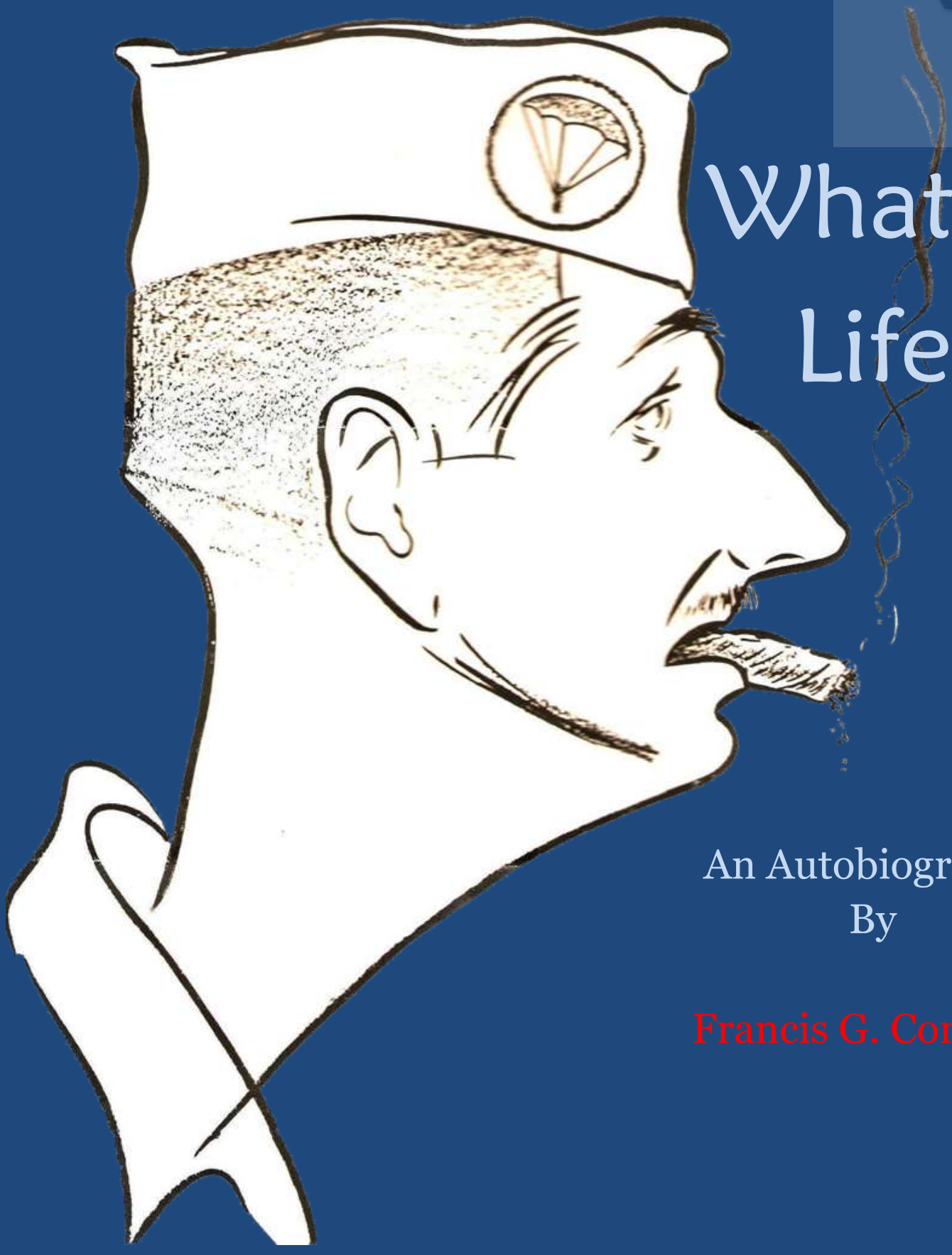
WITNESS TO WAR



What a Life

An Autobiography
By

Francis G. Connelly

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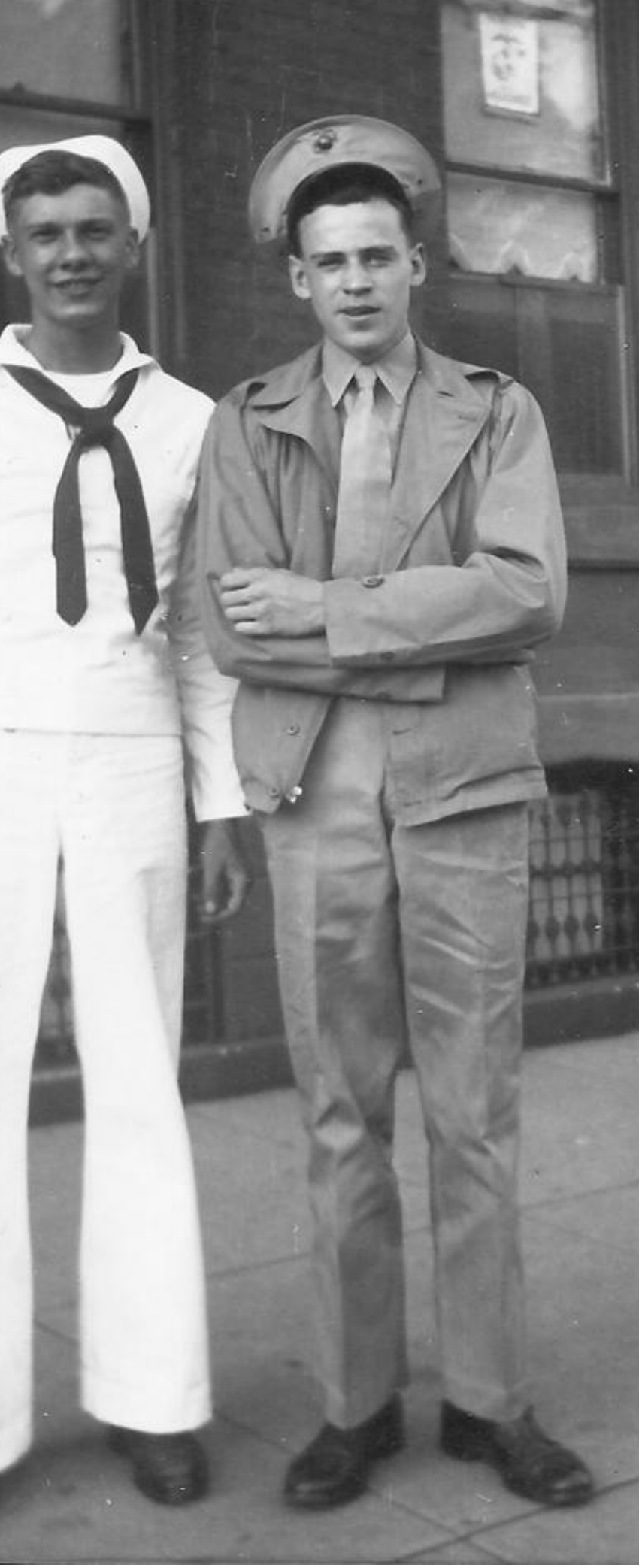
The authors would like to thank Joyce and Robert Dean; Mary Ilsemann Ruscavage; Terry Buchheit Turner; James Buchheit; John Buchheit; Edward Buchheit, Sr.; and the Michael Connelly Family for the use of their photos. Special thanks go to Edward Buchheit, Jr. who spearheaded the effort to collect pictures to tell the story of the Buchheit family.



Dedicated to
John Buchheit
(1924-1944)

My wonderful
brother-in-law
who I never
got the opportunity
to know.

What a Life

By Francis G. Connelly

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Forward

While studying history in college, I had the privilege of learning from some of the most well-known scholars and lecturers in the field. However, some of the most memorable lecturers were not the professors that had taught the subject for years. Rather, it was the guest lecturers who were there making the history that really held my attention. There came a point where I realized that what makes the past meaningful is our relation to the people and events. Not just that it happened, but how it affects us today.

The idea to detail my grandfather's life was somewhat borne of the World War II project. This was an effort to give living veterans the opportunity to share their experiences through interviews about their lives during the war, conducted by their relatives or friends. This historic project is a fantastic tribute honoring the men and women of WWII for their enormous contributions to history. When confronted with the idea, my grandfather, Francis Gordon Connelly, took it a step further. He decided to write his life story. This is that effort.

This is not a novel, or a dramatization of events made for a movie. Simply put, it is the life story of an American in the time when we as a nation went from an Isolationist power to a World power. It is the story of how the times around him shaped his life and the lives of his family. Furthermore, this is a selfish effort to keep part of our history. Hopefully someone will get a chance to read it and want to know more about theirs.

A special thanks to my sister, mother and aunt for their efforts in making this book happen. Their tireless efforts have made this possible.

On a personal note to my Grandfather and Grandmother—thank you and we love you. I know that it is not a perfect story, and that is just fine. It was not written to make heroes out of people, or sell millions of copies at bookstores. You are our relation to the past. This is one part of our history. Years from now, we will tell our story. Hopefully, it will mean as much to our listeners as your story means to us.

Michael W. Fry

Introduction

How does one begin to relate a story or an autobiography? Must it have a fantastic or mundane beginning? The answer to that is I don't know.

This story however began with a dull thought that I could write. Now that my grandkids and daughters said I should do it, I will try.

This story is for them. It is the story of their father and grandfather, a story of my life—Francis Gordon Connelly.

And so it begins…


WITNESS TO
WAR

The War

Unrest at Home and Abroad

Chapter 1: The Peace is Broken

When Germany's Third Reich took back Alsace-Lorraine without a fight in 1937, the world remained at peace. In 1939 however, the peace was broken when Germany invaded Poland. Germany did not stop there as Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Denmark fell under German domination. In 1940, Hitler turned his attacks on France, Belgium and Holland. England sent its armies to help stop the "Blitzkrieg" of the West but they too suffered great losses of men and equipment. France ultimately surrendered to Germany in 1940.

When England withdrew to their homeland, Hitler began an all-out air warfare against them. His navy also began sinking British ships all over the world. It was at this time that Roosevelt realized that England needed our help. The U.S. began the Lend-Lease Program, leasing naval ships, military equipment, airplanes, food and clothing to help the British fight off the expected invasion of the British homeland. The invasion never happened. The U.S. tried to stay neutral, but we were slowly being drawn into the war.

In 1940, the U.S. initiated the "Draft." All men over the age of 18 had to register for the draft and I was one to register that year and was classified "1A" or eligible for service. Hitler continued his path of conquest taking

Norway, Greece, Crete, and then into Africa. During the time of the invasion of Africa, the British Navy sank the French ships at Oran, Africa, Marseilles, Toulouse and Cherbourg to keep the Germans from using them. All the while, Japan was conquering China, Korea, Indo-China, Burma, Malay and had their sights set on New Zealand.

While the Lend-Lease Program was going on the U.S. had new jobs opening up to feed the needs of England. In December of 1940, I got a job in a ball bearing company known as SKF, which was a Swedish company. I learned to be a machinist and made parts for tank bearings. Our company became very busy and at 76 cents an hour, I could afford a few new clothes and think maybe I could eventually buy a jalopy by working overtime. This did not happen as along came December 7th, 1941 and life here in the U.S. took a drastic change.

AN SKF BALL BEARING

Rationing of gasoline, fuel oil, coal and foods such as sugar, butter, eggs, and meat began and the production of automobiles was stopped. The plants that produced those materials were now put to producing materials for the war effort such as: trucks, tanks, planes, guns and ships. I soon forgot about buying a jalopy.

Chapter 2: The Navy Didn't Want Me

My Aunt Eleanor, her husband, Uncle Icky, and their family were stationed at Pearl Harbor during the attack. Uncle Icky (Ilsemann) was in the Navy at Pearl Harbor where his command was captaining a refuel boat. Thankfully, he and his family survived the attack. They returned to Philly in 1942 and under his tutelage I was accepted into the Naval Intelligence at the Philadelphia waterfront. I was rejected however at my physical exam. Uncle Icky said to wait until they drafted me. So wait I did.

We were very busy at work making tank bearings, ship bearings and even making parts for the Norden Bomb Sight out of gold. Uncle Sam had guards at the machines to salvage the gold chips for re-smelting. In those days, gold was $33.00 an ounce and the U.S. was off the gold standard. Factories everywhere in the U.S. were working 7 days a week, 24 hours a day and the U.S. was feeling the effects of the war.

All up and down the coast of New Jersey, Maine and the Gulf of Mexico the German subs were sinking our ships. Over fifty ships were sunk from New York to Baltimore, Maryland. The summer of 1942 was a disaster for the seashore and all of the beaches were full of globs of oil from the sunken ships, not to mention the debris that had washed ashore.

The U.S. Coast Guard organized and certified ships for rescue duty when needed. Fishing boats, tugboats and small private vessels were made ready for use. The Coast Guard was taking a lesson from the British at the evacuation of Dunkirk where every ship they could muster was used to evacuate the British Army. The U.S. Coast Guard wanted to be ready.

MY ENLISTMENT PHOTO

Now that I was 1A in 1942, my company (SKF) declared me a vital employee to make tank bearings and Allied war materials. They had me granted a six month deferment from active duty. After the first six months, I told my boss I was ready to go in the service and in November, 1942 I was 1A again.

My barber, Herman Ferro, also dabbled in jewelry and we went downtown to buy some rings and watches. From there, we went to the Custom House to enlist in the Coast Guard. We were accepted and informed they would call us up in sixty days. A week later, we were both called up in the draft. Forget the Coast Guard, "You're in the Army Now!" Herman always blamed me for getting him in the army- in a joking way of course. Herman eventually ended up in the Pacific theatre - as a barber.

I didn't make the Navy or the Coast Guard but the Army took me. Regina Buchheit, my girlfriend, and I decided not to marry until I got out of the Army's war and return home.

CONNELLY, FRANCIS G

ARMY SERIAL NUMBER	**33597093**
NAME	CONNELLY, FRANCIS G
RESIDENCE: STATE	**#2, PA**
RESIDENCE: COUNTY	**101**
PLACE OF ENLISTMENT	3295, PHILADELPHIA PENNSYLVANIA
DATE OF ENLISTMENT DAY	**30**
DATE OF ENLISTMENT MONTH	**03**
DATE OF ENLISTMENT YEAR	**43**
GRADE: CODE	**8, Private**
TERM OF ENLISTMENT	5 - Enlistment for the duration of the War or other emergency, plus six months, subject to the discretion of the President
SOURCE OF ARMY PERSONNEL	**Civil Life**
YEAR OF BIRTH	**21**
RACE AND CITIZENSHIP	**1 - White, citizen**
EDUCATION	4 years of high school
CIVILIAN OCCUPATION	878 - Machine shop and related occupations
MARITAL STATUS	6 - Single, without dependents
COMPONENT OF THE ARMY	7 - Selectees (Enlisted Men)
BOX NUMBER	**0682**
FILM REEL NUMBER	**1.199**

You're in the Army Now

Chapter 3: The Army Life

I was drafted in 1942, reported for duty in 1943 with a physical and induction to follow. Next, I was to report to the Broad Street Train station for the trip to Indiantown Gap, PA. Regina, my parents and brother came to see me off. All of the inductees were from Bridesburg, Richmond, Frankford, Kensington and the Tacony sections of Philadelphia. Irish, Scots, English, Poles, Yugoslavians and Lithuanians—what an assortment of Americans! An uncomfortable steam train trip and then awakening to Army chow.

At Indiantown Gap we were given I.Q. tests and a lot of every other type of tests that the Army used to classify you. They never told you what the tests were for; we were just to do as told. To my mind and a lot of other draftees the "cadre" at Indiantown Gap were a bunch of "con artists" trying to flim-flam us out of money for a needy cause that didn't exist (their booze money).

After being issued clothing, shoes, dog tags and inoculations, we were ready to be shipped out to nowhere so back on a steam train we went—Westward Ho! Altoona, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Gary and next we knew we were headed southwest through St. Louis, Tex-Arkana and places we never knew existed. We were on the train for five days and ate twice a day when the train stopped at some unknown desolate railroad siding.

If you have ever tried sleeping standing up in an old rail car, it is not comfy. We ached all over and personal hygiene was at a premium. If there was a horse trough available we would use it. We went through Arkansas, Oklahoma and into Texas where we were lost. Night five we pulled into a railroad stop on the open prairie with the sagebrush rolling across the ground just like in the cowboy movies. Hell, we were in cowboy country! We were in Abilene, Texas but there was no town around. We truly were in the middle of nowhere.

Soon, to our amazement, Army trucks appeared and we were assigned to the trucks in groups and then it was off to Camp Barkley. We thought it was an Air Force base, but we were wrong—it was Headquarters for the Texas/Oklahoma 45th Division and the Medical Basic Training Center. Our luck got even better as we were to have seven weeks of basic training there.

Chapter 4: Oh, My Aching Feet!

All of us Easterners were disappointed that we were not in the Air Corps but we didn't awaken to that fact until we met our drill sergeant. Our drill sergeant was a 38 year old soldier who wore a Boy Scout hat and the first words out of his mouth were, "Welcome, and when we get through with you recruits you'll march 25 miles in eight hours." We thought he was joking. He wasn't!

For six weeks we were restricted to the base and the first weekend pass into town was a shock. Abilene was a Christian temperance town which meant no beer or alcohol at all. The Texas chili was also rank and the ice cream tasted like YumYum (a mix of snowball and cream). The doorman at the big hotel could open his long coat and sell you a pint of "hootch" for $4.50; so much for Christian temperance.

"We make men or else," were Sarge Perry's words. He taught us Army rules: how to dress, how to wash clothing, and personal cleanliness. You took your shower with the cadre. They gave you yellow laundry soap that made you clean because they used scrubbing brushes for the job. You learned how to fold your clothes to fit into a duffle bag neat and trim and how to lay them out for Saturday's inspection. If you passed inspection, you got a pass into town for the night.

Posey marched the daylights out of us and we ended up doing twenty-five miles in eight hours more than once—much to his satisfaction. He was a rugged 38 year old, God Bless him, he was a real man.

One of the men in the Army with us was from Bridesburg, PA. He had a hard name to pronounce- Krypsowski- and was called 'Cup Cake' because he was a baker in our bakery back home. After four weeks of basic training, he was put in the Cooks and Bakers School Unit where he taught G.I.'s to be bakers. This was a blessing to our group because he baked every evening after mess for the next day and we would visit Cup Cake for our late night

snacks. If we ever got K.P. duty, we could always rely on him for a special treat. Cup Cake got sent to another outfit, he survived the war and returned home. After the war, he went back to his old bakery job.

Since Abilene and its' county were dry, one day after we won some money backing a "crap game" in the Officers Training School, we pooled our money and sent one of our cadre, who happened to have a Ford car, to Wichita Falls for liquor and beer. We planned to meet him at a local gas station and distribute the goods. Unfortunately, there were two M.P.'s and two Sherriff's Deputies waiting for the Ford also. When the Ford pulled into the station, the M.P.'s and the Sherriff went to work breaking up all the bottles of liquor and beer. They poured the beer all over the ground. We lost close to one hundred dollars and the Sherriff said, "We mean Christian temperance- that means dry." It was so dry they didn't even sell 3.2 (non-alcoholic) beer in the P.X.

Chapter 5: Goodbye Abilene, Hello San Antonio

For reasons unknown to me and others in the group, we were assigned to the Medical Training of Brooke General Hospital at Fort Sam Huston in San Antonio, Texas. After a long bus ride, we arrived into a complex that had everything: its own movie theatres, swimming pools, a WAC's barrack, brick barrack buildings and all of the amenities of a small city. Outside the main gate were several blocks of stores. Beer and liquor were readily available.

Actually, any kind of store you needed was there. After being in the prairie for so long, we felt that we had finally arrived back in civilization.

We were assigned to classes in the hospital area from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Some men went to pharmacy, while others to radiology, dental technician, medical technician, and surgical technician. I drew surgery. It was to be a ten week course with the last four weeks spending 4 to 12 a.m. in hospital service: school in the day, hospital at night. Utopia, it was not! A lot of studying and practice to be done: sutures, transfusions, blood sampling, burn treatment, bandaging and splints. It was a serious study of medicine.

The big beautiful fort had a problem: Bed Bugs! There were bed bugs everywhere, even in the coils of the springs of our bunks. The frames were taken outside, doused with kerosene and passed through a fire pit. The coils were burnt and bugs destroyed. Although the bugs were destroyed, we had to wire brush the springs and clean up the frames before repainting them with silver paint. That weekend we lived in tents while our barracks were being fumigated.

Meanwhile, the Air Force was looking for cadets and I took the written exam and passed. I was then assigned to Kelly Field for more testing, both mental and physical. There were decompression chamber tests, oxygen tests and lots of physical exercise which lasted at least five hours a day. Day 10 and 11 were spent testing eyes and I failed the "Balls of Yarn Test." I was found to

be color blind. I asked if I couldn't be a mechanic or a gunner but was sent back to Fort Sam Houston to wait assignment to another class.

While I was waiting, I became the head lieutenant orderly for the barracks and they gave me night duty in the hospital wards. I hated duty in the psychiatric ward and volunteered for the Parachute Corps.

While waiting for orders, they kept me busy washing the showers with my "magic powder" I got out of the dishwasher. It bleached the floors white and the Sarge liked it so much that he told me to do the walk around the pool. It worked wonders on the concrete. The cooks made sure that I got excellent rations for making them look good too.

Orders came and I was off to Fort Benning, Georgia with a few other volunteers. We headed out by train. One of the trains was a wooden box car with a pot bellied stove that we used for heating and cooking. It was quite primitive. We made it to Columbus, Georgia and from there Army trucks took us to the fort.

Chapter 6: Jump School at Benning

The first stop at Fort Benning was the "Sand Pit." The sand pit consisted of log cabins with sandy floors in the middle of a sand pit. This was a temporary stop where you had to watch your money and clothing as thieves were a plenty. Day 2 we were assigned to a permanent barracks and formed into a class. I believe we were Class "H." We took a quick physical, were given a new issue of "jump clothes" and watched movies to acquaint us with what was to come. We exercised with billy clubs, double-timed around the airport and the attire of the day was shorts! Next came a lesson in the harness of the parachute, how to wear it and unbuckle it. Then a trip to the harness trolley where you were hooked up in a harness, slid down an I Beam on which the trolley ran, cut loose and then they taught you to roll when you hit the ground.

They had an order called 'Jab!' When an instructor or officer yelled, "Jab", you struck yourself with a closed fist in the rib cage. This was drilled into you because that was where you wore your reserve chute and you should always remember where the ring for the reserve was. It worked!

We jumped off towers 60 feet up in the air. We were in a harness, similar to what bungee jumpers use today. We learned how to deflate a chute in the wind and how to exit a plane in a timed order. We learned to pack the parachutes and when it came time for your jumps, you packed your own chute.

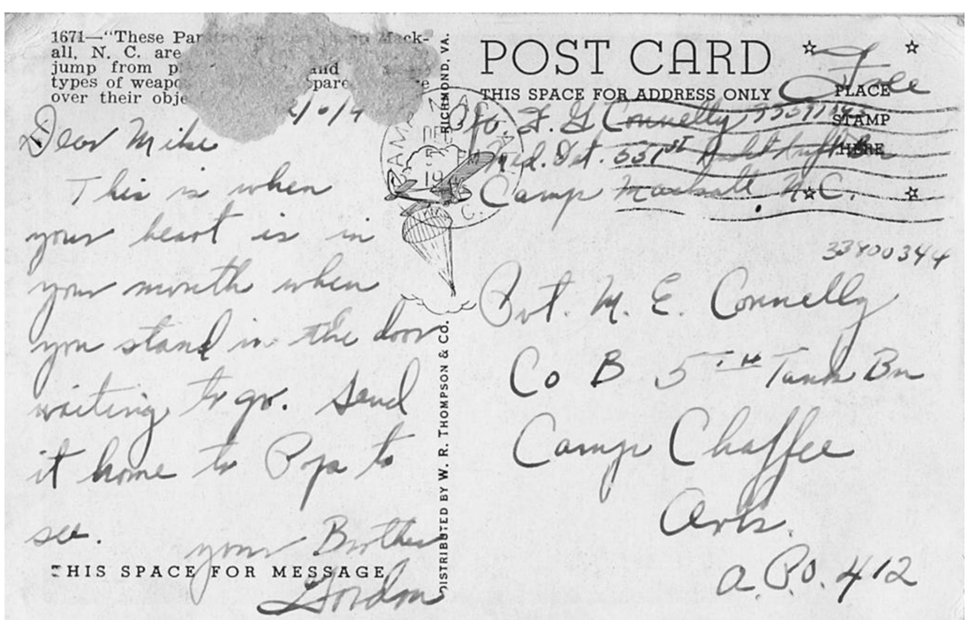
What a Life

Week 3 was spent at the parachute towers. These towers were 250 feet high and you made your test jump there. First, you had a controlled ride in a buddy seat with a buddy chute that was guided down to the ground by cables. Next, you rode alone on a controlled ride. They had one of these at Coney Island and my Dad and Uncle John had taken that ride. This seemed like it would be a similar experience.

We worked ground crew at the free fall towers while waiting for our turn at the free fall. The towers had four arms and three were used for free fall depending upon the wind. The chute was attached to a big steel ring and you were harnessed into the chute and then hoisted to the top, yelled, "Geronimo," and let loose to glide down to earth. You had to make sure that you didn't end up in the tower. Unfortunately, some men did land on the tower and had to cling there until rescued by the ground crew who were trainees themselves.

In the fourth week, you packed your chute and made your jump from a C-47. I said my prayers and jumped! Some of the men froze and jammed the door of the plane. The plane had to circle and make another try. If the person who froze didn't jump on the second attempt, he was transferred out and sent as a replacement overseas. That was the doctrine: "Jump or get shipped out as an overseas replacement." Four daylight jumps and one night jump and you were certified. Whew! What a relief.

No. 1671 Paratroopers Preparing to Jump, Camp Mackall, N. C.
(Photo by U. S. Army Signal Corps)



1671—"These Pa[illegible] Mack-
all, N. C. are [illegible]
jump from p[illegible] and [illegible]
types of weap[illegible] spare[illegible]e
over their obje[illegible]

[illegible]/1/0/4[illegible]

Dear Mike

This is when
your heart is in
your mouth when
you stand in the door
waiting to go. Send
it home to Papa to
see.

Your Brother
Gordon

THIS SPACE FOR MESSAGE

DISTRIBUTED BY W. R. THOMPSON & CO. RICHMOND, VA.

POST CARD

THIS SPACE FOR ADDRESS ONLY

PLACE STAMP HERE

Free

Pfc. G. G. Connelly [illegible]
Hq. Det. 551st [illegible]
Camp Mackall, N.C.

33800344

Pvt. M. E. Connelly
Co B 5th Tank Bn
Camp Chaffee
Ark.
A.P.O. 412

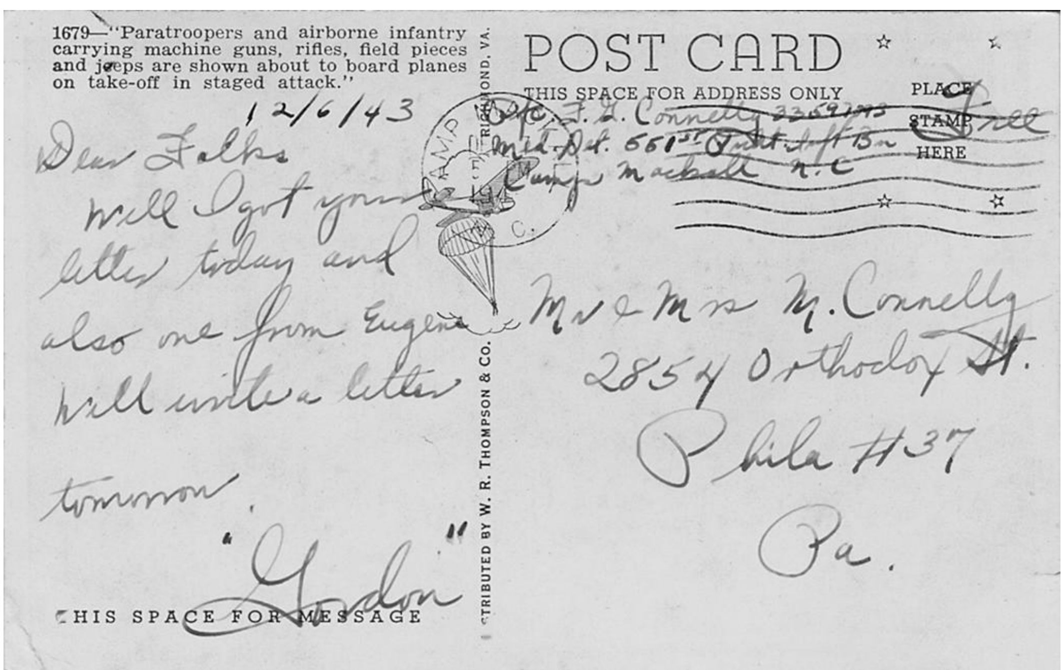
If you froze anywhere in the jump training areas you got a second chance. If you didn't jump or complete the area you were shipped out. It didn't matter if you were a Private or a Major. "Do it or be gone." I guess we lost eighteen trainees that way.

Chapter 7: The Weekend Pass to Atlanta and Beyond

Our wings were given to us and we got a pass for the weekend. A few of us chose a trip to Atlanta. While we were there, a fire broke out and we were pressed into service to help the police keep order. We still had a good time for ourselves. After that, we had a real meal, some beer and a first night's rest in a real hotel. Sunday we had a tour of Atlanta and a meal courtesy of the Police Department for our help during the hotel fire. By evening however, we were on our way back to Fort Benning, our future assignment, and to a new outfit. After our weekend pass we were processed for our new assignment.

MOM AND DAD IN BRIDESBURG

No. 1679 Airborne Troops Boarding Planes, Camp Mackall, N. C. Photo by U. S. Signal Corps



1679—"Paratroopers and airborne infantry carrying machine guns, rifles, field pieces and jeeps are shown about to board planes on take-off in staged attack."

POST CARD

THIS SPACE FOR ADDRESS ONLY

PLACE STAMP HERE

12/6/43

Dear Folks

Well I got your letter today and also one from Eugene will write a letter tomorrow.

"Gordon"

THIS SPACE FOR MESSAGE

DISTRIBUTED BY W. R. THOMPSON & CO. RICHMOND, VA.

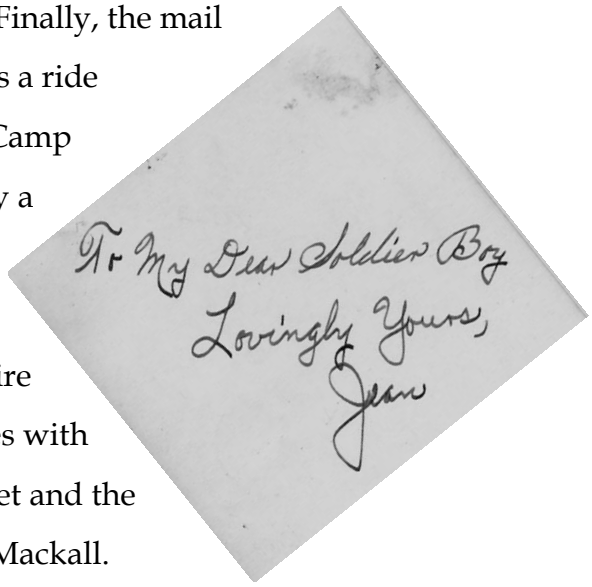
Camp Mackall N.C

Mr & Mrs M. Connelly
2854 Orthodox St.
Phila #37
Pa.

What a Life

Tuesday, we found out that our class was going to Fort Bragg, North Carolina in separate groups. My group however was to leave Thursday for Camp Mackall, which was also in North Carolina. All we were told was that it was off U.S. 1 and that it was a new camp. Thursday we were trucked to the train station in Columbus, Georgia and a Corporal in the group had our orders. Two trains later and at around 4 p.m. Friday we were dropped off the train at a remote North Carolina town with some mail bags. The stop had railroad siding plus a wooden sign that said, "Hoffman." There were no lights, no houses, or station in the area, only a wooden platform about a railroad car long, an old Railway Express baggage wagon with iron wheels and a handle to pull it by using good old muscle power .

We waited all alone at that siding stop and around an hour later a ¾ ton G.I. truck arrived to pick up the mail bags. They didn't know why we were there. Had we known that no one was sent to pick us up, we could have stayed on the train and took a short leave home. Finally, the mail clerk talked to the Corporal and gave us a ride through those lonesome pine roads to Camp Mackall. There was no formal gate only a shack with an M.P. on duty. Our first look at Camp Mackall was the stockade, a barracks with two sets of wire fencing and G.I.'s in blue denim fatigues with a big white "P' on the back of their jacket and the legs of their pants. Welcome to Camp Mackall.



Chapter 8: Our New Quarters and Duties

After our mail truck dropped us off at camp headquarters, we were sent to our new outfit: 551 Parachute Infantry Battalion which had just returned to the U.S. after duty in Panama. They had trained for jungle warfare but their objectives had changed. The island of St. Martinique had capitulated to the British (it had been under Vichy France) and the Shell oil complex in Guatemala had stopped fueling German subs and let our Navy occupy the area with a blimp station. The troops were then sent back to Camp Mackall.

Camp Mackall was a new camp miles behind our previous camp, Fort Bragg. Our barracks were one-story wood buildings covered with tar paper. Air conditioning was unheard of and pot-belly

stoves were used for heat. You would often get a four hour night shift feeding them with coal. There were no bathrooms in the barracks; you had to go outside to use a latrine box in a tent for sanitary relief. If you were a "bad soldier" you got to dig the hole for the latrines next move.

To wash up or take a shower, there was a building where you walked to in the morning to clean up for the day. 400 Men had to use it. What a rotten way to start the day. This was truly a primitive camp. It had plenty of sandy walks and one road but it had an airstrip with a paved runway on it.

The Air Corps had modern facilities and every chance that we got we used them. We even mooched a meal in their mess because their grub was definitely better than ours. Their PX was open all day with no limited hours like ours.

We were sent to our barracks, given a bunk, met the men in our company, informed of reveille for Saturday morning and then off to bed. If you needed relief in the middle of the night, it was a trip to the latrine tent. Cool or wet, off you went.

At Saturday's morning revelry, we new recruits were informed that we would be jumping out of gliders and spent the days training on a grounded glider becoming familiar with it. What a shock to think we would jump out of gliders—the first jump since jump school. Believe me, anxiety and the fear of the unknown was in our minds. Sunday morning found us at the airfield,

all suited up for our test jump. This was the first time we were using two gliders towed by one plane. There were 12 jumpers in each glider and seventeen men in the plane. This was an experiment and we new members were going to do it.

Never having flown in a glider, we were optimistic, so off we went. The two gliders were airborne and the C-47 was still tearing down the runway. All we could hear in the glider, was the wind whistling through the plane's struts. It sounded eerie and quiet. When the green light from the plane flashed it was time to jump. With six men on each side of the glider, it was like leaving a rocking chair when one jumped out. We did it and the test was considered a success.

551ST PRCHT INF BN AT FT. BRAGG, N. CAROLINA, 1943

Moving On

Chapter 9: Reassigned Again

I was originally put into Headquarters Company. But on Monday morning, I was sent to the medical detachment and put to work in the dispensary as a corpsman (male nurse). The morning started out with sick call and each man had to be examined, vital signs taken, physical inspection of bodies for lice, lesions and notice of any venereal diseases. Some of the men had bruised themselves in the last jump and had sprains, so we treated them as prescribed by the docs (3 doctors and 1 dentist). Any patient needing an x-ray had to be sent to the base hospital at Fort Bragg. Since most of our men had been in Panama about 10% of them developed "Jungle Rot" on their legs which were open sores that looked like they had diabetes. For open nasty wounds, the treatment was powered Iodine or Sulphur as Penicillin had not yet become available.

Now that I was in the medics working in the dispensary, my Army duties were not forgotten. I still had KP once a month and guard duty one night a week in the wee hours of the morning. If you drew "Stockade Duty" the key words were: "If you let them escape, you'll finish their time in the stockade. Just DON'T let them escape."

As a newcomer in the unit, I was among the selected few who would do the next test jump out of a British glider. How lucky can you get? This British glider looked like a B-17 without motors. It was long and lean and held eighteen men on each side. The C-47 only had allowed 17 men to jump and here we were with thirty-eight men doing the same routine. It was once again silent with only the passing sound of the wind. The jump was a success.

The men in our unit who had just returned from Panama were given ten day leaves in shifts. During one of these leaves a soldier of Polish descent from Chicago returned to base, walked into the Dispensary and said, "Look Doc, no Jungle Rot." He informed us, "Mom's cure worked." Her method was to save one's urine and dab your sores with it in the morning and at bedtime. It worked on 90% of our cases—so much for modern medicine. It was the old-time home- grown medicine that worked.

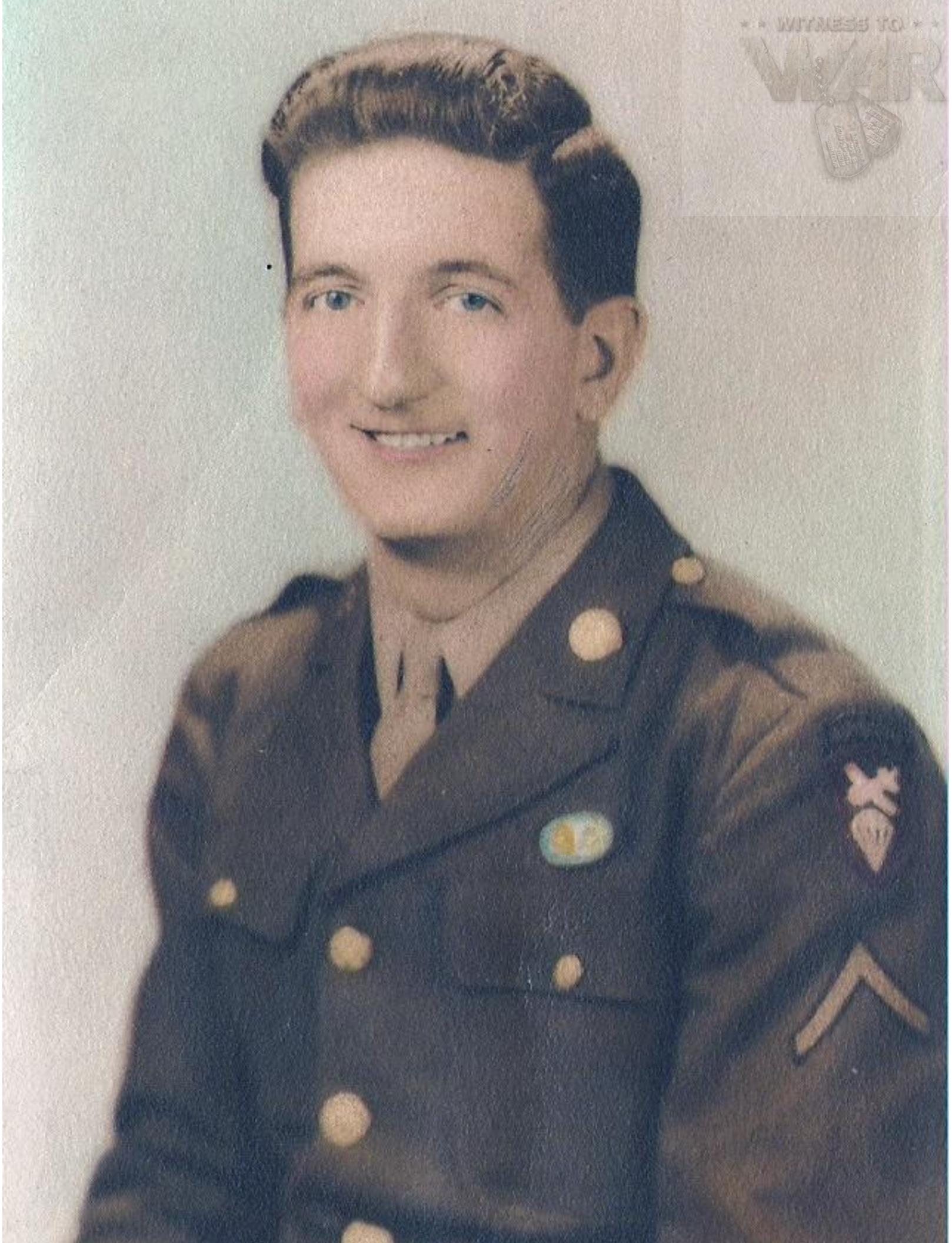
Chapter 10: Another Test Jump and Tragedy

Since most combat jumps had been made in daylight, our battalion was selected for a night jump to test its faults and probabilities of success. Because we were medics, we didn't jump. We were assigned spots at the drop zone with ambulances and medical equipment should they be needed. The night was dark and the pathfinders had lit the drop zone, but the air corps was off target to our left of the zone. When the men jumped, they were

over Lake Kinney. From the air, the open area of the lake looked like a good place to make the drop, even though our path finders had marked the fields. We rushed to the lake to find men in trees and in the lake. As the parachutes absorbed water like a silk stocking, they dragged the men under and rescue was a tough job. Seven of our men drowned. The jump was a disaster with more injuries than we could handle. We needed more ambulances to haul them away.

One Native American, who always seemed to have a second sense, heard the men screaming in the lake, released his chute and fell into the lake and swam to safety. We did not recover any bodies that night. At daybreak, we were back at the lake and the demolition squad blew out the dam and drained the lake. Most of the deceased had their chutes caught on the tree stumps in the lake. The bodies were recovered and taken to the morgue at Fort Bragg. The demolition squad went around the bed of the lake blowing up tree stumps to clear the bed of the lake before the dam was rebuilt. Years later, after WWII, a monument was erected at Lake Kinney to honor those men who perished that fateful night.

Our battalion was not done with experiments in parachuting assaults. More glider rides, more equipment drops, and glider pick-ups were scheduled. In a glider pick- up, the glider was on the ground loaded with men and was picked up from the ground by a flying plane. They were always trying new ideas.



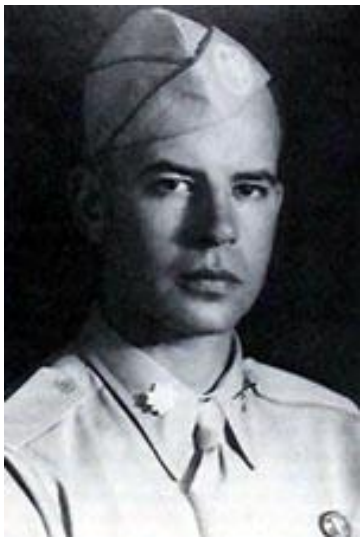
Our next target was an assault jump on Andrews Air Corps Base in Washington, D.C. for all of the top brass. It looked like we would be chasing women in D.C. after the jump, but our leave was cancelled while we were in the air, so our D.C. holiday never came to be. The Army never ceased to come up with new test methods. It was winter with snow on the ground in North Carolina, and we suited up for a test in Florida.

Upon landing at Elgin Field near Tallahassee, we had to get out of our winter clothes in a hurry because we were starting to sweat from the heat. The next day, we boarded the planes and were informed that we would jump through a smoke screen and make an assault on a town just across a small river. The fighter planes laid the smoke. We jumped, landed, crossed the river and made the mock assault on the town. Test complete and a success! Little did we know that these jumps were in preparation for "D Day." Our reward for this Florida jump was a pass to town and one more day in the sun before returning to the dreary weather in North Carolina.

Chapter 11: Winter Maneuvers and Relief

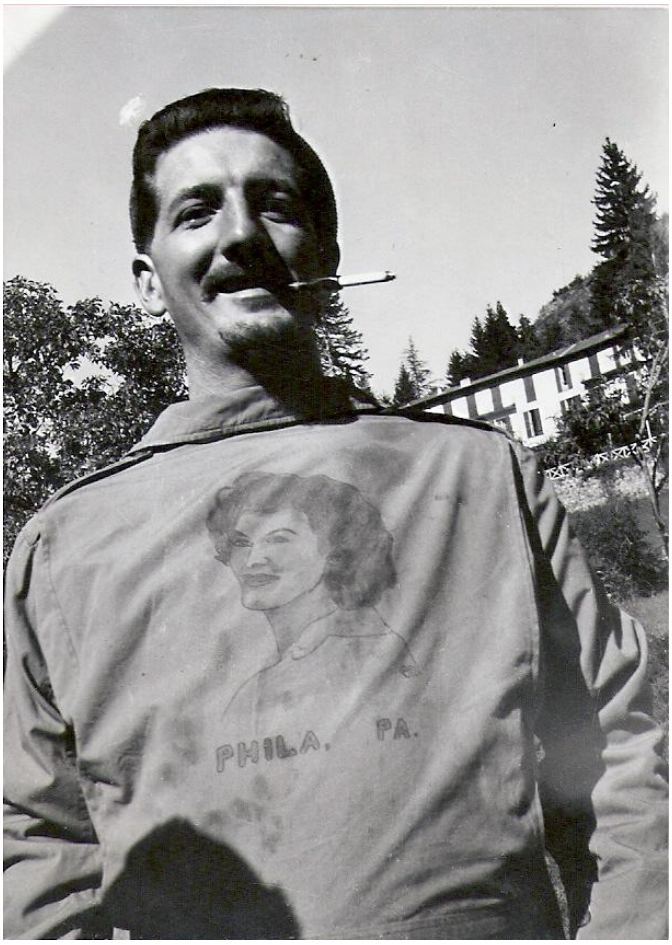
Our colonel was an old West Pointer and I guess he was about forty-five years of age. He definitely had a fetish for winter bivouacs and we went on a few of them. We were thinking, "Here we go to Alaska now." From Panama

to Alaska—what a change that would be but it never happened. The only thing we could see was our Colonel with icicles running down his nose. For some reason, the men lost respect for him. AWOL's were running high and discipline and morale were at an all time low. The Colonel had been an Army officer in Washington, D.C. during the time of the WWI Veteran's March and camp. When the Army routed the vets out of D.C., there was a loss of life in the process. I think the men in our unit felt resentment for his role in that rout and lost respect for him. He was replaced by Colonel Joerg, a Texan, who had commanded the unit in Panama.



Colonel Joerg's command was to reshape the unit and restore respect and discipline. His first act was to visit the stockade where he talked with the AWOL's and minor violators. His plan was to release them and form a special platoon of misfits who would live together, work together and in time be returned to their original companies. This group was disciplined from dawn to dusk. Breakfast together, "One done, all done." They dug latrines, did K.P., even cooking, marched, went to class always at double-time and at dusk were back to bed. The philosophy of, "One done, all done" worked as they all became good soldiers. We had no more AWOL's. Joerg knew how to handle men and gained their respect.

While I did most of my duty in the dispensary, weekends were left free unless I was nailed for guard duty or K.P. Some weekends, I would create a telegram and be allowed to board the Silver Meteor (train) as an emergency passenger and come home to Philly. Getting back to the base was aided by another soldier whose sister was a reservation clerk for the Pennsylvania Railroad. Riding in the luxurious head lounge, we got the 4:00 p.m. Silver Meteor back to Rockingham, North Carolina and arrived back around midnight. This was an upscale train to Florida and its clientele could afford that fare as most were going to Florida for vacations.



MY GAL REGINA, A SKETCH OF REGINA THAT A G.I. IN OUR UNIT DID FOR ME

Because we had an airfield on the base, some Saturdays we spent bumming rides on planes to other places. One weekend, Coates and I flew to Richmond, Virginia to spend the night at his family's house. We grabbed a flight back on

Sunday. Other times, we hopped a flight to another field, grabbed a meal and flew back to the base.

On one of those Saturday trips, I got a plane to Cherry Point, North Carolina. My next hop was a B-17 to Mitchell Field, New York or a Beechcraft A-10 to Paris Island, South Carolina. I chose Paris Island as John Buchheit, Walter Garvin and Louise Bergen were all there. That day, I flew co-pilot and was in my glory. It was a wonderful feeling. When I got to the gatehouse at Paris Island, I found out that all three had been shipped out. The airfield closed at 4:00 p.m. and there were no flights until Monday morning. I could have been home in Philly, but I was stuck in South Carolina. I got a bus back to Rockingham and it took two buses, 8 hours and a cab to get back to the camp Sunday morning. Plus, I was twenty dollars lighter. This put a big dent in my $37.50 per month pay.

All of my friends were in the service. Joe Lynch, my best friend, was in the Air Force in Utah. Joe O'Hanlon was in the Navy in the Aleutian Islands near Alaska. Joe Reiner was in the Navy on a destroyer in the Pacific. Dick Bergen was in the Air Force in Dayton, Ohio. Ed Kowski was in the 17th Airborne at Camp Mackall near me. The other Kowski, Charlie, was in Burma with the Air Force. Our entire neighborhood was scattered around the globe. My outfit was still doing various tests for the Army and I would sneak home whenever I got a chance. I never got a formal approved leave while in the United States.

What a Life

In January, 1944, rumors were flying that we would be shipped out soon. The 17th Division left in the beginning of February and the camp felt deserted. We guessed that we were going next. I took off on a Friday at 4:00 p.m. and went home to Philly and had a nice time at home with Regina and my family. Sunday, on the way back, the train got delayed in Virginia and we didn't get back into Rockingham until 7:00 a.m. Monday morning. We were late by seven hours and in trouble. The 6 x 6 were waiting for us, about fifty strong. We were given extra duty and restricted to base and slatted to be shipped overseas.

We entered the rail cars at the siding a week later and headed for Camp Patrick Henry in Virginia, our P.O.E. (Point of Embarkation) to be processed and shipped out. Our penalty for being late from the train trip was a twenty-five mile hike in new boots, full packs and orders to do it in eight hours. I patched up quite a few feet that day and I too ached all over.

We shipped out from Newport News, Virginia. With all of those sore feet, many men just had to hang out and heal their feet—me included. We didn't know it, but we were charged with three days AWOL for our late train trip. We didn't find this out until we got our discharges years later.

Heading Overseas – Algiers & Sicily

Chapter 12: The Convoy and the Thomas S. Mulholland

Our Liberty Ship, the Thomas S., sat out in the bay for two days before we shoved off. Day 1-breakfast was fried bologna, black-eyed peas, a piece of bread and coffee. What a way to start a day. Dinner meal was Spam, boxed mashed spuds and powdered milk laced with bacon fat. Eat or starve.

It took twenty-six days to cross the Atlantic and quarters were cramped. Our lavatory was a

trough up in the mid-section and as the ship rolled side to side, our waste rolled out into the ocean. There was no flushing the toilet. We painted the boat as we crossed the ocean, even painting the side of the ship to the water line.

As we approached Gibraltar at night, there were neutral ships there with their lights on and our navies were on edge scooting around the convoy for protection. The next morning, we got to see Gibraltar and it looked just like the Prudential Insurance Company Logo; "Solid as a Rock."

We went through the Gibraltar Straits and then the convoy was attacked. Below deck we went and all we heard was the bang-bang of the ack-ack guns. About an hour later, we were allowed back on deck and the only sight we could see was one of our ships beached on the African Coast, smoking. Our sailors were leaving that ship and as fast as they did, the Arab boats were coming out to see what they could salvage or steal! That attack scattered our convoy: some went to Naples, some to Bari, others to Sicily and we ended up in the deserts of Oran, Africa.

At Oran Harbor, we saw the French Navy ships which had been sunk in the harbor by the British Navy. After we left the sea wall, we went inland another twenty-five miles. The truck ride through Oran to the bivouac area, on the fringe of the desert, was not appealing. The city looked dirty and it was. The towns were the same and the roads were awful. Our tent city left a lot to be desired. It was as hot as hell in Algiers in the spring of '44 and cold

at night. Early sun-ups at 5:00 a.m. and sundown at 11:00 p.m.—not much time for a good night's sleep.

Well, we did another twenty-five mile hike in eight hours as a penance for that weekend in Philly and the late train ride. Hiking on the fringe of the desert was not a beautiful sight. Some of the ramshackle homes we saw left a lot to be desired. The Arabs also had an unkempt appearance about them. One Arab was riding a donkey side–saddle. If you've ever heard a donkey bray, it is not like a horse's bray; rather it was like a foghorn at sea. The Arab got off the donkey, squatted, took a "dump", got back on the mule and rode off. He never covered up the "dung" and that was a common sight in Algiers.

One evening, some of the men snuck off into the nearby town for Vino and Cognac. They got caught, put in a cage like P.O.W.'s and the Arab kids took turns taunting them. These kids were no angels. They would sneak into your tent; steal soap, mattress covers and pens. Anything that was loose was saleable on the Black Market. The boys in the bird cage got bailed out by Colonel Joerg and we now had new cooks in our K.P. unit. You could even order your eggs anyway you would want them.

Chapter 13: Let's Take a Boat Ride

A little training in Algiers, some new equipment and we were going on a boat ride to someplace unknown. In Oran, we were put on a Canadian Queen, an ex-luxury liner manned by British sailors. Our first meal that evening in the harbor was mutton served out of a big three-legged cauldron made of copper, a piece of bread and some hot drink that was not coffee but more like 'Postum.'

We spent two days in the harbor and were fed this "slum". But, at two o'clock every day, you could buy a cup of tea for five cents—a British tradition. Day three, we left the harbor and joined the convoy and another meal of mutton. That night, some of the men found out that there were 10 in 1 rations in the hold and stole some. We ate them cold, but it was better than that damn mutton. The captain of

You should look closely, you can see the fuzz on my chin – it's called a goatee. My buddy Dave, San Antonio

the ship found out and we were all roused up around 2 a.m. and brought up on deck and reamed out. Our colonel and the other officers were living topside in executive luxury quarters and enjoying good American food. When Colonel Joerg came to hear our complaints and deal out punishment, he was surprised that all we had was mutton when all the 10 units in the hold were to be used for our meals. After that session, the next morning we got American food and real coffee. The British captain had intended to hoard our food for his own staff. Colonel Joerg saw it otherwise.

Day 6 and Land Ho! We soon found out that we were in Naples, Italy. There was a big Afro-American M.P. on the dock shouting orders in Italian to the native dock workers. We soon found out that we would need to learn some Italian as well. "Eyetie," we did! "Quanta costa uno bottalia De Vino?"

Dave Munoz (right) and I. The bottle is only a front. I was the JEEP driver that day.

Italy found us being transported to a beach at Anzio where we were assigned duty on the south flank. The sector was quiet and we were relegated to patrol duty. We were to look for infiltrators at night. After

about four days, we were moved out to the railroad stop and boarded these famous box cars: 40 Hommes/8 Cheavoux (40 men, 8 horses). We were to go south and we traveled down to Messina and went across the Strait on barges with the railcars.

Along the way south in Italy, we made stops for meals and relief. At each stop, there were always kids begging for food as well as adults. The Germans had destroyed so much in their retreat and there were so many poor along the railroad tracks. These Italians were working hard to restore their lives and you wanted to help. We gave the kids food as we felt we could afford it.

The train trip took us through Pompeii and around the southwest side of Sicily to Trapanni to our new camp. We could look out and see the Mediterranean Ocean and even swim in it, when allowed. Our new camp was to have a jump school for new recruits and several towers were built for harness jumping (like today's bungee jumping). Several wrecked C-47's fuselages were brought in to teach the men how to exit a plane. Lessons with the Mae West vest were even conducted in the water. In the area, there was an extinct volcano pit which housed an infiltration course where you crawled under barbed wire while real bullets from machine guns blasted.

Having been told we were preparing for an invasion, I found myself with the Demolition Unit as their Medic. Lieutenant Booth was a wonderful instructor and a good leader who gained the confidence of his men. Needless to say, a lot of things got blown up while learning how to do things correctly.

Water for drinking was a problem and local water was taboo. You got your water from a Lister Bag hanging up that had been treated with iodine. You also had to take Quinine and Atropine pills to ward off malaria.

We enjoyed the local Marsala wine when it was available. On one of these jaunts to the wine vendor, he said, "You get me the meat and I will make you meatballs, spaghetti and a bottle of Vino." Our cook gave us three pounds of hamburger and our host ground the wheat to make the pasta. (Ever see horses running a grinding wheel to make wheat flour? We did.) We had our vino, meatballs and spaghetti—it was great. Our host said he had a special treat for us: roast rabbit. None of us felt like eating it as it looked like a cat that had been roasted so our excuse, "We drank too much Vino."

Most Italians we met, who could speak English, would say, "Uncle Sam sent me back to Italy as I was bootlegging in Chicago, New York or Detroit." There were quite a few of them.

ON BACK

Kid.
I crossed the
shirt that is why
the combat badge is
on it. Medics don't get
the badge or pay.
Love Mike

Chapter 14: Goodbye Sicily, Hello Rome

Sicily had its faults from the lava dust in the infiltration course to malaria, dysentery and bug bites. Several men complained to the doctor in the dispensary that they couldn't grow whiskers on their faces. The doc said that it must have been the lava dust that caused this. I and about fifteen other men got sick. Between dysentery, malaria and fevers, we were sent to a general hospital in Palermo.

Once on the way back from a trip to get supplies in a town near Palermo, we went off the main road to a beautiful plateau rich in crops which had just an amazing view. We were really looking for vino! When we approached the town, we were greeted by the police, the Mayor and a priest. We were welcomed and asked what we wanted. "Vino!" was the reply. They informed us that we could buy some and leave their women alone. We did! Then we got a surprise. There were seven ex-German soldiers working there in the fields and keeping the houses in repair. They had been part of a road and bridge repair unit and their officer left them. They became prisoners of this Italian town and everyone was happy. The men were Austrian, Hungarians and Chezcs. After some conversations, the men asked us if prisoners were still being sent to Africa. We said, "No, they weren't." To make a long story short, they agreed to come with us and we dropped them off at the M.P. barracks and we had our "Vino."

What a Life

Well, this trip to Palermo was different. We were sick as all get out and running fevers. We were put on a train that got to Palermo in less than an hour. Ambulances took us to the hospital where they gave us a lot of medicine. After three days, we were recovering and walking around. The hospital had a six foot stone wall around it and kids would play instruments and sing songs in Italian. They would sing songs like: *The Woodpecker Song, The Ferry Boat Serenade, Oh Mai Mai* and then shout, "Hey Joe, throw us some money." I can assure you they could sing!

Outside the walls were jewelry makers, shoemakers, cameo makers and tailors; all of whom had push carts. The shoe maker put extension straps on work shoes which made them as high as our jump boots and we no longer had to wear those horrible leggings. I think these shoemakers gave the Army an idea and they seemed to do the same for thing for the G.I.'s.

Upon our release from the hospital, we were sent to a Replacement Depot, not back to our outfit. After registering with the officer in charge, he told us to take a tour of Palermo and be back by 5 p.m. We didn't like the idea of being replacements (that meant cannon fodder) as you replace casualties.

Corporal Eury had been a clerk in Colonel Joerg's staff and he had a vague idea where our outfit was being shipped to. So, with a wicker jug of wine, we went to the airport and bummed a ride in a B-26 Bomber. The pilot was going to Naples. As we approached the Isle of Capri, he gave us a quick tour

around it. Once at the airport base in Naples, we found the Transit Quarters and Mess Hall. We ate, slept and even found some clothes.

We tried to find our outfit and no one seemed to mind our inquiries, never asking why we were looking for them. While at the airport, we took trips to Naples and Pompeii to see the town and the volcano. On Day 3, Rome fell and the next day we hopped a hospital ship to the Rome airport and then a British half to Rome, "The Eternal City." We found a hotel and began looking for our outfit once again.

While in Rome, we visited the sights: the Vatican, the Coliseum, Parthenon, Catacombs and anywhere our hotel manager suggested. Luck was on our side as General Mark Clark opened the restaurants for the troops: 1 meal a day at twenty-five cents. In the morning, we had coffee and doughnuts at the Red Cross for five cents. Our only problem was that we were running out of money and things to sell to pay the hotel rent.

After five days in Rome, our visit came to an end. At the Red Cross over doughnuts, we heard, "How long have you been here?" It was Captain Smith of A Company. We told him and he said, "Get in the Jeep and let's go back to base." The four of us hopped in and he explained that he was in Rome looking for hotels and eating places as the men were going to be given passes to Rome and he wanted to make sure the men were taken care of. Off we went back to our outfit which was stationed at the Pope's summer home at

Lake Gondolfo. We were welcomed back to the unit, no fuss, no questions asked. Having been blessed in Rome, we were lucky.

Chapter 15: Where Do We Go Next?

During our stay at Gondolfo, the men in the unit thought of us as "pros" regarding Rome. With their passes and our advice, they had a lot of fun in Rome. The unit next moved to Lido Beach on the Mediterranean. The new compound had been a Naval Station and the buildings were definitely better than the tents. Swimming was also available. By now, we had to start training again for a mass parachute jump, demolition sessions and bazooka practice.

One day, we were trucked to an airfield, painted like Indians with feathers on our heads, and given Yugoslavian money. That night, we camped at the airfield and "Axis Sally" said on her radio show that, "The Germans were waiting for us in Yugoslavia." Our practice turned out to be a dry run as we returned to Lido two days later.

There were more field trips and ploys that we were going to Greece, Yugoslavia and to the northern part of Italy. We kept training until the last week in July when we were moved to another airfield and shown sand mounds and pictures of the area we were to assault. The "real thing" was coming.

St. Martin Vesuibe, France 1944

The French Campaign

Chapter 16: The Invasion.

While waiting for the "real thing" to come, we packed parachutes, filled the equipment drop parachute bundles and were shown how to unload gliders. We were also shown how to guide the gliders to land in the drop zone. On July 31st, we loaded the supplies on the planes and found out where we would be dropped in France.

On August 1st, we took off for Southern France. We had some of the French with us who knew the drop area as they had lived there. We took off with the rest of the planes full of anxiety and many prayers. The chaplains had said Mass the night before and this gave us some confidence. As we approached the coast and beyond, we ran into "flak" but our fighter planes put most of it out of action.

The drop zone was coming up and we got ready to jump. We jumped and landed as fast as we could. We got our demo squad to its objective: a small railroad bridge that lead to the beach area. We encountered a few Germans who were shot or surrendered. Our job was to drop the bridge on to the road to block any tanks from getting our people who were coming ashore. While we were in the drop zone, getting our supplies out of the equipment bags (an explosive called, "Comp C"), the next wave of planes towing gliders made

their run and the gliders cut loose and made their landing approach. On the ground, we tried to guide them in because what was open farm ground four years ago was now vineyards. The French forces that accompanied us on this mission had no knowledge that the farms had been changed to vineyards. The poles in the vineyards made it difficult for the gliders to land easily. Some of the jeeps broke loose and pinned the pilots and some of the artillery did the same. Our medics were as busy as all get out. Most of the infantry men had very few mishaps as far as the Army was concerned. The glider landings were considered a success with few casualties.

While we had placed the explosives to blow the bridge up, the men in A Company had a 'fire fight". I was called upon to patch up two Germans. That was my first taste of bullet wounds—a nasty business. Our night was spent on the hillside guarding and waiting for something to happen. Luckily, no German tanks or vehicles came our way. Around 10 a.m., the American tanks appeared and we had to remove the explosives.

We next joined up with A Company and defused some mines and "Potato Mashers" (German hand grenades). We then escorted some prisoners back to the holding area at headquarters company. Walking down the road with these prisoners, one of the P-47 planes buzzed us. Because we had a yellow streamer being dragged on the ground, he knew we were friendly. These streamers changed each day to keep the Air Force aware of our positions at all times.

On Back:
St. Martin Vesuibe, France 1944
House was used as a first aid station. Gramps with his cigar

We had a few encounters with the enemy as we marched eastward toward the mountains. All we did was walk. There were no rides for us and we just marched along to the next objective. We crossed a wide river and the "Gerrys" had dropped a three arch railroad bridge into the river bed. We crossed the river and the area started to get hilly. You could see mountains in the background.

Most of the Germans we encountered were very young or very old. But, the mountains had a new defense, "Pill Boxes." These pill boxes lined the roads on our way to Metz, the main objective of our mission. The invasion of Metz

was crucial as it was situated on the border south of Germany. Each pill box was well placed and if the Air Force could drop a bomb on it, the job was made much easier. A direct hit on the pill boxes was much better than a near miss for us as the explosion created a tremendous kinetic pressure on the occupants inside and they surrendered. Each pill box was a contest and if the tank destroyer got the first shot, we would take the pill box.

With the armored units pushing towards Metz, we got the job of securing the east flank and its mountain passes. It was about a five mile line which was defended by the Austrian Mountain Troops whom we later discovered were expert skiers. There were pill boxes all along the border and they could shell us and we did likewise. My brother, Eugene, was a tanker with the 14th Armored Division. He was in the push to Metz, but I didn't know this at the time. I found out after the war that he was in the invasion of Metz also.

MY BROTHER, EUGENE, (LEFT) WITH HIS TANK BUDIES

Chapter 17: Guarding the Eastern Flank

All of the Airborne Troops were strung out along the mountain roads and towns with at least a 30 mile front on the Italian and German Alps. We had our headquarters in a town called St. Martin Vésubie. Vésubie had a few farms in the valley and vineyards on the hillside. On the top of the mountain there was a small town and ski resort and a tavern. The tavern was run by an English-speaking Frenchman who owned an old 1929 Army truck with solid rubber tires. He used this truck to bring supplies up the mountain. It moved like a mule, crisscrossing the mountain roads to the top. That old truck was something to watch coming up the mountain.

The town was unique because they farmed the hills in steps cut out of the mountains. In addition, they raised cows, chickens and goats. The townspeople, both men and women, wore hob-nailed soles on their work shoes. Their village was completely unfazed by the war. Their water came down from the mountain springs and was piped into their houses. The rest ran down through a trough to St. Martin Vésubie. It was not unusual to hear someone holler, "Ole!" and garbage would come out a window and flow down below.

Every day, patrols would climb mountains and keep an eye for Germans and the Germans did the same to us. Eight hours up a mountain and three hours along the top to look down on a pill box covering three roads in the valley. We would often see troops skiing along the pill box line. We would call in

artillery fire, take note of the location, and then run like heck back to our point of origin because the pill boxes could shell the top of the mountains where we were.

When not on patrol, I worked in the dispensary. One day, I was helping the dentist, who was drilling a tooth. I was pushing the treadle that made the drill move when a shell hit the roof of the stable. Doc, I and the patient made it to the cellar. When the shelling stopped, we went back to work fixing the soldier's tooth.

On one patrol, we came upon a church and some houses at a crossroad. We entered the church and found crutches and wheelchairs hanging on the walls as a memento of people who had been cured. The town was deserted and its' name I have forgotten. It was Saint "something."

LT. JOHN SINGLES, DENTAL OFFICER

All of our patrols encountered skirmishes and casualties were sent to a hospital in Nice. Nice was an hour ride away from our headquarters. On one of these hospital trips, we were told to stay overnight at a hotel, called "Negresco", which housed troops. In

the morning, we were to pick up medical supplies and head back. While there, I saw some naval officers and they were on LST's. I asked them if they knew Bill Conway. They told me he was getting ready to leave, but he was still in the hotel. I was supposed to have met Bill in Richmond before the war, but I never did. He was shipped out before I got to meet him. I finally met him in Nice, France for the first time. Bill knew Regina and my friend, Marie Petsch, whom Bill was dating stateside. When we met, he asked me if I had any German souvenirs with me, but they were back at St. Martin. Bill had to get to his ship and we bid adieu. Bill Conway became Mr. Softee Ice Cream in civilian life and we had many visits over the years after the war. What a small world it was that day in Nice.

ANTHONY NIKALI (LEFT), BILL CONWAY (CENTER) AND ME

Chapter 18: August 1944 — Trouble

On August 23, 1944, there was a skirmish up in the valley. One of our observers was hit while laying on a rooftop. He was hanging on near the chimney and we got the ambulance behind the house, as close to the wall as possible. Emory and I had the rope and climbed up on the roof of the ambulance. The others boosted us up to the roof's edge and we tied a rope around the chimney, gave the wounded man two shots of morphine, tied him up, and lowered him down to the ground. Emory repelled down to the ground and as I started to repel, the chimney blew up. I fell onto the roof of the ambulance, bounced off of it, and landed in the wires of the vineyard. I was hurt, but so scared that all I wanted to do was get out of there. Back at the aid station, I was treated and marked a casualty with a knee injury, cuts and bruises and was thankful that that was all it was.

Patton and our troops took Metz and kept pushing the Gerries back into Germany. Unfortunately, fuel supplies couldn't keep up with Patton. We moved to towns like Ramblesville and St. Etirine, always mopping up the Gerries who held out. There were plenty of prisoners and trophy hunters had a ball.

Rumors were buzzing again and we moved to Nancy, France. We stayed in a French Army Compound. It was here that eight G.I.'s got the idea to create an ambulance ride to the hospital. They never got to the hospital, only a tavern and a cat house. They got drunk and on the way back to Nancy they

totaled the ambulance. They got charged with misconduct and all eight had to pay for the ambulance- more than $3,400.00. Their share of that amount was deducted each month from their pay. What a wonderful way to end a joy ride!

Once again, we were on the move by 40&8's to an airfield for the next assault. It was coming near as we knew from all the parachute preparation and bundle packing. We were soon informed that we would be placed on reserve and would go when needed. We were told, "Just be ready." We were confined to the airfield and there was no alcohol allowed in the area.

Holland was invaded on September 18, 1944. The American Forces were successful in their objectives and were waiting for the British at the Nijmegen Bridge. They were there to help the British rescue their besieged troops at Arnham. As you know today, it was called, "A Bridge Too Far," as the bridge was never taken and the British Airborne suffered enormous casualties in their effort to retreat across the Rhine.

Day 5, we moved out of the air base and trucked to a railhead. On Day 7, we arrived in Holland to take up the flank and keep the Gerries from using the railroad to bring up supplies and troops. We did this for about a month. We also had to protect our supply trucks as they went to Nijmegen. There were towns like Achen, Masstricht and Endhoven in our area.

Once again, we got a train ride back to the Nancy area and set up in the mountains to relieve the 442nd Infantry Regiment. We were to look out for new patrols and engaged in minor fire fights. It was getting cold at night and we needed to replace our clothing to winter O.D.'s. (Order of the Day) The Germans would come down the valleys and capture our men, Jeeps and all, and take them back to their lines. I believe we lost 4 Jeeps and a ¾ ton truck. Two of our men were released and the French got them to our headquarters. Whatever the Germans gave these men made them tell you anything you wanted to know. They were in a "fog frame of mind" for at least a day and a half. "Truth serum?"

Chapter 19: Laon

We are going on another train ride in November. We boarded the 40&8's in Grenoble and headed west to a new town—Laon, France. We left the railhead and marched to our new barracks. It was an ex-French Base with real buildings and floors to sleep on. It didn't have bunks or cots, but it was better than a foxhole and we had a mess hall in each building. We soon found out that we would try jumping from a C-46 wide body version of the DC-3 (C-47). This time we would jump out both sides of the plane with 10 men to each side. The other airborne unit had tried it and so success looked great.

What a Life

We went to Soissone to jump. As the men were jumping during the flight, one plane's motor quit and the plane slipped down to the right and hit some jumpers before it righted itself. Some chutists looked like they were wing walking. There were eight men killed. There were lots of injuries and Sgt. Dumas told Marlene Deitrich (a movie star from old), "Get the hell away from the injured," in no uncertain terms. It was a busy day for us medics.

While at Laon, we could go to mass in the local church on Sundays. The parishioners saw that we bartered for French bread without ripping them off. A tuna size can of Spam was worth 2 baguettes. They kept us informed and even had a dance for us G.I.'s. We gave a lot of goodies to the kids who lived near the church and school.

Passes were now being given out for travel to Paris. Rheims, which was west of Laon, needed no pass. A man in our outfit named Mums from Minnesota said, "When we get up to Rheims we will go to my uncle's winery." We did and were treated to lots of champagne. Mums is a famous brand of champagne and we definitely had our share that day. We bid the gentleman adieu, walked outside and the M.P.'s told us to get back to camp as fast as possible as the Germans had broken through our line in Belgium. The "Bulge" had started and we were caught unprepared in our winter dress O.D.'s. Back at the base we grabbed our backpacks and whatever we could for combat, hung-over or not. We boarded these semi-type cattle trailers which were open and off into the cold night we went to the unknown.

On to Belgium

Chapter 20: Belgium and Snow Everywhere

After an eight hour ride in a truck convoy, we stopped in a railroad yard for relief and a box of "K rations," even cold water soluble coffee tasted good. Soon it was back on the trucks again and we just kept moving, often falling asleep in the trailer from exhaustion. Our next stop was a railroad station in Belgium, a break for relief and another box of "K rations." There was no snow here and we left in a hurry as the enemy was coming at the next railroad crossing. The last two trailers came under fire and one was abandoned. Some men got on other trailers while others took off into the woods.

We later found out that those left behind were able to sabotage two Gerry Halftracks and set a truck on fire. The Gerrys had stopped in the train station for the night and two of our men had hid behind the platform sign that had all of the train schedules on it and were able to inflict damage on the Gerrys. They both received silver stars for their actions and spent the rest of the Battle of the Bulge with an armored unit.

When we stopped, the M.P.'s usually gave our Colonel further directions where to go next. We soon found ourselves in farmland and woods where we took our stand. Off into the woods of nowhere we went, dug a foxhole,

and waited for the enemy. We didn't have enough clothes to keep warm that night and we had guard duty and passwords to remember. The next day we could hear shells bursting and we knew the enemy was coming. There was no food, only "K rations," which were packed in boxes that looked like Cracker Jack boxes but were wax coated. The boxes could be cut into strips and used to light a fire that didn't smoke. You could then heat a canteen cup of soluble coffee from that fire. If you wanted to wash your face, your helmet full of water did the job. Brushing your teeth required an art at saving water. To take a "dump" you moved off into the woods, dug a hole, squatted, and got relief.

Aside from these everyday functions, we now had to worry about the weather as the snow was coming and so was the enemy. For two days it snowed and our line was holding but we needed clothing to keep warm. The Gerrys had white snow suits and anytime we got one, we used their snow suits for cover at night to sleep and in the daytime as camouflage.

By Day 6 we got blankets, tank coveralls, socks, mattress covers (white) and shoe packs with felt liners. I wore three pairs of socks, tank overalls over my winter O.D. pants, two shirts, a Mackinaw coat and two pairs of gloves. It was hard to move around wearing all our outerwear, but we all did. Men's feet were a big problem as frostbite was starting to show up.

TANKS AND INFANTRYMEN OF THE 82ND AIRBORNE PUSH THROUGH THE SNOW TOWARDS THEIR OBJECTIVE IN BELGIUM

While our line was holding the unit, we were told to attack a farm village and bring back prisoners. We did it at night and Polly and I were assigned a ditch at the crossroad where we were to wait if we were needed. Polly wanted to watch the "fireworks" and as he did, a piece of metal bounced off his helmet. Needless to say, he kept down after that. Our unit suffered no casualties and brought back five German prisoners. We waited for a counter-attack, but it never happened.

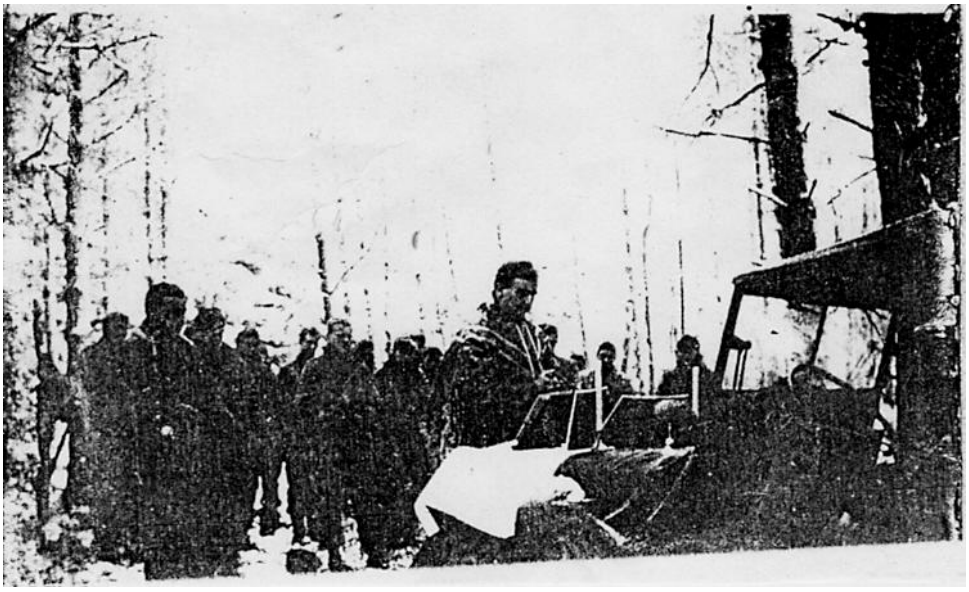
It snowed off and on until about Christmas. Between the shelling and "buzz bombs" you were kept on your toes. I had taken a man with a shrapnel wound back to the aid station, which was in the rear, to get some medical supplies in my kit. My medical kit looked like a baseball first base bag with

zippers on the outside edges. It opened up and all of my instruments and 40 cerrettes of morphine were all neatly held in place with loops and pockets. The parachute rigger had made these bags especially for us and you wore it on your chest. It was also a good shield. At the aid station, a hot cup of coffee was welcomed. An officer gave me a ride back to the line and as we were moving along the road, a "Buzz bomb's" motor stopped and it began to fall. We could see it and stopped, hopped over a wall in a cemetery, and took cover. It landed about a half mile to our left and shook the ground all around. When it blew up we were very fortunate as we had no casualties. The bomb had landed in an open field.

Chapter 21: A Christmas Present and More

With all the snow and misty weather, air cover was nil and air resupply didn't happen. The weather finally broke on Christmas day and the besieged 101st Division got the air drop they needed. Fighter planes filled the skies as well as bombers going to Germany to do their job. Bombs Away! A German fighter plane was hit and he was trying to get it up high enough to jump. He finally got it up and jumped. He landed in our lines and our boys stripped him of those fleece lined leather clothes and boots. He was sent back to the rear in a blanket and his warm clothes made some G.I. warm. His plane crashed landed in the Germans' area.

Since our zone was quiet that Christmas, we got to go to Mass. The Chaplain had set up his JEEP in the woods as an altar. To my surprise, the Chaplain was none other than Father Joe Kennedy from North Catholic High School, my former high school. After Mass, I introduced myself and he recognized my face. We had a chat and he told me that some airborne men had stolen his chalice and platen and sold them in town for some vino. He and two NCO's confronted the thieves and worked them over. When the C.O. found out about this, the two thieves were sent to an outpost on the front line. Prior to that, they had a snap of a duty in the rear echelon. Father Joe survived the war and stayed in the Army as a parachutist.



FATHER KENNEDY, A PRIEST FROM NORTH CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL, SAYING MASS ON HIS JEEP

What a Life

We had held the Germans and now started to push them back as we pushed along a ridge above a river. On the other side of the river, two Germans on a motorcycle with a sidecar came out of a barn and started riding along the same way we were going. Our mortar squad started shelling them and drove them back into the barn. Sgt. Splitzer, who spoke German, called for them to surrender or we would blow the barn up. The Germans, who were two older men in their thirties, surrendered. They crossed the river and were taken back to the rear.

We kept pushing along the ridge encountering pockets of resistance and I was kept busy patching up the wounded from both sides. One day I had to pass two wounded Germans for our men. I told them I would be back, but when I got back they were deceased.

The cold weather had taken its toll on the feet of most of the men. Those with the most frostbitten feet were sent to the rear and the worst to the hospitals. Sleeping at night meant guard duty and keeping warm in your foxhole shelter. Halves covered the hole to keep out the snow.

Onward we moved and I got a call to go up to an artillery spotter and two others who all had shrapnel wounds. I found the officer with a severe gash in his carotid artery. Blood was pumping out and he was unconscious. I placed a chocolate bar and a tourniquet bandage across his shoulder and under his left arm and the bleeding stopped. I then turned to the other two men: one had an arm wound and the other had shrapnel in his foot which rendered