

Mr. BankWalston  
(William B. Walston)

12-12-05

Betty,

These are Ben Walston's WWII papers. He's proud to have them included. As I mentioned on the phone, he's working on his father's WWI story now. I'll get that to you later.

Best wishes for the holidays.

Judy Batten

# A TOUR OF Duty - World War II

1

William B. Walston - 34314675

I was sworn into The Army of United States August 4, 1942 and reported for active duty August 18, 1942. One week later approximately, I arrived by Train in San Francisco on Embarcadero in the shadow of the bow of a Liberty Ship.

One day later I was put aboard a Tractor trailer rig, designed to haul horses, and transported to Camp Stoneman, Pittsburg, California, a staging facility for soldiers assigned to overseas duty in the Pacific Theater of Operations. I was at Stoneman - or Camp John T. Knight on the waterfront in Oakland, California until May 3, 1943. I received a furlough of 15 days beginning December 29, 1942 until January 12, 1943, I was at home in Wilson County for six days, leaving for Oakland on January 9, 1943. I did not know that I would not see family or home again until January 1, 1946.

I was put aboard the New Amsterdam, a luxury liner 795 long - Commissioned in 1938, along with 7000 Soldiers 100 Red Cross hostesses, about that many nurses, and two news correspondents, from Colliers and Time magazines. The ships officers were British along with a British Navy crew to man the guns installed on the decks of the ship. The operation crew of the ship were from Holland and the Dutch East Indies.

We sailed at dusk, headed out under the Golden Gate bridge, destination. We knew not where, I forgot to mention that I was a member of the 385<sup>th</sup> Port Battalion. Consisting of approximately 800 soldiers. The next day we noticed that we were going South - South West, further complicating our destination. We entered the shipping channel of Wellington, New Zealand on May 13, 1943, the voyage across the Pacific was calm.



We were not allowed passes in Wellington, but were taken ashore and marched through to the streets of the city to stretch our sea legs, the girls and others along the streets, cheered and tossed New Zealand coins to us. I was impressed by the cleanliness of the streets and the homes and stores.

We sailed west from New Zealand across the ocean south of Australia, to our starboard side, the coast of Australia, to our Port side the coast of Antarctica, our location in the southern hemisphere was similar to being close to the Arctic circle in November between the fifteenth of the month and Thanksgiving, it was cold, sometimes snowing and sleeting, the Nieuw Amsterdam took the choppy seas in stride, I didn't get seasick.

The next port of call was Fremantle, Australia, the port facility of Perth. Fremantle was very unlike Wellington, it was rustic, similar but not appearing as the American West in the movies. We saw ships loaded with sheep, and also marched the streets of the city.

We departed Australia in company with a troop ship which was departing Wellington as we sailed into port, also we were escorted by a Dutch Corvette, similar to a destroyer, and a British light cruiser sporting a catapult airplane, which was launched in flight twice daily, and landed in the sea, and was hoisted up to the catapult by a winch and beams. \*

The next port of call was Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). The port of Colombo was walled in, with an entry for ships, the Nieuw Amsterdam didn't dock, but anchored in the port waters, surrounded by sunken boats and ships, the work of the Japanese we presumed. ~~The~~ The 385th Port Battalion disembarked here and were



We're taken to the docks by motor launches, and put aboard a train, which when loaded with the battalion, pulled out <sup>to</sup> the south along the beach, which was unspoiled and beautiful, to a small city, Galle, which was severely damaged December 26, 2004 by the tidal waves spawned by an earthquake. We stayed in Galle camped in the infield of a race track about two weeks. It was tropical, Bananas, Coconuts and Pineapples grew in abundance in the surrounding jungles, these were cheap, but as long as we stayed the prices grew higher and higher. A ship, a tramp steamer, arrived, we were taken to Colombo, where we boarded the ship and departed, bound for the next port, Bombay, India.

The port of Bombay also was walled in, for a reason, ships entered through a lock, similar to those in Panama. We stayed on the ship, but had a pass on two days from 9:00 AM to 9:00 PM. We stayed in the western part of the city, but once we were the native part of the city, it was late in the afternoon, ~~we~~ we were riding in a Victorian carriage drawn by two small horses <sup>the</sup> driver was an Indian, he was whipping the horses to proceed, and was whipping the people on the street also, we told him to take us back to the western part of the city. There was a large Museum of The Western World covering a city block with a wide sidewalk and a wall around it. A snake charmer sat on the afore-mentioned sidewalk with a large round basket with the lid thereon tied with a ribbon, he informed us in broken english that he would charm the snake (a cobra) for a rupee, (33 cents US) from each, there was five present, he got his money, started to play his flute untieing the ribbon with one hand, the lid toppled off the snake raised his head about eighteen inches high spread his hood and weaved before the hindu with the



flute, we were standing around about two feet from the basket full of snake, a King Cobra, suddenly, the hindu stopped playing the flute, the cobra dropped to the pavement, his head in my direction, I crossed the street in a flash, much to the amusement of all present. I came back but kept my distance until we departed.

We left Bombay, and about this point in time we were informed that Iran was our destination. and a short time later we encountered a passage that had land on either side, with short palm trees which I learned later were date palms. The passage was the straits of Hormuz, the entrance to the Persian Gulf. We entered the mouth of a river from the Gulf. The ship docked at a city we learned later to be Khorramshahr, Iran our destination, the date was June 26, 1943. We were quartered in British desert tents which had a double top to help keep down the extreme heat. We were marched to an open area where we were assembled in military formations to ~~celebrate~~<sup>celebrate</sup> the fourth of July, 1943 in early afternoon, we were told that the temperature was  $140^{\circ}$ , it was hot dry heat.

About one day later, I was summoned to Company Headquarters and informed that special Orders transferring me to Gulf District headquarters had been issued and to be prepared to leave for Basra, Iraq immediately, ending my assignment of duty with 385th Port Battalion. The Gulf District Headquarters were moved to Ahwaz, Iran, but I didn't go anywhere but to quarters in the British compound, to work in an office located in a former British Officers Club building. The office was designated as the Reciprocal Aid Procurement Office, Persian Gulf Command, as a



Result, I was transferred from the 385<sup>th</sup> Port to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Persian Gulf Command, Teheran, Iran. I was assigned to the afore mentioned office, and stayed in Basra until January 1, 1945.

I contracted a skin disease, about December 15, 1943 I was hospitalized back in Khorramshahr until Christmas Eve 1943. The British had a large depot in the desert outside Basra, our office was obtain if possible, supplies the commands needed immediately from the British, and to represent the United States Army as the contact office for Iraqi business contractors of the Kingdom of Iraq, whose King was Faisal II, a boy nine years of age. The result of this function of our office, some of the contractors made a request to the officers to bring their daughters to our party. The college age young ladies were educated ~~some~~ in the schools in places such as Paris primarily and other schools in Switzerland in defiance of the teachings of the Koran against educating females. The officers agreed and we had young ladies, who spoke French and English as well as Arabic, to dance with and talk to, the walls of the large ballroom of the club building were lined with family members who were chaperones only.

I met and became acquainted with a State Department male clerk who worked in an office of The War Shipping Administration located in the same building. I was acquainted with Mr. C. Paul Fletcher, Esq, the United States Consul and even visited and worked one day in the Consulate. We were exposed to persons of United States such as bankers, diplomats, entertainers of the U.S.A. and British entertainers from the British Isles, South Africa, Canada, etc. The most well known visitor who was in Basra to stay overnite the Airport



Hotel about one mile north of our office and living quarters, which also was the terminal and airport for the British Overseas Airways Company, a four engine passenger plane and a four engine sea plane landed and departed each day and our visitor was none other than General Joseph W. Stilwell, commander of the China-Burma-India theater of operations. We also were visited with him, by General Frank Merrill, who commanded Merrill's Marauders.

I also visited the small country of Kuwait, which had Kuwait city, a cluster of mud-brick buildings with narrow streets designed for donkeys, camels and a few horses. We also saw about four late model American cars, Lincolns and Packards, because of the geological awareness of oil in the ground below Kuwait, the cars were novelties because of the narrow streets and the absence of any developed road approaching the city, there were no oil wells visible anywhere.

The purpose of the Reciprocal Aid Procurement Office ended January 31, 1945, I was unassigned, and transferred to Teheran, attached to a railway operating battalion as a train guard for two months, riding the rails like a hobo to Qom, Doroud, and even one trip all the way to Khorramshahr. April 1945 I was assigned to the 762nd Railway Shop Bat. (Diesel). I won a trip to Palestine which lasted three weeks. We were transported by truck to Basta, boarded the train to Baghdad, and after overnight there we boarded G. I. Trucks in a convoy across the desert west to Trans-Jordan thence to the River Jordan at a point south of the sea of Galilee, we could see it. I washed my hands in the Jordan. We proceeded south through what is now called the West Bank, to a camp about ten miles east of Tel Aviv. I visited Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and



places of interest around these places. I was in Tel-Aviv on May 8, 1945, V-E day in Europe. We returned to Ahwaz where the 762<sup>nd</sup> was located, to learn that the outfit had orders to proceed by air to the European Theater of Operations immediately. We boarded ~~a~~ a transport plane, a C-46 Cargo Plane, and flew ~~across~~ across the same route I had traveled days before, landing at Payne Field, Cairo, Egypt. I visited the city and the pyramids and the ~~sphinx~~ sphinx, both by air and on the ground, a courtesy of the pilots who flew us across north Africa to Tripoli, Libya and destination, Oran, Algeria where we were to stay about two weeks. We enjoyed the beach and the young ladies who were French, Italian and Spanish. Our last flight was across the Mediterranean Sea to Marseilles, France.

We left Marseilles by train, headed north through the Rhone river valley by Lyon, Dijon, Nancy, Strasbourg, Stuttgart, Ulm, Augsburg to Munich, West Germany. We were housed in a school building near the railroad shops in Fracmann, a suburb of Munich, we arrived on June 26, 1945 exactly two years from the date we arrived at Khorramshahr Iran.

My assignment here was The Backshop Superintendents secretary, Captain Hillstrom, who, like the majority of the soldiers in the 762<sup>nd</sup>, was employed as a civilian by The Pennsylvania Railroad. We were receive diesel locomotives shipped from the United States, and used in the Normandie invasion, recondition them, mothball them, to be shipped to the Pacific Theatre of Operations. I visited Berchtesgaden, Garmisch, Oberammergau and Schloss Linderhof, King Ludwigs castle, and places in and around Munich. The last of September, I was taken by Train by the same route which I came to Munich, back to



Marseilles, France. We were a mixture of soldiers from several outfits, who possessed enough points to return to The United States for reassignment or discharge. December 13, 1945 we departed Marseilles for The United States. The weather was wonderful for two days on the Mediterranean Sea, we passed through the Straits of Gibraltar, then the seas were extremely stormy and very wild. I went to the deck and looked out a door where I saw waves that appeared to be about fifty feet high. The stormy seas lasted for eight days or until we reached the entrance to the Port of Boston, Massachusetts on Christmas Day 1945.

Beginning August 18, 1942 and ending ~~April~~ December 31, 1945 at 9:30 PM, I crossed the United States, by train, three times, crossed the Pacific, Indian, and Atlantic Oceans, was on the continents of Australia, Asia, Africa and Europe, was present in New Zealand, Australia, Ceylon, India, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Trans-Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, France and Germany, Palestine. Crossed The International Date line, the Equator twice, visited the Southern Hemisphere, and circled the globe, I was twenty four years old.

R/ O.D. -4.75 Diopters	O.S. -5.75 Diopters
Vision O.D. $\bar{5}$	O.S. $\bar{0}$
O.D. 20/400	O.S. 20/400
Correct O.D. 20/20	O.S. 20/20

John -

The prescription for glasses issued to me by the U.S. Army -  
I WAS LEGALLY BLIND - until 1998.



## MY TRIP TO TEHERAN, IRAN

We left Basra by jeep and went to Ahwaz, Iran to board the train for Teheran. It was a rather warm ride due to having to travel all the way to Ahwaz by desert. We boarded the train at six o'clock Monday evening and immediately began to size up the situation to determine how we were going to sleep that night. The car on which we were riding was European, most likely of German make. It had hard wooden seats and by lifting up the back of them, which were hinged at the top, one could turn the compartment into a four bunk bedroom, no mattresses though. As we started to travel, we prepared to go to bed and about nine o'clock we did. Everything was alright until about eleven o'clock when we went through the first tunnel, then it got rough. One thing that made the situation worse was the fact that we had two steam locomotives pulling us and the cinders and hot fumes which came back into the cars were something terrible. If we had have been lucky enough to get two deisels, things would have been much better. Now you say, what's a tunnel or two, that is just it, there were over a hundred of them. By the next morning I had enough cinders down my nostrils and throat to know what a furnace feels like. After the tunnels, the trip wasn't so bad and we arrived in Teheran at seven o'clock Tuesday evening. On the way at Qum (pronounced like Gume) I saw a mosque with what is claimed to be an all gold dome, it seems rather fantastic, but it really looks like gold. Well, so much for my passage to Teheran.

On approaching the railroad station, it almost seemed like arriving at a railroad station in a city in the States, it is really modern and was built by Reza Shah, the former king, who died in South Africa recently. From the station they took us by truck to the Recreation Center, an old Presbyterian Missionary Hospital which has been turned into kind of a hotel for the fellows coming up from the south on Temporary Duty. It looks something like a college campus and has flower gardens and plenty of good shade trees around it. Being rather lucky, Wick, myself and another fellow from Ahwaz were put in a small room to ourselves, most of the fellows get big rooms. It was rather small, but there was room enough for us. One good thing, it was located in the basement where it was cool



day and night. They served good food and there is a PX at which you could buy ice cream. I didn't buy anything from the souvenir shop, because I can get the same stuff here in Basra much cheaper. The Recreation Center had a Quiet Room which looked something like a hotel lobby, for the fellows to sit around and read. Three nights out of each week about twelve pretty Persian girls come in and operate a Snack Bar. There is a theatre and a Day Room also. I guess I have elaborated enough on the Recreation Center.

Every day Special Service conducts tours of different places of interest in Teheran. The first one I took was on Wednesday afternoon to Darban, a summer resort about ten miles out of Teheran. It was very nice out there in the mountains and there is a very nice hotel too. We couldn't go into the hotel because it was full and they didn't want a bunch of soldiers wandering around inside, but we were able to walk around on the terraces which had beautiful flowers and lawns planted on them. We climbed to the top of the hill over looking the place and got a wonderful view of it. I didn't know there was any place in Iran as nice, beautiful and as cool as that. The Diplomats from the different countries spend their summer months at the resort to escape the heat of the city of Teheran. Also there is the summer palace of the Shah, all we saw of that was a peek through the main gate. There was a bar in a garden across the street from the hotel, so Wick and I went in and bought a shot of Vodka and lime. I wanted to taste of some of that, I would hate to say I had been so close to Russia and never tasted Vodka. The bar maid was French and she wanted to find someone among us what could speak French. I am not good enough at it, so I didn't let her know I knew a little French.

On Thursday I went on a tour of the museums, there are two, the Archeological and another one, I don't remember the name of it, but it is located in the home of one of the former Governors of Teheran. The Archeological museum has mostly the findings of archeologists in the old cities of Persia. There are two plaques, one gold and one silver. The gold one was found at the old city of Persepolis in southern Persia, the gold in this one is worth about fifteen thousand dollars and the historical value of it is priceless. The silver one was found in Hamadan by some coolies who broke it up into pieces and divided it among themselves. So far, one corner of it is still missing, they haven't found the



coolie who has it yet. The old Shah killed two of the coolies upon whom they found pieces of this plaque. Most of the other displays were Plaster work from the walls of old buildings, pottery, tools, weapons of war, stone carvings, old copies of the Koran, (the Mohamadan Bible), and rugs found in these old cities. The way they made the plaster work last so long was by mixing it with egg whites instead of water. There were some old doors taken from places in the old cities that had beautiful mosiac work on them. The other museum had costumes of all the tribes in Persia and a wardrobe of the old Shah. Most of the other displays consisted of things sacred by religion, art, atheletic equipment, and weapons of war. This museum, as I said before, is located in the old Governors home, and I think it was probably a luxurious place when it was new. It is now about one hundred years old. The Archeological museum is as new and modern as most museums in the States.

On this afternoon I visited the Bazaar, which is the largest I have yet seen, it has thirty five miles of hallways. In it one can buy most any article available in Iran. The first part is devoted to shoes, there shoes are made from the first stitch and sold. Futher on we saw them tanning the leather and cutting it out so that it could be made into different articles. Then we saw the Persian rug repairers fixing old rugs which had been worn out in places. Also inside the Bazaar was a Mosque and a school built by the Germans. The school stood out among the old buildings because it was new and modern. In the court of the Mosque there is a pool of water in which the Persians wash anything they have that needs washing, and that covers a lot of things, as well as getting their drinking water from it too. As we went through the halls we saw the metal smiths who were making pots and pans. It was interesting to watch the kids operate the bellows to the forge. I will list the other sections, I can't describe them all, it would take too long. There is the leather bag section, the butchery, the clothing section and the home appliance section, along with numerous other small ones. In the clothings section, one is measured up in the public of the hallway and the suits are made upstairs. In purchasing meat from the butchery the Persians cant be choosy, they take what they get. For example, they buy thirty rials worth, in that they get some fat, some lean, some bone, etc., they can't say they want ham, steak, or lamb chops, they have to take what the butcher gives them.



On Friday morning I went out to the old city of Rey, which is so old that it is underground. Dr. Smith from the University of Pennsylvania was doing archeological work there until the war broke out. The city was destroyed last by Ghengis Khan and his army and when the Persians rebuilt they moved further over toward the mountains and built what is now the city of Teheran. The coolies are still digging out the ruins for Dr. Smith and according to the guide, he thinks that they will have got down to where he can start finding things after the war. The main thing he is looking for is a gold or silver plaque like those found at Persepolis and Hamadan. I have a piece of pottery I picked up out there I don't know whether it is valuable or not. There are some carvings out there on the mountain side that some <sup>of</sup> the old kings had made, also there was a thirty <sup>foot</sup> slide carved out in the rock on which the kings used to amuse themselves. The guide said he wondered what they used for insulation and protection against the heat caused by friction, if you know what I mean.

On Friday afternoon we went on a tour of the city of Teheran, which took us to all the government buildings. They are all modern, the old Shah had lots of modern ideas and he was building Teheran into a modern city before he was exiled. The modern buildings are the Police Department, the State Department, Finance Department, Telegraph building, Post Office, Bank Building, and the Iranian Officer's Club. The next place we went to was the American Embassy, we didn't go inside the building, but we walked around the grounds. They have a nice pool in the garden which is out in front of the building, and there is a grove of trees, about the size of a city block, surrounding the Embassy. President Roosevelt stayed there one night during the conference. After seeing this, we went to the stadium which is as modern as some stadiums you can find in many cities in the States. There are two swimming pools, one for professionals and one for amateurs. They are about the size of the pool in Wilson and just as good. The Iranians can swim there free of charge. The stadium is about the size of the one at State College in Raleigh. Next we went to the Kings' palaces, of which there are fourteen. In these he, along with all his relatives, lives. The Shah's palace is very large and modern with beautiful grounds surrounding it. The best looking of the fourteen are the Shah's palace and the old Shah's palace. After this we



went to the University of Teheran and on the way there saw some of the modern apartments on Reza Shah Avenue. Since the conference, the city officials have renamed three streets, they are Roosevelt Avenue, Churchill Avenue and Stalin Avenue, I saw these too. One thing about the city, it's water system is in the gutters, the people throw sewage into the gutters and later in the day water runs down them and it is from this water that washes the sewage out of the gutters that they take their water for drinking, bathing, and cooking. This should give you some idea of how sanitary they are. They say that the old Shah was going to put in a water system before he exiled, incidentally, the reason he was exiled was because he was a little fond of the Germans, this accounts for all the German architecture in the city.

On Saturday morning we went out to another German built factory, the glass factory. This was particularly interesting to me because I had never before seen any glass blown. About the most interesting part of it all was the Czech glass blower, he blew a statue of a woman in glass, which was very good. It took about a half hour for him to make this, and every step of it was very interesting. I will say that I think about ninety percent of the labor in this factory were children, ranging from ten to fourteen years of age. I don't see how they stand it in there, those glass furnaces are from 3000 to 4000 degrees and that makes the heat in the place almost unbearable. The guide told us that they didn't live to be very old. The whole process from melting the quartz to the cutting of designs on the finished product was really worth while.

On Saturday afternoon we slept, because we had been on the go so much we needed it, and we wanted to rest up so that we could visit some of the night spots. I will write you later on about those.

The trip Sunday morning was to the Russian Embassy and the scene of the Big Three Conference. The grounds around the Russian Embassy are a lot like those of the American Embassy. You have probably seen pictures of the front of the building with President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, and Premier Stalin sitting on the porch. We went into the conference room which is the main room of the Embassy. It is a big room, about thirty by twenty five feet and has a hardwood floor which is laid like tile in a certain pattern.



In the center there is a beautiful Persian rug upon which sits the conference table. It is a plain table about eight feet in diameter. Around the table there are twelve chairs. In the center of the ceiling of the room there is a big glass chandelier and around on the walls are pictures of Premier Stalin, Molotov, Lenin and other Russian Statesmen and Militarists. President Roosevelt lived in some official rooms adjoining the conference room which were converted into bedrooms for the occasion.

The story is that the Russians didn't start to have the table or the chairs to go with it made until thirty six hours before the conference took place, and due to that fact the table was just roughly finished at the time. They said that the Americans and British wanted the table but the Russians wouldn't let them have, but suggested that they go to the Czech carpenter who made it and get the scraps. They did this and the carpenter was selling them packing crates and everything else until they were put wise to what was going on. Another thing that went like wild fire for souvenirs were pencils, every time one of the big three would put his pencil down it would disappear. The Russians prepared the conference room with matches, ash trays and other accessories, it seems they had to do this several times because those things kept getting into the hands of souvenir hunters. The Russians weren't souvenir hunters until they saw how the rest were acting so they started collecting stuff too. They say that the Russians at the Embassy knew something big was in the air sometime before it happened and when Stalin arrived it was almost a surprise but not quite. When Prime Minister Churchill arrived they pulled a trick on the Iranians who flocked along the main streets to see him. The British sent a limosine and an old R.A.F. truck to the airport. Churchill went through the motions of getting in the limosine but actually got in the truck. The Iranians cheered the limosine as it went through the streets and Churchill rode to the British Embassy by the back way in the truck. The grounds of the Embassies were heavily guarded by Russian, British and American soldiers.

On Sunday afternoon Wich and I went out to P.G.C. Headquarters to see some fellows we knew out there. Also on that afternoon I saw the highest mountain in Iran, which is 18,000 feet high. It is about three times as high as Mt. Mitchell in North Carolina. Teheran reminded me a lot of Bombay, except Bombay is a port city and Teheran isn't. The trip back was about the same as the trip up, except we had diesel engines and didn't choke like we did before.

*This trip was made the last week of August, 1944*