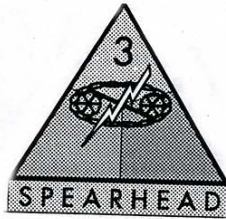


From KP to Combat

Recollections of a WWII Topkick

Ed Hoy



**From KP to Combat
Recollections of a WWII Topkick**

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*None deserves praise for being
good who has not spirit enough
to be bad; goodness, for the most
part, is nothing but indolence
or weakness of will.*

La Rochefoucauld

*How many fancy they have experience
simply because they have grown old.*

Stanislaus Lec



Ed Hoy, Newly-Appointed First Sergeant of the Brand New Recon Company, 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, January 1942.

This book is humbly dedicated to these three persons:

The memory of Lt. Col. Prentiss E. (Iron Mike) Yeoman, killed in action while leading the 83rd Reconnaissance Battalion in the final days of the war in Germany. He had commanded the 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion stateside, and was a stalwart supporter through "thick and thin."

Lt. Col. Wilbur E. Showalter who ably commanded the 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion in combat, exacting a huge toll on the enemy while minimizing the losses to his battalion. I will never forget one of his decisions in Normandy.

PFC Matt Arquilla of Company A, 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion. He never lost faith in Sgt. Hoy.

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Preface

It's January 1998, and almost fifty-three years since the ending of World War II. Here, on the patio of my retirement home in Cottonwood, Arizona, I've been wrestling with the idea of writing this book. A few friends and my daughter, privy to some of my stories, have provided encouragement.

At age 77, embarking on this venture would be challenging. I repeatedly asked myself why I should write the book. Invariably, the answer came back: many of these colorful events, deeds and misdeeds would soon be lost forever if not chronicled now.

This book will contain a variety of almost unbelievable actual incidents. In the following pages you will find stories of courage, truth that is stranger than fiction, the boundless exhilaration of youth, raucous hilarity in abundance and even some sexual encounters.

Because the author is central to many of these stories, he has generally not had to quote or borrow from other sources. When this has been necessary, he has provided proper acknowledgment.

There are a few highlights along the road from basic training to post-war occupation that have been intentionally omitted due to their nature or the possibility of hurting somebody.

For those non-Army folks that don't know what a "Topkick" is, let me explain. It is Army slang for a First Sergeant (the highest non-commissioned officer and enlisted man in a Company of about 150). He reports directly to the Company Commander, usually a Captain, and he is the primary dispenser and enforcer of discipline.

If he is a good Topkick he will be respected by the men of the Company. However, because he is responsible for duty rosters that assign personnel to such onerous tasks as guard duty, clean-up details and kitchen police (KP), there will always be those who resent his authority. This fact is well-illustrated by the 1993 article in our Battalion newsletter, *The Roadblock*, announcing the author's joining the Association. The article was jokingly captioned "A Topkick in Our Sights."

Finally, in most battle campaigns, our line Companies were assigned to different Combat Commands and the platoons of our Reconnaissance Company were, in turn, assigned to support one of the line Companies, A, B or C. Because of this organizational and geographic dispersion, it would be impossible for any one individual to have seen first-hand the many heroic exploits of the officers and men of the famous 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, an organization of the Third Armored (Spearhead) Division.

For far more complete coverage, you are referred to the quarterly annals of the 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion Association's newsletter, *The Roadblock*, ably edited by Nathan Goldberg. And now, join me in a series of hilarious chuckles and paeans of praise. —Ed Hoy

Prologue

Early Years

This book was not intended to be an autobiography, although it could be considered partially that. Certainly, many of the events covered are centered on me during my exuberant younger days in the U. S. Army.

When I was nine years old, in the first year of The Great Depression, I got a weekend and summer job as a caddy at the BelMar Golf Course about three miles from our home in Belvidere, Illinois. My oldest brother, Ray, was the caddy-master at BelMar. I still vividly remember the first dollar I earned toting a huge leather bag of clubs. I was so thrilled that I ran most of the way home to give the dollar to my mother, stopping only once to pick her a bouquet of wild flowers.

Sixty-seven years later, when relating this story to our daughter, Brigitte, she said "Dad, you were such a lovable, sweet boy. What ever turned you into such a hell-raiser later?" It was a fair question and I had never given it much thought. Reflecting on those formative years may provide answers to our readers who are psychologically and analytically minded.

A Few Highlights from My Boyhood

I was born on Christmas Day of 1920 into a large family (eventually had three brothers and three sisters). Dad, of Irish descent, was a railroad man most of his adult life. He was also a drinker, a fighter and a gambler. In 1931, during the Great Depression, Dad was critically injured in a railroad accident. It left him with one leg shorter than the other, no job and for a long time, no disability pension.

We children helped our parents survive this catastrophe by selling papers and magazines, caddying, mowing yards and doing other odd jobs for small change. Our dear mother tried to help by house-cleaning and taking-in laundry for others. She exchanged her fragile services to doctors and dentists to provide necessary care for her children. I recall many

days when we ate plain oatmeal for breakfast without milk or sugar. They were luxuries we could no longer afford.

In 1933, when I was 12 years-old, mother died from childbirth complications. The baby, Jean, was adopted by a wonderful, loving family, the Gustafson's. At mother's funeral, Pastor Whitten told the church full of mourners "Mrs. Hoy gave her life for her children."

From that time forward, I bought all my own clothes. Later that year, we moved from Belvidere, Illinois to Beloit, Wisconsin where my maternal grandmother Putnam lived. Dad, who was a good mechanic, found work in an auto junkyard, salvaging parts. His earnings were scarcely enough for the sustenance of his large family, but we children divvied up the household chores. It was a meager existence with bare essentials—kerosene lamps for light, a well and hand pump for water and an outside toilet with traditional catalog.

- I was a precocious child with an abundance of curiosity. At age 4, I would lie by a stream-bed for hours observing turtles and snakes. A neighbor boy had a copy of Ditmar's book *The Reptiles of North America*. I was enchanted by it and, with mother's help, taught myself to read before I was in kindergarten.
- Throughout my childhood school days, I was a straight A student in all subjects.
- My thirst for knowledge was so great that I read many hundreds of books at the Carnegie Public Library in Belvidere, Illinois. For a long period of time, I averaged a book per day, turning one in while withdrawing another—night after night. My tastes were varied, but natural history predominated. I remember a temporary interest in Africa and became an African expert by reading all the books by Paul du Chaillu, Theodore Roosevelt, Carl Akeley, Martin Johnson and others.
- I was a scrawny, skinny kid but admired the exploits of heroes in books like *The Song of Roland* and *Tales of King Arthur's Court*. My closest friend was neighborhood boy named Boyd Titman. Boyd, and his father and brothers, were physical fitness buffs and well-muscled. In addition, Boyd shared my love of nature and animal life.

- While still a young boy, I developed a great dislike for bullies. I recall besting one of them, "Chubby" R., who was considerably taller and heavier than I was. My brother, Ray, looked on and provided moral encouragement while Chubby's Dad was in Chubby's corner.
- At age 15, a friend, Cliff C., and I ran away from home without permission during summer school vacation. We hitch-hiked and rode freight trains to Rapid City, SD in the Black Hills. There we met an auto-dealer who was entering a string of horses in the annual Frontier Days Rodeo in Belle Fourche further north. I rode one of his horses in the opening day Grand Parade. Later, Cliff left and returned home. I hired out to a large Wyoming ranch and worked for them the rest of the summer.
 - In late August of that year, I left the Wyoming ranch to return home to my family in Wisconsin. On part of the trip, I hitched a ride on the coal-tender of a passenger train. It was immediately behind the coal-burning engine. Roaring through Minnesota, we entered a long tunnel. The dense smoke from the coal-burning locomotive nearly smothered me before we emerged. Arriving in Beloit, I found out that my young sister, Betty Lou, had died from a brain tumor after being struck by a car... and that Dad and the family had moved to Detroit, Michigan.
 - I hitchhiked to Detroit but didn't stay long. After a violent with Dad drinking, I left home again, joining my grandmother in Beloit, Wisconsin.
 - After a few months with grandmother, I decided to join FDR's Civilian Conservation (the CCC). I was only 16 and had to lie about my age to enroll.

The Early Molding of a Sergeant

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was one of several work programs initiated during the Great Depression under the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It was established to provide employment and job training for the vast number of unemployed young men and to advance the conservation and building up of the country's natural resources. An average of 1500 camps nationwide were in operation with total average enrolled strength of 300,000. The end objectives of these camps were quite varied but the services performed were invaluable to the nation.

In September 1937, at age 16 (lied about my age), I enrolled in a Forestry camp in northern Wisconsin near the town of Fairchild. As I recall, the average age of my colleagues was about 20. At this camp, our duties consisted of clearing and building forest fire breaks and trails, pruning out dead growth, planting trees and fighting fires, if necessary. The work was physical and tiresome but I exulted in proving that I could keep pace with my more senior co-workers.

There were many similarities to the later Army camps I served in. We used Army trucks for transport, slept on Army cots and wore Army issue clothing. The food was plain but nourishing and ample. Each day started with early-morning mass calisthenics. This regimen of wholesome food, exercise and hard outdoors work soon brought about a transformation. The scrawny, skinny kid became a proud, broad-shouldered, robust young adult.

We were stationed in the northern Wisconsin boondocks with only an occasional truck convoy to a local small town for the evening. Campside entertainment was provided at our recreation hall. Table tennis (ping-pong) was very popular and I soon became one of the two best players in camp.

At the end of my first 6-month enlistment period, I re-enlisted in another type of camp—Soil Conservation. This camp was at Menominee, Wisconsin, not far from Eau Claire. We built drainage ditches, installed culverts and protected many areas from serious soil erosion by installing rock revetments. We quarried the rock and chipped it to shape in our own rock quarry. I applied myself to this work as I had an intense personal desire to excel in everything, but it was not my cup of tea. I had heard about a Camp Wingra that featured Wildlife Management at Madison, Wisconsin and at the end of my 6-month enlistment at Menominee, requested a transfer there.

The University of Wisconsin maintained a huge wildlife arboretum on the shores of Lake Wingra and our CCC Wildlife Management Camp was located on its 1000 or more acres. The arboretum contained forests, open grasslands and swamps and was home to a

fascinating variety of flora and fauna. Specialists from the U.S. Wildlife Service and the National Park System were assigned special projects at Camp Wingra, in coordination with the University of Wisconsin. I was assigned to a wildlife team under the direction of W.F. (Bill) Feeney. Included in our duties were the live-trapping of many mammal and bird species for banding and study purposes (we also made the traps), making and placement of bird and mammal shelters, special studies (such as gathering and examining the pellets of long-eared owls) and miscellaneous observations and note-taking. I loved this work and thrived on it— even in wintertime when I would run from trap to trap, sometimes through deep snow, to keep warm.

Bill Feeney was a great manager and careful teacher and my education and usefulness in this field increased rapidly. Before the end of my first enlistment at Camp Wingra, I was promoted to Assistant Leader in charge of several others. I volunteered for a second term and was soon promoted to full Leader, younger than those who served under me. There were many interesting events that occurred during my year at Camp Wingra. These stand out in my memory:

- I participated in extracurricular sports events such as wrestling and boxing and gained some attention for my accomplishments. I also gained the jealousy and enmity of Don E., one of the biggest men in camp. His constant barbs and tirades against me led to a planned confrontation in a grassy area between our barracks one evening after dinner. It was to be a bare-knuckle boxing-wrestling fight with no holds barred and until one contestant gave up. A referee was appointed and I saw our Camp doctor in the large crowd that turned out. We struggled, slugged and pounded the hell out of each other for a full half-hour. Then I knocked him down for the third time and immediately piled on top of him. Gasping for breath, Don gave up. I was never challenged again.

- At the Wisconsin State Fair in Milwaukee (West Allis) that Fall, the CCC sponsored a booth show featuring CCC activities throughout the state. I was chosen to be in charge of the booth. It ended with a non-fruitful romance with a local girl. Her wiles and embraces woke me to the realization that there was something else in life more enticing than work.

- Our Wildlife Technician, Bill Feeney, also was licensed by the U.S. Biological Survey to conduct banding studies of migratory birds. He selected me to accompany him on a trapping and banding expedition. It was on Lake Superior near the Tahquamanon Falls U.S. Coast Guard Station in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Our objective was to trap, band and release birds of prey migrating southward from Canada that Spring. We spent the nights at the Coast Guard Station and by early morning were manning our blinds and net traps in the snow-covered junipers. We caught and banded hawks, falcons, owls and eagles.

- Bill Feeney was also an accomplished practitioner of falconry, and in our spare time he taught me the rudiments of that royal sport. Under Bill's tutelage, I trained two birds to hunt. More than a half-century later, I was re-introduced to falconry in Cottonwood, Arizona when I discovered that the President of the Arizona Falconry Association lived just a block away on my street.

- This growing-up and maturing period of my young life also brought a new interest and fascination with the opposite sex. While serving at Camp Wingra, I met pretty Betty H. of Madison. I was still a virgin but with an ever-growing urge. Betty and I tenderly and timidly explored all the preliminaries but she always stopped short. I was still too boyish to force my attentions further, but vastly intrigued by this temptation called "woman."

- It was now nearing the end of my two-year association with the CCC. World events were rapidly moving towards global war. Both Japan and Germany were on a war footing. On September 1st of that year, Germany invaded Poland and two days later, England and France declared war on Germany. I felt strongly that, sooner or later, the U.S. would be involved and so, on September 27, 1939, when my CCC enlistment expired, I volunteered for the United States Army.

My growth and experiences with the CCC were memorable and I never regretted them. And my leadership positions gave me an advance start in the military service. Yes, those two years were really the early molding of a sergeant.

Chapter One

Snuff and Whorehouses

When I enlisted in the United States Army in October, 1939, the recruiting office at Madison, Wisconsin gave me a choice of various Army branches. Romantically inclined and fond of horses, I chose the US Cavalry. I was soon on my way to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, home of the 4th US Cavalry.

Arriving at Fort Oglethorpe by train two days later, I was delighted to find it was located in the northwest corner of Georgia, next to the Tennessee border and adjacent to famous Civil War battlefields. A short walk from the Fort and I could look down at Chattanooga lying near a huge loop in the Tennessee River. The famous battlefields were on steep bluffs just to the south. Later, I found time to thoroughly explore this historic area.

The next few days were devoted to basic training. There were also assigned details such as cleaning the stables, shoveling manure and currying horses to assure us "rookies" that we were truly in the cavalry. We could scarcely wait to finish our basic training and be assigned to one of troops. And then disaster struck... .

We were told that the US Cavalry was being disbanded, except for the 1st Cavalry at Fort Riley, Kansas, and reassignments would be made to other branches of the service. At first I was quite dismayed—my cavalry service was ending before it had gotten started.

Within a week reassignments were announced. As I recall, we had little say in the matter. I, along with several others, would be reassigned to the 80th Field Artillery of the 6th Infantry Division, which was being brought to full strength at Camp Jackson near Columbia, South Carolina. Our prime weapon would be the 155mm howitzer. This roughly 6 inch bore gun was one of the Army's larger artillery weapons.

At Camp Jackson, we lived in pyramidal tents that in winter were heated by Sibley stoves. Our basic training was provided by a core of Regular Army non-coms (non-commissioned officers—corporals and sergeants of various grades). They were very proficient and taught us basic drill, small-arms instruction and firing range practice and defense against gas attacks. The small arms included the pistol, revolver, carbine, rifle and Thompson sub-machine gun. Frequently we were blindfolded during the breakdown and reassembly operations to see how well we had learned. Later, we would be assigned to a specific Battery and trained in the care and firing of the big howitzers.

The basic training also included the use of field telephones and wire-laying. Telephones were essential to Artillery operations. Part of the wire-laying training involved the use of safety belts and climbing spikes attached to your legs and feet when climbing trees or poles to string elevated wires. We practiced on tall sugar-pines and I recall a personal accident about 25 feet up a sugar-pine trunk. The spikes must be jabbed into the trunk with the leg at a slight angle. I forgot to keep that angle with my left leg, the spike slipped out and I slid at least 10 feet down the tree before halting my fall with the spikes. When they dug in again, the shock dislocated my left knee and I was disabled for a few days.

Another memorable incident was more laughable...

Snuff—Had Enough?

Part of our vigorous recruit training were long marches, generally for 25 miles, in formation. Smoking in ranks during marches was strictly forbidden. Many of the recruits got around the no-smoking ban and satisfied their urge for tobacco by using chewing tobacco. I remember that plug tobaccos and cut Beechnut were popular.

On this particular march we were told to take our gas masks with us and wear them if ordered. We marched in a long column of two-abreast with drill sergeants and lieutenants alongside. My partner in the two-abreast column was Pvt C., a likable chap

from Alabama. I smoked cigars under normal circumstances but this morning had put a chew of Beechnut in my mouth before the march began. It was not too difficult to secretly expectorate when in ranks.

About every 6 miles we would be given a "fall-out" break at roadside. At the first break, I observed Pvt C putting a dip of Copenhagen snuff in his mouth. My Dad used snuff but I had never tried it. Pvt C urged me to try the snuff for the next leg of the march but he cautioned "Put it under your tongue; don't let it float through your mouth." I got rid of the Beechnut chew and put a dip of Pvt C's snuff under my tongue. A moment later the drill Sgt barked "Fall-in" and we were soon on the long second leg of the march.

About a mile down the road, the Sgt shouted "Gas!" Without stopping, we had to remove our gas mask from its case and install it over our face. Then the march continued in the hot Carolina sun. Soon the snuff started leaking out from under my tongue (this doesn't happen to a "pro"). Try as I would I could not help swallowing a little of it and quickly became nauseated.

To spit, I would have to remove my mask. Quickly looking around, I discovered much to my horror that the drill sgt was right alongside me and the lieutenant just a few steps behind. I knew I had to keep that mask on or be sharply disciplined later for removing it.

For another good 45 minutes they stayed by my side as we continued marching, and my agony increased. I believe only my young rugged constitution kept me going. Finally, the Sgt blew his whistle and shouted "Fall-out! All clear for gas." I ripped off my mask and almost fell over Pvt C while rushing to the roadside ditch. There I vomited until it felt like my stomach would turn inside out. Pvt C roared with laughter. When the whistle blew again and I fell-in for the next leg, weak and trembling, I told my buddy, Pvt C, "That's the last snuff I'll ever take." And it was!

When our basic training was completed in January, 1940, I was promoted to Pvt First Class (PFC) and assigned to a line battery. My proficiency in math and rapid calculation was soon noted and in early March I was promoted to Specialist Fourth Class as Instrument Operator (BC Scopes, etc.). About this time I listened to the stories of other GI's who had visited the "red- light" district in nearby Columbia. I decided it was time that I had a sexual experience.

One Hell of a Way to Lose Your Virginity

My first five months in the Army were very busy. I seldom went into town and had not met any girls I was interested in dating. But my memories of a couple of sweet young things I had dated when I was in the last CCC camp were still fresh in my mind. Although never fully completed, those early encounters were thrilling and foretold heavenly sensations later. So it was with high expectations that I entered the Columbia red-light district on a Saturday morning.

My camp buddies had told me of a whorehouse that had a reputation for its beautiful ladies and cleanliness. I found it...and also a waiting-line of perhaps twenty soldiers outside with several more inside the reception room. In less than an hour, I was inside where the madam of the brothel took my money, assigned me a number and told me to be seated until my number was called. Excited, though nervous, I waited.

Every few minutes one of the "ladies" would appear in a hall doorway and call out the next number. They were clad only in a see-through light robe and most were attractive. Finally, my number was called. I looked up to see a short, fat, dumpy middle-aged woman standing in the hall doorway. My spirits dropped along with my penis. She called my number once again followed with a command to "hurry-up." I rose, slowly walked to the madam of the house and said "I'd like to wait for the next number." Her reply was "You take this girl or leave." For a moment, all eyes in the room were focussed on me. Feeling very uncomfortable, I walked to the hall doorway and followed "fat-ass" into her operating room where I removed my pants and undershorts.

She took off her robe, grabbed me by the hand, lay down spread-eagled on a dirty bed and pulled me on top of her. Her crotch was still wet from the last douche. This was not at all as I had imagined and I started to back off. "Kiss me," she begged, manipulating my member. I could not and would not kiss her, but the member stiffened and she quickly aided in the insertion. In a very few seconds I had an ejaculation. It did feel good but was far short of expectations and later sexual acts. There was no tantalizing foreplay, no feverish embrace of two eager bodies, no kissing and no magnetic madness of reacting, tingling pheromones—just a mechanical release. She immediately pushed me off, rushed to her douche pan and towel and told me to put on my clothes and leave. She had only dollars in her eyes and thoughts. I left telling myself, "I'll never again have sex in a whorehouse!" And I didn't.

Chapter Two

West Point and "Boots"

In May 1940 we were told that the 80th FA would be relocated in Iowa and be stationed at Fort Des Moines. There was an unmistakable "horsey" odor in the sheds at Fort Moines where we parked our big howitzers. We were told that another Cavalry unit had been disbanded there shortly before we arrived and our new gun sheds were the former cavalry stables.

In early June, I was promoted to Sergeant and transferred to Hqs and Hqs Battery as Instrument Sergeant. Later, my Battery Commander stated that I was the youngest Sgt in the entire 6th Division. I was very proud of my new position and wanted to be not only the youngest but the best.

In the pre-war Regular Army, visits to the Post by a General or other dignitary called for a special parade review called a Formal Guard Mount. This marching review called for "spit-and-polish" troops in some quite complicated drill formations called out by a Sgt. To mess-up was considered a disgrace, so it was with more than a little trepidation that I read on the Battery Bulletin Board that a Formal Guard Mount was to be held for some dignitary that week and the new Sgt Hoy would be the enlisted man in charge. Fortunately, some senior Non-Coms were assigned to teach me the routines and there was time for a practice review.

On the day of the big review, we were scrubbed and polished to a T. A small cannon on the parade ground roared as the dignitary arrived and we stood rigidly at Attention. A moment later the Post Band blared out with a stirring march and the assigned Lieutenant and I barked out the orders and the fancy drill was underway. To my great relief, it went off like clockwork.

Formal Guard Mounts were largely dispensed with as the country headed towards a wartime footing with a huge expansion by draftees—the new AUS. I have not kept up

with Army policies in the post WWII Army and don't know if this military "showpiece" was widely re-installed. A common joke of the old Regular Army about formal reviews illustrates the concern of Sergeants in being detailed to conduct one:

A long-time Army Sgt imbibed too much in town one evening. Walking back to his Post, he passed out alongside the road. Awakening several hours later, he raised his head to see where he was. He saw a large billboard with huge letters proclaiming that "Jesus is coming." With a despairing moan, he lowered his head and muttered "Goddamn, another review!"

Hard days training were often followed by evenings at the Post Exchange where we swapped jokes, drank good beer and listened to the latest record favorites on the juke-box. The Andrew Sisters were very popular at the time with such favorites as "If You Ever Need A Friend" and "The Boogie-Woogie Bugler Boy of Company B."

Around the 1st of July, the 80th FA got orders to join the 6th Division on maneuvers in Minnesota. I am a little unsure of the exact locale today, but I have a vivid memory that it was in mosquito country. These pests must thrive on my chemistry for they swarmed all over me. Our troops were quickly issued mosquito netting so we could sleep at night. Maybe that year was unusual for mosquitos in beautiful Minnesota.

Later in July I was told to report to our First Sergeant Darrow, a fine man and soldier. He told me that a special Army Board was in Minnesota administering tests to selected GI's in our Corps to determine their eligibility for West Point. Although I had only completed three years of high school when I left for the CCC, my officers and Sgt Darrow thought I would be a good candidate for West Point and urged me to take the tests.

The next week I was sent to the screening area and for two full days was given a variety of tests, mostly written. I had positive feelings but didn't know my grades or standing when I left. Perhaps ten days later, I was called to Battery Hqs. There a beaming First Sgt and my Battery Commander informed me that not only had I passed the tests but had passed them the highest of anyone in our entire Corps (several Divisions). I stood there humbly gratified and with moist eyes while they told me that later that year I would be transferred to the West Point Preparatory School at Fort MacPherson, Georgia, for three months advance training before entering the Point. It was a great honor for a Depression kid who had never had "a pot to pee in."

The very next week brought another development. Notice was given to all troops in the maneuver area that a new Army branch of service, the Armored Force, had been activated at Fort Knox, Kentucky and its two first divisions were to be formed—the First Armored at Ft Knox and the 2nd Armored at Ft Benning, Georgia. The notice also added that they were looking for volunteers to form a training cadre for the 2nd Armored at Ft Benning. Realizing that if accepted, I would be stationed in Georgia much closer to the fort I would report to for the West Point training, I volunteered. Much to my surprise, I was accepted and within a few days was on a train bound for Georgia.

At Ft Benning, our cadre was located in a pyramidal tent encampment in the Harmony Church area of the reservation. The organization and equipping of the brand-new 2nd Armored went into high gear and I was assigned as a Sgt to help form the 78th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, Battery D. Soon thereafter, our Battalion received our first big equipment, half-track armored vehicles and 105mm guns. Several other armored units, tanks, infantry and engineers, were also formed at the same time.

Earlier that month, we had received our new Division Commander, Brigadier General George Patton, who had been transferred from Ft Devers, Massachusetts where he had been a full Colonel. General Patton, who later had an illustrious wartime career, appeared to us as a vain man. His helmet was highly polished and he wore pearl-

handled pistols. The following incident in which I participated is illustrative of his personality.

Shortly after the equipping of his new armored division, General Patton decided to have a massive mounted parade and review for the press and various dignitaries. Thousands of troops in their new tanks, trucks, armored vehicles and motorcycles were lined up in a field-wide formation at one end of a huge sandy, dusty field. On command we were to start up and traverse the field at 15 mph passing in front of the General, press and dignitaries who were on an elevated reviewing platform. The massive packed assemblage took off and at 15mph were nearing the review platform when orders came down to increase our speed to 25mph (maybe faster, I'm not sure today). We heard later that the General had become impatient with the slower speed.

The entire massive force sped up and churned the dry ground with tracks and wheels. A cloud of smothering dust soon enveloped the field and drivers hastily donned goggles to keep the dust out of their eyes. We kept moving forward but pandemonium broke out as the visibility dangerously decreased. There were many collisions and we were damned happy to reach the end of the field where we slowed down and veered off the field.. Some time later, our Division became known as the "Hell on Wheels" division. I've often wondered if that slam-bang parade had anything to do with it!

It was nearing mid-September and the orders for me to report to Ft MacPherson for the West Point training had not arrived yet. And then, personal disaster struck—a disaster of my own foolish making—a disaster that probably changed the course of my life! I shall not describe it in detail for I am ashamed. I will only say that it happened at Ft Benning on a night of drinking and carousing with a poor choice of GI "friends." But I do not shift all the blame to them. I came within a hairs-breadth of losing my life that evening. The next morning I was in the Ft Benning stockade awaiting charges. I knew my high hopes for West Point were torn asunder. Only my outstanding military record to date plus many helpful character witnesses, including officers, saved me from a serious General Court Martial. As it turned out, I spent close to three months in the stockade

before I was restored to duty with my old Battalion, the 78th FA as a Private. Shortly after my return I was promoted to Corporal and within another three months was reinstated as Sgt and Section Leader.

Another incident happened in the next week. Our Battalion took part in brief maneuvers in southern Georgia and northern Florida. When they were over, we were near Panama City, Florida and most of us were allowed to go into Panama city for the evening. Several of us wound up at a bar and dancehall on the outskirts of town. We were sitting at the bar having a cocktail and listening to a male piano-player. Suddenly, a woman ran down the stairway from the second floor and headed for the piano-player with a gun in her hand. She shouted something, then raised the gun and shot him. Not wanting to get involved in any more incidents, even as a witness, I ran outside, hailed a cab and was soon back at our bivouac area. I heard later that the girl was a whore and shot her lover, the piano-player in a jealous rage. Apparently there was also a brothel on the second floor. It seemed like trouble spots were like a magnet to me! Fantastic, but true.

Returning to our base camp at Ft Benning, we read a notice that another new Armored Division was being formed in Louisiana, the Third Armored, and once again they were looking for volunteers for a training cadre that would be the nucleus of the new division. The lure of new horizons was appealing and I added my name to the list.

This time our cadre would travel by motor convoy and sleep enroute in pup tent encampments. We would encamp enroute at two sites, one near Montgomery, Alabama and the other near Hattiesburg, Mississippi. We spent two nights at Hattiesburg and many of us went into town for the evenings, which led to my contacts with "Boots."

"Boots"—One Determined Gal

The first evening, I left the bivouac with Sgt J and caught a taxi to Hattiesburg. There we rented an older model Ford coupe and inquired about local dance-halls. We were

told how to get to a popular "taxi dance-hall" a short way out of town. In those days, girls working at such halls generally charged ten cents per dance.

We found the place and soon had two dancing partners. Mine was an attractive Tennessee girl named Boots McG. We liked the girls and had several dances with them. When the place closed around midnight, Sgt J and I talked them into coming with us in the rented car to try to find another place that might still be open. While Sgt J drove, I talked Boots into climbing up in a space between the front seat and the rear window with me. In this cramped space, we enjoyed intercourse while Sgt J. drove. Later, we took the girls home, turned the rental car in and caught a taxi back to our encampment.

The next night we decided to visit the dance-hall again and hailed a cab to get there. Our two girl friends were pleased to see us and we had more dances with them. In between dances, we had cocktails at one of the bordering tables. Halfway through the evening I decided to dance with another attractive girl I had been watching. When Boots temporarily left for a restroom, I asked the other girl and we were out on the floor dancing in a close embrace when Boots reappeared. She quickly spotted us and approached.

There was a dangerous glint in her eyes and my partner and I stopped dancing and faced her. She literally hissed at me as she shouted "Stop dancing with that floozie and dance with me." I laughingly replied that I would dance with whomever I wanted to. That was the trigger! In a flash, she pulled a wicked-looking knife from somewhere and held it against my stomach saying "If I can't have you, nobody else will!" I backed off and asked her to drop the knife saying I'd be no good to her if she knifed me. But she was past all persuasion and lunged at me with the knife. I side-stepped and shouted to Sgt J "Follow me, let's get the hell out of here!"

We ran for the door with Boots and the knife in hot pursuit. Out on the porch, I could see a couple of taxis taking on other GI passengers. In a mad dash, we caught up with

one taxi just ready to leave. Shouting for the driver to wait for us, we wrenched open the rear door and tumbled in all over other passengers. We told the driver to take off NOW! Boots was pounding on the cab and yelling for it to stop but it was too late—we took off with squealing wheels. Back at the bivouac area I hurried to my pup-tent, thankful that I'd made it. I crawled into my bedroll and tried to sleep.

Perhaps an hour later, close to midnight, I heard a female voice repeatedly calling "Sgt Hoy, Sgt Hoy!" It was Boots and she was looking for me from tent to tent. I stayed put, remained quiet and maybe twenty minutes later could no longer hear her. Somebody must have got her out of our encampment or she left voluntarily. Boy, that girl from Tennessee was something else! If I had somehow married her in those days, I think we would have become the second "Bonnie and Clyde."

Early the next day while keeping a watchful eye out for Boots, we broke camp and left for our eventual destination—Camp Beauregard, Louisiana.

Chapter Three

The Day the Shit Hit the Fan

Camp Beauregard, Louisiana was located in the center of the state just outside of Alexandria. Our stay there was short, about six weeks. Most of the time was spent in early organization of new Third Armored Division units. My assignment was as a Section Sgt in Battery D of the new 54th Armored Field Artillery Battalion. We would get most of our personnel and equipment later at Camp Polk.

Evening passes were granted cadre members to visit Alexandria. Apparently, there was no Military Police (MP) unit at the camp so our cadre had to provide its own. Several nights I and another Sgt were given MP armbands and assigned to patrol Alexandria to ensure our fellow GI's kept out of trouble (it also kept "yours truly" out of mischief). I remember the song "Up a Lazy River" was popular at the time and we constantly heard it floating out of tavern doors as we walked our beat.

On May 19, just before we left Camp Beauregard, a traveling team of Colonels and Majors from the Armored Force Command was at camp giving tests to applicants for Officer Candidate School (OCS). My officers thought I should apply. I passed all the tests and was selected to attend a later Officer's training class with the view of being appointed a 2nd Lieutenant. After spoiling my chances for West Point only eight months earlier, this was yet another chance to become a commissioned officer!

By the end of the month, we were relocated to barracks at Camp Polk, Louisiana southeast of Camp Beauregard. Our Battalion was quickly brought up to personnel strength, including several new 2nd Lieutenants. One of these, Lt. B., was a Cajun from the Louisiana bayou country. We lost him a few weeks later. While on leave to visit home, he was caught in a neighbor's dairy barn, standing on a stool behind a cow in a stanchion and trying to have intercourse with it. He was cashiered out of the Army and the shameful news hushed-up. I must add that we had many other fine men from Louisiana in our organization.

It would be several months before we got our new artillery weapons. In fact, for a short while, we even used logs propped against saw-horses to simulate 75mm artillery pieces. And then, for several more months, we were given old but serviceable 75mm guns for training and firing. I believe they were left-over from WWI. We set our range and azimuth on these guns using the "plateau and drum" system. I recall that later that year we were on the firing range using live ammo on our targets when it was announced that the Japs had struck Pearl Harbor. We really poured it on our targets after the shocking news!

In the summer of 1941, the Third Armored Division formed a boxing team with the intent of entering the national Golden Gloves tournament. Our 54th FA had its own team as a part of the division effort. I was an early volunteer and fought in the middle-weight class. 160 pounds was the dividing line between a middle-weight and a light-heavyweight. I recall that we were allowed a 2 pound margin. So to stay at or under 162 pounds I had to make an extra effort during work-outs. My trainer would have me run for miles while wearing a heavy wool coat and chewing gum and spitting (procedures guaranteed to make you lose weight).

In those days I had a good physique, was in tip-top condition and felt like I could lick the world. Would you believe that I had a 28" waist and a 44" chest? I did! Our battalion even had a first-class boxing trainer in its ranks—a Pvt Raymond (Pat) Hanrahan. He had been a professional boxer before he entered the Army and was once ranked by *Ring Magazine* in the top four of the light-heavyweight division along with Fred Apostoli and Freddie Steele. In those days the champion of that division was Billy Conn, a very classy boxer. Pat Hanrahan was a disciple of Conn and believed strongly in the use of a good left jab. Pat and I became good friends and I learned a lot from him. Occasionally, in town, we got into some scrapes but we never started them—just ended them.

In the Division Golden Glove semi-finals, I floored my opponent twice but in the opening minute of round 3 an untaped lace on one of his gloves severely cut my left eye and brow. The heavy bleeding blinded me and the ring-side doctor stopped the fight (against my strenuous objections). I lost by a TKO. Had I won that bout I would have been sent to Chicago for the national finals. Later that year, I was sent to the Diamond Belt Tourney in

New Orleans where I fought twice in one night in the same Coliseum where old-timer John J. Sullivan fought some of his historic bare-knuckle bouts. Although I won some and lost some, I believe I was a fighter by instinct and enjoyed the sport. I boxed later with the 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion and my last bout was in the ETO Finals in London.

In my early months at Camp Polk, I was involved in an outrageous shenanigan and its equally outrageous aftermath.

The Day the Shit Hit the Fan

As the young men in our various units trained together, played together and felt their growing strength and proficiency, they developed an "esprit-de-corps." They felt that they were "numero uno." Sometimes, this competitive spirit erupted into fierce rivalry.

Between Camp Polk and the adjacent town of Leesville was a pine-covered area called Sandy Hill. In those days, its one claim to fame was a honky-tonk called "Hill-Billy No. 2" featuring a bar and dance-floor. I don't know how it all got started but it became the scene of several fist-fights between men of the 36th Armored Infantry and our own 54th Armored Field Artillery. At first they were isolated instances of one-on-one but soon gave way to unpleasant episodes of one unit ganging-up on individuals of the other unit.

One hot Saturday afternoon, I joined several other Field Artillerymen who were off-duty and drinking beer at the local Post Exchange (PX). One man from my Battery D joined the crowd with some upsetting news. He had just come back from the honky-tonk outside of camp. Two artillerymen had been jumped by about six infantrymen and were badly beaten because they refused to leave the place. The infantry was going to make "Hill-Billy No. 2" their private stomping-ground! In short order, our men at the PX were crying for revenge. They wanted me to lead them on a punitive expedition. The honky-tonk was reportedly full of the "enemy," the 36th Infantry.

I lined up the bloodthirsty and beer-sated men (about 20) in a column of two and headed for the guard-gate that led to our destination. Camp Polk was surrounded by a wire fence with guard-gates at road entrances. At the guard-post, we were ordered to halt and asked where we were going. I told the guards we were off-duty and going to Hill Billy No. 2, but didn't tell them why.

The guard in charge noticed that several of our men were without caps or ties and said we could not leave without them. I counted the missing accouterments and asked for a volunteer to go back to our barracks for them. Pvt Ernest Nighbert from Tennessee volunteered. He was the smallest and youngest man in Battery D, was about 15 having lied about his age to enlist, looked like the freckle-faced kid in the cartoon "Who-Me?" but was as game as they make them. Maybe 15 minutes later, Nighbert returned with enough caps and ties. Some of the caps didn't fit but the guard let us pass out.

Less than a mile down a sandy road, was the honky-tonk. Just before we got there, singing the artillery song, I stopped them and gave a few instructions. Meanwhile, one of our men spotted an old pail in the ditch and quickly filled it with fresh horse-shit lying on the road. A minute later, I opened the door and looked inside. Sure enough, it was full of infantrymen. I shouted "Attention" in a loud voice and then proclaimed "We've got a few damned good 54th Artillerymen outside and we've come to teach you a lesson!"

Over the bar was a large wall fan that brought fresh air in from the outside. As our gang pushed through the doorway, the one with the bucket flung a pailful of horseshit onto the fan where it blew all over the room. The infantry quickly rose to the challenge and fights broke out all over the place. The shouting bartender and his two waitresses tried to stop the fighting, but they might as well have tried to roll back the ocean. It was utter pandemonium! Battles were raging both inside and outside the place.

One of our men shouted for more help outside where the infantry was getting the upper hand. I, and a few others, rushed out the door and into the thick of it. The infantry recognized me as the leader and soon several had me backed up against a wall. Perhaps it

was a sudden release of adrenalin, but I fought furiously, knocking down most who charged me. They tore off my shirt and undershirt but could not fell or get the best of me.

I was truly enjoying this "battle royal" when several jeeps loaded with MP's arrived on the scene blowing whistles, swinging billy-clubs and shouting for us to stop. In a moment they were joined by several Parish deputies on horseback, The tavern owner had called both the MP's and deputies for help. Breaking loose, I shouted to our boys "Run for it; the police are here; everyman for himself." I repeated this same message inside, and then burst out the door and sprinted for the woods across the road. Quite a few of the fighters were caught—many, including myself, escaped. I stole through the dark woods, guided by the distant glow of lights from Camp Polk, until I came to the high fence that surrounds the reservation. Minus some clothing and bloody, I avoided the gate and guard-post. I scrambled over the fence and furtively found my way back to my barracks. After cleaning up, I managed to get a few hours sleep before dawn.

Early the next morning, my Battery Commander, 1st Lt. H. sent for me. In the Orderly Room with him was an MP officer from the Post Provost Marshal's office. Lt. H. addressed me "Sgt Hoy, there was a huge fight between the 36th Infantry and men from our Battery last night in Sandy Hill." "Yes Sir." I answered. "Some of the infantry who were arrested named you as the ring-leader. Is that correct?" I was trapped, knew it and could only reply "Yes Sir." Lt. H. then assured the MP officer that I would be given adequate Battery punishment and the MP left. I felt relieved that I hadn't been arrested and taken to the Post Stockade. One thing I knew..... my Battery colleagues who fought alongside me at Hill-Billy No. 2 would certainly give a good accounting of themselves when they met the real enemy overseas!

The Battery punishment promised by Lt. H. was lenient. I would keep my rating as Sgt but would be restricted to the Battery area for two weeks plus I was to wear a full pack on my back during daylight hours the first week.

The Outrageous Aftermath

For about a month I had been dating a cute waitress I had met in a restaurant in the town of DeRidder, not too far south of Leesville and the camp. Believe it or not, but I've forgot her name but will call her Dee. About halfway through the first week of my restriction, I remembered that I had another date with her for the coming Saturday night. I confessed this to two of my good friends in the Battery and asked that they see her in DeRidder and explain why I had to break the date. They agreed.

That Saturday, after dark, I was lying on my cot in my barracks room listening to a small record-player. There was a tap on the door and one of my buddies entered with a broad shit-eating grin. When I asked if he or my other buddy had given Dee my message, he blurted out "Better yet, we've brought her here to you. She's outside hiding on the floor of a taxi!"

What they had done was strictly verboten! They had smuggled my girl-friend, hid under a blanket on the floor of a taxi, into a well-guarded camp. "Sgt Hoy, she agreed to spend the night with you and we'll smuggle her back to DeRidder tomorrow. The same taxi-driver will come back for the job."

In disbelief, I walked outside with him. Sure enough, there was a taxi—and inside was my other buddy, the driver and Dee. I was flabbergasted but delighted! The barracks was almost empty as most of the men went into town on Saturday night. My non-com's room was just inside the barracks door and using my two buddies as lookouts, I led Dee up the steps and into my room (if Mahomet cannot go to the mountain, the mountain must go to Mahomet). The cabbie departed and my buddies told me that the girl and I would be well-provided for.

They left and soon returned with hot meals, snacks, cokes, a case of beer and a bottle of whiskey. Then still chuckling, they left. I locked my door and Dee and I enjoyed the repast, drinks and each other. It was all the more enjoyable because it was clandestine.

Later that evening, the men from our barracks started returning from town and "hit the cot" for the night. None of them came to my room but another problem arose later. Dee had to use the bathroom, which was located at the opposite end of the barracks from my room. To get there, she would have to walk down a center aisle with many double-decked cots (and sleeping GI's) each side.

The problem was how to get Dee past all these cots without waking the men or being discovered. And what if any of the men were in the latrine when she arrived? Desperate minds sometimes come up with brilliant solutions. Our solution was: A long GI raincoat to cover Dee's naked body and a helmet-liner on her head. Her curls could be pushed up inside the helmet-liner. I would first go out in the barracks to make sure that no one was stirring or inside the latrine. Then I would escort the camouflaged Dee to the latrine and stand guard at the doorway so no one else came in. Dee was a great cooperator. We successfully repeated this procedure twice that night.

Sunday afternoon the cabbie was at the barracks as promised. With the help of my two buddies, we got Dee back in the cab unnoticed and under the blanket on the floor. They got her out the gate guard-post and safely home to DeRidder.

Two weeks later, there was a startling sequel. As I approached Dee's home, her father walked out with a rifle. Pointing it at me he warned that I must marry his daughter or get shot. I told him that I would think about it, turned my back and walked off. There were other people on the sidewalk and that may have saved my life. He just stood there.

I realize that bringing and keeping a woman in the barracks is a breach of military regulations (have others done it?). But after 57 years, and I'm a civilian now, prosecution seems remote. And, to my two accomplices if you're still living, I'll never reveal your names!

There are many other memories of Louisiana in 1941. I will touch on some briefly:

- "Blackout" night maneuvers in wild country. I rode a motorcycle as messenger one night and had to cross terrain studded with low burnt-out stumps—with no lights!
- Wildlife in the surrounding countryside was varied and plentiful. I always had a strong liking for all facets of natural history and found time to explore nearby wild areas. Reptiles were especially fascinating. I was in alligator country but never found one. Snakes were abundant and I saw, and caught, many species including the poisonous Cottonmouth Water-Moccasin.
- There were unpleasant encounters during maneuvers with another form of wildlife—very tiny mites called chiggers that burrowed under your skin and caused intense itching. Like with mosquitos, I was apparently a very inviting host. I recall that my lower legs got so badly infested on one of our field maneuvers, that I scratched them until they became ulcerated. I had to wear leggings to prevent scratching while I was sleeping. An antidote for these pests is to sprinkle sulfur on your skin and to swallow sulfur and molasses. The odor not only kept the chiggers away, but your friends also!
- Rosie, a Cajun girl I dated in the bayou country near Plaquemine—I swear she was so oversexed that she went into orgasm when I just looked at her! I rented my 1st Sgt's car for this date and remember his anguish when I returned it, the back seat still very wet from her "flow."

By now, my readers must be thinking that Regular Army Sgt's lives must be just one round of carousing after another. Certainly, the adventures I've recited would give that impression. But the real bulk of our time was spent in developing strong young men proficient in the art of warfare. Men so proud of their disciplined skills and achievements that they would be more than a match for enemy forces and thus have a better chance of surviving battle. Most of our trainees understood this but there were a few, a very few, "Milquetoasts" that grumbled about their training and still grumble 50 plus years later.

This book would not be so interesting if I dwelt only on the training aspects of military life. Instead, I chose to accent the raunchy and the bizarre—truth sometimes stranger than fiction.

As 1941 drew to a close, our nation was at war with Japan and Germany and I was transferred to a brand-new organization, the 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, as First Sergeant (Topkick) of Reconnaissance Company. It would be the outfit I went overseas with.

Chapter Four

"Yes Sir! Beans ARE Dessert"

From day one, we felt a special pride in our new battalion, the 703rd Tank Destroyers. As our name denoted, our prime mission would be to knock out or destroy enemy tanks. Our Tank Destroyer motto was "Seek, srike, destroy." Even our logo, our shoulder patch, was an eloquent portrayal of our mission—a black panther crushing a tank in its jaws. Quite a few artillerymen from the "honky-tonk destroying" 54th Field Artillery wound up in the new 703rd. To us, we were not only the 703rd Tank Destroyers, we were also the 703rd "Honky-tonk" Destroyers, don't get in our way! Pride in your organization and *esprit-de-corps* are very important when you're committed to combat. We had it!

I had been promoted to 1st Sgt (Topkick) of Reconnaissance Company and our Company Commander would be 1st Lt. Jack V. Murray, later promoted to Captain. In time, for sundry reasons, he acquired the nickname "Tiger Jack." Our Company would consist of headquarters and four platoons, each under a Lieutenant and a Staff Sgt. They were the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Reconnaissance Platoons and a Pioneer Platoon. The then prescribed duties of the Recon Platoons would be to locate enemy tanks. Then our line Companies A, B and C would engage the enemy tanks with their M-10 Tank Destroyer vehicles. Our Pioneer Platoon's mission would be demolitions—use of explosives to blow up bridges etc. Later, in combat, these missions would be modified.

Our Battalion Commander, who stayed with us through all state-side training and until after we reached England, was Lt. Col. Prentiss E. Yeomans, who at some point intime acquired the nickname "Iron Mike." I remember Col. Yeomans as a somewhat short, rugged, aloof individual who ran his battalion with a firm. disciplined and impartial hand. He never got "familiar" with his enlisted men but I sensed that he liked me. More than once, he quietly "went to bat" for me when I needed support. He was also a strong supporter of our Division boxing team of which I was a member. While in England, Col. Yeoman was reassigned and Lt. Col. Wilbur Showalter became our Battalion Commander through all combat operations. "Iron Mike" Yeoman was later appointed Battalion Commander of the 83rd Reconnaissance

Battalion of our Third Armored Division. He lost his life in the closing days of the war in Germany while leading his troops in action. The news of his death was a grievous shock to me.

The early weeks of organization kept me very busy. Eventually we had 149 enlisted men in our Recon Company and I had a lot of faces and names to memorize. I kept the Morning Report, a journal of all that happened to each enlisted man, and the Sick Report and soon was thoroughly acquainted with all. Our Staff Sgts in charge of each Platoon were 1st Platoon Sgt Legget, 2nd Sgt Ransitt, 3rd Sgt Parker and Pioneer Sgt Boyce. In addition we had a Staff Sgt in charge of each of the following functions: Motor Pool Sgt Calcaterra, Mess Sgt Owens, Communications Sgt Rolando and Supply Sgt Hualde. Under most of the Staff Sgts were buck Sgts and then Corporals or Specialists.

For the next 2 and 1/2 years before we finally got into combat, our enlisted men (EM) and the rank they held remained fairly constant. There were quite a few changes in the staff of Recon Company 2nd Lts, although some, Lts Livengood, Stites, Bugganer, Cooper and Cole stayed on. Lt. Cole was later promoted to 1st Lt—a sour Company Exec Officer.

Some time soon after our new 703rd organization settled down, I was told by the Company Commander that orders had been received transferring me to the Officers Candidate School (OCS) I had been approved for after testing back in Camp Beauregard. I now had mixed feelings about the matter. I liked my new rating as 1st Sgt and liked the organization and men I was associated with. Further, I thought we'd be shipped overseas soon now that we were at war and wanted to go into combat with the men I had trained. I declined the transfer to OCS.

There were many other interesting events at Camp Polk I could write about but will omit to keep this book from getting too bulky. However, there is one I should relate—it even caused a temporary loss of my position and the outcome could have been serious.

In early 1942, after duty, I went alone into nearby Leesville for a restaurant meal. Later that evening, I visited a bar and dance-hall located on the 2nd floor of a downtown building. Once more, trouble seemed to follow me.

A small country-western combo was providing lively music for the mixed crowd of GI's and civilians on the dance-floor. I was having a cocktail alone at a small table and watching the dancers when it happened. A girl on the dance floor cried out loudly in pain. As I watched, her civilian partner struck her repeatedly. No one was intervening. It was outrageous and I leapt to my feet and rushed out on the dance floor. I grabbed the arms of the man hitting the girl and told him to stop. He broke loose from my grasp and, throwing punches, charged at me. I took a couple of stiff blows and then knocked him off his feet. The music stopped, the dancers gathered around us and the bartender was on the phone calling for help. The man I knocked down scrambled to his feet and rushed me again while a second civilian joined the battle against me. Two Military Police (MP's) came rushing up the outside stairs and into the room. They blew whistles and ordered a halt to the melee. We stopped and the MP's asked who started this ruckus. Much to my amazement, the bartender pointed his finger at me and said it was my fault. I tried to defend myself, saying that all I did was try to break up a bad spat where the girl had been repeatedly struck. The two MP's would not believe me, placed me under arrest and hustled me outside. On the way down the long wooden stairs, one of the MP's kept striking my head and shoulders with his billy-club and shouting obscenities at me. It was raining and dark outside.

An MP 2 & 1/2 ton truck under canvas was parked at the curb. The MP's forced me over the tailgate and into the truck. There were several other arrested GI's inside. One MP scrambled into the back of the truck and sat near the tailgate opposite me. The other got up front with the driver and the truck took off —probably heading for the stockade. I was furious from the injustice of it all and the clubbing by the one MP! I knew the whole episode could have later grave consequences. I recalled that the MP's had not asked my name or wanted to see my ID and I decided to escape.

We were still in Leesville. The truck stopped at an intersection and then slowly turned left onto another road. While we were going slow, I decided to act. Grabbing the web belt above the tailgate, I vaulted out of the vehicle, landed on my feet in the muddy road and started running to the rear. The shocked MP in the rear of the truck started blowing his whistle and shouting for the driver to stop. He stopped and the two MP's raced down the road after me while the driver watched over the other arrestees in the truck.

I had about a half-block lead on the two MP's but decided to stop running down the street and try to hide by some of the bordering houses. Seeing one home with a wooden fence around it, I dashed through the gate into the yard, hoping that the MP's could not clearly see which yard I had turned into. But they had, entered it, and were soon chasing me around the house. The grass was wet and slippery from the rain. They chased me around the house several times but I stayed ahead of them. Had they used their heads and split up with one going one way and the other the opposite, they could have confronted me. After a few minutes of running and running, I decided it was "for the birds" and decided to stop and fight.

I crouched beside the house just around a corner, and when they came racing by stepped out and "cold-cocked" one. He fell to the ground. The other started blowing his whistle again and we tangled. Soon help arrived. An MP Lieutenant and three more MP's arrived in a jeep and joined in the fray. The Lieutenant at first stayed on the sidelines and gave orders. I was now battling three fresh MP's—the first two were still laying on the ground. The three new MP's could not restrain me and the MP Lieutenant decided to help. He grabbed my blouse and almost tore it off me. In desperation, I struck him. That was my BIG mistake!

The first two MP's were now on their feet helping the last three. It was too much—I was overwhelmed and soon in handcuffs. On the way back to the truck, the Lieutenant told me. "You won't be a 1st Sgt very long. Striking an officer is a serious offense. We're going to put you so far back in the guardhouse that you won't see the light of day!" What a hell of a way for an evening to end just because I wouldn't stand still while a man was brutally beating up a woman in public!

The next morning, the Post Provost Marshal (the highest "law and order" officer at Camp Polk) got personally involved. He wanted me to be given a General Court-Martial. About mid-morning, I was escorted into a room where the Provost Marshal, my Company Commander and Battalion Commander Yeoman were sitting at a table. I was given a chance to tell my side of the story and then returned to the stockade. I was never told what took place in that meeting after I left, but that afternoon my Company Commander returned and I was released in his custody. We returned in his jeep to Company Headquarters where I was told I was being reduced in rank to a Private and restricted to the Company area for a month but would not be court-martialed. In a few short weeks I was promoted to Sgt and made Acting 1st Sgt of the Company. Four months later I was officially promoted to full 1st Sgt again. I will never know for sure, but I believe our Battalion Commander, Col. "Iron Mike" Yeoman had strongly supported me and blocked more serious punishment.

In June of 42, the entire 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion was detached from the 3rd Armored Division and sent to the northwestern part of the Camp Hood reservation in central Texas. The closest towns were Lampasas west of Camp Hood and Waco north of it. In this wild country we would be given some very tough training including obstacle courses with exploding live ammo, survival training and training in house-to-house fighting in a mock village. This latter training was conducted by specially trained Canadians who would take part two months later in the famous Dieppe commando raids on the coast of occupied France.

Our battalion suffered a serious bout of dysentery shortly after arriving in Texas. It slowed down some of the rugged training until the epidemic had subsided. We were camped in wild country and had dug slit trenches, surrounded by a canvas screen for privacy, as our latrines. You straddled two boards over the trench and "let er fall." The dysentery got so bad that these latrines were in constant use and quite smelly regardless of the lime and chemicals used. Strong sanitary measures were enforced throughout the battalion and, indirectly, led me to the humorous episode of, "Yes Sir! Beans ARE Dessert."

The wave of dysentery prompted our Battalion Commander, Col. Yeoman, and our Battalion Surgeon, Captain Ebbets, to make frequent sanitary inspections of many areas, including the company messes, or eating areas. A good friend of mine, PFC Matt Arquilla, was a cook in A Company. His Mess Sgt was a tall Regular Army man of primarily American Indian descent, Sgt Bob E. One afternoon, I walked over to the Company A Mess area to see my friend, Arquilla. The stoves, serving tables, utensils etc. were under a canvas fly or roof. The Menu for the day was posted on a sheet tacked to the fly center support pole. Arquilla and I were chatting when suddenly Sgt E. barked "Attention" in a loud voice. All the cooks and I stood rigidly at attention while Col. Yeoman and Captain Ebbets walked in for an unannounced sanitary inspection. After checking several other features, Col. Yeoman approached Sgt E. and asked "Where is your daily Menu?" Sgt E. pointed it out on the center pole and the two officers walked to it and started reading.

It had been crudely typed by Sgt E. with his "hunt and peck" system. At the bottom of the menu, it said "Dessert—Beans." Col. Yeoman couldn't believe his own eyes and roared to Sgt E. to "Come here." The tall Sgt approached closely and stood rigidly at attention facing the much shorter Colonel. The Colonel pointed at the menu and shouted "Sgt E., are beans dessert?" Without batting an eye, Sgt E., looking straight ahead over Col. Yeoman's head, shouted back "Yes Sir! Beans ARE Dessert." The Colonel was so flabbergasted that, muttering under his breath, he strode out of the area followed by Captain Ebbets.

I was amazed and also left the area. To this day I've often wondered if Sgt E. had just made a typing error, or did he really believe that beans are dessert. If he believed the latter, then I'd feel sorry for the A Company men he fed.

There's another interesting tail tale involving this area that I must tell (55 years later, retired vets who were there that day, or heard about it, still bring it up!). On an open grassy hillside, I was teaching Survival Training to men of my Company, who were squatted in the grass in front of me. I was using the Army Field Manual on Survival Training as a guide. We had just covered the chapter on Edibles you can find in nature when one of the men spotted a Fence

Lizard on a stump near us and asked it if it could safely be eaten. I answered yes, it was not poisonous. One jokester spoke up saying he wouldn't eat lizard and dared me to catch and eat this one. Well, I'm a sucker for taking dares and quickly retorted "What's it worth to you if I do?" He pulled out a \$5 bill. I was not about to lose face in front of my men and grabbed the startled lizard, about five inches long. Holding him up for all to see, I quickly bit him in half and swallowed the front half. A moment later, I swallowed the rear half. His tail twitched back and forth all the way down my gullet to my stomach. I felt a bit nauseous but tried not to show it. Instead, I smiled and pocketed the five-dollar bill. A few minutes later, in another bet, one of the men volunteered to eat a fat, green katydid for \$5. That was too much for me and I adjourned the class.

There were a lot of copperhead snakes in that part of Texas. One afternoon, when off-duty, I was hiking with two friends near our camp area when we discovered a live copperhead. They are a pit viper, same as the rattlesnake, and poisonous. I explained to my friends that one of their biggest enemies is the non-poisonous king snake that kills by constriction and is immune to the venom of poisonous snakes. This prompted one of my friends to ask if the copperhead is immune to its own venom. I replied that I didn't know but would find out.

Pinning down the copperhead in front of me with a stout stick, I very carefully grabbed it immediately behind its head so it could not turn and bite me. Then I maneuvered the writhing snake's body in front of its head and it bit itself several times. I held him securely a few minutes until he showed signs of lethargy and then released him on the ground. He gradually became still in the next 20 minutes and, I believe, died. Guess it was a search for useless trivia, but the three of us learned something that day—the copperhead is not fully immune to its own venom.

The last few days we were on the Camp Hood reservation, we participated in some of the most rigorous training I ever encountered in the several Army units I served with. I don't recall all the details but this training course included:

- Scaling high fences and walls while wearing a full field pack on your back.

- Running through a long field planted with simulated land mines exploding on all sides.
- Negotiating your way on your belly under and through dangerous barbed-wire entanglements while live ammo whizzed overhead.
- Fording a creek that was over your head in the center while holding a carbine over your head, safely dry. Non-swimmers were to be helped across by swimmers treading water on each side of them.

And there was more. We were timed going through or over these obstacles. If you didn't make it in the required time, or not at all, you had to run that leg all over again. I recall that we helped the weaker ones by reaching down and pulling them over the top of the high wall, etc. We were far too weak with dysentery the first few days and too tired from the training exercises later to think much about getting into the surrounding small towns when off-duty.

But I do remember dating a very lovely Texas girl in the town of Waco one weekend. Her name was Aurelia Van Winkle. Her Dad owned a car dealership in Waco and was called, guess what, "Rip" Van Winkle. She was a very nice girl and we were quickly attracted to each other but there was NO hanky-panky. Shortly after that date, our Battalion was on a train bound for the California desert to rejoin the Third Armored Division and participate in desert maneuvers. I heard later that Aurelia had joined the USO and was stationed at Riverside, California. I never got into Riverside to check this out and have sometimes vainly wondered if she came to California hoping we would meet again. "Aurelia, I don't even know if you're still living, but if you are, I want you to know I still fondly remember you.

Arriba y Adelante

In mid-July, the hottest time of the year, we boarded air-conditioned trains and left Texas for the California desert. To me, as always, life was just one great adventure after another and I looked forward eagerly to this next one. Our train slowly pulled to a halt at a small station and water tower bearing the name, Rice, California. You can find it on some California maps just a few miles west of Parker Dam on the Colorado River. If you look for it by auto, don't blink or you'll miss it. Anyway, that's where we detrained. The temperature outside

was 125 degrees Fahrenheit, in sharp contrast to the air-conditioned temperature of the train we just stepped out of. You felt like you had just entered a blast furnace! We gasped and some weaker souls seemed to be wilting.

We soon found out that you do not become accustomed to this desert heat overnight. The Army had thoughtfully provided an answer. Our approximately three-month stay in the desert would be divided into two different periods. The first, for about a month, would be at a spike camp living in pyramidal tents with the sides rolled up to admit the desert breezes. We would have relatively light training exercises in the early morning and late afternoon with a lazy "siesta" rest period during the hottest mid-day hours. This period was intended to gradually acclimatize our men to the desert heat. Despite this, we still had to admit some of our men to a distant Palm Springs hospital as heat exhaustion or heat stroke cases.

The second or last period would be leaving the protective tents of our spike camp and join the rest of the Third Armored Division in maneuvers that would embrace thousands of square miles in the desert. In spike camp, we were given good hot meals with plenty of California orange juice. The air was dry but bracing and we soon were becoming hardened "desert rats." I, personally, never felt healthier in my life and I knew our Company was getting well-acclimated because the entries in my daily Sick Report were steadily decreasing.

Chapter 5
"I Dare You!"

In desert country you can see for miles and miles—the only restriction to your vision is mountains, and there were many isolated mountain ranges. The skies are so blue, the air so clean and the sunshine so bright that you feel almost as if you were in another world. I loved it. This wartime desert experience was a major factor to my settling down in the deserts of Arizona many years after WWII.

The California desert area where our Battalion and most of the Third Armored Division had their base camp when not actually on maneuvers was located on the south side of seldom-used State Highway 62, which ran from Parker Dam on the Colorado River west and then south to the small town of Desert Center at the junction of US Hwy 10. The maneuver area was much greater and embraced most of the Colorado and Mohave Deserts.

Our 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion was in the easternmost sector of the base camp area just north of the Granite Mountains. Many other mountain ranges and the white expanses of dry lakes could be seen from our camp. Before maneuvers started, we were granted occasional leaves to visit distant towns such as Palm Springs, Riverside and Los Angeles. But most of the evening and weekend recreation took place at our PX area at the south end of our Company layout or in the motor-pool area at the north end. Our slit latrines were located well-away from our tent and Mess areas at the extreme north end of camp—which brings to mind my first story.

Pvt W. was a long-time Regular Army soldier. Because of his age, regulations later barred him from going overseas with us. He was a good soldier, always neat and clean. He was also a 1st Sgt's delight because he volunteered on all work details, especially on loading and unloading heavy 5 gallon cans of water or gasoline. Pvt W also liked his beer when he was off duty. Most enlisted men in our camp spent their evenings writing letters in their tents, gambling, or in the PX area drinking beer and "shooting the bull" with their friends. We kept

the PX beer and our Mess food in large pits dug in the sand, lined with plastic and filled with chunks of ice our trucks brought in from town.

Most evenings you could find Pvt W. squatted in the sand near the PX, enjoying beer with his buddies. The following incident took place night after night and was well-verified at both "ends." This sentence will make sense to you in a minute. At the PX and most other areas, was a variety of creosote and other desert shrubs dotting the landscape. After a person had drunk a few cans of beer he had to relieve his bladder. You were NOT supposed to piss in any areas except the latrines which were about a half-mile away—past the Mess area, through rows of tents in the Company street, over a large empty area and then through the motorpool where our vehicles were parked.

Most of the men drinking beer would ignore regulations, sneak to a nearby shrub and pee, but not Pvt W who was a stickler for regulation. He would drink until he could hold it no longer and then stand up and announce "I've got to go." And GO he did, double-timing all the long half- mile way to the latrine. Arriving there, breathless, he would enter the canvas screen, stand over the "slit" and, without opening his fly, piss his pants while saying with obvious pleasure "I just made it!"

And then there was the gambling crowd. They would go to the Motor Pool area to gamble on blankets spread on the sand. When it got dark, they would remove a battery from one of the vehicles and set it near the blanket. Then they rigged a light bulb, wired to the battery, and clip it on a nearby bush. Some of these games would go on all night. At reveille in early morning, as 1st Sgt, I would blow a whistle ordering the platoons to leave their tents and "fall out" in formation in the Company street. Many mornings about half of the Company would come out of the tents and the rest streamed in from the Motor Pool "Casino."

In 1958, 13 years after the war ended, I visited the old desert base camp area. Waking early the next morning, I saw a campfire and pickup camper about a mile away. After breakfast, I walked to the campsite. A man and his wife showed me two cigar boxes full of old silver coins they had found earlier with a metal detector. I explained that they were at the site of

our old WWII base camp, that I had soldiered here in those days, and asked specifically where they had found the coins. The area they pointed out was our old motor pool site. They had mined silver where our gambling boys had lost it off their blankets years ago!

There's a sequel to this story. A few months later, I bought a metal detector and returned to the area. It bore evidence of many fresh vehicle tracks—vehicles that pulled drags to loosen the compacted sand. Needless to say, I found just a couple of old coins but lots of badly rusted sardine cans that had been buried. I found out later that the original coin discoverer in the pickup truck was from Yucca Valley. He belonged to a "four—wheeler's club" and had told them of his find. They organized a big search and cleaned the area out. *C'est le guerre!*

The GI's in our Division found time for some other unusual endeavors. The Granite Mountains range, which started with foothills about 1 and 1/2 miles south of our base camp, culminated in a peak over 4,300 feet high. One afternoon, several of us saw what appeared to be a flag flying on top of the peak. Viewing it a few minutes later with binoculars confirmed that it was a flag supported by some type of structure. After making some inquiries, we believed it had not been installed by men from our Battalion. It was a mystery to us—who did it and how or why?

That evening, after dark in the PX area, some of us were still talking about the mysterious flag when we were joined by two of our Lieutenants. I recall that one of them was Lt Cole. They had also seen the flag that afternoon. The conversation turned to forming a Company expedition the coming weekend to retrieve the flag and solve the mystery. I commented that an expedition would not be necessary—one good man could do it alone, even at night. Lt. Cole said "Sgt Hoy, would you do it tonight? I dare you!" The dare was quickly accepted... if they put up enough money. A pot of \$20 was collected. It was then about 9 pm and I would have to be back for the next morning's 6 am reveille. I thought it could be done and went to my tent for some essentials before I left. I returned with my pistol, a compass and a flashlight. With a small crowd shouting encouragement, I strode off towards the looming mountains.

There was enough moonlight for good visibility but I was still careful in stepping over larger rocks to avoid stepping on a rattlesnake. They prowl and hunt at night. I reached the beginning of the foothills in about a half-hour. Like most mountains, there were first low foothills followed by several successively higher ones until I reached the main peak. As I ascended the foothills, my view of the main peak would occasionally be blocked and I would use the stars as a guide. By 11 pm, after some stiff scrambling and many detours to find a less steep route, I finally was on the last incline and could see the peak and flag directly ahead. As I neared the peak, I encountered strong winds. Reaching the craggy peak, I looked far to the north and below and could faintly see some lights in the base camp area. I also noticed that the flagpole was nailed to a rough tripod of 2 x 4's whose feet were thrust between large rocks for support. I guessed that two or more men had carried the tools, materials and flag to this remote peak. I had no tools with me and had to use rocks to loosen and remove the flagpole. It was ticklish business as the wind was whipping wildly and there were sharp drops on three sides of the peak.

In a few minutes I had removed the flagpole with its rough home-made flag. It bore the insignia and name of the 36th Armored Infantry, my old nemesis from the "Hill-Billy No. 2" day grand battle. I smiled to myself—wouldn't they have a fit if they knew Sgt Hoy was capturing their high-flying flag! Feeling relieved that I had attained my objective, I carefully rolled the flag on its pole and began the long descent. I knew I had plenty of time to return to camp, so I descended very carefully. Just after 5 am, I reached our camp, stuck the flagpole in the sand in front of my tent and got a little shuteye before turning the men out for the 6 am reveille. After reveille and before breakfast, the men examined the flag and asked questions about its retrieval. Lt Cole, who had dared me the previous evening, was beaming and complimentary—"Sgt Hoy, I knew you would do it!" A saying by Benjamin Disraeli, a past Prime Minister of Great Britain, seems apropos: *Success is the child of audacity.*

Chapter 6

The Wine-Merchant's Wife and Other Goodies

Our days at the base camp passed rapidly, even with the long mid-day siestas. There were many early morning marches, small arms firing practice on a nearby range, training classes in many selected subjects such as map and compass reading, and maintenance of our vehicles and equipment. Water was a precious commodity on the desert—ours was trucked in from the Iron Mt Pumping Station of the Colorado Aqueduct. Water from the aqueduct had to be "lifted" over the mountains. We had to conserve water, but there was enough for our needs and personal cleanliness. We usually washed our clothes while taking a brief shower at some improvised shower stalls. Our daily clothing was the one-piece HBT fatigue suit, commonly called "jumpsuit" today.

We perspired so heavily during desert exercise that our bodies lost a lot of salt. It would dry as conspicuous whitish patches on our clothing. To counteract this loss of bodily salt and thus reduce chances of heat exhaustion, we had to swallow a salt pill every day. When we used our vehicles, we hung canvas drinking bags on the side of the vehicle to cool the water inside by evaporation.

Before the actual maneuvers began, I was granted a weekend leave to visit Los Angeles, about 175 miles away. I remember some lively incidents in restaurants and bars on 7th Street in then downtown Los Angeles. One, in particular, was unusual. After stopping a fight in a bar and restaurant among several enlisted men, I was approached by an elderly gentleman who complimented me and then invited me to his table for a drink with him and his young, attractive wife. He told me that he was a wine-merchant. He and his wife then invited me to their apartment for some wine-tasting and snacks. They said they would drive me there in their car and return me later to the 7th Street area.

At the apartment, I was shown an extensive collection of fine wines in a specially air-conditioned room. Then they served tasty snacks with samples of various wines. Afterwards, the old man left the room and his young wife sat on my lap and kissed me. I was surprised

and said she should be more careful as her husband might return. She explained that her husband could no longer satisfy her sexual urges because of age and that they both had "selected" me to have sex with her. She then took me by the hand and led me to a bedroom. She was very lusty and we enjoyed sex together.

Later, they both drove me back to 7th Street. My buddies used to say that I was very lucky and could "fall into a pile of shit and come out smelling like a rose. " This was one of those "lucky" days! We had a variety of vehicles in our Tank Destroyer Battalion. My Recon Company had M-8 armored wheeled vehicles that featured a 37 mm turret gun and a 30 caliber machine gun. We also had jeeps, called peeps in those early days, 1 and 1/2 ton and 2 and 1/2 ton trucks, a larger touring-type command car that we then called a jeep and some half-track armored vehicles. Our line Companies, A, B, and C were equipped with fully-tracked, diesel fueled M-10 Tank Destroyers that mounted 3-inch diameter guns and looked like General Sherman tanks with an open-topped turret. Later, during combat, the M-10's would be replaced by the M-36 Tank Destroyer that has gasoline engines and mounted a larger 90mm gun.

While still in base camp, I and three Sgts from my Company were granted a weekend leave to visit the desert town of Needles on the Colorado River. We were allowed to use a command car for the trip. Being the most senior non-com, the vehicle was signed out to me. Two of the men were Staff Sgts and the other was an older Regular Army buck Sgt , Sgt P. Leaving the base camp on state highway 62, we headed east to the junction of US 95 and then turned north towards Needles. We were still about 25 miles south of the town when we were struck by a very strong sand storm. Two occasional phenomena of deserts are flash floods in the canyons and blinding sandstorms. Either can be killers to the unwary novice. This sandstorm was the first and only that I experienced during our three-month stay on the desert but it made up for that by its fury.

Within minutes after it started that afternoon, the sand and dust were so thick we could scarcely see. To avoid possible collisions on the road, we pulled off it into the desert for about 50 feet, shut off the motor and waited it out. The side curtains of the car were not

snapped on when the storm struck and we huddled down in our seats covering our face and heads with our arms while it got dark as midnight in mid-afternoon.

Maybe an hour later, the screeching winds abated and visibility gradually returned. The intense driving sand had severely pitted our wind-shield and pock-marked the vehicle's paint job but the vehicle could be started and we continued on our way to Needles. As we approached the outskirts of town, another misfortune arose. We were stopped by two soldiers at a roadblock and told that another Division (I believe it was the Fourth Infantry) was conducting maneuvers in the area and they had placed the entire town of Needles "off-limits" to all others. Our weekend leave was granted to visit Needles and we had come a long way that day to get there (even suffering a sandstorm). Now we must turn back and return to our unit? The four of us pulled out a map and went into a conference. The much more appealing town of Las Vegas was about 100 miles north through the little town of Searchlight, Nevada. We recalled that about 5 miles back we had passed a cutoff road to Searchlight. Also, we had plenty of fuel in 5-gallon gas cans, and we felt that our officers would understand if we went to Las Vegas because Needles was off-limits. We turned around and headed for the cut-off road.

Soon, we were on our way to Searchlight about 40 miles ahead. It was after dark when we arrived. Searchlight was a very small silver and gold mining town located on a crossroad deep in a valley surrounded by steep, rugged mountains. Most of the population lived in small homes that clung to the steep slopes and required walking up long flights of steps to reach them. At the crossroads was one commercial building. It was a combined restaurant, bar, grocery store and gas station. We stopped there for a hot sandwich and a cocktail. We also bought a bottle of whiskey to take back to camp the next day. The place even had slot machines for gambling and we discovered it had another business enterprise. The girl tending bar would take you in the back-room for a silver dollar!

An hour later, we left Searchlight and, putting our vehicle in low gear, climbed the steep grade out of town and were on our way to Las Vegas. Halfway there, we all felt sleepy so stopped the car on the road shoulder and all took a nap. Rested, we continued on our way. I

had driven the vehicle ever since we left camp, but now the others felt I should be relieved. Sgt P, in the back seat wanted to drive and was especially vocal about it. I found out later that they had opened the bottle of whiskey in the back seat and Sgt P had more than the others. Mostly to quiet Sgt P, I let him take over the driving but sat in the front seat with him. It was now getting daybreak and visibility without headlights was good. The road seemed deserted. We hadn't seen another vehicle since leaving Searchlight.

We had gone through the neighboring town of Henderson and were going up a long gradual grade towards Las Vegas when we ran head-on into Big trouble spelled with a capital B. Just over the top of the grade were three parked vehicles, two Las Vegas Police motorcycles and an old Ford coupe. The Ford and one motorcycle were parked off the road on the shoulder and the other motorcycle was parked on the right half of the right lane directly ahead of us. Fortunately, both policemen were off the road looking into the Ford coupe that seemed to be abandoned. I shouted at Sgt P. to swerve so he would miss the cycle in the road but it was too late. Sgt P's reflexes were too slow and our command car struck the parked cycle. It careened off the road and struck the other parked cycle on the shoulder. I, and the policemen were shouting at our vehicle to stop. Sgt P. stopped it a short distance from the accident and, escorted by the policemen, we walked back to the damaged cycles. They were both radio-equipped. The cycle we hit was totaled, but the other seemed to have only minor damage. The radios on both were smashed. We heard later that Las Vegas then had only three cycles on its police force. With one bizarre collision, we had wiped out two-thirds of their cycles!

We were placed under arrest and had to drive one of the policemen into the Las Vegas Police Station while the other stayed with the wrecked cycles. I drove the vehicle into town. At the station, we were questioned. We made the point that they should not have left the one cycle parked on the road. We were then locked in a cell while the Desk Sgt tried unsuccessfully to reach our officers at the base camp. I asked to see the Desk Sgt later and pleaded for our release, saying that we would pay the damages to the cycles when we got the bill. The Desk Sgt believed me and after signing some documents they prepared, we were released and given the key to our vehicle. We were also told to go straight home and not stop in Las Vegas.

It was now about mid-morning and we had not eaten since the sandwiches in Searchlight the previous evening. As we left Las Vegas, we saw a restaurant on the outskirts and, thinking we were out of town, decided to stop for breakfast. A juke box was playing, some people were dancing and a few others were playing slot machines. As I finished my breakfast, I asked the waitress for a dance not realizing that trouble was again just around the corner. She accepted. We were dancing when I felt a hand on my shoulder jerking me backwards and a loud voice that boomed, "What the hell are you doing dancing with my wife!" It was the waitress's husband who had just entered the restaurant. He gave me a violent shove and I went down. Getting up, I noticed he was wearing a gun in a holster on his hip. My first thought was that we had better leave this place, but it was too late—he was already throwing punches. Defending myself, I struck a good blow and he went down. When he got up, several other customers piled on both of us and tried to break it up. Meanwhile, someone had called the police. A squad car stopped out in front and two policemen rushed in. I immediately recognized one of them as one of the two cyclists who had arrested us that morning! And he immediately recognized us!" You guys just can't stay out of trouble, can you. We told you to get out of town!" The police took us back to their station, one of them riding with us in our vehicle. The Desk Sgt was astounded to see us again and we were promptly locked up. This time we looked forward to a longer stay. A half-hour later I was summoned again before the Desk Sgt. They had investigated the restaurant brawl and found out I had not started it. And they had tried again to contact our Battalion. By a combination telephone and radio hookup, they had reached Colonel Yeoman at base camp and told him the whole story. He requested that the police release us to return to camp and assured them that we would pay the bill for the cycles repair as soon as it arrived.

Late that afternoon, we arrived back at our California camp. We waited while Lt Murray called our Colonel and then were all ordered to report to Battalion Headquarters. There, a grim-aced Col. Yeoman "read us the riot act" and said that we would be punished—no more leaves while in California, we would pay for all damages to the Las Vegas cycles, and Sgt P., the driver at the time of the accident, would be disgraced to Pvt and be transferred out of the 703rd to some unit in Texas.

About a week later, Lt Murray received the Las Vegas bill. As I recall, it was a little over \$800, a stiff price for the four of us to pay out of our Army pay. But it turned out even stiffer when we were told that three of us would split and pay the bill as former Sgt P. was no longer with our Battalion and had been punished enough! I recall that I sold my record-player to help pay my share.

After our stay at base camp, we embarked on desert maneuvers against a simulated enemy. These maneuvers encompassed a huge desert area bounded on the north by Needles and Barstow and on the south from Blythe almost to Palm Springs. We "fought" around many mountain ranges—The New York, Coxcombs, Chocolate, Big and Little Santa Maria, Granite, Iron, Old Woman and Turtle, and over several salt-encrusted dry lakes—Cadiz, Bristol and Danby. Even today, you could probably find traces of our vehicle tracks and foxholes. We took these maneuvers very seriously for the rumour was that we would soon be shipped to North Africa to engage Germany's highly touted Afrika Corps under General Rommel.

Once we were on maneuvers, there were no more hot meals like we had in base camp. Now we subsisted on canned or packaged C or K Rations with a supplementary ration of canned sausages, chicken, turkey and sardines in tomato sauce. We did have a hot drink by mixing Nescafe powder in a canteen cup of water and placing it on the hot manifolds of our vehicles. Most of our men were not very keen about canned sardines but until they were gone, there were no other replacements. So they were "gone" by digging a hole in the sand and hiding them unopened. Armed with metal detectors, the curious could probably find thousands of old, rusted sardine cans in the desert today.

Chapter 7

The Sad Ending of Saving a Life

As I start the draft of this chapter, it is a striking and beautiful March day in north-central Arizona. I'm retired in the high desert country of Cottonwood.. From my front yard I have a magnificent, panoramic view of the Verde Valley and the scenic red-rock country that stretches from Sedona almost to Cottonwood. Looking up my street, I can see the nearby looming Mt Mingus, 8000 feet high and with snow gracing its upper slopes while it's 70 degrees F here in my yard. My home is at 3400 feet altitude but the surrounding countryside is typical desert. Nearby are cliff-dwellings, ancient artifacts and an abundance of wildlife.

In 1956, I had accepted a position with Kaiser Steel in Fontana, California, to once again be near the deserts I had learned to love back in those 1942 desert maneuvers. Now, in retirement, I chose the beautiful desert country of Arizona to be my last home. While on desert maneuvers, I was fascinated by the many secrets and treasures of the desert—its colorful rocks and gemstones, the occasional long-abandoned "glory-holes" of forgotten prospectors and the mysterious hieroglyphics left on some rocks by the ancient inhabitants. Many of the undisturbed areas of the desert bore a desert "varnish" called patina from eons of aging by the elements. I recall one area west of Blythe where this patina covered acres which glowed with an unearthly beauty. Not too far north of Blythe, on a high plateau, ancient Indians had arranged countless small rocks into very large outlines of snakes and mammals. I believe this is now a state-protected area.

Long after the war, I bought a four-wheeled drive "Scout" and explored much of the California deserts on weekends or vacations. I found many interesting things such as coprolites, which are fossilized dung of prehistoric animals, and fossil oyster shells almost as big as dinner plates. These enjoyable days were an unforetold legacy of the love I acquired for the deserts when maneuvering with the 703rd Tank Destroyer Bn in 1942. What other interesting events could be told about that maneuver period? If all of the fine officers and enlisted men who were there could be queried, I'm sure we'd have another book. But I'm just one man and chose the incidents I was most involved in and stood out vividly in my

memory. Some were humorous and others riveting because they were so unusual and bizarre—almost unbelievable! It was a joy to recall most of them.

In the last month of our desert stay there was another incident that should be told, one that was quite different from the others. It involved a man's life and later had a tragic ending.

The Sad Ending of Saving a Life

We had been maneuvering at the time in the eastern end of the Colorado Desert and were now close to the Colorado River. Our troops were tired, grimy with sweat-caked dust, and needed a break. On the Chehemuevi Indian Reservation bordering the river and about 20 miles south of Needles, a temporary halt to the maneuvers was announced so we could rest and clean-up. Our men rushed to the river to bathe and wash their dirty clothing. The Colorado at this point was broad and very swift. We cautioned everyone to stay in the shallower water near shore and not go swimming further out. I walked down to the river to help watch over the bathing men and was joined by two Lts then with Recon Company, Lts FW Jackson and W Bell, Jr. Together, we strolled up and down the bank.

Suddenly, through the babble of voices at the river's edge, we heard a loud, piercing scream for help. Rapidly scanning the river, we saw a man flailing the water out in a fast current. We learned later that he had been washing his clothes, stepped off in a deep hole, and was swept away downstream. The man screamed again and then went under. I am a good swimmer and reacted quickly. Taking off my helmet liner and pistol belt with pistol, I raced to the water edge and dove in at a point below where we had last seen the drowning man. I was counting on the powerful current to sweep him down to where I would be. I had no time to remove my combat boots and they became a drag and hindrance.

Then I saw the terrified man resurface further out and still downstream from me. I shouted to him that I was coming and swam in his direction. The strong current made it difficult to close on his position. Just as I reached him, he submerged again. Grappling under the surface, I touched him, got hold under his arms and, swimming with my one free arm,

pulled him to the surface. For a brief instant, he resisted me and then went limp. The two Lts and a gathering crowd followed my progress and shouted encouragement. I tried to swim to shore with the limp body but the swift current made it almost impossible. If I gained a foot closer to shore, I would be twenty feet further downstream!

I felt my own strength dwindling, and wondered how much longer I could hold onto the drowning man. Lts Bell and Jackson clearly saw my predicament and came up with a good idea. They took off their clothes and undershirts and with some clothing donated by other onlookers, knotted them into a makeshift rope. Then they flung it towards me from the bank. I missed it several times and was almost ready to release the drowning man to save my own life when I managed to grab it. I held onto both the "rope" and the drowning man, and they pulled us into shallow water near the shore. Soon we were both lying on the sandy bank. I was gasping for breath, but the victim was unconscious and showed no signs of life. The Lts tried artificial respiration and were soon joined by a Medic who was called to the scene. They continued with the rhythmic strokes of the respiration process. The prolonged efforts succeeded—the man expelled water, coughed and started breathing. A couple of the victims buddies arrived and identified him as PFC William French from one of our 703rd line Companies. About an hour later, his buddies and the Medic escorted the weak and trembling PFC French back to his Company. I felt extremely grateful that we had saved his life.

One of the two Lts with me said, "Sgt Hoy, we are going to recommend you for the Soldier's Medal." The next morning, before we pulled out of the bivouac area, he returned to my vehicle and told me "I'm sorry, Sgt Hoy, that I mentioned the Soldier's Medal to you. I saw our Bn Exec Officer last night and recommended it. He said that nobody in the 703rd would get any medals until they earned them in combat." At the time, I really didn't care, but I was aware the Soldier's Medal could be awarded for heroism stateside. The two Lts were later transferred out of Recon Company.

There are two interesting sequels to this story. The first came in a letter from my sister a couple of months later. I had three other brothers who served in the US Army during the war. One of them, Bob, was in the combat medics and had trained at Camp Roberts,

California. While there, he was enjoying a swim in the Post swimming pool when he saw a young girl lying motionless on the bottom of the pool. He dove down and brought her to the surface. Artificial respiration was given and she survived. She was an officer's daughter. For this action, my brother was given a formal parade review, a nice article in the Post newspaper AND the Soldier's Medal. Now I really felt letdown but kept it to myself. To our then Bn Exec Officer there WERE medals awarded to men of the 703rd before they were in combat.

More than a year later, in England, I was awarded the Triple Twenty League medal by the "London Daily Express" for an outstanding feat in a game of darts!

The other sequel to this story is the tragic one. PFC William French was killed in action during the latter days of the Ardennes "Battle of the Bulge" in Belgium. He was a member of Sgt Bill Crochetierre's Tank Destroyer, 1st Platoon, Company B. They had seen heavy action during the war, knocking out several German tanks. Only three weeks before his death, his Platoon, under Lt Ball, assisted the 82nd Airborne Division in stopping the advance of the German 1st SS Panzer Division at Trois Ponts where the German armor had tried to cross the Ambleve and Salm rivers. In that action, French's Tank Destroyer lost their Gunner, Al Morrie. I never saw PFC French again after that harrowing day on the Colorado River. I've wondered since about the imponderable Fate that would spare his life that day on the desert and then take it, in combat, a little more than two years later

Our training maneuvers in the desert ended in late October, 1942 and we were told that our Division would be shipped east preparatory to leaving for combat overseas. There was a general feeling that we were headed for the armored warfare in North Africa but this was not confirmed. Our Tank Destroyer Battalion was only told we were leaving for Camp Pickett, Virginia. We returned to our desert base camp to prepare for the move, including taking down our tents and cleaning up the site. Our last day on the desert was October 28th and one of our last tasks was to fill-in the Company latrines and place staked signs over them that

said: OLD LATRINE Company __, 703rd TD Bn 10/28/42. The signs were wood with lettering in black paint. I've dwelt on these latrine signs because they're associated with a much later interesting story. Long after the war, in 1958, I revisited the old desert base camp site. Wandering around, I came upon the former latrine areas. Much to my surprise, there were still some old latrine signs intact and standing at two of the old Company areas—Hqs and B. They were deeply weathered by the 16 year exposure to the sun and wind, but were plainly legible. I took the two signs home with me, as mementos, and hung them in my garage.

In May of 1994, almost a half-century after the war, my wife and I attended our first reunion of the Battalion at Springfield, Missouri. It was a GREAT reunion, ably headed by Association President Fred Hunt and Vice-President, Merle Goodrich. Along with other mementos, I had brought the old Company B latrine sign. At a banquet on the last night, I made a surprise presentation of this old sign to a former member of Company B, IB Wagoner of Bowie Texas (a long-time associate of mine in the Army). I had written a poem for the presentation: Ode to the Historic 703rd TD Latrines.

There were many man-made features
That graced our desert scene,
But none so badly needed
As the Company latrine.
A simple trench with straddle planks,
Walled in by a canvas screen,
With wide appeal at certain times,
Stood the Company latrine.
It served yet another purpose
When filled-in, and less its screen,
The SIGN above marked history
And for years was plainly seen
What history? You well may ask!

What nugget can we glean?

"Twas the departure date of the 703rd

Proclaimed over the old latrine 10/28/42.

The Secretary-Treasurer of our Third Armored Division Association, LeRoy Hanneman, was present at this Battalion reunion. He later published a picture of the presentation in the Association Newsletter with some nice compliments on our re-union.

Three or four days after leaving the California desert, our Battalion arrived at Camp Pickett, in central Virginia just outside of Blackstone. We were destined to be there only two months. While we engaged in training and maintenance activities, and a whole lot of re-supply, we were visited by a top-level team from the Army Inspector-General's office to determine our combat-readiness. Although we had completed all the prerequisite weapons firing earlier, apparently some of our training records were missing and there was no satisfactory verification. We were ordered to another camp, Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, to repeat much of the weapons firing and have it properly recorded.

We would not be going overseas into combat at this time as rumored. The news was met with mixed reactions. In early January 1943, we departed Camp Pickett for Indiantown Gap, not far from the beautiful Amish country of Pennsylvania. It was a large well-planned facility and we were assigned comfortable barracks as quarters. It was to be our last stateside camp before going overseas.

Chapter 8

Hard Coal Country

Eastern Pennsylvania is a beautiful region. There are many smoothly-rounded elongated mountains that stretch obliquely from northeast to southwest, all part of the very old and worn Appalachian Mountain Range. The mountains are mostly forested and separated by lush green valleys. This land is a startling contrast to the western desert areas we had recently left. Fort Indiantown Gap is located about 20 miles northeast of the city of Harrisburg, which is on the scenic Susquehanna River, and just a few miles northwest of Amish country with its productive agricultural land and hard-working people with their quaint customs. The "chocolate" town of Hershey with its museum and many tourist attractions is also in this general area. With its many fine motels, the entire region is a "must-see" for vacationers! It was also a fitting and enjoyable area for the final stateside days of the 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion. Many of our Battalion draftees came from Pennsylvania or nearby eastern seaboard states, and the Indiantown Gap location provided easy access home for short leaves.

Coal-mining was one of Pennsylvania's greatest industries back in 1943. Soft coal, bituminous, was primarily found in western Pennsylvania, while hard coal, anthracite, was abundant in the eastern half of the state, north and northeast of Indiantown Gap. Quite a few men from our Battalion came from the hard-coal mining towns such as Pottsville, Ashland, Shamokin and Mount Carmel. They graciously invited many of the rest of us to visit their homes and towns on weekend leaves, and fond memories of these visits prompted me to name this chapter "Hard Coal Country."

We spent about eight months at Indiantown Gap. A great deal of this time was on the firing ranges qualifying for the combat-readiness status that had not been acknowledged at Camp Pickett, Virginia. Our boys knew we were getting closer to overseas combat but there were no visible signs of apprehension or fear. Meanwhile, the war continued to rage on many fronts. It was now three years since the British and French had declared war on Germany in 1939 after Germany invaded Poland, and over a year since the German invasion of Russia

and the Japanese attack on our Pearl Harbor. We all kept a weather eye on the war's progress. During the short eight months we trained at Indiantown Gap, the following landmark events took place:

- 2/23/43 Last elements of the doomed German 6th Army surrender at Stalingrad and the Russians mount an offensive to recapture Rostov, Kharkov and Kursk.
- 2/20/43 General "Desert Fox" Rommel's armor breaks through the Kasserine Pass in Tunisia defended by the US 2nd Corps.
- 5/13/43 Last Axis forces surrender in Tunisia.
- 6 /22/43 US 8th AF makes first large-scale daylight raid on Germany's industrial Ruhr area.
- 7/22/43 US Army takes Palermo, Sicily (my younger brother Howard parachutes into this area with the 82nd Airborne Division), and the Soviet offensive spreads across the entire Eastern Front.
- 8/17/43 US 8th AF raids Schweinfurt and Regensburg while the British Royal AF attacks German V1/V2 missile sites at Peenemunde.

Along with many island and sea battles with Japan in the South Pacific, we knew that this was truly a world-scope war on many fronts and that there were many nations involved. With Allied victories in Russia, North Africa and Italy that year in 1943, the fortunes of war were turning in our favor but the struggle would still be a long one.

The 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion had its first birthday the month we arrived at Indiantown Gap. It was my longest continuous service with any Army unit to date. My knowledge of Recon Company and its personnel, after one year as Topkick, had increased manyfold as the following incident will attest. I have always been blessed with a retentive memory.

Admittedly, today, in my late seventies, there are occasional lapses and mental blocks, but I have never felt compelled to keep a diary. From constant entries in various Company reports I kept, I soon noticed I could remember the assigned Army serial numbers (ASN's) of many men in Recon Company and decided to make an effort and memorize the others, which I did. My ASN was 6917730, only seven digits because I was Regular Army. Most men in my Company were draftees and had 8-digit ASN's.

For those in the know, I was some kind of a mental "freak" for accomplishing this feat—there were 149 enlisted men in Recon Company. Our Company Orderly Room was in the front half of a small one-story building not far from the barracks. Some afternoons, when I was sleepy and events permitted, I would take a short nap. Immediately above my desk in the Orderly Room was a trap-door that led to a low attic. I felt if I went to my room to nap, there were good odds that someone would find me and wake me over some small matter that could have waited. So I secretly took some boards and a mattress up into the attic for unmolested naps.

One afternoon, I had just crawled up into my hide-away, shut the trap-door and reclined on the mattress when I heard voices below me. One of them was one of our Company Lieutenants. He was with a Lt from a neighboring Battalion. Remaining absolutely still overhead, I heard this conversation: "I'm sorry our 1st Sgt isn't here. I wanted to show you his amazing memory. He knows by heart, and can tell you, the correct ASN for every man in the Company." The other Lt replied "Where do you get all those tall fish stories—that's impossible." To which our Lt, his feelings apparently hurt, retorted "Damn you, I'm not telling stories! We'll come back in an hour or so, and if he's here then, I'll prove it to you!" They left, the Orderly Room was vacant again and I descended from the attic. Chuckling to myself, I did a little plotting. Some time later, the two Lts came back. I was ready for them. After greetings and an introduction, our Lt praised my memory on serial numbers and asked me to demonstrate it. I answered "I'll do the best I can, Lt." I reached for a Company roster and gave it to the other Lt who was grinning in disbelief. He picked a name on the roster and asked for his ASN. On this first one, I gave the number correctly. He seemed nonplussed but then selected another name. On this one, I deliberately gave a wrong number. He gave a gloating look at our embarrassed Lt and then selected a third name. Once again I gave a wrong number. Turning to our Company Lt, he said "I knew you were a bull-shitter! What have you got to say now?" Our Lt looked despairingly at me and didn't reply. He actually looked sick! His friend said "Let's get the hell outta here—you're wasting my time!" They both started to leave. I was by now in a fit of laughter but said, "Lts, I've been pulling your leg—try me again." They did and I reeled off correctly the ASN's for the many names they

selected. They left, our Lt immensely relieved and the other immensely "flabbergasted." I was the subject of several of these tests at Indiantown Gap.

The Staff Sgt of our Pioneer Platoon was George Boyce, who had been a coal-miner and came from one of the local mining towns. He invited me on more than one week-end trip into his hard-coal country. "George, I lost track of you during the war in Europe due to a number of reasons. If you're still living, I'd sure like to see you again!" Through George and his mining friends, I learned the hazards of the coal-mining profession. Throughout the hard-coal country I would meet families who had lost someone in the mines. It's a rugged way to make a living! Most miners I met were of Irish, Welsh or Polish extraction. They were all big-hearted people who worked hard, played hard and drank hard. as we shall soon see.

George was full of entertaining stories and jokes. One night I was having dinner with George and his lovely wife Anna. They had been telling me that they had a long courtship before finally getting married. The way George told it was—they had been dating each other for something like fifteen years when Anna said to him "George, after all these years, we're not getting any younger, don't you think it's finally time that we got married?" To which George replied, "Yes, Anna, I do. But WHO would have us now?" George introduced me to the coal-mining towns of Pottsville, Ashland, Shamokin and Mount Carmel. In most of these towns they had volunteer fire-fighting associations with their own private clubs. One reason for the private clubs readily became apparent. These coal-miners liked their drinks, but by Pennsylvania law, commercial bars and State-owned liquor stores were closed on Sundays. However, the law permitted alcoholic drinks at the private clubs on Sundays if you belonged to the fire-fighting association and had a private key to the club. George had a key to the Mt Carmel Cloverleaf Fire-Fighting Club and brought me as a guest. We always had a great time at the Cloverleaf. It was simply good food, strong drinks, rollicking dancing and the most fun-loving people I have ever met! The dancing featured polkas and schottisches. Frequently, a member of the band would step forward and instruct the entire gathering in these and other dances. I had no trouble in finding eager dance partners—and dates.

Outside the small town of Centralia, east of Mt Carmel, was a popular tavern called McHughes (I am not positive on this name today). It was a popular spot for many surrounding miners. George took me there a couple of times. Shortly after WWII, there was a popular radio program called "Duffy's Tavern." If you remember it, you're giving away your age. My wife and I always enjoyed it. To me, many of the episodes were reminiscent of McHughes Tavern in Pennsylvania. The patrons

of McHughes were typical coal-miners having fun in their own way. At the long bar, they generally drank "boiler-makers," a shot of whiskey in a glass of beer. You ordered the beer and whiskey in separate glasses, then dumped the whiskey into the beer. You got out the last drop of whiskey from the shot glass by upending and immersing it in the beer a couple of times. WARNING: these boiler-makers are not for novices—they pack a wicked punch!

A few boiler-makers frequently led to arguments and fist-fights. To the combatants it was all good-natured fun. After exchanging a few blows, they would shake hands and sit down again at the bar, side-by-side, good friends again. If a fight persisted and there was a display of ill-feelings, other customers would break it up. These people seemed to fight "just for the fun of it."

You've probably concluded by now that I enjoy a good fight and you're right. But it was easy for me to stay out of them here at McHughes. I was in uniform which the miners respected. They carefully avoided picking a fight with me and, for my part, I gave them no reason to do so. They had another popular pastime at McHughes. On Saturdays, they frequently advertised and held "pigeon-shoots" out behind the tavern for prizes. These "live pigeon-shoots" may have been the forerunner of the popular clay-pigeon or Skeet sport prevalent today—I don't know. In addition to the prizes awarded, there was a lot of background betting on favorites.

Your shooting sequence was established by drawn numbers and, as I recall, you shot at three successive pigeons when your turn was called. You stood behind a line on the ground, shotgun loaded and at the ready. A few yards in front, a live pigeon would be released from a container by a string pull on a door latch. A timer would blow a whistle when the pigeon

ascended to a certain height and you quickly aimed and shot. I attended one of these "shoots" the last time I was at McHughes. The miners were curious about the shooting accuracy of a soldier and invited me to compete that day. I had qualified as a rifle marksman on Army firing ranges, but shooting at a fast-moving target with a shotgun is an entirely different matter. So when my name was called, I walked to the firing line with some degree of inward trepidation. I didn't want to be embarrassed in front of this crowd.

My concern was groundless. I fired one shot each at three successive pigeons and dropped all of them. The wave of applause was spontaneous. In a few minutes, some of the enthusiastic miners had ordered boiler-makers for me. There were so many that they lined them up on a bench—maybe a dozen or more. Had I drank all of them, God forbid, I could never have left McHughes upright that day. What a place! Back at Indiantown Gap, our training and firing missions were soon to be completed. The days had just flown by. Near the end of August, we were told to pack for relocation to our embarkation staging area at New Brunswick, New Jersey, not far from Staten Island, New York, where we would ship out. We would soon be on our way overseas.

In May of 1996, more than a half-century later, I had a chance to revisit Indiantown Gap during a reunion of our Battalion at nearby Grantsville. Bob Downey drove Jim Roberts and me to the old stomping grounds. Bob was on the reunion planning and organizing committee, under Association President Frank Miller. He had been a member of our C Company but at some point in time had transferred to another unit where he became a Major. Jim had been a Platoon Lt in B Company with a distinguished combat record. The old camp still looked much like it did in WWII, although portions of it had been torn down and there were a few new buildings. Part of the camp is used occasionally by the National Guard today. I wanted to see where our Recon Company was quartered in those days and Bob Downey very patiently drove me to three different areas that bore a resemblance. The Gap is a huge camp and many of the buildings are look-alikes, but I think we finally located the old Company area and I got some pictures of it. I recalled how in 1943, our entire Company had its picture taken in front of one of the barracks. I still have it, framed, at home.

During the visit, we stopped at Post Headquarters and asked if they might have a Post layout showing the location of various units in 1943. We never located one, although we were told that the one person that might know was on leave. The Post personnel were very kind to us and even found a couple of documents in their files about our Battalion.

Chatting with affable Bob Downey, I found out that he is a native of the "hard coal country." Earlier, I had been told that Bob had a brother who was killed in action in WW II and that a street in the Indiantown Gap Camp had been named after him. I talked the reluctant Bob into driving us to that street where I got a snapshot of the street-sign with his brother's name. Thanks for everything you did that day, Bob, to show us around.

I didn't discover that the Third Armored Division and my Battalion were having post-war reunions until 1993, forty-eight years after the war ended. Since, I have attended several. Our Battalion has its reunions every two years. The next, and final one, will be in Grand Rapids, Michigan, home of our current Association President, Bob Schutt, in May of this year, 1998. It will be the final one due to dwindling reunion attendance caused by advancing age and illness. After all, most of our still-living Battalion vets are in their seventies and eighties!

Chapter 9

Convoy to Where?

We arrived at our embarkation staging area in New Brunswick, New Jersey about the beginning of September, 1943. Despite a lot of overseas preparatory work completed before leaving Indiantown Gap, there was still more to do. We were given very specific lists of what we'd wear and take with us on board ship. Surplus personal items we shipped home and surplus military issue was turned in to the Staging Area Quartermaster. Even the amount of money we could take on board was strictly regulate—it was limited to \$20 per man.

On the 4th of September, we left the staging area for the short trip to dockside on Staten Island, New York. Our ship, the MS Shawnee, was waiting for us and we boarded her shortly after arrival. The various companies of our battalion were guided to our quarters on one of the five decks. We were given location sketches of the various facilities on board, such as the mess kitchens and the heads. We were also given life-jackets and instructions for their use. Procedures for abandoning ship, if necessary, were explained. The MS Shawnee was an older vessel that had been refurbished as a troop transport and it was surprising how many troops it could accommodate. Two other Army battalions shared the Shawnee with our 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion. A three-inch naval gun was mounted on the prow of the ship. I recall that our battalion assisted the Merchant Marine crew in providing men to share the manning of this gun. It was the same caliber gun as those mounted on our Tank Destroyers.

In the staging area we had been briefed on the need for secrecy regarding this voyage. There were to be NO loose lips! We were not to divulge the name or type of our unit or our destination to anyone in the staging area, enroute to dockside or at dockside. More than a year ago, in the California deserts, we had thought we'd be shipped to the desert combat zone in North Africa, but now none of us knew where we were heading. If our top officers knew, they did a great job in concealing it from the rest of us. Our destination would be divulged much later on our voyage.

On September 5th, the hawsers binding the Shawnee to the dock were castoff and with the help of tugs we were on our way. Most of us stood on deck and waved farewell to the dockside workers. We joined other ships before we passed Long Island, and by time we were out in the Atlantic we were in a formidable convoy escorted by US Naval vessels. We were not told the exact number of ships in that assemblage but I was very impressed by what I saw from the top deck. Looking southward, I could see many ships all the way to the horizon and there might have been more way out there. Looking northward, I could see many ships but could see the northern perimeter where several US Navy Destroyers were guarding our flank from German sub attacks. In front and behind us were many more ships including the Nevada, a US Navy Battleship. It was a thrilling sight!

All the ships churned forward at a uniform speed and maintenance of interval. I recall one day when I was standing by the top-deck rail, I heard the cry "Man overboard." Looking down, I saw a man in an orange life-jacket in the water alongside our ship. I watched as our ship sped past him and he was near the ship behind us. None of our ships, within my vision, slowed down or stopped. I think that man was never saved—to leave the convoy in a rescue attempt might provoke a submarine attack. I heard later that he had FALLEN off the ship in front of us.

The Grand Banks of Newfoundland are noted for the large waves they generate during a storm at sea. It has something to do with the way the waves pile up when they encounter shallower depths. Our convoy steamed northeast after passing Long Island and then headed east when south of Newfoundland. Soon we were over the Grand Banks that stretch east of Newfoundland. Somewhere in the Grand Banks area we encountered a bad storm at sea. The gale force winds piled up gigantic waves. Standing on the prow of the ship and holding tightly to anything firm, I watched the wild scene as the ship plowed forward through the waves. Our prow pitched way down as it slid into the immense trough between waves. Then, shuddering, it would steadily rise to great heights as it encountered the next huge wave and was lifted to its crest. I estimated most of these storm waves to be at least 60 feet from trough to crest. I have since been in other ocean storms but they couldn't compare to the one that hit our troop convoy.

Years later, in September 1976, while piloting my own boat, a 36 foot, twin-engine, flybridge sportfisher and trolling for marlin near San Clemente Island in the Pacific, I was struck by a line squall from Hurricane Esmeralda. It was a day of great concern for myself and our guests on board but I brought them all safely into port.

A great many of our troops on the MS Shawnee were already getting seasick in calmer weather but that great storm made it worse. I'm not familiar with all the medical reasons why some people get seasick and others don't. My wife and I have never gotten seasick while logging more than 3000 miles at sea in our two different boats in the Pacific.

Our mess-halls or galleys, on board the Shawnee, were chaotic during the storm. We ate standing up, our tables being chest-high metal planks attached to uprights. At a serving-line on one side of the galley-room, cooks would ladle out hot food in the mess kits, which we took to the plank "tables." During the storm we didn't dare even temporarily let go of our mess-kits or they would slide down the metal plank and spill onto the floor. In addition, some of the seasick men couldn't restrain themselves and vomited on the floor.

If we weren't sick when we entered the galley to eat, there was a good chance that the sight or odor would make us sick. After the storm, and with the help of seasick pills, conditions in our galley improved considerably. During the storm, I heard about some gambling deep down in the hold. My duties as a 1st sgt aboard ship were minimal and I had lots of free time on my hands. With apples from the galley as lunch, I joined the games down in the hold.

At first there were several individual games in progress. You could find just about any type you'd like: draw or stud poker, high card-low card, blackjack, shooting craps, etc. The gambling continued night and day. Because we could only board ship with \$20 each, some men were quickly cleaned out and the number of games in progress shrank. Eventually, there was only one big game still going and I was a part of it. After about three days of "bumping heads," there were only two of us left in the game, myself and a Pvt from another

battalion. We had won everyone else's money. Each of us had a lot of "rooters" in the crowd of interested spectators.

The winnings see-sawed back and forth between us. We'd frequently switch from cards to dice and then back again to try to "break" the other man. At one time, I was down to my last \$5. Then we switched to black-jack and I got the deal on a draw of the cards. I always seemed to run a streak of luck with black-jack deals and this was no exception. I rapidly came back and was raking the money in. My opponent grew desperate and his bets grew larger—we had no limits. Finally, he split his cards with his last remaining money. It was the crucial high-point of the game. I hit myself with a 21 and took the whole pot—the game was over!

I counted my winning—over \$1300 total. I had started with \$20. A friend gave me a money belt I could strap around my waist. It was bulging. Although most men on board did not gamble, I figured that at \$20 per person, sixty-five GI's had contributed to my bonanza. Where we were going or what I'd do with that jackpot were two unknowns, but for the moment I was smiling. Many years later at a Battalion reunion, I met a man, Pete Onopa, who recalled being in the game and had seen me win all the "chips."

After the storm, the days at sea were, for awhile, uneventful. We expected some action from German subs but were fortunate. The enemy subs, sometimes in "wolf-packs," had been torpedoing many Allied ships in the Atlantic. They were deadly to unescorted shipping but our huge convoy was well-protected by the US Navy and our peripheral destroyers kept watchful guard over us. On two different occasions we could hear the muffled explosions of depth charges dropped at night by our destroyers. We assumed they were dropped because of German subs prowling nearby, but we never knew for sure. After about seven days at sea, we were finally told our destination. We were going to England! Details were not yet forthcoming. The announcement came as a surprise and created lots of interest and speculation.

Unknown to most of us, the Shawnee was also carrying a lot of frozen turkeys in its hold. On one of our last days at sea, the turkey and tasty trimmings were served. That gala dinner tasted great but had a miserable aftermath. Shortly afterwards, our men had stomach cramps and diarrhea—eventually diagnosed as a form of dysentery caused by spoiled turkey. What a disaster shortly before debarking in England! Our battalion had been the victim of dysentery fifteen months earlier in Texas and this new shipboard bout was very discouraging. The last couple of days at sea were blemished by the dysentery but rife with excited interest about England, our new home for awhile. The thoughts about England helped dispel the discomfort of the dysentery—we wanted to show our best face to the people of England.

On September 15th, we passed Ireland and headed for England's Bristol Channel. Entering the Channel, the ships in our convoy dispersed to various ports. Our ship headed for the docks at the port of Avonmouth near Bristol. We docked that night. The next morning, our men crowded on deck to get their first closeup view of England and its people. While we were still on board there were welcoming speeches over loudspeakers and an English band played several numbers.

Later that day, we debarked and entered English trains for a trip southward to the town of Gillingham, Dorsetshire. At Gillingham, we were trucked a few miles north to our assigned camp just outside of the small town of Mere in Wiltshire. We would get our vehicles later. At Mere, our companies were assigned to Nissen huts at various nearby locations. They were former British Army sites. We were located in a series of loaf-shaped hills called the West Downs. I never could understand why the English called these good-sized hills "downs" when they were really "ups." At one end of the town of Mere was a hill with the remains of a very old castle. Only a few rock ruins remained; not enough to discern the original outline. Mere and the surrounding countryside were quaint and charming. There were many cottages with thatched roofs and ivy; well-kept hedges and flowering gardens were abundant; and roads were narrow and winding with cars driving on the "wrong" side of the road by American standards. Our new quarters, the Nissen Huts, were sturdy buildings

constructed of corrugated sheet metal. They resembled a half of a large cylinder with their curving roofs that reached the ground on both sides.

For a few days, Recon Company was quarantined to camp because of the dysentery. The men were eager to visit the local town but had to wait. Meanwhile, those with money had their American currency converted to British. I had my shipboard gambling winnings of \$1300 plus with me and made many small interest-free loans to the men in my company when the quarantine lifted and they could visit Mere and other local towns. On payday, when the men lined up to get their monthly pay from our Company Commander, I would call out their name; they'd step forward and salute Captain Murray and be handed their pay. On the way out, many would stop by me to repay my loans to them.

Our latrines were in partially open sheds not far from our quarters. The toilet stools were built over large removable pots called "honey" pots. Periodically, the British would empty these pots into large wagon containers and spread the contents onto their agricultural fields as fertilizer. I like an occasional raw potato and had been eating some English raw potatoes from our mess-kitchen. When I learned about this "honey" pot fertilization, it ended my taste for English raw potatoes!

We had a NAAFI (British equivalent of our US Army Canteen or PX) at our encampment. It became a popular evening entertainment spot for some of our troops who preferred to spend some evenings in camp. The NAAFI served tea and various English pastries as well as soft and hard cider and ale. English ales are served at room temperature, not chilled like our American beer. I liked the full-bodied ales such as brown stout, half and half and Guinness.

We had a British Army Fire Corporal assigned to our camp. Corporal Coombs' primary duty was to ensure that camp fire regulations were understood and adhered to and he also maintained the fire-fighting gear. We liked Corporal Coombs and he soon developed an attachment for us "bloody Yanks." Corporal Coombs wore the traditional British Army uniform and hob-nailed shoes. He taught some of us their British Army drill commands and movements. Early in our stay at Mere, we sought out Corporal Coombs for information on

the English currency, customs and language differences. And, in turn, we explained the American ones to him.

In town, some of our men were surprised to hear English girls say "Keep your pecker up" when saying goodbye for the evening, or "Knock me up next time you're in town." Corporal Coombs quickly put our boys straight—these were not sexual expressions! What they really meant was: "Pecker" is an English colloquialism or synonym for nose. The phrase "Keep your pecker up" is equivalent to an American saying "Keep your chin up." "Knock me up" meant look for me when you're in town, i.e. rap on my door. Many evenings, we invited Corporal Coombs to the Naafi for a round of ale or hard cider. After a few rounds of these drinks we would rib and tease him without mercy, sometimes trying to imitate his Cockney accent. But he was a great sport and came right back at us as we found out time after time.

We were always proposing toasts to one thing or another. One night, Corporal Coombs leapt to his feet, a glass of ale raised high, and said: "Here's a toast to King George the Sixth." To which one of our men shouted "Screw the King!" Coombs faced his heckler, raised his glass aloft again and responded with "And fuck FDR!" I have visited England since the war and would have liked to see my old friend Corporal Coombs again, but unfortunately lost his address during the war. I am glad I did him a favor back in 1943. His personal bicycle was beyond repair, but I was able to find and buy him a new one. Chug-a-lug, Corporal Coombs!

Chapter Ten

Mere Incidents

When the 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion landed in England on September 16, 1943, the English had already been at war with Germany for four years. They had mounted a major offensive by British General Wavell's Army to engage the Axis forces in North Africa, fought several other skirmishes on foreign lands and, in 1940, held off the German Luftwaffe in their all-out determined blitz to knock out the British Royal Air Force (RAF) and rule the skies over England.

By a herculean effort, the British had built an air force whose fighters, primarily Spitfires and Hurricanes, defended against the Luftwaffe's Junkers, Messerschmidts and Focke-Wulf's to win the Battle of Britain by the end of 1940. By May 1942, the ever-growing RAF began a major air offensive against Germany with a heavy raid on Cologne.

Although there were still occasional isolated penetrations of English airspace by German planes during our nine-month stay in England, the peak had long since passed. During the incidents, we watched as a myriad of British searchlights stabbed and criss-crossed the heavens and puffs of anti-aircraft ack-ack filled the air with menacing bursts. It was our first close-up view of combat. Realizing that their Luftwaffe was no longer a serious threat over England, the Germans resorted to long-range missile attacks—the infamous V1s and V-2s.

The physical effects of the missile attacks and earlier bombing were not too evident in the rural countryside where we were stationed and trained—you had to go into the big cities to see the damage. But other effects of the war were widespread and clearly evident to us “Yanks.” Luxury items had almost disappeared and necessities such as food and gasoline (petrol) were severely rationed. I recall that breakfast sausages tasted a bit like sawdust—they were mostly grain meal with very little meat content.

Through all these privations and hardships the English were stoical and uncomplaining. They shared what little they had with us Americans. Many, many Yanks were invited to their homes for dinner and friendly companionship. They would save from their own meager rations to prepare typical hearty English meals for us such as roast beef and Yorkshire pudding.

One food item in England that many of us really liked was their fish and chips—you could buy this dish for a reasonable price from vendors in all English towns. The fish were thick, white tasty chunks and the chips were what we commonly called french fries in America. Wax paper and wrapping paper were also severely rationed so the English vendor wrapped your order of fish and chips in old newspapers! No matter, they still tasted scrumptious.

I believe that the fish and chip restaurants that sprang up in America years later were a direct outgrowth of the love for this delicacy acquired by thousands of American vets who had been stationed in wartime England.

An intriguing sidelight. I had always thought the fish the English used in their fish and chips was cod, but I found out after the war that I was wrong. I read that most of the fish used then (and probably today) were dogfish, a small variety of shark commonly found in shallow water and bays around the world. I hope this doesn't spoil your taste for fish and chips! It doesn't mine. Besides, I'm not at all sure that American restaurants use the dogfish shark.

Despite the rationing of so many things in wartime England, apparently there was little rationing of the ingredients that go into ales and cider. This had to be a morale-booster for a hard-pressed citizenry. Hard liquors, such as gin and scotch, were not always available and difficult to buy by the bottle—I assume rationing was involved. But Englishmen like their pint of ale and you could easily buy ale or hard cider at English pubs throughout England. The English are really social drinkers—you very seldom saw an intoxicated one. They prefer to nurse their pint an entire evening while socializing with others or playing darts, a national pastime. The dart games are a major feature of English pubs and many Americans in England became aficionados.

In an earlier chapter I mentioned briefly that I had won a medal in an English dart game. Here's the unusual details.

One of the better known pubs in the town of Mere was named The Talbot. I was a frequent evening visitor and can still picture the place in my mind. The Talbot also had dart boards and soon I was enjoying games with English civilians and soldiers as well as our own GI's. I had never played darts before but quickly developed into a fairly good player.

In the most popular English dart game, you must have exactly 302 points to win. If your last dart increases your total score to more than 302, it doesn't count and you have to throw again when it's your turn. The dart boards has 320 pie-shaped segments number 1-20 with number 20 at the top center. The bullseye circle in the center is worth 50 points. There are two circular bands less than on-half inch wide. The outer band, near the rim, is the "double" band. A dart in this band is worth double the number of the segment it hits. The circular band about midway between the rim and the bullseye is the "triple" band and a dart in it is worth tripe the number of the segment it hits. Early in the game, you strive for the highest points you can get. Each player throws three darts when it's his turn. A dart that hits the 20 segment in the "triple" band is call a "triple 20" and is worth 60 points—the highest score you can get with one dart (even higher than the bullseye).

I concentrated on the very small tripe 20 area and in time could hit it frequently. The players sometimes played for small bets or drinks. One evening at the Talbot, I played in a game against two English civilians and an English soldier. The winner would receive a drink from the others—I believe that I had already drunk two pints of ale before stepping up to play. When it was my turn, shortly after were all started, I took careful aim and placed my first dart in the center of the triple 20 zone. The other players and spectators were complimentary. Then I took careful aim and threw my second dart. It was also a triple 20 and its point was snuggled up against the point of the first dart. A wave of applause broke out and the spectators crowded in closer. "Cor, mon, do it again," they shouted.

By now, all eyes in the room were on me and all other activity ceased. I stepped up to the throwing line with my third and final dart feeling jubilant and cocksure. I aimed and quickly threw the dart. A roar of hearty applause broke out—my last dart was also in the triple 20, right up against the other two! My English compatriots couldn't restrain their admiration with shouts like, “Great shot, Yank!” and “Blimey, three triple 20s!”

I moved forward to pull my darts out of the dartboard but was held back by the crowd —“Leave the darts there until we get it witnessed and the papers filled out!” A minute later, the bartender approached with a form in his hand. He explained that my feat qualified me for membership in The Triple 20 League sponsored by a major London newspaper. I believe it was the London Daily Express. The form had to be completed, signed by three witnesses and mailed to the newspaper in London. I was told that very few dart-players had received the Triple 20 League pin and it was consider a great honor.

Our camp was only a short walking distance out of Mere. The main entrance to the camp was barred by a small manned guardhouse on the road. About two weeks later, I was called to the guardhouse late one evening. I recall it was raining outside. At the guardhouse, two smiling English gentlemen were waiting to see me—the Talbot bartender and a friend. In front of the astonished guard, they opened an envelope and presented me with a letter of commendation for the London Daily Express and a beautiful metallic gold and blue pin portraying triple 20 darts in a dartboard with the words “Triple Twenty League” above. The letter also state that I was the first American to ever win this award.

My First reaction was to locate the Exec Officer who, a year earlier, had refused to recommend the Soldier's Medal to me for saving the life of one of our men in the Colorado River and tell him that I had won a medal before getting into combat. But I didn't. I thought it might cause hard feelings.

For a few days, I wore my Triple 20 League pin when I went to town. Invariably, some Englishmen upon seeing my pin would challenge me to a game of darts for money or drinks.

After losing some of these bets, I stopped wearing the pin. I was a good player but NOT infallible!

About this time, I received a sad letter and news article from my older brother Ray, back in the States. My Dad had been killed in a tragic railroad accident at DeKalb, Illinois. Dad had been partially crippled in a train accident in the early 1930s, when I was a boy, and had trouble trying to get a small disability pension from the railroad. Now, hard-pressed in wartime, the railroad appealed to former employees to come back and help the war effort. Dad volunteered—and paid for it with his life. The news was very disheartening.

During our stay in England, the 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion continued to train for the day, not very far off, when we'd finally be in combat. There were special classes in many subjects. Including the attributes and methods of the German soldier, more firing practice on ranges and the endless road marches to keep fit. We were in good physical shape but many of us were not at our peak due to an abundance of good ales and cider at the British pubs. I was soon to discover this in London.

Our boxing team had not been active for almost two years when we heard there would be a series of inter-organizational bouts to be held at the Rainbow Club in London. The bouts were called the TO Finals and were open to any American units stationed in Great Britain. I volunteered to participate and, after only a week of shoddy training, was trucked into London for the weekend.

That Saturday, I fought my last boxing match while in the US Army. My opponent was an Infantry Sergeant from another Division. Boxing is a sport that takes a lot out of you—you must be in top-notch shape and that I wasn't. Amateur bouts are normally only three rounds. In the first round that evening, I tore into my opponent and had him on the ropes twice. I'm sure I won that round. But in the second and third rounds my stamina was fading. By the third round my arms felt like they had weights attached to them and I had difficulty keeping them up. Although my opponent couldn't put me down or out, he was making points in those last two rounds. He won the bout by a decision on points. I felt dejected and didn't stay for

the other bouts that evening. I'm sorry I didn't, as I heard later that Lafayette Pool of our Division's 32nd Armored Regiment (Tank) was on the card. We had both fought for the Third Armored Division stateside.

Pool was perhaps the best fighter on our Division team. I'm not sure today, but believe he was a light-heavyweight. He later had an outstanding combat record as a tank commander, knocking out hundreds of enemy vehicles and personally taking many German prisoners. He had two Sherman tanks that were knocked out by the enemy—in the last one he lost a leg.

After leaving the bouts at the Rainbow Club, I spent most of the evening walking the blacked-out streets of London. The city's outside lights were turned off and windows were shuttered to make the great city less of a visible target for possible German bombers. The eerie darkness also made it difficult for strangers like me to find my way around. I had to get assistance from many helpful English civilians and bobbies (policemen). I even took a long ride on their very efficient subway system.

Returning to my hotel for the night, I almost bumped into couples having sex standing up while propped against building walls. Have you ever tried it? I'd guess the male would need a strong back and legs! I heard later that many English girls thought you could avoid pregnancy by having intercourse in a standing position.

In daylight the next morning, I caught a cab to Westminster Abbey. En route, the cabby pointed out several badly bomb ed areas and some that had been hit by German V-missiles.

Westminster Abbey is a very old, historic cathedral. I found it fascinating! I spent more than two hours slowly walking through it and reading the inscriptions of the many famous people buried beneath its floors—royalty, poets and authors, religious leaders and many others. It provided a type of realism to my earlier studies of English history and literature. The stained glass window scenes were magnificent. There is another almost equally famous and historic cathedral in town—St. Paul's. Visitors to London are greatly amiss if they fail to visit those cathedrals. An interesting observation: later I was to see other beautiful and historic

cathedrals in France and Germany. Like those in England, they had been spared from bombing although other nearby areas and structures were destroyed. There was still a spark of humanity in the hearts of wartime leaders and bomber squadrons.

As I returned to our camp in Mere later that day, I vowed to return again to London. There were so many other interesting sites to visit and things to do.

Back in Mere, I was exposed to another unique adventure—hunting for hares on the Downs country. The English wild hare is a very large type of rabbit, as large or larger than the American jackrabbit. They are not jackrabbits, however, and are excellent eating. They are a favorite on the dinner table in English homes and dressed hare and rabbit can be found in most butcher shops.

An English acquaintance, Ben, invited me along on one of his hunting trips for hare. He furnished the shotguns for both of us. Mine was an older Belgian double-barreled. He also brought along a ferret to flush the reluctant hares out of their burrows or warrens.

I mentioned in an earlier chapter that the Downs are really a series of large, loaf-shaped hills in the general area of Wiltshire. The first one we reached was only about a half-hour's walk from Ben's home in Mere. I soon learned that there are lots of hares in the Downs and their warrens are most prevalent near the top of the hills.

Ferrets are small very slender animals that belong to the weasel family. They are bloodthirsty little critters and the much larger hares are scared stiff of them. A collar is fitted on the ferret with a long stout cord affixed to it. You let the ferret down one of the many entrances to a hare's warren and it smells and seeks out the hares. The hares try to escape by running out one of their warren entrances. If the weasel catches a hare in its underground warren, it will kill and eat it. The purpose of the long cord is to drag the ferret out if that happens. With the cord, the owner would have lost the ferret for it would stay in the warren and dine on the hare for days.

There are two ways for a hunter to get hares when using a ferret. You can spread small nets over all the entrances except the one you release the ferret in. Then when the ferret scares the hares out, they become enmeshed in the net and are easily caught. Or you can leave all the entrances open and shoot the hares when they come bounding out.

On this day, we had no luck with the ferret but the trial and explanation was most interesting. I had never seen this type of hunting in the US. We finished off our trip by hiking along the ridges trying to flush up hares that weren't underground. Suddenly, one broke and ran. Ben shouted for me to shoot him. I tracked the racing hare with the gun's barrel and downed it with one shot from about 100 feet away. Meanwhile, Ben shouted "There's another off to your left." Wheeling and tracking, I downed the second hare with the other barrel of the double-barreled gun. I was pleased but Ben was exuberant. "You're a posh hooter, Ed, the Germans better watch out!" That afternoon, I regained some of the self-esteem I'd lost in the London boxing ring.

There was another Mere incident I'm ashamed to relate. It involved a young officer, Lt. Bl, from Louisiana. He was caught in a nearby English cattle barn standing on a stool behind a stanchioned cow and attempting to have intercourse with it. He was promptly cashiered out of the Army and the incident was generally hushed-up. I spoke to his then Commanding Officer many years after the war. His opinion was that the man was not a "queer" but had staged this stunt to get out of the Army before combat in Normandy. This incident should not slight his home state. We had many great soldiers from Louisiana.

I had three brothers and by now they were all serving in the US Army. Eventually, all four of us would be in combat against Germany. The oldest, Ray, was an infantryman in southern Germany, Bob was a combat medic with our forces in Holland and Germany, and Howard—the youngest—was a paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne Division.

Chapter 11

The Taking of London

The war was progressing on many fronts. While our Third Armored Division had a peaceful existence in England, many other combat events were taking place:

- 10/43 US Fifth Army reaches and crosses Volturno River in Italy.
- 11/1/43 Americans land on Bougainville in the Solomon Islands. Japanese naval task force defeated off-shore.
- 11/2/43 American forces invade Gilbert Islands. Japanese routed three days later. •
- 11/6/43 Germans forced to evacuate Kiev by Russian troops.
- 11/24/43 Bougainville beachhead secured by Americans.
- 12/24/43 US 8th AF bombs secret German weapons sites.
- 1/15/44 Russians launch major surprise offensive on Leningrad front.
- 3/24/44 Organized Japanese resistance on Bougainville finally broken.
- 3/30/44 RAF bombing raid over Nurnberg suffers heavy losses.
- 4/44 USSR recaptures Odessa; attacks Germans in Poland.
- 4/17/44 Japanese launch offensive in Honan, China.
- 5/44 Allied forces capture Cassino in Italy; start drive on Rome.

It seemed like my Division and Battalion were being by-passed in this mammoth world conflagration, but our turn was approaching.

My earlier trip to London for the boxing tournament was over but not forgotten. I had seen just enough of that great capital on my last trip to whet my appetite for more. Besides, I still had most of the money I'd won gambling on the Atlantic Convoy - and, it was burning a hole in my pocket. I requested one more short leave to visit London and it was granted - but only for one day, a Saturday. And I would have to travel by train.

London wasn't that far off from Mere, about 130 miles. If I got an early start, I could spend most of the day there. I wanted to do some shopping, so I slung a musette bag over my shoulders.

By 6 am, I was on my way. I had bought round-trip tickets and there was only one train change each way at some brewery town whose name escapes me. My train pulled into London (was it Waterloo Station?) about 8 am and I hailed a cab. Knowing I couldn't do much in this huge metropolis without constantly calling cabs, I made a proposition to this cabbie: "I'll rent your cab for the entire day. You'll not only be the driver but my tour guide as well. Here's five pounds now (\$20 in American Currency) and you'll get much more at the end of the day." The cabbie was very pleased with this arrangement. It meant continuous employment throughout the day and would pay him handsomely. He agreed and we shook hands on the deal. It turned out to be a good deal for me as the cabbie was very knowledgeable about London and continually tried hard to please me.

When I left camp that morning, I had no firm agenda planned. Rather vaguely, I had some ideas in mind. I love books and wanted to visit some London book stores. Perhaps I could find some very old editions of English classics. And, if possible, I wanted to purchase some hard liquor—Scotch or Gin by the bottle to take back to camp with me. It was almost impossible to find alcohol in Mere or surrounding towns. Finally, I was obsessed with a desire to buy a young English bulldog, to me the symbol of a tenacious England. I loved animals and missed their companionship in service. What I'd do with such a dog, while in the US Armed Forces in England or when I left for combat, was not very well thought out. Maybe I could ship him to my sister in the states to keep until I returned (an optimistic outlook). In addition, I also wanted a tour of historic London.

Before we set out that morning, I told the cabbie my desires. Visiting some book shops was easiest and my cabbie found some good ones—I believe they were on Bond Street. He would let me out at the entrance, then park his cab and return to join me. We probably spent a couple of hours browsing in two shops. I found several old books which I purchased and placed in my musette bag. Before we departed for combat, I mailed these to my sister in the states. One was *Sesame and Lilies*, three lectures by John Ruskin, printed in London in 1893. I still have this treasure in my library.

I'll never forget my cabbie's given name. It was Edward, same as mine. I suggested he call me Sarge and I would call him Ed but with his adherence to protocol, neither would do. He insisted I just call him "cabbie" and he would address me only as "Sir."

We next started looking for an English Bulldog pup. He took me to several pet shops and some kennels within London. Some had Boston Bull Terriers but none had English Bulldogs. I couldn't believe it. Here we were in the native land of the breed and none were to be found in its capital! One kennel owner volunteered the information that the closest place to find English Bulldogs was at a kennel about 70 miles north of London. He told us the name of the town but couldn't recall the name or telephone number of the kennel owner. After discussing this information with the cabbie, we decided not to drive there. It would take a big bite of my remaining leave hours and there was no assurance of pups for sale if we could locate the kennel. With regret, I gave up the bulldog.

The cabbie said that we were now near a liquor establishment. He knew their location but didn't know if they had stock for sale. Taking a chance, we found the place and the cabbie went inside to make inquiries. He returned with bad news. They had a very limited supply of Scotch on hand and were reserving it for customers of long standing. We were about to leave when I had a bright idea: "Cabbie, go back in there and offer the salesman a pound (\$4) over his normal retail price for a bottle. If he accepts, try to get two bottles."

I gave the cabbie several pounds and he went back in. After about a fifteen minute wait, he returned with a paper sack and a smile on his face. "You're fortunate, sir, he let me have three 1-liter bottles." We had been successful on two of our three ventures—books and booze. It was now lunchtime and I asked the cabbie to take me to the swankiest restaurant in London. We wound up in the parking lot of the Mayfair. While parked outside, my cabbie said, "Go in at that door where the Doorman is and enjoy your meal. I'll wait in the cab." I objected and told him I was buying his lunch also and we'd go in together. He explained that the place was very "posh" and would not admit him—they would recognize that he was a cabbie by his clothing. I insisted he come in with me. I would overcome their objections.

At the main entrance we were halted by the Doorman who immediately said the cabbie could not enter. My plea and arguments were to no avail, the Doorman was adamant. With a few well-chosen words of derisive profanity aimed at what I called "caste discrimination," we left. I asked the cabbie to find a fish and chip vendor and we'd dine on a real delicacy! He did, and we enjoyed huge portions of fish and chips while seated in his cab. Then we opened one of the three bottles of Scotch and washed down our luncheon with a "regal" liquid. By this time, my cabbie was regarding me as not only an "American millionaire" but some kind of a "god" as well.

After our plebeian luncheon with its regal aftermath, the cabbie took me on a sight-seeing tour of London. It was very extensive and included St. James Park, the monuments in Trinity and Trafalgar Squares, the Houses of Parliament and No. 10 Downing Street. Some of these sites were in restricted areas and I had to be content to see them from afar. He also drove me by several sites damaged by Luftwaffe.

I was very interested in seeing the Tower of London on the bank of the Thames. My cabbie said he believed it was closed to the public due to either the cost of staffing or to a partial bombing, but he would drive by it. He found the street and parked in front of the main gate to the Tower so I could take pictures.

There was a sign in front stating that it was closed to the public. A lone sentry in a colorful uniform and headpiece stood just inside the gate. My cabbie told me he was a Yeoman of the Beefeaters, a very old and historic guard unit. We approached the gate and chatted briefly with him.

The cabbie expressed my disappointment that I couldn't enter and see the interior of the Tower but the sentry was unmoved. Dejectedly, we returned to the cab and sat there discussing where to go next. Then my cabbie had an idea. He got out of the cab and returned to the Tower gate. I could see him talking to the sentry. About five minutes later, he returned to the cab with a mysterious smile on his face. "Sir, you're very fortunate. I made an "arrangement" with the sentry and he's going to let us in, but it will cost you a bottle of

Scotch!" Astonished but pleased, I quickly agreed. The cabbie continued, "He has unlocked the gate and will wait for us just inside the building. We are to move the cab further down the street, then return with the bottle of Scotch. When no one else is nearby, we are to quickly slip in the gate and enter the building."

We followed the instructions and were soon with the sentry inside the building. He told us to wait while he re-locked the gate and returned. Before taking us on a tour of the Tower, he admonished us that this surreptitious visit must be kept a secret (is 55 years long enough?). We then left on a guided tour of the Tower with our sentry providing a narrative.

We saw so much that I will only recount the highlights, for I can't remember all the details. We were shown dungeons where royalty and political prisoners were kept, some awaiting execution. We entered and viewed the grisly Tower Green where several famous people had been beheaded, including Ann Boleyn. The executioner's axe and chopping block were still on display. We also were shown another grim-looking room where some very royal children had been executed.

Other historic rooms were shown us but one was barricaded and entry blocked. We were told that it was used to store and display the royal families crown jewels, swords and other accouterments. In peacetime, it would be re-opened to the public. I don't know if the treasure was actually in the Tower at this time. Our guide was mum on the matter.

By mid-afternoon, our tour was concluded and we left the Tower as secretively as we had entered—the sentry must have breathed a huge sigh of relief when we were gone! It was an experience made even more memorable by its clandestine aspects. I'll never know for sure, but it's possible I was the only "Yank" in wartime England to enter the Tower. Back in the cab, we noticed we still had almost two hours before my train's departure and discussed what to do next. We had a few swigs from the opened bottle of Scotch and I told the cabbie it had been a splendid day with one exception—no English Bulldog. He expressed his sorrow about that failure but said there were other breeds of dogs available. I needed

little urging and we were soon on our way to one of the larger pet shops we'd visited that morning.

Back at the shop, I stroked, petted, and carefully observed the pups of several breeds on hand. All were purebreds and most came with certified pedigree papers. I liked a three-month old Wire-Haired Terrier and said I'd buy it before even inquiring the price. After paying for it and ready to leave, I was struck by the thought (perhaps motivated by the Scotch) that the pup would get lonely back at camp and needed another pup for a companion. The shop-owner, with an eye on his cash-register, agreed. I then bought a second pup, a black Labrador, and collars and leashes for both.

My cabbie had meanwhile called the train station and confirmed the departure time of my train. If I missed it, there would be a wait of several hours before another and no connection for a train on the last leg. He brought his cab in front of the pet shop and helped me get the two pups inside. Looking at his watch, he cautioned that we had better leave for the train station now, for there could be late afternoon traffic delays en route.

On reaching the station and parking the cab, the cabbie and I embraced and exchanged best wishes for the future. I gave him five more five-pound notes bringing his total fare for the day to \$120 in US currency, and also gave him the balance of the open bottle of Scotch. Apparently he had been well-paid, for he was overjoyed and couldn't wait to get home and tell his wife. The English five-pound notes were very large and thin, about three times the size of the one-pound note or American dollar bill.

After paying the cabbie, he helped me with my luggage and in finding the right train on the right track. English passenger cars are not constructed like their American counterparts. Instead of just a door at each end, they had several doors on the side opening into individual compartments. The train seemed packed with passengers and my cabbie ran from compartment to compartment, looking for a place for me to sit. About that time, we spotted a conductor shouting "All aboard" and shutting each compartment door.

There was not a moment to waste and my cabbie shouted, "You must get on now!" With my musette bag full of books over one shoulder, the last bottle of Scotch sticking out of my blouse pocket, and a young dog under each arm, I mounted the steps of a compartment whose door was still open. The cabbie cried "Goodbye, sir," and pushed me the rest of the way in.

The compartment was full of middle-aged ladies on two long, facing bench-seats. Although I'm sure they were startled by this "Yank" in disarray, they didn't show it and one lady asked the others to squeeze closer together so I could sit down at one end of the bench. The door had already been shut by the conductor and the train was moving by the time I got seated. What an exit from London!

The English are a reserved people by American standards. Although they might catch my eye and display a fleeting smile, there were no comments or questions. You'd think they'd encountered blokes like me many times before and no reason to disturb their equanimity.

After stopping briefly at other stations, we reached the end of the line where I had to connect with another train. It was after dark, and one of the remaining departing ladies held my pups while I got off the train. I had only a short wait at the station. The connecting train was almost empty and I had no problem boarding or finding a spacious seat for my livestock. Arriving home, I caught a cab to our Camp outside Mere and showed the guard on duty my two pups. They were not too surprised by anything involving Sgt Hoy!

It was the end of an unbelievable day—truly the "taking of London." I had done almost everything I'd wanted to. It had put a good dent in my gambling windfall from the Atlantic convoy, but who cared? It would be the last adventure before combat in France and I'll never regret or forget it.

In the next few days, I found out that I could not ship my pups to the states. They would be quarantined and remain in England during the war. And I certainly couldn't take them into combat in France. Within a week, I gave them away to grateful English families.

There had been a lot of speculation on two very important wartime decisions still to be made. The first involved leadership of the combined Allied Forces in Britain—would it be British General Montgomery or American General Eisenhower? In early 1944, the decision was announced—General Dwight Eisenhower was appointed the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF).

Speculation had also been rife on the opening of a new front against the Germans. All of us felt strongly that a new front would be opened in occupied France, but WHERE or WHEN? A relatively narrow channel separated England and France and it seemed logical that the massive Allied build-up in England would cross that channel somewhere. All planning and preparation for Project Overlord was kept so hush-hush that the Germans didn't know where the blow, or blows, would hit and had to disperse their forces to meet all eventualities.

The 703rd Tank Destroyers also had an organizational change. Lt. Colonel Prentiss Yeoman, our Battalion Commander almost since day one in the states, was replaced by Lt. Colonel Wilbur Showalter, a West Point graduate. Later, in France, Colonel Yeoman was given command of the 83rd Armored Reconnaissance Battalion which had a distinguished record during the war. Colonel Yeoman was killed in action, leading his battalion, in the closing days of the war in Germany.

In the US Army, the position of Sgt-Major is the top enlisted administrative position. It carries the rank of Master Sgt which in those days was equivalent to the position of First Sgt in grade and pay. The stripes of a Master Sgt were three up and three down, same as the First Sgt except the First Sgt's stripes also had a diamond in the center. It was possible for a Sgt-Major to in time be promoted to Warrant Officer, an unusual rank midway between a commissioned officer and the non-commissioned officers.

A few weeks before the 703rd entered combat, our old Sgt-Major, Warrant Officer Pace, was returned to the states and I was promoted to the position of Battalion Sgt-Major as a Master Sgt. I would report directly to our Battalion Adjutant or S-1. I had mixed feelings about this promotion—proud of the promotion itself but with lots of misgivings about leaving my position as First Sgt of Recon Company. I genuinely liked Recon and its men, had played a prominent role in their development, and had hoped to stay with them in combat.

My new role as Sgt-Major would be markedly different with the accent being on record-keeping. Nevertheless, I accepted the promotion and became privy to lots of restricted and confidential data. I will quote from our post-war 703rd TD Association Journal edited by Nate Goldberg of our "A" Company, who had kept a diary. This entry is dated March 1996:

6-8-44: Master Sgt Ed Hoy told us at Personnel that the Germans were holding four armored divisions opposite the area where we were going in to the beach-head, but the order of battle is never a certainty."

On June 6, 1944, forever afterward remembered as "D-Day," Project Overlord became a reality. Allied forces, with the aid of massive air cover and naval bombardment, fought their way ashore on Normandy beaches. Despite very high Allied casualties in the surf and on the beach, the Germans were unable to resist the determined and costly advance. The Allies reached the cliffs and small villages on top and carved out a narrow foothold.

My Division and Battalion were not in this initial assault wave but were soon to follow. The 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion was ordered to Bournemouth on the Channel near the large port of Southampton.

In the Bournemouth area, we made final preparations for our trip across the Channel on Landing Craft Tanks (LCT's). All our vehicles had to be waterproofed so they would not stall in the surf when we rolled down the ramps of the LCTs, and had to be blacked-out—we would land under cover of darkness.

Our months of training in the US and England had come to an end and combat with an enemy was directly ahead.

Chapter 12

Normandy and the Great Breakout

The 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion and other elements of the Third Armored Division were finally on their way as part of the continuing greatest military invasion of coastal Europe in history. Soon we would be tested in the crucible of battle.

From Bournemouth, England, to Omaha Beach in Normandy, France is roughly 100 miles. The English Channel our flotilla of LCT's, LCI's and escort vessels was crossing could sometimes be very choppy and stormy but this night the seas were relatively calm. We made the crossing under cover of darkness with naval vessels and fighter planes providing protection. We were fortunate—I don't recall any enemy incidents during the crossing

Our men were tense and alert. I doubt if any of them left on this night journey. All lights on board were black-out and even lighting up a smoke was forbidden. Back in England we had waterproofed our vehicles using cosmoline, special tapes and exhaust extensions. Particular attention was given to all elements of ignition systems.

About 2 am, we could faintly see the cliffs of the French coastline and were soon nearing the surf and beach secured at such great cost on D-Day. Our specialized landing craft sharply reduced speed and their prows eased onto the sloping beach bottom. Then the forward ramps were lowered into the water and, in our vehicles, we cranked up and rolled off into the surf and onward up on the beach. The waterproofing had been successful. I did not see any vehicles stalled in the water. Our troops had been instructed beforehand to minimize excessive noise. The only sounds were the surf, our vehicle's engines and the landing craft.

On the beach, guides armed with flashlights blacked-out except for small center peepholes, efficiently guided us to a narrow twisting road that led up the cliffside to the small town of Isigny. Part way up this steep road, our column of vehicles halted—we didn't know why. A few minutes later, word was passed down to us that there would be a delay and the men

should try to get some badly needed rest. It was raining and I decided to lie down on my bedroll under our armored half-track vehicle.

A powerful stench drifted in from somewhere so I crawled out from under the vehicle and searched the immediate area. In the darkness, I nearly stumbled over the source of the stench—two dead German soldiers. How long ago they had died was unknown but they were decomposing. I found out later that both the American and German forces had “Graves Registration Units” whose job it was to gather up, identify and bury their dead. The Americans were very speedy and efficient with this gruesome task as the visibility of their fallen comrades hurt the morale of the survivors. In a losing or retreating situation, the Germans were forced to leave their dead where they fell. Eventually, they would be buried by the Americans but their own dead had priority. Seeing the dead Germans on this night was convincing proof that we were in the combat zone. I threw my bedroll back into our vehicle and a few minutes later we were again on our way up the cliff.

It was gradually becoming dawn as we reached the battered town of Isigny. En route we passed some of the massive concrete and steel German coastal fortifications that had been severely damaged by the earlier air and naval bombardments.

At this point in time, the Americans held only a long, narrow irregular-shaped chunk of Normandy real-estate. It was a hedgerow country. We were guided to a pre-established Battalion Headquarters site. Our line and Recon companies were in the close vicinity.

The peculiar hedgerows of this rich farmland would turn out to be either an obstacle or blessing to our troops, depending on conditions and objectives. Hedgerows were like earthen walls around each field with gateways for admittance. Hundreds of years earlier, they were wooden fences or rock walls erected by the farmers. Over many, many years they were covered and heightened by blowing dust, seeds, vegetation and trees. Today, they formed solid walls seven to twelve feet high. This type of terrain was not conducive for tank or tank destroyer warfare and most of the early enlargement of our Normandy beachhead

was through infantry action. The big drives of American armored vehicles were to come later.

While in the hedgerow country we quickly learned to dig foxholes for personal protection and to camouflage our vehicles to reduce their visibility to enemy aircraft and troops. We generally parked our vehicles under hedgerow trees and covered them with large camouflage nets issued to us.

Foxholes were dug deep enough below ground level to protect us from flying shrapnel and were generally elongated slit trenches so we could sleep in them. When we moved into a new area, digging foxholes with our entrenching shovels was a No. 1 priority. They saved countless lives during the war. The early weeks in Normandy were largely defensive actions with both sides using lots of artillery and mortars. In addition, the Germans used a type of rocket fired from multiple barrels of a specialized vehicle. The German name for this weapon was “Nebelwerfer” but Americans called them “screaming meemies” because of the unusual sound volleys of them made when approaching. As artillery and mortar shells and screaming meemies hit and exploded, the broken shards or shrapnel flew over the ground in all directions. You were generally safe if you were in a foxhole UNLESS it got a direct hit.

On June 29th, elements of the Third Armored Division went on the offensive at Villiers-Fossard to wipe out an enemy salient threatening the US 329th Division. Veteran German troops of the Panzer Lehr Division counterattacked. In the confusing battle that followed, American troops were fired on by their own artillery. The German advance was finally stopped by a huge barrage of our artillery.

Shortly after the Villier-Fossard engagement, our tank Destroyer Battalion was “baptized” at St. Jean de Daye. Our line companies supplied tank destroyer platoons to each of three Third Armored task forces of Combat Command B. The objective was some high ground held by the Germans at a place called Haut Vents. After five days of heavy fighting against elements of the German 2nd SS Panzer and Panzer Lehr Divisions, the heights were captured by our forces.

The Combat Commands of our Third Armored Division were comprised of “task forces” which each contained detachments of tanks, tank destroyers, engineers, infantry and sometimes artillery. Although our Division was composed of large Regiments and Battalions, they were not committed to action as such. Even the Reconnaissance Company I had left in England did not fight as an integrated company. Its platoons were assigned individually in direct support of individual line companies A, B, or C.

Shortly after landing Normandy, I began to hear of casualties in my old Recon Company. I believe the very first casualty in our Battalion was Pfc Altman of Recon, killed by enemy artillery fire. He had been my jeep-driver when I was First Sgt of Recon. Not long afterwards, Section Sgt Leon Michaud of Recon lost a lung in a “booby-trap” explosion. As our line company tank destroyer crews suffered casualties, Recon Company support platoons would occasionally provide replacements.

In our first three weeks in Normandy, there was an immense buildup of American units and their equipment in the beachhead area. During visits to the rear, I had to marvel at the US industrial production effort that produced this flood of equipment. A common joke going the rounds was that the Normandy peninsula was sinking under the massive weight!

Until July 26th, there were no major territorial advances by either side but the front-line of hedgerows frequently changed. The Americans might take another hedgerow filed in daytime forays only to lose it back to night patrols of the Germans. The German infantry specialized in night patrols and attacks. Also, they quickly learned that the turrets of our M-10 tank destroyers were open at the top (not like the closed turrets of our Sherman tanks). In their forays, German patrols would sneak up on our TD's and lob a hand grenade into the open turret. Our men quickly devised a protective measure. They covered the open turret with hinged metal plates so the enemy grenades would bounce off harmlessly before exploding.

The Army newspaper, Stars and Stripes, was occasionally distributed to our front-line troops. In one issue, the headlines proclaimed “Eisenhower Says Americans to Be in Paris

by Christmas.” Although we later b-passed Paris in August, we now scoffed at the headline...we had only advanced about three hedgerows (fields) in the past three weeks!

It was evident to all of us that the Allies had air superiority over Normandy and we were very appreciative of this fact. To be strafed or bombed from the air is terrifying...you feel absolutely helpless! Many times throughout the war I wondered how the Germans held up against our incessant air attacks. But regardless of our air domination, German planes made occasional strafing attacks and bombing raids on our positions.

Very early in the European war, the German Luftwaffe used lots of Stuka dive-bombers as they advanced. I never saw a Stuka in action in Normandy. The German fighter planes we saw were the Messerschmidt 109s (ME 109) and the Fock-Wulff 190s (FW190). They occasionally dueled far overhead with our American Thunderbolts (P-47) and Mustangs (P-51). These dogfights were thrilling to us on the ground and we often came out of our foxholes to cheer our pilots.

Our P-47s were primarily designed for close ground support and carried 500 pound bombs under each wing-tip. Throughout the war, they worked closely with our tanks and tank destroyers attacking and knocking out enemy tank, pillboxes and other fortifications directly in front of us. They were absolutely invaluable! The Germans had a lot of respect for our P47s and called them “Jabos,” a corruption of the word “Jagd-bomben” which meant fighter-bomber. Although supreme in their mission of ground support, they were too clumsy and slow for the serial dog-fights and I saw several shot down. Our P-51s were more maneuverable and speedy and won most of their dog-fights.

Foxholes are not adequate protection from overhead enemy strafing. I was lying in a foxhole in Normandy, smoking a prized English cherrywood pipe and writing a V-Mail letter, when a lone German FW-190 fighter plane made a low-level strafing attack on our hedgerow and its foxholes. It arrived with devastating fury and speed, its lethal bullets stitching the ground. I lowered my head so rapidly that I broke the stem of my pipe and drove my writing

pen in the ground. But otherwise I was untouched. The pattern of bullets tore up the ground a few inches from my hole.

I was only involved in one bombing raid (for which I am thankful). It was by a lone German bomber, believed to be a Junkers. We could always tell the approach of a German bomber by the sound of its engines. They sounded like they were not synchronized.

It was after dark and I had been trying to get some sleep in my foxhole. The plane made a pass over our field and dropped some parachute flares. They brightly illuminated the area. After another pass in which the German crew must have verified our presence, they made a third pass and dropped a cluster of bombs. They made an eerie whistling sound as they descended and to me, in my foxhole, it seems as if all bombs were slated directly toward me. They exploded near the middle of the field, creating craters and shaking the ground by our foxholes.

In the general area of St. Jean de Daye and Le Desert, our infantry fought many skirmishes with German infantry. The American divisions involved were the 1st, 4th, 9th, 29th, and 430th. The skirmishes left many German dead in the area. Our boys were very interested in the Luger and P-38 pistols found on dead German officers and searched for them. The Germans, realizing this, would often “booby-trap” their dead with wired explosives. The explosives detonated if the bodies were disturbed. It was another danger, subtle but deadly, that we faced. Many times, I warned our men not to go near German corpses.

Our huge American forces buildup was getting closer to a “breakout” from the confined hedgerow area although the planning for such action had to be kept secret.

Early on the morning of July 26th, American artillery from many divisions began shelling the German forces massed on the St. Lo front. Every day had brought artillery duels but this was different...this barrage was both massive and sustained. Soon, German artillery retaliated. We dove for our foxholes realizing that this day was unusual. Some units close to

us were told to withdraw a few hundred yards from their positions so they wouldn't get hit by our shelling.

Then we heard an immense humming sound coming from the west. Looking upward at the skies, we saw clouds of airplanes, like swarms of mosquitos, coming from the direction of the English Channel. It was the beginning of the most massive air assault on front-line troops the world had ever witnessed. Squadron after squadron of Allied planes filled the air to attack the Germans directly in front of us. They were a mixture of British and American planes of every type and size.

First came the fighters followed quickly by light and medium bombers and then the heavy-weights—the strategic bombers such as the British Lancasters and Stirlings and the American B-17s, B-24s and B-29s. Strategic bombers are not normally used to drop “blockbusters” on front-line troops.

The Germans opened up with the withering ack-ack fire from their anti-aircraft batteries. We had never dreamt that the Germans had so many AA batteries in this area! The sunny skies were pock-marked with exploding bursts among our overhead planes. I saw two of our big bombers struck by AA bursts and falling. You could see several parachutes opening just beneath one of the stricken planes. The sky was also riddled with tracer bullets and we wondered how any of the parachutists could make it to the ground alive and felt sorry for them if they landed in the chaos and carnage below.

We were positive by now that this was the prelude to our “breakout” out of the hedgerow country and stood up and cheered wildly.

The terrific bomb explosions on the nearby German front-lines shook the ground we were standing on. Surely nothing, German or French, could live through such a saturation pounding! I have thought about this spectacle many times since WWII and believe it will not be repeated to such an awesome extent. In a future war of two powerful opponents, nuclear bombs will probably be used before the conflict builds up to the proportions of

WWII. Although we used bombers in the Korean, Vietnamese and Gulf-Iraqi Wars, it was never on the scale of this July 26th in Normandy.

Shortly after the end of the massive bombardment, we heard a bugler blowing “Charge” from one of our vehicles. Orders had been received for some of our Division to move forward through the devastated zone. The “breakout” was underway! Part of our Division drove southward through the “saturation zone” towards Coutances that afternoon—the rest left early the next morning.

Our Battalion Hqs group I was a member of followed closely on the heels of our tanks and tank destroyers. As we maneuvered our way southward we were awed by the catastrophic damage on all sides. Destroyed German vehicles and dead were everywhere. I saw one Mark VI Tiger tank (largest of all German tanks) turned upside down by a block-buster bomb that struck alongside and tore out a large crater. Dead and wounded French cattle were everywhere and some French farms were blown to bits. I didn't know for sure but guessed that the Allies had not given the French any advance warning to withdraw from the saturation zone. To do so, would probably eliminate the surprise effect on the German defenders.

Driving southward towards Coutances and then eastward into the province of Calvados, we were soon out of the hedgerow country.

About this time, an event occurred, while our Battalion Hqs was under enemy fire, that had a major personal impact on my wartime role with the 703rd. It would be the first of two reassignments I would have during the course of the war. I will not reveal any specific details but will only say it was due to an incompatibility between myself and the Adjutant I reported to. Our Battalion Commander, Colonel Showalter, very fairly heard both sides of the disagreement and then announced he would make a decision later in the day.

That afternoon he told me of his decision—I and First Sgt Locke of H1s Company would trade places. Sgt Locke would become a Master Sgt reporting to the Adjutant as Bn Sgt-

Major and I would take Locke's place as First Sgt of Hqs Company. It was with a feeling of relief that I transferred to Hqs Company although secretly I would have preferred returning to my past love, Recon Company (which eventually I did).

Headquarters Company of the 703rd was then commanded by Captain Sydney S. Smith, Jr. He was able Company Commander and of considerable help in getting me started in my new role. The Company itself was primarily a service and support unit for the rest of our battalion. This support involved food, fuel, munitions, clothing, vehicle maintenance and parts, miscellaneous equipment and even mail. Our primary vehicles were 2 and ½ ton trucks armed with a 50 caliber machine gun on a ring mount over the cabs. Because of the need for our services, we were never far from the line companies we served or the very fluid combat zone.

Our Battalion's prime weapon was our fully-tracked M-10 Tank Destroyer which mounted a 3 inch diameter gun in its open turret, had a large counterbalance on the turret's rear to facilitate easy tracking of the big gun, had diesel engines and weighed about 32 tons. It fired both HE (high explosive) and AP (armor-piercing) shells. It was not as heavily armored as the big German tanks and the effective distance of its 3 inch gun was no match for the longer range of German 88 mm on the Mark Vs and Mark Vis. As a result, our M-10s were used in "roadblocks" where they would wait until the enemy tanks were within range, or close-up when they would try to hit them broadside where there was less armor.

Records kept throughout the war show that for every one of our tank destroyers lost to enemy action, men of the 703rd destroyed ten enemy tanks or assault guns...an admirable ratio!

Now that we had broken out of the restrictive hedgerow country, our tank destroyers were in great demand, heavily used and destroyed many enemy tanks. One example was the skirmishes at Ranee-Fromental in the Calvados country where we knocked-out seven enemy tanks. Two of them were Panther Mark vs destroyed at almost point-blank range by Corporal Joe Juno in Company "b" tank destroyer. The German wounded from one burning

tank tumbled out onto the ground. Cpl Juno dismounted to help them and was killed by exploding ammo. Cpl Juno, your nobility in compassion will never be forgotten.

Chapter 13

Liberation of a French Village

There was one more huge battle before the Third Armored Division and our 703rd Tank Destroyers were to be entirely out of Normandy. It should be ranked as one of the most critical battles for the Allied Forces in Europe. Had we fully attained our objectives in this battle, it might have resulted in a substantial shortening of the war's duration.

Normandy itself was comprised of three provinces. The hedgerow country we broke out of in the last chapter was named Manche. We had broken out into the more open country of Calvados and south of us was the third province, Orne. The critical battle we just referred to was called "the closing of the Falaise-Argentan Gap" and raged in parts of both provinces—Calvados and Orne. When the Americans established the Omaha beach-head on D-Day, huge British forces consisting of the British 2nd Army and the Canadian 1st Army battled ashore and established another beach-head further east near the town of Caen. As forces of the American 1st Army, including us, spilled out of the hedgerow country of Manche into Calvados, the German 7th Army under General von Kluge started the last great German offensive in western Europe until the Battle of the Bulge. They counter-attacked at Mortain and drove westward towards Avranches, hoping to cut us off from our Channel supplies and to try to split the American 1st and 3rd Armies. In the next few days the Third Armored with its 703rd Tank Destroyers would experience some of the most ferocious fighting of the war to date with heavy casualties on both sides, including high-ranking officers.

The German offensive was blunted and then contained. Now, large remnants of von Kluge's Army retreated eastward while the Americans to their south tried to link up with the British forces to the north in an effort to encircle and entrap the Germans. The "pincers" gap the Allies were trying to close was between the towns of Falaise and Argentan, but by time the gap was finally closed, most of von Kluge's Army had escaped and were making their way back towards Germany to strengthen the Siegfried Line defenses.

Two incidents, involving 703rd TD platoons, are representative of this hectic and fiercely-fought battle:

In mid-August, Lt Roberts, commander of a B Company TD Platoon, was ordered by his Task Force Commander to set up a road-block on the outskirts of Ranese. Halting at a suspicious-looking crossroads where the platoon had been ordered to turn left, Lt Roberts stopped his platoon and decided to reconnoiter ahead in his jeep with just Sgt Hart, who drove, and a radio operator. Rounding a curve they ran into a German Mark V tank with some accompanying ground troops. Their jeep was disabled by enemy machine guns and the three of them dove into a ditch where they were promptly captured. Lt Roberts was separated from his two men during an interrogation by his captors. He was then detained in a small building along with a captured Australian Spitfire pilot.

For the next six days, Roberts and the Australian pilot were under guard and driven in a German convoy to an unknown destination. On the 6th day, they came under heavy American artillery fire and in the resulting panic and confusion, Roberts, the pilot and one of their guards escaped from the rest and ran to a nearby river. Soon, they met a Canadian patrol and subsequently Lt. Roberts returned to his 703rd TD Company.

The other incident didn't have such a happy ending—it involved Lt. John L. Wissing, Jr., a TD platoon commander, and Frank Cox and Louis Ruiz (all of A Company) and two soldiers from the 23rd Armored Engineers, a Sgt Groff and an E. Long. The narrative that follows was taken from the accounts of three men, Nate Goldberg and Frank Miller of A Company and E' Long the 23rd Engrs survivor. These accounts were published in our Battalion's postwar newsletter, "The Roadblock," ably edited by Nate Goldberg

On the night of August 14th, our Combat Command B was active in the Ranese area. They established a security outpost with Lt. Wissing and the four men. The two Engrs had just laid a string of land-mines across the road and shortly afterwards all 5 men were captured. Lt. Wissing, who could understand German, overheard their captors saying they would be shot (probably because their captors were fleeing and cut off and had to take care of their own wounded, and were led by

a desperate officer). At Lt. Wissing's urging, the group of five broke through a hedge and, running, tried to escape. Four of them were gunned down—only one of the Engrs, Ellsworth Long, managed to escape and return to his unit. Before his death, Lt. Wissing had compiled a very commendable combat record with his platoon.

There were so many heroic exploits of 703rd TD officers and men throughout our year of combat in Europe that I could not possibly cover all of them in this book. There were undoubtedly many I was not aware of at the time (or even years later). To such men, whether you're mentioned or not, you are all admired and our country owes you a huge debt of gratitude! Many of you already have your deeds described in our post-war Association newsletter, "The Roadblock." Maybe some day, he can condense all these details of valor and sacrifice into a larger tome published on the commercial market. I hope so, but time's growing short, comrade Nate.

Before we landed in France, we were each given a small paperback booklet to teach us French and French phrases by use of a phonetic alphabet method. Later on, we received a similar booklet for learning German. I already had some knowledge of German gained from taking classes in 1939 while in the CCC (to facilitate reading a German falconry magazine). I have always been interested in foreign languages and found I could learn readily with some attention and discipline.

I read the French booklet at every opportunity and soon, with the help of some French civilians, could get by in conversational French. I was frequently asked to be an interpreter by my Company (in fact, our CO of Hqs Company, in 1994 postwar correspondence, praised my acquired knowledge of French). One day, while our units were getting some maintenance and rest in Calvados, we heard reports that there were German soldiers hiding in a nearby French farm-house. With about four men from my Company, I decided to investigate. We approached the farmhouse, which was around a curve at the end of a long lane, weapons at the ready. Within shouting distance from the house, I shouted in French "Are there any German soldiers here?"

A minute or two later, a young, almost boyish-looking German in uniform came around the curve at the far end of the lane, with his arms raised high in surrender. I expected no problems in taking him prisoner, but as he approached and was about 20 yards from us, one of my men dropped to a kneeling position, aimed his carbine and fired. I hollered "Stop!" but it was too late. The young German was hit in the forehead and toppled to the ground. The man who shot him was Pvt. R., a motorcycle messenger in our Company. I ran to the stricken German but could do nothing to help. I believe he was already dead with a large hole in the back of his head where the carbine bullet exited. I was furious and sharply berated Pvt. R. I told him that he had violated the Conventions of War by shooting an unarmed enemy who was trying to surrender with his arms raised above his head. It was wanton, cold-blooded slaughter! Pvt. R. tried to excuse his action by claiming the man was lowering one hand towards his waist. One of his friends supported him by saying he thought he also saw the man lowering an arm. I witnessed the entire incident and did NOT see any lowering of the man's arms. Further, a look at his body showed he was unarmed—and very young, a teenager.

The French farmwife, who must have been just around the curve urging the young fellow to surrender, heard the shot and came running around the curve. She saw the crumpled body and ran to it, flinging herself on the ground next to him, screaming and weeping. In French, she really told us off—we were murderers! I can never forget this scene, and Pvt. R., I hope your conscience still bothers you—IF you have one!

War is brutal and often brings out the ugliness in man's nature. I have seen unnecessary mistreatment on both sides. But there have also been incidents of humanity and compassion. One was our Sgt Juno when he dismounted from his TD to give assistance to the German wounded from a tank he had just disabled. He paid for it with his life as he was killed by exploding ammo. And in another battle action we are furnished this account of a German infantryman who risked his life to save a wounded American in agony. This narrative was provided by Sgt Frank Woolner of our A Company, who in turn heard it from one of our Third Armored 36th Armored infantrymen who was at the site. Woolner was temporarily serving as a historian with our Division G-2 (Intelligence) unit.

The 36th was in the middle of ferocious house-to-house fighting in Stolberg, just inside the German Siegfried Line. Both sides suffered heavy casualties. Then the 36th tried to cross and capture a heavily-contested street but were driven back. The action left one severely wounded American lying on the street, writhing in agony and screaming for help. The small-arms crossfire was so intense that American Medics did not try to reach him.

Suddenly, a German unarmed infantryman dashed out into the street, gathered the American in his arms and carried him to the American positions on the far side. Dropping him there, he raced, crouching, back across the street to his German unit. The action was so surprising and precipitous that momentarily both sides stopped firing (a short period of armistice). Sgt Woolner ended his narrative with high praise for the German hero, saying he deserved the highest medals and that "He was quite a man!"

The Calvados region of Normandy is a grape-growing region and especially noted for the fine brandies it distills from grape wine. In an intermediate process, the wine is first distilled to a colorless, very strong liquid called "Calvados." The following incident is about this "Calvados" and is in a humorous vein for a change.

At one of the rest and maintenance stops in Calvados after the huge battles of the Falaise-Argentan Gap, our Company pulled into an area temporarily occupied by some units of the 54th Armored Field Artillery, my old outfit in the early days at Camp Polk, Louisiana . There I met an old Army buddy, Corporal C. from Alabama. He had a bottle of the notorious Calvados and asked me to try it. It was my first try and I tipped the bottle up, taking a big slug. The fiery stuff burned its way down my gullet and made my stomach feel like I had swallowed the sun. I gasped and cried out "Wow!" Corporal C said "You think it's strong? Wait until you see this," whereupon he spilled some on the ground and lit it with a match. The burning ground flamed for a full minute! Corporal C continued, "Sgt Hoy, I'm keeping some of this for my Zippo lighter. Lighter fuel is hard to come by."

During the mid-August hectic fighting in the Falaise-Argentan Gap, we received news that the US 7th Army had established a new front by a landing in Southern France. Also adding to the pressure on the Germans was the Free French 2nd Armored Division that fought in a sector near us. With von Kluge's German Army remnants in full retreat, our Third Armored Division with its 703rd TD's swung south through Alencon and then eastward through Breux and Chartres towards the Seine River beyond. There were only brief limited engagements as some German rear-guard units tried to slow our advance. Our P-47 dive-bombing fighters flew in front of our troops, effectively hitting German armor.

On August 26th, our 703rd Hqs Company reached and crossed the Seine River at Melun, near Corbeil. We were about 25 miles south of Paris having driven about 120 miles in one week since leaving Alencon in Normandy. After our almost static existence in the hedgerow country, it gave us great satisfaction to be making such progress!

Looking about 25 miles northward, we could see smoke rising from Paris. The Allied High Command had allowed the Free French troops the honor of liberating their own capitol, and Germans in Paris were blowing up fuels and munitions they could not take with them as they were leaving. It was on this day that I and one of my Staff Sergeants, John Erwin of Mississippi, had a unique experience that we called, The Liberation of a French Village.

Our Company had just crossed the Seine River when I and Sgt Erwin, our Motor Maintenance Platoon Leader, were asked to find a Division water point supposed to be nearby. If we found it, we would then guide our supply trucks to the water so badly needed by our troops and vehicles. We were given a rough sketch showing its approximate location.

We left in a jeep driven by Sgt Erwin. Its equipment consisted of Erwin's carbine, my .45 cal pistol, binoculars and a two-way radio. At a bend in a side road, we encountered German troops and came under fire from their lead vehicle which had halted in a woods ahead of us at the bend. We stopped our jeep in a ditch on the left side of the road and leapt out to take

cover by lying prone in the ditch. The firing stopped and, as we watched, the German vehicle slowly backed out of sight around the bend. We lay there for a few more minutes and then decided to get back in our jeep and head back on the route we came from. Starting the jeep, we swung it around and with tires squealing raced to the rear.

Less than a half-mile down the road, we encountered small-arms fire. We were trapped! The enemy was on both sides. I saw an open gate going into a field north of us and shouted at Erwin to leave the road. We escaped again by driving over a rise in the open farmland and were soon defiladed from enemy view. No one came after us. Ahead, in the distance, we could see a small French village. It was late in the day, would soon be dark, and we were cutoff from other American troops. Advancing slowly towards the village, we stopped intermittently and surveyed it with binoculars. It appeared deserted, but as we got closer we could see civilians pour into the main street, some waving white flags. They had apparently also been watching us and decided we were not Germans.

We slowly drove into the village, guns loaded for any eventuality. Our jeep was overwhelmed by cheering happy villagers and we stopped. They told us that we were the first Americans to enter their village and that a detachment of German soldiers had left, on a road to the east, a few minutes earlier. After telling them our plight, they insisted we spend the night with them and get some rest.

John and I will never forget the hospitality and assistance of these villagers. They helped camouflage our jeep and even put out guards on the road where the Germans had departed. A Monsieur Pierre Bailey was the head of the family that took us in. He was also the Mayor (Maire) of the village. He could speak some English and told us an interesting story. His father had been a soldier with the British Army way back in WW I and had later married a French girl.

All that evening, they wined and dined us as if we were royalty. The neighborhood women helped Madam Bailey prepare a several-course dinner featuring roast goose! Early the next morning, John and I said our farewells and departed to try to find our unit. As the

villagers saw us off, they showered us with flowers and placed a large wicker basket with food and wines in our jeep. We knew our forces were driving eastward so left in that direction. The Germans who had been in our village the previous day had also departed eastward and we were very careful to not run into them again. We carried extra gasoline in 5-gallon cans and believed we had sufficient to regain our unit.

All that day, we searched in vain for American units and frequently made guarded radio transmissions that we had been cut off from our unit and were trying to locate them. Our Company CO received some of these transmissions and enlisted the aid of patrols from the US 13th Armored Cavalry (tank) to help find us. Early on the third day of our absence, we ran into this unit and a grizzled officer told us we had been miles behind German positions. His men guided us to a column of armor heading eastward and we finally caught up with our 703rd Hqs Company that afternoon. Captain Smith was relieved to see us again. He was just about ready to declare us officially as "missing in action."

Forty-nine years after this incident, in 1994, I met Sgt Erwin again at my first Battalion reunion in Springfield, Missouri. He was in a wheelchair and we were both overjoyed to see each other again. John had remained in the Army for some time after the end of WWII, transferred to another unit and worked his way up to the rank of Major before he left the service. At this reunion, as we recounted our unusual "liberation" incident, John told my wife "I was never afraid when I was with Sgt Hoy."

There is an interesting sequel to this reunion meeting. John and I could not remember the name or exact location of the village we'd "liberated." We thought it would be nice to write to the Pierre Bailey family after all these years if we could determine the name of the village. After a map check of the area, we narrowed the search to one of three villages and decided to contact a large French newspaper, "LeMonde," for assistance in locating the village and the Bailey family. Drawing on my rapidly disappearing WWII knowledge of French and a lexicon from the local library, I drafted and mailed a letter to them. Much to our sorrow, we never received a reply from "LeMonde." I don't know why, but did note

much later that I had dated the letter as September 1944 (it should have been 1994). Had they perhaps regarded my letter to be a joke and decided not to reply?

Elements of our Third Armored Division accompanied by the 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions rapidly drove northeastward through the towns of Meux and Coulommiers, against only sporadic German resistance, and crossed the Marne River on the 27th of August. During the next three days, they raced towards Soissons and crossed the Aisne River. In the vicinity of Soissons, our Company watched and waited as a long French train carrying German troops and their dependents passed just ahead, chugging eastwards toward Germany. It was soon disabled and stopped by tanks from my division and many prisoners were taken.

The last of August saw our Division heading eastward towards Sedan. En route, American forces received orders to shift our attack northwards toward Mons, Belgium. Many years later, I was to learn that this abrupt change in our offensive plans was the result of the interception and decoding of high-level German radio messages involving the movement of massive German forces.

Chapter 14

When the Irresistible Meets the Immovable

What a surprise! Our hard-hitting Third Armored Division was stopped in its tracks in its eastward drive through France and ordered to change course northwards to Belgium.

On September 1st, we launched a six-pronged drive through northern France towards Mons across the Belgian border. Our 703rd tank destroyer platoons were an integral part of each of our Division task forces on this push northwards.

We quickly overran Laon, Vervins, Hirson and Avesnes. Enemy resistance was light to moderate and often attacked the rear of our columns after the forward elements had passed. By late afternoon of September 2nd, our Combat Command A had crossed the Belgian border and seized Mauberge. From there to Mons we were in coal-mining country. I saw many huge stacks of coal adjacent to mines.

Our Division took up positions in and south of Mons after dark that evening. We were to be followed by the 1st Infantry Division. None of us knew the onslaught we were soon to face. Before daylight on the morning of September 3rd, an estimated 30,000 German troops, retreating eastwards towards their Siegfried Line, collided with our two Divisions. The confusing battle that raged for the next two days was, in my opinion, one of the greatest and most decisive battles of America's war in Europe. It was chaotic, oftentimes sheer pandemonium and marked by heavy casualties, mostly German. It was truly a collision of the irresistible with the immovable.

Our Division is credited with taking about 8000 German prisoners, including three Generals, and killing thousands more. Our 1st Infantry Division swelled the enemy casualty count. Several of our 703rd tank destroyer platoons joined the fray and knocked-out scores of enemy vehicles. One platoon from A Company, by itself, destroyed twenty German vehicles in a six-hour period. Accounts of this action may be contradictory. One says the gunners of this platoon were Victor Borek and Frank Karpinski—another gives credit to

Sgts Muriel Lehman and Arthur Parnell. I should check this out further. It's possible they were all members of the same crews.

Everyone there was pressed into this frantic large-scale action—headquarters and service personnel fought alongside tankers, TD's and infantry. In my Headquarters Company, we dismounted the heavy 50 cal. machine guns from the truck ring mounts and zeroed in on the Germans who were coming straight towards us in waves.

Daylight brought a cessation of activity in our Company's sector and revealed the carnage with many dead and dying scattered in front of us. I can understand quite a bit of German and heard one man screaming in pain and calling for his mother: "Mutti, hilf mir. Liebe mutti, hilf, hilf!" (Mother, help me. Dear mother, help. help!). He was crumpled on the ground about 50 feet in front of us. His cries and pleas were heart-rending and drew me to him. Looking down, I could see he was a young man in German paratrooper uniform and I was shocked at the severity of his wounds. Our machine-gun fire had raked and torn open his abdomen from side to side. He looked up at me with glazed eyes and I knew he was dying. I spoke to him in German. He told me he had a letter to his mother in his breast pocket and asked me to mail it to her. I assured him I would and then removed the letter and put it in my pocket. As I left I told him I would get a medic to help him. Our medics were already on the field administering to the German wounded. One of them went to the mortally wounded paratrooper and gave him a shot of morphine. He died a few minutes later. I carried the letter until we were in Germany and then left it with a postoffice. The German systems were so disrupted by war that it is possible his mother never received her dying boy's last letter.

The battle of Mons must have had critical after-effects for the German Wehrmacht. Although many escaped and continued eastward towards Germany, the weakened condition of their forces probably lessened the resistance at the border and Siegfried Line.

After a very brief rest at Mons, our Third Armored Division headed east towards distant Germany in pursuit of the retreating enemy. Against variable German rear-guard resistance, we drove through the Belgian towns of Charleroi, Namur, Huy, Liege and Verviers. At two places the enemy had blown up the bridges over the wandering Meuse River and we were temporarily halted while our 23rd Armored Engineers erected pontoon structures. The civilians in these Belgian towns were wild with joy at our arrival. Occasionally we would see them publicly shaving the heads of known collaborators.

At Fleron, on the outskirts of Liege, Sgt Clarence Gann, a Company A tank destroyer commander with a very good battle record to date, let his guard down for a few moments and was killed. He had dismounted from his vehicle to take a shower in a factory building when he was hit by a sniper. I believe one of our historians erroneously described this incident in Yank Magazine. Without naming the victim, he described him as "....the big man with the tattoo marking on his neck that said 'cut on the dotted line.' A sniper killed him at Liege." The only big man I knew with such a tattoo was one of my platoon sergeants in Recon Company, S/Sgt Roger Ransitt. However, Sgt Ransitt survived the war. If Sgt Gann also had such a tattoo, it would have been an amazing coincidence.

Another unusual incident happened just a little further down the road, in Liege. A German General and three others tried to escape in an open-topped German civilian sedan. They were fired on by a B Company tank destroyer from Lt. Claude Ball's platoon. The General and one other were instantly killed; the other two severely wounded. I passed the German vehicle shortly after it happened. It was a grisly sight as it appeared that two of them had been decapitated by our fire.

Our Division reached Verviers on September 10th, six days after leaving Mons, and against increasing enemy resistance. We immediately drove on to Eupen, the last major town in Belgium before reaching Germany. There were no cheering crowds waiting for us here. Before the Versailles Treaty of WW I, Eupen was a German town on the then German side of the border.

The Siegfried Line fortifications of Germany's western border were just a few miles directly ahead of us. Tired and weary, but flushed with victory, our Division and others, prepared for an immediate assault. Large bulldozer blades were mounted on the front of some of our Sherman tanks. Under withering protective fire, men of our 23rd Armored Engineers strapped explosive charges to many of the vaunted Line's "dragon's teeth" and shattered them so our tanks with bull-dozers could shove them aside. Our big 155mm artillery guns fired point-blank at enemy pillbox fortifications by "bore-sighting" through the barrel. The pillboxes were also pounded by our P-47 dive-bombers.

Our tank destroyers were also active with all of our Division's task forces in this assault and infantry provided magnificent close support. The Germans used lots of anti-tank weapons in their defense and our Division lost many tanks from their determined efforts. Sgt Lafayette Pool's tank, "In the Mood II," was struck and this tank ace's leg was lost. He was an outstanding boxer on our stateside 3rd Armored boxing team and we had both fought one night in the Diamond Belt Tourney in New Orleans. You could count on Sgt Poole to always do his best.

At the Siegfried Line, our Third Armored Division racked up another "first" to its credit. We were the first Allied Division to penetrate the Siegfried Line and enter Germany. We were also the first to capture a German town—Roetgen fell to our 33rd Armored Regiment's Recon Company on September 12th.

It had taken the Third Armored only 18 days to advance from the Seine River in France, through Belgium, and into Germany, a record we were all proud of. But there was still a lot of combat ahead. In the next six days we advanced much more slowly against stiff resistance towards the larger town of Stolberg. En route, we captured Nutheim, Kornelimunster, Brand, Breinig and Mausberg. The enemy put up fierce resistance at Stolberg with house-to-house fighting. After a protracted struggle, it was finally cleared on September 23rd.

Just a few miles west of Stolberg was the much larger and ancient city of Aachen. It was initially bypassed on our drive through the Siegfried Line and into Germany but those plans soon changed when our high command learned of the troops within. The task was given to the 30th and 1st Infantry Divisions to encircle and capture it. After partial encirclement the Americans delivered a surrender ultimatum on October 10th, but it was refused by the German garrison. One Task Force from our Third Armored was then sent to help the two infantry divisions. Aachen surrendered on October 21st. Aachen for years was known as Aix-La-Chapelle and was the capitol of the Frankish Emperor Charlemagne in the 8th and 9th centuries.

During the protracted battle for Aachen, the balance of the Third Armored consolidated their positions in the smaller towns in the Stolberg area. My Company was ordered to occupy Breinig, where we lived in foxholes until the early winter snows. Then we evacuated some German families and commandeered their homes as billets. It was a welcome relief after shivering in wet foxholes lined with damp snow. It was a wonder that all of us didn't get sick!

Our Division was suffering from a logistics problem—we had far out-distanced our sources of supply and badly needed rest and maintenance of our vehicles. There would be no more long "drives" for awhile, so we dug in and held our modest "real-estate" near the German border. Our Division, that used to read about the war's progress when we were stationed in England, had now made front-page news for the rest of the world to read about.

After the battering we had given the enemy in France, Belgium and now the German border, we thought Germany might soon capitulate. Boy, were we wrong! They continued to fight the United States, Great Britain and the USSR on several fronts. In just the three weeks since we breached the Siegfried Line, these other actions involving German forces were taking place:

- 9/18/44 Germans counterattack British airborne troops at Arnhem, Netherlands.
- 9/20/44 British force Germans to withdraw from Rimini Line in Italy.

- 9/23/44 Russians break through German lines to Gulf of Riga in Latvia
- 9/25/44 US Fifth Army completes penetration of Gothic Line in Italy.
- 9/26/44 Germans overrun last British units in Arnhem, Netherlands.
- 9/30/44 Russians cross Danube in drive on Belgrade.
- 10/2/44 Germans complete suppression of Warsaw revolt.

And, in the Pacific Theater, America continued fighting on another front—against the Japanese. On 10/10/44 our Third Fleet Carrier Task Force raided Okinawa.

During our October rest period, I was shown an interesting G-2 Intelligence Report from our First Army Headquarters. In a very recent assessment of relative strengths, American forces outnumbered opposing German forces by the following ratios:

Troop strength	4 to 1
Artillery weapons	15 to 1
Aircraft	100 to 1

It was almost unbelievable to me that the Germans could continue fighting when on our front alone they were so vastly outnumbered. The entire country of Germany is smaller in area than our state of California!

During the several weeks of rest and resupply in these border-towns, another type of problem reared its head—fraternization with German frauleins. Although it was strictly forbidden, it was widely, though secretly, carried on, not only by enlisted men but some officers as well. Our "Yank" Magazine campaigned against it with cartoons about "Veronica Dankeschon" (always shown as chubby with braided pigtailed and a fondness for sauerkraut). Even her initials were VD! The fact was that there were many attractive girls in Germany and after their boyfriends and husbands were away for so long in the war, they wanted male companionship. Further, food and candy were scarce and could be used as enticements (haven't you ever heard of the "Tootsie-Roll kids?"). I discouraged the men in my Company from "fraternizing" but secretly became ensnared myself. An attractive

fraulein named Rosa lived in the home behind our Company Headquarters. I would see her often, through a separating fence, in her back yard and would occasionally try out my German vocabulary in short talks with her when no one else was around. Well, one thing led to another and one evening after dark we had a tryst in a hayloft over their small barn. Earlier, I had found some new nylons for her and this night she was wearing them under a pair of short leather boots. To get up in the hayloft, you had to climb up a ladder nailed to the outside. She climbed up first, followed closely by me. As I climbed, I looked up and saw her shapely legs encased in the nylons and boots and almost went out of my mind! We won't mention her again until the day we leave.

By early November our Division was rested and re-supplied. Our VII Corps Headquarters grew concerned about the buildup of German troops east of us and decided to launch an offensive to capture the ground before the Roer River. It started on November 16th with a massive bombing of German positions in the Eschweiler-Langerwehe area by our 8th Air Force bombers. Although this bombing couldn't compare with the spectacle the day of our "break-out" from Normandy, it was still a massive effort. Our Division moved forward with several Task Forces, each including some of our tank destroyers. My Headquarters Company remained in Breinig to fulfill supply missions.

Inclement weather (and our armored vehicles) had turned the roads into a sea of mud and water and the enemy had heavily mined some areas. Fierce battles broke out over control of the towns of Hastenrath and Scherpenseel. Near Weisweiler, our forces were frequently bogged down in swampy ground and our tanks immobilized in the mud and "sitting ducks" for sharp-shooting enemy anti-tank gunners. Adding to the problems of our Task Force Richardson, the Germans blew up a dam on the Inde River, flooding task force positions.

The Third Armored's task forces were ordered to withdraw from the offensive on November 27th, leaving VII Corps infantry to continue a slow advance toward the Roer River. On December 10th, Combat Command R of the Third Armored with two Task Forces and a Reserve was recommitted to the offensive to assist the 9th Infantry Division in

a final push to Hoven on the Roer River. Against heavy resistance, they captured Hoven on December 12th. The infantry was left in Hoven to secure and occupy it and our Combat Command R returned to its assembly area near Mausbach. It had been a short, savage campaign since November 16th. The Americans had prevailed and were now on the Roer River, but the Germans were not finished yet.

During November and December 1944, our Battalion's M-10 tank destroyers were replaced by the new M-36's which mounted a larger 90mm gun instead of the 3" gun on the M-10's. The M-36 also had gasoline engines instead of the diesels on the older m-10's. Our men liked the larger gun on the M-36 but had reservations about the gasoline engines (wouldn't gas ignite easier than diesel if their tank destroyer suffered a hit?).

On December 16th, we were jolted by news of a huge "surprise" German offensive back into Belgium southwest of us. It was moving rapidly westward into the hilly, wooded terrain of the Ardennes region And it had been timed to benefit from overcast foggy weather that would keep the superior Allied air force grounded. Twenty-five German divisions under their best German General, von Rundstedt, struck us on a 70 mile wide front between Monschau and Trier. They quickly broke through the front thinly protected by six American divisions, some of them "green."

Their grand objective was to recapture Antwerp and trap four Allied Armies—American, British and Canadian. The sprawling battles that followed were collectively named "The Battle of the Bulge."

Our 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion was detached from the Third Armored Division and attached to the 1st Infantry Division (the "Big Red One") on the right flank of the German advance. Within two days of the German "breakthrough" we marshalled in the Breinig area and headed back into Belgium.

As Captain Smith, our Headquarters Company Commander, and myself were leaving Breinig at the head of our column in a jeep, Captain Smith pointed to a fraulein standing on

the corner near our Headquarters billets and said "Sgt Hoy, look at that German girl. She's watching us leave and crying. I'll bet one of our men has been getting next to her." It was Rosa.

We were on our way to another major battle sector, but this time going in the wrong direction. Bye, Rosa.

Chapter 15

Battle of the Bulge

Although the great German counteroffensive back into Belgium started on December 16, 1944, it was two days later that the 703rd Tank Destroyers and some elements of the Third Armored Division reached the battle scene and engaged the enemy. But initially they did not work as a team as they had since Normandy. Organizational realignments were made by top brass of the Allied Command, and our own First Army, to meet the exigencies of the crisis.

During the next month, before the German advance was finally halted, portions of our Third Armored Division were detached from the VII Corps and attached to the V Corps and shortly afterwards to the Airborne XVIII Corps. Our 703rd TD Battalion was detached from the Third Armored and reassigned to the 1st Infantry Division (the "Big Red One"). Later, they would be reassigned to the 82nd Airborne Division before finally rejoining the Third Armored in the great American counteroffensive that started on January 3rd. To me, this constant reorganization only added to the confusion of the entire scene.

As my battalion raced southwestward to join the 1st Infantry Division and engage the enemy, we heard about the Malmedy massacre of 125 Americans the day before. They were machine-gunned after capture by SS troops. We passed close by the scene.

About this time, we were warned to be on the lookout for German troops in American uniforms and driving captured American army vehicles. These impostors spoke excellent English with American accents. We always used a secret "password and reply" system (also known as "countersign and parole") but for the next few days changed it several times a day to help confuse and detect the impostors.

We joined the First Infantry Division in the mountainous Schnee Eifel region to help contain German thrusts along the north flank of their great offensive and our tank destroyer platoons were assigned to many defensive roadblocks. The weather was bitter cold and the

terrain was covered with snow. Our troops suffered extensively from frostbite of the extremities. My hands were frost-bitten so severely that even many years later my fingers would turn white in barely-freezing weather and the pain would be excruciating when they thawed out. Through-out the Ardennes campaign, our troops tried to keep warm at night by entering Belgian barns.

The hardships faced by our men in this area is shown by the action of one of our tank destroyers from C Company, 2nd Platoon, while defending Elsenborn Ridge on December 20th. While supporting the 26th Infantry Regiment, thinly stretched over a wide front, three out of five of our normal TD crew had to dismount to provide outpost security for their vehicle (normally performed by infantrymen). This left a short-handed crew of two in the tank destroyer to perform all necessary functions. Clinton Reid's crew was suddenly reduced to just him when his gunner's hip was broken by the big gun's recoil. Clinton now had to perform all the duties of a normal five-man crew, including repositioning the vehicle, in a fight with German tanks. Although his TD was struck by enemy fire, he still managed to knock out from five to seven German tanks and other vehicles.

Although the weather remained overcast during the early days of the German counteroffensive, the enemy still managed to get some planes in the air, primarily strafing our columns. It was during this period that we saw the occasional use of a brand-new German weapon—the jet-propelled fighter plane. The Germans had developed the world's first jet plane but it was introduced too late in the war, and in insufficient numbers, to create a real problem for the Allies. But to us, on the ground, the appearance of this new plane zooming by at fantastic speeds was disheartening. Had this world's first jet appeared in numbers two years earlier, it might have had a tremendous impact on the war.

The Germans, as a race, have always been industrious, inventive and noted for their engineering technology. I realized it during the war but continued to see evidence of their technology in postwar years. Six years after the war, I was associated with Emil Eckstein in an American corporation. He was a former engineer with the Peenemunde Missile

Research site in Germany and was brought to North America by Canada after the war. Americans had him working on "boundary layer control" of aircraft skins. In Germany, during the war, he was the preliminary designer of a small collapsible German sea-plane that when folded up, fit into the conning tower of German submarines. Also, in 1970 at an engineering conference in Cleveland, Ohio, I met Werner von Braun, then head of our NASA, and former head of the Peenemunde Missile Research in Germany. Von Braun calculated the orbits for America's first successful rocket to the moon.

My then company, Headquarters Company of the 703rd TD Battalion, was engaged in many hazardous supply operations for the rest of the battalion. On one of these missions, our column was strafed by a FW190 German fighter plane. Pfc Matusavige, one of our drivers, stopped his truck during the attack and manned the 50 cal. MG mounted on the ring-mount atop his cab. On the second strafing pass of the enemy plane, he shot it down (another first for the 703rd)!

Meanwhile, the balance of our Third Armored Division was active in many individual battles to contain the thrusting German Panzer Divisions. In addition, our High Command had ordered part of General Patton's Third Army out of their Saar offensive in southern France northward to strike the German advance into Belgium on its southern flank. And two Airborne Divisions, the 82nd and the 101st, received orders to defend Bastogne and the surrounding area. The British had also sent their 20th Army Corps to protect the Meuse River sector.

I wish I could remember all the subsequent actions in this huge Battle of the Bulge, but there were many and they kaleidoscope together in my memory. I do recall some actions of our 703rd TD platoons when they were released from assignment with the 1st Infantry Division and were temporarily attached to the 82nd Airborne Division. The 82nd had been trying to stop the advance of the SS Panzer units under Colonel Pieper (the Malmedy murderer) near the juncture of the Ambleve and Salm Rivers. There, our tank destroyers of B Company, 2nd platoon, under Lt. Claude Ball, provided a determined resistance to the German efforts to cross the two streams. At this engagement, Lt. Ball had his

tank destroyers elevate their guns to shoot across the river into Colonel Pieper's position to emulate artillery and hopefully scare the enemy from attempting a crossing. It worked. His platoons suffered casualties in other actions nearby (see chapter 7).

In a series of stunning battles and reversals, the Battle of the Bulge raged across the Ardennes until near the end of December. Then, German General von Manteuffel's drive to take Bastogne was stalled. About this time, the weather cleared and our Allied airforce swung into action again.

On January 3rd, the Third Armored Division, joined again by the 703rd TD Battalion, opened a new offensive to cut-off the German drive between Houffalize and St. Vith. The Third Armored was to attack from the north meeting Patton's forces attacking from the south. In a series of brilliant actions spearheaded by our 83rd Armored Reconnaissance Battalion (led by former 703rd commander "Iron Mike" Yeoman) the gap between Houffalize and St. Vith was closed and the great German offensive blunted on January 16th. It was a source of great satisfaction to me that Yeoman's task force included a tank destroyer platoon from the 703rd, his old command.

Shortly before the Battle of the Bulge ended, I was involved in my second personal reassignment of the entire war. Captain "Tiger Jack" Murray, commanding officer of the 703rd's Recon Company, requested that I be transferred back to his company as 1st Sgt again (I'd left it in England). It was approved and I left Captain Smith and Headquarters Company (a fine unit and Captain).

Returning to my old Company, I had a pleasant surprise. In chapter 12, I mentioned how Sgt. Leon Michaud of Recon Company had been severely wounded in a booby-trap explosion in Normandy (lost a lung). He had been evacuated to a hospital in England for recuperation. When well enough, he could have been discharged and sent home but chose to rejoin us in combat. We were pleased to see each other again. After the war, Leon became a chiropractic doctor in Phoenix, Arizona, and we remained in touch. He died in

1997. Rufino Hualde, who had been our Recon Company Supply Sgt, still resides in Phoenix.

On January 20th, the Battle of the Bulge was finally ended, and the beaten German forces retreated back into Germany. Our Division and Battalion moved into rest and rehabilitation areas near Barvaux and Durbuy. We had sustained many casualties in the Ardennes and cemeteries in Belgium are a mute witness.

The citizens of Belgium were extremely grateful to the Americans who had liberated their nation from German occupation and then returned to save them from reoccupation by the great Battle of the Bulge German counteroffensive. And they still are grateful many years later.

On November 3, 1945, the Belgian Government awarded the highly coveted Belgian Fourragere to all members of the Third Armored and the 703rd Tank Destroyers who had participated in the Ardennes action.

Postwar Belgian historians of organizations like CRIBA and GERBS have done an excellent job of reconstructing the historical details of our American units in this great battle. My cousin, Jack Hoye, retired USAF Colonel, has been very active in researching the Ardennes battles to find out missing details on his brother-in-law who was KIA there (he has made several post-war trips to Belgium).

Of particular interest is a current Belgian group that calls itself the "1944's Allied Remembrance Group." It was formed in 1983 by grateful sons and daughters of wartime families but first became known to our 703rd reunion Association through former Lt Everett Stites of Recon Company. Their purpose is "to commemorate the memory of those American troops who gave their lives during the liberation of Belgium. They have officially adopted our 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion and on the front page of the periodical they publish monthly is the official logo of our Tank Destroyers (black panther crushing a tank in its jaws). Among other things, they salvage and rebuild some of our WWII disabled

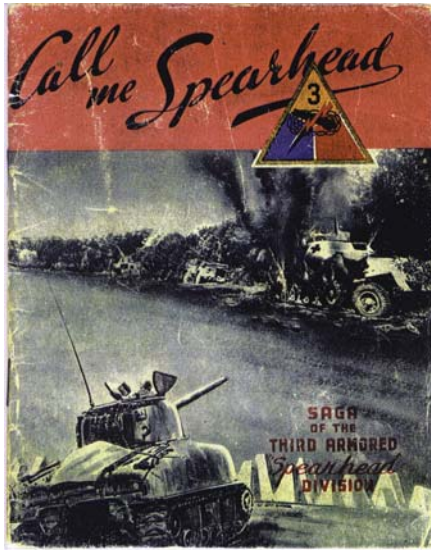
tank destroyers and other vehicles and have reconstructed our organization charts. They sponsor many related events in Belgium and invite all us old vets to visit them. They have corresponded with several vets in our Association (including our former Battalion Commander, Colonel Showalter). I have sent them organizational data as well as logo patches and chevrons.

We wish to thank all our Belgian friends for their continued appreciation of our WWII service in their country, including Henri Rogister and others who frequently attend our stateside reunions.

Back to January, 1945. We remained in our rest and rehabilitation areas in Belgium until early February. Many of our battle-weary troops were granted short recreational leaves to Liege and Verviers before returning to Germany and resuming the positions that we had left when the Battle of the Bulge started. Soon, we would be penetrating deeper into Germany.

Chapter 16

Call Me Spearhead



The great "Battle of the Bulge" came to a smashing end and von Rundstedt's cut-up and defeated forces were streaming back into their fatherland, but we knew the war was not over. After a few days rest and rehabilitation, our division and battalion moved out of Belgium and back to our original positions just inside the Siegfried Line in Germany during early February, 1945.

There would be little time for further rest as our VII Corps had plans to lunge across the Roer River near Duren and drive through the Hurtgen Forest to the Erft Canal, a last line of defense for the Wehrmacht before the great city of Köln (Cologne).

I was now back as 1st Sgt of our Recon Company but generally traveled with our company's headquarters unit as our platoons were assigned to work directly with our tank destroyer line companies A, B and C. The individual sections of the Recon platoons were assigned in direct support of that line company's tank destroyer platoons.

Each section of our Recon Platoons was equipped with M-8 Armored Cars mounting a 37mm gun on their turrets along with .30 cal. machine guns, and jeeps. They supported our tank destroyer platoons on roadblocks, patrolled the roads in that combat sector, kept supply lines open, transported ammunition, assisted in indirect firing of the TD's and filled in as TD

crew replacements (a number of the line company casualties were former Recon platoon men).

The great American assault on the Rhineland kicked off on February 23rd with forced crossings of the Roer River near Duren by the 8th and 104th Infantry Divisions. The bridgehead was established by February 26th and early that morning our Spearhead Third Armored Division was committed to action in a five-pronged drive to the Erft Canal and then Cologne on the Rhine River. Six Division Task Forces with Col. Yeoman's 83rd Armored Recon Battalion in the center participated in the five-pronged drive. Platoons from all of our 703rd TD line companies, with supporting Recon platoons from my company, were a part of each of the task forces.

We battled through towns and villages that had been reduced to rubble by our earlier air force bombing and artillery fire. At one town, a hastily organized German "People's Army" (Volksturm) surrendered enmasse after being deserted by their officers.

While driving through grassy fields between woods, I heard the drone of a V-1 German missile overhead as it headed west towards Belgium. As I watched, its engine sputtered and the missile made a huge U-turn and headed back over Germany from where it had been launched. It must have been a bitter disappointment to the enemy when it exploded on their own soil!

On February 27th, one day after leaving the Roer bridgehead, Task Force "Doan" of our division was in Kerpen on the Erft Canal, about 9 miles from the great city of Cologne and the Rhine River. On the next day, several of our Task Forces along with the 8th and 104th Infantry Divisions seized bridgeheads across the Erft Canal at Glesch and Paffendorf. That night our bridgeheads were bombed by a large contingent of the German Luftwaffe. The following day was spent in securing and cleanup of several towns in the Erft Canal area.

On March 2nd, our division with the two infantry divisions launched our final attack toward Cologne against very stubborn resistance in all sectors. We were to reach Roggendorf in the Rhine River area and then attack southeast to Cologne. On March 4th, our Task Force Lovelady fought its way into Roggendorf. In heavy action, one of our tank destroyers from the third platoon of Company B was hit by enemy tank fire. The entire crew (Sutliff, Janowicz, Hall and Shields), except their TD Commander Sgt Gore, was killed. Gore was thrown clear by the explosion. Sgt Gore was a long-time buddy of mine, having served alongside me in two different artillery battalions of the Second and Third Armored Divns. There were many other casualties on this drive to the Rhine.

One of the outlying towns captured just before our entry into Cologne was Pulheim. It was roughly 6 miles northwest of Cologne and was first entered by Task Force Kane supported by Company A tank destroyers on March 3rd. Later that afternoon, my Recon Company headquarters spent the night there. Major resistance had been broken but there was scattered resistance and mopping-up operations proceeding in the area. That night we established armed outposts around the perimeter of our bivouac area.

While checking these outposts after dark, I heard music and saw some light emanating from an underground bunker about 300 yards in front of our outpost line. Double-checking the current security "password and reply," I told the two guards at that outpost that I was going forward to more closely view the underground bunker and they must watch for my return and not shoot me as one of the enemy.

Armed only with my .45 cal. pistol, I advanced to the beginning of the long steps downward to the bunker. Peering down, I could see a large group of mostly women (some old men and children) who were dancing and singing to the accompaniment of an accordionist. I walked down a few steps and was spied by the group. They sent a woman up the steps to meet me. I can converse in German and soon found out it was a "survivor's" party celebrating the end of the war (for them). They were overjoyed that we had taken Pulheim and invited me to join their celebration. I returned to my Company, gave the correct password in the darkness and was readmitted through our guard outpost.

Two days later, as we advanced towards Cologne, we passed a Ford Assembly plant maybe a mile north of the city. Although the nearby countryside was heavily pock-marked by bomb-craters from repeated US and English bombing raids, the US-owned Ford plant was untouched!

On the 6th and 7th of March, all enemy resistance in the great city of Cologne was ended. Our Third Armored Division with the 8th and 104th Infantry Divisions had reached the Rhine and occupied one of Germany's greatest cities!

Back home, our Life Magazine's front cover carried a picture of a disabled German Mark V Panther tank sitting before the steps to the huge historic Cologne Cathedral.

The accompanying byline gave credit to General George Patton who commanded the US Third Army. Patton's forces were not in Cologne. The knocked-out German tank in the Life Magazine photograph was a victim of our Third Armored Division (Part of General Bradley's First Army) but confused newsmen erroneously gave credit to Patton's Third Army. My sister in the States sent me that front cover from Life Magazine in the mail later. It infuriated us Spearheaders (Patton several times was erroneously given credit for achievements of our Third Armored Division).

With the capture of the big city, there was a brief respite from the daily death and destruction of war. But you still had to be on guard. Our Stars and Stripes Newspaper reported this incident that happened to some of our "A" Company men of the 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion in Cologne... .

"So," said John Pollard, "here we are in Cologne, sitting around our billets griping," Otto Strahm claimed the place was not warm enough, Rosviel Reiling, Sgt Miklausich, Jim Coughlin and Lee Wittler sat around cussing the war in general and Al Miller was griping about the radio—"We need a new one!" So, along about that time a shell came through the side of the house. Miller's radio became a hunk of junk. Strahm found a bushel of assorted bricks and mortar in his stove. Reiling climbed out of the debris of his chair. Everybody quit griping right quick! It was a sure cure. Nobody got hurt, but all of us learned

to appreciate peace and quiet. "All except me," said Pollard smiling wryly, "and here I am still talking!"

Of noteworthy interest is this paragraph quoted from the official Third Armored Division booklet Spearheading with the Third Armored Division. "Those tanks which escaped the deadly accuracy of Colonel Brown's artillery were usually smashed to ruins by Lt. Colonel Wilbur Showalter's big M-36 tank destroyers. The 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion had been a potent factor in reducing strong points and pill-boxes as well as in the liquidation of Nazi armor."

Our next big task was to get across the wide Rhine River but in the last hours of German resistance in Cologne they blew up the large Hohenzollern bridge. In the following two weeks, the US 9th Armored Division captured the Ludendorff Bridge intact, south of Bonn, and elements of the Third Armored Division massed in this area for a drive across the Rhine.

We had hoped that Hitler would realize by this time that the war had been lost and surrender to avoid any further destruction of his country, but despite abortive attempts by his generals to persuade Hitler to surrender, he chose to defend the balance of his nation to the last city. We still had a big task east of the Rhine.

During the next two weeks while our 1st and 104th Infantry Divisions crossed the Rhine at Remagen and established a bridgehead on the far bank, the Third Armored and our 703rd TD Battalion moved southward opposite the bridgehead area and had a brief period of rest and refurbishment. It was during this period that our Division Commander, General Rose, received a communication from our President, Franklin Roosevelt, officially bestowing the name "Spearhead" to our Division in recognition of its many "firsts" in combat. It was to be one of FDR's last official acts. He died the following month.

FDR's message was quickly disseminated to all of us—we knew we were good and had already been calling ourselves the "Spearhead" Division. I remember clearly this FDR

message to our general, but surprisingly can find no mention of it in books on the war that I have read.

On March 20th, our Division started crossing the Rhine on a newly constructed pontoon bridge at Bad Honnef near Remagen and took up positions in the new bridgehead east of the Rhine. Our VII Corps was now poised for its next big drive—into Germany's heartland.

The big drive started on March 25th with the initial objective the taking of Altenkirchen to the east and then crossing the Dill River near Herborn. Our division, supported by the 104th Infantry Division, advanced forward with Combat Commands A and B abreast, the 83rd Armored Recon Battalion on the left flank and followed by Combat Command R (Reserve) and Division Control units including my company headquarters. Our 703rd Tank Destroyer line companies with supporting Recon Company platoons were active in all the Combat Command task forces. The initial German resistance came from six depleted divisions consisting of Volks-grenadier, Parachute and Panzer forces.

In a series of stubborn battles, Altenkirchen was captured one day later and on March 27th our Division crossed the Dill River and seized Herborn which had a renowned optical plant producing binoculars and other optical instruments. My company headquarters spent a day and a night in Herborn in two private homes seized as temporary billets. It was at Herborn where I first became concerned at the extent of looting being carried on by our troops. In general, looting was prohibited by military law but not uniformly enforced by all units. The most coveted items were weapons such as expensive shotguns and civilian hunting rifles with scopes, cameras, watches and binoculars. But the looting soon spread to most any item of value. To ship this "loot" home via mail required only the approving signature of one of your officers (they were frequently "lenient" in their approving role).

I was not averse to our boys seizing military trophies and weapons but frowned on works of art, household items etc. I strongly lectured the men in my company to not remove such

items and my advice was generally followed. Almost two years after the war ended, I revisited peace-time Herborn to purchase a pair of binoculars at their reopened optical plant. I stopped briefly at one of the homes we occupied during the war and was warmly thanked by the old lady owner for my wartime stand against looting.

We were now driving northeastward and captured the university town of Marburg on March 28th. At Marburg, our Division was ordered to drive about 90 miles straight to the north to capture the strategic town of Paderborn with its German tank training grounds. Then we would swing to the west towards Lippstadt and meet the east-ward advancing US 9th Army in an attempt to encircle all remaining German forces in the great industrial Ruhr Valley.

The drive to Paderborn was spearheaded by our division's famed 83rd Recon Battalion led by former 703rd commander Col. "Iron Mike" Yeoman. His battalion made the longest one-day drive of the war by battling northward against fierce resistance for 90 miles. Other elements of our division were advancing in the same direction in four columns. The German resistance used a lot of hand-held bazookas (Panzerfaust) which took a heavy toll from advancing Third Armored forces, especially near the town of Kirchboren. The terrain to Paderborn was heavily wooded, making communication difficult between our advancing columns. German tanks took advantage of these wooded areas to set up concealed roadblocks along the wooded roads.

On the night of March 30th, our Task Force Welborn column was cut by roving enemy Mark V (Panther) and Mark VI (Tiger) tanks. about three miles south of Paderborn. Our division General, Maurice Rose, was up in the front elements of his command. He was in a small group of three jeeps and an armored car when they were halted by a large Tiger tank concealed at roadside. In the ensuing confusion, General Rose was killed by the Tank Sgt with a burp gun, some others in his group were captured and two escaped. The reason the General was shot is unclear but apparently was caused by his dropping one arm down towards his pistol. General Hickey of our Combat Command A assumed command of our division for the rest of the war.

The night General Rose was killed, I and others in Recon Company were in the nearby vicinity, alert for sporadic German resistance. The next morning, per official division records, a section of tank destroyers from our 703rd TD Battalion "destroyed two Tiger tanks close to the scene of General Rose's tragedy." Did we get the one that killed our General? We'll probably never know for sure.

Also, on March 30th, the day General Rose was killed, my Recon Company lost Lt. Edwards and three enlisted men who were riding in a jeep early that morning near the town of Wewer. They were initially reported as "missing in action." Their vehicle had been the end vehicle of a 703rd TD platoon of C Company supporting Task Force Hogan. Subsequently they were listed as "killed in action." I never knew all the details, but the Germans were known for their habit of letting a column pass them and then knocking off the last vehicles.

During the early morning of April 1st, just before entering Paderborn, our VII Corps directed our division to divert one of our task forces about 20 miles to the west to meet the eastward advancing 2nd Armored Division at Lippstadt. Task Force Kane, with tank destroyer support, was given this mission and drove westward at 3 am. At 3:30 pm they made contact with the 41st Armored Infantry Regiment to officially close off the great Ruhr Valley pocket and encircle all remaining German forces there. This pocket was quickly renamed the "Rose Pocket" in honor of our fallen General Rose (the Rose Memorial Hospital in Denver, Colorado, is also named in his honor). Paderborn itself fell to the other Third Armored Task Forces at 5 pm the same day. Much of the city was in ruins.

In the six-day period since our Spearhead Division had broken out of the Rhine bridgehead on March 25th to the encirclement at Lippstadt on April 1st we had taken 20,193 prisoners and destroyed countless German Wehrmacht vehicles and big guns. In the same period my division had lost 125 killed, 504 wounded and about 115 tanks and other vehicles. During the next three days our division cleaned up remaining pockets of resistance in the Paderborn area and consolidated our defenses. We were flushed with victory and very weary with the constant strains of warfare but Hitler still wouldn't capitulate.

We were in central Germany with only a month and about 140 miles to go before meeting the Russians at war's end. On April 5th, the Third Armored Spearhead Division and its 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion started the last big drive with the initial objective of crossing the Weser River.

Chapter 17

A Fitting Ending

The biggest and the most costly war in the history of Europe was rapidly drawing to a close. In addition to our First Army, the US Third, Seventh and Ninth Armies and the British Second Army were driving eastward through the remaining enemy-held regions of Germany. We had hoped to have the honor of entering Germany's capitol, Berlin, but had heard that Eisenhower felt that honor should go to the USSR who had suffered terribly at the hands of the Germans. They were almost in Vienna at this time and were advancing towards Germany through Poland and Czechoslovakia.

On April 5th, our Third Armored Division with its 703rd Tank Destroyer support headed east from Paderborn in four somewhat parallel columns. Our initial objective was to reach and cross the Weser River—the end objective was to meet the advancing Russians on the Elbe River south of Berlin. Initial resistance was light to moderate but stiffened considerably as we, along with the 83rd and 104th Infantry Divisions, approached the Weser.

Our Recon Company platoons were in active support of our big tank destroyers. The following incident, reported in our post-war 703rd Association Newsletter, "The Roadblock," under the heading "Reconnaissance Par Excellence," is illustrative:

Early in April, Lt. Hugh (Doc) Livengood and his Recon 3rd Platoon were the pupils when the enemy tries to teach them how to reconnoiter for targets. It was daybreak along thickly wooded highways. A section of our tank destroyers with light tanks and a few infantry were on roadblock. Germans filled the woods, spending the night trying to get close enough to be within range for effective use of his bazookas. "Doc" was on guard at dawn, saw movement just yards away, and looked to make sure what it might be! He challenged and received a harsh cry in French. By this time, the men dug in close by were alert enough to pull the stranger down.

The German soldier had an egg grenade in his pocket, but he pulled it away from the G.I. examining him, jerked out the pin, and took off as a German comrade opened up with a 'Burp' gun just yards away. "Doc" and the men close by could not see the source of the rounds coming their way, but "Doc" and a doughboy spotted the end of a bazooka emerging from a bush. They called for the TD to machine-gun the area from where the danger was evident, apparently frightening the bazooka man. The German turned and fired at the distracter, his round hitting a tree above the doughboy's head. Some American unloaded his weapon into the German soldier, as did Pvt Millen's machine-gun, and a few M-1's! The platoon leader thought the explanation quite evident. One German had the weapon to decommission the TD, the other had gone forward to identify a target, simple enough!

On the 6th and 7th of April, our forces reached the Weser River and the Third Armored captured several small towns on its west bank. They found all bridges across the Weser blown up by the enemy (they were not going to make the same mistake they had made at Remagen on the Rhine—letting the Allies capture a bridge intact. American forces quickly installed two pontoon bridges over the Weser. Two infantry divisions, the 1st and the 104th established bridgeheads on the east bank and soon all four columns of the Third Armored had crossed and were again battling their way eastward. On their northern flank, in the Harz Mountains, the enemy was building up a very strong position with an eventual 80,000 troops and the Third Armored had to block the south exits of the mountains. Our blocking action kept this large force in a defensive posture and only caused a temporary delay in the Third Armored's eastward advance.

The quality of the German resistance met by our four columns varied from excellent to shoddy—from crack SS Divisions to hastily organized People's Army (Volksturm). We were starting to see old men, teenagers and bicycle troops in the forces opposing us.

Two of our advancing Third Armored columns entered the city of Nordhausen on April 11th and soon discovered the infamous slave labor concentration camp on its outskirts. It was

replete with the dead and dying and cremation ovens and was a pity to behold. Some of our division personnel forced the inhabitants of Nordhausen city to clean up the stinking rotten mess at the concentration camp and bury the dead. The sight and stench was a sickening shock to our troops and reinforced the reasons for our entry into this war. About two miles north of the concentration camp, at a place called Dora, a huge underground factory was discovered. Here, the healthier inmates of the concentration camp were forced to manufacture and assemble V-1 and V-2 missiles and aircraft engines for the military.

Sangerhausen, about 20 miles to the east, was our next objective and it was taken the next day, April 12th. On the way there, we captured a large group of SS Panzer troopers. While logging them into a Division prisoner-of-war (POW) enclosure, I noticed that one of their officers was holding a beautiful Wehrmacht attack dog (German Shepherd) on a leash. I told him he could not keep the dog in the POW enclosure. He noted my interest in the animal and asked me to keep and care for him. He said the dog's name was Odar and he instructed me on the various German training commands the dog reacted to. I accepted the dog and he later rode with me in my jeep for the rest of the war and into the Darmstadt occupation at its end. He was a very "sharp" dog and men in my company kept their distance, but he responded well to my commands and caused no problems. His alertness to strange sounds at night made him a valuable ally.

After over-running Sangerhausen, we drove into Eisleben the next day. At Polleben on its outskirts, we found a German Stalag or POW Camp. It housed mostly British POW's including pilots and parachutists but also had some Canadian and American POW's. I had heard that my younger brother, Howard, an 82nd Airborne parachutist captured in Normandy on D-Day, was interned here. Just before our column reached the Stalag, its doors were opened and the POW's released. They came streaming towards us by the hundreds. Our vehicular column moved past them in clouds of dust, and visibility was impaired. I leaned over the side of my vehicle, intently searching the faces of the passing POW's but could not spot my brother in all of the dust and motion. I heard later that he had been freed and eventually reached home safely in the U.S. All three of my brothers in this war on the continent were survivors.

Resistance was stiffening as we neared the Saale River in the vicinity of Konnern where the enemy had destroyed all the bridges. We crossed on our own hastily-constructed pontoon bridges after dark on April 14th. That same day, our Task Force Welborn reached the Mulde River just south of Dessau—our last great objective. About 15 miles northeast of Konnern, and against increasing enemy resistance, we reached the town of Quellendorf. In this general area we over-ran and set free thousands of slave laborers, displaced persons and allied POW's. Two noteworthy incidents involving myself took place here.

In the first one, I stopped to look at a large group of conscript laborers we had just liberated from huge German agricultural farms where they were forced to work in the fields. One was a very attractive young Russian girl. She had a crude bandage over one eye and told me, in German, that it was infected. I told her to get in my jeep and I would get medical attention for her eye. In a nearby town, I found an old German doctor and ordered him to examine and treat her eye. This accomplished, I drove her back to the site where I had found her (American authorities were already gathering them up for assistance). She was very appreciative for the help I had gotten for her eye. Outside the eye problem, she looked the epitome of health from working in the German fields and she was perhaps one of the most beautiful women I have ever met (on a par with my wife Maja). I no longer remember her name, but sincerely hope she made it home to her Russian homeland.

The second incident involved a young Polish army officer we freed in the area. He had the SS Identification number tattooed on one arm. He begged to join us Americans in the remaining battles with the Germans. Among his other talents he was a linguist and could speak seven different languages. I instantly liked this man and secured proper authority for him to join us. "Thad" now rode in my jeep with the other "auslander," Odar, my German attack dog. What an assemblage! But true! In the final weeks of the war, Thad was valuable to us in several ways—particularly in securing needed information from the German populace for our Company Commander, Captain Jack Murray, and myself.

Our Third Armored Division forces reached the city of Dessau on the Elbe River on April 21st and two days later enemy resistance there ended. On the opposite side of the river,

we could see contingents of Russians. We had met up with them in a giant squeeze trap on Germany from both the east and the west! The Russians were also battling their way into the suburbs of Berlin, 80 miles north of us, and by May 2nd had captured the last stronghold of Hitler's Germany.

Yes, the war was truly winding down but in its last days was still claiming casualties from our Third Armored Division. To have come this far since the June 1944 days in Normandy and then get wounded or lose your life at the very ending of the war was most certainly an ironic tragedy—probably feared by all in the final days.

About mid-April, Dick Langerveld, a member of one of our "B" Company tank destroyers, was wounded by an enemy sniper. He was shot while riding on top of his TD with his Company Commander, Captain Henry Gosch. When shot, he fell on top of his Captain who administered morphine to the stricken man and got him promptly to medics. Although he survived, it was his second wounding in combat for which he wears the Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Cluster. I met both Langerveld and Gosch at the final reunion of our battalion in Grand Rapids, Michigan on May 20, 1998. It was the first time Langerveld had seen his old Captain Gosch for 53 years!

Another war-ending casualty, but more unfortunate, for he lost his life, was Pfc James A. Murray of my Recon Company. He was in our 1st Recon Platoon under Lt Stites supporting "B" Companies 2nd TD Platoon under Lt Roberts. In the final days of the war, at Raguhn on the Mulde River just south of Dessau, Murray was hit by enemy rifle fire and died in Lt Robert's arms.

And perhaps the most famous war-ending casualty was Lt. Colonel Prentiss E. "Iron Mike" Yeoman, Commanding Officer of the famed 83rd Armored Reconnaissance Battalion and former stateside commander of our 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion. Col. Yeoman had racked up an amazing war record. He was killed by enemy artillery fire while leading his men near the town of Thalheim on April 18th. I was shocked and deeply grieved when I heard this news.

I have itemized only three of our war-ending casualties. There were others. By April 25th, the 9th Division had relieved our Third Armored Division in the Dessau area and we were sent a few miles west to the Sangerhausen area to occupy and govern that area temporarily. The war was figuratively over although there were still occasional last-minute skirmishes and mopping-up exercises. Enemy holdouts were surrendering in large numbers.

My Recon Company of the 703rd Tank Destroyer Bn occupied the small town of Rastenburg about midway between Dessau and Sangerhausen. Until the official declaration of war's end on May 8th, VE Day, we posted machine-gun outposts around the town's perimeter. At Rastenburg, we had "the fitting ending" for the war and helped our battalion and the entire Third Armored Division celebrate it. I and my ex-Polish Army officer Thad were very central to this amazing incident.

On May 7th, Thad approached me with the news that he had been interrogating the German Burgermeister (Mayor) of Rastenburg when the Burgermeister told him that just outside town was a locked sheet-metal warehouse owned by the German Army that housed vast stores of looted Russian vodka and Dutch cigars. Under questioning by Thad, the Burgermeister admitted that he had a key to this warehouse "treasure."

I immediately asked Thad to go with me in my jeep back to the Burgermeister's office. We took along several empty duffel and barracks bags just in case the Burgermeister was telling the truth. On confronting the Burgermeister, I told him he was to bring the warehouse key and accompany us to the warehouse. He was initially reluctant, but quickly became fully cooperative when I tapped the pistol on my thigh. At the warehouse, we directed him to unlock the door and enter ahead of us (just in case the place was booby-trapped). He was very nervous but did as he was told.

Once inside the warehouse, we switched on some lights and were astounded at what we saw! The left two-thirds of the one-story warehouse had shelving almost up to the ceiling and the shelves were stacked with cases of Russian vodka, each bottle wrapped in protective straw. And on the shelves of the right one-third of the warehouse were hundreds

and hundred of boxes of good Dutch cigars. The labeling showed they were from the Netherlands and they bore the name "Wilhelm II." The warehouse must have been a repository of the Wehrmacht to serve many military organizations and we had stumbled on it! We were flabbergasted but not for long. Soon we filled our empty bags with vodka and cigars, relocked the warehouse, keeping the key, and then drove the Burgermeister back to his office.

Arriving back at the German homes my Company had taken over as temporary billets, I gave some of the "spoils" to my platoon sergeants and then told an incredulous Captain Murray of our find. He, with a couple of our Lts in a half-ton truck, followed Thad and me back to the warehouse. They soon loaded a considerable portion of the "goodies" for our company and officer's use and then reported the great find to our Third Armored Division Headquarters. The next morning, May 8th, the Division posted its MP's (Military Police) at the warehouse, officially took it over, and unloaded its contents for Third Armored Division war-ending celebrations.

In the book *Spearhead in the West, Third Armored Division*, by Turner Publishing Co. of Paducah, Kentucky, 1991, on pp 77 and 78, under the heading "The War Ends," is this erroneous statement: "Third Armored troops were scattered throughout the area, ostensibly to keep order. One, was it the 703rd, found itself with a champagne factory at hand. Lucky 703rd!"

Well, *Spearhead in the West*, you finally know the truth! It was NOT a champagne factory, and a hell-raising 1st Sgt of the 703rd with an ex-Polish Army officer discovered it and provided celebratory vodka cocktails for the entire Third Armored. Boy, I'll bet that used up all the grapefruit juice in the division!

That night, after our initial discovery on May 7th, Captain Murray asked me to accompany him on a tour of our perimeter machine-gun outposts at Rastenburg. Unfortunately, I had given some of the vodka to my platoon sergeants that afternoon and some of the Russian "tranquillizer" had gotten into the hands of some of the

posted guards at the outposts. This was noted by a disgruntled Captain Murray and myself on the tour. I spent the next two hours trying to find sober men to replace the "mushy-headed" ones at the guard outposts.

The next day, we properly celebrated the official end of the madness, mayhem and killing that was World War II. There were some terrible hangovers later, but who cared - THE WAR WAS OVER!

Within a week, our Division and Battalion was ordered to convoy a long way west to the general area south of Frankfurt-am-Main including Darmstadt, Aschaffenberg and surrounding towns. There we would temporarily assume occupation duties while awaiting shipment orders back to the U.S. In terms of points awarded for battle service, we were a high-point group and expected rapid deployment home instead of to the South Pacific Theater where the war against Japan was still in full force.

There was an unanswered question in many of our young minds—particularly mine. WHY were we giving up almost one third of central and eastern Germany to the Russians in exchange for one-fourth of the administration of Berlin without even a guaranteed land route to it? We and the British had taken that land in combat with the loss of many lives. All this malarkey had been agreed to in discussions between the Big Four—Stalin, Truman, Churchill and DeGaulle. America was sold out! I rebelled against this then as a young soldier and later when I returned to the States, but very few listened or seemed to care. Our subsequent Berlin Airlift, Iron Curtain wall and the Cold War bore out my earlier concerns.

Still, the war was OVER! During the war, from late June of 1944 in Normandy until war's end in May of 1945, roughly one year, our Third Armored Division had officially taken 76,720 enemy prisoners (five times the strength of our Division) and suffered 10371 casualties.

God, are we proud of our record! And, God, were we glad it's OVER. On to Darmstadt!

Chapter 18

Darmstadt—En Route Home

The transition of Germany from a hostile combat zone to a dismembered, defeated nation carved into four specific occupation zones was startling and immediate. The four great powers, France, Great Britain, the US and the USSR had already established the boundaries of each occupation zone before the war ended.

At war's end, the American troops in eastern Germany discovered that they were in the newly-designated Soviet zone and they faced a long trip westward to reach the American zone of occupation. We were told that our 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion would convoy about 300 miles to the west to Darmstadt, then capitol of Hesse, which we would occupy until final arrangements were made to ship our personnel back to the USA.

The long trip was made without major incident and before mid-May we were billeted in some nice German homes on the east side of Darmstadt. Russian troops, sometimes in horse-drawn columns, promptly moved into the east German area we had just vacated. What kind of city was our new temporary home? Pre-war Darmstadt had a population of about 140,000 and was noted for its chemical industries and huge railroad marshalling yards. It was on the edge of a major north-south autobahn (freeway), was about 14 miles east of the Rhine River and the French Zone of Occupation and was 16 miles south of huge Frankfurt-am Main and 20 miles southeast of Mainz. It was a historic city dating from around 800 AD that had been heavily bombed by the Allied Air Forces during WWII.

Eighty-five percent of the city was destroyed by bombing raids. The worst one was an incendiary bomb attack at night by the British RAF who dropped thermite bombs which burnt their way down to the basements where the citizenry had sought protection. The city soon became a flaming holocaust—survivors staggered out of the burning basements and plunged into outside vats of water only to find the water was near-boiling from the intense heat. Many thousands of residents died in this one-night catastrophe. Witnesses the next day said the streets were strewn with what looked like black logs—carcasses with

their extremities burnt off. Such are the horrors of modern warfare where the casualties also include non-combatant women and children! The Germans had started this cowardly practice in their much earlier massive bombing raids on Holland's largest cities.

Our billets were in the eastern part of the city that had escaped the bombing. About a mile east of our billets was a huge former German Army Kaserne (Post) that had been taken over by the US Military Government to temporarily house and feed thousands of "displaced persons," DP's, until they could be sent back to their homelands.

Our men were very happy that the war was over and could scarcely wait until the day they would be shipped home. After months of unstructured combat existence, they were once again subjected to some of the disciplines of a peacetime army, but not too much. Once again, they had to "fall-out" for reveille, eat in a mess-hall at established times, and perform their share of necessary details such as KP, guard duty, cleaning and maintaining vehicles and "policing" their billets and surrounding areas.

But they still had "beaucoup" of time on their hands and many spent it in fraternizing with frauleins (which was a "no-no") and in black-market activities. Lots of our GI's had their family or friends back in the States ship them large boxes of cigarettes—great trading material for dozens of other coveted items. For those men desiring female companionship, there were plenty of German frauleins and, also, girls of many nationalities at the nearby DP Center who volunteered to sleep with them. As Topkick, I had to blow the whistle at reveille each morning and have the Company line up in the street and report "All present and accounted for, sir" platoon by platoon. I often thought that if the platoon sergeants routed both men and women outside for this reveille formation, the ranks would be almost doubled!

Shortly after reaching Darmstadt, I lost the association of our Polish Army officer, Thad. He checked into the nearby DP Processing Center and soon had a priority ticket back to his homeland. He was all smiles at the news and we were very happy for him. Also, about this time, I met the beautiful Maja who would become my wife two years later. Her home

was actually in Worms-am-Rhein in the French Zone but she had been living with an older sister, Agnes, in Darmstadt. How we first met was unusual. I love raw potatoes and on this day was standing on the sidewalk in front of my billets (which were also the Company Orderly Room and officer's quarters) alternately eating a slice of raw potato and then giving one to my attack dog, Odar. Across the street, Maja was passing by. She stopped, amazed, and then burst out laughing. She told me later, "I couldn't believe my eyes. There was one of the 'rich' Americans who was satisfying his hunger with a lowly uncooked potato!" Hearing her laugh, I walked across the street with my dog and introduced myself.



Through Maja, I later was invited to some parties thrown by a very wealthy ex-building contractor and his wife (the Mitteldorfs) who lived a few blocks away. The parties were a fascinating exposure to another aspect of German social life. About two weeks after our arrival in Darmstadt, my Battalion staged a Memorial Day Parade and Review in honor of all our wartime casualties. It was held on the parade-ground of a former German Wehrmacht Kaserne and was most impressive. The entire Battalion was at their "spit-and-polish" best for this event. There were many moist eyes among these hardened vets as the names of their fallen comrades were slowly read and "Taps" played by a bugler.

I loved my wartime-acquired dog, Odar. He had "imprinted" on me since the day I got him from the SS Officer who was being imprisoned. Now, he spent much of his time lying near my desk in the Company Orderly Room. But good things do not always last. One day, Odar disappeared. I didn't know why and inaugurated a vain search for my friend. Then, about ten days later, Odar reappeared at our Orderly Room. He looked emaciated and sick—I scarcely recognized him. I found an old German veterinarian and asked his help. After examining Odar, his diagnosis was distemper and the worst news was yet to come. He had no distemper shots and couldn't locate any in Darmstadt. He did treat my dog with other medicines but to no avail. Odar's condition worsened until he could no longer eat or get up. After the vet told me it would be futile to try to save Odar, I broken-heartedly transported him to a nearby woods where I said a tearful goodbye and then shot and buried him. It was perhaps the most difficult thing I've ever had to do. I have always loved all types of animals and within a week had acquired another.

A USAF pilot from North Africa had just flown into Darmstadt and I became acquainted with him. He was accompanied in his plane by a young male African lion, a cub perhaps three or four months old. The cub was growing rapidly but had still not lost all his childhood spots. The pilot was dismayed when told he could not bring the young lion to America with him and was searching for a home for the animal. With some reluctance and a few restrictions, our Company Commander, Captain Murray, agreed that I could have the lion cub. I kept him in a second-story room that opened onto a low-walled outside veranda.

Then, the problems arose—when it comes to animals, my heart prevails, not my head. The first problem I became acutely aware of was the young lion's tremendous appetite. At each feeding he wolfed down several pounds of raw meat. Our Mess Sgt Owens kept me supplied with raw meat until meat became noticeably scarce on the Company menu. Then I had to resort to the "black-market" to get enough meat to satisfy my "kitty's" ravenous appetite. This put quite a dent in my "trading stock" of alcoholic beverages!

The next problem, as he grew larger, was his escape by leaping over the veranda's low walls to the ground several feet below. Twice, I used some of our enlisted men to search for and

help recapture the miscreant. Meanwhile, I had thoroughly investigated my chances of getting him home to the States. It just wasn't in the books!

Searching for other answers, I found out that Frankfurt, the large city north of us, had a zoo which was partially destroyed during the war. Contacting their Head Keeper, he agreed to accept the young lion as a new zoo resident. With my lion sitting in the back seat of a jeep with me, held firmly by a leash and collar, my jeep driver slowly drove northward to Frankfurt. You can bet that all other motorists nearby were thoroughly surprised by the spectacle. We were very lucky that there were no "lion-induced" crashes en route to the zoo.

There was another incident at Darmstadt I never will forget. My older brother, Bob, a combat medic, showed up at our billets on a captured German Army motorcycle with two five-gallon cans of pure German medical alcohol swung like saddlebags over the rear-wheel carrier. His unit had just arrived in the Darmstadt area from Holland, where they had served in combat until the war's end. Now they were being transferred to temporary billets at Heppenheim am Bergstrasse about 30 miles south of Darmstadt. The "Bergstrasse" was a low chain of mountains that stretched south from Darmstadt. It was beautiful former tourist country and included several historic towns and schlosses (castles) including "Frankenstein Schloss" where the popular Frankenstein movie had been filmed.

Bob promptly invited Maja and I, and several more from our 703rd Recon Company, to a party at their new billets in Heppenheim. What a party!! That evening we were the guests of Bob and his unit. We mixed the pure medical alcohol with grapefruit juice in our canteen cups. WHAT a potent drink! There was also a supply of German beer, wine and schnapps on hand.

As a young man at home, Bob used to cut the hair of the rest of us Hoy kids. Now, while inebriated, he wanted to show off his barbering talents. I volunteered as his customer and soon clippers, scissors and razors were produced. To this day, I am still mystified how I got out of the "hot-seat" without losing an ear or my nose! Later in the evening, we ran out of wine and I volunteered to search the neighborhood for some more. Bob "loaned" me his

CO's jeep and I took off. Perhaps a half-mile away, I was negotiating a sharp curve when I lost control and the jeep overturned in a steep ditch. Supporting bushes kept the jeep above from crushing me. I climbed out of the ditch and staggered back to the party. Several of Bob's buddies escorted me back to the scene of the accident in a truck equipped with a winch in front. They quickly righted the jeep, pulled it out of the ditch and I drove it back to the party. The jeep had only a few scratches as testimony to its ordeal. The fun and revelry continued until about 3 am, when we got a little shuteye and then drove back to Darmstadt. Bob died in 1983 and this is just one of many daredevil episodes we shared together.

By the end of July, the Army had finalized plans for returning our men home. The 703rd TD Battalion would be deactivated in Germany and our men transferred, in small contingents, to other military units for shipment home. I had decided to stay in Germany as a civilian and try to marry Maja as soon as military bans were lifted. I applied for an Honorable Discharge overseas and was transferred to the Third Replacement Depot at Marburg, Germany. After what seemed like an interminably long time, in which I was repeatedly urged to stay in the U.S. Army, I was finally Honorably Discharged as a First Sergeant, TD, on 5 November 1945. Part of the delay was caused by waiting for acceptable proof that I had a civilian job when I was discharged from the Army. I secured a two-year civilian contract with the Office of the Theater Chief Quartermaster in Frankfurt where I started as a clerk and soon rose to Section Chief over 26 civilians and military personnel from three different countries.

Soon after becoming a civilian in Germany, I bought a war-surplus jeep at one of the surplus depots in France. The tale of how I smuggled food to Maja's starving parents in the French Zone, fought to get 21 written endorsements on my application for marriage to Maja (including driving my jeep into Berlin to confront a Russian Colonel whose signature I needed) and many other adventures is extremely interesting. It could be part of another book but not this one.

The balance of our Recon Company men and officers made it safely home and returned to civilian life. They had served their country well and honorably.

God bless each and every one of you. It's 1998 and our saga is ended. But I shall never forget.

Ed Hoy, Cottonwood, Arizona

[Ed Hoy died of heart failure in February 1999]