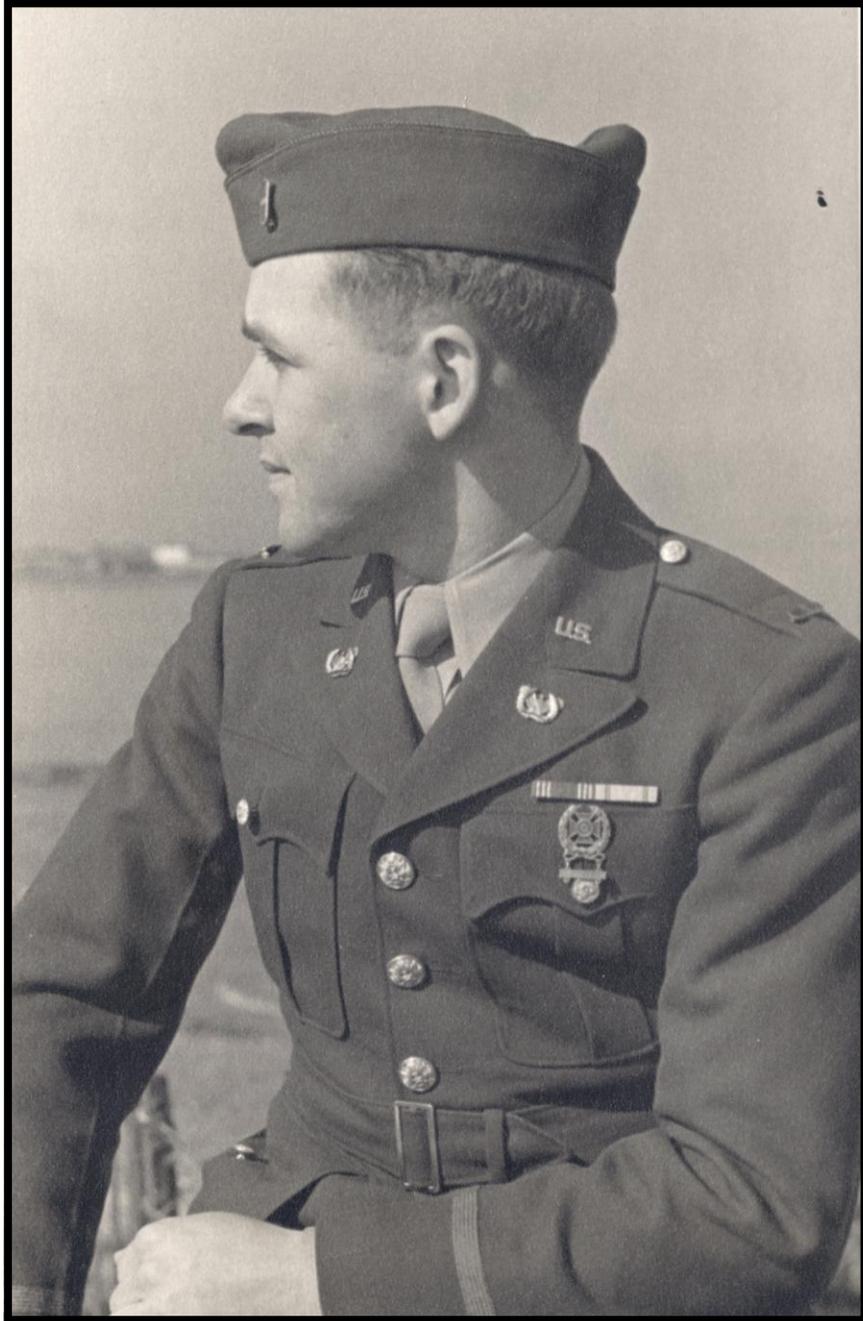


# My Story



**Eric Wiesenhutter**

## MY STORY

### PROLOGUE

In 1940 with Hitler rampaging across Europe and Imperial Japan moving in Asia, the United States Congress decided to build up our military just in case. In October of that year it passed the Selective Service Act, more commonly referred to as the “draft”, which required all males between the ages of 21 to 36 to register for possible military duty. A classification system was set up which assigned each individual a specific number based on a variety of criteria, such as physical condition, marital status, occupation, etc. These classification numbers ranged from 1A to 4F. Anyone classified as 1A could expect to be called without too much delay. From 1941 to 1946 an estimated 16 million men were processed through this system. Most “draftees” entered the Army. While most were exposed to similar conditions, each individual’s experience was unique. The following is the story of one of the millions who donned the uniform of the United States during that era. It is a day-by-day account of what it was like to be a citizen-soldier in the United States Army during World War II.

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My name is Eric Wiesenhutter. It all began on August 21, 1941 when I was inducted into the Army of the United States. Since I attained age 21 shortly after the Selective Service Act had been passed by Congress, I was among the first to register for military service. Having been classified as 1A it would have been only a matter of time before I was called. So I decided to volunteer in order to get the one year of military service over with. I left my home in Philadelphia together with a couple hundred other guys to go by rail to Petersburg, Virginia. We were met at the railroad station by military personnel in Army trucks who transported us to Camp Lee, which was located just outside of town.

We were greeted by a tough looking sergeant who got us all lined up in some kind of formation and then turned us over to an officer who swore us in and then congratulated us for now being members of the United States Army. We were then assigned to a barracks and a specific bunk to sleep in. Then we marched to the supply room where we were issued sheets and blankets for our bunks. As it was now dinner time (chow in the Army) we marched to the mess hall where we got our first taste of Army food. I don’t recall how good or bad it was except that the coffee appeared to have a purple shade. We were also told that lights would go out

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at 11 o'clock and wake-up call (reveille) would be at 5:30 next morning. So much for the first day. Since practically none of us had ever been in a military installation before it was all a little bewildering especially having to sleep in a barracks with about 60 other guys and having to use a common bathroom (latrine). From here on privacy would be a thing of the past.

On day two we were roused out of bed by the sergeant in charge of our barracks and lined up outside for roll call. We were then marched to the mess hall for our first breakfast in the Army. As I recall it wasn't too bad even though the eggs were a little cold. After chow we returned to the barracks, finished cleaning up and were then ordered to "fall out", a term which would become very familiar for the rest of our Army careers. We were then marched to the supply room where we were issued our uniforms and miscellaneous field equipment. At last we were beginning to look like soldiers. After lunch we were instructed in the basics of close order drill. After a couple of hours of that we were ordered to line up and count off. When the count reached 100 everyone in that first group was told that they would be assigned to the Infantry. The following group of 100 went to Engineers. And so it went. By pure chance your future depended on where you happened to be standing in the original line-up. When my turn came I was in a group that was assigned to the Signal Corps Replacement Training Center at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. We were issued individual orders to that effect and given travel vouchers to proceed to that location on the following day. For me that was pure luck because Fort Monmouth was located near the seashore only about 70 miles from home. When I arrived there I was able to tell my family the good news and planned on coming home for a visit in about 6 weeks following completion of basic training.

The purpose of basic training was to turn civilians into soldiers in the shortest possible time. We were instructed in various military subjects both in classroom and in the field. Since we would presumably be assigned to various Signal Corps units in the Army, becoming familiar with various communications devices then used by the Army was part of our training. But the most exciting was our initiation in the use of fire arms. Before going on the firing range we had to learn how to take a rifle apart and re-assemble it in a limited period of time. The actual firing at targets was a new experience for most of us who had never held a deadly weapon in our hands before. I was more successful with the rifle than the pistol and eventually made "Expert" on the old 1903 rifle. We also had to listen to many lectures such as the organization of the army, military history, code of military justice and of course military courtesy. Personal hygiene was emphasized and we were warned of the danger of contracting venereal disease. We also had to become

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familiar with chemical warfare. We were kept busy from dawn till dusk and by the time lights went out most of us were already asleep.

But we also enjoyed the new experience of living and working with a bunch of fellows from all over the country. Prior to the army most of us had never been very far from home and were only familiar with our immediate environment. We would do anything for a laugh and one opportunity arose when one of our “old” men (36) was due to leave because they had reduced the maximum age to 28. He became sloppily drunk the night before his scheduled departure and made a nuisance of himself. So we decided to teach him a lesson. After he finally passed out in his bunk we took his boots and nailed them to the floor. When time came for reveille all of us watched him slip his feet into the boots, laced them up and tried to walk. It was the funniest thing I had ever seen and we all screamed with laughter even as he was cursing us. Of course he had the last laugh. He was going back to civilian life and we were stuck.

So the time went fast and we all expected to be shipped out upon completion of basic training. Until orders were posted on the company bulletin board no one knew where they were headed. Sadly many of our group were split up to various destinations and friendships that evolved during this initial period were terminated. I was lucky to be assigned to the cadre of Fort Monmouth to help instruct future recruits. Since our country was not yet at war I was able to get weekend passes whenever I was off duty. I was also able to keep my car on the Post so it only took about 2 hours to get home to Philadelphia where I could visit with my family and friends. When I received my first promotion to Corporal, I felt pretty good about being a member of the Army. Once you got used to it barracks life wasn't all that bad. All of us were in the same age group and every barrack had at least one clown who would keep the rest of us laughing. The wars in Europe and Asia were far away and didn't seem to ever affect us so the possibility of one day having to face an enemy who wanted to kill you seemed rather remote. My main problem at the time was the difficulty of obtaining enough gas to drive my car. Since there was no direct rail or bus line between Ft. Monmouth and Philadelphia then, my car was my only means of transportation. Fortunately there were always some fellows who wanted to go to Philadelphia on weekends and they scrounged ration tickets from their families so we could get enough gas to make the trips.

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My first “home” in the Army - Ft. Monmouth, N.J.



Me in front of my platoon taking roll call

## MY STORY



I just got my military driver's license

My personal life came to a crashing halt on October 15, 1941 when I was awakened by a military policeman in the middle of the night to be informed that my father had been in an automobile accident and was not expected to live. I was given a special pass to go to the hospital in Philadelphia that night. When I arrived, he had passed away. Having only one older brother who had his own family to support, I was faced with the necessity of taking care of my mother who had no other family. Since she was partially handicapped due to a previous accident, it was not possible for her to get any work other than occasional baby-sitting, etc. Since a Corporal's pay at that time was insufficient to support any dependent, I was forced to submit my resignation from the Army on the basis of economic hardship. It was while waiting for the paper work to be completed that the next blow came - December 7, 1941. I was in my car driving home from camp for the week- end, when the news came over the radio that we had been attacked by Japan and that we were at war. Announcements followed to the effect that all military personnel were to immediately return to their respective duty stations as all leave and passes were cancelled. In the days that followed it was also announced that all applications for discharge from the Service for any reason were cancelled. All of us, who had expected to serve one year, were extended for the duration of the war plus 6 months. Christmas 1941 was very sad for the country in general and for me and my family in particular. Somehow we got through that low point in our family life. In the early part of 1942 the Government took cognizance of the economic hardship suffered by the families of draftees with dependents and enacted a system of family allowances which was a great help. Sometime in the spring of 1942 I was promoted to buck sergeant and together with another sergeant we were in charge of a barracks of about 60 men. However I still spent most of my time doing administrative work in Post Headquarters. My previous office experience and especially my typing ability were in great demand at the time. And so the months passed and I was beginning to wonder if I would have to spend the

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war in Fort Monmouth. In those days one could not ask for a transfer to another unit except to apply for Officer Candidate School or airborne training. I wasn't too keen about these options so I waited for fate to take its course. And it happened in September 1942, after just about one year at Fort Monmouth. One morning before going to work I was called into the Company Orderly room and presented with a set of orders transferring me to the 57th Signal Battalion stationed in Camp Edwards, Massachusetts. There were about 6 of us who received similar orders effective the following day. This gave me very little time to get my affairs in order, get one of the guys to drive my car home and take care of the many details involved in clearing the Post. The following morning we were transported to the train station to catch a train for Boston, Mass, which was approximately 300 miles away. Once we arrived there we had to catch a bus to take us to Camp Edwards, where we arrived late at night. We had to wake up the Charge of Quarters, who of course wasn't expecting us and we had one heck of a time getting some bedding and a place to sleep for the night. When we got straightened out the following morning we discovered that we had been assigned to an outfit getting ready for overseas shipment. This meant that they had been going through a tough training cycle and we were expected to fit right in as though we had been training with them all along. Coming from a comparatively soft assignment doing mostly administrative work was quite a shock to the system but we adapted quickly. The battalion commander was a West Pointer who evidently thought he was training an infantry unit rather than a bunch of Signal Corps specialists. His motto was "soldiers first-specialists second". So after the blisters on my feet healed after many 25-mile marches with full field equipment I finally could call myself a soldier and take pride in my accomplishments such as in excelling in firing various weapons. We had very little time off during this period of preparation and even if we had there was no place to go since Boston was about 60 miles away and the camp was serviced by one small bus line for the thousands of troops stationed there. When Christmas came, those of us whose homes were too far away for weekend passes volunteered to take over the routine duties such as charge of quarters, guard duty, etc., so those whose homes were closer could spend time with their families. On Christmas Day I was Sergeant of the Guard and we had about a foot of snow on the ground. It was a lonely time and we knew we would soon be shipped out. However we enjoyed the camaraderie born of our common experience and we all anticipated the excitement of our impending shipment to a theater of war.

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Camp Edwards, Mass. - getting ready for overseas shipment

Then suddenly the fickle finger of fate moved again. On the eve of our departure for overseas, about a dozen of us were notified that we were being transferred out of the 57th and assigned to staff the Signal Section of the newly organized XIII Corps Headquarters. This was quite a shock as all of us were psyched up for overseas shipment and we hated to say goodbye to all of our buddies. I later learned that the 57<sup>th</sup> Signal Bn. landed at Anzio and suffered considerable casualties in that bloody battle. XIII Corps Hq was located in the city of Providence, Rhode Island, temporarily occupying a former high school building close to the center of town. Overnight we were changed from combat training to doing mundane clerical work. Providence happened to be a Navy town and as Army troops we really felt out of place especially when we frequented the downtown bars packed with sailors on leave. Fortunately this bizarre situation only lasted a couple of months and we were notified that XIII Corps HQ would be moving to Fort DuPont, Delaware. Again, I couldn't believe that fate had now placed me within about 40 miles of home. Since I had by now attained Staff Sergeant rank I was permitted to keep my car on the Post and when not on duty I could make it home in about one hour. Ft. DuPont was a very small installation dating back to Revolutionary War days when it was erected as a coast artillery installation for the purpose of protecting the approaches to Philadelphia on the Delaware River. The ancient gun emplacements were still there but the guns of course had long since been removed. My main job was to monitor the status of Signal Corps equipment in the units assigned to XIII Corps. It was a monotonous job for any young G.I. who was anxious to see some action. Since there was nothing to do in a small Post like this I went home to Philadelphia as often as I could. The only problem was that most of the fellows my age were now in the

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Service and although it was good to see my family I was beginning to feel very lonely. In fact I felt self-conscious walking around town in uniform while so many others were fighting overseas. Also I didn't have a steady girl friend at the time and it was not easy to find a nice girl without a proper introduction. Coming from a small family I had no normal contacts in that respect. Talking to my older brother, who was an officer in a local insurance company, one day this subject came up and he volunteered to give me the names and telephone numbers of his secretary and her girl friend. Not knowing either one of them I called his secretary first but she wasn't home so I then called her friend who agreed to meet me on a blind date. Since she lived outside of Philadelphia she had to come in by train and we met at a YMCA near the train station. Neither of us of course knew what to expect so it was an exciting moment. Her name was Ann Moore and with me it was love at first sight. We had a most enjoyable date and promised to see each other again whenever I was able to get a weekend pass. By coincidence the date was June 5, my father's birthday. We did see each other quite frequently during that summer but of course the cloud of war hung over us constantly. Before meeting Ann, I had filed an application for appointment to the rank of Warrant Officer as one way to get out of my current assignment. The only other options were airborne training or Officer Candidate School. However nothing materialized during that summer (1943) while Ann and I enjoyed each other's company and dreamed of the future. So the summer and autumn passed and I often felt guilty enjoying the company of a lovely young lady when so many others were fighting and dying thousands of miles from home. I had almost forgotten about my application when in December I received notification from the War Dept. that my application had been approved and I was appointed Warrant Officer Junior Grade with immediate transfer to the 166th Signal Photo Company stationed at Camp Crowder, Missouri. How quickly your life can change in the Service especially during war time. It was with mixed emotions that I accepted the appointment. While I was proud to be elevated to officer status, I was also miserable about our impending separation. We had fallen in love with each other and planned on getting married. Once again I was faced with an overnight conversion from an easy administrative job to joining a unit getting ready for shipment to a combat area. I had only a couple of days to say goodbye and get on a train to Camp Crowder. I arrived on a miserably cold day and reported to the company commander, who advised me that I would be the company supply officer. He was not thrilled when I told him that I knew nothing about photographic equipment and supplies as all of my previous experience had been in regular Signal Corps communications equipment. Combat photography was a new activity in the Army and had been arbitrarily placed under the jurisdiction of the Signal Corps.

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However no special training had as yet been available for this type of activity as it was assumed that professional photographers picked for this unit would be familiar with the equipment and supplies. Fortunately the Supply Sergeant was experienced and very knowledgeable in this field and I knew that I wouldn't be able to bluff my way so I simply told him that until I had a chance to acquaint myself with photographic equipment and supplies that I would abide by his decisions. This worked out fine and we maintained an excellent relationship throughout our service together. Life at Camp Crowder was rather dreary. The weather was very cold and we lived in temporary Quonset huts that were impossible to heat. Since we had been alerted for overseas shipment none of us could leave the post even after working long hours each day. We virtually worked around the clock getting our equipment ready for shipment and getting our final physical check-ups. One day when we were scheduled to have our teeth checked, we showed up at the dental clinic only to find that a bunch of German prisoners got there ahead of us for the same purpose and we had to wait for them to finish before they would take us. Only in America could something like that happen. Speaking of prisoners of war, I amused myself one day when I saw a detail of them marching up the road carrying shovels and brooms on their shoulders in a very military manner. Their sergeant saluted me as they passed and I turned around and followed them at a distance until they arrived at a warehouse where they were going to work. I listened to them speaking to each other and then casually walked up to them and made some remark in German. As I expected, they were shocked to hear an American officer speaking their language and probably thought I was spying on them. I did find out that they were members of the Africa Corps and were very happy to be American prisoners and in this country. For them the war was over. For us it was only beginning. When we finally had all our equipment packed and ready for shipment we were told that we would all be granted a 15-day leave prior to going overseas. I could hardly wait to get on a train back to Philadelphia. When I arrived, Ann met me and we had a joyous re-union. It was just around Christmas time and we agreed to become engaged but would hold off as far as marriage was concerned until after the war. Those two weeks went much too fast and before we knew it we were saying goodbye again. Knowing that this was happening to millions of others didn't make it any easier for us. When I arrived back in camp we completed our processing and shortly thereafter boarded a troop train heading north towards Chicago. None of us other than the company commander knew if we were headed for Europe or the Pacific. When our train turned east we realized that our destination was going to be Europe. In fact the train went right through Philadelphia and at one point was only about a mile from my home. We continued to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey which was one of the

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staging areas for the New York Port of Embarkation. After getting settled we were told that we were free every night after duty until we were alerted for actual shipment. I immediately called Ann and we managed to meet in Philadelphia. This continued every night for about one week before the axe fell. When I didn't show up for our date she knew that our company had been alerted for shipment and all of us had been sealed off from any communication with the outside. Emotionally that was hard, being in love and not knowing if we would ever see each other again.

Several days later we were trucked to the New York Port of Embarkation and in the dead of night we boarded our troop transport. We could see the lights of New York City and felt strange to be sneaking out in the middle of the night. But we were told that this was all because of security reasons so that enemy submarines would not be tipped off that a convoy was on its way. We were literally packed in like sardines and sleeping that first night was impossible. At daybreak we cleared New York harbor and met the rest of the convoy, about 50 ships. Our daily routine consisted of constantly standing in line to either eat, use the toilet or wash. When you finished with one activity it was time to get in line for the next. In order to confuse the enemy subs the convoy zigzagged all the way across the Atlantic. When we were about half way across early one morning we were awakened by gunfire. Naturally we thought we were being attacked by enemy subs, but luckily it was only the Navy gun crew practicing their gunnery. Since we had not been warned about this we started putting on our life preservers and prepared to abandon ship. Even if we had been torpedoed it wouldn't have done us much good since the rest of the convoy would not have stopped to pick up survivors and our life expectancy in the ice-cold water of the Atlantic was only about 10 minutes. After 12 days of this we were happy to see land again. Ireland really did look green and we followed the coastline all the way around North to Belfast. There we parted company from the rest of the convoy which continued to Liverpool, England. We disembarked in Belfast and trucked east to Groomsport, a village on the coast in County Down. We were billeted in a large mansion almost the size of a castle with about 4 guys in a room. The next day, as Supply Officer, I had to sign for all the crockery and miscellaneous kitchen equipment the Brits supplied for our temporary stay. They called this "reverse lend-lease". We still hadn't been issued our own vehicles so we had to depend on a local motor pool whenever we needed transportation. We quickly established a good rapport with the locals who seemed happy to see us come. Although I presume that some of the older folk were a little annoyed when a bunch of noisy Yanks took over their local pub after duty hours. One day as I was taking a walk along the shoreline I met a local gentleman who

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was walking his dog. We struck up a conversation and I wound up with an invitation to his home for dinner. He asked me to bring one of my buddies along which I did. It turned out to be a very pleasant visit for Lt. Joe Zinni and myself. We really enjoyed a home-cooked meal after all those K-Rations. The couple's name was Holloway and they invited us again before we departed for England. We did feel a little guilty knowing that they had probably used up their monthly food rations in order to do this for us. Of course we reciprocated with a little coffee and candy. As we were located in County Down, not too far from the border of the Irish Republic, it was not too uncommon for some of our guys to "invade" this neutral country for the sole purpose of enjoying a good steak dinner. Restaurants had sprung up all along the border for this purpose. The Irish received American



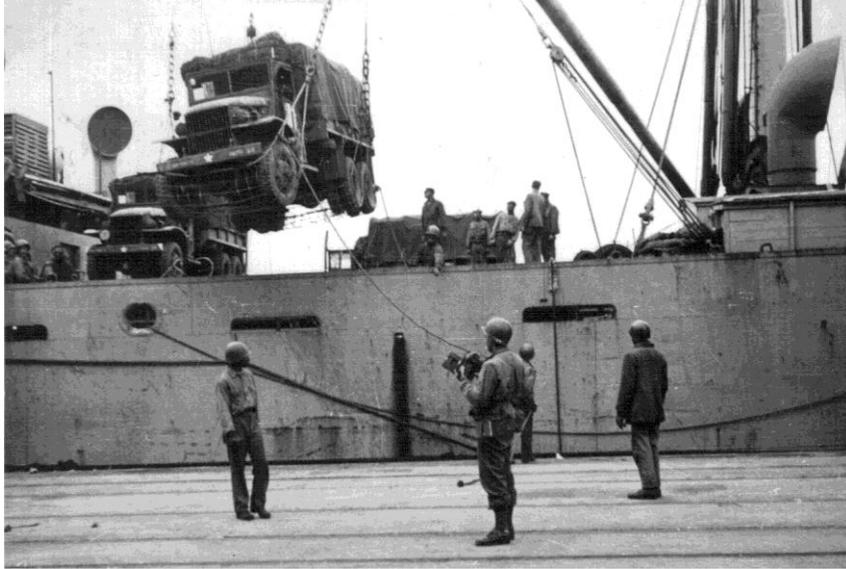
My first Irish friend - Groomsport, County Down

dollars and our guys got good food and drink. Technically we should have been interned but why interfere with legitimate business. Everybody was happy and the Irish military stayed out of the way. Of course we couldn't expect this pleasant situation to last and one day in April we received our orders to move. Our destination was the port of Liverpool in England. So we boarded another troop

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ship in Belfast and left Northern Ireland forever. Arriving in Liverpool we were trucked to a little town called Knutsford where we camped out on a large estate not too far from Third Army HQ. We all knew that the invasion was coming but the only question was when. We worked practically around the clock getting our gear ready and drawing all of our authorized vehicles. Next came the required modifications to every motor vehicle enabling it to survive going through fairly deep water if necessary during landing operations. We seldom had any time off so we had very little contact with the local civilians unlike the troops that had been there since 1942. However my supply sergeant and I had to take a trip to one of our depots in southern England in order to pick up some equipment when we accidentally bumped into the Fourth Armored Division which was encamped in the vicinity of the town of Devizes. Knowing that my old buddy, Henry Cotter, was a member of that outfit, I made some inquiries and sure enough I was able to locate him and we had a most joyous re-union. We hadn't seen each other since both of us worked at Peirce College in Philadelphia. It was hard to say goodbye as neither of us knew what was ahead of us. Finally June 6th occurred and it was almost a relief after all those months of preparation and waiting. We received our orders about 2 weeks later around 4 o'clock in the afternoon to join a convoy heading for the port of Southampton the following morning about 7 o'clock. While our mess sergeant picked up additional K-Rations for the company to see us through the first few days on the continent, the motor sergeant took a 2-1/2 ton truck loaded with empty gas cans to the local petrol (gasoline) depot to be filled up for our impending convoy. He arrived there about five minutes after five in the afternoon and was told to come back the next day since the depot closed at five. He couldn't believe his ears. Here in the middle of the war with a major invasion underway, the British army who ran the depot was apparently on a peace-time schedule. My CO and I contacted everyone who had any authority but got nowhere. "Sorry old chap but we are closed". Anglo-American relations were at a low ebb at that point as far as we were concerned. P.S. We got out gas the following morning and missed out place in the convoy. When we finally got on the road it took us all day to get down to Southampton where we were loaded onto a ship together with all our vehicles. The following morning we joined a large convoy of ships all bound for Normandy. The crossing was uneventful but since none of us had seen combat before we had butterflies in our stomachs wondering what to expect. We knew that the beachhead was only a few miles deep so enemy action could be expected. Fortunately for us our Air Force controlled the air and we never saw an enemy plane during our landing operation. Our ship stopped about two miles from the beach and an LST came alongside to take us onto Utah Beach.

## MY STORY



Loading our vehicles on board transport in Southampton



All aboard - ready to join the convoy to Normandy

## MY STORY



Approaching Utah Beach

After our vehicles were offloaded all of us climbed down the usual rope ladders into the LST. The sea was relatively calm as we approached the beach and we were able to land hardly getting our feet wet. Most of the ships had barrage balloons on heavy metal cables for protection against low-level enemy air attack. It was good insurance but fortunately not needed. The beach itself was a picture of organized chaos with all kinds of military gear strewn about. Nearby was a large hospital tent with a huge pile of bloody uniform items that had been cut from wounded soldiers and were ready to be burned. As soon as we had vacated our LST it was immediately loaded with the wounded on stretchers for transportation back to England. There was only one narrow road from the beach inland that had been cleared of mines and was marked by white tapes by the engineers. It was

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getting late in the afternoon and we were headed for the French town of Ste. Mere Eglise where our paratroopers had landed on D-Day. The front was a few miles further inland from there. It was time to set up camp for the night. We could hear the sound of artillery and machine gun fire in the distance which gave me an eerie feeling. We had no idea how many of our guys were between us and the enemy. Anyway, we ate some of our cold K-Rations, dug foxholes and bedded down for the night. About midnight we heard the sound of approaching planes. When bombs came whistling down on us we knew we were receiving our baptism of fire. And I was scared! There was no defense against a bomb that was on its way down to your position. I am sure that most of us were praying. The explosions were deafening but miraculously none of us were hit. In the morning when we crawled out of our foxholes we were shocked to see the depth of the craters all around us. We had been lucky. The next day we moved closer to the front which was now very close. Our infantry guys were having a hard time trying to dislodge the enemy from the hedgerow country and were having a lot of casualties. Our combat photo units were now being assigned to the various divisions that had landed and were moving up to the front. It was around this time that one of these units under command of Lt. Shadden was almost completely wiped out. Lt. Shadden and his Sergeant became our first KIA's and several of the enlisted men were badly wounded. It became my sad duty to gather his personal effects and send them home to his family along with a letter from our company commander. The war had hit home.



Driving through Ste. Mere Eglise, first town captured in Normandy

## MY STORY



Some of the troops were landed in this manner



“Ducks” out of the water

Every day more of our troops landed and were moved into position for the breakout which we knew was coming. While we were waiting, our company headquarters platoon along with several photo units which had not yet been

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assigned was camped in the vicinity of Third Army HQ., which was then near the town of St. Lo. Finally it happened. The sky was black with American bombers which dropped hundreds of bombs on German positions in and around St. Lo. The ground literally shook beneath us and we were about 2 miles away. We almost felt sorry for the enemy because no human being could stand that kind of punishment. Following this saturation bombing, Third Army armored divisions broke through and the mad race across France was on. It was hard keeping up with our armored spearheads. For a while we moved almost every day and sometimes twice a day. Our mission was to keep as close as possible to our far-flung photo units in order to give them appropriate support. All of these combat photo units were now shooting thousands of feet of motion picture film along with numerous stills. With our mobile lab trailer close by we were able to process the film almost immediately and forward same to higher HQ. As the front moved farther and farther away



Marking time in the field waiting for the breakout

from the beaches we encountered our first major problem. Re-supply of film and chemicals was of course critical to our mission. However a constant flow of rations, ammo and gasoline from the beaches to the front took top priority and our requisitions were ignored. What to do? At first we sent one of our own vehicles back to the beaches to pick up the necessary supplies. But the trip took too long and we couldn't even be sure that the supplies would be available at that time. So we hit on another idea. It was known that the German army also did a lot of

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Briefing my CO as to location of our photo units at the front

combat photography so they must have stores of such supplies available. Since this was not the type of supplies and equipment they would bother to destroy in their retreat we did find supplies of film and chemicals in enemy depots captured by the Third Army. And we were able to put them to good use. However one day when I was on one of these missions to find enemy supplies, that I almost came to grief. We had heard of a German supply train parked on a siding in a little town which had been bypassed by our armored columns. Mapmakers back at Third Army HQ had drawn a line between the points reached by two parallel spearheads implying that the front had moved up between these spearheads as well. However this assumption was 100% wrong insomuch as there were lots of enemy troops still in the pocket created by these advances. Not knowing this my driver and I proceeded to find this town and railroad siding. As we drove along a back country road, things became very quiet and we didn't see any GI's or civilians anywhere. It was really getting spooky and our sixth sense told us that we were getting into a bad place at a wrong time. We were about to turn back when we came around a curve and saw about 3 or 4 of our armored cars creeping along with their machine guns ready to fire. After we had passed them I noticed that they had given us very funny looks and I then realized that we had just got ahead of a reconnaissance

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outfit trying to make contact with the enemy. In other words we were now in “no man’s land”, between us and the enemy. This was definitively not our mission and we had to get out of there fast. Just at the time we were ready to make a U-turn we reached the edge of a village and turned around in the village square. Before we had a chance to leave, several hundred members of the French Resistance surrounded our jeep and for a moment no one knew what to do. Asking if anyone could speak English got a negative response. Sensing the proximity of the enemy I didn’t think it a good idea to try out my rudimentary knowledge of the German language. I then pulled out a pack of Chesterfields and that broke the ice. It appeared that we were the first Americans they had seen and they weren’t sure until then that we were OK. In my best high school French I tried to tell them what we were looking for and they laughed and told us that the Germans had only pulled out of this village about 10 minutes before our arrival and that the railroad siding we were interested in was still in enemy hands. By that time the recon outfit arrived and I was chewed out by the lieutenant in charge for my stupidity. But my luck was good or I could have been killed or captured had we got there 15 minutes earlier. Oh well, C’est le guerre”. And the war continued. We moved almost every day. Always forward toward the German border.

One day I received an unusual order from my company commander. I was to take one of our enlisted men (age 46) back to the beach and put him on a transport to England for shipment home. It seemed that he was not only unable to keep up with the rest of us physically but he had all kinds of family problems and the Army decided that he should be shipped home. So my supply sergeant and I loaded him and his gear into our jeep and we started the long way back (about 250 miles). It sure felt strange seeing Utah Beach again. Where we had originally landed, there were now huge piles of various types of supplies. Ammunition, gas and rations were everywhere but virtually no photographic supplies. So it looked like we would have to depend some more on captured enemy supplies. Anyway we put him on an LST together with a bunch of wounded guys going over to England where he would be put on a transport going home. He was sure happy. Our next problem was to get back to our unit which we couldn’t do that same day. By taking back roads we avoided the main military traffic (the Red Ball Express) which was packed with trucks taking supplies up to the front. Not wanting to spend the night in a tent along the road, we stopped at a farm house and asked if we could sleep in the barn. The owner and his wife were overjoyed to have us but no barn. They insisted we use one of their bedrooms which had two beds. It didn’t take too much arm-twisting for us to agree. We had brought our K-Rations which

## MY STORY



The first time I saw Paris - August 1944

included some instant coffee which we gave them along with some chocolate and they reciprocated with champagne. Not being used to the stuff we drank a little too much and paid for it with terrific headaches the next morning. It was hard to say goodbye. They hugged and kissed us and wished us “bonne chance” (good luck). Franco-American relations were at an all-time high. When we got back to where we had left our unit the previous day, we found that they had moved again and it took us a couple more hours to find them.

August turned into September and the rains arrived. Unbelievable mud all over! Our advance almost ground to a halt as we drew ever closer to the German border. Enemy resistance intensified and caused us many more casualties. Our unit suffered the loss of another sergeant and several combat photographers. It didn't look like the war was coming to an end any time soon. Trying to keep dry was becoming a major problem. Our boots were not water-proof and constant wet feet were causing many cases of trench-foot. While all of us had pup tents, those who could, slept in the back of trucks if possible. The rest of us slept on the wet ground in our pup tents.

On the more pleasant side, the Third Army overran an enemy Quartermaster

## MY STORY

Depot which, among other things, contained a huge amount of assorted wines and liquors. Verbal orders came down from Army HQ for every unit in the Third Army to send a truck and collect their share. I think the war actually stopped for about 3 days with most of the men in various stages of inebriation. Good thing the enemy didn't counterattack or we might have been pushed back to the beaches. Good old Patton knew how to take care of his men. While on this subject it comes to mind that one of my more pleasant duties was to make a monthly "liquor run" up to the British Army. Unlike the American Army, the Brits took care of their officers with a monthly quota of assorted liquors. American officers were authorized to take advantage of this if they chose to do so and of course virtually all of them did. It was funny to see such a huge pile of liquor stacked up on their beach. When my sergeant and I wanted to get a cup of coffee we were told that only tea was available and my sergeant would have to go to the Sergeant's mess while I would be served in the Warrant Officers' mess. After living in the field all those months we weren't used to that kind of discrimination. Anyway our officers shared their liquor with the enlisted men. Oh well, different armies, different customs.

Well, our rapid advance during the summer months had slowed to a crawl as we were approaching the German border via Alsace-Lorraine. Mud was everywhere. As the front was not moving very much we often spent as much as a week in one location. And it was when we were camped outside a little village called Chaligny (in the general Metz-Nancy area), that I met a couple of French kids who were destined to have a long-lasting effect on my life. It was common during those days whenever the locals saw an American unit near their homes, that they would send their kids with little pots and pans to beg for food. We knew of course that they were hurting because of the disruption of food distribution caused by the fighting. So all of us shared our rations with them. Trying to communicate with them with my high school French wasn't too easy but when I found out that in this border area between France and Germany most people spoke both languages I was able to put my limited knowledge of the German language to good use. The two kids introduced themselves as Pierre and Paulette Goudot and they invited me to visit them in their house where they lived with their parents. Since there wasn't much going on at the time my CO gave me permission to leave the outfit for a couple hours and accept their invitation. So I took my jeep and following their instructions found their home very quickly. The parents were overjoyed to have an American soldier visit them and since they all spoke German we were able to have an interesting conversation. Pierre and Paulette were 14 and 11 years old and I judged their parents to be in their forties. When I learned that the father had been a major of artillery in the French Army who had been taken prisoner by the Germans

## MY STORY

and subsequently released, I was curious to get some inside information as to what had happened to the French Army in June of 1940, especially after their heroic performance during World War I. He informed me that because of utter corruption in the French government at the time the army was shortchanged in everything they needed to put up a credible defense. In his case he told me that he only had 3 rounds for each of his guns and requisitions for more ammo and barbed wire, etc. were routinely ignored. As their village had been liberated just shortly before we arrived, and they had not had any real news prior to that, I filled them in on what had happened since D-Day and they really appreciated that. I briefly told them about life in the U.S.A. and before we knew it the evening was over and I had to say goodbye after promising to return once more if I could. I did so the following day. I brought what items I could, like a little coffee, candy, chocolate for the kids and some cigarettes for the father. I also gave them a Third Army shoulder patch as a souvenir. Then I took some snapshots with my personal camera and promised to send them copies if I succeeded in making it home. They had tears in their eyes when we said our final farewell. After 4 years of Nazi occupation, I was a living symbol to them of their liberation. More about this family later.

After this pleasant interlude it was time to move again. The weather kept getting worse and constantly living in the field was getting extremely uncomfortable. Increased enemy resistance caused us many more casualties and the roads were full of ambulances transporting our wounded back to the rear areas for treatment. Winter was approaching and no one expected the war to be over by Christmas anymore. From day to day we lived for mail call. When the mail arrived we virtually ripped open the letters and devoured their content. I wondered if people at home could realize how we yearned for these letters and how much they helped our morale. Letters written by enlisted men were required to be censored for security reasons. This became a boring job for us officers who had to read each letter and cut out anything that was considered as classified. In the process we came across all kinds of sentimental yearning of young men forcibly separated from their loved ones.

Speaking of morale, it was around this time that we had a visit from Bing Crosby and his USO troupe. It was the only time we had seen any of these entertainers come this close to the front. When Bing sang the popular and sentimental song "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas" with the rumble of the front in the background, there were quite a few moist eyes in the audience, knowing that many of us would never see another Christmas at home. I didn't get a chance to talk to Bing Crosby but got a snapshot of him from about 10 feet away.

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M, and Mme. Goudot with daughter, Paulette and son, Pierre, when I visited with them at their home in Chaligny

## MY STORY



Bing Crosby entertaining the troops close to the front

As the presidential election was coming up in November, each unit in the Army had to appoint a “voting officer” for the purpose of distributing and collecting absentee ballots for transmission back home. This became another one of my extra duties and also represented the first time I could vote in a presidential election. I had just missed it in 1940 because my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday occurred about a week after election day. Of course, everybody voted for Franklin D. Roosevelt since changing presidents in the middle of a war didn’t seem to be a good idea. Little did we know that he would not survive the war.

And the war dragged on. The weather getting worse and enemy resistance stiffened as we approached the German border. Then in December, the incredible news that a major German offensive has begun in the Ardennes, an area north of us in Belgium and Luxembourg. Since this had been a relatively quiet sector of the front, it had been lightly held and the attack was a complete surprise. Third Army was ordered to immediately come to meet this new threat. So the entire Army disengaged its eastern advance toward the German border and rushed up to what became known as the “Battle of the Bulge”. The weather was horrendous. Traveling in open vehicles over icy roads in zero degree weather about 100 miles to our destination was quite an ordeal. Since the convoy would

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Our first view of the Moselle River

never stop it became quite a chore to relieve oneself from a moving vehicle. When we came within about 20 miles of our destination, each unit was directed to a specific location and await further orders. After our small unit broke away from the convoy our CO decided to make it to the next Luxembourg village on the map and try to get some shelter for a night or two. I was ordered to take my jeep and make a reconnaissance ahead of the company. When my driver and I entered the village we found no one on the streets so we pulled up to a café where a good number of locals had gathered. I asked if anyone spoke English but no one did. Knowing that the people in Luxembourg speak both German and French and my French not being too good I started speaking German, explaining that we had about 50 men who needed shelter for the night and would they be able to help us. The response was anything but cordial. After being hailed as liberators all over France this came as a shock. What had I done wrong to get this kind of reception? Luckily the rest of our guys pulled up about that time and then I heard the answer. It seemed that as part of the German offensive German soldiers in American uniforms had infiltrated our lines for the purpose of disrupting communications and whatever other damage they could do to us. These villagers knew about that and when just the two of us showed up and I spoke German to them they assumed that we were two of these infiltrators and they were debating whether or not to kill us. So much for being a linguist. Anyway we were properly welcomed then and our enlisted men were put up in a local school house and we four officers were billeted in one of the houses. It was quite a shock to sleep in a bed after all those months in the field sleeping on the ground in all kinds of weather. We stayed in

## MY STORY

this village for several days while the rest of Third Army units were getting into position to attack the bottom of the bulge in our lines after the German breakthrough. The weather was getting worse by the day and we were thankful to have some shelter instead of sleeping on ice and snow as heretofore. One evening our hosts wanted to entertain us and suggested playing a game which involved asking and getting answers to both current and future events. So the four of us and the host and his wife sat around a table which had been placed on three blocks of wood with the fourth leg suspended in air. All of us placed our hands flat on the table top and any question asked would be answered by the suspended leg tapping the floor once for a “yes” or no response for a “no”. If the question required a numeric answer the leg would tap the floor the corresponding number of times. Of course we thought this was ludicrous but just for fun we went along to pass the time. What a surprise! The table actually tilted and the suspended leg tapped the correct number of times or gave the correct yes or no answer to every question asked. We watched our hosts closely but could detect no manipulation of the table on their part. The questions we asked pertained to facts about the history and composition of our company which these locals couldn’t possibly have known. We were then told we could also ask questions about the future. Now this was getting a little scary and we kept to general themes like “will the war end in 1944?” (negative), “will the war end in 1945?” (yes). Then I asked a personal question “will I marry my fiancée?” (yes). “will I have children?” (yes), “how many?” (two). Then I stopped and others asked their own questions. All of these answers became true. And to this day this has been an inexplicable mystery to me.

One day when I was driving in my jeep to locate one of our photo units attached to the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored division, I came into a village where a number of tanks were being worked on. Some were having their tracks replaced while others were being white-washed. This was necessary to blend in with all the snow that was all around, otherwise they would present a big fat target for enemy gunners. As I knew that my old friend, Henry Cotter, was assigned to this type of unit I made some inquiries and sure enough found him in a tent near one of the tanks. We had a pleasant re-union, our first since I found him in England prior to the invasion. I promised to look him up again if at all possible. As it turned out this did not happen until after the end of the war in occupied Germany. More of that later.

Third Army was now in position to attack the enemy who had surrounded our guys in the Belgian town of Bastogne. It was the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, my friend, Henry Cotter’s outfit, which led the attack and successfully broke the siege. Many of them were in bad shape after all that time fighting off the enemy with a fast

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diminishing supply of food and ammunition and virtually no medical supplies for the wounded. And all this in sub-zero weather! Many of the casualties were due to frost bite. It was during the time preceding the attack when the weather made it impossible to provide aerial support that General Patton ordered the Army



When I found my friend, Henry Cotter, in a little Luxembourg village they were white-washing their tanks to blend in with all that snow

Chaplain to compose a prayer to the Almighty imploring Him to grant us relief from this terrible weather so we could continue our “Crusade in Europe”. The resulting prayer was printed and distributed to the entire Third Army. Two days later the weather lifted and our planes could resume flying in support of the troops on the ground. The war continued successfully but the cost had been high on both sides. I can still see the endless lines of ambulances heading for the rear with their human cargo. There were no helicopters in those days for evacuating the wounded and they had to travel many miles over bumpy back roads to get to medical care. I did not actually get to see Bastogne as my unit passed about 10 miles East on our way to the German border. It was now February and the cold had abated but it was still miserable sleeping on the ground and eating cold K-Rations most of the time. Once in a while, conditions permitting, our Mess Sergeant managed to cook a hot meal for the troops. This was greatly appreciated by all. The enemy was now in

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full retreat and we were approaching the German border and the formidable fortifications called the “Siegfried Line”. Fortunately for us it was not seriously defended and our tanks and infantry breached it successfully. We were getting more and more prisoners now and it really appeared that the war was coming to an end. When we entered the first German towns the people looked like they couldn’t believe their eyes to see the endless lines of American tanks and troops passing through. They had been told by their government that they were winning the war because of the secret weapons they were now deploying against us like the V-2 rockets and jet fighter planes. Luckily for us they came too late.



Watching German prisoners filing into a stockade

Prisoners were becoming a real problem now because of the logistic difficulties they presented. It was not unusual to see a column of German soldiers marching toward us with GI’s scrambling to get out of their way to escape having to take responsibility for them. We crossed the Rhine on a pontoon bridge near the city of Mainz. We were now racing across the middle of Germany against virtually no opposition. It was then that we had our last casualty. One of our lieutenants who evidently was tired of riding in a jeep had decided to confiscate a civilian car. This was becoming a common thing to “liberate” civilian cars for possible use for personal transportation during the coming occupation. Unfortunately for this officer, riding in this car with the

## MY STORY



German Army women behind the wire

middle of Germany against virtually no opposition. It was then that we had our last casualty. One of our lieutenants who evidently was tired of riding in a jeep had decided to confiscate a civilian car. This was becoming a common thing to liberate” civilian cars for possible use for personal transportation during the coming occupation. Unfortunately for this officer, riding in this car with the windows up, he did not hear the challenge of a sentry who proceeded to level his

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rifle and shoot him. This was a real tragedy after having survived all the fighting since Normandy and then to be killed by “friendly” fire so close to the end of the war.

Once when I was on a routine trip in our jeep we happened to come across a former SS barracks which looked deserted except for one of their cars, a 1938 Chevrolet sedan in beautiful condition, parked in the middle of their parade ground. I was tempted to commandeer this vehicle for future use but knowing the Nazi skill at setting booby-traps for us we thought we had better check it out first. We lifted the hood and examined it for anything unusual. Sure enough there was a wire attached to a spark plug wire which did not belong there. It was probably set up so that if we had started the motor the whole thing would have blown up. At that stage of the game I was taking no chances and we left with the hood up.

As we were progressing deeper into Germany we encountered our last shock Of the war, namely the notorious concentration camps. We could not believe our eyes. Words cannot describe the horror of these camps. Most of us had come up against some gruesome scenes during the campaign but we were unprepared to witness this horrible example of man’s inhumanity toward man. General Eisenhower ordered a complete pictorial record of these camps and the 166<sup>th</sup> Signal Photo Co. did so of every such camp that we encountered in the Third Army area. It was also our last photographic assignment as the war ended shortly after that and we prepared to settle into occupation.

May 8, 1945, designated as “Victory in Europe Day” found us in the German city of Regensburg. It was actually anticlimactic because to all intents and purposes the war had ended weeks prior to that. We were now ordered by Third Army Headquarters to move south into Bavaria and find a suitable place in the general Munich area to settle down in occupation. On the way down we passed through such completely destroyed cities as Frankfurt, Nuremberg and of course Munich. Sometimes we had to wait while bulldozers cleared a path through the piles of rubble. The devastation caused by our bombers was horrendous and we thought that it would take Germany at least 100 years to dig out of that mess. On the way to our destination we happened to camp overnight in one of the smaller towns that had not suffered as much damage as the larger cities. As a matter of convenience we put up our tents in a local park surrounded by an apartment complex. As we were going about our business, a shot rang out from the direction of the apartments. This was a shock inasmuch as we had not encountered any

## MY STORY



The “autobahn” was used by the German air force as runways after their airfields had been bombed out. This is near Munich.

resistance whatever from the civilian population. So my company commander ordered me to take a squad of our guys and try to flush out the shooter. The apartments were crowded with refugees and trying to find this individual was virtually impossible. This time my knowledge of the German language came in handy. I approached the people and told them that if they did not surrender the shooter I would call in a couple of tanks and level the complex. Of course this was a bluff since I had no such authority, but it worked. As I was playing with my “Walkie-Talkie” field telephone, they brought out a kid about 16 years old dressed in a Hitler Youth uniform who apparently couldn’t believe the war was over. His mother, believing that we would shoot him, got on her knees before us pleading for his life. I told her that he would not be shot but would have to be questioned by our military police and probably be locked up for a while. We then put him in our jeep and took him to the nearest MP outfit who then took over. Luckily for him and us he hadn’t hit anyone. Just another young victim of Nazi brain-washing. Arriving in the Munich area the map showed a lake resort area south of the city, called Tegernsee. So we headed for that hoping to find some nice resort hotel to spend our occupation time. No such luck. Every decent place was being fought over by different units wanting the same place. It was almost comical to see officers pulling rank on each other in ordering the lower-ranking ones to get

## MY STORY



A typical street in Frankfurt, Germany, April 1945

lost. Since our CO was only a captain we didn't stand a chance against all the Third Army brass. So I got hold of a local civilian who appeared knowledgeable, gave him a pack of cigarettes and asked him if he could tell us of a suitable out-of-the-way place where our company could settle down in occupation. And I hit pay dirt. He gave us the location of a SPA-type hotel nestled in an Alpine valley far off the beaten path, called Wildbad-Kreuth. It was completely isolated and very hard to find on any map but it was perfect for our company. It had about 200 rooms so every one of us had a private room. The place had not sustained any war damage and was in perfect shape. We had found our home for the occupation. At the very end of hostilities, the disintegration of the German army presented us with a serious logistical problem, namely, what to do with these guys until they could be processed back to civilian status. So it was decided to apportion them to each unit of the Third Army. Our "quota" was 50 prisoners whom we had to house and feed. Of course these guys were happy as hell to have escaped Russian captivity and there was never any problem as to security. We gave them enough 6 x 6 tents to take care of their needs and they put them up at the other end of the compound. Each morning they would participate in Reveille by lining up their platoon with a lieutenant in charge alongside our three platoons. After roll call the German officer would come into the orderly room where he would receive his duty assignments for the day. I had to translate since none of them could speak English. Then he

## MY STORY



Frankfurt, Germany, April 1945 - oddly the F.W. Woolworth building escaped destruction

would click his heels, salute our CO, about face and return to his unit. It was almost like comic opera. They did all the KP and clean-up work around the place and since we were their meal ticket we couldn't have chased them away with a club. At that point in time, with the German economy in shambles, food was very scarce and they were given the same rations as we had. Of course that was OK with our enlisted men since they had no dirty work to do anymore. And so we settled into a comfortable routine. There was absolutely no resistance from the German population as they were evidently sick of war and suffering.

Occupation seemed to be rather pleasant duty after all we'd been through, but in the back of our minds we knew that even though the war in Europe was over, the other war in the Pacific was still going strong and some of the troops would have to be transferred to that theater of operations so the Army devised a point system to determine who would have to go and who would stay in occupation. The magic number was "85". Anyone who had 85 or more points would stay while anyone with less than that number would be shipped out. Points were awarded for total number of months served, number of months overseas, battles participated in, medals, wounds in combat, etc. I was lucky. I had earned exactly 85 points. Sadly about half of our company had less than 85 points and sometime in June orders

## MY STORY



When Henry Cotter and I met again in the Nuremberg area

were issued for them to proceed to the port of Marseilles for shipment to the Pacific. The night before their departure we held a farewell party using all the wine and liquor we had “liberated” along the way and we all got pretty tight. But it was hard to leave friends who had shared so much with us and in all probability we would never see each other again. Of course we all promised to get in touch after the war.

Now that we had the German prisoners doing all the work around the place there really wasn't much for our guys to do anymore. So we were able to become tourists. One day a bunch of us traveled up to the top of Germany's highest mountain, the so-called “Zugspitze”. A cogwheel train took us nearly to the top and we were amazed to see considerable amount of snow even in the middle of summer. Some of the locals were even skiing wearing summer clothing. One day while riding around the countryside we came up to the Danube river. It was a hot day and I decided to go for a swim (my first chance in about 2 years). It felt good

## MY STORY



Our mobile lab trailer parked in front of our occupation home in Wildbad-Kreuth. All of our combat film was processed in this trailer from Normandy to Czechoslovakia

and I ventured a little closer to the middle of the river. It was then that I realized that the current was a little too strong and swam back toward shore. It was then that I ran into trouble. Long vines were wrapping around my legs and I had a moment of panic thinking I was trapped by this underwater growth. After freeing myself I swam back toward the middle and let the current take me farther down the river before attempting to make the shore again. But these weeds were still there and I began to wonder how far I would have to go before getting out of this unexpected entrapment. I finally made it about a half a mile from where I had started. The other guys didn't even know that I had been in trouble and thought I was just enjoying myself. That was my first and last swim in Europe.

Another time we visited Hitler's so-called "Eagle's Nest" and roamed around where other Nazi big wigs had their vacation homes. We were too late for souvenirs. The troops who got there the first day had taken everything that wasn't bolted down. So we just took a few photos.

In August some of us had a chance to go back to Paris on a 3-day pass. That was quite an experience. It was our first time back since the liberation a year ago and we erroneously thought that the celebration would have been over. But not so. Any American in uniform was a target for all kinds of attention, including solicitation by swarms of prostitutes. It was really a problem escaping all this and

## MY STORY



That's me in Hitler's picture window



The "Eagle's Nest"

do some actual sightseeing. When it was time to return we were able to get a ride in a C-47 going back to Germany. It was my first ride in an airplane and I was quite thrilled. The pilot allowed us one at a time to come up front and see what was happening. Since he was flying at an altitude of only about 1500 feet one could clearly see the details of the ground. The co-pilot had a map on his lap and instructed the pilot at various times to either follow a road or make a turn at some stream below, etc. I was really impressed. After about an hour or so the pilot informed us that all the airfields in southern Germany were "weathered in" and that there would be no place for him to land. He then gave us a choice of either returning to Paris or going north to a British airfield outside of Brussels, Belgium. Since most of us had not seen Brussels before, we opted for that. We landed and agreed with the pilot to check with him every day until the weather had cleared. In the meantime we got a ride into town and checked into a hotel.



## MY STORY

The next day we acted like the tourists we had now become. We walked around downtown Brussels and took in the sights. About noontime we went into a servicemen's club which was located right on one of the main streets intending to get something to eat. All of a sudden everything went silent as an announcement came over the loudspeaker "Japan had surrendered after a second atomic bomb had been dropped on them". Then the place went wild and normal discipline was cast aside. Colonels and Privates were slapping each other on the back and we poured out on the street screaming and cheering. Now the war was really over and we had made it. Some of the local passersby had puzzled looks on their faces, like, what are those crazy Americans up to now. Perhaps they were unaware that the U.S. had been fighting a major war in the Pacific too and against a much more fanatic foe than the Germans. But now we had reason to celebrate because we would be going home. Also the reports from southern Germany indicated that flying conditions had cleared up so our pilot told us to meet him at the plane the following morning and we would be on our way back to our various duty stations. When we arrived at the British airfield and located our plane we were in for a shock. During our absence the Brits had completely cleaned out our plane. Everything that was not bolted down had been taken. So those of our group who had left luggage in the plane and just took some overnight things, lost all of their gear. We all felt sorry for one young lieutenant who, as the Personnel Officer of a unit located in Germany, happened to be transporting a large number of individual personnel records which were now lost. We couldn't imagine him reporting back to his CO with that kind of news. Losing personnel records is always serious but this couldn't have happened at a worse time. I could guess that most of the fellows in that outfit didn't get home for quite a while. Our pilot and co-pilot were really mad because they had even stolen their parachutes. It was probably some black market operation which was not unusual at that point in time. Luckily for me I had left nothing on the plane as I was traveling light with only a small bag I had taken with me. We reported back to our unit and started speculating as to how soon we would be on our way home.



One of our P-38's ran out of gas and landed on the autobahn



This Nazi plane landed a little differently

## MY STORY

It was now the middle of summer and we were really getting itchy to get started on our way home. Most of us had been away from our families and loved ones for years and were understandably anxious to pick up our lives again. But moving so many men was a logistic nightmare and we just had to sit and wait. During this waiting period the powers-that-be decided to assist the Germans in getting their economy going again. Since we were a photographic unit in an area where German photographic industry had been located, we were ordered to do what we could to get them started again. Since I was able to converse with the locals, I worked in a liaison capacity with a local manufacturer, helping him to get materials, transportation, etc. It was something different and helped to pass the time. One day while performing this function at Third Army HQ in Munich, I happened to stop in the Officers' Club for lunch. It was there that I saw my first Russian soldier. During the final months of the war when we were headed in their direction and could have reached Berlin first, we were ordered to go back and let the Russians do it. We were about half way through Czechoslovakia at the time but had not made contact with the Russians. Seeing him sitting alone at the bar, I went over and offered to buy him a beer. It turned out that he too was in a liaison capacity but spoke no English. He did, however speak German. So we had an interesting conversation using German to communicate.

While at Third Army HQ I checked to see where the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division was now located. It turned out that my old buddy, Henry Cotter, who went through the entire war with that outfit and who I hadn't seen since our brief meeting in Luxembourg, was now within a reasonable distance of my location. So after making contact, we both took a couple days off and I picked him up and brought him back to our place. Then we did some sight-seeing in the Nuremberg area and attended a USO show there in what used to be a huge stadium for Nazi conventions during Hitler's hey-day. It was really great to see each other again and talk about all our big plans for the future when we would revert to civilian status. It was shortly thereafter that his unit was shipped home.

Now that we were settled in occupation with no immediate prospect of going home, we just had to make the best of a boring situation. We were lucky to still have our lab trailer with its darkroom. Since our official photographic mission was finished we all had access to our lab trailer darkroom to process our personal photos. Doing this and writing many letters helped the time to go by.

So August passed, then September and still no orders to do anything but wait. We were beginning to think that the Army had forgotten our little unit tucked away in

## MY STORY



My last re-union with Henry Cotter at our occupation “home”

that remote Alpine valley. Finally about the middle of October we got the good news that we were now alerted for shipment home. Since no other unit was slated to replace us at this location, we had to get the German prisoners off our hands. This was accomplished by turning them over to Military Government pending processing them back to civilian status. They were really sorry to see us go since we had been their meal ticket at a time when food for the civilian population was very scarce. But they did help us load our vehicles and we let them have whatever food we could to tide them over. Most of them were not fanatical Nazis but just ordinary guys who fate happened to have put in the wrong place at the wrong time. So we turned the buildings over to the local civilian authorities and we were off on our last convoy to a staging area located in the German town of Marburg.

When we arrived a flurry of activity awaited us. We had to turn in all of our vehicles, field equipment and weapons, leaving us virtually naked. Even though we were full of anticipation of going home, this was a traumatic moment for us all. Within the period of a few hours we passed into a strange type of limbo - we were no longer soldiers but not yet civilians – just a bunch of bodies waiting to be

## MY STORY



This “souvenir” was a little to big to send home

shipped somewhere. The realization sank in that all that we had experienced and our resulting camaraderie was soon coming to an end. Since we had all come from different parts of the country, it would be unlikely we would ever see one another again after release from active service. So we were nearing the closing of one big chapter in our lives and the beginning of the next.

While awaiting the port call, we had a few days to wander around and try to pass the time. Marburg happened to be a small college town with a Medical college in its center. Since the school had not yet re-opened and just for something to do, I contacted the custodian and asked him to show us around. A pack of American cigarettes made him extremely happy to oblige. I took a bunch of the guys with me and for a couple of hours we played tourist. Near the end of the tour, he took us down to the basement where they had a number of vats of formaldehyde containing human cadavers presumably used for medical studies. After a year of warfare, this was not exactly of interest to us but out of sheer curiosity we did look at a couple of bodies that were unusual. One was of a young woman obviously pregnant. There was a U-shaped cut on her stomach and the custodian reached in and lifted it like a flap exposing a perfectly formed baby. Questioning him as to what had happened to this young lady, he informed us that she had committed suicide by jumping off a bridge into the local river drowning herself.

## MY STORY



Marburg, Germany where we awaited our port call, October 1945

He also told us that this had happened around 1890 when having a baby out of wedlock was usually the end of the world for any woman. The other body was of more recent origin. It was a man with a severed head. It seemed that he was caught listening to an Allied radio broadcast and in Nazi Germany that was a capital offense. All this made us even more anxious to put all these horrors behind us and go home.

Well we got our port call and were loaded into box cars (yes, the traditional 40 and 8's (forty men or eight horses). This was really humiliating after riding all over Western Europe in our own vehicles and being welcomed as liberators. Now we were just human cargo to be shipped at the convenience of the Government. How quickly one's situation can change. It was an agonizing trip. There were no toilet facilities and the train just poked along but never stopped. Eventually some of us heard the call of nature and had to relieve ourselves. There was nothing to do but to open the sliding door and do what you had to do while a couple guys held you to keep you from falling off the train. It took almost a full day to reach the Antwerp port of embarkation. A couple more days of processing (we had to submit to a special physical examination for venereal disease among other things) and finally boarded the SS Williams Victory and we were on our way home.

## MY STORY



Packing up to leave for the Antwerp Port of Embarkation

These so-called “Victory” ships were not built for comfort. They had been slapped together during the war years for the sole purpose of transporting as many troops and as much cargo as possible to the various theaters of war. To say there were no amenities would have been an understatement. We were packed in like sardines and sleeping was almost an impossibility. To make things worse, as soon as we left the Channel and got into the Atlantic Ocean we encountered a big storm and most of us were sea-sick for days. The stink of throwing up made it very hard to stay in the hold of the ship and many of us opted to spend most of our time on deck. But



Camp “Top Hat”, staging area for Antwerp P. of E.

## MY STORY



Lt. Salvas and I enjoying a “new treat” - ice cream

no one complained. After our wartime experiences this was just a minor temporary discomfort. And our anticipation of coming home and being re-united with our loved ones became greater every day. After about 8 days we finally approached the American coast. It took another day to reach New York City harbor from where we had left so long ago. Passing the statue of liberty was a very emotional event. As we proceeded up the Hudson River we were greeted by bells, whistles and sirens from various sources along the shoreline. Large welcome signs were all along the water front and it was a very good feeling. We finally tied up at a military installation some miles north of the city and disembarked. Practically everybody knelt down and kissed the ground. We were so grateful that we had made it, knowing that so many others had not. The next couple of days became a blur of processing out of the Army. We received our final pay, discharge papers and train tickets to our various home towns. In all that confusion it was hard to say our goodbyes and we wished each other good luck, knowing that it was highly unlikely any of us would ever see one another again. Trucks took us to the railroad station in New York City and for the first time in years I was on my own. I located my train to Philadelphia and after standing in line for quite awhile for a public telephone I reached my fiancée and we were able to actually talk to each other. What a thrill after all that time of communicating only by letter. Of course we couldn't talk too long as there was a long line forming behind me. So I gave her the details of my impending arrival and went to my train. When the train finally left I had about an hour and a half to think of our impending re-union. The anticipation was almost too much as the train approached its destination. As it slowly rolled to a stop I could see her standing on the platform trying to find me in

## MY STORY

the crowd of disembarking passengers. I virtually ran to her and put my arms around her. She smiled at me beautifully and we hugged and kissed each other completely oblivious of the world around us. It was a moment that comes once in a lifetime. She had waited for me and I had been among the lucky ones who made it home. After that long delay our life together was about to begin.

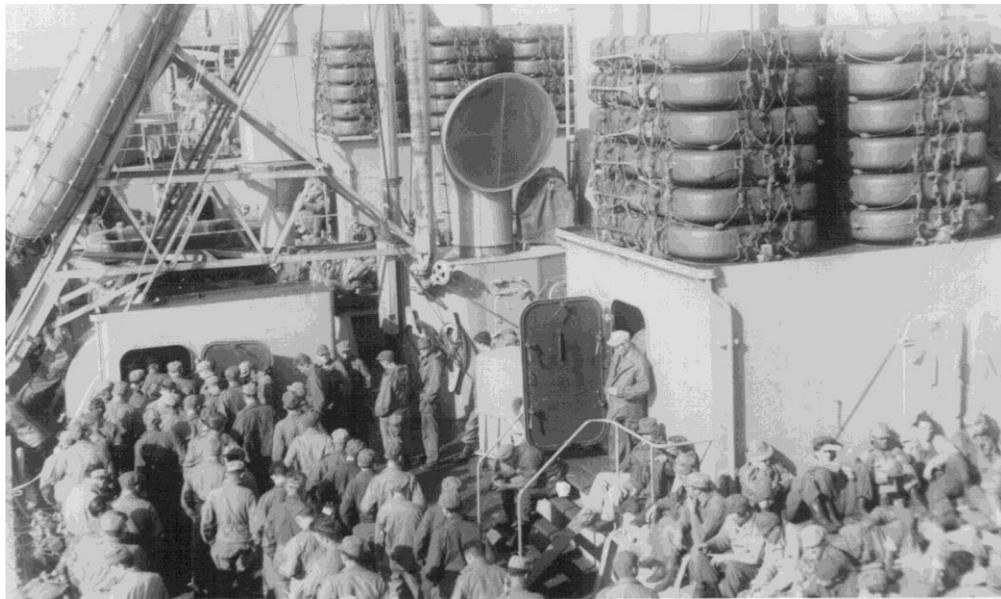


Waiting to board our transport home



It's finally happening - we're going on board

MY STORY



ON THE WAY HOME!!

## MY STORY

### EPILOGUE

I contacted the Goudot family in Chaligny by letter shortly after my return, and sent them copies of all the photos I had taken during my brief visit with them. We exchanged a few more letters but then all of us were too busy re-building our lives to engage in a lot of reminiscing about a moment we had shared during the war. And so the time passed. Ann and I married and had the two children as predicted in that little village in Luxembourg. After our retirement, my wife and I traveled to various locations where I had been during the war, including Northern Ireland, England, Germany and, of course, Normandy and other parts of France. In 1994 we traveled to France in order to participate in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day. Starting in Germany we drove all the way across France to Normandy. Since there was a shortage of accommodations for so many veterans, the French Government had asked the local population to open their homes to any veterans who needed a place to stay during these ceremonies. So my wife and I were hosted by a nice French couple for three days and nights which made our visit so much more pleasant. During the period of June 5-7, we attended most of the ceremonies around the invasion beaches and the town of Ste. Mere Eglise. It was a very emotional experience for all of us who had been there in 1944. The local people went all out to display their love and affection for their American liberators. Before we departed the area I was able to locate the grave of Lt. Shadden, our first casualty, and pay my respects. He is one of almost 10,000 Americans buried in a beautiful military cemetery overlooking Omaha Beach.

On our return trip we took the Northern route back to Germany visiting some of the battlefields of World War I. Driving in the vicinity of Nancy I happened to see the village of Chaligny on my map. Remembering the Goudot family I had met there during the war, I decided to make a little detour and stop in this village hoping to find someone of that family still living there. Not having an address, we stopped at the local town hall to make inquiries. The people there were very helpful and checked their records but to no avail. The family had apparently moved away years ago and they had no record of their current address. So we thanked them and continued our trip back to the airport and flew home. About two weeks after our return I received a letter from Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was from the daughter of the 11-year old Paulette Goudot I had met in 1944, she was working for a French company with an office in Cambridge. She asked if I were the one who had been looking for her mother in Chaligny. It appears that after our departure from Chaligny someone sitting in a hair-dresser salon overheard an employee of the town hall talking about an American soldier and his wife looking

## MY STORY

for the Goudot family and showing photos taken of the family during the war. She regretted that she had been so busy with preparations for a village feast that she could not take enough time to thoroughly search for Paulette's address. The person who overheard this discussion happened to be the friend of a friend of Paulette. So when word finally got back to Paulette, she knew that this visitor had to be me. Luckily, she had salvaged her father's address book after his death and this contained my full name and original address in Philadelphia. She then called her daughter in Cambridge and asked her to check it out. Although we had moved several times since the war, we still resided in Philadelphia. I returned her call and informed her that she had indeed found the right person. She relayed this information back to her mother in France and arrangements were made for all of us to meet in Cambridge for our re-union. It was a most joyful occasion after 50 years. My wife and I have met with her on several later occasions both in France and in our country. We are keeping in touch with her as well as with several French couples we met in Normandy. The French people who suffered so much under the Nazi occupation have not forgotten their American friends. Those of us who took part in the liberation know that our sacrifices forged an unbreakable bond between our two great nations. We must never forget that all gave some but some gave all in the cause of freedom.

The following pages contain excerpts of individual experiences of the combat cameramen of our unit. I had the honor of giving them the direct support they needed in order to perform their mission of recording on film all of the combat operations of the Third United States Army in the European Theater of Operations under the inspired leadership of General George S. Patton. They endured unbelievable hardships and dangers in performing that mission. Some of them died and a number were seriously wounded. Unlike combat units who were periodically relieved from front line duty, our combat cameramen were on duty from the beginning to the very end without rest. It is believed they earned more medals and honors than any other company in the Third Army. They succeeded in preserving for posterity a pictorial record of what war was is really like. Photographic units of the 166<sup>th</sup> Signal Photo Co were assigned to Divisions of the Third Army at every historic event that occurred in the Army's liberation of France, Luxembourg and Belgium and the conquest of Germany. Each had a part in supplying photographic records of forward echelon action. Here are some personal accounts by some of them.

## MY STORY

In Normandy, as Omaha and Utah invasion, beaches were taxed to capacity landing men and material, the need for the Port of Cherbourg became paramount. The 79<sup>th</sup> Division landed on D-Day plus 4, and Sgt. Aaron Lubitch tells of his experiences after the division reached the port after two weeks of fighting.

### CHERBOURG!!

When, on June 25<sup>th</sup>, we looked down on the city we knew that the great port would soon be ours. From Fort DuRoule, taken at early morning after a bloody battle, Colonel Robinson, commander of the 314 Regiment, 79<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, pointed out the pillboxes. "These" he said in a tired voice "will have to be destroyed before we dare to come down the hill". The bombing plus the artillery had left these fortifications intact and it was up to the doughboys to do the job -- a job that was bloody and hard!

Loaded with camera and film, I tried to descend the hill with the first platoon, but got pinned down. Behind every burning building a burp gun or machine gun was covering the approaches to the city. "We'll have to burn them out" the platoon leader remarked. To "burn them out" was only a phrase. The platoon leader actually meant fight them and kill them. I found a clearing in the wooded hill overlooking the railroad yard and from there had a front seat for the show. The afternoon fighting on June 25 was a failure. We fought on the approaches, were held up, lost much and decided to wait for more support. That night was a night of sweating it out. "Tomorrow" said Colonel Robinson "the show will start and it won't be play. There will be blood."

Zero hour was 0600. The artillery kept up for 35 minutes. The city became a huge ball of flames as though everything in it was afire. We made our way toward the railroad yard where we encountered our first stiff opposition. There were machine guns behind us and their fire was covering the whole area. An Army photographer is a soldier. No matter what happens in front of his eyes he is not supposed to get too disturbed. He must keep an objective viewpoint, select salient action, and concentrate upon technical matters of exposing and focusing. So calmly I was filming the "Come and get the bastards!" as the platoon leader yelled. Calmly...? I was actually shaking like a leaf. I was scared. But once a man is in the thick of it he forgets about his fear. He discovers it after he catches his breath.

## MY STORY

Three men were lost in cleaning out the machine guns, but the hard job was just started. There was a pillbox a couple of hundred yards ahead of us and it had to be “burned out.” Baker Company on our right flank had just been shooting up the works without actually fighting. Being nearest the pillbox they were ordered to attack. There was one method of burning them out that employed a long stick with dynamite that had to be thrown into the pillbox from close range. “Long Jack”, a tall guy from Arizona, was to carry the stick. “I’ll get those bastards” he assured us, crawling toward the pillbox. But a couple of bursts of machine gun fire turned him back. It was too dangerous to try again, and it was decided to use artillery. Fifty yards in front of the pillbox the platoon leader of the first platoon acted as forward observer, directing the fire. The first shell landed a little beyond the target, the second clipped the side of the pillbox and the third shell was a bull’s eye. This bull’s eye was the death of four German men and a woman. These “morale” women were everywhere with the German troops.

There were a couple of more entrenched strong points in the street before our objective, which was a corner building. But the Germans and their women didn’t want to die. The day was much too beautiful, and no one wanted to see the sun for the last time--but many of our boys never did see the sun again. Slowly we and the other units on our flanks were advancing through the narrow streets. Rifle fire echoed all over the town. Germans were still holding out. The stationed Cherbourg garrison was still fighting and did not surrender until the waterfront was taken--until everything was covered with flames.

For the Army it was a triumph; for a photographer, blood and death in front of a camera finder--for the weary G.I. the largest liquor cache. “If I had known there was so much liquor”, said Long Jack, already a little on the happy side, “I’d have gotten there a long time ago.”

The danger, the prospect, the price of photographic recording was brought to the realization of each photographer in one detachment when a mortar shell killed two, wounded two out of a six-man unit. Private Howard Kuehn tells of that fateful day.

This is the story of Detachment #7 of the 166<sup>th</sup> Signal Photo Co. It was a fine group of men but was doomed to a short combat life. We arrived on Omaha Beach on July 7, 1944, and after a short sojourn with Company Headquarters at Nehou, France, were ordered to report to VIII Corps at La Haye de Puis. We spent some time at Corps doing behind the lines work, until the attack to break the St.

## MY STORY

Lo-Perrier highway was started.

The big drive was scheduled for August 12<sup>th</sup> and early that morning we drove down to the front on the right flank of the 90<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. None of us had had any previous combat experience, so we were all slightly nervous but in good spirits. The vehicle, being the command car, was left about a mile and a half back of the lines in a field, as the enemy had observation on anything larger than a jeep when closer. We caught a ride on a jeep to the forward command post and checked in for information. After obtaining the necessary information we proceeded to a narrow roadway between two hedgerows to await the start of the attack.

Four tanks were firing from this position and our artillery was located in the field above the road. We were in the roadway about three quarters of an hour when our Lieutenant asked us to come closer to him so he could tell us something. We never learned what it was, as almost immediately the Jerries started a searching mortar barrage. We all hit the dirt, hugging the bottom of the hedgerow as close as possible to avoid fragments from the field. I was on the end of the line closest to the Jerry lines and about five feet separated me from our officer, Lieutenant Shadden, and Sergeant Richmond. T/4 Walker was about seven feet further down from them and Pfc Sloan seven feet past him. Suddenly in the middle of the noise there was a roar and a shock that stunned me for a short time. As I began to get my bearings and moved to see if I had been hit I heard Walker and Sloan call for help. I turned as I got up and started toward them. A pack on the back of Sgt Richmond was burning due to shrapnel hitting the inflammable film he had placed in it. I cut it loose and as I did so saw that he was already dead. The Lieutenant, too, was dead before I reached him. Walker had been riddled with shrapnel and Sloan also. Sloan was the worst of the two as shrapnel had smashed his right leg just between ankle and knee and struck him in the back. As I attempted to administer first aid I called for stretcher bearers and after what seemed hours ... but most likely was minutes they arrived.

We carried the two wounded men out and then went back for the camera equipment. As the mortar barrage was still going on I could only carry a part of it at once. When I got ready for the second trip one of the fellows at the Aid Station went with me. We checked the Lieutenant and Sergeant to make sure we could not help them and then carried the rest of the stuff back. By this time the two boys had been evacuated and I started back with the cameras. After walking a mile or so I caught a ride in a jeep to Regimental Headquarters. Our vehicle and driver were

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not there so I left the cameras and started after him along another road toward the front. After finding him we both went back, picked up the cameras and returned to the Company. The reaction set in then and I went to pieces. I was sent to the 101<sup>st</sup> Evacuation Hospital nearby for treatment for shock. There it was discovered that only one tiny piece of shrapnel had entered my back, though I had been but five feet from the exploding shell. PFC Sloan and T/4 Walker were permanent casualties and are now home

The fighting in Normandy was at close quarters and bitter. Massed artillery, tank-dozer and Infantry that dug the enemy out of holes burrowed into banks of hedgerows. Bloated cattle in the fields were round and grotesque with legs pointing skyward, and ground haze held the odor of death for days. At St. Lo fighting reached its climax, and with the tremendous saturation bombing on the last of July the Normandy confinement began to break. Sgt. John Blankenhorn tells of this.

Toward the end of July '44 the Allies, although still penned up in Normandy, had enough power to attempt a breakthrough into the interior of France. With the aim of effecting this penetration several special troop dispositions were organized among which, and probably most important was VII Corps commanded by General Collins who was one of the battle-wise CG's, having served on Guadalcanal earlier in the war. This Corps had as its area the ground immediately bordering XIX Corps, which was the unit attacking St. Lo. Just west of St. Lo was the town of Marigny, a road junction between Carentan to the south, Lessay and Perrier to the west and Coutance to the northwest. This town was held by the Germans and VII Corps forces were about three miles from advancing from the south. The Corps was made up of 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions and the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Divisions. The 9<sup>th</sup> Detachment of the 166<sup>th</sup> Signal Photo Company was attached to the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

The idea of the attack was to capture Marigny and break the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division out onto the two roads west, one to go to Lessay and the other to Coutance, thus trapping the German troops on the western end of the line. This was to enable the Armored Divisions of the Third Army to pass around the disorganized western end of the Germans and proceed both into Brittany and the interior of France. As a prelude and it was hoped a decisive element in this attack, large numbers of heavy bombers were to be employed for the first time in direct support of ground troops. 2000 B-17's and B-24's and 1000 B-26's were to come

## MY STORY

over in waves and drop on an area 3000 yards by 2000 yards, between VII Corps and Marigny--but not on the town itself. This was saturation bombing and possible hazard to US troops was foreseen and allowed for in that night preceding the day of the bombardment. Our troops withdrew 100 yards. A retirement of this kind is most valuable if it can be achieved without the enemy's knowledge. But secrecy was considered a pretty forlorn hope in this instance as the Germans were maintaining very close contact. The briefing we received was to the effect that the bombing would last one hour and 45 minutes, and would be followed by a 30-minute artillery barrage and after that was over it would be possible to march unscathed into Marigny.

It started, I remember, at 11:45 with P-47's going in after the "flak" guns, but when the heavies came over at 12:00 there were still a good many greasy black blotches in and around them. One of the first wave was hit and seeing it flounder hit you in the pit of the stomach; to me the sort of sensation one experiences if a great friendly St. Bernard were to be hit by a car and not quite killed. It fluttered and struggled but the Krauts just waited until it lost altitude and then the guns all went at once and the plane blew to pieces. The noise of the bombs falling was monumental. Not just an explosion or even a series of explosions but more like an earthquake trying to shake a city to pieces. The concussion stirred up a strong wind as far as four miles away and even at that distance made you feel a little nauseated.

After about half an hour there was a wall of dust and smoke over 4000 feet high over the area and we took off down to the C.P. of one of the Battalions to get ready to "walk unscathed into Marigny" when it was over. The bombing, of course, was still going on and nearly everyone there had lost their lunch because of the terrible vibrations. I promptly lost mine too. The dust was unbelievable and that plus the tension of sweating out some plane bombing us by mistake more than overcame any exultation we might have experienced at the Krauts getting such a pasting. The country was hedgerows at their worst since it was hilly, the "bocage" especially tall, and the fields very small. The usual props were present: one-wall houses, demolished apple trees and as always, the cow, bloated and upside down. During the time we were at the Battalion, two sticks of bombs fell short to one side of us and not far away. General McNair was one of the casualties. At Company the sensation was infinitely worse, and weird in appearance, since G.I.'s, radio sets, medics' arm bands and dead cows were all exactly the same color from the dust.

## MY STORY

After the air bombardment the barrage seemed childish and ineffectual. Everyone was getting up to move out on our “unscathed” walk. We moved out into a road with the Company Commander and passed a TD (tank destroyer) which was firing at some- thing we couldn’t see. Our “walk” lasted about 100 feet. After that we huddled “unscathed” in a ditch. Kraut confetti came in by then and the TD was knocked out. Jerry was very much alive, for he had followed us in the night before! About an hour later we started to inch forward, but only for a moment; a runner came in. “Sir, those mines we laid last night when we retired - somewhere in the shuffle Jerry has booby trapped most of them”. Another regiment has better luck and 24 hours later the 243<sup>rd</sup> Armored had cleared Marigny.

Through the breach fought the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Divisions, and the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division was able to shake loose and penetrate behind enemy forward elements. This rapid movement southward opened a new phase in the war, and Sgt. Marvin Connell related his experiences in the breakthrough.

In July 1944 the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division was fighting in the hedgerows of Normandy. General Wood, later known as “Tiger Jack”, paced his tent impatiently for the terrain offered a greater obstacle for armor than the enemy itself. However, the Armored Infantry was slugging it out with the Heinies and measuring their gains in yards. This threw in the element of doubt--would we fight across France at this pace and cost?

Then one day at Meautis, the village in Normandy bordering our static command post, the sky became dark with bombers--our bombers and our signal to take off! Tanks started to roll as a half-back shaking himself through the scrimmage line and breaking into the open. The battered town of Perriers was quickly taken and the drive continued. As we entered the railroad and communications center of Coutances we spotted General Wood’s armored car and proceeded to pace it into the town until heavy artillery forced us all back to our new C.P. on the outskirts. Snipers were covering all the roads. Many houses had been flushed but hazards were still great.

After a hurried conference at headquarters, the General again called on his infantry and personally led them back into town, flushing the area at the same time. We filmed the entire action with “Tiger Jack” strutting into Coutances unflinching through the heavy shellfire while his troops automatically took cover from time to time. Wood received the DSC for his work that day after taking the town, and was

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advised to hold the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored there and consolidate. But the now famous 4<sup>th</sup> pushed on. Having the Germans on the run, our armor cornered the enemy at Avranches and left a mass of death and destruction as far as it was possible to see. Yet at the same time we were far out on the limb. Our supply lines were of unbelievable length and our infantry support was still closer to Omaha Beach than they were to us. The enemy didn't expect the unorthodox but Wood pulled it off and got away with it in taking Rennes and Vannes and cutting the Brittany peninsula from the mainland, completing one of the longest armor dashes ever made in face of a new, untried enemy.

Wood was given the name of "Tiger Jack" for his habit of pacing his tent in the manner of a caged tiger whenever his men were in combat. He advised his gunners to fire upon anything that they suspected; thereby using sixty percent more ammunition than any other division. With such phenomenal success across France with his 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, still one of the strangest questions of the war is: "Why was General Wood replaced?"

Free to move unexpectedly the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division penetrated southward behind the 4<sup>th</sup> and then went westward into Brittany. Affiliated Infantry and Combat Engineers fought in the towns, at the bridges and in the woods. The enemy closed behind forward elements and supply trucks of gasoline, rations and ammunitions fought their way in both directions. The ports of St. Nazaire and Lorient and Brest received thousands of German troops who withdrew before the American penetration. These enemy troops were contained by a small number of tanks and "recons" who were on the end of the line until Infantry arrived to consolidate. Pvt. Hansel tells of his experience as he went to rejoin the division after it had made its run across Brittany.

On August 8<sup>th</sup> our photo unit of six men was ordered to join the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division on the tip of the Brest peninsula. At that time the 6<sup>th</sup> had finished their drive down the center of the peninsula and since the drive employed no Infantry other than Armored Infantry of the Division, the route they had opened had been closed behind them by the Germans. Over this same route the Quartermaster Truck Co. had to haul gasoline and ammo. The only possible means of our reaching the 6<sup>th</sup> was to tie on to a convoy of ammo and gasoline. The afternoon of August 9<sup>th</sup> we met our convoy near Avranches. We waited until 1900 hours, and then took off. We didn't know exactly what route we were taking and little did we

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suspect that we were starting a 185-mile trip involving 24 hours of steady driving.

It was approximately 2200 hours when we encountered our first obstacle--a bridge that had been blown out the day before. The three-mile long convoy was completely turned around and re-routed. It was during this maneuver that our unit, along with the second half of the convoy, was separated from the leading element. Somehow we managed to get back on the right road and started out again. We drove continuously the rest of the night and up to 1000 on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August, at which time our forward jeep ran into a Jerry machine gun nest. The four multiple-50's the convoy carried for safety measure were spaced evenly along the line of trucks and every man except drivers had guns fully loaded and ready for instant action. This was accomplished during a back-track maneuver which led us back to a little town half a mile behind our line of march, where we turned around and now more fully organized again headed for the machine gun nest. When we reached the spot not a shot was fired and we rolled on to finally reach the comparative safety of the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division which faced the Germans on three sides and the sea on the fourth. A week later the battle of Brest began.

St. Malo was by-passed and when it was besieged, the fighting was characterized by the ability of the concrete fortifications to absorb heavy bombardment. Air attacks and artillery were ineffectual against this concrete. The tremendous explosions ripped off hunks of debris but the defenders continued to hold. Sgt Curry and Sgt Ryan were able to get into the town, and they were drawn into events beyond their mission.

In five days of hard fighting two task forces of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Division had compressed the Germans on the St. Malo peninsula into the city of St. Malo on the tip. Now surrounded on three sides by water, this enemy force could throw its entire strength at the U.S. troops thrusting up the peninsula. A speedy seizure of the port was necessary to relieve overloaded Cherbourg and the impending immobilization of our beachheads by the coming September storms. Our lines were soon stabilized. After a two-day air and artillery preparation, the companies jumped off at daybreak, the object being the city itself. By 0900 hours almost all companies had been halted by heavy enemy artillery concentrations. As I and K Companies on the left flank were making slow progress, we decided to join K. This decision proved correct as K Company entered the town at 11:15, being the first unit in. Our job consisted of showing in motion pictures and stills our I and K Companies entering the town down the dusty, shell-ploughed road, past badly

## MY STORY

battered buildings. It was a matter of dodging, running and sweating.

As the spearhead split the enemy into small bands it afforded pictures of Germans coming out of buildings to surrender. As an officer of the Marines led his men out, shots fired by fanatics cut him down. Our boys advanced on this sniper point as several bursts from the Nazis pinned them down. Another burst cut down one of our BAR men, his ammo exploded, but the Boche continued to fire on him, cutting him to ribbons. The snipers' house was taken with five Germans.

When we were ready to start back it was learned from the C.O. of K Company that the Germans had succeeded in reforming their line, thereby cutting the company off in town. The radio was out and we had no communication with Battalion. As we intended to try and make it back that night the C.O. entrusted us with a message calling for reinforcements and medical supplies, which we were to deliver to Battalion Headquarters. Taking nearly an hour to work our way about a mile, when a German machine gun on our right opened up. We split up in order to increase the chance of getting our message in. Surviving a mortar barrage unscathed, we both made it into Battalion late that evening with the message. In looking over our souvenirs we discovered that we had picked up a case containing a map of the fortifications. The map indicated all German gun emplacements on both St. Malo and Dinard. This map was used by G-2 and aided in the expeditious termination of the battle for St. Malo.

Brittany was incidental to the principal allied effort. Eastward the British fought in the North and the Third Army drove a flanking movement in the South, threatening the German 7<sup>th</sup> Army. It attempted escape through the Falaise Gap. Sgt. Peter Anders witnessed the first major catastrophe to German resistance in France.

We went with the 90<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division on its drive North from Le Mans, to get coverage on their push to meet the British coming from Caen to close the gap on the German 7<sup>th</sup> Army attempting to withdraw to the Seine. The final junction was made at the town of Chambois, situated in a beautiful valley through which passed the only possible German escape route. The 90<sup>th</sup> got the ridge overlooking the valley. It was like a front row balcony at a theater. Weather was perfect for photography and the unobstructed view was magnificent. We set up the newsreel camera there and for five days covered the carnage of the battle taking place at our feet. The highway we had ran along the lip of the ridge. Anti-tank guns set up across the highway where they had direct fire at a distance of not more than half a

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mile. They sighted down the barrel, and then fired. All the artillery available of all sizes was massed behind us. The Germans were plainly visible with the naked eye, desperately trying to figure their way clear.

On August 21<sup>st</sup> we tried to get into the village of Chambois with a patrol, but were driven back. At 1:15 August 22<sup>nd</sup> we did get in, and ran into four German tanks. We called for artillery on them, which came in a deluge: it knocked out the tanks, but we were so close to them that we lost a lot of men also. With those tanks gone we cleared the village and drove through to the far side, where we met the British elements of the Canadian and Polish outfits. With their last road cut the Germans gave up. In that area of the valley within a radius of two miles of the village, were 67,000 German dead plus their shattered equipment, horses and wagons. 54,000 were taken prisoner. This action at Chambois definitely removed the German 7<sup>th</sup> Army from hostilities in Europe. (It was a newsreel man's dream). Bodies were so numerous and so scattered it was impossible to care for them and vehicles had to drive over them, pushing and flattening them into the road until it looked as if none had been there. Bulldozers from the American Army skimmed all bodies into ditches and covered them up. Such action was the only recourse because of the overwhelming number and the summer heat

Whatever the fighting, wherever the village, town or city, the exuberant, sincere, demonstrative gratitude of the French people toward their liberators was universal. Tears and wine, flowers and cider mixed in unabashed joy for men in tanks and half-tracks, trucks and jeeps when they passed between lines of cheering people. Cpl. Sullivan in entering Rheims, found a welcome that all photographers experienced at one time or another.

Probably in none of the liberated cities of France was the carnival spirit more evident than when the 7<sup>th</sup> Armored Division roared into Rheims on the heels of the retreating Jerries. This city, famous for its majestic Cathedral of Notre Dame, and well known for its excellent champagne, escaped most of the horrors of besiegement and block by block street fighting incidental to the freeing of so many French cities. The minor defending forces, dreading the impact of Patton's approaching armor and completely demoralized by the fantastic type of guerilla warfare waged by the French "Resistance", chose the better part of valor and left. That is, those whom the FFI allowed to leave. The "Resistance" then promptly turned their efforts to clearing up remaining snipers and rounding up female "collaborateurs" for the shaven head treatment

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When the Americans entered town we were led by cheering, laughing screaming mobs to the square in front of the Cathedral. Here the vehicles were transformed into seething mounds of exuberant humanity as civilians, children, lovely girls, and even bearded men decided that he or she must personally embrace each and every American G.I. It was here that one of the members of our photo team was modestly suffering the caresses of a comely mam'sel, when two smiling Maquis approached and explained that she was a "Boche collaborateur". Whereupon they marched her off for a haircut-leaving a very red - faced photographer. Meanwhile I had made the acquaintance of an American flier, who, upon being assured that the city was now in free hands, disclosed the presence of another Yank and three British airmen who had been in France for periods ranging from two weeks to four months. These men, after being shot down, had been rescued by the "Resistance" who furnished them with civilian clothing and faked credentials. They were transported from place to place by wagon, bicycle, oxcart and what have you, to eventually arrive in Rheims. There they stayed, living on smuggled food and champagne (mostly champagne), waiting for the Americans.

The impromptu spontaneity of our first reception was soon followed by a more formal ceremony at the "Mairie", or city hall. There was much speech-making and flash of colorful uniforms. The people jammed the streets, draped themselves all over the statue of Louis XIV, shouted "Vive l' Amerique", and reached for the nearest American. Later in the afternoon we had a more leisurely look at the Notre Dame Cathedral. The massive doors were protected by thick cement walls and sand bags were piled high around the statuary in front of the church. Inside, all was quiet. The quiet of an ageless and unchanging refuge through war and peace for hundreds of years. There were American soldiers there. Civilians, too. For a moment they had forgotten the tumult outside - their minds on other things. By evening most of the celebrating was indoors for there was still danger from occasional sniper fire. Either the snipers or patrolling Marquis mistakenly firing at each other - we were never quite sure about that. Early the next day the city was declared "off limits" for American troops. The G.I.'s had to leave, but they left with memories of beautiful girls and good champagne. An hour before we left we again met our friends, the liberated British and American pilots. This was at the Pomery Vinery. They were filling their borrowed jeep with cases of - of all things - champagne.

The liberation of Paris would be a political and moral victory of world interest and attention. Representatives of all major

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news agencies attached themselves to the divisions approaching the city. With the first Allied troops to enter was Sgt. Russell A. Meyer with the 2<sup>nd</sup> French Armored Division.

Accompanying the 2<sup>nd</sup> French Armored Division (Division LeClerc) I entered Paris on the morning of August 25<sup>th</sup>, at 7:30 A.M. through the Porte d'Orleans, after two weeks of continuous driving. With me in the jeep were my photo officer, 1st Lt. E. J. Moore, Cpl. C. E. Summers and Cpl. C. Sullivan. Everywhere I looked there were pictures to be taken; people crowded the broad avenue, cheering and feverishly clutching at our clothing as we passed by. The terrific congestion necessitated an occasional stop at which time we were showered with embraces and kisses from the excited populace. Upon dismounting from the jeep, I was barely able to take pictures; people crowded around me expressing their appreciation. By then our jeep was loaded to capacity, which necessitated us photographers to ride on the hood of the vehicle.

Our vehicle was sandwiched between two of the lead tanks for protection. We halted and dismounted from the jeep numerous times when the snipers and Nazi sympathizers opened fire on us from the roof tops. The activities of the FFI and the French tanks cleaning out these snipers offered excellent motion picture and still coverage. In one instance when we turned down a side street in search of pictures, we were hailed rather abruptly by a man who later proved to be an American citizen who had somehow hidden his identity from the Nazis for years. At first he considered us French soldiers due to the likeness of our dress, and was overjoyed to learn that we were Americans, the first that he had seen in many years. His timely action had saved our lives -- for as soon as he had greeted us he exclaimed "for God's sake don't go down that street, it's full of Germans."

Our activities for the remainder of the day were very much the same, plenty of excellent photographic opportunities. Our finest action pictures were gotten down on the Quai d'Orsay where French tanks encountered heavy anti-tank fire. The people of Paris treated us handsomely; nothing was too good for us. We made several good friends, many of which have been corresponding with us continuously. We had spent days living under most extreme physical discomfort as well as danger, and we enjoyed most of all the hospitality of the fine Parisian family who took us in their home so we could bathe and sleep and rest.

The rivers beyond Paris provided good photographic material, for in a river crossing action and terrain are in an area limited enough to be

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entirely within the range of the cameras – although natural and artificial atmospheric conditions are often adverse. Sgt. Warren Rothenberger tells of his experiences at the Moselle River.

During November '44, the 90<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Third Army, to which my photo unit was attached, had as their objective the establishment of two bridgeheads across the Moselle River, near the two small villages of Catternon and Malling, France. The river itself was in bad shape, the Germans having blown several dams upstream flooding the surrounding countryside in the vicinity of the proposed bridge sites. On the night of the 4<sup>th</sup>, elements of one regiment were ferried across in assault boats and after a bitter struggle cleared the East side of the river to allow the engineers to start on the pontoon bridge.

The next morning three of us were at the Catternon bridgehead site. I was shooting stills and another of our unit motion pictures. We were lending a very cool presence to an otherwise very hot spot. The engineers had started early and had half a pontoon bridge up by 8:00 AM, when the Germans started throwing in a very accurate '88' barrage. With three direct hits they knocked the bridge out. It was then decided to throw the bridge across at night. Across the river the Germans held some high ground, making for some very accurate artillery fire. Obviously these OP's and mortar positions had to be knocked out. P-47 fighter-bombers were called in to do the job using 500-lb fire-oil bombs. This meant good pictures and we were in an excellent position to get them. We were on a slight hill behind a ridge that offered good cover from the damn mortars that were dropping uncomfortably close. The planes came over and did a wonderful job. We worked like hell. I was shooting as fast as I could although it was so cold I could hardly tear the film tabs from my packs. Twice the motion picture camera froze, causing us much cursing and sweating. We got the pictures of the attack anyway. Next day the other three men of our unit went down again. The bridge wasn't up and they took shots of men and ammo being ferried across the river in assault boats. This had A-1 priority - ammo and food going over and wounded and PW's coming back. Sgt Tomko managed to bum a ride across and shot stuff on the Infantry boys who were having a tough time of it on the East bank. All this time the weather was terrible, cold, rainy and on top of it all water up to your knees wherever you went. For the next few days all of us worked hard. The Germans knocked out the bridge three times. We went out twice to cover a Chemical Smoke Generating Company that was doing a wonderful job of laying down a gigantic smoke screen. The boys worked right out in the open on the river's edge, and although enemy artillery searched for them continually, they kept right on grinding out the smoke.

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Sometime around Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> we went down to the Malling bridgehead site. They were still working on the bridge and assault boats were shuttling back and forth. I made movies here - mostly of PW's who after being brought from the other side were put to work as litter bearers wading through the water. A Lt. who was urging the ammo bearers and litter bearers on, spied me and yelled "what in the hell are you doing - we aren't supposed to use PW's for this kind of stuff and you can't make pictures of it". I kept on shooting and finally he stopped yelling. Stuff was coming in all the time, mostly mortar shells, and every time you ducked you dipped your fanny in the water. We had a tough time keeping our cameras dry. All this time the weather was bad, and plus the smoke screen, we had a lovely time with exposures. Finally on Nov. 11<sup>th</sup> the bridge was up and early that morning two of us went down to film the actual crossing by Infantry reinforcements and later artillery. That was the Moselle crossing. We had shot about 2400 feet of motion picture film and over 100 still pictures. Later on there were other river crossings, but I don't think any of them compared to the first Moselle crossing by the 90<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

In combat the events often become a fiasco, and Sgt. Paul Fox relates a humorous train of incidents under hazardous conditions.

I was with the 5<sup>th</sup> Armored Division during the breakthrough in France. The 5<sup>th</sup> had knifed into Luxembourg meeting light resistance. Outside the town of Nommern we caught up with a Jerry convoy, cornered them in the town and gave them hell. The main task force by-passed Nommern and left "Dog" Company of the light tanks to clean it out. I asked the tank commander if his force was going into town right away. He said "yes" so I started to walk into town by myself, figuring that the tanks would be coming right in. I walked about four blocks before I reached the center and still no tanks. There were a lot of civilians milling around, some buildings burning, and one of the women was crying. She saw me with my movie camera which must have looked like a "V" weapon to her because when I started to take movies she shrieked twice as hard. Some of the braver towns people timidly approached me and started to point toward the hills, evidently thinking I was a German. I said "no, no - I'm an American soldier". I no sooner said that when four or five people tried to kiss me at the same time. Then they asked me where the rest of the Americans were, and I said "oh, they'll be here any minute. Then I asked them where the Germans were and they pointed toward the hill.

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Then the fun started. One of the families had some live stock in a burning building and since I represented the conquering American Army, I was the logical one to get them out. Playing my role as expected, I brushed everyone aside and swaggered up to the barn door, opened the door only to have a flame shoot out for about 25 feet. I lost interest in heroics fast. Suddenly a priest rushed out and said that there were two Germans behind his church. I put down my camera, drew my pistol and advanced cautiously around the building. Suddenly a voice rang out in a British accent, "I say old boy, can you take us prisoners?" In a doorway stood two Wehrmacht soldiers. The tanks were still sitting outside of town and we walked practically all the way back to them when we passed a cow one of whose legs had been shot off. The owner of the beast begged me to kill it, so I halted my prisoners and placed my pistol against the cow's head and fired. It didn't seem to have had much effect, the cow just stood there. I put the pistol against its head again and fired but with the same effect, the cow just kept standing there. But I didn't for long as one of the tanks opened up with a machine gun on us. All they saw was the Jerry prisoners and heard the gun shots so they decided to fire back. After we picked ourselves off the ground I turned around to see if the cow was still living, and there it was apparently none the worse for its experience. I decided that was a job for a 75mm cannon and started to march the prisoners up to the tanks again. When I arrived there the first thing I did was to ask who fired on me. They all looked a little uncomfortable, glanced at one another, and a PFC on one tank finally broke the awkward silence. He answered in a sheepish tone "Aw, I was just kidding".

When the city of Metz fell the forts in the mountains around the town were so well defended and constructed that after the costly attempt to penetrate Fort Driant, the remainder were by-passed and left to surrender. Sgt. R. H. Butterfield relates an experience at Fort Driant.

In October of 1944 Sgt. Russell Meyer, Pvt. Joe Lapine and myself drove up the narrow muddy road through the forests in the hills back of Metz. That was the only way to approach Fort Driant unobserved, and on the slopes and in the ravines artillery fired continually. We were looking for an observation post from which we could see Fort Driant, one of the many fortifications originally placed by the French and modernized by the Germans, defending Metz from the hills.

At a CP we left the jeep and walked over the top of a ridge to an observation post under a tree, dug into the bank, protected by logs on top with apertures

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between logs in front. From it we could look down upon the panorama of the Moselle River valley. Fort Verdun (on top of the hill two miles across the valley) was visible, the slope around it pock-marked by scars of shell bursts. Upstream were two bridges across the Moselle, the target of artillery fire. White spouts of water in the stream showed the shell bursts. The city of Metz filled the valley further upstream. When Metz was captured the chain of forts that overlooked the city in the mountains continued to harass American communications. From these vantage points they commanded the city and roads on the plane westward, the river valley, and roads and towns behind them. They were able to direct an accurate and troublesome artillery fire from stationary guns zeroed upon roads, intersections, bridges and villages. Fort Driant was the control of the fort system. Fort Driant was concealed behind the perimeter of a ridge, a system of cement casements linked by connecting tunnels; all invisible from the valley below. The 5<sup>th</sup> Division spent bitter, agonizing fighting getting a few men past mines and booby traps into one of five casements. There they fought in the confines of tunnels, bazooka shells ricocheted down a corridor, explosions tumbled the roofs of compartments down upon defenders and attackers.

On the crest of a ravine five hundred yards down the slope from the casement was a round cement pillbox, the target for fire from one of our self-propelled guns located a hundred yards down our right. While Sgt. Meyer from the O.P. trained his camera on the pillbox, I and Pvt. Lapine went to the self-propelled gun. It was out on the edge of the woods on a road leading directly toward the tunnel, and as it fired a mission of eight rounds upon the pillbox we photographed them. The target was about five hundred yards, so that both gun and target were visible in the range of the camera. It was a good scene photographically. The explosion of the gun, observers in the foreground and dust spurting up as shells hit the earth. Some hit the battlement and caromed off the cement with no visible effect. Then the turret of the pillbox slowly revolved toward us, bringing the gun which had been pointing in the opposite direction, trained upon our position. As the first shell exploded in the trees by the self-propelled gun we all took cover, running to dugouts under the trees. Shells burst in the trees above, limbs, branches and shrapnel cracking and thumping down upon us. In a few minutes when the barrage ended, the crew emerged from holes, cautiously first, then hurriedly, and fired eight more rounds upon the target.

We, as hurriedly returned to the observation post, where Sgt. Meyer had photographed the turret revolving toward him, the gun firing directly toward the O.P. The shells passed his position on the way to the S.P. gun. The photography

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was an interesting sequence of the proximity of enemy and American guns. Fort Driant was not taken and surrendered months later. In the casement that Americans had penetrated were pitiful remnants of their sacrifice. Torn garments, discarded mess kits and lonely graves.

Winter in the Hurtgen forest and the Schnee Eifel taxed the endurance of photographers as it did all troops whose duties included exposure. To the discomfort of numb hands and feet was the effect of low temperatures and snow and rain upon film and cameras. To this was added the emotional trials of sustained combat tension, built up in the liberation of France, and now accumulated a temperamental and physical fatigue. Von Rundsted's counter offensive in the Ardennes couldn't overrun besieged Bastogne and at the "battered bastion" photographers performed their duties under inevitable emotional distress. Pvt. Sam Gilbert tells of entering the town.

I was packing my equipment for a trip to photograph Mickey Rooney who had just come in to Third Corps with a Special Service Company, when my photo officer called for me. "Gilbert" he said, "I've got a big story for you--even bigger than Mickey Rooney!! The 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne is surrounded in Bastogne. The 4<sup>th</sup> Armored is on the way to relieve them. We want pictures." His voice grew louder and more determined. "We want action pictures -- lots of smoke, fire, shells bursting in air. Now Gilbert, let's show them what we can do. You go out there and get the pictures and don't forget to phone me the coverage report on time."

The road to Bastogne was covered with snow - dry snow that swept the road in mystic whirlpools as our tanks and half-tracks pushed their way past the smoldering wreckage of our lead vehicles. It snowed upon the grim procession of frightened youthful Jerry prisoners going one way, weary tankers going the opposite way. Upon this procession of Bastogne traffic there looked down from the overhanging branches shreds of human flesh and bits of charred O.D. clothing. And so it was that many who had helped open the road to Bastogne never knew of the glory and the military victory which they helped achieve. Those still alive weren't thinking of glory - they were thinking of rest, of warmth, of home - of their job not yet done.

As we came closer to Bastogne the column came under a heavy artillery bombardment. The driver and I left our jeep for cover along a ditch in the road. About 500 yards off the road I saw armored infantry working their way towards a

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woods in which Jerries were well dug in. I sent the driver with the jeep to the next town in the rear, and told him I was going to try to get in with the infantry. During a let-up in the barrage I ran across the field to join these doughboys. They would have been much happier to see me with a bazooka than with my "Speed-Graphic". Things were happening fast - they were moving up with marching fire, and that really offered good picture possibilities. I was kneeling, focusing on a rifleman about fifteen feet from me when without realizing what had happened, I found myself knocked over backwards with snow and mud all over my camera, and the frantic cries of "medic, medic" ringing in my ear. The rifleman whom I was photographing got hit and a couple of other doughs right by me got some shrapnel from that mortar. I got pictures of them being treated in a shell hole by a medic who worked calmly and joked with his patients as the Jerries really let us have it. The boys were digging in so I worked my way back to the highway and asked an officer in the ditch as to how much further I could go. He replied "son, this is as far as anyone has gone".

It was getting late so I hitch-hiked back to the next town in hopes of getting my films to the message center. There I met a couple of civilian correspondents who were all trying to get into Bastogne and we hopped into their jeep and started to go forward again. Everyone we asked told us we couldn't get into Bastogne - everyone but a Lt. Colonel who said "hell yes a couple of tanks just went in". We took another drink of cognac, pushed the accelerator to the floor and didn't dare breathe until we were in Bastogne. Somehow we were lucky and made it.

In the town itself there was no fighting when we arrived - only the aftermath of an arduous struggle. Dead paratroopers lying in the town square - PW's under guard digging through the rubble for bodies - and bringing out the pieces of men and placing them in the silk supply parachutes which had been dropped. There were the paratroopers and the tankers, each praising the other for what they had come through, and the town itself badly damaged from the fighting.

Every photographer felt the voice of conscience at some time that winter, not so much personal as human. He felt it when he compared what he knew of death in the snow and mud with what was written about it beneath his photographs published in newspapers at home. Cpl. Donald Ornitz expresses what many held unspoken.

There have been many articles of the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division's cut-through to

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relieve encircled Bastogne. Most appear as if it were a ninety yard run to score, back in our football days at school. Remember the thrill, the fun and the color then? This Division's dash - actually our people stumbling over snow-covered ruts, bitter with exhaustion, cold and hateful of everything - wasn't like that at all. You knew it too then behind the headlines you felt the misery they were made of.

I remember Chaumont, a town two villages from Bastogne, equivalent to the crucial 15-yard line, as it was the day after the game. It was there I found my friends - their clothes blown, the shreds hanging on trees (live photographs), their bodies dead, loss of blood: you could see the quantity - measurable on the snow. These people did what they had to do well. And they were well led. I saw the maps - the care with which facts were garnered. But now the leaders, staff people before busy, conscientious with grease pencils, are proud - too proud. (I'm not; my pictures were used, but not the ones I wanted seen - my friends dead).

The job, telling what it cost in terms of people, I have hardly begun. But how can the men who led be so proud - their responsibilities as leaders, as survivors to prevent more glorious military achievements haven't even begun. They are too busy having ribbons pinned on for the dead's work and too busy observing the form of our close order drill to see the dirty joke if it happens again.

The Rhine was approached, the bank consolidated from Switzerland to the North Sea. The Allied armies were grouped in such force that once the Remagen bridge was seized and the East bank assured the slow advance during winter was behind. The sun dried muddy roads, shone on surrender flags in German farm buildings; they had a white checkered effect, they were in such profusion in the streets of small villages. Ground haze in the Rhine valley was augmented by smoke from hundreds of generators that concealed location of bridge intentions. Sgt. Caliendo at St. Goar took cover near where a negro soldier was faithfully tending his generator. When asked how much shelling was going on at the river, a few blocks away, he replied "I don't know what's doin' down there Sergeant, but I'se makin' smoke". Pvt. Nesterack tells of his experiences photographing a Rhine crossing.

As our forces reached the Rhine river at Nierstein, special types of Naval craft, supplies, etc. cluttered the fields on the West bank of the river for about five miles to our rear. At daybreak of the eventful day, the river was booming with

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activity. Men were building ferries, hoisting landing craft, vehicles and personnel boats into the river, and building a pontoon bridge. Enough of a force was taken across to prepare ferry dockings - all was going smoothly - the enemy inactive. By 0800 hours a full battalion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division crossed the Rhine in CVP's, while ferries landed larger vehicles, and one pontoon bridge was completed from the East to the West bank. After I photographed all the phases of the preparatory steps, the Infantry came marching to the river bank and loaded into LCVP's, and by hopping on the same boat I got scenes of the men loading, embarking, and disembarking on the East bank of the Rhine. While on the East bank, after about a dozen boats had crossed, a Nazi fighter-bomber zoomed down attempting, with no success, to shoot up the half completed pontoon bridge. With the first blast of the plane's strafing guns, the river bank's activity stilled and all dove for cover. I chose the nearest fox-hole, and as the plane zoomed overhead two "butts" protruded from it, mine and the owner of the fox-hole who arrived in it the same time I did.

At about noon at another point along the river amphibious tanks began crossing. Civilian spectators crowded the walled houses, peering through windows in amazement at our amphibious equipment. Two or three tanks had crossed when I arrived at the crossing, and just then another one rumbled down into the water, gurgled, and sank - resting on the river bottom. The tank crew, clothed in heavy combat clothes, scrambled over the side into the river. A motor boat of the Bridge Assembly Engineer Battalion was on hand and pulled some of the crew into the boat. G.I.'s on the shore tore off their clothing, dove into the water and rescued two others. The entire crew was saved. The other tanks continued to cross steering around the sunken tank.

The first day of the crossing was performed without the aid of a smoke screen, and was a bright sunny day. As one pontoon bridge neared completion, another was begun and when it was finished each was used for one-way traffic. Wounded and prisoners returning, and the stream of supplies and men were moving across the Rhine into Germany.

American men, familiar from childhood with automobile travel gave grudging admiration to the German "Super highway, the Reichs-autobahn. These are six-lane roads, divided in the middle by a twenty foot strip. The curves and grading were made for high-speed, uninterrupted travel. All traffic off and on was at clover leaf intersections, at bisecting roads on overhead bridges. We noticed the absence of ad-

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vertising signs along the route, the beauty of the road curving gracefully through the forests and valleys, over bridges and near peaceful towns. We admired them, and felt disgust and anger toward the people who turned such creative capacity into killing and destruction. Sgt. William Tomko was among the first to reach the roads.

It was in the early part of April that I got my first glimpse of Hitler's biggest project, the "Reichsautobahn". I was with the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division and we were racing toward the Rhine when just outside of Bad Durkheim our tanks were being side-tracked because of a destroyed bridge ahead. Near this huge pile of concrete rubble was a sign, "Einfahrt Autobahn", (entrance to autobahn). This was my first contact with Hitler's twentieth century wonder. We pulled our jeep up to it, and on the side was one of our half-tracks - K.O.'d as it traveled down the highway trying to take advantage of the long straight-away. I climbed on top of this vehicle and as far as I could see were six lanes of concrete runway.

It was designed for the Wehrmacht. This was Hitler's dream, a spider like net of super highways through the Reich, whereby he could move whole armies from East to West in twenty-four hours. And we learned that Hitler was right, except of course it was Allied armies that moved as rapidly. As Allied aircraft sought out and destroyed German landing fields, the Luftwaffe used the autobahn for landing strips. In forests along the route trees were cut next to the road, and the planes backed into parking places.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Armored rolled on to Frankfurt, the first large German city East of the Rhine to be taken. From there on it was very unorthodox combat travel. In a single day three combat commands of the 6<sup>th</sup> raced down the autobahn from Frankfurt to Kassel virtually unopposed. The Germans were thoroughly confused, and small units were bringing in overwhelmingly large numbers of Heinies. At some point the number of P.W.'s grew so large that a single MP would set up a cage along the road. I stopped at one of these points and made a picture of the prisoners sitting along the autobahn watching our armor rolling by. They certainly looked far from the supermen they were thought to be so long ago. There was one sight along the autobahn I will never forget. I was standing on one of the bridges overlooking the highway, and racing toward me down all six lanes were our tanks and armored vehicles. Marching in the opposite direction using the medial strip was a long line of German soldiers trudging to the rear as prisoners of war.

In the country it was orderly. The cities were destroyed. Acres of

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heaped stone, twisted iron, gutted buildings. Prum, Koblenz, Karlsruhe, Frankfurt, Plauen, Nurnberg, Munchen, Mainz and Mannheim. Their individuality was gone, reduced to a common destruction. Cpl. Harry Miller entered Nurnberg when it was taken.

The 80<sup>th</sup> Division after taking Bamberg, teamed up with the 5<sup>th</sup> Division to encircle Nuremberg, the city used by the Nazi Party for its yearly gathering and meetings. Under the leadership of Julius Streicher, dictator of the Nuremberg laws, several thousand Volksturm troops defended the city. The fighting was heavy for four days and nights; it was a house-to-house and street-to-street battle. As the 80<sup>th</sup> advanced further into the city it became apparent that Julius Streicher had led his Nazi Volksturm into a mass suicide, as the streets were littered with dead Germans. The advance passed where on March 30, 1933 the giant book burning took place. Here the books that did not meet with the approval of the Nazi teaching were destroyed. It was by strange coincidence that it was exactly 12 years later that the 80<sup>th</sup> had won that section of Nuremberg.

Still more than half of Nuremberg had to be taken, and the Division passed the “Brown House” in which all the Nazi atrocity laws were made under the leadership of Julius Streicher, and then to the famous Leopold arena and Nuremberg stadium where for many years the annual Nazi meetings were held. The few Nazi Volksturm troops that survived raised the white flag of surrender, and then the city was completely taken over by the 80<sup>th</sup> Division.

Nuremberg is divided into two parts, known as the new and old Nuremberg. In the old city there were several underground tunnels built during the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, and in some sections five levels below the surface. Together with my combat pictures of the fighting, the shots of the tunnels made my coverage of Nuremberg complete. After the fighting ceased, I met a Sgt. Fred Selling of New York City, serving with the 80<sup>th</sup> Division, who was born in Nuremberg and who knew the tunnels very well. We decided to investigate these tunnels. The Nazi Party had these tunnels rebuilt into modern underground offices and many of the Nazi officials had committed suicide and lay there dead!!

Personal human anecdotes will be related all his lifetime by every soldier in the war. Here are a few. In the city renowned for Luther and Goethe houses, Sgt Caliendo and Cpl Herz found good photography and unexpected adventure.

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The name of the town was Eisenach. It was isolated and almost completely surrounded by troops of the 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Time was precious and to avoid unnecessary casualties the CG, General Finkley, decided to try to have the place surrender. Consequently a Major on the staff of General Finkley accompanied by combat camera men, Sgt Bernard Caliendo drove into Eisenach flying the white flag of truce. The first German soldier encountered on the road was asked to take the American party to the Wehrmacht headquarters. The fellow was somewhat confused, he did not blindfold anybody and permitted the Americans to note and evaluate the disposition and the amount of German defense in the streets. Once the Nazi headquarters had been reached, Herz and Caliendo jumped out of the jeep, shooting pictures of the HQ building, of guards and officers who were standing about in confused bewilderment. This state of affairs however, did not last long. Three or four shouting Nazis rushed Herz trying to take his camera away, while Caliendo with grins meant to be re-assuring to the Germans repeated "Alles ist Okay", and managed to keep the crowding Nazi soldiers from his camera. The two photographers, still doggedly hanging on to their cameras finally made it to the conference where the surrender negotiations took place.

Despite the Major's repeated warning that at 1900 hours Eisenach would be subjected to terrific artillery and air bombardment unless it surrendered, the Nazi CG wanted to fight it out. It was 1840 hours, 20 minutes before the scheduled bombardment when the negotiations broke down with finality. Their weapons were returned to the American party and this time they were blindfolded preparatory to being driven back to their own lines. Yet there was one more and most disconcerting delay. The Nazis decided to take the Signal Corps photographers' film and cameras. Thus the two cameramen found themselves again being rushed by grabby SS characters who could not be put off, so following the fast "pig latin" discussion between the two cameramen, Caliendo offered to destroy the film in front of the Jerries if they would not bother with the cameras. While in the conference room however, the photographers had reloaded their cameras which now held only unexposed film. It was 1850 hours - ten minutes to go, and everyone in the American party was getting nervous, when the Krauts agreed to the suggestion. So the two men opened their cameras, unraveling the unexposed film before the narrowly watching Jerries. But the trick worked. It was 1858 hours when the Americans finally crossed back to their own lines, clearing by two minutes the doomed city, which thereafter was to receive 4000 rounds of artillery.

With them Sgt Caliendo and Cpl Herz brought motion picture and still shots

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showing the German headquarters with mounted guards and other Nazi personnel. Also photographed were several bridges which were being prepared for demolition. For this piece of work in which they pulled the wool over the Jerries' eyes these two combat cameramen were commended by General Finkley

Cpl. Charles Summers was as diligent as every soldier is in the prize sought for by all - loot. He got his Luger pistol surprisingly and unexpectedly!!

It occurred just outside the little German town of Labits, located approximately twenty miles south of Leipzig. After cutting the Leipzig-Chemnitz autobahn, a task force composed of the 69<sup>th</sup> Tank Bn. and the 44<sup>th</sup> Armored Infantry Bn., caught a company of German infantry retreating toward Leipzig. The Germans made no attempt to surrender, and the G.I.'s had no alternative other than to cut them down. We halted our jeep near two fallen German soldiers; both quite obviously dead. One had been hit in the head with a .50 caliber round, the other bearing no visible wound. My fellow photographer, Sgt. Russell Meyer, San Leandro, Cal., and I took several shots of the tanks and half-tracks passing by with the dead Germans in the foreground. Suddenly, I saw one of the figures move. I called Meyer's attention to it and we went over to investigate. Inasmuch as Meyer could speak a little German, we hit upon a plan. Quite audibly I drew and cocked my .45 pistol and Meyer said in German "this first soldier is not dead, come here and shoot him in the head." That did the trick – the apparently dead Nazi jumped to his feet begging for his life and yelling "Kamerad". Net proceeds: one Nazi POW and one Luger pistol.

Germany was beautiful. The fields were well cultivated, with vast tracts of forests and picturesque towns. Inconceivably brutal and ugly in the scene were the uncovered infamy of Nazi degradation - the Concentration murder camps. Equally astonishing was the feeling of civilians, who disclaimed any knowledge of, responsibility, for, and curiosity about camps so close to them that they complained to the guards about the odor of the dead. The German people walked to work, and rode to church, by excavated pits - the common burial grounds of thousands of their fellow men, who died by starvation or pestilence. They were angry, affronted and hurt that they should be made to witness, comprehend and dispose of the thousands of bodies in barracks, on the ground, in box and flat cars, in burial pits. Sgt. Cummings tells about one of the first found- the one at Ohrdruff.

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We were within one mile of the concentration camp and under constant shelling, with the CCB of the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, when someone mentioned the Jerries were probably so ashamed of their work they were trying all the harder to keep the Americans away from their camp.

The first thing I noticed on reaching the camp was the odor; they had used lots of lime, but unless a body is buried within a week it takes more than lime to preserve it. The first sight that greeted me was forty men sprawled in death. They had been murderously machine-gunned as they waited for their marching orders. I noticed one body on a stretcher and wondered why this one in particular had flowers. It seems he had been an English flier, and the few girls of the camp had come and placed them there.

The next sight was the store room. Bodies stacked up like cord wood. Days later when the civilians were forced to look upon this spectacle of horror, some were violently sick. The pit on the hill above the town where 3000 bodies were buried had a three inch layer of reddish colored water. Blood, from the many countries mixed with mud was in the coloring; one decayed leg was sticking from a partially exhumed man. The pit was 20 yards long and 10 yards wide. Bodies had been buried and stacked in layers. Besides the pit was a pyre of bodies. Our advance had interrupted the ghoulish work. They were burning the bodies in layers of four on a grill - a grill of rails. There were blackened chunks. They had burned 1600 bodies in two weeks - "they" meaning Nazi guards who sat on the edge of the pit and amused themselves by firing their rifles close to the Poles and Russians forced to exhume and burn their own countrymen. This was the "Ohrdruff Concentration Camp".

The reckoning, the guilt of the German people, will be decided by the evidence against individuals and groups. Pvt. Louis Dougall worked in gathering photographic data.

In addition to the regular and routine experiences of following the battle from the beaches to the Czech and Austrian borders, Sgt. Robert Sawyer, New York City, and I were withdrawn from our regular assignments to work with Third Army Headquarters Judge Advocate Section investigating German war crimes and atrocities committed in the Third Army area. They equipped us fully, gave us an official sounding paper that would open the Bank of England, pointed to a spot on the map and told us to go to it. We covered a lot of ground and saw a lot of sights

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in our visits to such camps as Buchenwald, Mauthausen, Flossenbürg, Dachau; and the little heard of crimes that occurred in such cities as Wetterfeld, Amberg, Nuremberg and Bayreuth-- they were none the less horrible in their murdering and shooting. To say the least, our job was a stinking one and many times we had to have dug up the bodies of men and women long dead in order to bring to light and investigation the killing of slave labor personnel in forested areas as the SS and fanatical Nazis marched these walking skeletons from camp to camp and away from the closing-in front lines.

It was satisfying to learn that the Judge Advocate Section had much information and evidence against the German people responsible for crimes and injustices at the camps and that much was being done to bring them up for prosecution. Wherever possible, we arranged to have the crimes brought to the attention of the local populace. The case at Nuremberg was ideal and done in detail. About 160 slave labor men had been killed and buried in three shallow pits in a pine tree grove approximately two miles from the town of Nuremberg, Germany. Arrangements were made to have them dug up, and individual coffins made for the murdered men who were laid out on the wooded hillside. Everything had to be ready for Sunday morning, and meanwhile it rained, washing off the dirt and sand from the bodies, and making them more effective for the program scheduled.

Appropriately enough, Sunday was a brisk and sunny day and the townspeople, as ordered, turned out en masse and lined both sides of the town's main street. At the appointed hour, and with cameras already emplaced at strategic points to record each step of the proceedings, four men of the town stepped forward, grasped an open coffin and began the two-mile trek to the scene of the crime. Eventually there were no men left to carry bodies, and the women and girls of the town were enlisted to also make the trip to the grave, secure a body, place it in the crudely made coffin, and again, with a person at each corner of the coffin, make the trip back to town and through the lined streets, and then to the Nuremberg cemetery, where a ceremony would be held. Several men and women quailed at the proceedings, fainted away, or otherwise would have quit but the program was kept moving. It was a strange and ghastly sight to see a two-mile long procession of groups of five people, one of them in an uncovered coffin – dead of an unjust and horrible death, the other four in file over a main road and through the town to the cemetery.

There among the tombstones of the townspeople dead, the bodies were laid

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side by side - everyone, men, women and children alike were made to attend commutative services held by several Army Chaplains and a Rabbi who had known many of the dead who were before him. After this was all over every adult and child was made to singly walk by the row of rain-washed bodies that lined the walks of the cemetery in their open coffins and each was made to see for themselves the irrefutable evidence of crimes committed by the regime they had supported. Final phase of the ceremony was the placement of lids on the coffins and interring the bodies in large and separate graves apart from those of Germans. Because very few men could be identified, no separate crosses were erected, however, a permanent stone monument to these men, and telling of the brutal way in which they died, was erected and will be maintained in the small town of Nuremberg, Germany.

Anticipated for and sought after by American forces were other camps in Germany-- military Prisoner of War enclosures. There were hundreds of them, large and small, and the Third Army liberated a great number of them that the enemy had placed in southern Germany. The majority of the men in them had been in several POW camps, traveling on foot hundreds of miles, often under climatic conditions of cold, snow, and exposure that was fatal. Cpl. Billy A. Newhouse had the happy coincidence of meeting hometown friends in one camp.

By the time the Rhine River was crossed by the Allied troops, it was quite evident that Germany had been defeated, and the remaining action would be one of mopping up the routed enemy troops. So far as combat photography was concerned, every phase had been completely covered and any additional coverage would only be repetition, except for certain specific engagements. Orders came down to be on the lookout for subjects of interest which could not be photographed outside of Germany proper. Among these subjects were the Concentration and Prisoner of War camps.

As we pushed eastward from the Rhine we ran into POW camps, but in each there were only a handful of Americans present -- the bulk of British and American troops had been moved into the heart of Germany. The first POW camp we had the opportunity to photograph was in Limburg. By the time we reached there it had been cleaned up considerably and we were not able to make a photographic record of it as it was before liberation. We were, however, given very vivid descriptions by our guide, a paratrooper of the British Red Devils, who had been captured during the ill-fated operation at Arnheim, Holland. The largest compound was

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French. Then came the Russians, British, Indian, Italian, and the smallest was the American group, numbering 150. Living conditions for the French were comparatively good. They received adequate medical supplies and were issued Red Cross parcels regularly. Their barracks were crowded but each man had a wooden bunk to sleep in. The remainder of the camp was forced to live in miserable conditions. They slept on filthy straw on the floor with overcoats or burlap bags for covering. Sanitary facilities were practically nonexistent, and dysentery spread like wild fire. The German food ration consisted of a bowl of thin mush served at 6:00 A.M. and a bowl of watery soup served at 7:00 P.M. Each man received one kilogram of bread per day -- and once a week boiled potatoes and 10 grams of meat. Red Cross parcels were issued irregularly to the Americans and British with the excuse that with the disruption of train transportation the packages could not be delivered at regular intervals.

As we drove further into Germany I was anxious to come across a camp in which there were a large number of American prisoners. Several of my friends in the Air Force had been shot down over enemy territory and had been reported as Prisoners of War. Two weeks before VE Day, while our unit was attached to the 14<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, the POW camp at Moosburg, was liberated, freeing 70,000 American, British, Italian and Russian prisoners. The camp had been freed at 10:00 A.M. and when we drove in at 6:00 P.M. the inmates were not used to the fact that they were free. We made a mistake by driving our jeep into the compound. Picture taking was an impossibility because we were immediately surrounded by 45,000 Americans, each anxious to know how the war was progressing, where his unit was located, how long it would be before they got food, and when they could be evacuated. The sight of the jeep brought some of the men almost to the point of tears. They closed in and around it, and those who were close reached out to touch it -- just to be touching something that was American. Someone yelled "blow the horn", and then it started. Each man took his turn sitting in or on the jeep and blowing the horn until we were ready to leave.

I climbed to the top of a fence post to take a shot of the assembled groups; after tripping the shutter I heard a voice say "what the hell are you doing up there"? I looked down and at the foot of the pole I spotted Capt. Chester Pasternak, CO of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn, 314<sup>th</sup> Regiment, 79<sup>th</sup> Division, with whom we had worked several times while we were attached to the 79<sup>th</sup> Division. I climbed down and talked with him a few minutes about the activities of his outfit after we left the Division, how he had been captured, how long he had been in, etc. A thought struck me and making a stab in the dark I asked if anyone knew Vincent Shank or Lt. L. Bascom, two

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fellows with whom I had gone to high school, and knew were in some camp together somewhere in Germany. A fellow standing at my elbow spoke up, "I know them both, come on and I'll show you where they are".

The two fellows informed me that a third Corona man was also in the camp, Lt. James Pirtle. We invited the three to spend the night with us and we had no trouble in inducing them to come. As we drove back to our location, we passed a large group of German prisoners, including some of the guards and the commandant of the camp. Lt. Shank remarked on seeing them, "it just doesn't seem possible that this morning we were prisoners, and this evening we are free and they are the prisoners." For chow that evening we all had the fresh eggs we could eat, "liberated" from a nearby farm. While we waited for the eggs to be cooked, the three fellows spent the time eating bread and jam. After downing three slices apiece it dawned on them that they were stuffing themselves and would not be able to eat the eggs. The temptation of real food was too great for them and each ate another piece of bread. But that didn't stop them from eating 14 eggs apiece.

We were naturally interested to learn of conditions in the camp and to hear some of their experiences. Lt. Shank and Lt. Bascom had both been held for 22 months and Lt. Pirtle for six. Lack of food and fuel were the greatest discomforts suffered. They both said they would have starved had it not been for the Red Cross parcels they received. The food the Germans gave them was not enough to keep a man alive nor was it fit to eat. For fuel they had torn out the panels separating the toilets in the latrine, and ripped up the floors in the barracks.

A good many of the officers in the camp at Moosburg were forced to march from a camp south of Berlin to Moosburg in February. They were a little more fortunate than some prisoners who were marched to new locations because their guards averaged from 45-55 years old. The guards marched them slowly because of their own age and found barns for them to sleep in at night.

From the chance meeting of my friends, by visiting other camps, and by talking to men who spent time in German POW camps, we came to the conclusion that prison conditions at their best were far from good. There were no standard conditions maintained. Conditions depended upon the individual personnel of the various camps

VE Day came and passed, and celebration among the troops was

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conspicuous by its moderation. For most the day did not end but die, and death is sobering and not demonstrative. Photographic work continued in greater volume. Mass surrenders, murder camps and displaced persons. In Czechoslovakia, American forces liberated a country with greater democratic vitality than anywhere in Europe. A sound motion picture unit went to the capital, Prague, and filmed the return and celebration procession of President Benes to his country. Sgt. Harry Downard tells of his assignment.

The day following the taking of Prague by the Russians, Sgt. Harding, Sgt. Butterfield and myself, a three man photo team, were on our way to Prague with our motion picture sound camera. Upon arriving at the demarcation line separating the American and Russian territories, we were stopped by a Russian guard. His orders were to allow no American soldiers to enter the Russian territory. By a long process of signs with our hands and saying over and over "General Eisenhower, General Patton and President Benes - photo", we finally convinced them to allow us to pass on to Prague. The roads were jammed with Russian vehicles consisting of the American ¾ ton trucks and the 2-½ ton trucks mixed with the Russian horse-drawn wagons. The Russian soldiers upon seeing that we were Americans would shout "Komerad", running up to us and giving us such a bear hug that we could hardly breathe. Of course we exchanged American cigarettes for Russian cigarettes and there was a wonderful feeling of comradeship and festivity in the air.

We were among the first Americans to arrive in Prague and were more than warmly welcomed by the civilians. No matter where we parked our truck, it was immediately surrounded by civilians who wished to shake our hands. Many of the civilians could speak English and were very anxious to converse with us as it was their first opportunity to speak English in six years. During the German occupation it was forbidden to speak our language. The Czech people are more like the Americans than any we had met in Europe. They have a great regard for America and know all our film stars and our modern music up to six years ago. Many of the people have friends or relatives living in America and many wish to come to America as soon as possible.

We were fortunate in being in Prague at the time President Benes returned after six years in exile. With a certain amount of difficulty with the Russian girl Military Police, who directed traffic with a grand flourish of flags, we were able to gain a position in the parade near the President. The streets were lined with girls dressed in their colorful native costumes, cheering as the President passed in

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review. There were many Russian cameramen taking pictures also, and we carried one with us to help get through the many traffic blocks.

Following the parade, I was fortunate in arranging a personal interview with President Benes in his private chamber. The President gave us an address in English for our sound camera and afterwards we talked about twenty minutes about the conditions in America. He mentioned Colonel Lindberg being in the same room in 1937; of the disbelief of America in 1937 about German military intentions, and his own happiness that Czechoslovakia was free

We were all very much thrilled by our good luck in meeting the President, and especially since we were the only Allied cameramen who were able to get through the Russian lines to cover this important event. Since then I have returned to Prague six times, photographing such activities as the return of Allied prisoners, the arrival of the American Legation, and the arrival of UNRRA food and supplies. My visits to Prague will always remain in my memory as the most pleasant and enjoyable experience during my one year in Europe.

The work of the 166<sup>th</sup> was finished in the summer of 1945. They provided pictures of historic, documentary and newsworthy importance. Perhaps seeing some of the published photographs will enable people to have a better understanding of war, a greater desire for peace and a pictorial reminder of what is in store for those who might seek future world conflicts.

In recognition of the outstanding accomplishments of these men, the 166<sup>th</sup> Signal Photographic Company was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.

MY STORY



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY HAS AWARDED  
THE ARMY COMMENDATION MEDAL

TO **ERIC R. WIESENHUTTER**  
(THEN) WARRANT OFFICER, ARMY OF THE UNITED STATES

FOR exceptionally meritorious service while serving as Supply Officer for the 166th Signal Photographic Company. Warrant Officer Wiesenhutter's exceptional performance of duty reflects great credit upon himself, the 166th Signal Photographic Company and the Army of the United States.

THIS 11TH DAY OF JUNE 2001

Permanent Order 162-1, dated 11 June 2001  
U.S. Total Army Personnel Command  
200 Stovall Street  
Alexandria, VA 22332-0471



*Stephen G. Frost*  
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL