Tex "I got it" and took off back down across the field we had come up. When I got to our vehicles the 6X6 in front of ours was burning. It wasn't until then that I realized I had never shut off the engine on our truck and it was just sitting there chugging along. That small rise saved us. I got turned around and picked up Tex plus a lot of other guys as we got the hell out of there only to reform again down the road. The vehicles continued back thru Vielsalm and the Infantry guys dug in East of Vielsalm.

On 22 December more reinforcements arrived. We also got a break even tho we were still being pushed back. The size of our C-2 and trailer was blocking traffic more than it was helping. When a Captain yelled at us we told him we were Air Force and he said words to the effect of getting that thing out of here and go back where we belong. We took that as our services were no longer needed and began to work our way West hoping to find any road that would take us back to Laon. We also need gas as we had used up all that we had brought with us in driving back and forth.

23 December we were able to work our way in the general direction of Liege and then Charleroi and found some gas to get us home. Everytime we tried to turn south we found the Germans were there. Finally we did manage to reach Dinant just ahead of the Germans and turn south to Givet and then the road to Laon arriving there late afternoon of the 24th--- Christmas Eve. They were glad to see us back safely but not nearly as glad as we were to be back and see them. We did get one souvenir. The picture I took of Tex on a knocked out German tank. In one photo, just as I snapped the picture he hollered "catch" and threw a German grenade to me. The pictures are in my scrap book.

A supply run from Melun had given us a turkey for Christmas dinner along with the trimmings and one of the boys was a good cook. We couldn't help but think about what we had just left and what was happening as we ate some 75 to 80 miles away. We also had been advised the move to Laon by the Squadron was now on hold pending the outcome of the battle. Tex was to return to Melun with the C-2 and trailer and we were to hold our spot on the airfield and continue to prepare the site. Cookie and the other guys had been busy while we were gone. All the hard pan area had been policed and the debris thrown into the bomb holes where everything else had been tossed. At a future date this would prove not to have been a good idea. The French, on their own had gotten a single power line working to our site. We had electricity! We were not empowered to hire anyone so what they did they did on their own.

26 December I went back to cleaning up areas further away from where we were living. Some German Ordnance I threw in the bomb hole with the rest and some I detonated by rifle fire. We all kept wondering. How close are the Germans getting? That night our concerns were to increase. We were going to bed around 10 or 11 at night. At 11PM that night as we lay in our sacks the unmistakable drone of a FW190 engine coming over could be heard. We grabbed our shoes and some clothes and ran outside. It had come in from the direction of Laon. The perfect reference point. Nothing. He came and he went.

The next few days we did 'our thing', getting some order to the area. Some Frenchmen from Couvron, Crecy-sur-Serre and Fere were coming by looking to work for us. We had to keep telling them they would have to wait until our Squadron arrived before they would learn about going to work. And now every night at eleven o'clock on the nose 'our' FW190 was coming over and checking the airfield. Sometimes we would go outside and watch him, however, if we were in the sack we wouldn't bother to get up.

30 December Around noon time B-17's began to circle the airfield. Some 12 to 15 proceeded to land and park on the various hard stands off the perimeter. One parked directly across from our building. We were all busy ourselves so we didn't bother to go over right away. I wish we had. Suddenly there was this explosion and screams coming from the B-17. I ran like hell over to the site where two guys were on the ground and the others had converged. The first wounded man had his left foot above the ankle blown off. It lay some four or five feet away. His right foot was shattered but still attached and his flight suit and he were full of shrapnel. Mostly from the waist down. The other man was sitting up. He had been hit in the fore arms and was bleeding also. The other crew members were giving first aid and one of them fired a red flare. To my surprise a 'meat wagon' came racing across the airfield with medics in it. I had no idea that a medical unit had arrived along with that other unit I knew was there. The guy that had been hit in the forearms was bandaged up but refused to go in the ambulance. The badly wounded one was loaded into the ambulance still praying and asking the medics not to let him die. Just before they closed the ambulance doors one of his flight crew buddies ran over and picked up this guys shoe with his foot still in it and tossed it in with him. They were all in a state of shock. The Captain of the B-17 was a First Lieutenant. I asked him what had happened. He told me they were returning from a mission when their base in England radioed and said weather had closed in and to land where they could in France until tomorrow. This place being 'behind the lines' meant it was safe and anything laying around was harmless. To pass the time they had all stood in a circle and were playing catch with this anti-personnel bomb. That is until this one guy dropped it. We shared some rations with this one crew and they slept in their plane.

At eleven o'clock that night our FW190 came over on schedule, circled the field twice and was gone.

Next morning, 31 December the 17's started their engines around mid-morning departed for their base in England.

Sans one waist gunner.

A supply run had come in with Christmas packages, letters and rations. As a result we had a fairly quiet day. They also brought rumors on how the fighting was going less than 100 miles away. We all hit the sack at the usual time and as eleven o'clock came listened for our nightly visitor. He was right on schedule. The steady drone of his engine suddenly began to change into a whine--he was diving. We all reacted about the same time, reaching for our clothes, shoes, etc. when the staccato of machine gun fire now over rode the scream of his engine as he roared over the field. He was coming back. As we flung open the door and started to all try to go thru it at the same time the concrete apron in front of us exploded under his strafing run. Those of us in front tried to climb right up the front of those behind.

Those behind were trying to stop and do something with those climbing up their faces. Had we been outside where we usually stood to watch him go over he would have gotten some or all of us. Timing was everything. As soon as we could recover we went back out the door and jumped in the air raid shelter next to our building. By now he had banked left and was setting up for another run. At that point a fifty caliber opened up on him from the other side of the field and the tracers were following him as he turned. Surprised he banked right and climbed. And left. Not knowing if there was more to come we took turns standing guard while the rest tried to sleep with our clothes and shoes on.

In the morning we decided to go over to the other side of the field and see what damage had been done over there. When we got there the sight was incredible. Their living arrangements were in six man tents in two rows of five. In between, with the tent flaps facing it was a board walk and more board walks running from it to each tent. That strafing run had turned those board walks into toothpicks--and never touched a tent. Had I not seen it it would have been very difficult to believe. As one of their guys put it the odds of what happened were about the same as trying to thread the eye of a needle on the first try with your eyes closed. Nobody argued with him. Again, we had all survived.

We were now getting mail and supply runs once or twice a week and life settled into a routine. The German army was in retreat and no longer any threat. We did, however keep one eye on the sky during the day and one ear cocked at night. On one run it was asked if the area was secure. Cookie gave them an up dated report saying all German ordinance that had not been destroyed had been collected and stock piled for removal. I was recalled back to Melun, the rest were to remain in Laon. Another driver went up in my place.

I arrived back at Melun on 16 January 1945.

It was a busy time for us drivers. 'The word' was the Squadron would be soon moving up to Laon. Early in February I was sent on a run up by Saarbrücken with orders to return to Laon when completed. An aircraft was down but it was highly questionable if there was any salvage. Accordingly I took a 6X6 to see if a C-2 was worth the trip. My map did not go into Saarbrücken and I ended up getting lost. I just started driving around and asking if anyone knew of a downed aircraft. I kept being directed in a generally eastern direction and altho I knew I was close to the front lines all was quiet. Going down this one road I saw some of our guys come out of the ditch along side the road ahead and waving me down. I was asked where the hell I thought I was going. I told them. A Corporal pointed to a line of low hills and said words to the effect that they were held by the Germans and I was about to drive thru our lines and to get the hell out of there before I drew their fire. He didn't have to tell me twice. As I started to turn around a shell slammed into ground and everyone took cover. I floored it, bounced across a ditch and bounced back again to the road. As I started 'getting the hell out of there' a second shell hit in back of me and shrapnel slammed into the truck. I kept going as fast as it would go and one more shell hit nearby before I got clear. Once safely back behind our lines I stopped to take a deep breath and retrieve my helmet from the floor board where it had landed when I hit the ditch getting back on the road.

It was then that I realized for the first time just how close everything had come. Protruding about a quarter of the way thru the wood slat in back of my head was a piece of shrapnel. It had gone clean thru the tail gate, part of a wooden slat in back of the cab and had partially penetrated the wooden slat of the cab itself. Had it continued it would have caught me at the base of my skull. It was then that fear and the shakes hit and I sat with my head in my hands for several minutes before being able to think clearly. I still have that piece of shrapnel with my memorabilia of the War. I spent a day looking for that downed aircraft but never did find it. Finally I said to hell with it and headed back for Laon. The trip back was without incident.

On 19 February 1945 the 43rd Repair Squadron came to the airfield at Couvron. I understand Headquarters and Supply went into Laon. All operations now would be conducted from Laon, France. The same day we had to move out of our nice building and into six man tents away from operations.

20 February The Motor Pool was set up adjacent to our two six man tents which we had moved into. We were now operational.

21 February A Squadron of B-26's were now operating from the airfield. As night fell operations continued. Along in the evening a jeep came tearing up to our tents and this guy hollered that a '26' had crashed on the runway with a live bomb hung up in the bomb bay. It was blocking the aircraft behind it from landing and needed to be cleared off the runway fast. 'Ribby' stood up, looked at me and said words to the effect that you went to school for that stuff. As we rode toward the crash in the C-2 I told him my schooling and experience had all been with German ordnance not American. I remember his reply, "you're just trying to make me feel good". The air crew were standing on the runway, B-26's were circling in the dark, the radio operator in the jeep (we didn't have a control tower yet) was telling the pilots we were clearing the runway as fast as we could and they were hollering about being low on fuel. We stopped short of the B-26 whose nose wheel had collapsed. Its main gear was ok and the bomb bay doors were open. A break. I learned later they were open because of flak damage. The same reason the bomb was hung up. Crawling inside with a flash light showed the fins on bomb were tangled with the release mechanism that was all twisted up from shrapnel. And the safety wire in the spinner was missing. There was no way to tell if the bomb was armed or not. I reported back to those standing there what I had found, told them I was going to tie the bomb as best I could and then move the aircraft. I suggested they clear the area. Ribby sat in the Crash Truck waiting to move into position as I ducked back inside the bomb bay doors. As I was maneuvering to begin this voice said "I'll hold the light soldier". It was a Lieutenant. He sat there on the ground, standing up as needed while I lashed that bomb with wire and rope to what ever looked strong enough. Things were pretty bent and twisted. Ribby backed up to the nose and we slipped a sling under the nose, fastened a cable around the broken nose wheel and took strain. The Lieutenant and I walked along by the nose wheel and Ribby drove. I don't think the tail had more than cleared the runway when the '26's' were landing. It looked like nose to tail but they seemed to know what they were doing. We dragged the ship

well clear and waited until all the aircraft were down safely. It was a Snafu that no crash crew had been on duty when they came in. It was nearly morning before everything was wrapped up so we went to the mess hall and got some coffee and then some breakfast. Ordnance took care of neutralizing the bomb and removing it. Later we went out to it and brought it over to a hanger for repairs, the B-26 that is.

On a run to Cologne in early March saw my first German jet, an ME262. He was flying fairly low and drawing fire from the ground. I pulled over and stopped in case he was setting up for a strafing run. If he was I wanted to be able to run like hell away from the truck. He wasn't, and soon left the area. I was surprised to also encounter a couple of V-1's. They posed no real threat to me but when I saw them I stopped just to be on the safe side. Later I heard they were being fired at Antwerp in an effort to disrupt the Port facilities there.

When the Squadron moved to Laon, France Cookie had given the names of the Frenchmen who wanted to come to work at the airbase to the higher ups and as a result I knew several of the French civilians. One day around the end of February I ran into one of the men I knew. He wanted to know when we were going to do something with the German bomb dump. That brought me up short. What bomb dump--where--in what direction. He thought we knew all about it. I took him with me and we went to the Orderly Room to report what he had said. Orders were to take him and a jeep and go check it out. It was for real. About a quarter of a mile from the base in a grove of trees was a revetment still covered over with camouflage--and it was full of all kinds of German bombs. High explosives, Anti-personnel and incendiary. All neatly resting on pallets. The grove of trees was a hundred yards off to the left of this little farm road that led only to a farm. As there were no fresh tracks running to the site we parked the jeep and walked carefully over to it. I spent the next hour or so carefully probing for mines while my Frenchman shook his head and went back to the jeep. What he didn't realize was that if the dump blew he wasn't one bit safer there than I was. I went back and reported what I had found. They wanted the dump moved further from the airfield. I said that before that was done a lot closer inspection of the site needed to be made than what I had done. The next three days I lived in that bomb dump--poking and prodding and crawling around, in and over those bombs and pallets. Nothing. I came to a momentous decision--either I had missed a booby trap or there weren't any there. I kept remembering the chaotic way I had found the German ordinance when we first arrived. Fused mines laying on top of the ground--none buried--a panic departure. It weighed in on the side of not having missed any and there were none there in the first place. On that basis I made my report.

The following day, driving 6X6's we began moving the ordinance to another location roughly another mile away. Arrangements had been made as to where to take it while I was working at the bomb site. I did have one request from the other drivers. You drive the first truck to be followed by a fork lift into the dump and load up. I did. It was a couple of months later that Ordnance or Engineers or somebody came and hauled it all away from where we had left it in the middle of some guys field.

Race relations were never very good between black and white troops. Particularly where white guys from the deep south were concerned. Any social gatherings where both black and white troops were vying for white females was sure to end in a free for all. The black troops presented themselves to the white girls as 'night fighters', for obvious reasons. As I can best recall it was on a day in early June 1945 when some white troops went into a Cafe in Laon where a number of black troops were partying with some French girls. A fight erupted and the white guys got the hell beat out of them. Later buddies of the white guys drove by in a 6X6 and tossed two hand grenades into the Cafe. No one was killed but all the blacks and all the girls were wounded. Some seriously. It really raised a ruckus. Trip tickets for a number of outfits were all checked to see who was anywhere near Laon that day. None of our guys were. I never did learn how it all turned out.

The day I tried riding a German motorcycle. It was big and I had never been on a motorcycle in my life. I took it for a ride without really knowing how to stop it. Part way around the perimeter I met a B-26 taxiing coming right at me. I managed to get turned around but had to really speed up to keep ahead of him. I finally lost control and went into the ditch. It was too big for me to pick up. I had to leave it and limp back to the outfit and get some of the guys to help me. I took a lot of kidding. I didn't try it again.

Coming back late one afternoon from a trip to Belgium I stopped to take a nature break as dusk was settling in. When I finished I walked around the 6X6 kicking the tires. As I kicked the inside duals on the drivers side a bullet hit the truck a foot or so from me. For a second I couldn't believe what I heard, but the sound of the shot was real. Not being able to see just where the shot had come from I decided discretion was the better part of valor and jumped back in the cab and floored it. It shook me up and made me realize that not all French loved us 'nice' Americans.

On a trip to Aachen in September 1945 I stopped to check on directions with some GI's standing around this German's house. In the conversation I learned they had found a large safe in the house on the second floor and were going to blow it to see what was inside. Sounded like fun so I stayed around. They were using about a pound of plastic explosive to do the job. It not only blew the safe but collapsed the floors and walls and half the building fell down. If there ever was anything in the safe no one could find it.

One thing the drivers learned early. While civilians could not cross borders between countries we could go 'anywhere we damned pleased'. We also quickly learned there were items available in Belgium that were not available in France and vice versa. Shoes, clothes, wrist watches were just a few. Food, fuel (coal) American Whiskey were high priority items. When 'runs' were to the same place time after time we found out it was profitable to take an order in one country, fill it in another (or just fill it) and on the next trip dispose of the items thru sale or barter. Everytime we got paid I would send it all home and 'live off the land' so to speak.

I just remembered something else. Running into Fred Hodgson, the only one from my graduation class from High School I ever met. It was in late January 1945 shortly before we moved from Melun to Laon.

There had been a hard cold rain all day and mud was every where. It continued to rain hard all evening. Somewheres around nine o'clock while we were playing poker in our six man tent by the light of a lantern with water flowing under the tent and around our bunks and feet a voice hollered in that a Red Cross coffee truck was on the field. We cut cards. Low man was to take several canteens, find the truck and bring back coffee for the rest of the guys. Guess who drew the low card.

With three canteens around my neck I put on my helmet and rain coat and started slogging in the direction others were going. The line was long when I got there and after awhile I took off my helmet and sat down on it. The line would move and I would move. All at once I was hit on the head and a voice said

"What the hell are you doing here?" It was Fred Hodgson.

There in the mud and pouring rain we embraced and shook hands. Fred had just arrived. He was with a search light outfit on the other side of the field and had lost in the cutting of the cards the same as I had. He had caught a ride over but was going to have to walk back. When I told him to get in line with me objections were voiced immediately. When we explained the situation the objections tapered off.

Fred said he was looking down where he was walking and would never have recognized me if I hadn't taken off my helmet.

Think of all the exact events and their sequence as well as the precise timing that had taken place for he and I to have met in the black of night in the pouring rain in a field 'some where in France' where hundreds of other soldiers were standing around. INCRIDIBLE !!

We got our coffee, ignored the tin cup they had out and went back to my tent where I introduced him to my buddies with whom I shared my tent. After a few minutes I told Fred I would take him back to his outfit and proceeded to 'barrow' a 6X6 from the motor pool. His outfit was located off the airfield and we had trouble finding it. Finally we did and I joined his guys in a bombed out building that only had half a roof. We talked until almost dawn, then I started back. Again I had trouble finding my way in the blackout, rain and fog. Finally I did find a road that took me to the airfield. Just as I was about to feel I was home free I came to an MP road block. And me with no authorization to have the truck or be off base.

As I stopped at the road block I feigned ecstasy at seeing him and went into this rambling of being lost, driving around half the night trying to find my outfit stationed on an airbase near here and was this it? He said it was and to calm down everything was ok. I kept thanking him profusely, put the truck in gear and took off. I think he started to raise his left hand and to say something but I just kept going as fast as I could.

Anyway I put the truck back and crawled into my sack just in time to crawl out again to face a new day.



In order for me to get over to see Fred in the evenings it became necessary for me to acquire, by moonlight requisition, a few blank trip tickets and to leave 'cargo' in the back of the truck. Their outfit was operational and was plotting the whereabouts of aircraft in the area. Some nights he was 'on duty' and we would sit and talk as he had time. A movie theatre (out door) had started up so I made arrangements with Fred to pick him up, bring him over to the airbase and get him back after the movie. I had no idea what the movie was.

To appreciate the following I need to say both Fred and I were born and raised in Saratoga Springs, NY. Home town USA !! The movie? Saratoga Trunk! The movie was filmed in Saratoga and set in the 1890's showing the Grand Union Hotel, the United States Hotel, the Adelphi Hotel, The Worden Hotel, all of Broadway the Race track and various streets etc. We almost died.

Talk about emotions! We kept pointing places and things out to each other like two little kids. It was quite a roller coaster night. INCREDIBLE !!

A couple of days later I was sent on a trip. When I returned Fred and his outfit were gone. I never saw or heard of him again until after the war.

As a closure to this I attended my High School's 25th reunion at what was then the Town House restaurant out South Broadway in Saratoga Springs, NY. There sitting at the bar looking old and haggard was Fred. I tried to talk to him about the old days, France, the night we saw Saratoga Trunk but he was already too far gone from drink to carry on much of a conversation. I was back in town again a few years later and asked about him. "Oh he died a year or so back." I was told. Died an alcoholic. Never did recover from the war.

I drew a run to take a Lieutenant to Reims in a jeep. It was cold but the ground was bare. The jeep was open and we were both bundled up. The sun was setting and we still had quite a ways to go to get back to base. Up behind this large wood burning French truck we came and tried to pass. The road was narrow and he pulled over right into us. I barely avoided rolling us over as I stood on the brakes. A second try at passing produced the same results. By now he had two real mad guys behind him. His passenger kept looking out the rear window to see what we were going to do next. He damned well found out real quick. The Lieutenant said something to the effect of holding it steady, gripped the top of the windshield with his left hand, pulled his .45 with his right hand and blew a hole right thru the rear window of their cab. The bullet went right between their heads and the windshield blew all to hell. Off the truck went to the right into a shallow ditch. I floored it and we were gone. After a few minutes the Lieutenant spoke. "I guess I'll have to explain all this when we get back." I glanced over to see him looking at me. Explain, sir I said explain what? He half smiled as he put his .45 back in its holster. I have no idea if he did or didn't. I know I never reported it.

Soissons had a supply depot located there. Everything from donuts to real American whiskey. And, of course, MP'S to guard all the 'stuff'. Regular weekly runs there all the time we were stationed at Laon (Couvron) gave us ways to beat the system. Number one priority was American booze--any kind. One of us was always making a run for the Officers Club. Only they were allowed to get as much American booze as they wanted. Usually we got it when one of us took Officers on a liberty run as a thank you. I will use myself, altho we all used about the same approach, when 'liberating' extra bottles from the supply dump at Soissons. We rigged a spare tire to put on the 6X6 that was to make the trip. Clips inside the tire replaced inner tube. The MP's never searched us going in but always did on the way out. This way one or two MP's could guard a whole warehouse as you came and went. By opening a shipping container way in the back and placing the contents in the clips in the spare tire we could generally 'liberate' four to six quarts of good old American whiskey. Worth a fortune. As new shipments were arriving at the warehouse all the time a 'properly buried' empty shipper might not be discovered for a long time.

We had a Mess Sergeant by the name of Bill Green who was a real SOB. He yelled most of the time at everybody if you were on KP. Never could do anything right. I was no exception. It was noon chow on a day in late September 1945 and I was going thru the chow line when he called my name. Said after I ate he wanted to see me. I was sure I was in trouble but for the life of me I couldn't figure out what for. After eating I dutifully reported and waited for a chewing out. He said he wanted to talk to me walked away from where everyone was. I followed. When he stopped we both just stood there for what seemed forever. He reached in his pocket and pulled out a letter. It was from his mother. I was having a hard time believing he had such a thing. He still was not looking at me. He said words to the effect that I got to travel a lot. I said yes. Now he turned and looked at me. Said his brother had been killed in action and was buried in Henri-Chappel cemetery. His mother wanted a picture of her son's grave. Did I know where it was? Would I take him there? All of a sudden I was looking at a very sad man. No teeth and hair. I told him I did not know where Henri-Chappel was but could find out. And yes if it could be worked out I would see he got to the cemetery. Without a word he walked away leaving me thoroughly confused about this man. I subsequently learned it was just east of Liege on the road to Aachen. I knew there were cementeries there and in fact I had driven right past it on previous trips to Aachen only never knew its name. I reported where it was to Sergeant Green but told him trips to Liege or Aachen were not very frequent. Trips to Charleroi were another matter but Liege was another 75 miles or so to the east or another four to five hours driving. As much as I disliked the man there was a side of him I had never seen before and ---then there was his mother. I told him if he wanted to chance it and could get a pass, that on the next run to Charleroi we could make a run to Liege. If we got picked up by the MP's without proper authorization for being in Liege it could cost him his stripes as it would be looked at as his being in charge. He said he would talk to the CO about a pass.

A few days later I got a run to Charleroi--a two day trip. Sergeant Green got his pass and we left well before dawn. The plan was to drive to Charleroi and then to Liege and the cemetery of Henri-Chappel. We needed to arrive in time to take pictures and then return to Charleroi for the night. I had a 6X6, the trip was long and we seldom spoke. It was late afternoon when we reached Liege and found Henri-Chappel with day light just starting to fade. Not much time left. There was a Master Sergeant in this little house who ran things and our arrival was not appreciated. He was just starting to wind up his day and leave. In fact, he was very emphatic--"I'M closed, come back tomorrow." Words were getting nowhere. Sergeant Green was sounding desperate and the Master Sergeant was getting down right hostile. One last chance crossed my mind and I went out to the truck. From its hiding place I took a quart of good old American Whiskey. As I walked back in the Master Sergeant was saying he was tired as he had had one load come in today and another one was coming in tomorrow. The thought went thru my mind, "I guess that's how you learn to handle all the dead GI's they're bringing in." Anyway I walked up to his desk and sat the bottle down and stepped back. There was a pause while he looked at the bottle and then at us. Finally he said, "Well, I guess she'll just have to wait." He found Sergeant Green's brother's name and told us how to find it. His parting words were to the effect to be quick about it as no one was supposed to be in the cemetery after he left. Where upon he departed cradling his bottle. We found the grave site. Sergeant Green got his photos and then took his last one of me standing at the grave site. It's in my scrap book. He also gave me a picture of himself. We drove back to the American parking lot at Charleroi arriving in the middle of the night and slept in the cab for a few hours. Next morning we loaded up and drove back to Couvron right on schedule. Sergeant Green was a funny man, never once did he ever say thank you. Not once. However, I never returned late from a run after that that I did not get fed. He would cook it himself and it was 'Officer grade' food not cold beans and left over potato. When I drew KP he made sure all I had to do was drive the Mess Hall garbage truck. Even assigned two other KP's to ride in the back with the garbage and dump it at the farmers house for his animals. Actually the dumping process took some time as there was always a number of French people waiting for us at the farm. They would pick thru 'the slop' for their own food and then we would empty the GI cans where they wanted us to. Sergeant Green was a funny man.

In September 1945 I was again returning from a trip up along the German/Belgium border when I spotted a 'GI' walking along the road thumbing a ride. As we always did, we stopped and asked where they were going. His reply to my question was "Then I may ride with you may I not?" I said "Yeah, get in the back." His response was "Thank you very much, sir." and climbed in. Something was very wrong. His English was too good and I did not rate a 'sir'. All I could think of was "Where the hell are the damned MP's when you want one?" Some time later going thru a small village I spotted two MP's in a jeep in the village square. I stopped and waved them to come over. In low tones I told them I had a 'GI' in the back who I didn't think was really one of us. That got their attention real fast. One drew his .45 and held it behind his back as they walked around the truck

and told this guy to climb down. He did and they asked him for his ID. He had none. Turns out he claimed to be a Dutch National trying to go to Paris to visit friends. As an American GI and speaking excellent English he could travel without papers and go anywhere he wanted to. As they got ready to take him away he turned, looked up at me sitting in the cab and asked "What did I do wrong, sir?" I replied "You spoke English not American." The puzzled look on his face was still there as he was led over to the jeep.

November 1944 Went on a trip to Belgium with three other men whom I did not know personally. As the sun set we looked for a place to hole up for the night. We came to this tiny village consisting of a half dozen houses and a Cafe. We shouldered our M-2's and went in. Our greeting was most cordial. The pretty young girl served us vin and her father joined us. I spoke a little French (2 years High School, 1 year College) so we managed. That was until one of the guys got well into his cups and started speaking German. I didn't know this next until later but his folks had come from Germany. He was first born in America and lived in Philadelphia, Pa.--and he did not like the French. I guess to him the French and the Belgians were all the samething. He spoke fluent German. We never missed the young girl and her father was now asking pointed questions about where we lived and America in general. Finally on unsteady legs it was time to go. We shouldered our M-2's and walked? out the front door--straight into the guns of five men. One said something in German which I did not understand and our German speaking soldier started to go for his gun. I thought we were all dead as we grabbed him and took away his gun. With hands in the air we all went back inside where our German speaking 'friend' promptly passed out. We sat at our same table with our now hostile inn keeper, pistol in hand, asking questions. Just before dawn a jeep pulled up out front with two MP's and an MP Lieutenant and the young girl. The Lieutenant spoke French very well. It took awhile to get everything straightened out. We had convinced our genial cafe owner we were Germans in American uniforms. His daughter was sent to alert the Belgium underground and then find some Americans. He was visibly upset as he explained, they fully intended to shoot us if we had not surrendered. Nothing would do except to drink some toasts and and part friends. Well, maybe there was one exception.

15 Ocotober 1945 the Squadron moved to Kassel, Germany. We moved into some German apartments after kicking out their occupants in a small village named Kaufungen a couple of miles northeast of Kassel itself. Fraternization was a Court Martial offense, however, had it been enforced the whole American army would have been in the guard house. Including the Officers. The young German girls were now in the same position that the girls in the countries the Nazi's had over run had been in--- that of having prescious little to offer but themselves in exchange for what ever they needed. The older people stood outside the mess hall just past the GI garbage cans into which we dumped our mess kits. Those who wanted to were allowed to empty their leftovers into the slop pails the Germans held. For many it was their only food. I'm not sure if their standing there shivering in the cold and snow with their ragged clothes clutched around them was to evoke sympathy or it really was all

they had left after we got done blowing their country all to hell. Maybe a little of each. At first I would act like I was going to give my left overs to them, but would then reach back and put them in the garbage can and just smile at them. The problem was everytime I did that I kept seeing that little girl in Coventry kneeling in the road with her hands in a prayer position hoping for some coal to get warm by. I finally had to acknowledge to myself that I was not the 'tough guy' I thought I was and started emptying my mess kit into their slop buckets. I think I even started taking a little more than I wanted to eat.

The young girls made out much better. For being 'good company' they got to share food smuggled out of the Mess Hall, share in Red Cross packages from home and be able to take a good hot shower with the guys. The fact that not to long ago they had been yelling Heil Hitler and taking care of their soldiers took second place to being young, female and available. I guess you could call it the fortunes of war.

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4 December 1945 After spending the last several days living in a box car (40 & 8's) guarding them from sabotage we got orders to load up and start for home. We were leaving behind death, destruction and suffering and beginning the long journey back to our families and loved ones but some things weren't quite over yet. The train moved slowly. There was a large pile of straw to make our own beds out of but no heat. We carried our own rations and water and a couple of large buckets to relieve ourselves in as need be. These we emptied out the sliding door. The door was left open all the time for both fresh air and light. Then something began to happen to break the monotony. We were obviously not the first troop train to pass thru and and the young German girls quickly learned to run along side the slow moving train, staying just out of reach, and asking for food, candy, cigarettes or just about anything. They were not going unrewarded. Then the game began. Could we catch one. They were practiced, getting close enough to grasp the article without letting hands touch. One of the boys volunteered to catch one. Using several san-brown belts around his waist and four of our larger guys to anchor him he leaned out as he normally could and at the right moment upon a signal from another GI he suddenly came out a good foot and a half more. The girl was dragged screaming into the box car and promptly taken to one corner where she was stripped and enjoyed by a number of the men.

By now we had passed thru the Siegfried line and were starting thru the Magnot line. We no sooner had entered France than the tracks were lined with French girls doing the same thing the German girls had been doing. By this time all who wanted the German girl were done with her so she was pushed naked and screaming out the door into the midst of the French girls followed by her clothes and yells to the French girls she was German. The last we saw she was surrounded by the French girls who were kicking her as she lay on the ground.

So much for being female and being on the loosing side.

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It took a few days after we got to Kassel to get settled and get our bearings. It was around 20 October 1945 that we started going to Kassel and finding the air fields in the area. On one such trip I came upon a large PW camp where German soldiers were still being processed. I stopped to see what was going on. As I walked down this one line of Germans I noticed they were all either real young or real 'old' for being in the military. From the male stand point it was all they had left. As I walked down the line I noticed this one German soldier who looked to be in his fifties at least who was wearing an Iron Cross. One of Germany's highest military honors. I walked up to him and ripped it off his tunic. His eyes blazed and he started to come at me only to be grabbed by those standing next to him. It wasn't until later that I discovered the medal was from World War One.

Nearby was a collection of German weapons. In the pile I found a German pistol with its holster. Emblazoned on its barrel was the Nazi emblem. Swastika and all. I picked it up and together with the Iron Cross brought it home with me when I returned to the States.

The short term for the weapon is it is a CZ 27 7.65 or 32 calibre. Its full description is: CZ 1927 7.65 Calibre  
Made in 1927 for the Nazis Military  
in Prague, Czechoslovakia

It was valued on December 15, 1993 by the Elmira Arms Company Elmira, N.Y. at \$337.50 and is considered a classic antique from World War 2 even tho it is fully operational.

Another item I brought home was a German wooden bullet. It was used in street fighting and had an effective range of 300 yards. Or so I was told. It would shatter into splinters on impact and cause infection. Disabling but not usually fatal.

There were several air fields in and around Kassel. I drew the assignment to go to the one South of Kassel and destroy P-47's. They were now surplus and obsolete. With a crew of six men we turned brand new P-47's into junk. There were other crews doing the same thing. Our crew destroyed around 100 brand new ships. At this same field were the remnants of the German Luftwaffe. We had a chance to see up close some of the newest weapons Germany had. ME 163, ME 262, V-1, V-2, rocket bombs with a place for a suicide pilot. This field was the assembly plant of all kinds of new weapons of War. Had the Nazis had one more year to prepare there is no telling how things might have gone. At that point in time they were so far ahead of us in Research and Development of weapons of War it still scares me to even think about it.

The time to prepare for War is before it starts---not after.

The train ride had been long. It had literally crawled across Germany and then France. Also there had been numerous stops to allow everyone to get out and stretch their legs. Finally we reached our destination---Le Havre. There we were billeted for several days while paper work was processed. On 16 December 1945 we were told that the next day we were to board transport for the United States. Just one year from the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge. The good Lord had been kind to me. Next morning we were all lined up for final briefing before moving thru the staging area to our troop ship. There were several Officers standing out in front of us along with the latest batch of Red Cross girls who had been assigned to us. We were then told we were not to be allowed to take any foreign money home with us nor would it be converted into American money. In other words we were stuck with it. However, we would be allowed to give it to the Red Cross and they in turn would be able to 'cash it in' for their own use. It has to be understood that what happened next was the culmination of a very poor relationship our Squadron had had with the Red Cross. Yours truly included. I had personally been harassed all over the States and half way thru my stay in England over their claim I never repaid the fifty dollars they lent me when my grandmother died in June of 1943 and which I repaid promptly when I returned from her funeral. I had the receipt and kept giving them that information to no avail. After being called up in front of the Squadron's CO for disciplinary action for failure to repay and proving to his satisfaction I had repaid the loan I still continued to be harassed. Only the direct intervention by the Major finally brought it to a halt. Every time we had seen the Red Cross in the field and they had coffee they also shook the tin cup. From home we kept hearing how the Red Cross was being supported at home to take care of our boys 'over there'. We all felt that someone in the Red Cross was also taking good care of themselves as well.

Back to Le Havre---we were told to bring our foreign money forward to a spot in front of the Red Cross girls and put it in a pile--one at a time. There was a long pause when no one moved. Then one man near the other end of the line walked out to the spot indicated and emptied his pockets of what money he had---then lit a match and dropped it in the pile of money. Then another dropped his on the pile--and another--and another. An Officer ordered a stop to what was happening but the ranking Captain countermanded it. One by one we all walked up to the pile of burning money and threw ours into the fire. I could hear some of the Officers swearing and the Red Cross girls were crying. Two of the four walked away. The other two just stood staring at the fire crying.

When it was over a very sullen Squadron did a left face and in a column of fours marched to our transport, the Westminister. One old tired Liberty ship.



Like I said, the Westminister was one old tired Liberty ship. The date was 17 December 1945. Our quarters were in the bowels of the ship and stunk of sweat and vomit. A forwarning of what was to come. Our racks or bunks were barely separated vertically enough to crawl into by laying flat before trying. They were six high and anchored solidly to the overhead and the deck beneath our feet. Every motion of the ship, every roll was directly transmitted to those bunks.

The crossing was pure Hell. The food consisted of C and K rations, The Head (bathroom) could not accommodate the number of men especially when the ship began to pitch and roll as the sea began to get rougher and rougher. Those in the top bunks who got sea sick would vomit and it would trickle down over the five bunks and onto the men below. They in turn would get sick. Soon the deck was slippery with vomit and men would slip and fall in it. I was never particularly susceptible to sea sickness but this I could not handle. I found my way as close to the axis of the ships pitch and roll as possible and still remain inside. Here I stayed until the wave of sea sickness began to pass and the living quarters were cleaned as well as well as they could be.

Someone had smuggled a dog aboard. To pass the time some of the men began making bets on what the dog would do if such and such happened. Then someone found that the dog would chase a spot of light such as a flashlight would make and try to grab it. By running the spot of light across the deck and then pointing it at a bulkhead the dog would run full tilt into the bulkhead and bounce off with a yelp of pain. This led to bets as to high he would jump before he hit the bulkhead to how many times he would run into the bulkhead before 'the dumb dog smartened up'. It also led to a few fights when others objected to the abuse the dog was being subjected to. These were quickly broken up but the dog and the spotlight continued until we hit a good storm.

Now the seas were crashing over the decks. The bow would rise almost straight up into the air and then come crashing down throwing everyone all over the place who was not hanging on for dear life. Then someone discovered a crack in the steel bulkhead the dog had been bouncing off of. Everytime the ship rose and fell you could feel the crack move by putting your finger on it. A chalk line was drawn across the crack and just at its tip. When it was discovered that the crack had gone thru the chalk line another line was drawn and bets were now being made on everything from how far the crack would go by tomorrow to whether the ship would break in half before we could make port. It was reported and the word came back 'yeah, these thing happen on old tubs like this. Don't worry about it.' Sorry!!! But I was scared as hell. What a way to get it after all this. And so close to getting home. I found out I was not alone.

Finally, after what seemed a lifetime aboard the Westminister we got the word we would be docking the next day and to get ourselves ready. We were to be all clean shaved, dressed in our OD's and looking like soldiers. When we stepped off the ship we needed to look like the victorious army we were to the welcoming crowds. I'll say this. It did perk us up. We were coming home, bands would be playing and people cheering. It would almost have made these last few days all seem worth while.

28 December 1945 1:30 AM We had been ready since late afternoon of the 27th. All spit and polish with our duffle bags packed ready to march off the ship. Now it was the middle of the night and a steady cold rain was falling. We were all wet, cold, tired and hungry. A couple of dim lights shown on the dock as we filed off the ship in dead silence and started walking along the dock. Up ahead the Red Cross waited with coffee, smiles--- and TWO tin cups. One at the beginning of the line and one at the end. The line moved slowly. Word trickled down the line a couple of the men had spit in the tin cups and refused any coffee. By the time I got to where their line was I was soaked, cold and the duffle bag weighted a ton. I ignored the coffee proffered to me and kept on walking. All I wanted to do at that point was to get where we were going and get warm and maybe something to eat. Next we came to the trucks that were to take us from the pier at New York Harbor to Fort Dix, NJ. We were divided into groups ( I can't remember the count but it was something like twenty) and told to remember the barracks number we were given. Each group now walked over to the designated 6X6. Sitting in the back of each, well fed, warm and dry were two PW's taking our duffle bags as we passed them up. Off they drove waving to us standing there in the middle of the night in that cold rain and soaking wet. Next we went to another 6X6 and climbed in for the trip to Fort Dix.

I am not sure what the hour was when we arrived at Fort Dix but the driver asked what our barracks number was as we arrived. The rain was still pouring down. The road into the barracks area was elevated as was the ground on which the barracks sat but the barracks were surrounded by deep ditches that were full of water. As we arrived the last of our duffle bags were just being thrown into the water filled ditch by the PW's. There was hell to pay real quick but the PW's were in the back of their truck and pulling away before we could get to them. We were cursing and waving our fists. They yelled something and waved back. We had to wade in the ice cold water to retrieve our duffle bags before they became saturated and sank. We were already for murder at that point. We got our bags and went into the unheated barracks, found a cot and then fell out to go to chow. The 'Mess Hall' was a large tent with tables and benches and the food line was made up of wooden saw horses with plywood on top. And the servers were all well fed, warm and dry PW's. Not having eaten since the previous noon we were all pretty hungry to say nothing of what we had just been thru and when some of the men asked for a larger helping and were told by the German prisoner to "move along" that did it. The Kraut took the tray of food right in the face along with the metal serving tray. If it weren't for some quick action by the mess sergeant the whole place would have been turned into a shambles. We got what ever we wanted and as much as we wanted.

It was such a warm good feeling to have been welcomed home in the manner in which we had. Especially since we had been told to expect cheering crowds, bands playing and flags waving. It was one hell of a let down and I'll just leave it at that. The war was over and nobody gave a damn any more.

3 January 1946 Today I am to be discharged from Military Service. After the rain we had arrived in the weather had turned cold but clear. Days had alternated between lectures and nothing to do as we waited for our turn to be discharged. The day after we had arrived a lot of pressure was put on everyone to either re-enlist/sign up for the Reserves. If we did either we would immediately advance one grade and be sent home within 24 hours. If we chose not to it was not certain when they would be able to get to us. Of the ones I knew a few did sign up. There thinking was 'Why not? There can't possibly be another war in our life time. There's nobody left to fight.'

I did give it some serious thought. Then decided to make a clean break and get on with my life. The night before I was to be discharged I couldn't sleep. It was clear as a bell that night. The stars shown like diamonds on black velvet and the air was crisp and cold. I walked and walked and walked around our area my mind racing a mile a minute. Where I had been, what I had seen, what I had done, how close death had come a number of times, the names and faces of buddies who had been killed, would I ever see any of my other buddies with whom I had done so much ever again? What lay ahead?

Finally I stopped and lay back against a forty-five degree bank of earth and just stared up at the heavens. Suddenly another GI came walking along just as I had been. He stopped and asked if he could join me. I said sure and he lay down next to me and we both stared up at the heavens. Finally he began to talk, not really to me but just talk. He rambled, mixing the past events of the war with the present moment and his unknown future. Again we lay there silent, just looking up at the glittering stars and watching our warm breath crystallize in the night air. He had done all the talking. I had just listened. He got up, brushed himself off, gave me a half salute said "good luck buddy". I returned his half salute and said "good luck to you". He walked off into the night. I never saw the man before. Nor he I.

The time is 10:30AM. The place, a tent. One by one we step up to the table where our discharge and final instructions are being given us. The 'ruptured duck' is sewn on our Eisenhower jackets, we are advised that after discharge we will be still under Military Law for the next 24 hours, our discharge papers are typed and signed by a Major Bliss. I pick mine up, step back from the table throw the Major one last 'high ball' pick up my duffle bag and turn my back on World War 11 and the Military.

I catch a train into New York City and look up Lon (Lohnas H. Knapp) who is now working American Air Lines. I go home with him that night and spend the time with he and Shirley until he can drive me up to Saratoga Springs and home. On 5 January 1946 in early afternoon we pull up the drive way to the side door of 760 North Broadway. As I start up the steps my mother comes out the side porch door. I paused and said "Well mom, I made it." We hugged and kissed and I walked up the side stairs to my room that I had left nearly three years earlier to go to war.

There is one more Remembrance. I have debated about putting it down for posterity. I have been told that some things are best forgotten. I'm sorry, I just cannot. I found a roll of film in the latter part of the war in a desk drawer of what had been a Nazi office or Headquarters and carried it around with me for quite some time. When the chance came I asked one of the photographers in the Squadron to see if there was anything on it. There was. Just four pictures. They were War Crimes material. By rights I should have turned them over to some higher authority. I did not.

Two were of a young woman, she was naked from the waist up and tied to a post. A block had been shoved between her back and the post accentuating her breasts. In the first picture a German soldier was holding what looked like a poker used in a stove and the woman's face held sheer terror. In the second picture her right breast was just a bloody smear where it appeared that a hot iron had been used to burn off the nipple and flesh. Her head was tilted back, her mouth wide open in a scream and her eyes dilated. A grinning German soldier, poker in hand stood looking at her.

In the second set a naked man except for his socks was hanging from a cross bar of a lean-to type shed from a rope tied around his testicles. He was not tied in any way. He was desperately reaching up to grasp the rope that had stretched his scrotum nearly to his knees as he hung upside down. In the second picture he appeared unconscious, hanging limp, arms dangling straight down and his testicles now stretched well below his knees.

I had these pictures for several months after discharge. I was still living at home at 760 North Broadway and my mother sent a suit I had been wearing to the cleaners. The pictures were in an inside pocket of the jacket. I never saw them again.

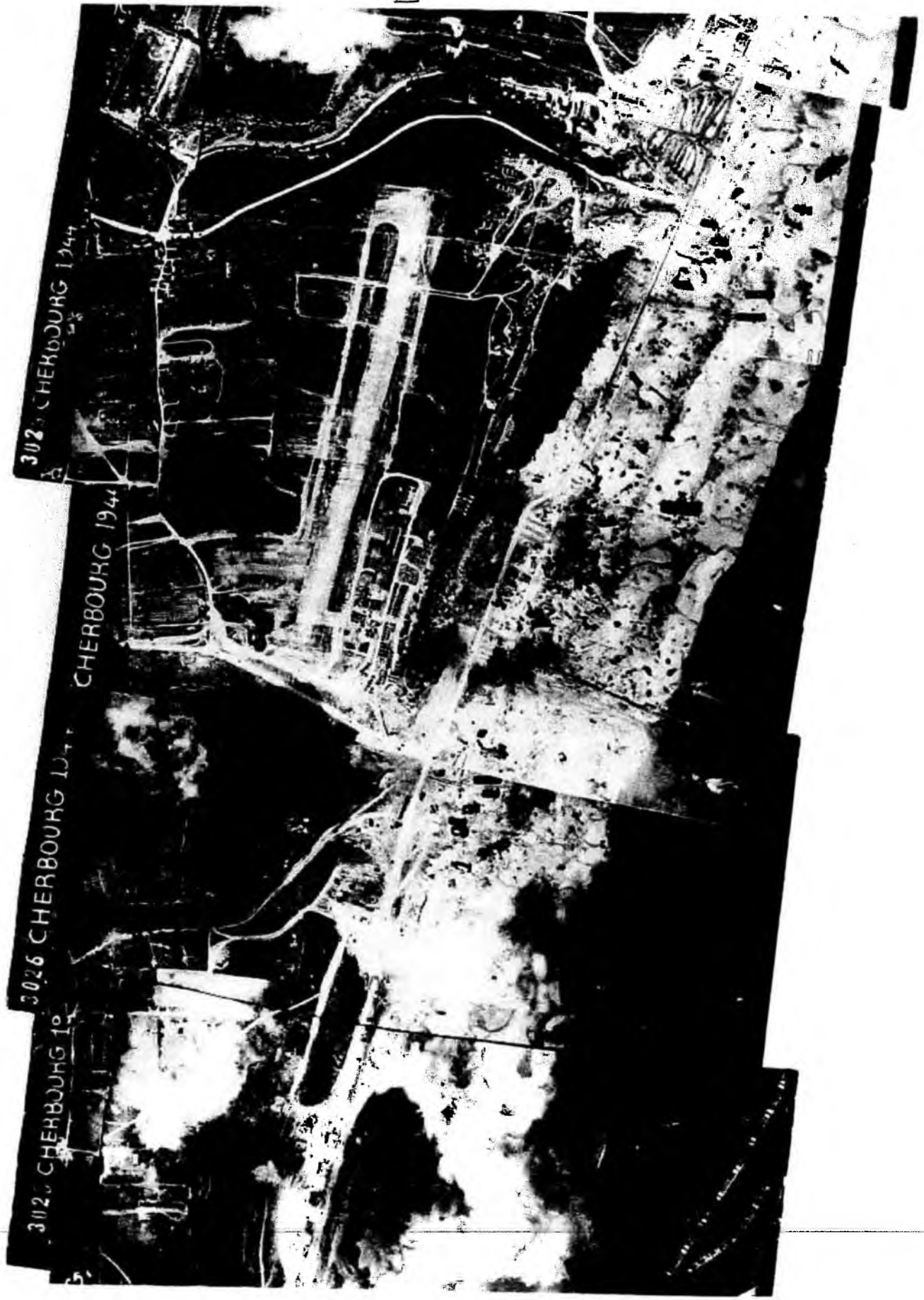
Thus is the fate of those whose Country loses a war. They become non-entities good only for entertainment or the use as slave labor by the aggressor nation.

Is that wrong ? Remember one thing---The winners always write the rules the losers lost by.

Del Sahlberg

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302 CHERBOURG 1944

3026 CHERBOURG 1944

3012 CHERBOURG 1944

N

E

**OMAHA BEACH JUNE 1944 AERIAL RECON VIEW TAKEN SEVERAL DAYS  
AFTER D-DAY JUNE 6, 1944**

**This aerial reconnaissance photo of Omaha Beach was taken a few days after D-day. It was before the beach was cleaned up from the carnage of destroyed American equipment that came ashore in the first waves of 6 June 1944. Only the overwhelming assault of men and material broke the resistance of the Nazi defense fortifications. The cost in American soldier's lives was horrific.**

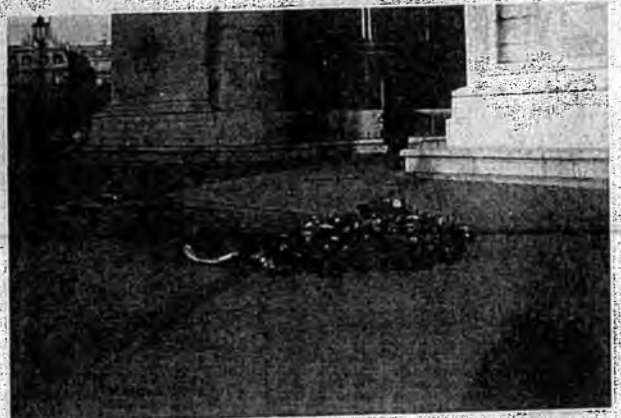
**The aircraft making this photo came in from the North, therefore the top of the photo is South and the seaward side or bottom of the photo is North. All the black dots showing on the white sand beach represent destroyed American equipment. Only two roads were bulldozed off Omaha Beach. The left or Easterly one led to the French village of St. Laurent-sur-Mer while the right or Westerly one intersected a road that ran parallel to the coast. A right turn here took one to Isigny.**

**The airstrip was bulldozed out by the Combat Engineers and was first used by L-4's and L-5's. These were light observation aircraft. It was then expanded to accommodate C-47's bringing in men and material and taking out the wounded back to England. It is the FIRST airstrip made in France after the Invasion and for lack of formal identification was designated as E/2. This designation was dreamed up, the E standing for EXITS and the 2 standing for the two roads bulldozed off the beach. Later this was changed to coincide with proper Air Force nomenclature or T/2.**

**The westerly or right hand road is the one I entered France on quite some time after D-day.**

**Del Sahlberg  
6 June 2000**







DAWSON JETER<sup>CS</sup>  
WITH DAMAGED  
P-38 NEAR  
LAON, FRANCE  
NOVEMBER 1944  
PICTURE TAKEN BY  
DEL SAHLBERG

▲  
CS  
KNOCKED OUT  
GERMAN TANK  
JUST WEST OF VIELSALM,  
BELGIUM

DECEMBER 1944

DAWSON JETER IN  
PHOTO

PICTURE TAKEN BY  
DEL SAHLBERG

▲  
CS  
KNOCKED OUT  
GERMAN TANK  
JUST WEST OF VIELSALM  
BELGIUM

DECEMBER 1944

DAWSON JETER IN  
PHOTO

PICTURE TAKEN BY  
DEL SAHLBERG

CS

▲

JU-88 BOMBER<sup>CS</sup>  
ABANDONED ON  
AIRFIELD

LAON, FRANCE

OCTOBER 1944

DAWSON JETER IN  
PHOTO

TAKEN BY  
DEL SAHLBERG

JU-88 BOMBER<sup>CS</sup>  
ABANDONED ON  
AIRFIELD

LAON, FRANCE

OCTOBER 1944

DAWSON JETER ON LEFT  
DON GIOFFREDO ON RIGHT

TAKEN BY  
DEL SAHLBERG

JU-88 BOMBER<sup>CS</sup>  
ABANDONED ON  
AIRFIELD

LAON, FRANCE

OCTOBER 1944

CECIL C. LINDBLAD  
ON LEFT

DON GIOFFREDO ON RIGHT

TAKEN BY  
DEL SAHLBERG

CS

▲

▲ 8

TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN  
SOLDIER

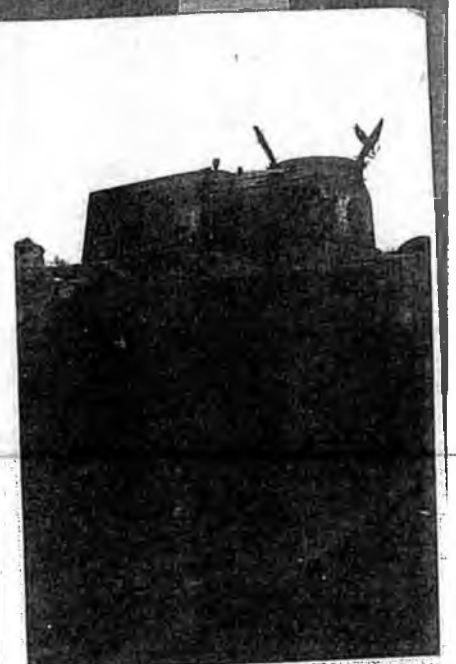
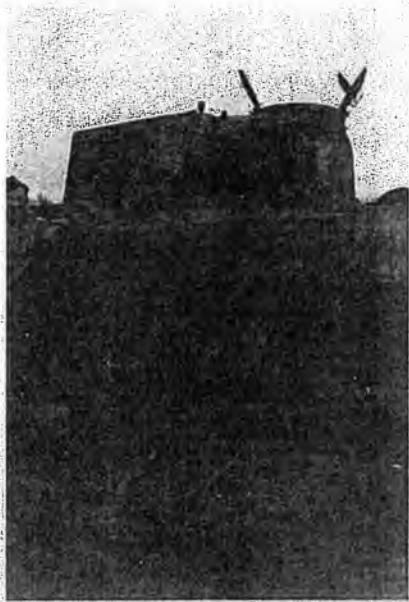
PARIS, FRANCE

SEPTEMBER 1944

PICTURE TAKEN BY  
DEL SAHLBERG

AMERICAN RECON UNIT  
AMBUSHED NEAR MELUN, FRANCE  
UNIT WIPED OUT TO A MAN  
LESTER L. LEMKE ON LEFT  
DEL SAHLBERG, MIDDLE  
JAKE ODGEN ON RIGHT

TAKEN BY SEPT. 25, 1944  
RAY CAMBRA



Ray Cambra  
Charles Fishby  
England  
GROVE  
1943

~~Ed Sahlberg~~  
Charles Fishby  
England  
Fishby  
GROVE  
1943

Ray Cambra  
Station 519  
England  
Grove  
EHB 1

SOM LEFT:  
EIL C. LINDBLADE  
VALD GIOFFREDO  
MELUN, FRANCE  
SEPTEMBER 1944

TAKEN BY  
DEL, SAHLBERG

48  
BURNED OUT RECON VEHICLE  
HIT BY GERMAN FIRE NEAR  
MELUN, FRANCE  
SEPTEMBER 1944  
DEL SAHLBERG IN PICTURE  
TAKEN BY RAY CAMBRA

AMERICAN TANK KNOCKED  
OUT OF ACTION NEAR  
MELUN, FRANCE (NOTE HOLE)  
SEPTEMBER 1944  
RAY CAMBRA IN PICTURE  
TAKEN BY DEL SAHLBERG  
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AMERICAN TANK KNOCKED  
OUT OF ACTION NEAR  
MELUN, FRANCE  
SEPTEMBER 1944  
RAY CAMBRA IN PICTURE  
TAKEN BY DEL SAHLBERG

AMERICAN TANK KNOCKED  
OUT OF ACTION NEAR  
MELUN, FRANCE  
SEPTEMBER 1944  
JAKE ODGEN IN PICTURE  
TAKEN BY DEL SAHLBERG

48  
GREBTHAS TAKEN  
AMERICAN TANK KNOCKED  
OUT OF ACTION NEAR  
MELUN, FRANCE (NOTE HOLE)  
SEPTEMBER 1944  
LESTER LEMKE IN PICTURE  
TAKEN BY DEL SAHLBERG