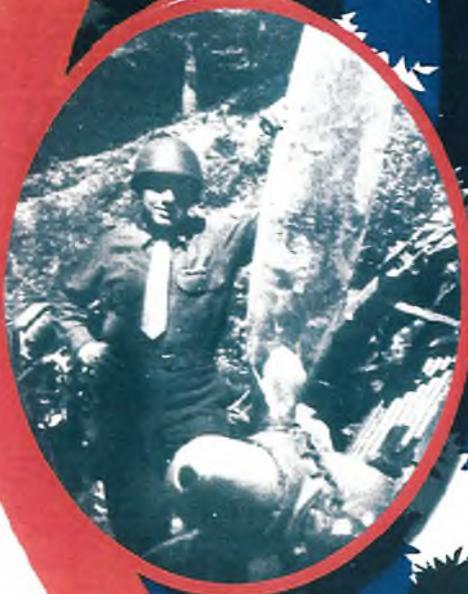
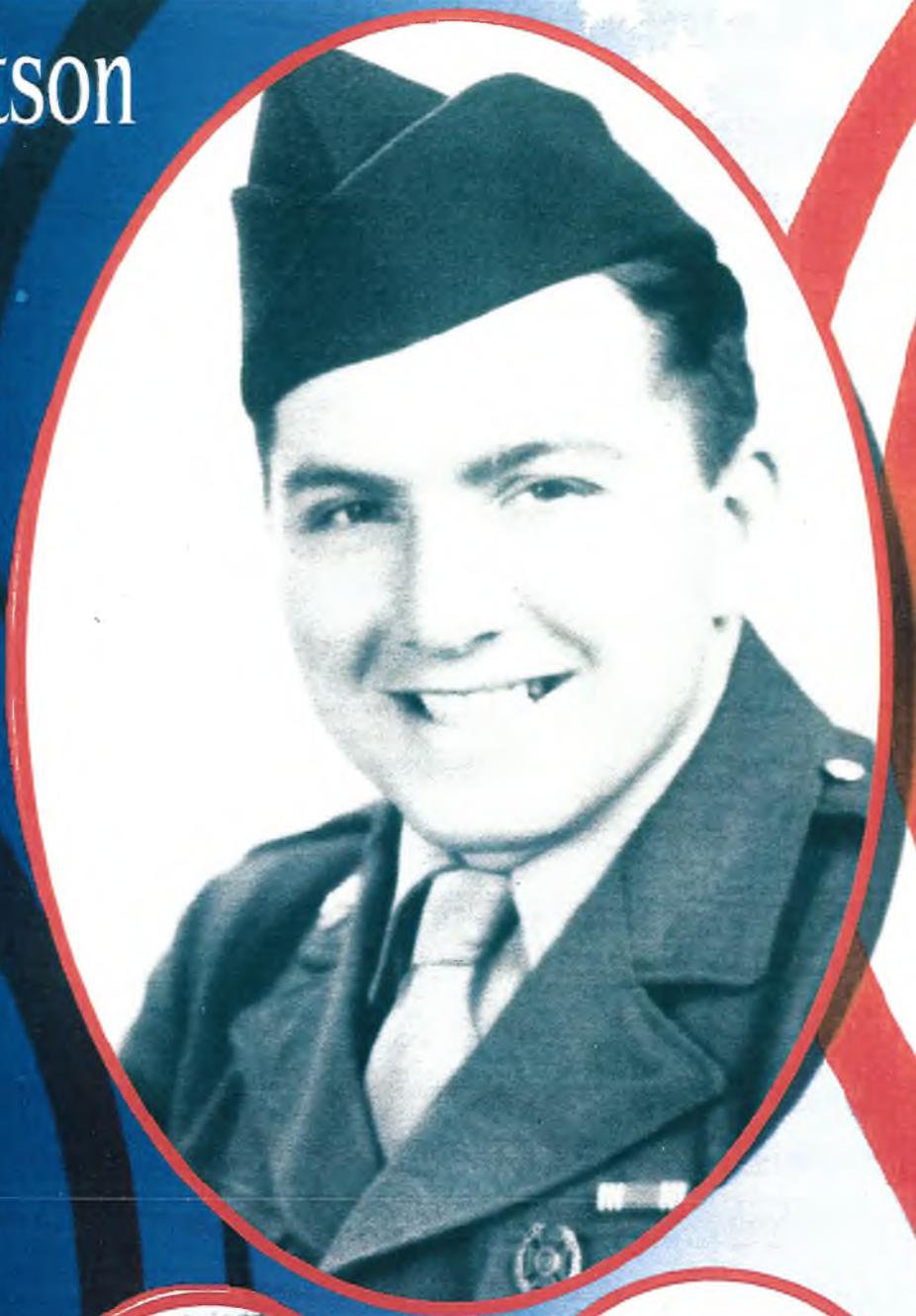


Stewart C. Watson

Service Record
&
Highlights of My Life



Stewart C. Watson

**“Service Record
And
Highlights of My Life”
(As recorded beginning 2/18/02)
Name: Stewart C. Watson
Rank: Technical Sergeant
Serial Number: 32739132 AUS**

In early January 1943, I was working as a Personnel manager for the Acme Steel Company when I received a notice from the local draft board that I would shortly be inducted into the US Army. I was a Canadian citizen, but they ignored this and took me in anyway. I played my last night in a dance band, and they gave me, as a parting gift, a complete 4-piece set of luggage. The next morning I reported to the recruiting office, and was taken by train to Fort Niagara in Niagara Falls. That's the last I saw of that beautiful luggage. Some sergeant is probably using it right now!

We went by train on a five-day long trip to Fort Hood, Texas. We never were allowed off the train for the entire five days. When we got there, they lined us up outside the train, and asked us if any of us could take shorthand. I answered affirmatively, and they said, "That's wonderful, because we are short handed in the kitchen." This resulted in three days of kitchen work, non-stop.

The minute I got to Fort Hood, I formally applied for duty in the Regimental Band. I had a lot of band experience in civilian life, and being in an army band meant no combat. My application was never acted upon during the three years I was in service. At the end of the war when the fighting was all over, then my application was finally approved. I guess you know what I told them to do with it.

We had finally been assigned to a regular army outfit when we met our first sergeant, Eugene Logsdon, who told us, in no uncertain terms, that he didn't like "smart-assed Yankees," and from that point on, we belonged to him. The Texas prison system had 50,000 short term convicts (men who were convicted of things like theft, arson, robbery, and rape) who were told they would be pardoned if they would sign up for a three year term in the army. Sgt. Logsdon was one of these convicts, and his career was that of a shoe cobbler. This man was given charge of three thousand men, with a life or death possibility hanging over them. It's no wonder that we all went crazy with a man like him in full charge of us.

We began a rigorous period of basic training for seventeen weeks, which was just awful. One of the men came down with spinal meningitis, so they quarantined us, which meant that you could not leave the camp for any reason whatsoever. Then, they decided to make us take our basic training all over. It was terrible in that hot desert of Fort Hood, which had a water shortage problem as well. You only received one helmet liner (about a half gallon) of water each day.

We ate all of our meals in a mess hall with ten men seated around a sort of picnic table. GI waiters served the table, and we all took turns doing this. One morning we were served dry cereal with milk. I was at the end of the table, and there was no milk left in the bottle for the last three of us. This went on for a couple of days, and finally, I got up enough nerve to say something about it. Sgt. Logsdon came tearing over to our table and made me stand at attention while he dressed me out as being no good, and gave me a couple days extra duty peeling potatoes in the kitchen. From this point on, I never complained about anything in the Army.

After we completed our basic training, we were allowed to go on pass once in a while. I got a short furlough and came home on pass in early August. Irene and I got married on August 4, 1943 in the North Delaware Methodist Episcopal Church on Delaware Avenue in Buffalo. I was one month short of being twenty-one years of age, and they wouldn't give me a marriage license, so I had to get my mother to sign for me. We had a short honeymoon on Sunset Bay near Hamburg, N.Y., and I went back to duty at Fort Hood.

Eventually, Irene decided that she should come to Texas and spend some time with me while I was training. Once she took the train with Grandma Watson down to Fort Hood. Another time, Irene and I had an occasion to take the train from Buffalo to Camp Hood, a trip of about three and a half days. Irene attracted a lot of attention with her beautiful legs and short skirts. When we got on the train, it was packed with service men. All of the seats were filled, and even the aisles were filled with people standing up, including us. Irene sat on her suitcase and I sat on my duffel bag in the aisle. Sometimes, Irene went to the ladies restroom so that she could sit semi-comfortably for a while. After a period of time, two sailors offered Irene the chance to sit with them, so she had a good ride for a brief part of the trip. In time, however, Irene left her seat for a few minutes, and the sailors found two pretty girls to take her place. We rode all that distance and all those three days without taking a bath or changing clothes or sleeping much. But, that was how it was in wartime.



Conway Field
Colvin Blvd and Brighton Rd
1943



Stew and Irene's Wedding
August 4, 1943

Shortly after her arrival, Irene got a job in the Post Engineer's Office. After living in peoples' homes for awhile, we finally got a soldier's barracks home to stay in. She worked for the Fort Hood Post for the better part of a year. She was a beautiful young wife, and the other employees fell in love with her. She was a secretary and she worked hard for them. One day, she came into work and told them she had just seen a baby cow. This caused a lot of laughter because the correct farm name was either a calf or heifer. Her job ended, and she went home after I was transferred to Fort Benning Georgia for officer candidate school.

Every soldier had an MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) record that followed with him wherever he went. I had on mine the ability to take short hand and typing, and the fact that I had a fairly high IQ rating. The colonel in our regiment at Camp Hood noticed this, so he selected me to do court martial proceedings for a while. If a soldier was caught stealing or doing something illegal, even killing or rape, he was brought up on charges before the Judge Advocate Division. I found myself in trials taking shorthand of the proceedings, the testimonies of the prosecution and defense witnesses, etc. The only thing wrong with that was I could type pretty accurately, but my shorthand was something else. The proceedings of these trials were as fast as rapid fire, and I could hardly get it all down in shorthand. Also, shorthand consisted of a series of diphthongs or brief marks that often could have two or three different meanings. When I went home at night to transcribe the shorthand, I was in a real mess because I couldn't really decipher what I had written down very well, and if a man's life was at stake, this was awful. I finally told the colonel, but he wanted me to stick with it a little longer. After a number of trials, the Colonel finally called me in and ended my career as a court reporter, much to my great happiness!

I met some interesting men in the service while training in Texas and at Fort Benning, Georgia, while at officer candidate school. One man was named Dave Christoff, who was from New Jersey. He was a slick dresser and always looked like he was going on parade. We had a lot of fun together because he was a big band devotee, and he reminded me of home, and my band days.

Another man was Al Ludlow, who was 37 years old and should never have been drafted. He was from Kansas where they probably had reached the stage of drafting anyone who could walk. Al had trouble keeping up with all of us younger men, but we got him through his training somehow. He was a school teacher, by trade, was very smart, and we all liked him. He would probably be in his mid-nineties by now if he survived the war.

Most of the men in my outfit were from 17-21 years of age. They make the best soldiers because they will do what you tell them to do—immediately—and without question. Being 21-22 years of age myself, they kept calling me “Pop” or “Dad.” A guy like Al Ludlow just didn’t seem to fit in. The young guys were all scared to death in combat, but they would do what you told them to do, while the older men held back. We were *all* scared to death, for that matter, but you were better off with the younger guys when the fighting got hot.

I had a battalion leader by the name of Captain Earl Vollrath. He was a cold fish who never smiled and was a stickler about operating by the book. Guys like him and Sgt. Logsdon sweetened up in combat because they knew that they could be shot from “Friendly Fire” if they got too unpopular.

Another friend I met was Emmanuel Gelband from New York City. He was very clever and knew how to work all the angles. He organized getting the use of a car even though it was a time when it was extremely difficult to get gas ration coupons. Together with his wife, Irene and I would go riding with them around Texas, west of Temple. One day we stopped at an abandoned farm where we spotted endless numbers of large pecan trees. We picked about a bushel of them and sent them home to Grandma Ahrens who loved pecans. It was so pleasant riding around in Mannie Gelband’s car, those few times that we did. I remember driving along one time when we spotted a large rattlesnake on the road that had been run over. Texas is full of rattlesnakes, and we in the Army, had to be careful not to disturb them when we were on field maneuvers.

We trained rigorously for about a year when they approached me with the suggestion that I should apply for officer training, which I did.

I had a fairly high IQ, which they noticed on my records, so I got chosen for special duty in the S-3 (Intelligence) section of my regiment. I was assigned to work directly under a Major Burroughs. He was from Atlanta, Georgia, and didn’t particularly like Yankees. So, I told him I was a Canadian, which was a lot better as far as he was concerned. However, he really hated black people, and would do anything mean to them that he could. He and I would drive around in our jeep inspecting things and stirring up a lot of dust. Major Burroughs was a real martinet, and if you crossed him or let him down, all hell broke loose.

We spent a lot of time training in the use of weapons such as the M30 Garand Rifle, the Thompson Machine Gun, 40mm and 80mm Mortars, 50 Caliber Machine Guns, and both the 76mm and 90mm artillery pieces. We had the 90mm artillery piece on our tanks as well as the 50 Caliber Machine Gun. The 30 caliber Garand Rifle was the basic piece for the infantry, and

everyone had to train with it. I remember all day, day after day, shooting the Garand Rifle, which had a heck of a kick back to it. After a day on the rifle range, your shoulder would be all sore and black and blue. I finally qualified as an expert marksman, which is as good as you can get. However in the tank, we carried the Thompson machine Gun and the Colt 45 pistol because there just wasn't room for five big Garand rifles. The Germans had an excellent machine gun, which we called the burp gun (Schneiser Machine Pistol) because of its high cyclic rate. It could empty its chamber of 36 rounds in a few seconds and sounded like a burp. They also had an excellent pistol known as a luger, which everyone tried to get. I liberated a whole case of them from a gun factory and took them with me to my trip to Paris for bartering. They disappeared really fast.

Life in a tank training camp was pretty boring and time consuming. You knew that you were being trained for the very worst, which is combat, and you were lonely and homesick most of the time. One of the greatest events that took place was the arrival of the United Service Organization's star performance of the Bob Hope entourage. There were about 10,000 of us who turned out for the occasion. Bob Hope, Jerry Colonna and Francis Langford, plus some others and a really swinging band, made up the cast. Bob was out in front swinging his golf club telling jokes for two hours while Jerry did his humorous song bit. Francis sang a number of songs and the band played a lot of swing numbers. It was a day for us to remember because it gave us a lot of laughs and the remembrance of home. It sure meant a lot to us to have Bob there.

I trained as a tank destroyer operator for a full year, and my officer's candidate application was finally approved in 1944. It was a tenuous seventeen-week course, where they practically kill you with unheard of discipline and try to break your will. I stuck it out for the complete course when they called us in and told us we had made it. We were told to go into town and get our officer's uniforms. Then at the last minute, they called us in and told us that they didn't need so many officers at that time, and they were taking away our Sergeant stripes (five stripes) and sending us over to France as a replacement unit, since they needed infantrymen badly.

Everything was a big secret, so they shipped us by train to Maryland, and then by rail again to Camp Shanks, New York, which was a Port of Embarkation for Europe. After about a week, they loaded us onto the Queen Elizabeth for the trip to Edinborough, Scotland. The trip took six days because every one and a half minutes, they executed a zigzag. This, together with the roll and toss of the ship like a cork in the rough North Atlantic, resulted in me being seasick for two weeks. Even when we got to

Edinburgh, when I would shut my eyes, I would get sick all over again. We then took the Royal Scot (Britain's crack train) to Southampton, where we boarded a Land Ship Tank for one of the roughest crossings of the English Channel in history. It took us twelve hours to cross to France, when it normally takes only six. I got seasick all over again. When we finally landed, I was so weak that I could hardly function, but we all had to dig our heels in and bear it. That's the Army for you. We then marched about two or three miles until we came to a large aerodrome, which was being used as an amphitheater. We were paraded in just in time to hear Tommy Dorsey's band (without Tommy) playing. It was a real thrill to hear his male vocalist, Jack Leonard, sing his hit, "Marie." They continued playing all the Dorsey hits that we were so familiar with, which served to make us a little more homesick.

Shortly thereafter, we were taken by truck to get affiliated with our outfits on the battle line. I was assigned to a tank destroyer battalion in the 35th Infantry Division under General Patton's Third Army. The very first night in my battalion, we were told to spend the night in an old farmhouse. Things tend to slow down at night, but get very busy during daylight hours. The officers took the basement because it was safer from artillery shells. I ended up on the second floor along with a young soldier from Indiana that I made friends with on the trip over. He decided to look out of the window while I rested. An artillery shell hit him on the head without leaving a piece that you could even pick up. I had trouble sleeping that night thinking about him and his family.

It was the practice of my outfit to put guards out at night to insure that enemy soldiers could not sneak up on us. One night, I was serving a tour of guard duty from 2:00 am to 6:00 am, and I heard loud breathing coming closer and closer to me. I was sure it was the enemy, and I was getting ready to shoot my rifle, because it was pitch black out. I called for the password or I would start shooting. The breather kept ignoring me, and the breathing kept getting louder and louder until I finally realized it was only a wandering cow!

On the first day that we were in actual combat, I saw my first dead German Soldier. He had been shot in the head and was laying face upward like he was asleep. He was tall, about 6'5" and was wearing a beautiful black gabardine uniform with a silver insignia on the collar. He had blonde hair, and a physique typical of a Nordic member of the German master race.

I had the thought, while looking around at my battle-mates, who were mostly short men, that maybe I was on the wrong side, in the wrong army!

We fought on, crossing a number of rivers until we came to the German border town of Aachen. The fighting there was so heavy with constant artillery shelling and aerial bombardment that there wasn't a single store or building that wasn't leveled to the ground.

We came to Koblenz on the Rhine River, and there was a ten-day period of recuperating to get ready for the crossing, and for engineers to build a pontoon bridge. During this time, I had taken a German army rifle from a dead soldier, a Mauser Carbiner, which was manufactured in Skoda Works in Czechoslovakia. It was a beautiful piece of workmanship, and I wanted to ship it home. I liberated a piece of white material from a bombed out department store in Koblenz, took out the firing pin and threw it away, and wrapped up the rifle so it could be sent home.

Also during this time, German snipers were picking off some of our men. They had positioned themselves in the upper piers of the massive Cathedral in Koblenz. We were under general orders not to destroy churches, but in this case we went ahead and sent artillery rounds into an area where we saw a puff of smoke. In the end, we did a lot of damage to that Cathedral, but we ended the problem of those snipers once and for all.

Our battle plan tended to drive us north to the city of Rheinbeck on the Rhine. This caused General Bradley to detach us from the Third Army and temporarily place us under the command of General Montgomery's British Second Army for the Rhine River crossing.

When the engineers had finished the pontoon bridge over the Rhine at Rheinbeck, the US Navy brought in their smoke bombs, which completely blocked out everyone's vision, including the Germans. So early one morning, we were given orders to go. We drove our 36-ton tank destroyers on to the pontoon bridge. It was a nerve-wracking ride with the pontoons barely able to hold us, swaying from side to side in the river. About every third tank slid off the pontoons into the river, and everyone that slid off was presumably drowned. The Rhine is a little wider than the Niagara River at this point, so it was a terrible experience not being able to see ahead of you in all that smoke. We finally made it across, and all hell broke loose with the German Army throwing every weapon that they had on us. There were so many of us that we overwhelmed them and got them to retreat back a couple of miles. This gave us a chance to re-group and bury the dead. We were then reassigned to General Simpson's ninth army until we met the Russians at Berlin.

The German army was now in full retreat, but still very dangerous because they were on home ground. It was felt by our superiors that we needed a rest, so they offered us a three-day pass in Paris. Paris was one

hundred and fifty miles west of us, so they loaded us in an army truck and we headed for the City of Light. The first ones on the truck were our company chaplains. We spent a nice three days taking in the sights and the nightclubs. We visited the Moulin Rouge, the Louvre, Notre Dame, the subway, Napoleon's Tomb, etc. When it came time to leave, the last ones to get on the train were our chaplains, and they looked all tired out! It was great to get away from all the fighting, but we knew that when we got back, it would be awful again.

We were on the move constantly through Dusseldorf, Dortmund, Essen, Osnabrook, Hanover, Magdeberg and on to Potsdam and the Elbe River, where we met up with Russians outside of Berlin. On the way to Berlin, we came upon a concentration camp with all dead inmates who had been killed by the guards. The smell was awful, and when one of the guards tried to escape, one of our men opened up on him with a 50-caliber gun, and he was finished. There were over a hundred of these camps, but this was the only one I saw. This was a small one called "Gardelen" and there were about five hundred inmates, but we understood that it was the same all over Germany.

We had a little more time to ourselves, now that the war was winding down, and now we could finally have a bath, after about six months of being filthy. I decided to get a brush cut and sent a picture of myself home to Irene, which we still have. It sure felt good, because my hair was very long. I looked like a spook for a while, but we all did.

When we met the Russians outside of Berlin, they were a sight to see, full of pep and energy. They wanted to try out all of our tanks and equipment, and in general, made a nuisance of themselves. But they were good fighting men, and knew it. They would dance those Russian dances for us, and sing Russian songs. At this time, the war in Europe was over for us and we started thinking about going home, but it was not to be. They sent us to the town of Basel on the Rhine River for a two-month period of military government. We had to get the Germans going again because all of their towns were ruined, and they had no food or water. We gave them all passes and made them stay home after 6:00 pm. We hired a young lady to hand out the passes. She was always in a rush, with big lines of people waiting, and she would blink her eyes and say, "Ein augen blick," which means, "in the twinkling of an eye," which meant they wouldn't have to wait very long. We reorganized their town governments and got them working for us so they could have money with which to buy food. There were no men of my age left. They all had died in the war or were in prisoner of war camps.

After our period of military government was over, we were then sent to Camp Lucky Strike, which was in the center of France. We were told that because we had crossed so many rivers, this was tantamount to having amphibious experience, so we were picked for the invasion of Japan. You can imagine how we felt after all that fighting, to have to go to Japan. We were told we could expect to be in the Army at least another five years. By this time, I was twenty-three years old and had had enough of Army life.

Anyway, I was sitting on my tank one day in August 1945, listening to the British BBC, when they announced that the Atom bomb had been dropped on Japan, and that the war was over. No one can ever tell me anything but good things about the A-bombs. It saved the lives of millions of GI's, including mine. It was the happiest day of my life, because it meant that we were finally going home.

One thing I'll never forget was the ride home from Camp Lucky Strike. We went by truck to LeHavre, France, and boarded a ship to cross the English Channel to Southampton. It only took six hours, as compared to twelve when we first came across. It was a smooth ride this time. I remember writing Irene after the trip across the ocean the first time, followed by that rough crossing of the English Channel. I told her at the time that I would rather stay there and not come back than get so seasick again. We boarded the Queen Mary for the ride home to New York, and that was also a smooth ride. What a difference it made not to get seasick. As far as the rest of the GI's, it was one big five-day long crap game! Some lucky guys made fortunes, even though it was against army rules to gamble for money on board ship. I didn't gamble because I didn't know how, and I'm glad I didn't.

I was then shipped to Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky, where I was declared essential because I could type. I was kept there until late 1945. I finally had to call on my brother, Ed, to contact a congressman, who eventually got me out of the army, and I finally got home.

Special Memories

During the last three months of the war, as the fighting became less intense, I began taking pictures with a box camera I had found in an abandoned German home. Just prior to this, we had captured a German Army signal corps outfit intact, and we had the opportunity to get hold of some excellent film, print paper, and developing solution, which I kept in a bag in my tank.

One day, we came across a Bell Airacobra fighter aircraft that had crashed along the side of a road. We could find no evidence of the pilot, so he either was captured or had made a parachute landing. When I noticed the printed address on the plane was 1300 Elmwood Avenue in Buffalo, we had another reminder of home. I took pictures of this plane and brought them home. I ended up printing all my buddy's pictures as well. I used the inside of my tank as a dark room.

Another time, we came across a German factory that manufactured motorcycles, and there were about one hundred of them all ready to go. The Germans used them for dispatch riding and message taking. We used a 50-caliber machine gun to completely destroy them. We also came across a factory that manufactured dress swords for the German Army. They liked to get dressed up with swords, etc., for their parades. I picked up six long and six short swords and brought them home as souvenirs. I gave some away, but I still have a couple of them today.

I had a day to spend in Liege, Belgium, which was pretty well banged up from German Buzz Bombs. I took some pictures and brought home one of me standing in front of their famous cathedral.

It was our practice at night to back our tanks right into what amounts to the living room of a German house. The tank, weighing thirty-six tons, would then settle into the basement. The roof usually would stay in place, which would generally give us good cover and camouflage from German planes. They would fly over every night bombing anything they could see. We would call them "Bed Check Charley."

At night the American Air Force would fly over, literally thousands of them, to bomb the German cities while the British Air Force would fly over during the day. It was a beautiful sight to see, except for the occasional bright orange flash, which would mean that the German artillery had finished the plane, with ten to twelve men inside. I would liked to have been in the Air Force except for this. Our planes would drop bundles of strips of aluminum paper, which would screw up the German radar, which controlled

their ack-ack guns. After a raid, there was aluminum paper all over the place.

One day we were moving into battle, after a long one hundred mile and three day trip north, which was supposed to be a secret march. Our tanks were painted all over so that no one could see what our outfit was. Patton wanted to surprise the Germans by hitting their flank. After we arrived that morning, the Germans sent artillery shells with propaganda leaflets, which announced, "Welcome, 35th Division! We have been waiting for you." They listed our complete order of battle, how many tanks, names of our officers, everything. We were supposed to jump off at 6:00 am, and you can imagine how we felt. Regardless, we went into battle and pushed them back, so that we had them on the run. We had lots of casualties, of course, but they had more.

One thing that was really horrible and frightening was the German Buzz Bomb. They would start them off in a place called Peenemunde, and fly them in our direction or towards Liege or London. They would sound like a giant motorboat, which is why they called them Buzz Bombs. When the motor cut off, they would dive toward the ground and explode with a tremendous explosion. We would listen to them at night wondering who would be the recipient. If the motor noise kept going, you were safe, but if it cut off, you were likely to be pretty close. We never had one go off near us, thank goodness.

Another scary thing was an artillery barrage. The Germans were very good at this because they had the advantage of having the ground zeroed before we got there. They had a 88mm gun that could split a needle at a three-mile distance. They were constantly shelling us and our trucks and tanks. When we had the rare chance to get an evening meal, we could not stand in line, but had to go to the mess truck one at a time to get our food. The Germans seemed to know the whereabouts of our kitchen trucks, because they were always bombing us with artillery shells. We only got two meals a day, if we were lucky, both served in the darkness. Often there were a lot of casualties from artillery fire. Our artillerymen were doing the same things to the Germans, so we got pretty adept at distinguishing what we called "incoming mail" from "outgoing mail."

We had a man in our outfit by the name of Poshe. He was a Frenchman from Louisiana, and he was so afraid of artillery fire that he just couldn't function. He would roll up in a ball and shake and scream. He was normally a good soldier, but unfortunately his job was to drive the Colonel around. The Colonel was incensed with Poshe and would scream at him

unmercifully, trying to get him shaped up, but Poshe would only get up when the shelling was over. Then he would return to normal once again.

Our tank destroyer battalion had assigned a tank to a platoon of infantrymen. The infantrymen would jump on the back of tanks and ride into battle. I felt sorry for the infantrymen at night because they had to sleep on the ground, which meant the snow. A lot of them had trench foot from being wet and cold all of the time without a chance of getting dry socks or dry feet. Some of them got gangrene and had toes cut off because of this condition. We were dry in our tanks, but we were sitting ducks for a smart German, since all he would have to do was drop a grenade in our open top. Tank Destroyers had open tops and did not button up like the Sherman tanks, which could bolt their top secure. The Sherman tanks were rather slow compared to ours. We had so many of them that the Germans couldn't keep up with them, and they ran out of shells trying to stop them. I liked ours because they were fast and you could move out quickly if you got in a jam or trouble. However, they made a terrible engine noise when they were started up at 5:00 am. You could never sneak up on the enemy. Right about that time, they switched our tanks over to 100-octane (gasoline) based engines instead of diesel, so they would start up faster. The engines were much more quiet, but because of the octane gas, they were highly susceptible to exploding if you took a hit in the engine or gas tank area. We were scared to death about this, but at least those engines were relatively quiet.

Our battalion was fortunate enough to have a Congressional Medal of Honor winner in the person of a man named Junior Spurrier. Junior, which was his real first name, was a big farm kid from the mid-west. He was what the Army called a "screw-up" because he was always doing something that was not by the book – being late for roll call, having messy gear, shoes always unlaced, etc. He was always on report for some minor infraction, but he did one thing perfectly. He was an expert marksman with a Garand rifle that could take the wings off of a fly at 1000 yards distance. One morning, when we looked around for him, he wasn't there. He had disappeared and we got ready to go without him. At about 10:00 am, when we were moving forward, we saw about twenty-five Germans marching towards us with their hands held high up in the air. Junior was behind them, herding them along. He had gone off early in the morning before we got going. When he came to a machine gun nest, he picked them all off with his rifle, and the twenty-five men surrendered rather than get wiped out by Junior. The Battalion commander recommended him straight away for the Congressional Medal, which was the highest award a soldier could get. It was, and still is, for

extreme courage and valor, way beyond the normal call of duty, and that's really what Junior did. After that, we called him Task Force Spurrier. The Battalion Commander secretly got word to us that we should take care of him from then on, and keep him from screwing up things, because he didn't want the higher echelon to know what Junior Spurrier was really like.

Because of my typing skills, my superiors would call on me in combat to make out the morning report to Division Headquarters, which was a typewritten document that told the story of the previous days battles. It included information like KIA (killed in action,) MIA (missing in action,) WIA (wounded in action,) and a brief report of our status in battle, and what we had accomplished the previous day. We also were required to list our requirements – such as how many 90mm shells and how much 50 mm and 30 mm ammunition was needed, how many privates and second lieutenants were needed, and a general description of how many tanks were still operational, and how many new ones we would require. I had about thirty minutes to assemble all this information and get it off to higher headquarters, which was a big rush. But, after a while, we got pretty good at it. This report was required every day, including Saturday and Sunday, which were each considered “just another day” as far as the Army in battle was concerned.

During the last few months of the war, we were capturing Germans galore. In the earlier days, they were die-hard Nazis and were sullen and nasty if you tried to talk to them. After the tremendous beating that we gave them from about February until May 1st, 1945, they were glad to surrender in order to keep away from the Russians. Their cities were pulverized, their Air Force and Panzer Corps were decimated, and they wanted to quit, but you still had to worry about the occasional SS man who would never give up. One day, I was assigned the job of marching about one hundred prisoners from the frontal zone to the rear echelon area, which took about two hours. There I was, all alone with my machine gun, guarding one hundred men. I was really concerned that they might try to jump me, but they didn't. The German soldiers were excellent marchers, much better than we were. So, I just marched along beside them until we got to the prisoner of war area. I was really relieved when that was over.

As the war wound down and the rear echelon and supply units began to catch up with us, we began to receive weekly rations of seven candy bars, seven packages of cigarettes and seven cans of pop. The officers got the same thing with the addition of two quarts of whiskey. There was a lot of trading going on among us, with the guys like me (who didn't smoke) taking a lot of candy bars. We soon got sick of the candy and began giving it to the

little French and German kids. They followed us around like locusts, and the German and French adults would do anything for a package of American cigarettes. They would wash and iron our clothes, shine our boots and in general, be helpful in order to get their hands on this stuff. We got a lot of canned Spam, which the Germans loved. We passed this out, too, because you can get real sick of Spam when you eat it every day. We gave out K-rations as well because these people were all starving and had no money to buy anything. The German mark was worthless at this time.

One of the most interesting activities took place when a regimental combat team stopped for the night. A couple of privates were assigned the job of digging what was known as a slit trench. It was eight feet long, eighteen inches wide and four feet deep. When the ground was frozen, it was a terribly hard job. There were usually two slit trenches dug, one for the officers and one for the enlisted men. I dug a lot of them in my career. They were used as bathrooms. However, during an air raid or an artillery barrage, many guys used to dive into them for protection, regardless of the stench. It was excellent protection against bomb fragments that were sailing all over the place. We also had to dig foxholes where we would spend the night. I usually would stay in my tank, but that was dangerous at night with enemy patrols roving around all over the place. They could throw a hand grenade in the tank, and that would be the end of the story.

The rigid discipline and the terror of battle were hard on everyone, but some men couldn't handle it at all. Some guys were known to inflict wounds on themselves just to get out of combat. Others got what is known as battle fatigue, and just couldn't function anymore. There were malingerers who were faking battle fatigue. Others wouldn't pick up a gun, supposedly because of their religious convictions, like the Amish or Jehovah's witnesses. I had a couple of good friends who got battle fatigue and I hated to see them sent back. They were usually sent back to the rear echelon and handled rather badly as if they were cowards. It was impossible to tell the difference between true fatigue and cowardice. I never saw those men again. Sometimes, they made medics of them, which meant they couldn't have a gun with them. But, the main job they gave them was to pick up the dead soldiers, both the Germans and ours, and take them back for identification and burial. The worst ones who wouldn't do anything anymore were cashiered out of the Army under the provisions of Section 8 of the army code of justice. We had one poor guy who took off all his clothes and wouldn't let anyone put them back on. Of course, he would have been useless in combat because he was so obviously off his rocker. It's

a wonder that we got along so well in battle, but these are examples of the real life in the Army.

Another interesting thing was the pay scale that we received in the army. It started out at \$21.00 per month for a Private. Corporals would get \$2.00 more, and a T-Sergeant would get \$70.00 a month. I was a Technical Sergeant, so my pay was \$70.00 per month.

After I got married, the army sent home an allotment of \$70.00 per month to Irene, which she saved religiously. We had a nice nest egg when I finally got out of the service. Every soldier was given a life insurance policy by the government of \$5,000.00, in case he was killed in action. After the war, a slick insurance agent had me convert it, which was a farce, because I ended up with no insurance at all. There were all kinds of crooked schemes to get the insurance away from soldiers after they got home. I can't remember what they did to convert it, but I ended up with nothing from the government after all. These "slicksters" should have been put in jail for doing what they did to us returning soldiers.

You might be interested in what salaries were during the war as compared to what the soldiers were getting before I was drafted. My salary at Acme was \$30.00 a week for a five and a half to six-day week. Your Momma made \$75.00 per week as a secretary at Curtis Wright, an aircraft plant, and if she worked over 40 hours, she got double time. She had a really good job and she saved everything for our future. Soldiers really were very poorly paid for putting their lives on the line. But that was the way it was during wartime. Food was rationed, and you needed stamps, which were issued by the government, to purchase everything – food, meat, tires, and gasoline. Naturally, there was an active black market, but you had to pay dearly for anything you wanted. When I was in the Army, I thought that if I could make \$1.00 per hour when I got out, I would be sitting pretty!

I thought you might be interested in how the Army was organized. It consisted of Squads, Platoons, Battalions, Regiments, Divisions and Corps. A Squad was comprised of 8-10 men and a Platoon consisted of about 40 men or 4 Squads. A Battalion consisted of 4 Platoons or about 160 men. A Regiment consisted of several Battalions or about 3000 men, and a Division consisted of about 15,000 men. A number of Divisions comprised an Army Group, and a number of Armies made up a Corps. I was a member of the 134 Infantry battalion, which was in a regiment that was part of the 35th Infantry Division that was a part of the Third Army. Our Division Commander was Major General Paul W. Baade who commanded the 35th Infantry Division. I only saw him once when we were moving up to the front one day. He was standing beside his command car with a grim look on

his face, and sported a silver baton, which probably showed off his authority. I never saw General Patton who commanded our Third Army, but I had seen the aftermath of his visit to the troops in the person of demoted officers, who were unlucky enough to get in his path. He would bust full Colonels down to Private just to make an impression of his supreme authority. He was always immaculately dressed, and wanted his troops to look the same way. He felt that it was important to their morale to look all “spit and polish.” It was “Blood and Guts” Patton that really knew how to move an army around, with *our* blood and guts. I never saw General Montgomery, but I served under him for a while in his British 2nd Army. I never saw General Simpson of the 9th Army, but I served under him during the last three months of the war. General Omar Bradley was in command of all us who were appointed Corps commanders by General Eisenhower.

I received the following awards while in the United States Army:

- ASMG Theater Ribbon with 2 Bronze Stars
- American Theater Ribbon
- World War II Victory Medal
- Good Conduct Medal
- Garand Rifle TSMG Qualification

Most of the people in World War II had a “Victory Garden.” This was true of the British, French and the German people. Most of the produce from the farms was going to the armed forces, so you had to grow your own tomatoes, potatoes, beans, corn, onions, radishes or you wouldn’t have any. Most people preserved their homegrown fruit and vegetables, and some people, including my father, had their own chickens as well. When we were fighting our way across Germany, we would avail ourselves of their gardens to supplement our K-rations, which were pretty awful day after day. The Germans grew large potatoes, tomatoes and wonderful squash along with all kinds of berries. They had great beer and wine in large quantities. We would give them cigarettes in return for their produce and beverages. I never used to drink much before I went into the Army, but I sure learned fast with all that noise and confusion. You could keep going after a few belts of wine!

Life in a Tank (Tank Destroyer)

First of all, there was a big difference between a tank and a tank destroyer. A tank had a 76mm gun, while a Tank Destroyer had a 90mm gun. A tank was suspended by a T-shaped bogey wheel arrangement, which the tracks would run on, while a tank destroyer ran on solid wheels that were holding up the tracks. You did not have the problems of maintenance with a tank destroyer. A tank would go about twenty to twenty-five miles per hour, while a tank destroyer would go up to fifty miles per hour, which was a big difference. A tank destroyer had a 50-caliber machine gun on a round scate mount on top, while a tank had a 30-caliber machine gun.

A tank destroyer had a crew of five men. A tank commander stood up with his head exposed out of the open top. There was a driver and an assistant driver seated side by side in the bottom, and a loader, who positioned the 90mm shells in the breechblock of the 90mm gun. Finally, there was a gunner who sighted and aimed the gun. All of us were trained in each other's jobs in case someone got wounded or killed. We rotated positions several times during the day. In the summer it was unbearably hot and dusty, while in the winter, it was very cold. If a man got wounded, General Patton's rule was that you would throw the injured soldier out of the tank and call for a medic. Under no circumstances could you hold up the advance for a wounded man. We didn't replace a man who was wounded until nighttime or a halt was called. It sounds kind of cruel, but it made sense in the long run. We usually stayed in our tanks and we had a canvas cover for the top in case of rain or snow. We had water and K-rations in the tank, so we were all set for the day except when you had to relieve yourself, in which case, you got out of the tank!

One of my best friends from back at Fort Hood, Texas, was a big farm boy from New Vienna, Ohio, Eddie Thornburg. I didn't see Eddie after I went to Officer Candidate School, but he was assigned to a Tank Destroyer outfit like I was. One day when he was riding in the tank destroyer as a tank commander, he was shot in the right shoulder. He had to be taken out of his tank and placed on the ground to await a medic, who did arrive. Three years later, when the war was over, Irene and I drove to New Vienna to see Eddie. There he was on a farm with a redheaded wife combining wheat with one arm. His right arm hung down like a stick, paralyzed. Later on, Eddie gave up farming and moved away. I lost touch with him after that, but he really was a good old boy, and some day I would like to look him up.

Morale

A young soldier away from home for the first time after one, two or three years got terribly homesick and was afflicted with low morale, particularly in a combat situation. The only remedy for this was to see that he got his mail about once a week, if possible. Irene used to write me three or four times a week, and my brother Ed was always sending me something.

My Mom and Dad were pretty regular about sending mail, but I especially looked forward to receiving letters from my father. His name was Samuel Henry Watson, but he went by the name of Harry. Because he served with the First Canadian Pioneer Battalion of the Royal Canadian Army for four years, my mother was left back at home in Vancouver, British Columbia, with a son (my brother, Edward.) He had a lot of combat duty and he used to jokingly say that he was with a bantam battalion because he was so short. He was wounded in the battle of Vimy Ridge where the Canadians lost so many men. He took a shell fragment in the head and was in the hospital for nine months before he finally returned to duty. For a man with only six years of schooling, he wrote with a beautiful English script. He knew what I was going through, and his letters really cheered me up because I knew of his combat experience. He served a five-year apprenticeship with his father's company, training as a plasterer and cement mason. He really knew a lot about concrete, which is probably the reason I like concrete so much. He has a special place in my heart and remembrance.

I also got occasional letters from Bob Bollman and the guys at Acme. What a lift it was to get mail in France and Germany. I wrote V mail letters back occasionally, but this would be only when you were given a rest from the fighting. Your morale picked up immediately when you got mail, because it reminded you of home and your loved ones. Irene's mail meant so much to me. It gave me a new start in life to read her letters.

My Sunday school class gave me a small New Testament Bible that I carried over my heart in my shirt pocket all during the war. It could have saved my life, and I did a lot of reading from it whenever I got a free moment. I still have it on my dresser in my bedroom.



Stewart's Army Unit



Stewart's Army Jacket



Technical Sergeant

Received 5 stripes which is the highest rank after battle



Stripes depicting service in England, Germany and France
3 stars = 3 battles In Germany



Hash Marks which counted years overseas



Wagon Wheel—35th Infantry Division
Part of the Third Army



Samuel H. Watson



Piece of American Parachute



Treasure Box



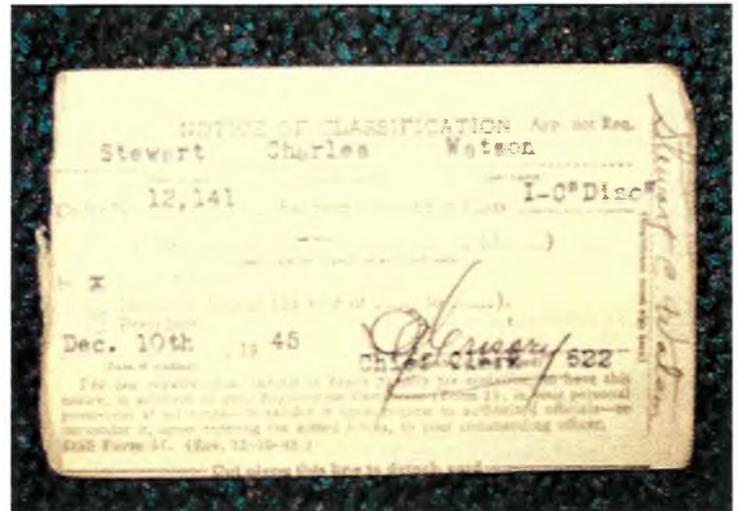
Banner from Camp Hood



Tank Destroyer Unit Insignia



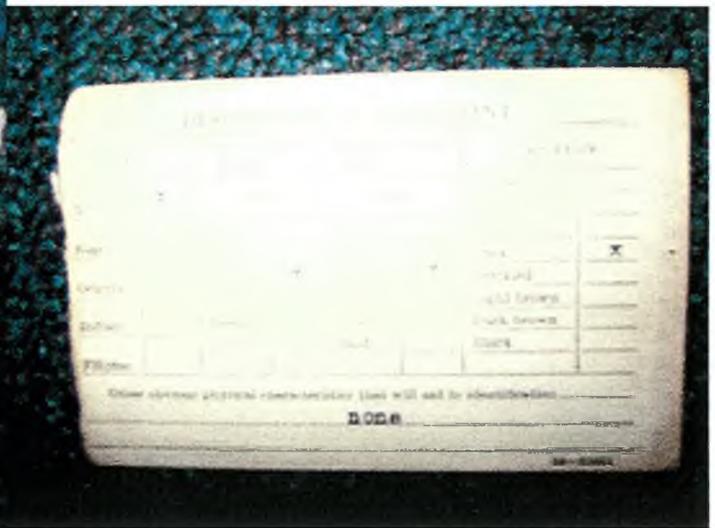
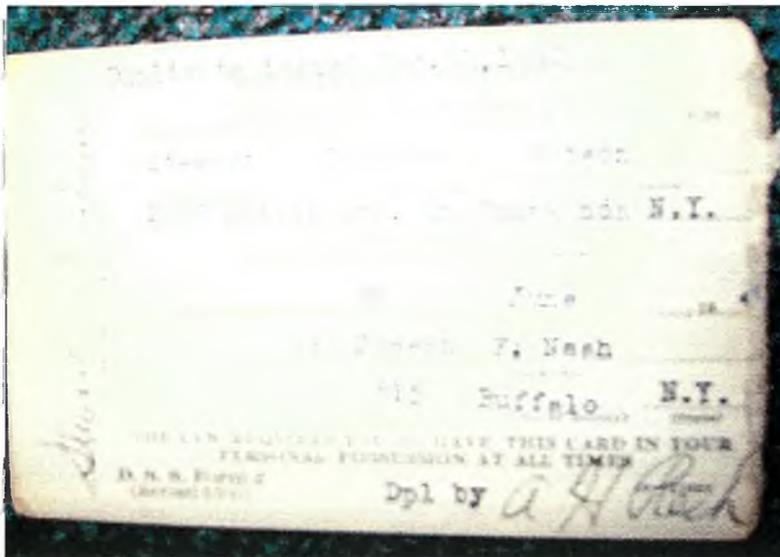
US Medal and Victory Badge



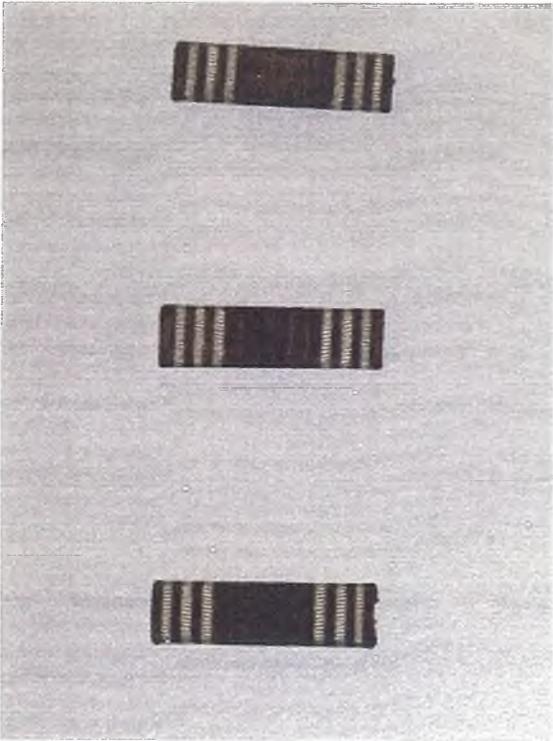
Notice of Classification



Alien Registration Receipt Card



Registration Certificate



Good Conduct Stripes



Awarded for Service in France and Germany



Tank Destroyer ID



Good Conduct Medal



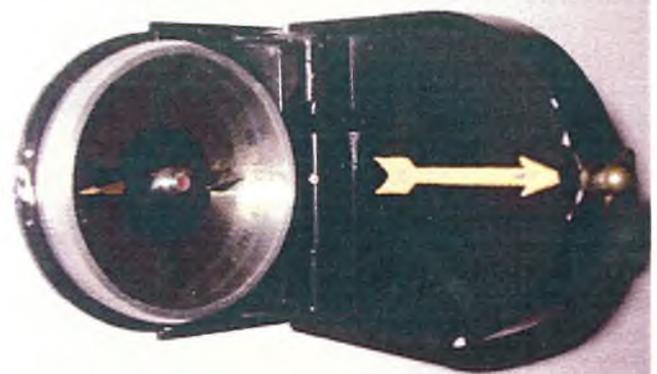
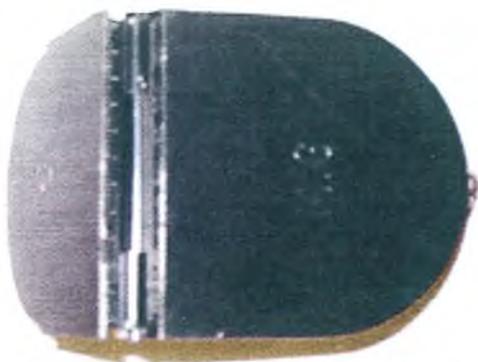
German Cooking Unit



German Stove



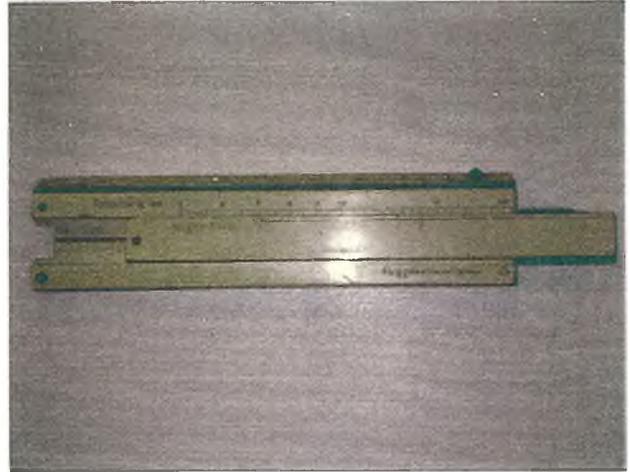
Truman Inauguration Medal given to soldiers after the war



German Compass



Dog Tags



German Artillery Slide Rule



Good Conduct Medal of Appreciation



US hand grenade clip



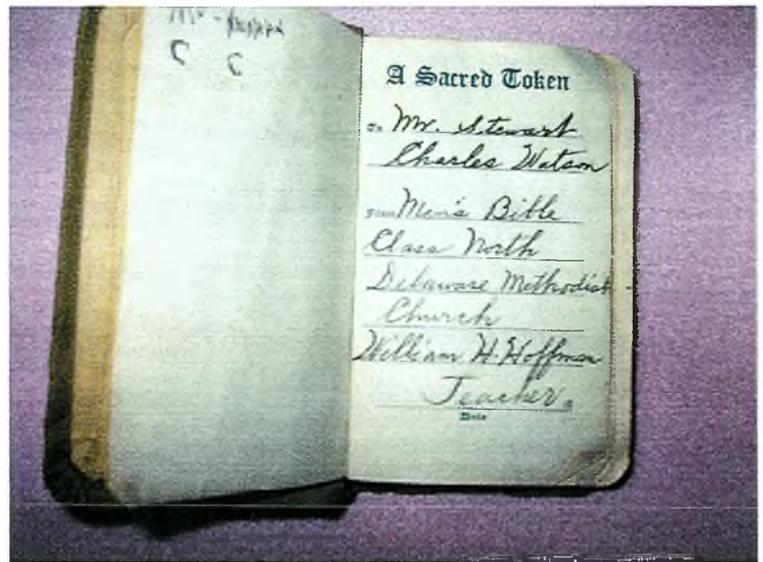
German Soldier Armband



US file hidden in his shoe with silk map of France to help him escape if necessary



Bible kept in his left breast pocket throughout the war. It was given to him by his Sunday school class before he left.



Nazi sword



Replica of statue in downtown Liege, Belgium

Watson Bowman

After working 30 years for the old Acme Company, and after putting up with their euphemistic and business BS, I was told that I didn't have any business management in me and could never aspire to being a vice president. They hired a new man to supervise me, Alan Becht, and he immediately took over my parking space. After a few more insulting occurrences, I decided to terminate my employment with them. I sat down at my typewriter at home one Friday morning, after a long trip on the road, and typed out nine copies of a letter of resignation, which in effect said, "I am herewith resigning, effective immediately." I also said that after working so hard for thirty years for them, I felt like a darn fool for having wasted all that time on them. In that three-sentence letter, I said that I hoped that my wife and family did not think ill of me for leaving so abruptly. I didn't tell Irene until I came home that day that I had resigned.

I went into the office and planked my letter down and reiterated the contents to Alfred Crone, the company president. He hit the roof and tore up my letter, so I planked down another (remember – I had nine copies!) He kept tearing up copies and sent Dick Crone out for aspirins because I had tears in my eyes. After about three hours of this he was convinced that I was having a nervous breakdown. I finally cleaned out my desk for good. I was making a salary of \$35,000 per year, which would be like \$100,000 today, and had an unlimited expense account. In addition, I got annual bonuses of \$5,000 to \$10,000, so it wasn't the money that caused my action. It was the bonehead management that treated me unfairly, and stole my ideas for patents without telling me.

Later that day, Mr. Crone called my brother Ed, and complained to him about my resignation, telling Ed that I had always been treated like a member of his own family. Ed told him that he better get used to the idea, because I had told him I would drive a taxi before I would go back to work at Acme. That afternoon, Tom Bowman resigned, and the following day, we both left on a trip to England, Germany, France, Switzerland and Italy in an attempt to buy up cross license agreements. We were successful in most cases. For about three to four months after I left, they told everyone I was having a nervous breakdown to smooth things over with my customers, who liked me better than them.

On the 7th of February in 1970, we incorporated the firm of Watson Bowman Associates, and we were off and running. For the next month, we traveled all over looking for rubber and steel suppliers, including the Johnson Rubber Company. Don Finefrock hesitated because he knew the

shock effect it would have on Acme when they heard he was making rubber for us, but he then gave us the go-ahead, and we were in business with the best rubber company in the business. We began to accumulate orders fast, and started shipping compression seals right away. When Alfred Crone learned of this, he hit the fan and began screaming to Don, but Don stuck to his guns. I always say that Don was the "father" of Watson Bowman.

After about 4-5 months, about nine Acme men, my old team, came to me for a job, and stated that they would work for nothing until I could pay them. So, one at a time, I took them on, starting with Wayne Walters.

Alfred Crone decided to sue us and petitioned the court for an injunction to padlock our doors until the outcome of the suit. Judge John Curtain would not allow any of this nonsense, and the trial went on for about a year, and was finally settled out of court. Our chief counsel was Larry Hymo, who worked for us all this time without any payment because he believed in us wholeheartedly.

This was the first of many lawsuits we would have in business, and it was a great education for us. Most of the other suits concerned our patents, of which we had quite a few, but the Crone suit taught us a lot about our rights and responsibilities under the law. It was a blessing in disguise, although we didn't think so at the time. In all of our lawsuits we came out quite well, thanks to the skill and daring of Larry Hymo.

Some of the things we developed, tested and patented were Waboflex, Waboseal, Wabo disc bearing, Waboflex two-sided strip seals, Wabo Armoflex, various types of architectural seal elements for parking structures, Wabo Modulares for Bridge Sealing, Wabo Beta System, and a host of others. I took them all over the United States and Canada and traveled the world over getting them into specifications, establishing distributorship companies, and even establishing manufacturing rights in England, Spain and Brazil. These people would make our products locally and mail us money for each product made.

As time went by, I saw the merit in the German Maurer system for bridge joints as an advanced type of high quality. I went to Munich, and with the help of Waldemar Koster, took a license for world rights and began to promote this system widely around the world. It turned out to be a superior system, and we made and paid royalties of a minimum \$60,000 annually to the Maurer firm. The biggest seller of all our products was Waboflex SR. We shipped them everywhere and had them made under a license arrangement in London and Bilbao, Spain. We also made them in Brazil. It was the most profitable product in our product mix. We did a lot of experimenting with sound walls and wind generators, but we had too

much on our plate, and did not follow through with these two interesting developments.

Watson Bowman was a tremendously profitable company, just raking in money. In 1980, while on a trip to Europe, I sustained a heart attack and traveled home for four days before I had any medical treatment. My symptom was extreme exhaustion, and I even went to work on a Monday morning before I realized that I needed to see a doctor. The doctor immediately saw that I had had a heart attack, and I was taken to Millard Fillmore Hospital on Gates Circle. I was placed in Intensive Care where I had the classical signs of pain in the chest and arms. It was a week before they classified me as stable, and I began a period of treatment and rehab, which followed religiously, until I had my stroke on October 15, 2001. At the time of the initial heart attack, the doctors told me I was a classic type-A person, and that if I didn't sell out the business and retire, I would be dead in ninety days. (The doctors that told me this are all dead now.)

It almost broke Tom Bowman's heart for a young man like him to sell, but he agreed to do this for me as a friend. It took us almost three years to sell, during which I worked part time. One company, The Sun Oil Company, offered us a lot of money if we would stay on for five years, which we couldn't agree to do. We finally sold it to the Berwind Company for not quite that much, and turned over the keys to them in 1984. In just fourteen years, Tom and I became wealthy men, thanks to a lot of hard work and travel. Time and geography were our enemies in business, so I made the judgment to begin to charter jet aircraft to move around fast, so that I would have some time with my family, which brings up the next subject: Air Stewart.

Air Stewart

Having had a taste of the niceties of air travel at Watson Bowman, we learned a lot about jet travel, and the costs inherent in it. I needed something to do with myself instead of sitting home, so I decided to buy a Falcon 20 Jet Aircraft in 1985, which I got at an incredible bargain. Initially, we used it for personal travel to Florida, and later we took it to conventions when Watson Bowman desired my presence. It had a crew of two pilots and a stewardess, and seated nine people comfortably. We had it outfitted with special tableware, a TV set, slide projector and every possible wine or liquor you could imagine. It was the epitome of luxury first class.

We took three different fishing trips to Alaska and another one to the Main Southwest Miramachi River in New Brunswick, Canada, each a year apart. We took many pleasure trips to Sarasota, and the ladies took a shopping trip to Albany, while we took care of some business with the NYS Bridge Department. We went a couple of times to New Orleans for the convention of the National Business Aircraft Association. In plain language, it was one heck of a lot of fun for everyone involved.

It was costing money, so I decided to purchase three Lear-jets and charter them out to make some money. We charged \$250,000 per year plus engine time for them and for about three years we made a fair amount of profit. We bought a small Twinco for Rocky to use on short trips. We also bought a King Air in 1989, but it proved to be too slow and noisy. It could not fly very high and it was too bumpy, as well. Later on, we bought a twin-engine Cessna 414, and on one trip to Florida, we had a crash landing (due to poor maintenance by the previous owner) with Marc, Rocky and me on the plane. We replaced it with another Cessna 414 and were back in business.

The Learjets were older planes and the maintenance began to become excessive, so we decided to get out of the charter business and sell them. Prior to this, we had an agreement with the Cleveland Clinic to deliver body parts to them. When some unfortunate person got wiped out on a motorcycle, a medical team would fly to the site and take hearts, livers, kidneys, veins, lungs, corneas and some twenty-five other body parts from the deceased. We averaged the delivery of five hearts per week. There is a six-hour maximum time period allowed for the part to be harvested from the body and be placed in the new recipient. This mandated the use of a Lear Jet, which is the fastest aircraft of all. On one trip to upper Michigan, they picked up a heart for a recipient in the Cleveland Clinic. But when it was time to land, the Cleveland Hopkins Airport was socked in with fog and was

closed. The doctor on the plane got hold of the tower by radio. He begged them to let them land because a man at the hospital was two hours into an operation, and we had a time problem with the heart. The tower gave in under the circumstances, and gave permission to land. Unfortunately, the pilot could not see and he pancaked the plane. He slid off the runway tearing up \$250,000 worth of navigation instrumentation and lights at the end of the runway. No one was hurt. They got a taxi to take them to the hospital, but the Learjet was severely damaged. The doctor got a slight cut on his finger and sued us for a million dollars. He was on the Today Show the next morning telling about his heroics, but it took a year to fix up the plane. The insurance company paid him \$250,000 and felt that they had gotten off cheaply.

Because of problems like this, I decided to sell all of our planes and close down Air Stewart, which was finally completed in 2000. But from 1985 – 2000, we had a lot of excitement and a lot of pleasure from those aircraft, and I have to reiterate that they were among the best and happiest years of my life.



Watson Bowman Established



The Sale of Watson Bowman



Air Stewart



FALCON 20 JET

The Early Years

Brock is in the center of the wheat growing farm industry of Saskatchewan. Each of my uncles had a section of wheat (a mile square) that they farmed. Together, they farmed seven square miles of land. The soil in the vicinity of Brock is composed of rich topsoil, jet black in color and twelve feet deep, so it was a natural place for growing wheat, or anything else, for that matter. The growing season was twelve weeks, after which the weather got bad. So everything, including harvesting, had to be done very quickly.

My father, Samuel Henry Watson, met my mother, Elva Jane St. John, in Victoria, British Columbia while she was on a trip. They fell in love, got married, and started a family in Victoria. After they had had two children, my dad enlisted in the Canadian Army, and went away to serve in the First World War in 1914. He was wounded in action in the battle of Vimy Ridge, France, where the Canadian Army sustained a tremendous loss of life. He returned to duty after nine months in the hospital in England, and continued his service duty in 1918. My mother spent the war years back on the farm in Brock, and my father returned there to his family in 1919. He was a journeyman plasterer and a mason bricklayer by trade, so he spent four or five years working for the local farmers building all kinds of things for them. He was a fairly popular person in the community.

I was born on the second floor of a farmhouse in the little village of Brock, Saskatchewan, Canada, on September 17th, 1922. My mother had five boys, Edward, Robert, Stewart, James and William, all named after Kings of England. My mother told me that they contacted a doctor whose name happened to be Dr. Watson (no relation) who traveled by horse and buggy fifty miles to officiate at my birth. In the early 1920's, things were not very prosperous in Canada so when I was four years old, it was decided that our family would move to the United States. We boarded the Canadian National Railroad and traveled to a border crossing in Northern Minnesota where we paid a head tax, and went on through to Chicago. I can remember that during that train ride, my mother purchased some kind of sweet for me to eat, and another little boy on the train wanted some of it. My mother insisted that I share it with him, which didn't feel right to me!

My mother was a beautiful woman who loved music and going to church. She had a lovely soprano voice, and it was always a pleasure standing next to her in church when she would sing so beautifully. She had just one piano lesson, and taught herself from then on to play both the piano and organ. She was much in demand in the local churches both in Brock

and Chicago. Her social life revolved around the church where Sunday was always a day of rest. No work, card playing or anything else was allowed – just rest. There were no radios or televisions at that time. She had very high moral standards. She once told me that if I ever did anything really wrong, I would know that it was wrong, and from that point, I could no longer call her mother. That made a real strong impression on me, and I carried this thought with me throughout my entire life.

My father was a member of the First Canadian Pioneer Regiment, which trained in Winnipeg, Manitoba. He always said that because he was a short man, they had put him in a special bantam battalion. My father worked hard physically all of his life in mason work and plastering. When he would come home at night, we would rub his lime-chapped hands with Vaseline, and he would suck on a lemon to get the lime dust out of his mouth. He was very powerfully built, with big shoulders and a strong back and arms. The four of us boys would wrestle with him for fun, but he would throw us around like rag dolls. My mother was always afraid that he would hurt us, but he never did.

He built our homes in Victoria and Chicago by himself, both of which had a stucco finish, the Canadian style of homebuilding. He was a real high-class builder, and took pride in his work. When I was a teenager, he often took me out with him on jobs and taught me the fundamentals of masonry, which was extremely physically demanding work. To this day and because of his influence, I love concrete work and have done a lot of it.

Our home in Chicago was at 3351 Overhill Drive, in Elmhurst, which is a suburb. It was the nicest home on the street because my father built it. We were doing fine until the depression came in 1929, when the bottom fell out. My father's work ceased to exist, so he did all kinds of jobs. He worked on the railroad track gangs, sold vacuum cleaners, sold eggs, anything he could get paid for. For three years we went along this way until he finally got work in his trade again. There was no welfare or relief, but somehow we survived through those bad years.

I was sent to a Lutheran Parochial School in Chicago where I somehow flunked the fourth grade. I don't know the reasons why, but it made me feel bad at the time. We had Lutheran Seminary students as teachers, and they were really strict with us for even the slightest infractions of the rules. They used rulers to hit us on the hands and paddles on the fanny for serious infractions. I stayed there throughout the sixth grade, when we moved to Buffalo. My brother, Ed, met his wife Ellen in school in Chicago, since she was a neighbor of ours on Overhill Drive. He fell in love

with her and finally married her later on. Ellen was a beautiful blonde of Finnish descent, and she had a sister, Lillian, who was also an attractive girl.

My father always managed to have a beautiful car, the first two being brand new Ford Sedans. Chicago was a city ripe with crime, and his first car was stolen. He went to the Police Department, who told him to put up a \$200.00 reward, and they probably could get it back for him. He put up the money, and, after a couple weeks, they called him and told him to come and see his car. When he saw the car, it had no wheels or tires, and was completely stripped. It was worthless. The second new Ford that he bought had the same thing happen to it. He decided, then and there, to leave Chicago. He bought a Studebaker Sedan, loaded everything we could in it, and left for Buffalo. There he had a good job waiting for him at \$100.00 a week with my Uncle Bill's firm, The Buffalo Plastering Company. I might add that my father, during the end of the depression, had a fairly sizable bank account in a Chicago bank. When the banks closed in 1930, he lost every penny he had saved. It was a serious blow to his morale, but he took it on the chin like the good soldier he was, and dug his heels in and started over again from scratch.

It was 1933 when we left for Buffalo, and the mayor of Chicago, Anton Cermak, had just been assassinated. We all went downtown to see the funeral parade. Cermak was a real politician in a city loaded with graft and crime. The funeral procession was comprised of open sedans loaded with floral bouquets from every department of the city and industry. When the fire department truck went by, it was said that he would need a fire engine where he was going!

We settled in an upper flat on 53 Shoreham Drive in Buffalo, and immediately joined the North Delaware Methodist Episcopal Church. I was enrolled in Public School 21, and my mother had me take up the violin, which I played for three years. I disliked playing the violin tremendously, but I kept at it to keep my mother happy. (Recently, while attending Williamsville Methodist Church, I heard a young girl (Meagan Prokes) play a piece that I had played when I was young, "Liebeslied," by Fritz Kreisler.) I was enrolled, in the latter half of the sixth year, in 1933, in School 21, and completed my eighth grade in the year 1936. It was during these two years in school that I noticed and fell in love with Irene Ahrens, and this love has endured until the present time. Irene was an exceptionally pretty little blonde, and the boys *all* noticed her. It was about this time that I took up playing the drums. I had a paper route, so I had lots of money to spend. I bought a Ludwig drum set from Denton, Cottier and Daniels for \$350.00. It was a lot of money for me to lay out, but I was so crazy about swing music

that it made sense to me at the time. Also at about this time, Ronnie Olson (who was a good friend and neighbor on our street) and I started to form a band. We did a lot of rehearsing and began to play for dances and similar activities. We purchased uniforms and bandstand equipment, which we put to good use in our many jobs. Ronnie and I used to go and see the popular big time bands of our day like Chick Webb, Jimmie Lunceford, Cab Calloway, Count Basie and anyone else who came to perform in Buffalo. We watched carefully to see how they performed which was good training for us. We played for church dances, school dances, Hi-Y affairs, and even went on the road for a while. I also played at taverns on Friday and Saturday nights with a three or four piece band. Ronnie's band had twelve to fourteen pieces, which was a big organization for us to manage and make up payrolls. But we did it and prospered. This all took place while we were teenagers, so it required an unusual amount of discipline to organize these evening events. We worked very hard and were very busy doing this.

One of the interesting times of our social lives as teenagers was the Friday or Saturday night dance which was held at various churches in the North Park area. One dance was at Holy Spirit Church located on Dakota Avenue near Delaware. This was very convenient for Irene because she lived right down the street. There were a number of good bands, which were hired for these occasions – Vince Ryan, Ronnie Olson, Bunny Elmer, and Joe Giovino. The dances started out at 8:00 pm and lasted until 11:00 pm, with two intermissions and refreshments. Sometimes, they let me go on drums in certain swing numbers, and I beat the heck out of my drum set for five minutes, non-stop. The crowd would gather around me on the bandstand cheering me on, and it was very exciting for all involved. It was an age where just about everyone could dance, particularly the girls. So, if you couldn't or wouldn't dance, you were "out of it." If I remember correctly, the charge was twenty-five cents, which was pretty cheap entertainment for three hours of exciting music. There was no air-conditioning back then, and all of the basement windows were open during the dances. Irene's Mom and Dad would sneak down to the church and peak in the open windows to make sure that she was really there, as she had told them. They were very protective of their only child and would always check up on her to make sure she was telling the truth!

One of our most exciting evenings was when we organized a battle of the bands where we arranged for the best "colored" swing band in Buffalo to play against us in a standoff. The audience would cheer for the best sounding band. The other band was exceptionally good, and we were in our prime, so it was a standoff. It was a really exciting evening with both of us

playing our hearts out. I remember once we were scheduled to play in the Riverside High School auditorium on a special program. I was sick to my stomach during the event, and after it was over, I ended up in Sisters' Hospital with an appendectomy. Irene came and visited me while I was there. We played a number of times in the Riverside High School gymnasium for dances, which were a lot of fun for us. We enjoyed playing so much that we would have played for nothing because it was so much fun. After about four or five years of playing, we turned into real professionals and really made some fine sounds.

I had a nice little girl friend by the name of Ethyl McGillan, who used to come to the dances and hang around the bandstand. I used to take her out on dates for a while, but her father didn't like me, so it was troublesome. One time, I took my car and positioned it near a bus stop on Military Road, then called for her at her home on Hinman Avenue. We then got on the bus to go downtown to a movie. At least, that's what we told her father. We rode the bus to the bus stop, got off to get in my car, and there was Ethyl's father waiting for us. He hit the fan and told me that I was never to see Ethyl again, and dragged her off in his car. Ethyl did not come to school for the next few days, and when she finally showed up, she had brown marks on her chin from taking a dose of iodine in an apparent suicide attempt. There were other girls who came my way – Marjorie Shano, for one, many of whom hung around our popular dance band. The one girl that I really cared for was Irene. She was so popular that she had a list of some fifty boys who took an interest in her. Some were popular football stars, some were good dancers, and others were just plain good-looking fellows. She kept pretty busy during our years at Riverside High.

I was elected President of our Junior Class, and she was elected Vice President, and we had a lot of fun being so popular. I finally got up enough nerve to ask Irene for a date. When the day came, I showed up at Irene's house at 14 Dakota Street about ten minutes late. I met her mother at the door, and she told me that Irene had already left. Her mother was instructed by that little snip to tell me "Time and Irene wait for no man!" I recovered from this, and we began to have a number of dates over a period of time during our high school days, which ended with graduation in the summer of 1940. I got a job at the Acme Company and since war was coming in 1941, no one in my circle of friends considered going to college. I was playing in various dance bands, which kept me pretty busy. We kept having dates and started to get serious in 1942, when Irene and I became engaged. I bought a ring on the installment plan, because I never did get around to having a bank savings account. My high living was the reason for this. I was making

money at the Acme Company, and I had a continual stream of money coming in from my band work, but all this money went for dates and self-entertainment.

Once I remember borrowing my father's new car and took it for a spin on the Lake Shore Road near Angola. I was doing about 80 miles per hour. I was in the midst of passing triple on a curve when a cop nailed me. He took me before the Justice of the Peace in Angola, who promptly put me in their little jail overnight. When my brother, Ed, heard about it, he came to Angola and met with the police officer and the Justice of the Peace and listened to the facts. My brother, unbeknownst to me, made a deal with them to pay a \$25.00 fine, which was an enormous amount of money, and we went through the court procedure where I pleaded guilty. I was then sentenced to an amount of time in jail, which scared the heck out of me. But Ed, who was in cahoots with them, finally made an impassioned plea to let me off with the fine. He said that he would take me under his wing for the future. They agreed to this, and I was let go. That should give you an idea of what kind of an angel my brother, Ed, was. He would do anything for his brothers, regardless of the circumstances.

In January of 1943, I was drafted into the Army and was sent away to Texas to train in the Tank Destroyer School at Camp Hood, Texas. Irene and I were engaged, and six months after I was drafted, on August 4, 1943, we were married in the North Delaware Methodist Episcopal Church on Delaware Avenue in North Buffalo. The service was at 7:00 pm and the wedding reception was held in Irene's home at 14 Dakota Street. We spent our wedding night at the Hotel Statler in downtown Buffalo, which was a first class hotel at that time. The next day we went to Sunset Bay on the lakeshore for a few days. The Army had only given me five days off, so I had to go back to Texas and endure some of that awful hot weather.

I kept putting in my application to join the Regimental Band, but was told there were no openings. They had a really fine band with a lot of the members being in name bands from civilian life. The men in the band had a really good thing going for them. Other than practicing a lot, which was fun, they didn't do any training like we had to do out in the hot Texas desert. I kept up a regular stream of applications to no avail, until the fighting was all over, when I was no longer interested in anything else but going home.

After I got out of the army, I didn't have the interest in music like I did before I went. My primary interest was in building a career for Irene and me. I still enjoyed music as before, but I never played professionally again after I left the service.

Travel Memoranda

In the course of my business career, I was required to travel extensively. While at the Acme Company, we developed many new products that necessitated considerable travel throughout the United States and Canada. I documented these new developments in the form of technical papers that were sent to the National Academy of Sciences and circulated all over the world. I was invited to several countries to speak about these new products, and tell the stories of their development. One of the most important concepts was the development of neoprene compression joint seals for pavements, bridges, and for all types of civil engineering structures. This joint sealing concept revolutionized the practice of sealing joints. In the course of introducing our new methodology, I was required to go to nearly every country in the world, including Russia and China. My normal practice was to present my paper to a large group of civil engineers, entertain questions, and go out on a typical project and give a hands-on description of neoprene compression joint sealing. In this way, we built a world interest and market for our neoprene seals.

On one trip, I flew from New York to Geneva, Switzerland, and then took the train to Zurich, where I had scheduled a slide presentation for the firm of PROCEQ through Mr. Antonio Brandestini. When I got ready to leave the train in Zurich, I found that my slides and projector had been stolen from the luggage area. When I called Mr. Brandestini and told him about the situation, he couldn't believe it. He said that there was no crime like that in Switzerland. The scheduled meeting was later that day, in a country club, with over one hundred engineers present. I got through the meeting without my slides only because I did have some hand samples to show. Everyone understood my plight. After this, I became very good friends with Mr. Brandestini for many years, until his retirement. He even traveled to Buffalo a couple of times with his wife, Hahnny, and stayed with us.

On another trip to Moscow, I arrived at the airport and went through their rigorous customs procedures. I had carried with me three copies of my paper entitled, "The Compression Seal in the Architectural Industrial Environment," which I intended to leave with them at the conclusion of my presentation. When I arrived in the auditorium, which was located in Gorky Park, I was amazed to see about 1000 copies of my paper printed in the Russian language. Also, there were 1000 engineers seated in this massive auditorium waiting to hear me speak. Two Russian women, who were built like football players, were present to hand-feed my slides into their gigantic slide projector. Every once in a while, they would get one in upside down,

which was the occasion of much laughter from the audience. I was told to take three hours for my presentation, but the best I could do was about an hour and a half. Based upon the audience's reaction, it was a success!

On this same trip (I traveled to Russia three times) I engaged a rental car, but they insisted upon giving me a driver, who turned out to be a KGB man. During the month of February, we made a three-day long, one thousand mile trip from Moscow to Leningrad in the middle of the Russian winter. I became quite friendly with the driver since he could communicate in English. There were only a few gas stations, and no restaurants or short-order places during the entire ride. He felt sorry for me and brought along some oatmeal cookies, which were as big as your fist, and some cold coffee in an old wine bottle. It wasn't very much, but he did this out of the kindness of his heart. I suspected he was a heavy drinker because he smelled of alcohol. I wanted to take some pictures of bridges, but it was against the law. So, I asked if I could take his picture, and had him stand in front of one of several bridges along our route, and I got away with it. The trip took three days. We stayed in the industrial city of Novgorod, and I had been given a pass for the hotel. No money was exchanged since the passing of American funds was forbidden. The hotels were atrocious, and the furnishings were 18th century style. One night, I heard some noise outside my hotel room, so I opened the door, and there lay my driver sleeping in the hallway. When we finally got to Leningrad, I took a taxi to the airport. After endless customs activity, I got on the plane. It was about minus 40 degrees Fahrenheit. During the delay before take-off, I saw two military guys coming up the stairway of the airplane yelling, "Watson! Watson!" They literally dragged me off of the plane without my overcoat, and began to question me concerning the rented car. They wanted to know where it was. After about 15 minutes standing in the freezing cold, I was able to convince them that I had no knowledge of its whereabouts, and they let me back on the plane. During all of this time, I was extremely concerned about the bridge pictures I had taken. What I think had happened was that my driver probably had gotten drunk, took off in the car, and tried to cross the border into Latvia.

On another trip to Russia, I took my paper along and found again that they had printed numerous copies in Russian. On this trip, I took along two friends and business associates, Don Finefrock and Frank Gaus. At the airport, where there was a lot of confusion in customs, the Russians arranged it so that we became separated. We had no idea how to contact each other. We each had reservations at the same hotel, the mammoth Hotel Russia, which has 5000 rooms and check in stations on every floor. In spite of the

fact that we stayed in the same hotel for seven days, I never saw Don or Frank – which is the way the Russians wanted it. On our last day there, we finally spotted each other in the lobby so we decided to have a “going away” party in the restaurant on the top floor of the hotel. In this restaurant Frank Gaus made a big fuss over the Stolnichi Vodka, and ordered two cases shipped to his home in California.

In spite of the restrictions, I got a fair amount of slides of Russian bridges for my slide collection. In my travels around the world, I have amassed about 80,000 slides in my library, which represent every conceivable type of civil engineering structure. Dave Stafford and I went to several countries in order to collect and sort out the problems with cable-stayed bridges. We went all over the USA, Canada, the UK, France, Germany, and South America for this study of cable corrosion and premature distress to that type of bridge. We reported on this to a wide number of conventions and technical societies, and had our data published in Civil Engineering magazine.

We had an unusual experience in Germany when we tried to photograph Kohlbrand Estuary Bridge over the Elbe River in Hamburg. The bridge had a narrow maintenance sidewalk, about two feet wide that was not open to the public. Dave dropped me off with my camera to get the photographs we needed while he drove across the bridge, turned around and returned to get me. When he came back, I was no longer there. Dave became more and more frantic as he searched for me and finally contacted the police. What had happened was that a police car had picked me up and taken me to their headquarters, and the officers were trying to find out if my mission was to blow up the bridge. I was wondering how I could get out of this mess because we had a plane reservation to leave Hamburg later that day. Dave was really worried because the bridge authorities told him that they had had a number of people jump off the bridge and asked him, “Was your father-in-law a happy man?” After about five or six hours I was able to convince the police that I had no ulterior motive about the bridge so they let me go. I grabbed a cab and raced to the airport and met up with Dave in the waiting area.

On one of my trips to Europe in 1980, Dave and Judy came along. We went to Austria for a bridge convention and drove back through Germany to Munich to catch a flight to Paris. I was driving the rental car and I dropped Dave and Judy off at the airport gate, and then took the car about two blocks away to return it. I grabbed my four bags and started to run to catch the plane. I was totally out of breath and exhausted when I got to the luggage area and then became so weak I could hardly carry my

briefcase. Boarding our flight ahead of me was a Russian tour group, which dragged out my boarding and became a source of frustration. When I got on the plane, I was terribly tired but that flight to Paris was a blessing because I sat still all through it. What I didn't know at the time was that I had sustained a heart attack – my only symptom was exhaustion. We went out on the town in Paris that night and I got a second wind because we wine and dined and saw a terrific show. The next day we went to see the Eiffel Tower and I remember that I had difficulty walking across the esplanade to get to the tower, but Dave was with me and I somehow made it. It was a full three days and nights before we boarded the Concorde to fly home and I was totally exhausted. The morning after I got home, I decided to go into the office because I had some French engineers coming from Paris to see me about a licensing agreement. I lasted until about 10:00 AM when I realized that something was radically wrong. Someone called our family doctor, John Dustin, who said to come right over. He took one look at me and pronounced that I had had a heart attack. He laid me on the floor, loosened my clothes and called for an ambulance, which took me to Millard Fillmore Gates Circle. I was immediately placed in intensive care and that night I had another severe heart attack. I stayed in intensive care for a week until they stabilized me. I was in the hospital for about three weeks. They put me through a cardiac rehabilitation program with light exercise and a plan for recovery.

When I got home to our house on Sherbrooke Avenue, it was “doctor’s orders” that I stay home for eight months and I almost went crazy for something to do. I had a terrific business going, with all kinds of interesting problems and challenges. To have this kept from me was pretty hard to take as I became stronger and felt better. I was told that I am a Type A personality and it would finish me off if I started to work as hard as I used to.

I used to make various wines at that time, particularly from the elderberries we picked at Watson Farms. I had a fresh batch of 60 liters cooking at the time of my heart attack. The doctor gave his consent, so I finished off the entire batch during my 8 months recovery, which I really feel helped me to get better. Elderberry wine is an old Indian sickness medicine and it worked for me.

The Watson Bowman Company was a real gold mine in terms of profits but I was advised by my doctors to sell it and get out because of my heart condition. This was a real shock to me. We built the business up from nothing, it was thriving - the leader in our field - but I had to face the facts. I was in my sixties and it was time for me to sell. I talked Tom

Bowman into selling against his wishes. We had a lot of wealthy firms trying to buy us. Shell Oil offered us a lot of money if we would both stay on for five years, which I could not agree to. We finally settled with the Berwind Company (a wealthy conglomerate) and we didn't have to stay on.

In the process of building our firm, Watson Bowman, into an international company, I traveled all over the world. There were numerous trips to Johannesburg, South Africa, where I lectured before their construction and cement societies. I went to Buenos Aires, Argentina; Sao Palos, Argentina; Caracas, Venezuela; La Paz, Bolivia and Lima, Peru. All of these trips included onsite visits to their bridges and lectures before their cement and engineering societies, where I detailed what our products could do for them. Along the same lines, I traveled to Wellington, Christchurch and Auckland, New Zealand. I spoke in Brisbane, Melbourne, Hobart (Tasmania), Adelaide, Perth, Sidney and Darwin, Australia. I went to Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan, and later on to Tokyo and Kobe, Japan. We made life long business friends in all of these cities and, more importantly, we established a world base for our product line.

When our family was young, we got heavily involved with the Children's Community Chorus of the Tonawandas, under the direction of Lillian Sandbloom Wilder. This was a group of one hundred well-trained children who gave concerts primarily in Western New York during the summer months of May – September. They sang all kinds of songs – classical, show tunes, secular and sacred. The children ranged in age from 5 to 18 years. At all times there was a training chorus or "Second Chorus" of 30-40 children who would attend the weekly 3-hour rehearsal on Saturday. They would watch and learn the music, in anticipation of being promoted to "First Chorus", which was the 100 member-performing group.

For a number of years Irene was chorus mother, in charge of attendance, dress and gown arrangements, etc., which was a hair raising job under a martinet like Mrs. Wilder. The children had three costume changes; red satin robes, formal eveningwear and traveling outfits of white blouses/navy blue pleated skirts. Gowns and robes had to be exactly 5 inches from the floor, singers had to be at the concert site 60 minutes before a performance, and everything from lipstick color to length of hair bangs was regulated.

The chorus traveled to numerous cities in the USA such as Chicago, Washington and New York (Carnegie Hall) and sang some concerts in Canada and Pennsylvania, too, performing primarily at schools, churches and summer fairs. They also sang a concert every year with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra. In 1960 they went on a five-week tour of the music

centers of Europe, which included seven countries: England, Scotland, Holland, Germany, France, Italy and Switzerland. Highlights included a concert for the Lord Mayor of London, a twilight concert in the Heidelberg Castle and a special performance for Pope John XXIII in his summer palace outside of Rome. We left through Montreal and traveled on the Empress of Britain – a 6-day ocean liner voyage winding up in Edinburgh. Eighteen chaperones were in charge of sixty singers and I was in charge of the first aid kit. Fortunately during the five-week trip I never gave out anything stronger than aspirin. I was the sitting Master of Kenmore Masonic Lodge at that time and I wore my Master's Jewel in our audience with Pope John so it is probably the only Masonic Master's Jewel ever blessed by a Pope.

We had many adventures during this trip and we returned to London for our cruise home, only to be confronted with an international boat strike. Arrangements were quickly made for us to travel home on a Varig Airlines Boeing 707, which was an unexpected treat since in 1960 intercontinental jet travel was less common.

Judy served as piano accompanist for the chorus for many years and Mrs. Wilder was a difficult taskmaster to perform under. However, she established a high level of quality performance that will never leave our children throughout their lifetimes. Mrs. Wilder taught Wendy and Judy to play piano and organ together, and they still play duets to this day. Once during a costume change at a concert in Hornell, NY, Wendy fell down two flights of stairs and knocked herself out. She was to play a duet accompaniment with Judy for the finale and Mrs. Wilder was infuriated that she couldn't get up!

We participated in the chorus for about 12 years and in spite of the disciplinary mannerisms of the director, we all felt that it was worthwhile. We had a lot of adventures, learned a lot, and made many lifelong friends. Ron joined when he was very little and was placed right in the center of the first row to show him off. We have a great photo of him in that row shaking hands with then Governor Nelson Rockefeller when the chorus sang for a campaign event. Ron was only four when we took the trip to Europe and everybody fussed over him because he was so cute. His name to everyone was "loveboy".

Our Children

Irene and I had a disheartening start with the death of our first baby. It is hard to describe the depth of sorrow we endured for a long time afterward. It was heartbreaking and demoralizing.

Fortunately for us, Irene was pregnant at the time. We were very concerned because she had previously suffered two miscarriages. In any event, on April 3, 1949, Judith Gail came into our lives as a pretty little strawberry blond. I personally wanted a boy because we had lost Wayne. However, when Grandma Ahrens and I had our first look at her, she got inside of us forever and still is to this very day. Judy was a happy little thing and just what we needed to pull us out of the depth of our depression. We had just moved into our new home on Coventry Road and Judy kept us so busy we didn't have much time for being depressed any more.

Two and a half years later, Wendy Carolyn made her entry on the scene – August 14, 1951. Once again when Grandma and I saw her for the first time, we saw another red headed blonde. Just like Judy, she carved a place in our hearts forever and ever. Wendy was different from Judy in her little personality in every respect, from what she liked to eat, to what she liked to do. For example, Wendy loved dolls and still does to this very day. She still has a big collection of them in her home.

Both girls liked to dance and our front living room was the scene of much dancing and pageantry. They both were musically inclined from when they were very young. They would stand up in front of the church and sing and Wendy would hold Judy's hand while they were singing for a little moral support. The girls were and are today very beautiful and Irene loved to dress them up cute whenever we went anywhere. Music was a big part of their lives then as now so we went to endless concerts and recitals as part of this routine.

On January 28, 1956, Ronald James was born and we finally got our son. He was a little fellow but he was healthy and good looking and a wonderful completion to our family. Ron had dark hair and dark eyes and was different in every respect from the girls.

A short while after he was born, a nurse brought Ron into Irene's room for us to see. The rooms at Millard Fillmore Gates Hospital had swinging "Dutch" doors and as the nurse brought him in, the large door slammed onto his head. She panicked and ran out with him. We were unable to find out if Ron was all right for a very long time. We were concerned about a concussion on such a small baby, particularly when the

hospital staff acted so suspiciously. They finally brought him back and pronounced him OK.

When Ron began walking to school at Phillip Sheridan (about a block away) there was a kidnapping scare reported in the newspapers. It frightened him so much that Irene had to walk him to school for several weeks.

Ron always liked to play games with anyone he could enlist. He liked competition in whatever game it was. He loved outdoor sports then and still does whether it's baseball, hockey, golf or football.

I remember taking him to play his first hockey game at the local arena. He was all dressed up in heavy hockey equipment, as were the other 5 year olds on his team. They spent most of the time lying on the ice because none of them knew how to skate!

I remember a time when we were painting a bedroom in our home. We had taken all the furniture out and the only object in the room was a metal wastebasket. Ron was a toddler and was playing in the empty room. He happened to fall on the wastebasket and severely cut his tongue, which caused a lot of excitement. We rushed him to the hospital but they told us they couldn't stitch a tongue. It took a long time to heal and he still has a gash mark on his tongue.

Homes and Property We Have Built or Purchased

The year was 1947, shortly after World War II and Irene had her first baby - a beautiful little boy that we named Wayne Charles Watson. She had had two miscarriages before this, so he was a welcome little gem to our rented flat at 411 West Hazeltine, in Kenmore. Unfortunately, he developed croup in his second year. He was admitted to the hospital on New Year's Eve. Sister's Hospital did not want parents to stay after visiting hours so we went home. The nurses were apparently celebrating instead of taking care of their patients. Perhaps if we had insisted and spent the night, things might have been different. Little Wayne passed away on New Years Day in 1949. Our lives were virtually shattered after we had waited all this time for him to come into our lives. We were devastated and could think of nothing else for a long time. In fact, to this day it still hurts when we think of him. Irene was pregnant at the time, about 5 months, which kept us very busy, and she soon gave birth to Judith Gail, a red and gold haired beautiful little girl who gave us a reason to go on.

I had to have something to occupy my mind, and after a lot of pondering, I decided to build a house. We purchased a lot at 44 Coventry Road in the Town of Tonawanda, rolled up our sleeves and went to work. We purchased a set of plans, applied for a building permit and began the laborious work of building a masonry home from the ground up. My brother, Bob, who was an engineer, and my father, Harry, who was in his seventies, helped me. My father showed us how to lay blocks for the basement walls and how to pour and place concrete for the basement floor. It was a pretty big house for that time and neighborhood because it was 38 feet wide and 34 feet deep. We ordered and placed the steel beams for the first floor support, after which came the bricklaying job which my father taught me how to do. Irene's father came around and helped us out by mixing the mortar for the bricks, a really hard job, but Fred was about fifty years of age and in good condition. The bricklaying job was enormous and took about 2 months but we finished it and began to put in the partitions for the various rooms on the first floor. I might say that the laying up of the corner bricks is the key to a nice straight job. I was working on one corner while my father was on the other, so you can imagine me, a novice, trying to keep up with him, an expert bricklayer. I would get the layers of cement crooked and irregular so he would come over and show me how to do it. My brother, Bob, who was a perfectionist, would get so upset with my work that he would get in the car and drive away, returning in a half hour to see the work had been corrected. I finally got the hang of bricklaying and we ended

up with a beautiful job. Then came the windows – all aluminum – some of which were installed upside down and had to be corrected. Following this came the roof framing and the second floor. The plywood for the roof was then applied, followed by tarpaper and shingles. We weren't allowed to do our own plumbing so we subcontracted it out. We laid in the electrical wiring and Bob hooked it up because he was an electrical engineer. We built the house in the era before drywall so we had my cousin Bob Watson do the plastering. He and his company did a masterful job. I might add that I was trying to save money wherever possible. My father had in his yard on Colvin Avenue a large quantity of 2 x 8 tongue and groove planks that he had torn out of a railroad warehouse floor. They were big and heavy and I used them for all the partition studs, rafters, etc. – everywhere I could work them in. That house was and still is built like Fort Niagara! We then laid the concrete for the driveway and sidewalk, built the garage using the same bricks and installed a chain link fence. It took about a year of hard work but we were very happy in that home, particularly when Irene gave birth to Wendy Carolyn, another pretty little red head.

My brother Ed, who had a wholesale appliance business, donated the dishwasher, dryer, washing machine, garbage disposal and a complete furnace for the house, including all the heating pipe runs and cold air returns. We made up our minds that when we could afford it we would pay him back, which we ultimately did.

Irene took over the decorating job and did a first class job of it. We even tiled the basement floor and finished it off with paneling. We had a lot of parties down there with my business friends and the neighbors.

Our next-door neighbors were George and Leetta Middlemiss. We came to know them well and were good friends until they passed away.

The total cost of the materials for our house, excluding our labor, was \$8,500.00. We lived there until 1963 and we sold the house for \$20,000.00. We moved into a house on 178 Sherbrooke in Williamsville, which was built for us by Fred Pazzaglia.

This house was built to our specifications and we had just about everything imaginable put into it. We even had an in-ground swimming pool installed by my other cousin, Bill, who owned Watson Pools. Judy and Wendy were both in middle school and Ron was in grammar school.

When we first moved to 44 Coventry Road, Irene and two other men did a survey of the neighborhood to see if there was any interest in building a Presbyterian Church. They went from house to house, and the answer was in the affirmative. We started having church in our basement. Presbytery sent us a start-up minister by the name of Rev. Richard Poethig and we were

off to the races. We then organized a building fund campaign, which was very successful. We began to build an impressive new brick church on Elmwood Avenue, near Coventry Road. We had a lot of fun building the church. Irene and I were elected Elders of the church, which is a position you hold for life. I taught Sunday School for years and Judy, at the age of 11, was the church organist. Irene and I took over the Junior High Youth Group and had many interesting meetings. We made many life long friendships with people in this church and we hated to leave when we moved to Williamsville.

About this time, we were spending our weekends at a 40-acre plot of land we bought in the town of Johnsonburg, in Wyoming County. I decided to build a cabin, about 24 feet square, on the property. One day when I was working all by myself putting on the roof, I was at the top of an aluminum ladder with a bail of shingles on my shoulder. The ladder collapsed and I fell down one story with the shingles on top of me, about 100 pounds in weight. I must have lain there about half an hour when I finally managed to get the shingles off and dragged myself over to the car, in order to drive home. It was a lesson I learned about aluminum ladders that I'd never forget! It was a miracle that I didn't have any broken bones. We had many pleasant weekends there. I planted some 25,000 Christmas trees (by hand) with the assistance of Jody Sutton during this time.

I started Watson Bowman on February 5, 1970, and a few years later we purchased the 140-acre property and lake on 4775 Youngers Road in Weathersfield. It was a beautiful piece of land with an old stucco schoolhouse that overlooked an 8-acre lake. We soon named the lake "Lake Irene". We saw an ad in the Pennysaver of Warsaw, listing Dan Erhardt as a builder. We contacted him and hired him to build an overhanging deck on the escarpment where we could sit and look at the lake. I helped Dan, and working closely with him, came to know him as a good friend. That structure is now nearly 30 years old and is as good as the day he built it. We later built a steel barn, a Butler type building, which we purchased from Morton Building Co. We installed the concrete floor in the barn by ourselves. Next we contracted out a tennis court with an asphalt floor. We remodeled the house to include 6 bedrooms and 4 bathrooms, and installed wood paneling.

We had many parties at the Youngers Road facility, entertaining both friends and business associates. We hosted the annual summer outing of Watson Bowman there. We always hired an orchestra and had many special games and activities from scavenger hunts to fishing contests, canoe races, golf ball driving contests, dancing, etc.

We built two floating bridge boats, which could be propelled by electric motors. One was named the "Jenny Anne" and the other was called the "Amy Reb", named after my two granddaughters at the time. We had many nice trips on these boats, which seated about 8 persons each. Some times when the wind was strong the canvas awnings on the boats would act like a sail and propel us down the lake very fast. We wouldn't be able to sail back because of the wind and would have to disembark way down at the end of the lake and walk back.

We installed a big, rotating mirrored ball in the ceiling of the steel barn and it was very romantic to dance under it.

I bought a large quantity of clay trap shooting items at a garage sale, complete with a sling device to shoot them in the air. The boys had many a shooting practice until the clay skeet ran out.

We bought 5 golf carts to be used for transportation around the property because it was a distance of 3 miles from one corner to the other. We also purchased 5 snowmobiles for winter sports and they have been a continual source of winter pleasure.

There are a lot of maple trees on the property, many of which are over a hundred years old. We made an agreement with a young farmer who takes the maple sap each spring. He pays us 50 cents a tap and gives us 2 dozen pints of maple syrup in return.

There are lots of other types of trees, including hard rock maple, red cedar, willow, ash and others. They were growing too close together for good growth, so we entered into a true pruning program, administered by the Wyoming County Forrester. They required that we take all the small growth trees out for a distance of 40 feet around the major trees, to encourage growth and provide sunlight. This job took about 2 years and Dan Erhardt was engaged to do it. When the work was done, we applied for Registered Tree Farm status. They inspected the cutting job and we were given the certificate.

The large maple trees along the front of the property have to be more than one hundred years old since they measure 8-12 feet in diameter. It is possible to have as many as 40 maple sugar taps on each one of them, they are so big.

Lake Irene is full of large mouth bass, which are good eating. Judy caught one weighing 5 pounds and we have a picture of it in the cabin.

There are all kinds of red and black berries growing all over the property. We used to go out and pick elderberries in the fall of the year and fill a couple of plastic garbage cans. Then, we would take forks and strip the berries from the stalks and place them in a large container. Next, we would

crush them until we had a nice mash of berries. We would add the necessary wine making chemicals to the mash, and let it sit for a period of time until it was ready to be poured through cheesecloth into a 5-gallon carboy jug. Sometimes, we had two or three of the carboys cooking. We finally poured these into wine bottles and corked them up to season. We usually had 60-80 bottles of wine after all this work. It is said that the American Indians had used elderberry wine for the treatment of various illnesses. If you were sick, it would heal you. If not, it would make you sick. It was pretty powerful stuff and had a real woody bouquet.

My mother taught us how to make elderberry tarts and pies, which were wonderful. We also used to make elderberry jam and jelly. I used to get some lovely old wine bottles at garage sales and fill them with wine and take them on my business trips to Europe to give out to friends and customers. On one trip to Germany, one of the bottles broke in my suitcase and ran out into the trunk of a taxi I had taken in Munich. The driver wasn't very happy about that pungent dark red mess we left him with! I remember elderberry wine season as a very happy time in my life.

Time has caught up to the two houseboats. Their superstructure and awnings have all rotted away but the decks are still good and are now used for fishing and watching the activities.

We had lots of fun at the cabin over the past 30 years and we have now deeded the property over to Judy and Dave, Wendy and Rocky, and Candy and Ron.

In addition to the cabin we built on Dunham Road (the 40 acre property) we also built a 2-story slant roof chalet, with a big front porch. Actually, Jerry Robb built most of it but we furnished it. Wendy and Rocky lived in it for a year until we could build them a better place on Sheridan Drive. The house on Sheridan was a lovely 2-story, 4 bedroom home that took us 6 months to build. Dan Erhardt was the builder and we all helped him. We bought a house trailer and put it on the lot until it was completed. The concrete driveway in the front was very special. It was heart shaped and circular so that you could drive in and out. It cost upwards of a hundred thousand dollars to build but it was worth more than that. Dave Stafford did the electrical work. Wendy and Rocky lived there for a number of years. Rocky's father, Tony, built Amy a beautiful playhouse on the property which was a sight to behold, since he is a master carpenter.

We also built a 2 story house at 488 Sherbrooke. We hired Jerry Robb to do most of the work but again, we all piled in and helped. It was a beautiful home and Wendy did all of the decorating. Judy laid the kitchen floor. We put in the driveway ourselves and it turned out very well.

In 1983, a year before I sold my business, I sent Wendy and Irene to Sarasota to look for a condo to live in so I could establish a residence in Florida. They bought a beautiful one in a place called Cassarina on Midnight Pass Road, about half a mile north of Stickney Point Road. We owned it for a short period of time until we bought another – Unit 306 A at Island Reef. It was a nice place; right on the Gulf of Mexico and we owned it for 5-6 years. We noticed a new seven-story building going up about a block North of us. We applied for a position on the pre-construction list and a spot was reserved for us on the 7th floor. When the condo was finished, we found out that they had sold our spot on the list but they still had one condo left (304) if we wanted it, which we did. Irene took over the decorating again and we fitted it out nicely with a white grand piano and everything nice and new. It's a lovely place to visit and we have had a lot of pleasure from Hidden Lagoon.

My father was a master builder and ran a lot of school jobs, his specialty being masonry structure. He befriended a young black man by the name of Herman Ryan, taught him how to lay bricks and brought him into the construction trades as a journeyman bricklayer, paying him top wages. One day Herman called me on the telephone after he retired and told me about his properties on Millersport and Tonawanda Creek Roads. He was moving to California and offered to sell his property at a low price to "Harry's Boys" because my father had treated him so well during the times when a black man couldn't get a good job. We bought this property, about 40 acres, and later Ted sold his half to me. I sold it to my company. We had a chance to pick up another 40 acres and now we own 80 acres.

Just before I sold my company in 1983, I wanted to establish residency in Canada for tax reasons – there is no inheritance tax in Canada. We bought a nice place on 272 Lake Shore Road in Fort Erie. We migrated with what they call a "Settlers Load" in a moving van and lived there for quite a while enjoying the home immensely. It was designed by a Swedish architect and had a lot of open area with red cedar ceilings and a stunning stairway to the second floor. I finished off the basement with wood paneling and did a lot of work around. The basement leaked so we brought in Spruce Waterproofing, Dave's company, and they fixed it. We had a lot of parties there on the front lawn during the summer and watched the air shows during the Friendship Festivals.

We sold the house in 2001 and moved back to Williamsville after they changed the tax laws.

We moved from our home on Sherbrooke Avenue and bought a house at 60 Briarhill Road in Williamsville, a large lumbering place with a heavily

treed lot. We didn't realize it at the time but the house was just too big for 2 people. It had seven bathrooms and so many other rooms that we were lost in it. We lived there only about a year and sold it.

Our present home is at 3 Chicory Lane, East Amherst. It was built for someone else who walked out on the deal so we took it. We bought the property from Gary Bock Enterprises in 1985 and moved in. It has a nice little lake in the back, which is always full of ducks and wildlife, which we feed daily. We installed electric moving elevator chairs on the basement and second floor stairways to help us get around because I had a stroke in October of 2001 and Irene had knee replacement surgery in the spring of 2002. We will both turn 80 years of age on our next birthdays.

Judy and Dave, Wendy and Rocky, and Candy and Ron and their families all live within walking distance of us. How lucky we are to spend our golden years with our family so close by!



The
Watson Family