

My Army Days

Then came that horrible day December 7, 1941, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. I will never forget that day as long as I live. I was invited to dinner at a friend's house. This was a friend I had made while working on the railroad. We were just eating dinner on that Sunday noon when the radio had a special announcement from President Roosevelt that Japan had just bombed Pearl Harbor and that we had just declared war on Japan and Germany. I was a freshman at St. Thomas and would be turning eighteen in February 1942. By the time the school year was out they were already drafting eighteen year olds. I had gotten my notice that I was one A for the draft. My best high school friend was Rich Lahl. We knew we would be drafted soon so we went to the recruiting office to see about enlisting, because we both had plans of getting into the Army Band. The recruiter told us unless we were in a hurry to get in to wait to be drafted and we still could get into the band. We were in no hurry so we took his advice. So knowing it would not be long before I was drafted I did not register for my second year at St. Thomas. Instead I put in my application at the Chaska Sugar Factory. I got the job in the laboratory (the best job in the factory). My job was to test samples of the beet juices every hour to see the sugar content. It was a good seasonal job to earn some money before going into the army. The factory ran through December and by that time I had received my notice that my neighbors and friends had selected me to serve in one of the armed services. My induction was on February 20, 1943. In other words I had just turned nineteen. When the army gave me a questionnaire as to what I could do, my answer always came up "Play the drums." I should have listened to my Dad and told them about my meat and grocery experience but that was hind sight. I was bound and determined I was going to get into the army band. I reported to Ft. Snelling for my induction. They issued us uniforms and then sent us home for a week. I had to report back on February 27, 1943. They then loaded us up onto a troop train headed for Camp Campbell, Ky. The camp was located on the Kentucky-Tennessee border. This was a tank training center where we took our basic training for six months. It was very tough, but being with other guys of the same age going through the same experience kept you going. You paid attention to what they were telling you because they kept saying your life may depend on what you learn here. I still had hopes of getting into the band so I went for a tryout. I passed with flying colors and was told "Yes you will get into the band as soon as the cadre ships out and

you have completed your basic training". In the meantime they were giving me training as a radio operator. Then one night in August it was midnight or later when they woke us up and told us to get packed and that we were being shipped over seas as replacements. We boarded trains and headed for a debarkation center in Norfolk, Virginia. We were put on Liberty ships which were meant to carry cargo and not troops. They loaded us down with duffel bags that were so heavy we could hardly make it up the gang plank. They were just using us as pack rats to get the clothing overseas. We set sail in a large convoy of Liberty ships. It took us 22 days to arrive in Oran, Africa. The trip was terrible with ninety percent of the guys seasick. We were stuck down in the hole of the ship where they had put bunks five high. The guys were throwing up all over the place. The odor was so bad you could hardly stand it. I could not take the smell so I took my blanket and found myself a place inside a lifeboat up on main deck. The sea was very rough, so it was a very long twenty two days before we landed in Oran. We were very happy to see land again. It was not a picnic living in a pup tent in the sands of North Africa. When it was chow time you stood out in the wind trying to eat food that would have a layer of sand over it. They had us do some training but pretty much of the time we were free to lay around. One day I was lying in my pup tent when I heard a voice saying, " Does anyone know a guy by the name of Dietz here"? I jumped up to find it was Pres Abel from Chaska. He was a year behind me in high school. We had a good visit and both agreed it was a small world. It wasn't too long before they told us to get ready we were going to ship out again. This time they loaded us on 40 & 8 box cars. This meant 40 men or 8 horses. They were regular box cars about one third the size of our box cars. After they got all the men loaded we took off ,headed for Bizerte, Africa. This was almost an inhumane trip. You just had enough room to sit on the floor of the box car. Three times a day when it was close to meal time the train would stop and they would come along and throw in C rations for 40 men. C rations consisted of 2 small cans, one with beef stew or corned beef hash and maybe one other choice plus a can with dry crackers, instant coffee and a couple pieces of candy. The trip lasted five days and nights. To that point it was the worst experience of my life. When we arrived in Bizerte they loaded us onto LCI (Landing Craft Infantry) ships and set sail for Naples Italy. Sea sick again. I don't recall how long it took to get to Naples. When we arrived in Naples we were sent to a large replacement depot. This is where they held GI's until they were needed on the front lines. I don't remember the month we arrived but I do know I spent Thanksgiving and Christmas in the replacement depot., because at Thanksgiving they served a pretty good turkey dinner and I

could not eat any of it because I had trench mouth. My mouth was one big sore inside. They say you get it from lack of vitamin C in your diet. The weather in Italy this time of the year is cold and rainy. So what did they do with us? They took us on fifteen and twenty mile hikes in the cold rain. "You had better get used to it," they would say, because when you get up on the front lines, there will be no escaping the weather. I'll never forget our first night in Naples. We were camping out in a large open area in large tents that held eight or ten guys. Well anyhow in the middle of the night the air raid sirens went off telling that an air raid was in the making. Those were the days when I slept like a rock, so I did not hear the siren. When I woke everyone had left the tent. I looked out to see the Germans had dropped flares to light up the ground in order to see where we were so they could bomb and strafe us. So I said the h--- with it, if I go out now I'll be a sitting duck. As it turned out they did not hit my tent, but I came to find out someone had stepped on my glasses and broken them beyond repair. So from then on I was without glasses during the war.

The American troops made the invasion of Anzio, Italy on the 22nd. of January 1944. The purpose of this invasion was to cut off German supply lines to their troops that were fighting at Mt. Cassino. It seemed no matter what we threw at the Krauts at Cassino we just could not shake them out. Well the invasion did not succeed in doing that because our troops came into Anzio almost unnoticed. But after a few days the Germans reinforced their lines with many more divisions and almost drove our troops back into the sea. After much hard fighting our troops regained a strip of land ten miles wide and seven miles deep. Very close to my birthday in 1944 my name was called to leave the repel depot and be shipped to the 601st. Tank Destroyer Battalion up at Anzio. Another boat ride from Naples to Nettuno. There I got on the back of a six by six truck. It was just me and one other G.I. It was already dark and the sky was lit up all around us from the muzzle blast of big guns. I was scared to death. I didn't know which were our guns and which were German. We got to the spot where they dropped me off. It was a big pile of rubble where a house once stood. There was an entrance to the basement which was the Company C headquarters where I was introduced to Captain Richardson. At the time I was chewing gum. My mouth must have been going at top speed. From that day forward Captain Richardson called me "gum chewing Dietz." He tried to calm me down some what and said he was putting me in a tank with one of his best tank commanders. It turned out to be Clyde Choate's tank. He had lots of combat experience, because he had been in it since Africa. I was to be the radio operator. Jay Shively was our driver and he

had joined the company just a few days earlier. I can't remember who the gunner and loader were. Anyhow we had a crew of five men. I guess I felt somewhat relieved to see how calm the other guys seemed. It did not take long to learn when a shell was going to be close or if it was going over us. The next morning when it was day light I got a look at the situation. There was not one building standing. They had all been destroyed by shelling. Behind each one of these piles of rubble we had one of our tank destroyers. The Germans were up in the mountains looking down on us at all times. We went out from behind the so called safety position to shoot off rounds at the enemy. They shelled us day and night and never let up. They had this big gun or cannon mounted on a railroad car in Rome. This had shells bigger than bombs and they would shoot this all the way from Rome at us. When these shells would be coming in it sounded like a freight train coming. We lived inside the tank day and night . We were a five man crew with the driver, radio operator, loader, gunner and tank commander. Talk about close quarters. The tank floor was steel with trap doors full of shells. We slept, ate, and went to the bathroom inside the tank. At night we laid blankets on the steel deck and slept with all our clothes on. The only way we could all fit was for us to have four guys at a time and alternate with your head next to one of the guys feet. The fifth man would be standing guard. We each had our turn for a two hour period. We had three guns on our tank. A 75MM ,a 50 caliber machine gun plus a 30 caliber machine gun. The tank destroyer weighed 30 tons. Can you imagine five guys living in this small space 24 hour a day for months at a time without taking a bath? We had a single burner coleman type burner on which we would heat a canteen of water for our lousy Nescafe and also to heat our C rations , such as beef stew or hash. Our C and K rations had a few hard crackers, Nescafe, a small chocolate bar and a four pack of cigarettes. If you were lucky in the K ration you might get a can of eggs with ham. This is what we ate three time a day. This went on for four months, coming out at night and firing our 75MM gun at the kraut. We had three kind of shells, high explosive, armor piercing and incinerator. The Germans held air raids on us day and night. At night they would drop flares so the area would light up as bright as day. Our planes would come out to fight them off. They also would drop propaganda leaflets showing Roosevelt saying "No 18 year old shall ever enter foreign soil". Also they would have some for the benefit of the married soldiers showing their wives in bed with the boss back home. They were trying to break our morale, but we used get a good laugh out of them. Then all day we just stayed under cover as the Germans shelled us all day long. The Germans shot tens of thousands of shells at us and there was never a dull moment.

I realize now that I should have written home more often than I did. I can imagine how the folks must have waited to hear from me while in combat. I'll bet they would go to the post office every day expecting to hear from me. I was told by the depot agent's son that he had to deliver the telegrams when I was wounded. The second time he delivered the message he said he had to keep my Mom from falling down the steps.

One thing that helped us stay sane was a gal named "propaganda Sal." We had made crystal sets out of shrapnel, some copper wire and a set of earphones. Propaganda Sal was a German gal who was on the radio playing all the popular American songs like "In the Mood" by Glen Miller. She played this music all day long and in between she would say "Boys why don't you give up and come over and have a nice bed to sleep in?" Nice clean sheets and good hot food." When some of our guys would go back to the so called rear area and have a soft ball game a few hours later Sal would tell which team won and give us the score. This meant that some of our guys were working for the Germans. Then came the time when the allies said it was time to make a break for Rome. So on May 23, 1944 all hell broke out. For two days and nights the Americans let go with a continuous barrage that was unbelievable. The entire sky was lit up with tracers from all the shells being fired. Also the airforce started pounding the Kraut with bombs. This went on around the clock. After all this shelling stopped we were off and running on our push for Rome. All the shelling did some good, the Kraut were in caves and underground fortresses. With the help of the doughboys we had to get out there to rout them out of their holes. The Kraut were in stone caves and underground fortresses. Everything was mined and booby-trapped. On the second day out our tank hit a tank mine and blew off our right track. When we hit the mine I was the radio operator and the only person in the tank that could not see where we were going. When the mine blew up oil and dirt blew up onto my face. Not knowing that, I thought that I had been hit and that my face was bleeding. I wiped my face to find it was not blood (Thank God) but oil. This put us out of business, so Clyde Choate the tank commander said "Dietz you and (can't remember his name) stay and guard the tank in case the Germans counter attack." He and the other two crew men were going back to headquarters and get a new tank and would come by and pick us up in a day or two. The first day and night we stayed inside of the tank for protection from small arms fire. After one day the front had moved up far enough that we thought it was safe to get out of the tank and look around the area. within a few yards of the tank was an old German trench next to what used to be a house but was nothing but a pile of rubble. The next

night we slept in the trench next to the former house. The next day my partner whose name I can not recall said "Lets go down into the basement and look around." I said "no way" the Germans may have it booby trapped. He got the bright idea to get some big rocks and roll them in that would set off the booby traps if there were some there. He went in, to look around and barely got part way in when he shouted out "Dietz come on in, there's a live Kraut in here". He was very young, maybe fourteen or fifteen and had both legs shot up. His medics must have bandaged him up and left him behind hoping we would find him and care for him. He was as white as a sheet because he was afraid we were going to kill him. He had a rifle and grenades and food . He pulled himself up and out of the so called basement, so he still had plenty of strength. After we got him out we turned him over to our medics. Thinking about the whole thing later if he would have been older and a Nazi I would not be here writing this story because all this German had to do at night was pull himself up the hole and lob a grenade about three feet into the trench where we were sleeping and we would have never known what happened.

The maintenance crew came up and put a new track on our tank, and we were off and running to catch up to the front line. It was not that far north and did not take that long to reach the front. It did not take long before we were shooting it out with the German tanks. Their tanks were so well built that we had to knock them out by hitting them in the tracks. Their 88 MM gun was much superior to our 75's. If they hit us anywhere we were done for. On May 30th. we had an out and out battle with the German tanks. We won the battle and pulled back a few hundred yards. Then things were very quiet for an hour or so. Thinking it would be safe I got out of the tank to take a sponge bath out of my helmet . I was in the process of doing this when a mortar shell came in landing only a few yards away from me. I caught two pieces of shrapnel, one in my neck and the other in my left shoulder. So I had to find the medics. We were on the out skirts of a small town, so I'm running up and down the street looking for a medic. I kept opening doors until I finally found one. They bandaged me and put some sulfa on me and loaded me into an ambulance. They took me to Anzio to the 9th. Evac Hospital and then loaded me on an English hospital ship, taking me back to Naples. I was in the 182nd. General Hospital until I was healed. On June 16th. I was discharged from the hospital to rejoin my outfit who were in a rest area outside of Naples taking amphibious training getting ready for the invasion of southern France. Rome had fallen on June 4th., so I had only missed 5 days of combat. I really felt bad that I didn't get into Rome. I had wanted to see the Vatican and the Pope.

On June 6th. the word came that our troops had made the invasion of Normandy, France. This was a boost in our morale, because we had been thinking that the dam war would never end and none of us would get out alive.

While our outfit was back in the Naples area we were getting amphibious training and getting ready for the invasion of southern France. Some of the guys were really living it up at night with the cognac. One night Clyde Choate had too much and went wild and thought we were the enemy and was going to shoot us all. A bunch of guys jumped him and pinned him to the ground and got his weapon away from him and tied him up and put him in the sack to sleep it off. Our training area was close to a corn field. So we would go pick the corn (field corn not sweet corn) and have a feast eating corn. Maybe we were just so hungry for sweet corn we could not tell the difference.

By August 8th our battalion was on board LCT ships in the Naples harbor. There were ships as far as the eye could see. We set sail on the 12th. at sundown. Churchill came by on a speedboat just as the convoy got out of the harbor. He gave us the V sign. The ships were very crowded and the food was bad. The sleeping and toilet facilities were almost nil. The weather was warm and the sea was smooth and everyone was too scared and worried to give a dam about anything. On August 15th. we were ready to make the landing near Marseille in Southern France. The Navy fired rockets and big guns . The air force sent in bombers and dropped their bombs to soften up the Kraut. Much to our surprise the German intelligence must have done a bum job because we did not run into much resistance. All the sweating we had gone through was totally unnecessary. We must have made 20 or 25 miles inland on the first day. We stopped to rest after dark and our tank was parked in the middle of a road. At day break here come two Germans walking down the side of the road with their rifles at sling arms. They were walking toward us as though they didn't see us. I was on guard duty at the time and this was the first time I had come eyeball to eyeball with a Kraut. I froze on the trigger of the 50 caliber because they were coming toward me defenseless . If they would have had their guns pointed at me I would not have had a problem shooting then. At this point of the war I probably killed many Germans with the use of our 75mm gun, but this was my first encounter face to face. There was not a problem because we had infantry men laying alongside the tank and they had no problem taking care of them. By this time because of

the gunfire the rest of the crew woke up. One by one German vehicles would come driving down the road and when they spotted us they tried to make a U-turn, but it was too late. We knocked them out as fast as they came. Then a crazy thing happened. Another German vehicle was coming down the road. Sgt. Harper grabbed the 50 caliber machine gun which was on the back of our turret. He started shooting and accidentally hit our 30 caliber machine gun which was on the front of the turret. The ammunition started exploding like popcorn and flying around the inside of our tank. Guess what I was hit in the upper left arm. It burned like my arm was on fire. Here it was only the second day of the invasion and I'm wounded again. The medics took me back to the beach-head and I was put onto an American Hospital Ship. They did surgery on the ship but did not get the shrapnel out because they said it was lying on a nerve and they could ruin my entire arm if they cut the nerve. We set sail back to Naples Italy. I was aboard the ship for five or six days on the way to Naples. While on board I thought I had died and gone to heaven. A clean bed to sleep in, soft drinks like coke to drink They would say "What would you like for dinner ? Chicken, steak, or what"? Best of all, here were all these beautiful American nurses to care for us. It was just as though I had gone back to the states.

On August 22nd. I arrived in Naples, Italy much to my disappointment , because as we had pulled out for the invasion we all said "Good bye, you God forsaken country." Here a few days later I was back. Was sent to the 21st. General Hospital. I left there on September 16th for a combat conditioning company. The shrapnel was still in my shoulder and hurt all the time. It was so bad I was using aspirin by the bottle. After some time I went before a Medical Board to see if I was fit to go back to my outfit and into combat. This was a board of doctors and after they examined me they said I had to have surgery again to remove the shrapnel. This was to be my second surgery. They operated again with the same results. They did not remove the shrapnel. After I healed from the surgery they again sent me to the conditioning company. Went before a board of doctors once again. My arm or shoulder was still no better. I was told by the board of Jewish doctors that it was hurting me in my head and not in my shoulder. I said O.K. Doctors if that's what you think fine. So they then proceeded to make arrangements to ship me back to the front lines. I still could not raise my arm over shoulder high and had constant pain. Got on a French ship, with terrible accommodations and even found a cock-roach in a salad as I was eating it. We arrived back in Marseille France. While I was in a repel depot in Marseille I met my cousin from Union Hill, Severin Riesgraf, and we got

together for a visit. He was stationed outside Marseille in an anti aircraft company. I then shipped out on one of the famous 40 & 8 trains headed for Dijon France. Then on to Ribeauville which is about 40 miles from the front lines. I then went on sick call. The doctor who examined me said "What in the hell are you doing up here?" I told him the doctors back in Naples thought I was ready for combat, so who was I to argue. He said we have to operate on you and get that shrapnel out of there so that your arm will heal. So onto the operating table I go again. This makes number three. This time when I woke up I asked if they had gotten it out and the answer was yes and gave the piece to me to keep. After a week or so they were getting ready to evacuate the entire Hospital because the Germans had put on this big push in the Battle of The Bulge and it was getting too close for comfort. Our troops with the help of the air-force, finally stopped the Kraut and drove them back or killed them.

After a couple of weeks of healing I was headed for the 601st. near Strasbourg. My shoulder was still giving lots of discomfort but once I got back into combat and the shells started dropping I soon forgot about the shoulder. The weather was cold and miserable, so we had on all the clothes that the army had issued us. We had a rough time with the Kraut in getting them out of Strasbourg.

After Strasbourg we went into the battle of the Colmar Pocket. It was still very cold (the temperature never got above 14 above) and there was 2 feet of snow Later we found out that this was the worst winter they had had in this area for the past 100 years. This area had been back and forth. It would be German, then French. At this time it was French. We sometimes would park our tanks near farm buildings and get eggs and potatoes and fresh milk from the farmers wife. I'll never forget the first time she gave us some boiled milk and we took it and put into the snow to get it ice cold. She thought we had lost our minds. Two incidents I will always remember that happened at on of these farm houses was one night when I was standing guard in our tank which was parked near the hen house and the chickens started to flutter. I was so shocked with the noise I turned one of the machine guns in that direction and opened fire. The other incident was when a fellow said he woke me and told me I was to relieve him on guard. He said I said O.K. A few hours later we woke up to find no one was on guard. I had slept through my entire shift, which could have been a disaster if the Germans had infiltrated our lines they could have come in unnoticed and probably killed us all. I could have been court martialled for not being on my post. Then I would have spent the rest of the war in the brig. At this point in the war we no longer had to depend on C and K

rations, because the civilians kept us supplied with eggs, potatoes, and fresh meat. Anytime we would ask they would fill up our helmets with food.

Getting back to the battle in the Colmar pocket. The snow was two feet deep and very cold. The Germans had retreated after a long battle. We were moving across this open field when all of a sudden we hit a ditch with our left track. The entire left side track was in this ditch. Our platoon had four tanks in it so we called up another tank to pull us out. When they got close enough they hit the same ditch, so now we have two tanks stuck. So now we all get out and start stamping on the ground to see if it was solid. It felt solid so we call for the third tank to come up. Guess what, the same thing happened so now we have three out of four tanks stuck in what turned out to be an old German trench. We were smart enough not to bring up our fourth tank. Instead we radioed our headquarters and asked for a T-2 (a big tank with towing equipment) to come to our assistance. They said they would come as soon as possible. So to kill time while we were waiting we were inside the tank playing cards. After a couple of hours we got on the radio and asked where the T-2 was. They then said " Where in the hell have you been? We have been trying to reach you to let you know the Germans have counter attacked so you had better be on a lookout". As soon as I got off the radio and looked out the turret here they were coming like a swarm of bees. They were only a few hundred yards away. So we could not use our big gun and it would have been hopeless to only use the machine guns, so over the side we went running in the direction of our fourth tank which was mobile. The Germans started shooting at us with everything they had. We could only run a few yards and then hit the snow face down because of the deep snow. We did this until we reached the fourth tank. Some of us made it and some did not. As soon as we got everyone loaded onto the tank we took off for the rear. After getting back a safe distance we bailed out and started running down a road on foot. As we were running we ran into a jeep coming toward us. It was a two star General and his driver. We didn't even slow down or salute. The jeep then stopped and came backing up and caught up to us. This time we stopped and saluted. The General said "Where the hell do you think you're going"? "To the rear sir" Why he asked? "The Germans have counter attacked and we have lost three tanks stuck in a ditch up there". He then said "Did you blow them up"? and we said "yes sir". But of course we had not. He then took off in that direction to see for himself. When we got back to our headquarters area we found out we could have been court martialed for not blowing up the tanks. We had lost all of our personal items, like shaving equipment and letters and stationery. The fighting in the Colmar

pocket was vicious, bloody and costly to our battalion. We lost heavily in men and equipment. The Germans had plenty of anti-tank guns, artillery, and bazookas. My guardian angel sure was looking over my shoulder through this all. By the time we got out of Colmar it was already February and we headed for Pont Mousson France. We got a few days to rest up. We also got new tanks with 90 mm guns and gas engines. Our old diesel engines gave out a smoke screen when ever we started them up, to say to the Germans "here we are!" Well anyhow we had lots of work to do on our new tanks to get them combat ready. Each crew was responsible for their tank. Also while we were there we were testing out the new 90mm guns. They were looking for new gunners and so I took my turn. I was hitting everything they told me to shoot at. The Lt. asked who's on that gun, they replied "Dietz, sir". He said, "He's now one of our gunners". With this promotion I got to be a corporal. When I joined the 601st I was a radio operator, then a loader and now a gunner. On our last day of rest before going back into battle we still had work to do on the tanks. We also were to have a dance with a G.I. band and girls from the Wacs and Red Cross. We could not join the party until we had our tanks in shape. For some reason our crew was one of the last to get done, so we joined the party late. So when we got in there we thought we would make up for lost time. So we bellied up to the bar and started drinking cognac. One shot after another. Then I went up to the band and asked the drummer if I could sit in. He said fine. After playing for close to an hour my head started to spin and I had to crawl off the band stand on my hands and knees. I made it to the latrine and threw up. I had never been this sick in my life. I could not stop. I was wishing I could die. It took me more than a week to recover. So needless to say that was the one and only time in my life that I can say I was drunk. Never again!!

Now it was time to cross the Siegfried line, which was cement pillars about three feet high and three feet wide. They were spaced about three feet apart. Hitler had these built so that we would not be able to cross this line and then get access into Germany. Some how we were able to get through after blasting them with our 90mm guns. All it did was slow us down somewhat. Our next mission was to cross the Rhine river. The Germans blew up all the bridges as they retreated. But again all they did was slow us down because it was just a matter of a couple of days and our engineers had a pontoon bridge for us to use and cross the river. Once we got into Germany it was hard to believe the welcome we received from the civilians. They greeted us as though we were liberators and not the enemy. They would say in German "Me nix Nazi, me Catholic" No one wanted to admit that they had supported Hitler, but we knew they had. Then they

would say " When the Negro coming"? They had been told that first the white G.I.'s will come ,then the blacks will come and rape and kill all the women and children.

By now the Krauts were disorganized and resistance was spotty. Lindenfell, Lohr and Bad Kissingen all fell. We had a terrific scrap at Alt Erlanger and then we were off on our way into Nurnberg. In Nurnberg it was a new kind of fighting. The enemy was in cellars and on rooftops and in every window. We literally stuck our 90mm tubes inside the windows. When Nurnberg fell it was just a pile of rubble. I brought home a German Swastika flag about twenty five feet long that I took down from a court house in Nurnberg. They had flags everywhere,. The city was full of them. I gave this flag to Kyle (my grandson from Wichita) with other souvenirs I had saved from the war. The only souvenir that I kept is a German Luger pistol. To this day I still wonder how the Germans knew that the money they had at this time was worthless, because as we would go through houses we would find paper money scattered all over the floor. At the time I had taken loads of it but finally threw it away. After Nurnberg we were to have a short rest and moved toward Rothenberg. Then we got word that we were needed near the Danube river. The Krauts had dealt out one of the worst shellings of the war from across the river at Augsburg but the city fell without much of a struggle. Without any rest we were off to Munich! All of us could see that the war was just about over and we worried that now was not the time to get hit or killed. We did have some of our guys get killed who had fought all the way up from Africa. The battle for Munich was unbelievable. The German civilians were helping us and were beating up the Krauts and turning them over to us as prisoners. The welcome we received from the civilians was unbelievable. Everyone turned out and there was cheering and applauding and crying. The whole thing seemed unreal. We had so many souvenirs in the tanks we hardly had room to move. We had Lugers and cameras. We also had lots of German paper money which now was worthless. When the battle for Munich was over, Munich was nothing but a pile of rubble. Our Air force had made all big German cities pay the price. Now we were off again. This time toward Salzburg, Austria. By this time the Krauts were completely demoralized. They were giving up by the hundreds. The highways were jammed with trudging Krauts on their way back to P.W. camps. Salzburg fell without much fuss. And then we raced to Berchtesgaden. This is where Hitler had made his hideout under the mountains. It was almost like a little city under ground. The Germans surrendered on May 8th. 1945. We called this V-E Day or victory in Europe because Japan had not surrendered yet. We came out of Hitlers hideout with lots of good champagne. Now that the war had

ended we set up shop in a manufacturing plant and a creamery. This was our home while we were to be an army of occupation. We would go out in the field on maneuvers, just like back in the States in basic training. They had us do this to keep us occupied. They gave us lots of three and four day passes. Lt. Ed Josowitz asked me if I would like to be his driver to go to Paris, France. Of course I said yes. We drove on the autobahn all the way from Salzburg to Paris in a jeep with the gas pedal all the way to the floor board. When we got hungry we would stop at an American Army camp along the way. But before we would get to the camp Lt. Josowitz would remove his bars to look like a private so he could eat with me. He was one of the best officers we had in our battalion. He had gotten a battle field commission. He was Jewish and had a bull horn in the tank and would tell the Germans to come out with their hands up or we would blow the hell out of them. The Germans could tell by his dialect that he was Jewish and would surrender by the dozens. Well, back to Paris, I did not think much of it. I was not impressed. Back to our outfit in Salzburg.. I also received a pass to Brussels. I would be remiss if I did not talk about our army of occupation while in Salzburg. After the war my best friend was Ed Keefer who was in supply. Well anyhow as soon as we came back to Salzburg Ed went out searching to find a horse to ride. He found one and latched onto it. One day he came to me all excited to tell me that he had met two lovely Austrian girls while riding through the streets of Salsburg. He was going past this apartment building and heard these girls singing from an apartment on the second floor. He stopped to listen. I don't know why but in a while the girls came out onto the balcony and saw him sitting on his horse and invited him to come up and join them. There was no hanky panky and they were just lonesome and lived with their father and mother in this apartment. He must have impressed the folks and the mother told him to come back for the evening meal tomorrow night. So anyhow Keefer comes to me and says "Dietz I need your help I found these two beautiful girls and I need you to come with me for dinner this evening". Being that he worked in supply he had access to things like sugar, breads, eggs etc. So we loaded up with some of these items to give to the mother because they did not have too much after the war. The father had a baby carriage factory next to the apartment and our planes took it out without touching the apartment building. We must have know that it was a factory but did not know what it produced. To get on with the story we would go there every evening for dinner and always bring with us some of the supplies. After the war we were not to fraternize with the civilians so we were taking a chance of getting caught. Also the civilians had a curfew and were not to be out and about on the streets after dark until 6 am in the

morning. Like I said we used to go to their house every night. Then the girls were invited to a so called party on the other side of Salzburg and invited us to go with them. We went early while it was still day light so that they would not be breaking the curfew. Well it turned out that the party was a dud and all that were there were former German soldiers and their girl friends. I don't recall what we did maybe some dancing and other wise we stayed on the floor across the room from these Germans with our hands on our guns just in case. Because the girls were not supposed to be on the street before 6 in the morning we tried to stay awake until then but just could not do it so we said let's take a chance and leave now which was like 3 or 4 in the morning. Like I said this was quite a hike to their home and Keefer went ahead of me and I lost track of him. We were with in a half a block from their house and we were rounding a corner when an MP stepped out and grabbed us. He now was going to take her off to jail and write up a report on me so that I would be court martialled. Well needless to say I called this MP every name in the book even so far to call him a rear echelon so and so and after I had been on the front lines for a year and a half while he probably served in the rear area someplace he was going to have me court martialled. That morning I went to see Lt. Josoitz to tell him the story and he said "don't worry Dietz if anything comes in I'll throw it into the waste basket." Guess what, the MP never did send in a report. We got to know the girls and the family rather well and the father insisted that we take a bike ride out into the country to visit a Dietz family. Of course it was a waste of time because they could not speak English and I could not speak German. The girls spoke perfect English but the folks spoke nothing but German. So we knew these girls and her family for almost four months. Before you jump to conclusions as to why would you guys befriend a couple of Austrian girls. The two sister's last name was Fineberger and the one I associated with was Berti and I don't remember the first name of the one that Keefer kept company with but it does not matter. In the first place I did not leave a girl friend back home and we were happy to get the attention from these girls. There was no hanky panky involved. They did not like to see us getting ready for home, but we promised we would write and send them items such as nylons when we got back home. (An added note to this story. I did not meet Ann for a year and a half after I got out of the army.) .

You received points for each month in service, points for service overseas, points for decorations you had received and so on. I had 135 points, so I would be on top of the list for going home. My day came in the middle of September when I was shipped to Camp Lucky Strike in France. This was

on the coast of France where we would wait for our ship to take us back to the States. I was not alone from the 601st. We had a volley ball team that I was part of and we were unbeatable. Our day finally came when we got on board our ship to sail home. I don't recall what kind of a ship it was but it was not made to carry troops. We ran into bad storms crossing the ocean. We thought the ship was going to break in half, the waves were so high. It was not a pleasant trip but then we were on our way home! Finally the day came when we could see land. None of us had ever expected to see the day when we would be alive to see America again. When we got close enough to see the statue of Liberty there was not a dry eye on the whole ship. Every person was crying like a baby. When we landed on shore they took us to Camp Shanks New York. I never will forget that first evening meal they served us, steak with all the trimmings. It was served to us by German prisoners of war. They all had a sad look on their faces. While spending time at Camp Shanks I got a 3 or 4 day pass to New York City. It was the first time I had seen a city the size of New York. A small town boy from Carver Minnesota turned loose in the city of New York. Wow!! This was my first encounter with gay men. We went into a bar and here are a bunch of guys holding hands and kissing each other. We had no idea why. According to my discharge we landed in the states on October 8th, 1945. After spending time at Camp Shanks I was sent to Camp Mc Coy, Wisconsin to be discharged. I forgot to say that when we landed on American soil I called my mother & dad to let them know I was back in the states safe and sound. While talking with them my dad said he had a surprise for me when I got home. Well, I would not let them hang up until they told me what the surprise was. They had a 1939 Dodge club coupe waiting for me. My dad had taken part of the wood shed and made it into a garage where he put the car. Needless to say I was surprised and happy. At Camp Mc Coy it took several days to process us to receive our discharges. They had to give us a physical exam and other tests. Because of being wounded twice in action they awarded me a 10% disability pension. My left arm and shoulder were still giving me lots of discomfort. Finally on October 27, 1945 I received my discharge.

I forgot to mention that while I was overseas I had visits with at least five people I knew from home. First, it was Pres Abel in Africa. Then my cousin Severin Riesgraf and I met in France. Rich Lahl, my best friend in high school and I met in Salzburg. Also Elmer Lenzen from Carver, who only lived a half a block from me in Carver I met in Salzburg. I also met Ernie Poppitz (from Carver) in one of the hospitals. So you see the world is not that big after all.