



**Lucky Seventh
Belgian Fourragere**

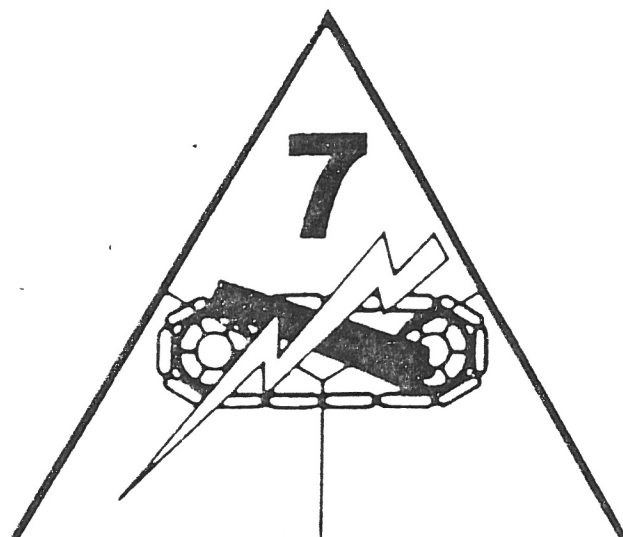
A Journal
of
"Papa 'T's" Army Days In World War II Europe.....
As Viewed Forty Years Later

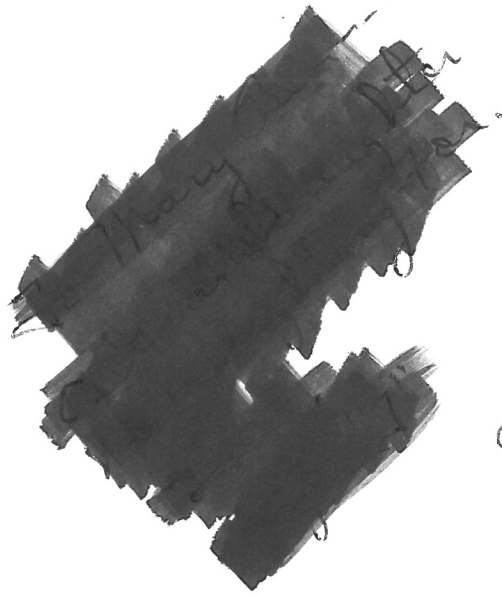
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in
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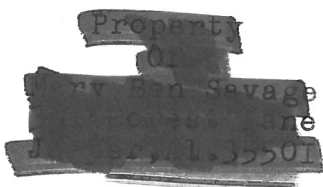


Aug '85

DEDICATION

This journal is dedicated to my family,
that they might know the perils of war,
as lived by one who loves them. It is
my prayer that my family will never
have to experience war as I lived it
and that the world will be spared of
anything resembling this in the future.

Papa "T"



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PROLOGUE

On occasion my grandchildren have asked, "Papa 'T', what did you do in the war?"

Forty years after the war, I undertook the task of compiling a record of my experiences, before time dimmed the memories too much. I suppose many who served in World War II (WW II) have been reluctant to discuss it. There can be horrible memories, yet at times there were events providing enriching thoughts. This is what I want to share with my family.

My great-grandfather served in the Civil War, was wounded in the Battle of Spotsylvania and taken prisoner later near Harper's Ferry. My father served with the 81st "Wildcat" Infantry Division in World War I (WW I). He had written an account of his experiences, which I learned to appreciate especially after following in his footsteps in WW II.

Even today when reading books relating to the history of WW II, many conflicting accounts concerning dates and events can be found. One writer posed the question, "Is history written by the upper classes for the upper classes?"

My information comes from a variety of sources, including letters sent home that had been preserved by my family which I was not aware of until many years later, my own recollection of events, a publication on the history of the army division with which I had served, two return trips to Europe in 1969 and 1975 retracing the routes I had traveled, talking with people, etc. I am confident my account is quite accurate, but I realize there may be mistakes on exact events, locations and dates and I will stand to be corrected.

After reading the draft of my journal, my wife admonished me not to embellish my story. I have heeded her advice.

People who have not experienced first hand the horrors of war cannot possibly comprehend the circumstances involved or what the ordinary combat soldier often went through day to day. My story deals with these events not often found in history books of WW II. I leave the recording of history for that event to those assigned the responsibility. I plead guilty to being proud of the outfit in which I served and may appear to be somewhat boastful of the division's record of accomplishment. I was proud to have been a small part of it.

Events have been set out in chronological order as much as possible, often using excerpts from my letters. During combat we were not permitted to state our location, but I provided as many details as permitted by the censor. As soon as the war ended and censorship was lifted, I began to recount in my letters the events and locations while they were still fresh in my memory. Later I verified these with accounts in the book on our division's history along with maps indicating the routes taken, etc.

My story is that of an ordinary soldier who did not rush to volunteer for service, yet when the draft call came, I did not attempt to dodge it. I served my country as honorably as I could. I was neither a hero nor a coward. I often reacted as circumstances required, which was not always pleasant.

I participated in three major battle campaigns in Europe, the Ardennes, Rhineland and Central Europe. I served with the 38th Armored Infantry Battalion, 7th Armored Division. I joined my outfit as a replacement in Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge.

After the war I spent a few months in the Army of Occupation. My assignments after the war provided me the opportunity to travel, work, and live with German civilians. I made friends on a person-to-person basis and found we shared many common beliefs on religion, war, love for our family and fellow man.

Purposely I have deleted the names of buddies with whom I shared many experiences, in respect for their privacy. There are many, of course, whose names I do not accurately recall. I begin my story from the date of my induction and basic training.

INDUCTION INTO THE ARMY

June 15, 1944

I was inducted into the army at Fort McPherson, Georgia, and was sent to Camp Wheeler near Macon, Georgia, for basic training. My wife and two year old daughter were able to visit me only once during the five and one-half months I was there. In August, they made the trip by train and upon their return home, they occupied a car with a group of German prisoners of war on their way to a prison camp near Aliceville, Alabama. My wife said our daughter enjoyed running up and down the aisle getting a lot of attention from the prisoners.

(In my 1969 trip to Germany, I talked with a former German prisoner of war (POW), who told me he had been in a "concentration camp" in Alabama during WW II and had to pick cotton on farms in that area.)

October 14, 1944

While on bivouac, near the completion of basic training, I incurred an infected knee, which required hospitalization. Consequently, I missed out on the twenty-five mile march with full field pack back to camp.

November 4, 1944

I was discharged from the hospital and returned to duty. My buddies whom I had trained with had been shipped overseas. Therefore, I was placed in a new group nearing their completion of basic training. I was a stranger in the crowd. I completed basic training with this group, including being allowed to make the twenty-five mile forced march with a full pack. I went home on furlough prior to being shipped overseas. (As I reflect back now, this delay in my training may have been a life saver.)

December, 1944

I boarded the train for Fort Meade, Maryland, at the terminal in Birmingham. It was a sad day when I told my family goodbye, threw my barracks bag over my shoulder and walked away - it was so near Christmas. I was at Fort Meade one week and then transferred to Camp Shanks, New York for a week.

While at Camp Shanks, we were trained to board a ship by climbing a net up

the side. There was a moat to jump across to grab the net and start climbing up the side of the ship. The weather was near zero and the water in the moat was frozen. I made the jump and was ascending the net when a soldier above me slipped and fell on my arms, knocking me free of the net. I fell several feet, breaking through the ice and into the water. They hauled me out and sent me running for the barracks a short distance away. By the time I reached the barracks, my clothes were frozen. After shedding the wet clothes, drying off and dressing in warm clothes, I was none the worse for wear. Fortunately I never did have to use that method to board a ship.

BOARDING OUR OVERSEA'S SHIP

December 24, 1944

We were boarded on the ship for overseas assignment on Christmas Eve. Our ship was an ancient Dutch freighter, the Volendam, which had been converted into a troop ship. There were 240 of us put in one hold (compartment) located below the water line. This was to be our home for more than two weeks.

The Red Cross distributed Christmas presents as we loaded on the ship. These consisted of coffee, candy, donuts, a carton of cigarettes, cigarette case, shaving kit, books, soap and stationery. This improved the morale at this particularly depressing time in our careers.

December 26, 1944

We sailed from New York harbor and joined a convoy of ships for the Atlantic crossing. The bunks in the ship's hold were stacked four high. The air was not too fresh in this ancient ship. Since we were in a lower hold, below the water line, it was impossible for those soldiers who became seasick to rush to the rail to throw up over the side, so fifty-five gallon drums were placed at convenient locations. This did not improve the smell during the voyage.

The Dutch crew seemed to enjoy goat meat and they served it a few times. However, for many of us it was just too greasy and nauseating. I survived those sixteen days aboard an often rolling ship without becoming seasick. I was one of the fortunate ones. I disciplined myself to eat something each meal even if it was only bread and peaches. I believe this prevented me from becoming seasick.

During our zig-zag crossing, it was often necessary to drop depth charges to scare off German submarines. For those of us in the hold below water line, the concussions were traumatic. However, this was probably responsible for our safe passage. We sighted the White Cliffs of Dover and docked at Portsmouth, England, but didn't disembark. The next morning we crossed the English Channel.

January 8, 1945

We arrived at LeHavre, France, disembarked and were loaded onto a troop train. We were being rushed to the battle front as replacements. The Germans had broken through our lines in what was to become known as the Battle of the

Bulge. The outfit I was to join (Seventh Armored Division) had almost been annihilated at Saint Veith, Belgium, by the Germans, and replacements were urgently needed.

ACROSS FRANCE ON A TROOP TRAIN

January 8, 1945

Thirty-four of us with back packs and barracks bags were loaded into one small boxcar. It had been built in 1903 and could accomodate forty persons or eight horses. These were the same cars used in WW I, the type my father had been transported in, and they referred to them as a "40 and 8". The one we were assigned to had cracks in the walls and floors which made the trip across France a cold and drafty one.

For the next two miserable days and nights, we rolled across France and into Belgium to the replacement depot. The troop train would stop occasionally where a field kitchen had been set up to provide food. The French people would be there to welcome and cheer us on. They, of course, would be expecting cigarettes, candy, gum and soap the troops might give them. Some of the more enterprising French girls were trading kisses for these items.

Conditions in the boxcar were extremely crowded. We could not all lie down to sleep at one time. Bathroom facilities were nil. Those soldiers unfortunate enough to have diarrhea were at a disadvantage on this train ride.

JOINING MY OUTFIT

January 11, 1945

There were fifteen from our boxcar assigned to the 38th Armored Infantry Battalion, 7th Armored Division. We joined the division in Verviers, Belgium. At this time the division was attached to General Hodges' First Army. We did not know at the time, but in April we would be attached to the British Second Army, then later to the Ninth Army under General Simpson. Also, at one time we were in Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) Reserve to be sent where we were needed and finally in the Army of Occupation with the Seventh Army.

An armored infantry unit had more maneuverability than the line or "foot" infantry and could be deployed more rapidly to an area where needed for a spear-head attack.

January 13, 1945

Our first night in Belgium had been spent in an old school house, sleeping on straw, while some stayed in a barn. There was no electricity. I put a cloth in a box of shoe dubbing (dressing) and lighted it to provide illumination to write home. The next night we stayed in a warehouse with no lights, heat or windows and it was cold!

The Germans were launching their buzz bombs or V-2 rockets, and we could hear them pass overhead. We had been told that as long as we could hear the motors not to worry, but if they cut off, they would be landing in our area.

Later, Belgian people let us sleep in their homes. The family I stayed with gave me a mattress and pillow. They heated water so we could bathe, and also prepared hot waffles and french fried potatoes. We stayed in the basement which was heated and comfortable. These were the most comfortable quarters I had experienced in recent times.

January 15, 1945

I had received no mail from home and this made me appreciative of the letters and packages I would receive in the months ahead. Having now joined up with my outfit, I had the best chow since leaving the States. The men in the unit were

a good group of fellows. There was only one other man from Alabama in our outfit.

January 16, 1945

I got my first haircut since leaving the States. I paid the Belgian barber twenty francs (forty cents). I had shown the lady in whose home I was staying pictures of my wife and daughter. Each time one of her neighbors came in, she wanted me to show them the pictures. She had a cute little girl five years old and she had her dolls, buggy and toys in the basement.

We were busy preparing to go into combat, checking out the half-track (armored vehicle) I was assigned to, etc. The name of our half-track was "Holy Hell II". The first one had been destroyed by the Germans.

January 17, 1945

I sent Tommie pictures of our platoon and the family we were staying with. I had ice cream today which we found downtown. It is never too cold for ice cream. (I did not know at the time, I would not have ice cream again until the war was over.)

The food during this time was good. We had chops, steak, stew, apples, pineapple pie, chocolate cake and other good things. We were alerted to move up to the battle front so I suppose they were providing us a last good meal before going into combat. Little did I realize what was to take place during the next several days. The Seventh Armored Division had been built back to fighting strength with replacements for the casualties they had suffered from the Germans at Saint Veith.

The first casualties I saw when going into combat for the first time were all Americans. I had the uneasy feeling we were being led to slaughter. These soldiers were members of a tank unit which had been destroyed by the Germans. The bodies of the American GI's had not been removed by the burial detail. Some had not made it clear of their tanks before being burned to death, others who made it out had been shot.

Later I was told that the soldiers were mostly raw recruits who were used as replacements without adequate training and experience as tankers. The Germans with their superior tanks and experience had picked them off like sitting ducks.

ARDENNES CAMPAIGN - BATTLE OF THE BULGE

January 19, 1945

This was my first day of combat and my sister's birthday. I had spent the night before in a barn. We left our half-track and advanced to the front on foot. I had eaten a cold army ration tin of eggs with bacon and it had made me sick. Fright was partly to blame. It was a long and miserable night.

We were on the attack, retaking the territory around Saint Veith, a rail center, occupied by the Germans. It was rough in the dark, spooky forest and bitterly cold. The temperature was below zero at night with snow knee deep. During the next ten days we had no hot food, only K-rations and a few sandwiches. We wore the same cold, sometimes frozen, clothes.

One day when we were under fire, sandwiches were sent up for us. I crawled out of my hole, ran back and got them for our group. Each soldier got one sandwich and my buddy and I ended up with three (bonus for going after them). We sat in our foxhole, eating pork sandwiches, with bullets flying all around.

I experienced some of my closest calls in this area. Once, the Germans fired mortar shells as I was rigging up a makeshift radio antenna outside a shelled out house. I dove for the cellar just before a shell hit the house and the blast knocked me against the wall. We had lost the regular antenna in the snow somewhere between the half-track and the battlefront.

In another instance we were to attack a hill near Saint Veith and had our machine guns set up on an adjacent hill. The Lieutenant and I were set up a little further down the hill with the radio, so that we could observe the Germans. A buddy who was behind us setting up his gun was spotted by the Germans. They opened up with a machine gun and the bullets went flying over my head, knocking out my buddy's gun. He had flung himself into the bottom of his foxhole and escaped injury. Then one of our mortar guns, further up the hill, opened up on the Germans' gun position, knocking out the gun and killing four Germans. There was heavy rifle, machine gun, mortar, flare and artillery fire. One of our squad leaders was hit and I had to leave the forward observation position and the radio to assist on his machine gun.

January 24, 1945

After we had taken our objective, we were pulled back to a rest area, having spent about seven days, mostly in foxholes. There was hot food awaiting us, but unfortunately we did not have a chance to eat it. We received an urgent order to take a hill the the 48th Armored Infantry Battalion had been unable to take. We were rushed to the area to prepare for a midnight attack. On the way to our position, we sent scouts ahead and we stopped for a brief rest. I had a .30 caliber water-cooled machine gun on my shoulder. During this stop I was so tired and sleepy, I leaned against a tree and probably dozed off. I relaxed my hold on the gun and it fell off my shoulder into the snow. That brought me back to life! We were wearing white snow suits and the gun I was carrying had a small leak. The anti-freeze in the water had stained my suit.

We moved out for our attack at midnight and were successful in taking the hill. We had experienced difficulty in getting our machine gun operating, because I had been unable to get all the snow brushed off after it had fallen. A good soldier always tries to keep his gun dry and in good working order. Thanks to being ingenious soldiers, however, we were able to get the recoil mechanism moving by urinating on it, thus using our own body heat to free the recoil. After firing a few rounds, the gun rapidly warmed up and we could even warm our hands on the barrel.

I recalled how in basic training I tried to maintain my gun in good working condition. On one of our inspections, the Company Commander had used my gun as an example of how equipment should be cared for. I wondered what he would have thought of my gun now.

After taking the hill, we were cut off by the Germans and our relief was unable to reach us. We sent out a patrol the next morning. They were pinned down by German machine gun fire and were unable to get through until that night. It was the next night, at ten o'clock, before we were relieved by a an airborne group. Boy, were we tired, cold and hungry! My feet had been frost-bitten about the fifth day out and were very painful. A buddy and I had shared a foxhole to try and stay warm. I was sitting with my back against the back of the hole and he was sitting in front leaning back against me. My legs and feet were pressed outward against the frozen earth, resulting in the frost-bite. This had been the toughest ten days I had ever experienced.

We had taken a lot of prisoners and equipment. As the prisoners were captured they were searched. I recall one unfortunate German wearing a pair of

our army combat boots. He was forced to remove them and walk back in stocking feet. It had been tough going and one of our sergeants went berserk while under fire. He jumped out of his foxhole and began running back toward the rear. It took three men to catch and hold him. We suspected many soldiers were trying for a "Section 8" discharge (faked mental disorder). The soldier who replaced him was shot two days later.

At one place in the Battle of the Bulge we rounded up German snipers who had been left behind to harass and delay us. One of our runners shot one in the leg. They told us their troops were using horses and any other means of transportation to escape the area.

At another location in the "Bulge" we had pinned down a large group of Germans in a farm house and barn complex. We suspected some were escaping and later I edged closer and observed one of the animals leave the barn. A soldier was crouching behind the animal. He was using it as a shield to get across the clearing between the barn and woods in order to escape. After that, we shot at anything that moved.

REST AREA IN BELGIUM

January 29, 1945

We were pulled out of the combat zone and moved back to a Belgian town for a much needed rest. We were either in Eupen or near there. I had still received no mail since leaving the States. I was staying in a Belgian home with a real honest-to-goodness bed to sleep on.

My feet were still sore and swollen and for a time I was unable to wear shoes. However, it was not considered serious enough for me to be sent back to a field hospital. There were far too many soldiers seriously needing medical attention much more than me.

The lady in whose home I was staying applied medication to my feet and prepared hot food, including rabbit stew. They raised rabbits for food and used the skins to make coats. She gave me several skins which I sent home for a coat for Carol. My buddy brought food from our field kitchen until I was able to walk comfortably again.

January 31, 1945

Was I elated! Mail had caught up with us at last and I received seventeen letters. I wore them out reading them over and over again. Tommie wrote that Carol had a big Christmas. How I wish I could have been with them!

One of the presents Carol had gotten was a toy telephone. Tommie said she would pretend she was talking to me. When someone asked her what her Daddy was doing, she would reply, "He is shooting Germans". Tommie also wrote that when she said I was in Germany, Carol would reply, "No, Mommy, he is in a foxhole". She said Carol could sing the song about "The dolly with a hole in her stocking". (Forty years later this talent for singing remains undeveloped, so far as I know.) Needless to say, receiving mail from home was very important.

My buddy and I were the only ones staying in this private home, and one night the lady fixed coffee, waffles and chocolate pudding for us. Delicious! They had one son, age seven, who played the piano and another son, twenty-one, who played an accordion, so we enjoyed their music. They also had a daughter seven weeks old. The older son was a baker and worked for the Red Cross, baking donuts. Late at night the lady would bring us coffee and donuts. We gave the

family cigarettes, gum and candy, and I also got some oranges from our mess hall so the baby could have orange juice. At night the lady would heat a brick and place it in our bed. It was nice to sleep in a bed with a feather mattress and covers after trying to sleep in a cold foxhole with one blanket and almost freezing to death.

February 2, 1945

I had a chance to go to Paris on a pass. My heart was willing but my feet were not. They were much improved but still sore. I got to go back to the medical aid station to have them checked. I didn't know at the time, but this was my one and only available pass while in Europe, except to go to Switzerland, December 11, 1945.

February 2, 1945

After eating at the mess hall for the evening meal, I returned to the Belgian home and was asked to have dinner with the family. Rather than hurt their feelings, I sat down at a table with meat, french-fried potatoes, stewed apples, bread, butter, coffee, cake and pie. I had a little of each and was I ever miserable! I would have really enjoyed it had I not already eaten. This taught me honesty is the best virtue.

BACK IN ACTION

February 12, 1945

After spending several days in the rest area we were once again back in action. We had gotten replacements for the casualties in the Battle of the Bulge and had been built back to combat strength. We spent a night in a barn with fifteen cows, three horses, three sheep and seven hogs. It was surprising how the heat from the animals took the edge off the chill. After awhile, the smell was no bother. (Forty years later I read the following interesting newspaper article published February 20, 1985 in The Daily Mountain Eagle, page 4: "One cow produces 80,000 BTU's of heat every 24 hours. Scientists in Lund, Sweden, proved it from a cow barn in which eighteen cows stomped and chomped. They piped the heat forty yards to a farm house, otherwise unheated. It warmed five rooms and the people therein." Just imagine how much time and money that government could have saved if they had only asked me. For the people's sake, I hope they filtered out the odor.)

The next night was spent in the cellar of a bombed-out house with a dead German soldier lying outside the door. The burial detail had not picked him up. The body was frozen so there was no odor. Even though an unpleasant situation, it beat sleeping in a foxhole with the temperature below zero. I took the soldier's canteen as a souvenir, he had no further use for it. Years later, upon examining it closer, I discovered a name was scratched on it, "Lanzing". There were several letters in his pocket. I took a couple of them, thinking I might someday contact his family, but over the intervening weeks, the letters were lost.

(I did not discover, until many years after the war, that my parents had saved the letters I had sent from Europe. It was like finding a long-lost part of the past. After my retirement I had the time to begin sorting them out to organize for preparing this manuscript.)

Most of my foxhole time was in the Ardennes Campaign. When we started rolling across Germany, spearheading attacks, we operated from half-tracks a lot of the time. At night we would stay in buildings whenever possible, which was an improvement over the foxholes.

A couple of the fellows captured fifteen Germans one morning. They had

slept in a house next to them all night without knowing it. When they awoke the next morning, they discovered them and got the drop on them. I don't know which group was the most surprised.

I was staying in a captured German pillbox (bunker) where it was fairly dry and comfortable, with concrete walls and roof about three feet thick, covered in heavy armor plates of steel, with two steel entrance doors. My feet by now were much better.

We fixed our pillbox up with a stove, mirror, clock and sofa. The Germans had left a bit of junk which we threw out. We were thankful for this pillbox since the houses in the area had been destroyed. Our mess (kitchen) truck moved up close so we were enjoying two hot meals a day. There were fifteen in my platoon so we split up, staying in different places. The Lieutenant, medic, myself and four others were in the pillbox. We had also acquired a pet, a cat, which ^{was} took up with us. After we determined he was not a spy, we started feeding him. Some of the fellow rounded up six cows so we were having fresh milk. If we'd had the ingredients and a freezer, I'm sure we would have made ice cream. We thought about butchering one of the cows, who did not want to give up her milk, and have steak.

February 22, 1945

I was told today I had been awarded the Combat Infantry Badge. This meant an increase of \$10 a month pay, a total of \$33 after deduction of a war bond and insurance. There was no place to spend it.

When possible, PX rations were brought up to the front. A typical allotment, for example, which I received one week, was seven packages of cigarettes, two pieces of gum and six pieces of candy. This was not very much and it was never certain. I suspected many items were rerouted along the way from the rear to the front and ended up on the black market.

February 23, 1945

We moved again, and had less comfortable quarters. I rigged up a cognac bottle filled with fluid and stuffed a rag in it for a wick, which provided enough light for me to write home. The snow was about gone, resulting in mud that was just about as bad to wade through. The roads were all torn up from the heavy military equipment and this slowed down our drive. No matter how rough the going, gruesome the sights, or great the danger, GI's could find humor in

the situation to relieve the tension to cope with the problems. I had always heard that "misery loved company". It was certainly true in combat. If you felt sorry for yourself, there were plenty of others in the same boat.

In certain areas we had no indoor toilet facilities and frequently had to improvise. We would prepare a latrine by digging a trench about six feet long. It was good insurance to dig a foxhole conveniently nearby. On one occasion, when I had a case of GI's, I had to rush to the trench. After taking the proper position, a "Jerry burp gun" (German automatic weapon) opened up in the area. This didn't leave any alternatives.

I don't know what caused my case of GI's. Might have been that SOS (shit on a shingle) the mess sergeant served so frequently.

REPAIRING THE ROADS

February 27, 1945

We began repairing the roads with the Corp of Engineers for a few days. We cut logs in the forest and laid them across the roads which would allow our military vehicles to travel on. The work went on from daylight 'til dark. I was staying in an old house with nine of my buddies. We would come in at night, light up a fire and sit around the stove talking about home, our expectations when we got home and passing photos around. We would discuss our daily experiences and eventually someone would yawn and we would start dragging out our bed rolls to hit the sack, just thankful we had made it safely through another day.

March 1, 1945

I got to go back to a Quartermaster shower point for a hot shower and issue of clean clothes. Wonderful! This was a heck of a lot better than trying to bathe out of a steel helmet full of water.

This was payday and some of the fellows had a poker game going. They had sent back to the rear for beer and cognac. Letters and packages were coming through fairly regularly now. We would all share the goodies from our packages. We had a big laugh when one of the fellows opened one of his packages which contained a tie (we had not worn one since we left the States), a watch band (he didn't even have a watch), six pairs of silk socks and underwear, none of which he needed.

About all a person needed was something he could eat. My family was considerate. I had let them know what I would like and that's what they usually sent. I would get one or two boxes a month from Tommie, and one from Mother, consisting of items that would not spoil or break. Tommie began to number the ones she sent so we could determine if they reached me, or were intercepted in the rear. Some of the items were: cookies, candy, fruit cocktail, Hershey bars, caramels, canned orange and pineapple juices, peanuts, salmon, sardines, Vienna sausage, jelly, relish spread, deviled ham, veal loaf, crackers, peanut butter, pecan log, fudge, airmail stamps, stationery, magazines, and hair tonic.

Once I requested Vienna sausage rather than deviled ham or veal loaf since these tasted too much like K-ration meats. We all had space to carry personal items on the half-track. I took some of the food items along in combat to

supplement K-rations and army chow.

One thing I learned in the army was that you had to be resourceful in many areas, too numerous to mention here. I wrote home frequently and often ran out of stationery. Many times I wrote on the back of letters I had received from home.

RHINELAND CAMPAIGN

March 5, 1945

The Seventh Armored Division was assigned to aid in clearing the enemy from the territory between the Ruhr and Rhine rivers. There was a pocket of resistance southwest of Bonn, Germany. The Seventh Armored Division forced a collapse of this resistance. At one point I had been on the banks of the Ruhr, below a dam the Germans had blown up which caused the river to rise, thus delaying us. While on guard duty the German guns opened up when one of our outfits tried to cross the river. One night forty Germans slipped back across the river to our side and walked two miles to surrender. They were without food and were ready to quit fighting. They say an army travels on its stomach. The Germans were on the run and the front had moved further into Germany. I moved out of the pillbox near the Ruhr River.

March 7, 1945

We moved again. Many of our moves were at night under blackout conditions. We captured a town and had time for a little recreation. We "liberated" a motorcycle and took scenic rides. We caught a couple of horses and harnessed them up to a carriage we found in a barn. This provided rides around town for our platoon. We had also "liberated" a German car for our platoon's use. Two of the towns we captured were Simmerath and Schmidt. We had to be careful in the places we captured because the Germans were clever at placing booby traps as they abandoned an area. They knew the GI's would build a fire as soon as they took over a building. Coal brickettes with explosive charges in them would be conveniently near the stove. This was only one of many traps used by them.

REACHING THE RHINE RIVER

March 13, 1945

Eight of us occupied the Rheinterrassen Hotel overlooking the Rhine River in Mehlem just below Bad Godesburg. Earlier, on our drive, we had taken the wrong road. As we entered town, the German civilians were surprised and began placing white sheets in upstairs windows surrendering.

Up until now, the civilians had been fleeing the towns ahead of our troops, but they were now blocked by the Rhine River and were unable to flee. Also, some of them thought Hitler was still having success and didn't know the American forces were in the area.

We decided on the hotel for our headquarters. As we approached it, we found German civilians having dinner. After clearing the hotel of Germans, we took it over, set up guard and got some rest. We had been on the move for seventeen hours and had ended up where we were not, at first, supposed to be. The next morning we took stock. The owner had left the kitchen fairly well stocked with food and utensils, so for the next two or three days we did our own cooking. The manager had locked the heavy door to the wine cellar. It didn't take too long to blast the door open and we found it well stocked.

It was about this time that we received our first PX-rationed Coca-Cola delivered to us at the front. Each man received four bottles as his ration. However, we had been resourceful and were doing all right. We had the wine cellar open. The fellows in the rear could keep the Cokes.

The rooms were furnished adequately and were comfortable. There was a nice terrace overlooking the Rhine so we had found a good home for the next few days.

While we were awaiting further assignment, our Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion was called on to augment the defense of the Ludendorf Bridge at Remagen. American troops had been able to capture the bridge before the Germans could completely destroy it and this allowed some American troops to reach the east bank of the Rhine. The bridge collapsed ten days later, about March 17, 1945. We set up outposts on the west bank of the Rhine. Directly across the river from us were a lot of German troops. The Ludendorff Bridge was further down, on our right flank. From our observation point, we were able to direct mortar and

artillery fire over the river into the German positions. In one instance a German military truck loaded with soldiers made a dash to evacuate their position. Our shells made a direct hit on their truck as they hurried over a rise out of the embankment they had been behind.

We had been watching, listening and timing as trucks geared up for this dash over the rise, and when they came into view, we were able to score a bull's-eye on this particular load of soldiers.

One morning while in Mehlem one of the sergeants and the chaplain were going to walk downtown and asked me to go along with them. I was shaving at the time and told them to go on ahead and I would catch up with them. After they had walked a short distance, a German plane flew over and dropped a bomb. Both of them were killed in the attack. A civilian hospital nearby was also damaged. It was plainly identified as a hospital. We had inflicted no damage on the town when we took it and now the Germans were bombing it.

I saw my first jet plane while on guard duty one night on the Rhine. I had no idea what type German plane it was as it flew low over us. We shot at it, but did not score a hit.

March 17, 1945

We moved from the hotel one block down the street to an eighteen room house. This was to allow the hotel to return to business. It was beautifully furnished. All the furniture, paintings, silverware, linens and closets full of clothes, were left intact.

German women were doing our laundry. I remember one of them looked at her hands and said it was the first time she had done any washing.

I "liberated" some barber tools and began giving some of the fellows haircuts. It helped to pass the time as I was never one to play cards.

CENTRAL EUROPE CAMPAIGN

March 26, 1945

We were back in action. The Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen had collapsed before we broke out of our bridgehead. Therefore, we made a night crossing of the Rhine River on a pontoon bridge. It was not a comfortable feeling driving across under blackout conditions. (Forty years later the bridge has not been rebuilt. The towers stand as a memorial.) The capture of the bridge allowed enemy troops to penetrate into the heart of Germany for the first time in more than 130 years. The German officer who failed to blow up the bridge was executed on Hitler's orders.

After getting safely across, we broke out of the bridgehead and drove on unchecked for several days. We changed direction several times, covering approximately 150 miles of beautiful countryside with quaint villages.

We left it littered with remains of German equipment including many which were drawn by horses. The German army was running low on gasoline and had begun using all available horses. Many times we had to shoot beautiful horses lying injured along the roadsides.

The only damage to our half-track in this drive was when a German shell made a direct hit on it. The shell, luckily for us, was a dud. However, the impact tore a large gaping hole in the armor. By this time, we had become quite attached to "Holy Hell II" (our half-track) and affectionately referred to it as our "home away from home".

We were taking many prisoners. In a five day period the Seventh Armored Division took 13,071 prisoners. General Van Fleet described the attack of the Seventh Armored Division as one of the most rapid and vicious advances by armor which had ever been executed by American forces. We often had long lines of prisoners marching back to POW cages.

The Seventh Armored Division drove south to Limburg, then across the Dill River, captured Giessen, then Kirchain and next the Eder See Dam. A rest period was taken in this area.

On the drive it was always reassuring when weather conditions permitted our bombers to make their attacks. Did they ever look and sound powerful passing over us in such large numbers on the way to their targets!

I compared those pilots to the one who flew the small Piper Cub planes in combat. These planes flew overhead in the combat zones as observers for our

artillery fire. One I had been watching one day, as it floated overhead, was struck by a German shell and it completely disintegrated.

April 3, 1945

One of the men shot a deer, dressed it out and we had venison to eat. Three of the men went fishing with a hand grenade and netted about seventy five pounds of fish. We had a little variety to supplement the K and C-rations, as well as the army chow. I kept pretty busy cutting hair. In Germany we didn't have civilian barbers available. We got to be a pretty ragged looking group. I started cutting one fellow's hair one day and had him about half-finished when the Germans began shelling us. We had to move out in a hurry. It was three days later before I got around to finishing that haircut. I never did become a good barber, but somebody had to do it.

April 5, 1945

We were back in action, captured Schmollenberg, Gleidorf and Fredeburg. (Tommie and I visited Fredeburg in 1975 and it is one of the neatest and most charming small rural villages in Germany. It is located in a remote area near Brilon.)

In one of our spearhead drives we advanced thirty-five miles in thirty-four hours through enemy lines and several times, had Germans on both sides of us. I recall one instance when we rode into enemy territory, our half-track was the lead unit and I happened to see a German poke his head out of a hedgerow, then disappear. My buddy and I sprayed the hedgerow with machine gun fire. Later when our medics checked, they found six dead Germans. Later, that same day, while I was on guard duty, several Germans came out of the woods with their hands up with white flags and surrendered. They were captured not necessarily due to our bravery or skill. They were outnumbered and out produced.

We were now traveling so fast, gas and food supplies were often in short supply. Our kitchen truck had difficulty catching up and finding us. We relied on K-rations and food we found in homes of towns we captured.

We often got by on the drive by living off the land. We found chickens, eggs, canned vegetables, fruit, ham, etc. We might find adequate kitchen supplies in a house. In one house a couple of the fellows and I took over, we found a beautiful layer cake with icing, probably made for someone's birthday. We celebrated it for them - whoever it was. We found jars of peaches and cherries

to go with it. But no ice cream! The people had fled the house only a short time before we took it. We probably took some chances but nothing appeared booby-trapped in this house. At one house we even set the table, complete with linen, silver and china. We fried chickens which we had dressed, had fresh eggs, ham, bacon, pickles, bread, cheese, pears, potatoes and coffee. We even milked a cow to get cream for coffee. All of this was going on near the fast-moving battle front. We were staying in a different place almost every night since we were rolling at such a rapid pace. A lot of the German troops were just not able to get out of our way.

The stench was awful after the snow melted and the ground thawed. There were many decaying bodies, both humans and animals. At times the smell was almost unbearable.

We were one of the unidentified units on several of the spearhead drives. We had to cover up our identification numbers on our vehicles and clothing.

The Germans had begun to refer to the Seventh Armored Division as "The Ghost". A correspondent called it the "Rattlesnake Division", striking swiftly in many directions. Our division was also known as "Lucky Seven". The British Army in Africa had a Seventh Armored Division known as "The Desert Rats". (All these nicknames, etc., were confusing when trying to trace our locations and action years later. Also, having been on a secret list on occasions, the division often received less credit and publicity than other units.)

(Reflecting back, I understand how awards, publicity, etc., often went more frequently to those units having persons with a high degree of skill in writing, recording and applying for citations. I had often heard the phrase, "the pen is mightier than the sword". Forty years later, having seen several movies about WW II, I realize that often they do not and cannot depict all that occurred during the war. Many of the over-dramatize in order to sell. This is only a personal opinion, but others who were in the war much longer and saw more combat than I did appear to be of the same opinion.)

I had received letters from home questioning why our division location had not been listed in news reports while so many other divisions were. The reason was that we were on the secret list often.

We captured our share of prisoners and liberated a lot of Allied POWs. Also, many slave laborers were freed. The conditions they lived in were pitiful. It would make you sick.

One day the driver and I had been hauling German prisoners back to a POW

cage. We were traveling at a good pace and hit a bump in the road. The rear door flew open and one prisoner fell out. He was very eager to get back in - he didn't want to escape.

On one of the trips back we picked up three American POWs who ran out of the woods wringing wet and out of breath. They were so happy to see us they ran up and kissed the half-track in their joy of reaching freedom.

A German major surrendered to me one day and gave me his practically new Walther P-38 pistol. I was able to bring this home. He said it was one of the last ones manufactured up to that time. He even gave me an extra barrel for it. During this drive, in one town we captured, after heavy shelling, the civilians had been gathered up and placed in a large building. There were several pregnant women in the group and later our medic told me he had been busy that night helping to deliver babies. These are some of the terrible events that happen in war.

Under Hitler's regime, the German women were encouraged to have children. They were given awards for producing the future Hitler Youths.

NORTH TO THE BALTIC SEA

I do not recall the exact dates, but we had been in the Ruhr basin area before changing directions again to head into Northern Germany. The Ruhr pocket area was where General Rose was killed.

We were deployed to assist the British Second Army in cutting off and capturing a large group of German troops in an area near Lubeck and the Baltic.

It was during the British drive north of Hanover and near Celle that the Belsen concentration camp was found and liberated. There were 28,000 women, 11,000 men and 500 children in the camp. Filth, typhus, tuberculois and typhoid were prevalent in the camp. The British later burned it, sometime in May 1945.

This was reported in one publication as the first concentration camp to be liberated in Germany. Dachau was liberated about two weeks later. The Belsen camp was in a remote wooded area near the small rural village of Bergan. The German commander of the camp was SS member Joseph Kramer. He was later hanged for his crimes. He was referred to as "The Beast of Belsen".

(I returned to the area in 1969 and visited the site. A museum and memorial has been constructed there. On a monument, in different languages, it reads: "Israel and the world shall remember the 30,000 Jews exterminated in the concentration camp of Bergan-Belsen at the hands of the muderous Nazis". "The earth shall not cover their blood." There were several large burial mounds. The marker on the largest read as follows:

Heir Ruben	(Here in Repose)
5,000 Tote	(Dead)
April 1945	

All that could be done with so many decaying bodies was to dig a large hole and bulldoze the bodies into it. A sign as you enter the area states, "Visit to Gedenstatte Belsen" (Belsen - a place to remember).

While in Europe, I saw many unidentified decaying bodies, mass burials and cremations. Our bodies, regardless of methods of burial, will eventually return to dust. I don't believe God will judge us on whether we were buried in mounds, cremated and ashes buried in a brief private ceremony, or embalmed and placed in expensive caskets inside vaults with lengthy and elaborate funerals. The latter probably benefits the funeral director more than the bereaved family.

Customs often dictate what is done, war sometimes makes many of them less meaningful. It did for me.

There is a cycle of life on earth, a time for ones to pass from this

earth and leave space for the new generation. We have wars, famines, diseases, etc. which contribute to these cycles.

When a person has reached his golden years, I do not believe in life support methods and artificial organs to prolong life, especially to see a person's resources drained away to pay the huge medical bills, thus depriving his family.)

April 19, 1945

This was the first opportunity to write home in several days so I have a gap in letters and dates. On April 13th we received news of President Roosevelt's death. We were saddened but much too occupied to think of it for long. We realized none of us are indispensable. We were in the courtyard of a rural farm complex when we received the message. I have no idea which village we were near, but I remember vividly the farmyard scene where we were taking a short rest period.

I mailed home two rifles (a .22 and a .30 caliber) and also sent some swords. We couldn't mail anything over thirty-six inches in length, so the rifles had to be dismantled and four inches cut off one of the swords.

I had collected several war souvenirs, some of which I had to throw away at one point when there was danger of being captured by the Germans near Saint Veith.

I now had four pistols, a Walther P-38, a Beretta, a Mauser .25 caliber and a Russian .38 caliber on a .45 caliber frame. I also mailed five German stainless steel daggers with black handles which had been used by the SS troops. These all had the Nazi and SS insignias.

We had been traveling fast and far. The German army was collapsing, but there were still too many fighting to the very end. We observed many of the slave laborers who were now freed, trying to whip a few Germans. You could not blame them.

Some of the Russians we had freed had found a German farm smokehouse with meat hanging in it. They were devouring the raw meat. I imagine there were many such instances of the ones who survived to see freedom, only to fill their stomachs to the extent they died from overeating. Their bodies could not adjust that quickly.

The roads were jammed with refugees, walking and traveling in every imaginable means of transportation available, trying to find their way home and locate their families. It was heart rending to see what war had wrought. Why?

Who has profited from all this suffering? (As I write this forty years later there are still many questions unanswered. Greed was probably the largest contributing factor. I am afraid greed is still prevalent forty years later. Sometimes I wonder if we will ever learn. I hope my family, children and grandchildren will never have to experience what took place in Europe.)

April 21, 1945

We found a large German bathhouse and I was able to get a good bath. There were three floors of private showers and tubs with dozens of lockers and dressing rooms. The tubs were marble, almost small swimming pools. I filled one with hot water that came up to my chin. Later I boiled and washed my clothes.

May 3, 1945

When the German resistance in northwest Germany ended, the Seventh Armored Division was in the middle of it. We drove north from the Elbe River to reach the Baltic Sea, the first American troops to reach the Baltic according to our division's history publication. I believe we were among the first, anyway. We drove our half-track down near the edge of the sea.

More than 51,000 German prisoners were herded into the Seventh Armored Division POW cages during the Central Europe Campaign. In all, the Seventh Armored Division was credited with capturing 113,041 prisoners during the war, according to the publication. I was surprised at the number of women we found with the German troops. I knew there were a lot of prisoners, but I wasn't counting. We had generals and their large staffs to keep count for the combat GI's.

(In the Seventh Armored Division's publication regarding the history of the unit, it stated their 87th Reconnaissance Squadron was dispatched from Ludwigslust on the Elbe River to meet the Russians. Later this appeared in the Reader's Digest. It stated they traveled east and spent the next twenty-four hours within German lines. They were surrounded by German SS troops before the Russians were contacted at 0924 hours May 3, 1945. There are conflicts with other publications on when, who and where first contact with the Russians was actually made.)

There appears to be much confusion on who was to push across the Elbe and rush to capture Berlin. Several commanders wanted to be first and take the credit. Units had made bridgeheads across the Elbe in preparation for the rush on Berlin. There were many disappointed when orders came down for them to pull

back to the west bank and await further orders. A decision had been made that the Russians were to take Berlin. In my opinion this was a mistake. (Years later this decision is still being questioned.)

All I knew for sure at this point in time was that I was in northern Germany near the Elbe River. I remained in this area for perhaps two weeks before being ordered to Dessau, on the Elbe River, where we guarded that point with the Russian troops until the middle of July 1945. (I leave it to the generals to argue as to who was to be credited with being first to meet the Russians. I don't believe there were many combat GI's fighting the war for glory, promotion or profit.

In 1969 when I returned to Germany with my wife, we rented a car and drove from West Germany through the Russian zone of occupation where I had once been stationed in 1945, to Berlin. At the Russian checkpoint in Helmstedt we had our passports held up for quite a while. Waiting for clearance we observed the Russians had German women scrubbing the floors of the waiting area on their hands and knees.

Later on the 120 mile drive through East Germany we noticed German women working in road gangs on the badly deteriorating autobahn (interstate highway). We were halted at another checkpoint and our car was searched while another soldier stood by with a machine gun. It was an uneasy feeling.

The only humor I noted from a Russian soldier on this trip was at another checkpoint, while alone from other soldiers, he smiled as he examined our passports. He then pointed to the scarf my wife was wearing that day was the same one she wore in the passport picture.

There were no speed limits in West Germany. In the Russian territory speed limits were posted in certain zones at 30 km (18 mph). Russian police cars were concealed behind tall shrubbery along the autobahn to enforce that speed. This was a very harrowing 120 mile drive.

As we were then crossing the Elbe River, I could not help but feel resentful toward these former allies and with the decision to halt our troops on the Elbe River in 1945 and sit there to let the Russians capture Berlin. I finally made it to Berlin twenty-four years later at my own expense, not the taxpayers.

The Berlin Wall had been erected, creating a further division among the world powers. The Berlin airlift was another tremendous expense to the taxpayers. I felt I was paying twice.)

We had to turn in our captured enemy weapons to the supply sergeant and could claim them when we left the outfit. There had been a few soldiers shot

with these captured weapons. I recorded the make and serial numbers of a Beretta, serial number F76471; a Mauser, serial number 43087; and a Ceska, serial number Z263630. I was allowed to keep the Walther P-38, serial number 6544, which a German had given me when he surrendered. I had it certified as captured enemy equipment and as bearer, was officially authorized by the Theater Commander, under the provisions of Section VI, Circular 155, to retain it as personal property.

Earlier I had sent home captured enemy equipment including a helmet, canteen, swords, daggers, iron crosses, two rifles, etc. I don't believe my wife was too happy over these items. Several of her friends had received items such as silverware, linens, etc. There was a difference, however, between captured enemy equipment and loot. There were a number of Americans who profited from loot.

WAR IN GERMANY IS OVER

May 8, 1945

Victory in Europe Day! The war was officially over in Europe and we had reason to celebrate. The rumors were plentiful. Would we be shipped to the Pacific, assigned to the Army of Occupation or go home? The blackout in Europe was over and we sang, "When the lights come on again all over the world", still thinking of the Pacific. In the next several months there would be many false rumors, many disappointments, many assignments and several false starts home.

May 15, 1945

I was in Schoenberg, Germany, located about twelve miles from Luebeck near the Baltic Sea. I was kept busy reconnecting electricity to the houses we occupied. Due to the shortage of electric power, many buildings had been disconnected. Individual towns often had their own generating plant. Electrical voltage varied from village to village. In the months ahead I would be called on many times to assist in restoring electric power since they had learned of my civilian background with an electrical utility. We were even able to get an ice cream plant connected and back into operation, thus, we enjoyed the fruits of our labor. Later we had ice cream for the first time since leaving Belgium.

I befriended a German artist by the name of Hoffman who had fled Berlin ahead of the Russians. He painted a picture of the village for me, one of an area in the Harz Mountains and two portraits of me in water color. He charged \$40 for an 8" by 10". He preferred cigarettes to money and since I didn't smoke, it was a bargain for me. (Forty years later when my granddaughter was looking at the portrait she remarked, "Papa 'T' you only had one chin then".) Our cigarettes cost five cents a pack at the time. Later in Berlin, they sold for as much as \$200 per carton on the black market.

May 18, 1945

Ten of us went out with one of our tanks and began pulling in captured enemy vehicles to our motor pool. We chained them together and pulled several at one time. Some of the cars had charcoal burners in the rear which had been engineered and used as the gasoline supplies dwindled. I was amazed how ingenious those

Germans were.

It always surprised me how resourceful a bunch of Americans GI's could be adapting to a challenging situation. When we needed various skills, while living off the land, as we spearheaded on, it seemed there was always someone available. Whether the need was for a butcher, cook, electrician, plumber, mechanic, barber or whatever. If someone did not have a particular skill, we improvised.

Earlier in the army we learned to keep our metal mess kits clean. No one wanted diarrhea. If we didn't have the time or boiling water to clean it, for some reason, we at least attempted to scrub it out with sand until we could give it proper attention.

There was a hospital in Schoenberg filled with wounded German soldiers. A buddy and I confiscated weapons which had been checked in at another hospital in a town we had captured on our drive north. We used a hospital stretcher to carry the guns to headquarters.

The weather was warming up and one Sunday a few of us drove up to the Baltic Sea and went swimming. The Germans were sun worshippers and were stretched out on the beaches. I noticed the girls didn't have as much material in their bathing suits as the girls back home.

The customs in Europe were different in many ways from those I knew as a country boy from Alabama. Wine was used instead of grape juice in their communion service. The toilet customs were another example. In Belgium I first saw the niches in the walls on public sidewalks in downtown areas for a person to use as a comfort station.

Later in Switzerland, I discovered the difference in their public restrooms. They had free and taxed areas in some of the train stations. I went to the first one I came to and while standing at the urinal I sensed someone standing behind me. I thought they were waiting their turn. I was surprised to see a woman standing there with fresh hand towels, soap and lotion. This was the service that was taxed. No one had to explain the difference to me after that.

We were to learn in the months ahead that although the war was over, there would still be many dangers, especially as German prisoners were released and returning home. Some discovered that girl friends had deserted them for American soldiers.

I couldn't help but think of a buddy who was killed the day after the war ended. He was riding in a half-track, sitting up on the edge when a sniper shot him. It was either a fanatic or someone unaware that the war was over.

Many unwary GI's were mysteriously assaulted after the war. There was a period of time before military and civilian governments could organize and work effectively and in the interim there was a certain amount of lawless conduct. A person's character could be tested and measured, and there were many greedy Americans who failed the test.

ASSIGNMENT WITH THE RUSSIANS

May 26, 1945

The area we were in at the end of the war was designated as the British zone of occupation. We were transferred to the Ninth Army and assigned to Dessau, Germany on the Elbe River. We were to guard the west bank and the Russian troops the east. We had been patrolling and guarding both refugees and prisoners of war. Now ten of us were on an outpost on the Elbe River. We were doing our own cooking. The bridges between us and headquarters had mostly been destroyed. The main bridge across the Elbe was blown up by the retreating German army. The only way across was by boat, but it was not a very wide river as measured by some of those back home.

We checked the papers of all persons wanting to cross. We had allowed a few Russian soldiers to cross the river when we first arrived. There was the usual handshaking, back slapping, rejoicing and toasts. Some of the Russians had vodka in their canteens which they passed around. We were outnumbered and they were a pretty rowdy group so we thought we should go along with the toasts. This was my first exposure to that Russian beverage. The best way to describe it was, "Fire Water!" I have never cared for it since.

We had a group to drive up to our outpost one day wanting to go across. Their papers were in order so they gave us their car and left. We were getting quite a bit of experience with German vehicles by now.

One day while I was on guard duty I saw something floating down the river. Upon closer inspection I could see it was a body, the first of many we were to see floating by. The Russians, who as I said were a pretty rowdy group, began using them for target practice. A horrible way to dispose of a body. Another MIA!

There were still isolated cases where American soldiers were being killed. There were three lonely outposts that we were responsible for on the Elbe River. We stood guard in pairs and when it was time for our relief, one would remain on the post alone, while the other one would go and wake-up the relief. This took a few minutes and during that time it was rather scary being alone. We were having trouble with people trying to sneak across the river at night.

One night the outpost above ours lost a man. One of the men had gone to

wake-up the relief and when the relief got to the post, there was no one there. Efforts to find him were fruitless. Later his body was washed ashore. Evidently, they waited until he was alone to slip up and kill him, and throw his body in the river.

While on guard duty another night, my buddy and I heard a noise in the river and went to investigate. We saw someone swimming toward us. We pulled the person out and discovered it was a German girl. My buddy spoke German rather well and after he got her calmed down she told him she was fleeing from the Russians, who had raped her. My buddy gave her a blanket and after our relief came, he took her back for medical attention.

Later reports by doctors and others estimated as many as 10,000 to 20,000 women in Berlin had been raped by Russian troops. Many women, and even entire families, had committed suicide to avoid this threat. Many of our own troops were guilty of rape, justifying it as being one of the spoils of war for the conquerors.

May 28, 1945

It was a relief to be able to write letters home without them being censored. With the number of letters I wrote, I am certain the person responsible for censoring mail was relieved also.

I must have taken my war time letter writing habits from my father. As evidence of this I quote from an article his commanding officer wrote about him shortly after the end of WW I:

John F. Thompson, or better, just plain John, came to us from Camp Sevier from away down Alabama way. His quiet manner has kept us from getting well-acquainted with him. But actions always speak louder than words and so John with his cheery willingness to do all the work given him, coupled with the neatness and thoroughness in doing that work have convinced us that John is all to the "mustard". (Able to cut the mustard)

We have observed that John's chief occupation seems to have been writing letters to a certain little Southern town. Well, here's luck and best wishes, John.

In one of the letters my wife had written my mother during the war, she told her she received three letters from me that day, one was only four lines. "He must have been in a hurry." Another had been written at 5:45 AM. "Can you imagine getting up at that hour to write a letter?" (Forty years later I can't believe I did. Just proves what you will do when you are in love.

I couldn't remember furnishing as many details as I did in numerous letters.

Reading them forty years later, I was embarrassed with several, also my English and spelling was not the best then and has not improved noticeably since. Many times I spelled writing with two "t's". I had used a few V-mail type letters. I didn't like to use them because it limited how much I could write.

In my letters after the war I began to coordinate places, events and dates before they became too foggy and difficult to remember years later. I knew then that someday I wanted to return and visit these areas. Also I wished to record events for my children and grandchildren, hoping someday they might appreciate having a record of my experiences in WW II to share with their children.

At that point in time I did not know that I would be able to return to Europe. However, many years later, in 1969 and again in 1975, I was able to retrace my routes during the war. I was amazed at the accuracy with which I had been able to pinpoint the events, places and dates. I located many of the people who had befriended me while in service there.)

Apparently I had found a way to be exempt from guard duty, patrols, inspections, reveille, etc. They needed a company barber and tailor to keep the men looking neater, so a buddy and I were successful in obtaining the assignment.

We set up shop in Dessau, Germany, after "liberating" a sewing machine and iron, we had the barber tools already. We sewed on soldiers' chevrons, stripes and patches, and altered shirts, pants and jackets. Since my buddy was a better barber than I, he took care of that job and I rapidly became skilled in the art of sewing. The Germans referred to me as the "Schneider Meister" (Master Tailor).

Our charges were nominal, so there was no chance at getting rich. Ten per cent of what we made went into a company fund and we kept the balance. I cleared \$53.75 the first week. It wasn't so much the money, but keeping busy. Idle time presented problems and, with the war over, soldiers were restless. It was important to keep them occupied with inspections, patrols, KP, etc., to keep them out of trouble.

June 15, 1945

I was transferred from the Ninth army to the Seventh army. Soldiers were really being transferred in and out of our unit. It was like a regular replacement depot. It was pretty certain that I would be in the Army of Occupation. The tailor shop kept me busy. I was making overseas caps for the fellows from wool pants. According to the size of the pants, I could make four or five caps.

The fellow who furnished the pants got his cap free and I sold the others for \$4.50 each. I found a good supply of thin leather to use for the sweat bands. The demand for the caps was good. We were not receiving a good supply from the States at this time. Some groups had banned the overseas-type cap. Soldiers who didn't have a cap had to wear a helmet when they went out on the town. The helmets were cumbersome whereas a cap could be tucked under the belt when visiting their "frauleins" (girls). Fraternization was forbidden but was going on regardless.

June 17, 1945

The following article appeared June 15, 1945, in the armed services paper "Stars and Stripes":

VE Day has come and gone and what do we get? Guard duty every other day. When we don't stand guard we work, reveille and retreat. We are not allowed to ride horses or bikes for some much needed recreation. Not allowed to wear the overseas cap and a host of other chicken uniform regulations. Ten percent cut in rations which has a couple of fellows trying to get food from the Red Cross to supplement their rations. That story about a transportation shortage doesn't go, because if they can ride those Krauts around in army trucks they can ride GI's to France on leave. These guys are drinking buzz bomb juice because they can't get anything else and they are fraternizing for the same reason.

I think we did a pretty good job knocking hell out of the Fascist beast so how about the brass giving the guys who did the dirty work a break by cutting down on the guard, giving more passes and furloughs, better chow, and less chicken about riding bikes, etc.

Some good liquor and better PX rations and some cigarettes would help once in a while. Most important of all, let us in on what the future holds for us in order to stop the many rumors from going the rounds.

One of the forgotten men, 7th Armored Division

I don't know who wrote the letter, but in a crude way it expressed the frustrations of many GI's. I confess to my share of griping while in the army. I still suspected some of our shortages were created due to black market activities, but I couldn't prove it. (Years later it became known how greedy some had been with black market activities. Forty years later the war on hunger is being waged in Ethiopia. Reports state much of the food supplies sent to aid the starving people does not reach them. This is not just because of transportation problems but many of the supplies are being diverted to the black market, just as they were in WW II.

Has the lesson on greed been learned? Are people still profiting from tragic situations?)

AMERICAN ZONE OF OCCUPATION

July 14, 1945

We were in the territory which was to be a part of East Germany in the Russian zone of occupation. We had several men transferred to the Second Armored Division. Weeks later I would end up with the 1st Armored Division, 14th Armored Infantry Battalion occupation force. We had transferred to the small rural village of Leibenstadt, near Heilbronn, with a population of about 400 to 600 people. There was plenty of open land to regroup and park our armored equipment. It required two days to make the 300 mile southwest trip from Dessau to Leibenstadt. One way to relate the size of an armored division is that it required fifteen liberty ships to transport it overseas.

We opened our tailor and barber shop in the front room of a German home. We were not supposed to live in a house with civilians due to the fraternization rules. When a platoon selected a house, the civilians were moved out. However, only two of us were operating the shop and living in the same room, and on this basis, the family was allowed to stay in their house.

Families in the rural areas were living better than those in the cities. Many had been untouched physically by the war. However, this one family where we lived had a son killed in the war. There were three other children living in this household, and since they were no longer afraid of us, we showed them some attention and played with them. We were instructed by some leaders to treat the Germans as a conquered race, show them no kindness. Yet it was impossible for such behavior when you saw frightened and hungry children. They were the victims of war.

During the combat months I had expressed some fairly bitter and harsh remarks about Germans in my letters. The army had conditioned us to this state of mind in preparing us to fight and kill. However, after the war I found it difficult to harbor any ill will toward individuals who, like myself, had no control over war.

During the post-war occupation period, I made friends with several German civilians. They were a very proud people and for this I admired them. Their weakness was that they were easily led. Hitler and his leaders led them to their downfall.

I was also exposed to some contact with French, British, and Russian citizens as well as Germans. When I removed elements of politics, etc., and on a person-to-person basis, I admit my esteem was more toward the Germans. My personal opinion was not popular in 1945. (Forty years later I think history indicates more Americans would concur with my evaluation of the people from these various countries.)

There are good and bad characteristics in all nations and races. Greed is present to some extent in each. I am sorry to have to admit, that while I was in Europe, I saw it in ours also.

The sewing machine in the tailor shop belonged to the woman in whose home we were staying. (When I returned twenty-five years later, she showed me the same machine. The sofa and pictures on the wall were still as they appeared in the pictures taken in 1945.)

(Reflecting back, that was a strange situation in 1945. Two strangers living in a German home with people who had been our enemies in war, yet we felt very comfortable with the arrangement. Although we were the conquerors nothing out of the ordinary was expected from them, yet they seemed to want to make our days pleasant. The woman kept our room clean with fresh flowers, laundered our clothes and often did some baking for us. It is likened to the scripture in Ruth 2:10: "why should you be so kind to a foreigner?"

Returning in 1969, I drove right up to the house I had occupied in 1945. Tommie was a little doubtful I had relocated the right house in this remote and rural village. I had not been in contact with the family since 1945 and they did not know I was coming back. In fact, I was not sure I would even find them. The couple answered the door together and at first they seemed somewhat puzzled at the strangers, but then the lady recognized me. The husband immediately went to the cellar and returned with a dusty bottle of wine to celebrate the occasion. I was again made to feel welcome. I produced the pictures of their children they had given me in 1945.

When we returned in 1975, the lady had since died. I accompanied the husband to visit her grave. It was in a small, beautifully kept cemetery, within walking distance of their home, with many blooming flowers. There was space beside her grave for him to be buried which was not always the custom. Since this was a sparsely populated area there was adequate space for burial in this manner, rather than being buried in the same grave as was the requirement in crowded areas.

The daughter, whom I had given the first chocolate candy she had ever tasted

during my stay in 1945, was now living with her husband and child in an apartment upstairs over her parents. This is the custom often carried on in Europe, the home remaining in the same families for generations. As the parents die, the children begin the cycle of moving into that part of the house leaving the upstairs for their children, etc.

We were invited to spend the night in their home, but we had already made a reservation in a small Gasthaus (guest house) just a few yards away. In 1945 we had taken over the Gasthaus for our mess hall and kitchen.

When we checked in the Gasthaus after having dinner with this family, the owner wanted to know if I was one of the soldiers who had been there during the war. I said I was and she seemed quite friendly. This small village had escaped from the hordes of occupation troops and even today I imagine the village appears as it has for centuries in both looks and customs.

The cost of the large room with three beds and bath down the hall was \$8.00 including breakfast. As I remember we were the only guests spending the night there. However, the Wirtschaft (mess or pub) was quite busy with the locals enjoying their drinks.

We enjoyed the experience, but preferred more conveniences. The people were very friendly. This area had probably not seen too many Americans since the war.)

During the occupation period we were able to observe the German people and their different culture. The people in the rural villages went about their daily chores as usual. They were a very industrious group of people. They were, by nature, very conservative, and the war years had made them even more frugal since many items were scarce. I tried to learn from them. One day after we had closed up shop, I walked up on a hillside and sat under a shade tree watching the farmers work their fields. Many of their farm animals had been killed and the best horses had been taken for use by the army. It was not unusual to see milk cows being used to plow. I saw one farmer using a cow and a horse hitched together, another was plowing with oxen. A few farmers had small tractors. One sight, that was unusual, was a cow that a farmer had put shoes on. They were a determined people. In the bombed-out towns, it was very common to see women digging in the rubble, helping to rebuild their homes.

One of the things I never became accustomed to in Leibenstadt was the smell of the "Honey Carts". This was a wagon with a tank mounted on it which was used to haul liquid waste from houses and barns to be used in their fields as fertili-

zer. To be sure, you never wanted to be directly behind them on the road.

I never did understand how the European people got by without screens on their windows. They didn't seem to be bothered by flies like we were in Alabama.

While in Leibenstadt, we had a young Polish lad working in our mess hall. He had been liberated and wanted to stay with us. He became our mascot. He was better fed than he had ever been and saved some soldiers from KP (Kitchen Police) duty. He was very strict on the Germans and we had to watch him about that.

July 29, 1945

I went to Heilbronn to see a show the United Services Organization (USO) was putting on for the troops. Jack Benny, Ingrid Bergman, Larry Adler and Marth Tilton were the stars. It was very entertaining and I was looking forward to going back to other shows there. However, Heilbronn was put off-limits for us when some fellows from our battalion got drunk and started a fight, resulting in someone getting killed.

It was reported that the non-fraternization policy might soon be lifted. It wasn't very effective. Many German girls had been in to our medics saying they were pregnant by American soldiers.

Before condemning them, we should note a bill passed in California about that time known as the "Baby Bill". As it was originally drafted, it would have permitted a married mother of an illegitimate child to have the infant adopted by others without the knowledge or authority of a husband overseas. Protests by servicemen and the armed forces paper, "Stars and Stripes", resulted in the elimination of the secrecy provision of the state adoption bill. This was another tragic consequence of war.

The girl I referred to earlier, as being pulled from the Elbe River by my buddy, had become friends with him. He later told me they had fallen in love and planned to be married as soon as the non-fraternization rule was lifted. However, when we left Dessau he had to leave her behind. He told her where he was being sent and about two weeks later she arrived after traveling 300 miles on a bicycle. I don't know if they ever married.

Another fellow was dating a girl who had been the mistress of a Nazi officer. She was known in the village as "Machine Gun Gertie". This "fraulein" was rumored to be quite free with her favors to others in the machine gun squad and thus acquired

the nickname.

There were many problems with the fraternization of soldiers and civilians. One day a soldier came to my shop, looking down in the mouth. He had contacted a venereal disease. He had been given penicillin only to discover he was allergic to it. (On the black market, penicillin could bring \$400 for just a small amount.)

We were lectured by our medics about the consequences of such contacts, but much went unheeded. I remember during the doctor's talk someone in the back of the room was overheard making the remark, "Aw, that guy is just a horse doctor". The doctor instantly shot back, "Hell, I have to be to treat you bunch of jack asses". The doctor received a round of applause.

August 8, 1945

Out of a company of 134 men, there were only fifty-four left. Men with less than eighty-five points were being shipped home and I expected to be leaving soon. (The "point system" was established to keep track of the soldiers with the most combat time. Points were given for months of service, combat campaigns, etc., thus the senior soldiers had more points.) We had turned in our half-tracks and tanks.

August 13, 1945

By now only twenty-one men were left in the company and it was getting a bit lonely. I sent Carol an overseas cap I made for her as a souvenir of the tailor shop. (She still has it, forty years later.) The shop had been good therapy during the transition period from combat to occupation duty and would be closed soon. I had been living more like a civilian than a soldier.

August 15, 1945

The war with Japan had ended. We were all thankful that the world was at peace again. My buddy has really been celebrating that war's end, since he had been scheduled to be shipped to the Pacific. With a little bit too much to drink, he threw an empty bottle through the window before I could stop him. He was quite rowdy and I thought I might have to put him to sleep (with my fist). This was the first time I had seen him drunk, but he had a good reason for celebrating.

NEW CLASSIFICATION AND PROMOTION

August 22, 1945

I was transferred to the Battalion Headquarters Communications Sector. This led to a promotion from Private First Class to Technical Sergeant.

There was a shortage of qualified personnel due to transfers, a captain, two sergeants and a corporal had shipped out of this section. Based on my civilian background with an electrical utility, I was selected. We were located in Sennfeld, I had a jeep and driver. Two fellows and I tried to catch up the slack as best we could. Four additional men soon joined as switchboard operators.

September 4, 1945

Our battalion headquarters was in the home of a local wine merchant. Due to a case of trouble near Leibenstadt, I was able to stop and see the family I had stayed with. They gave me a sack of apples and tomatoes.

September 7, 1945

A new ruling stated that a soldier will only be allowed to carry one captured enemy pistol home with him. I gave my extra ones to fellows who didn't have one. Fortunately, I had mailed two German rifles home before the ruling.

September 14, 1945

I was transferred to the 1st Armored Division, 14th Armored Infantry Battalion with the same duties. We were assigned to a unit designated for occupation duty. We were located in battalion headquarters in Babenhausen, with the division headquarters in Darmstadt, about twenty-five miles away. With the streetcars back in operation in Babenhausen, we were hindered somewhat in stringing our communication wires. We were scheduled to move in October to a permanent location for occupation duty (Heidenheim). I visited Heidelberg, a university city, during this time. It was one of the larger cities left undamaged in the war. I stopped by our Seventh Army Headquarters and enjoyed talking to the ladies with the American Red Cross.

After the war, I encountered many ex-GI's who felt there were a number of Red Cross girls who had taken this overseas assignment as an adventurous lark,

spending too much of their time back in the officers' clubs.

One soldier complained for having to pay a nickel for a cookie to one of the Red Cross units which had moved into a rest area where he was in Italy. He said it wasn't the nickel he had to pay, but the principle of it. (There are WW II ex-combat GI's who will not, to this day, contribute to the Red Cross for reasons such as this and it is unfortunate.)

I also visited Mannheim, which had been heavily damaged. Leaving there, I took a wrong turn and ended up in Frankfurt, which was another interesting city. This turned out to be a beautiful drive and not too far out of the way. During my tour of occupation duty, I made quite a few wrong turns, thereby getting a chance to see many scenic and historical areas.

September 27, 1945

I took a jeep down to southern Germany with an advanced scouting expedition, to the area we would occupy. This was about a 450 mile round trip, a large part of it on Hitler's autobahn. I took another "wrong turn" and wound up in Ulm on the Donau River (Blue Danube). There was quite extensive damage in this town with the exception of a beautiful cathedral, the Muenster, which had the tallest steeple in the world (529 feet). The steeple was still erect, untouched by all the bombings. Some gave credit to this to Allied precision bombing. I give credit to a Higher Power.

The jeep I was using came up through Italy with the First Armored Division. It was pretty well shot-up with about fifteen or twenty bullet holes in it. It was the typical decked-out jeep with cartoon characters of "Sad Sack" drawn on it, with a mess kit in his hand, running for the chow line, named "Late for Chow".

October 1, 1945

I had an opportunity to get into the military government, utility section, which carried a Master Sergeant rank. However, I didn't think it would be wise to move since I believed I would only be there a few more months. I was now Battalion Communications Chief, which had been an interesting assignment and provided an opportunity to see the country.

The war experience, living so close to death at times, surely changes a person's values. The small things are more important. It was not my skills that survived the war. The Lord has been my Shepherd.

October 5, 1945

My driver and I were in Heidenheim in advance of the battalion move to our permanent headquarters. This was a beautiful town which escaped the bombings of the war. (I did not know until forty years later that a cousin had been with the troops who captured the town. He said it had been negotiated that if they would give the Germans a few hours time, they would withdraw, thus preventing damage to the town.)

Heidenheim was the birthplace of German Field Marshal Rommel. The Chamber of Commerce was established there in 1866. The area at one time had been sheep country, and centuries ago, had been occupied by heathens from whom the name Heidenheim was derived, translated it means "Home of the Heathens".

(Upon visiting Heidenheim in 1969, I met a German I had not known in 1945 there. He was not very friendly toward me then, but in 1975 when we were there we visited in his home, and he told me why he had been distant when we first met. American soldiers had raped and murdered his mother. He was just a small boy at the time, but the memory still haunted him.

Another German I first met on my visit in 1969 was a few years younger than I. He told me of his life as a member of the Hitler Youth.

Several German civilians I knew in 1945 have died. One of the customs there is to send death announcements with envelopes edged in black. We have received a few of these. I spent many hours at a beautiful thirteenth century castle overlooking Heidenheim. There was a factory complex there that manufactured one-third of the 88 mm cannons the Germans used in the war. I could not help but wonder why the factory had not been bombed.)

The Twelfth Armored Division, presently occupying the town of Heidenheim, had their shipping date delayed ten days. This also delayed our move.

The driver and I were staying in a small German hotel in Heidenheim, Hotel Ochsen (Oxen). (My wife and I stayed in this hotel in 1969. Plans were underway to tear it down to make room for a Volksbank (Peoples' Bank).)

During this time we were doing preliminary planning and work for our move. We also were scouting out living quarters we would occupy. Later we moved to the Officer's Club, which was in a small twenty-four room hotel. The German civilian telephone building was a four-story unit with living quarters on the top floor. We eventually took this building over and put our office on the second floor. Both military and civilian telephones would operate from this building. This permitted us to live in a civilian, rather than military, atmosphere.

The Twelfth Armored Division which had occupied the town before us were still using army field telephones. We utilized the civilian telephone workers, building and equipment. We were able to have a more efficient system and it helped their economy.

The natives said we could expect snow as deep as six feet and temperatures as low as twenty degrees below zero. We were preparing for a cold winter. My feet had been hurting some since the weather had turned colder and I was going to need a heater at times for a foot warmer. We found some electric heaters in a German store but a permit was needed to purchase one. It was amazing what a carton of cigarettes could do.

The Twelfth Armored Division was delayed once again on shipping out for the States, which we understood was due to a strike back in the States. We continued to prepare for our move.

We found out about ten o'clock one morning that one of the Germans working in the exchange was a Nazi. After consulting with the military government, we ordered him to be out of the building by noon.

October 10, 1945

I was back in Babenhausen, having driven over 1600 miles over the past two weeks. Most of our equipment was ready in Heidenheim for our group. Our "A" Company would be in Ulm, "B" Company in Obersoden, and "C" Company in Schwaebisch Gmuend. We would be leaving the next morning for Heidenheim, stopping in Stuttgart for lunch.

October 17, 1945

The Twelfth Armored Division was delayed enroute home once more, due to the strike in the States. They were a month behind schedule. Our headquarters had to move from Babenhausen so we moved to Crailsheim. I received orders to set up communications there. I drove 550 miles on trips to Ulm, Schwaebisch Gmuend, Aalen and Goeppingen installing circuits in the various telephone exchanges.

October 21, 1945

My driver and I were staying in Blaufelden, a small rural town in an out-of-the-way place, about sixty miles from Heidenheim. We enjoyed staying in this type of village, off the beaten path. As far as I knew, we were the only Americans in a town of Germans, including ex-soldiers, and it was kind of spooky and

lonesome. The only weapon we had was a pistol. The nearest mess hall was in a town eight miles away, and we went there for our meals.

One of the interesting things in the rural areas was the way the buildings were clustered together. The houses had barns attached and the waste from the barns was piled in front by the street. I understood what Dad meant when he said while he was in Europe during WW I, he could always tell the wealth of the farmer by the size of the manure piled up in front of the house.

October 22, 1945

My driver and I finally learned where our mail was. We were told by headquarters one night about eleven o'clock that our mail had been sent to Heidenheim in error. We decided to go after it. It was a foggy night and we didn't get there until 1:00 AM, but we opened letters and packages before going to bed in Heidenheim. We got up at seven o'clock the next morning to return to Blaufelden. That just goes to show "mail call" is one of the most important events in the life of a soldier. This has been true for centuries, world wide. All old soldiers understand this, also Social Security recipients.

Our crew now consisted of two code clerks, two message center clerks, three radio operators, four switchboard operators and three linemen. We gradually increased the personnel even though still shy a few.

Many "high point" men were shipping out to return home and it made it difficult to stay fully staffed. We were considering supplementing with German civilians. I now had fifty-one points, but still didn't know how long I would be there.

October 27, 1945

I was busy compiling a telephone traffic diagram for distribution to our companies, indicating how calls could be routed.

October 31, 1945

We began to encounter sabotage on some of our lines. Of course, we suspected the Germans, who were familiar with telephone circuits. They were very clever in breaking the circuits without detection as to location.

We began ringing the circuits on a regular time interval and patrolling the lines. Later, our "B" Company conducted a surprise raid on the town and a suspect was taken to the military government headquarters for questioning.

We managed to obtain Coca-Colas, wine and cider for our group. We were beginning to be able to get passes and the fellows from our section would go in pairs, in order not to be short of personnel. I loaned one fellow \$50.00 so he would have enough to go to Paris. After we move and settle in permanently at Heidenheim, I plan to put in for a pass to Switzerland, I prefer it to France.

HEIDENHEIM AT LAST

November 10, 1945

We were finally settled in Heidenheim.. It began snowing and we expected to get the cold weather the natives had warned us about.

Our conditions in the building were good, with steam heat. It was nice to go from the office on the second floor, to the apartment on the fourth. We were able to use a large German bath house and also an indoor swimming pool close by. I found a German in town who said he could enclose our jeep for us. He did a good job installing top, sides, doors and windows. It improved the comfort conditions on our trips.

November 16, 1945

We took part in a black market raid in Ulm. We got up at 5:00 AM, my mission was to carry three men and take over the telephone exchange in Ulm. One of the men was the German telephone supervisor. We had to freeze the automatic phone dial system to prevent the people from calling and warning others in town that American soldiers were searching houses and buildings. Three battalions took part in the raid which lasted over eight hours. The population of Ulm was about 65,000.

November 19, 1945

I was called into Combat Command "B" Headquarters and informed I was to be in charge of their communications system. I had the authority to operate not only our battalion but also Combat Command "B" which commanded four battalions. Our communication officer had shipped out and Combat Command "B"'s was leaving in a few days.

November 26, 1945

I was up at 4:30 AM to go to Geislingen to take over the telephone exchange while our troops were conducting another raid on black market activities, which had been increasing. The division was getting 500 new troops from the States. Maybe there would be a replacement for me.

My base pay was now \$114, plus 20% overseas pay of 22.80, an additional

\$10 for combat pay, plus family allotment of \$80, for a total of \$226.80.

November 28, 1945

Frequently problems would crop up. Our front-wheel drive civilian car broke down, then our jeep. We needed fuel for the building, gasoline for the civilian vehicles, etc. About thirty civilians were now working in the exchange in addition to our people, operating both military and civilian switchboards. Emphasis was placed on switchboard courtesy, neat personal appearance and good house-keeping in our work and living quarters.

We were commended on our communications system. We had a smooth operation section, with much of the credit due to the German supervisor of the telephone exchange who was working with us.

We had a couple of men from the 141st Signal Company assigned to us that were just not working out. We finally had to transfer them out, but not before giving them an opportunity to shape up.

I regretted having to return these guys to their units. Both were combat veterans, waiting to be shipped home. They thought they were still due the spoils of war and resented conforming. It was not right for these two men to spoil it for the others. Later, after they returned to their unit, I received a call from their commanding officer, who attempted to give me the typical old army chewing-out for shipping his men back. He was going to return them to us. I explained why we did not want them and stood firm on my position. We did not take them back.

The only other unpleasant altercation I can recall while in the army was with a first lieutenant. He was on an ego trip, bucking for promotion. The dispute led to the involvement of a colonel and a captain. With three officers, and me an enlisted man, I did not give myself much of a chance. In the end, they decided I was in the right and the captain went so far as to say should I have further trouble of this type with the lieutenant, I had his permission to ask the lieutenant to remove his bars and settle it between us. This did not become necessary. Later the lieutenant was relieved of his command and transferred.

The German supervisor of the telephone exchange and I had become friends. He was a Christian and a good family man. I often told him that I hoped to return to Germany some day and that if I did, I would certainly look him up. (I did return in 1969 and visited in his home. Later he wrote me the following letter:

Dear Friend Thompson,

When you came to Heidenheim 24 years ago I immediately felt close to you. Your sincere character taught me trust and in the past I have much thought back to the hard times we experienced when I found a dear friend in you. Perhaps and with God's help we might see each other again.

Here was a German who was not a politician, nor professional soldier. He was a layman who during the war was fearful of what the future held for his family. He died before we returned in 1975. I visited his widow, daughter and son-in-law, and they wanted me to see where he was buried. The son-in-law was from Dessau, the town I had occupied. He had been a POW in England and learned to speak English well. At the site where my friend was buried I noticed there was no space for his widow. The son-in-law explained it was due to limited space in the cemetery. The spouse who dies first is buried deep enough to allow for the surviving spouse to be buried above them. Because of space limitation, bodies are often cremated.

It makes me realize how customs are changing in America. I read of the possibilities of being cremated and the ashes placed in a reflective capsule to be launched in space. As it orbits overhead, it will reflect light. The estimated cost is \$3,900.)

December 5, 1945

I had plans to leave on the eleventh for a week in Switzerland. This would be the first leave that I would have taken. The trip would cost approximately \$80. I planned to go to Karlsruhe by bus and from there by train. I was really looking forward to it. Many soldiers would take extra army wool clothing to Switzerland to sell on the black market there to obtain money above the allotted amount allowed to be carried in.

I helped the telephone supervisor obtain some material for him to build a battery operated merry-go-round for his children for Christmas. It would be a bleak Christmas for many of the people throughout Europe, but much improved over the past few.

December 21, 1945

I was happy to read in the paper that the "point score" would be lowered to fifty at the end of the month. I would qualify to be shipped home. Since I had fifty-one points it shouldn't be many months before I would be back home.

I had a wonderful week in Switzerland. I traveled to several of the cities, including Basel, Lucerne, Berne, Lausanne and Geneva. It was interesting riding on their extremely punctual trains. You soon learned to be in the station at departure time. Luckily my Dad had taught me that it was better to be an hour early than a minute late. I had no problem.

I believe the engineer sat in the cab with his hand on the throttle and his eye on the huge clock in the station. As soon as the large minute hand struck the departure time, we left the station. If you were not there on time, you were left waiting for the next train. Fortunately, the trains seemed to be running quite frequently between cities, through the beautiful areas of this small country. After traveling through so many destroyed towns, it was a treat to visit this unblemished peaceful country. The food was plentiful and excellent with all the delicious ice cream, pastries and Swiss chocolates a person could want. The hotel accommodations were adequate and the service good. One particular hotel we enjoyed was the Hotel DeLaPaix in Lausanne.

Back in Heidenheim we were beginning to use Germans to operate our military switchboard on a trial basis. This would relieve the shortage of military personnel created by so many being shipped home.

I just wished I had a few more "points" so I could be shipped out to the States, but guess the "point system" was only fair. I got a later start in the army than most. I felt like I had made up for lost time, though.

(Years later I can better understand delays in getting us home. The plan had called for 9,000,000 Americans to be demobilized between June 1945 and June 1946. One report stated there had been 12,000,000 in the military in WW II. This number included career personnel. A slow return was necessary. Large numbers were needed for the Army of Occupation, and the physical logistics of transportation. Besides, what would happen to the economy by dumping so many men on the job market? Many home front assembly line workers feared for their jobs. Many of the civilian work force were women. Articles appeared in magazines with titles like, "What you can do to help the returning veteran?" Numerous women did not want to give up jobs to return to keeping house, raising children, etc. Just my opinion, but this may have been, in part, the beginning of the women's movement as we know it today.

Out of the 9,000,000 veterans to be discharged, very few had ever put their lives on the line and fewer still had heard a shot fired seriously. There was probably a lot of money passed under the table, so what if a few tens of thousands

got home earlier than they should have. Who was going to worry about it, except the men whom they had got themselves squeezed in front of. Among such huge numbers of veterans, which political leaders would listen to such a small number of voices representing combat GI's?

During WW II morals of the nation appeared to be swiftly undergoing a change. For instance, one article I read stated that at least half of the women who used to visit the drinking parties in the suites of the Peabody Hotel in Memphis were defense plant workers. The person writing this article stated he often shuddered to think what their trembling fingers might do the next day to some piece of armament destined for some poor "dogface" on the battlefield. He went on to relate a friend of his had pulled the pin on a hand grenade and it exploded before the normal interval of time, resulting in severe damage to his hand. After recovering from surgery the friend jokingly said he was going back and lay as many of the girls in that plant as he could, just to get even.

WW II was probably a contributing factor to the increase of inter-racial marriages. A large number of Negro troops were assigned to supply and transportation units. They were often utilized to drive supply trucks such as "The Red Ball Express", hauling supplies from ports and depots to distribution centers. This was a vital and dangerous mission, being exposed to shelling and strafing attacks, even though it might be in the rear areas. There were Negro combat troops who served well. This was during segregation and the number of Negroes in combat units was limited.

Being in the rear areas and probably able to obtain the popular PX items, i.e., cigarettes, gum, candy and soap, they became popular with a number of European women. The women, not having been around Negroes, were curious. It was humorously reported that the Negro soldier explained to the girls that they were "night fighters".

December 25, 1945

This was my second Christmas away from home. It's sad to be separated from family at any time, but to be in a foreign country so torn up by war made it even worse. I realized though how much I had to be thankful for and to look forward to. I started singing "I'll be home for Christmas - 1946".

I went over to the home of the telephone supervisor and carried presents and a large bottle of wine. It was good to be with a family group. I will always remember how former enemies shared this Christmas.

January 5, 1946

Recently we had a sniper take a shot at one of our jeeps, narrowly missing the driver. We are keeping guns on the jeeps now. There are a few still out there who do not want to give up.

January 8, 1946

Received a call from a battalion S-1 Officer asking if I would be interested in a field commission. There was a shortage of communications officers in the European Theater of Operations. The army was considering Non-Commissioned Officers for commission and they wanted to submit my name.

After learning it would require my staying overseas longer, it didn't take long to make a decision. I had a family and a job waiting. Also, I did not consider myself as material for a military career.

I had criss-crossed Germany from the Ruhr to the Elbe rivers and from north to south from the Baltic Sea to the Alps. I was ready for home.

Tommie had written that when her mother asked Carol what her Daddy had sent her for Christmas, she replied, "a hundred dollars to buy Coca-Cola's". (Incidentally, Coca-Cola's were very scarce at the time.) In addition to presents I had sent \$100 for Christmas and Tommie used it to purchase four place settings of Wallace Rose Point silver (instead of Cokes). She never did receive any overseas silver from me in WW II.

January 18, 1946

The status on redeployment was that men with over fifty "points" could expect to leave the European Theater of Operations by mid March.

We had a water pipe burst in the basement, flooding it and putting out the fire in the furnace. We called on the German fire department to send over a truck to pump out the basement so repairs could be made.

We had problems with the payroll for the Germans working on our military switchboard. It had been agreed that they were to receive their pay from city hall (Rathaus). They went there to get their money, only to be told to come back later. This was the second trip. Finally, I went down and talked to the town treasurer and was able to get the matter resolved. (When I visited Heidenheim in 1969, this treasurer had retired, but I did get to visit with him. He accompanied me on a tour of the old city hall and other parts of town. Later, on our 1975 visit, a beautiful modern city hall had been built. While on a tour of the new

facility we received gifts and a book about Heidenheim. There was an ex-German soldier with only one arm working in city hall and he remembered me from 1945. He said he had delivered things to me at the telephone building. (This building has been torn down.) Later one night, while Tommie and I were out walking we met up with this guy and his wife. We were treated kindly by many German families and visited in their homes and offices. We were taken on trips to surrounding countrysides, out of the way places we would never have found. These are some of the riches I reaped from having been there in WW II.

In one German home I happened to mention to the family that we planned to visit in the area of Dessau, in the Russian zone. The host who was an ex-soldier seemed surprised and asked why. After telling him I had occupied the area in 1945, he went on to explain Dessau was his former home. He fought on the eastern front against the Russians. He lost a leg and had a long facial scar, the results of the war. He advised against our making the trip. He had been back once to try to retrieve family property but did not want to risk returning. Later while we were in the area I almost wished we had heeded his advice. This man had returned from the war and became an orthopedic surgeon. He appeared to me to be a very compassionate person. I first met him in 1969.

In 1975 we had been invited to stay in the home of German friends, but we made the Ottilienhof Hotel our headquarters for the week we stayed in that area. The owners were extremely accommodating. They said they had not had anyone stay there who received as many calls and messages. Friends would come to pick us up and return us to the hotel. We enjoyed the German cuisine and it was especially good at this small hotel.)

January 24, 1946

Our new telephone directories were delivered from the German printers and ready to be distributed on the first of February.

February 5, 1946

I was transferred to a unit in Ludwigsburg, preparing to return to the States. While there, they came up with an exercise to occupy our time. There was a German SS troop POW camp nearby and we were to demonstrate what we would do to contain the prisoners, should they attempt an escape. We did the exercise in a downpour of rain and a field of mud. The unit I had been transferred to was over-strength, so being a lower "point" man I had to ship out to another unit.

February 13, 1946

I was transferred to a fifty-one "point" unit which had a readiness date of February sixteenth. They were then in a staging area near Ellwangen, Germany.

February 21, 1946

I joined a new group in Ellwangen. Due to bad weather conditions and delays in shipping, we were delayed seven to ten days. It doesn't take long to become accustomed to disappointments, having had a couple of false starts home earlier. We would go to the port in Antwerp, Belgium and sail from there.

Everything was covered with snow.

SHIPPING HOME

March 12, 1946

Left Antwerp on the S.S. Aiken, an American liberty ship. A great improvement on both food and ship compared to the one we came over on.

March 19, 1946

Arrived in the States. Returning was a much faster trip than going over.

March 23, 1946

I was separated from the service at Fort McPherson, Georgia, and I mean a complete separation. We were given the re-enlistment pitch, but I was not buying. No way!

I was so anxious to get home that I didn't wait on a bus or train to Birmingham. Three of us hired a car to carry us to the bus station in Birmingham. Upon arrival at the bus station, we learned that a bus was scheduled to leave shortly. I called my family to meet me in Calera, Alabama.

The bus left on schedule, but broke down in Pelham. I could not believe this was happening to me. The driver did not know how long we would be detained for repairs. I had no way to get in touch with my family to tell them, since they had already left to meet me in Calera. I called a taxi in Alabaster to pick me up and take me to Calera. Although late, I was finally re-united with my family that night. Later, I reassured my family that I had been a good soldier. The army in all its generosity had awarded me a good conduct medal.

EPILOGUE

Forty years after the war I still have faith in God, family, country and our free enterprise system. I remain optimistic about the future. I continue to complain about certain situations, just as in my army days. I appreciate and cherish the freedom which allows me this privilege. I trust our young people will prepare themselves to be good citizens and work to obtain adequate standards of living for themselves and their families. Take time to enjoy life, avoid some of the stress and "practice humanity". Don't become greedy.

I am concerned over certain trends in our country. We have many dedicated and moral people of all races and ages. There appears to be still too many who are greedy, just as I observed forty years ago.

There continues to be too many ego mania, war-for-profit type generals, political leaders, industrialists and others in various countries of the world, including our own. It will be the GI's who will do the dirty work, fight wars for them, then return home to be taxed to pay the war debts. Many who reap the profits will be protected by tax shelters.

We tend to forget events only too soon, allow greed to raise its ugly head time and time again. Greed may be the enemy from within which could cripple or even destroy a country. Drugs are a horrible example of this, as we note pushers becoming wealthy while so many lives end tragically.

I wanted to buy a new car after I was discharged from the army. While shopping around for one, I found that the dealers just added my name to a waiting list. Later I began to get the message. There were price controls and to obtain prompt delivery, it was sometimes necessary to pass money under the table. I purchased a used car from an individual instead.

Almost forty years later the automobile industry was crying foul on foreign imports, urging people to "Buy American". They lobbied for restrictions on imports and were successful. Then what did they do? Raised prices and charged their fellow Americans hundreds of dollars more. Now there were no government price controls, only suggested list prices, so it was not necessary for payment under the table. It was being done legally this time. Greed! Is this the American way? Manipulated supply and demand? In my opinion this is not what our forefathers had in mind for our free enterprise system when they drafted the


Constitution. Many people could easily pay the higher prices, often by use of legal tax shelters. The citizen who could not began to resist by driving his car longer.

I do not wish to appear cynical, my point is, we appear to be a nation where "money talks". It is happening far too often in our society. This seems to be a weakness of many Americans I have observed in my lifetime. It is certainly all right to have money - it's the American dream - earn it the old-fashioned way, work for it, but do not be obsessed by it.

I abhor waste in our government and greed in many of our professionals. Our government has to be supported by taxes. I consider those who dodge taxes in the same category as those who dodge the draft. I think it is of the utmost importance that we have a more equitable tax system. I believe this is one of the great challenges facing our young people today, to devise a system that considers moral and ethical aspects as well as legal.

V-mail used in WW II. I sent very few of these. I preferred the conventional letters.

EXHIBIT

 (CENSOR'S STAMP) SEE INSTRUCTION NO. 2	Mr. & Mrs. J. F. Thompson Box 215 COLUMBIA, ALABAMA U.S.A.	Mr. & Mrs. J. F. Thompson 15470 15470 15470
	(Sender's complete address above)	

Dear Ed,


Has come rough traveling since I landed in France. I made two days right to see the Battle of Verdun. But I know what they are. Cracks in the air & floor. I am soon to even lay down. We had even stop in England or France. They are really making us up without more training. I'm going to know again any day, but I'm staying in an old school house & sleeping on straw now, but some of the fellows are in bunks. I don't pretend to this weather here. I'm sure I should be in the action now. I don't look like I'll have much time for anything. I have a cloth in a bag of chocolate burning near to ready. We're getting pretty well mounted. We get 1 ply of eq. - 1 candy bar, 1 piece of gum ration a day. There is no such things as 1 or 2 hours around here. Come to let me know where I am in case I don't get my letter. I told him to let you know I don't know when I'll get my mail, but not too long I hope. The country, houses, and people are interesting. It's so different from things back home. I've seen black & black of buildings completely destroyed over here. I'm thankful it's not that way back home. Help me get that it will soon be over & all the boys & myself will get back home. I'll have to stop now and let you know again soon as possible.

Love of Love,
Ed

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?

V-MAIL

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?

 (CENSOR'S STAMP)	To Mr. & Mrs. J. F. Thompson Box 215 COLUMBIA, ALA. U.S.A.	From Mr. & Mrs. J. F. Thompson 15470 15470 15470
(Sender's complete address above)		

February 12, 1945

Dear Ed,

Well my mail is finally catching up with me, and I'm glad. I really hope to get these letters from home, I've gotten 11 from you & I'm sure that this week, and I got one from you & one from Tom, a couple of days ago. That's pretty good service, I just hope it keeps up to. I don't see as yet as possible unless I'm very busy, although I wish I could, but I'm more around in good luck sometimes, and you can't write from a gas hole, I mean, a quill, so well. I spent a night recently in a barn with 15 cows, 3 horses, 3 sheep, and 7 dogs, and then I slept in a circle of a straw up house with a dead Jerry laying right outside the door, but that's better than a gas hole in this weather, and I know you & I spend your nights in one and get some pretty good sleep, they are really some for a couple of weeks but they're a lot better now.

I hope that Ed is getting along alright now, in case and I'll be sure you see it.

I don't get the packages yet that I'm sure sent me, but I guess it'll eventually show up. I hope so anyway. I sent her the packages of souvenirs, I said I would to help. I hope you get to go up there soon to see them. I know Carol is getting up good now, Tom wrote me about her I was, and she said she could sing the song about the bunny with the hole in her stocking. I really wish I could be there watching her grow up. Well I'll have to stop for now and let you know when I can. I can write very much unless I'm now, but I'm getting very busy.

Love of Love,
Ed

V-MAIL

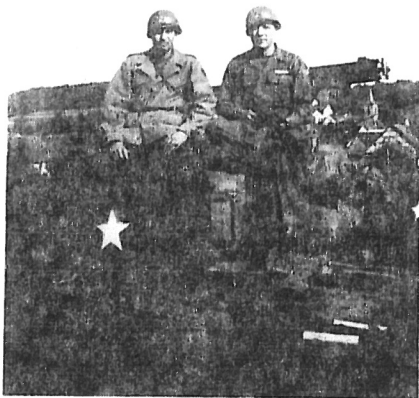
AUTOBAHN IN GERMANY 1945



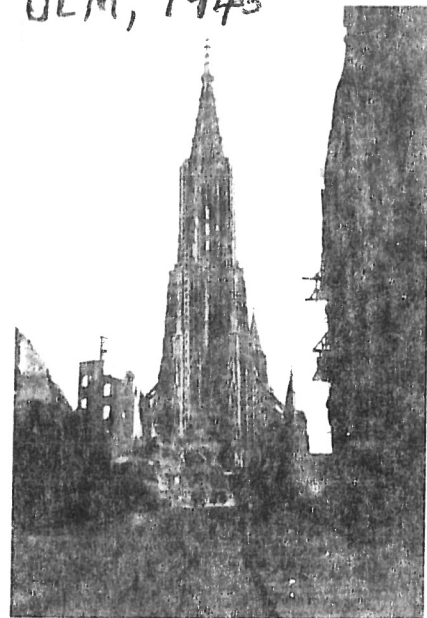
HAMBURG TO
OSTERFELD

WHERE SHELL HIT HALF-TRACK-FAILED TO EXPLODE

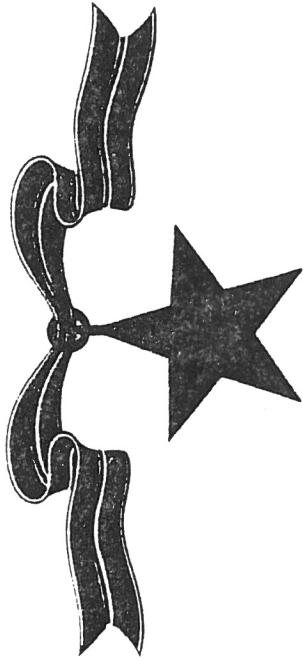
LIEBENSTADT, GER, 1945



ULM, 1945



IN CASTLE YARD-HEIDENHEIM
1945 " JEEP "



THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING: THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE PRESIDENT
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AUTHORIZED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER, 24 AUGUST 1962 HAS AWARDED

THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL

TO

TECHNICAL SERGEANT JAMES E. THOMPSON, UNITED STATES ARMY

FOR

meritorious achievement in ground combat against the armed
enemy during World War II in the European-African-Middle
Eastern Theater of Operations

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON
THIS 5th DAY OF September 19 84

Leah Spence
The Adjutant General



James D. Marshall, Jr.
SECRETARY OF THE ARMY

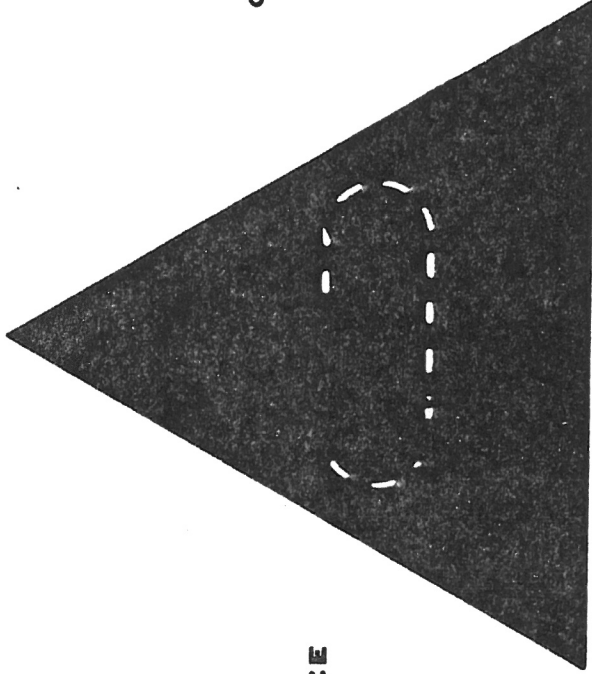
SEVENTH ARMORED DIVISION ASSOCIATION

CAMPAIGNS...

- ★ NORTHERN FRANCE
- ★ RHINELAND

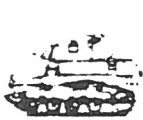
CAMPAIGNS...

- ★ ARDENNES-ALSACE
- ★ CENTRAL EUROPE



*This is to certify that J. ED THOMPSON
served with the Seventh Armored Division as a member
of the HEADQUARTERS 38th A.I.E. and is a member of
the Seventh Armored Division Association.*

Glen R. Fackler



"From The Beaches to The Baltic"

Seventh Armored Division Association

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Belgian Fourragere



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28 May 1985

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J. Ed Thompson (HQ/38)
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Treasurer

JOHNNIE WALKER
3 Adelaide Place
Denville, NJ 07834

Dear Ed,

Judge Advocate

BEN R. FREEMAN
Box 252
Greenville, GA 30222

The "memoirs" you sent to Glenn Fackler were forwarded to me-----as Memorialization Chairman, Glenn sends me all related papers such as you wrote. I maintain a file and eventually when we are no longer a viable organization they will be offered to the Historical Archives kept at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

Chaplain

REV. JOHN W. CERMAK
Box 112 North Shore Dr.
Northport, MI 49670

Such papers as I have are of great value to me in doing my job as Memorialization Chairman.

Editor—Workshop News

WM. E. (GENE) JONES
Rt 2 Box 284
Ronda, NC 28670

The delay in response to your "write-up" is because I have been indisposed since the 30th of April. I took sick on that day and was admitted as an emergency patient to the hospital on the 4th of May, and operated on for a blocked intestine on the 6th. Things did not go too well for me, and I burst the incision as soon as the surgical clips were removed. In any event I am now home a week, the wound has to be irrigated and repacked three times a day but as you can see I am up to sitting and typing a letter.

Honorary President

Major General
ROBERT W. HASBROUCK

Honorary President

General
WILLIAM A. KNOWLTON

I am not up to leaving the house, and really need a new ribbon for this typewriter-----but I felt that if I can type with a hole in my belly you would overlook the poor results of the holes in the ribbon.

Your memoirs are quite interesting, I note that you joined the 32nd AIF for the retaking of St. Vith. The 32nd had taken a very bad

(2)

In 1980 I was part of the Seventh Armored Division Association group that dedicated our monument at Fort Benning. Leland Harrison, who lost an arm serving with C/38 uncovered our Monument. After I had made the dedication speech, Major General David Grange, commandant of Fort Benning, made the speech of acceptance-during which he said that as a private of Airborne Infantry I had been in the Seventh Armored halftracks that made the attack to retake St. Vith. He also stated he knew he was with a first class fighting outfit in that action. He may have been one of those that helped get you off that hill.

I have many friend in the 38th,-during the War I was a Truck Platoon Leader and seldom got to the Line of Departure, but I did run that zone between the Division Trains and the Service Companies of the Tank, Infantry and Artillery Battalions---consequently those 38th friends I have made since the War. On a few occasions I did get where some of them recalled seeing a QM Truck Lt such as the crossing of the Seine, the fight at Chartres, taking the walkin wounded out of Vielsalm on the night of the 22nd December, and hauling those thousands of POW out of the Ruhr Pocket---the town of Brilon is etched in my mind as being the place I fell over from exhaustion.

More poignantly for me concerning the 38th-is the fact that the only other Seventh Armored man in Scranton was Pat Flaherty C/38. We had become good friends since we had met at a reunion shortly after the War, he would often drop in our house unannounced-and we would have a drink and talk of mutual friends. I had told Arlene, my wife, should anything happen to me I wanted one of my pall bearers to be a Seventh Armored man, and Pat Flaherty by preference.

Pat was in my home the night before I went into the hospital, as usual offered to do anything he could for me---he died in his sleep the morning of the 7th of May. I have yet to be able to see his sister with whom he lived, but as soon as I am able-I will.

Should you get to the Cincinnati Reunion please make yourself known to me, I should like you to meet Carl Mattocks who was HQ Company Commander of the 38th when you joined the Division---Carl was wounded at Wallerode-just outside St. Vith-just about the time you joined. He was in the group with us that dedicated the TANK at Vielsalm last September.

Your mention of Schmidt and the Roer River Dams brings back memories of moving into the town of Steckenborn in the black of night and waking up to find the place littered with hundreds of box mines---how we had missed them I will never understand. Also remember going up to those big houses on the Rhine with trucks filled with hay to get the bottles out of the wine cellars. Also found some nice sardines and tuna fish in cans, but the Military Government Officer made us give it back to the hungry civilians.

Your being a GI Barber reminded me that in our outfit we had a fellow by the name of Ned Mitchell who could cut our hair with professionalism---only no one knew how to cut his. He was the only man in the outfit with a bad hairdo.

Due to the point system, I had a protracted stay in Germany--finally coming home in February of 1946---85 points--came home with the 84th Infantry Division who had fought near the 7th Armored Division Trains in December 1944. I would not take off my Seventh Armored Patch, though I was assigned to a BN H I got away with it. Apparently the BN CO respected my pride in the 7th.

I enjoyed all of your "Memoirs"----they relate to fact, and aside from fixing precise dates I could not offer anything that would be an improvement

I believe your written word says much about you----it is my belief that those you wrote it for will remember it for two things, the events you went through during the War----and second, the revelation it makes about the character of the author.

You are a decent person and I understate the fact. Should it be possible for me to choose my friends, a person of your make-up would place you at the top of my list. If you did become my friend I would consider myself a very fortunate person-----I know that without prejudice, the one who knows you best, your wife-would agree.

With Sincerity---one who would be your friend.

Norm

Norman G. J. Jones

Note:

a copy of the Journal has also been placed in the following:

The Heritage Room at the City of Jasper Public Library in Jasper, Alabama

The Mildred Harrison Library in Columbiana, Alabama

The Shelby County Historical Society Museum in Columbiana, Alabama.

JEI