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My military experience was very short compared to many others. I was drafted into the army in July of 1944. The war in Europe had been going on for about 4 or 5 years before I arrived on the scene. Nazi Germany started the war in 1939 and we, along with England, Canada and Russia finished it on May 8, 1945.

I was married and my wife and I were a farm family at the time I entered the military. Farmers were exempt from the military until conditions world wide became so critical that it became necessary to pull us into the conflict.

We had a newborn child (a boy) who was only 17 weeks old when I had to leave home and go to war. Leaving my family was one of the worst experiences of my life. My tobacco crop was mature and ready to be harvested and I left it behind also.

After basic training at Camp Wheeler, GA., I was granted a week's leave. A very short week indeed.

I had orders to report to Fort Meade, MD and there we received mountain training for a short period of time. Then on to Camp Shanks, NY to prepare for shipment to Europe. I missed the ship though, because my mother died December 20, 1944 and her funeral was on my 21st birthday, Dec. 23rd.

Then I returned to Camp Shanks, but all the guys I knew had shipped out. I loaded onto the SS Fairfield along with about 3000 others and about 10 days later we arrived at Liverpool, England. We disembarked and traveled an entire night by train and arrived at Southampton. There we loaded onto a Dutch transport and crossed the English Channel to Le Harve, France.

Le Harve was a shambles-nothing but rubble. Not one building was standing. It appeared like a giant bulldozer had run over it. A ship was burning in the harbor, devastation was everywhere and I wondered where the people stayed; probably in their cellars. (All French people had wine cellars.)

We loaded onto old wooden box cars (World War I era) that were referred to as 40 and 8's. Each one could carry 40 men or 8 horses. We headed north to Belgium and we had snow to begin to fall the day we departed Le Harve. The farther North we traveled the deeper the snow became.

We slept on the hard floor of the box car with the canteen cup for a pillow. Not exactly 1st class accommodations, that's for sure.

Upon arriving near Liege, Belgium we were trucked to Division Headquarters and we separated into groups and were sent on to units as replacements for the soldiers who had been killed, wounded, captured, etc.

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I was assigned to Company A of the 334th Battalion of the 84th Infantry Division. Our division was part of the 9th Army, commanded by General Courtney Hodges.

My friend, Joseph Tedder, from Bailey, NC, who was on the ship with me, was also with me all the way to our current station. But then he was not there anymore. I wondered where he had been sent. This was during January, 1945. The next time I saw him was in April 1945 at the 8th Air Force Hospital in England. He was wearing a cast on his left leg. He came into the mess hall at the hospital on crutches and sat beside me as I was eating. He had fallen into a shell hole during a night advance and had broken his leg. I didn't see him again until we were back in Wilson.

I was a patient at the 8th Air Force Hospital when the war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945. President Roosevelt died a short while before Germany surrendered.

After my discharge from the hospital, I was assigned to Special Services in Chatou, France. Chatou was a small town a few miles from Paris.

I was a private at the time of my arrival in Chatou, but very soon, I was promoted to Staff Sgt. and commanded a group of soldiers numbering about 25. I also had 15 or 20 German prisoners of whom I was responsible for.

Our group took in the USO groups as they arrived from New York. They disembarked from their ship at Le Harve and I sent buses there to pick them up. They didn't fly in as they do now. All were transported by ship.

When they arrived in Chatou, we assigned them to their billets (hotels) and exchanged their American money to French francs. They were very anxious to go into Paris to see the sights and purchase souvenirs, etc.

Paris sustained very little damage during the war. A few bullet holes here and there. All of the USO people were very nice and our military personnel were honored to have them in our charge.

I will give a short list of those who came over. Their purpose, of course, for being there was to entertain the troops.

We had the Rocketts from NY, Bob Hope and his troupe, Jack Benny, some Hollywood stars, some vaudeville people, some name bands such as Arty Shaw, Tommy Dorsey and others whom I can't remember. (It has been 60 years.)

Mickey Rooney was a soldier at that point in time and was assigned to my company. I was his superior. We had a couple of "run ins"-nothing serious. He did try to use his celebrity status to his advantage but I had a serious talk with him and he "fell in line" and all went well.

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We had another celebrity who was in the military and was on TDY from New York. He might not be classified as a celebrity by some, but to me he definitely was. His name was Eugene List. He was and still is a concert pianist. He had a lady violinist with him and I enjoyed their performance immensely.

We had a former work heavyweight boxer champion. His name escapes me at the moment, but it was a thrill to meet him and shake his hand. He was 75 years old at the time and I was 21, but he could have beaten me to a pulp. I was six feet and 1 ½ inches tall and weighed about 160 pounds and he was six feet 5 inches tall and weighed about 250 pounds. He stood straight and tall and was very muscular. He was not military. He was a member of the USO troupe.

Our duties were to furnish them with transportation, generators, lighting sound equipment, technicians and drivers as they went out over Europe where our soldiers were located to entertain them. But first, they would put on a show for us.

The day after Christmas of 1945, our entire battalion transferred to Bad Schwalbach, Germany. It was a small town in some of the most beautiful mountains imaginable. The town reminded me of Boone, NC. From there I took 2 weeks leave and traveled to Switzerland in February, 1946. It was the most beautiful of all the countries I was in.

I earned enough points to go home in June of 1946 and home was where I wanted to be.

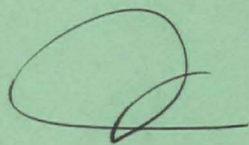
From the Desk of

John N. Hackney, Jr.

04/06/09

H. Berry Ray -

LANNIS WATSON HAS
'UP GRADED' THE FIRST
HISTORY HE GAVE ME
Quite A Bit - Now
One ATTRIBUTES!



P.S. Thought you might
like a copy of THE
TO VETERANS -

A COUNTRY BOY'S STORY

Written by: Lannis B. Watson

In the year of our Lord: 2004-2006

Chapter 7 Road to War

When I graduated from High School in May of 1941, war clouds had been gathering over Europe for a couple of years. Germany's 3rd Reich was over running some of the small countries and was giving England a pounding from the air.

Adolph Hitler wanted very much to invade the English coast from his bases in France. (France capitulated in 1940 and was occupied for 4 years.)

The invasion was planned and it was assumed that it would come to fruition by late 1940 or early 1941. However, due to the heavy losses of German bombers and fighter aircraft, they had lost air superiority and the German high command knew that it would be fool hearty to attempt an invasion under those circumstances.

England had a super fighter plane, the "spit fire". It was equipped with a Rolls Royce engine and was manufactured in great numbers. Well trained British pilots decimated the slower German bombers along with quite a number of their fighters. The American and British had developed a radar system which allowed the fighter pilot to get up and meet the enemy even before they got beyond the English Channel. The Spitfire won such a reputation that when Hermann Goering, the German Air Marshall, told a group of his pilots to tell him if there was anything needed, just speak up. One of the pilots answered, "How about a squadron of Spitfires."

We (the USA) sent volunteers to England to help in the air war and so did Canada. Our engineers developed the P51 Mustang, the P47 Thunderbolt and the P38 Lightning (Lockhead). Great numbers were shipped to England. Many were flown over by women pilots.

The Mustangs were the most popular, but not until all of the Allison engines had been removed and Rolls Royce engines installed. With the Allisons, they were no match for the German ME 109 and the Folke Wolfs. With the Rolls engine they flew higher and faster. The P51's were water cooled and the P47 was air cooled. Both were excellent planes. I don't know much about the P38. The pilots I talked to while I was a patient at an 8th Air Force

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Hospital had differing opinions about the P51 vs the P47. Some pilots were definitely P51 guys and others were P47 lovers. The pilots who chose the P47 did so because of the air cooled engine plus the heavy armor plate which provided the pilot with more safety from enemy aircraft fire and from flak. The plane was stubby and short and big and heavy. It carried the nickname of "the jug" but it was a great fighter and could take lots of punishment and still fly.

Those who flew the P51's had only one concern, in as much as it had a radiator and water lines, it was a serious thing when a water line was severed during an encounter with an enemy fighter or by flak because without water the engine would run hot and unless the pilot was fortunate enough to be real near a friendly air base, he had two choices-bail out or ride it down and crash land. The P47 pilots were not faced with such problems.

Well, my intention when I began this chapter was to cover the events of my life from the time of high school graduation on forward, encompassing the highlights of my military time, but I got side tracked and instead, rendered a history lesson on the 8th Air Force in England. Let me inject one more event and then I will try to get back to my subject.

I traveled quite a bit & witnessed some wonderful events, but I must say that the event which impressed me most of all was while a patient in an 8th Air Force hospital. I made my way outside early one morning upon hearing a mighty roar of aircraft coming over the hospital. Dawn was breaking and I looked overhead and watched in awe as all of the bases in England launched an armada of 1000 B17 bombers, headed for a bombing raid over Germany. They were coming as far as the eye could see and gathering in formations. They continued to pass over for what seemed like hours. What a sight!!!

After they had been gone for a while, the fighters came over. Their goal was to rendezvous with the bombers and make an effort to engage the German fighters and thereby afford the bombers a degree of protection. Even so, we were losing an average of 100 per day.

Late in the evening (still daylight) I heard them coming back. There was no more formations. They struggled in from every direction. Some had engines out (no propellers spinning), some had large holes in various

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sections of the planes. Some had parts of the tail section missing. One belly landed. His hydraulic system was damaged to the point that the landing gear was out. Many, many ambulances were in place and they transported the wounded and dead to the hospital.

I don't understand how some of the planes made a safe landing, judging by their awful condition. Our B17's were rugged and could take a lot of damage and still get back to base, but these wonderful pilots deserve a lot of credit. As a footnote, these pilots were young guys, 22,23,24 years old. Some possibly didn't have a driver's license before entering the Air Force.

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Chapter 8

Becoming a Soldier

Now maybe I can get back to my subject once more.

Two years out of high school, my girl friend and I decided to marry. I was a 19 year old farm boy and she was an 18 year old farm girl. We both were Watsons (no relations at all). I had mixed emotions about matrimony at such an early age, but the decision was made, right or wrong.

Many of my relatives and classmates were inducted into the military as soon as they were 18 and of course some volunteered.

Huland Raper, another farm boy, at age 17 approached me one day at school and stated that his mother and father had promised to "sign for him" and he was going to join the army and he tried to persuade me to do likewise. I answered no, I would finish high school and "play it by ear". He was sworn in at Fort Bragg, NC and was shipped to California for some infantry training and it was told to me that in as much as infantry men were needed so badly in the Phillipines to fight the Japanese invaders, that the Army sent him there. He was taken prisoner and died of malaria at about the same time as the Baton Death March. I doubt that he reached age 18. I was certainly glad I rejected his request.

Seven months after I graduated from high school, the Japanese bombed Pearl harbor and suddenly we were at war. Prior to this dastardly event we had remained neutral but, we were assisting England and Russia with their struggle with Adolf Hitler and his cronies by providing war material of all sorts-from bullets to barbed wire. Our factories were rapidly converted to the manufacturing of guns, tanks, planes, etc. and non war products were put on hold. New cars were produced in small numbers in 1942 but none in 1943, 1944, & 1945. Production of vehicles for civilian consumption resumed after the war ended in the latter part of 1945. The 1946 models were very similar to the 1942 models. My wife put in an order with the Kenly Chevrolet dealership (Simmon's) in early 1946 and it took a year for delivery. When it arrived it was a maroon 4 door Chevrolet and it cost

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\$775.00. I was discharged in July of 1946 and purchased a 1930 Model A Ford to "knock around in" until the new car arrived.

Between graduation (May 1941) and the time of my induction into the Army (June 1944) I worked with dad as a farmer for a year and then moved in with my wife's parents and helped them on their farm. The draft board exempted us from military draft if we worked on a farm, but as the need became great for infantry replacements, our exemption was terminated, even if you had a child. My son was born on June 3, 1944 and I received orders to report to Fort Bragg 17 weeks later. As one can imagine, I found it very difficult to leave my wife and 17 week old child.

My brother who was 7 years older than me was inducted in 1940 and was sent to Panama as a member of a Coast Guard Battalion near the Panama Canal. My parents had 2 sons and we both were now in the military, leaving our aged parents behind to an unknown fate.

My first cousin, Willard Kirby and I, plus some of our friends were sent from Fort Bragg to Camp Wheeler, GA for basic training. Seventeen weeks later, these farm boys had been transformed into soldiers, who had been taught how to use an M-1 Garand rifle, and how to take it completely apart and reassemble it in the dark. We also became proficient in the use of the M-1 carbine, BAR, Mortar & light machine gun (30 calibers). We were instructed how to kill the enemy with not only the above, but also with our trenching tools such as knife, shovel, bayonet and even with our bare hands. We learned fast but the Germans and Italians were trained much longer (years even) and were better equipped, especially the Germans.

There was only one piece of equipment that we used which was superior to the German's, and that was our rifle, the M-1 Garand. The Germans were still using a bolt action rifle but ours was automatic and was very reliable.

Our tanks were inferior to the German main battle tank. They utilized an 88mm gun but ours was a 75mm. They could blast our tanks at great distance with their 88's and when hit, it would immediately burst into flames. Thereby destroyed, as well as, those poor souls inside, who burned to death.

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The German 88 mm was very versatile. Not only was it used on tanks, it was also used as an artillery piece, mounted on two wheels and towed by trucks. The gun's velocity was such that they would fire it at one man as readily as they would with their 30 caliber rifle. The 88 could also penetrate any armor we possessed.

Now back to the events after being inducted at Fort Bragg and basic training at Camp Wheeler, GA.

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Chapter 9

My Mother Died

After training was completed, we were told that we were to leave for Europe, but we were allowed a two week "delay in route". This simply meant that we could spend 2 weeks at home before taking a train to Fort Meade, Md. Those 2 weeks were great. It was nice to be with the family again. Albert Lannis by this time was slightly more than 8 months old. I spent some quality time with him, bouncing him on my knees and playing with him as a father usually does. My time with my wife's parents was also pleasant. It was great to be back on the farm. Albeit a short time. I even helped Mr. Albert, my wife Irene's father, install some pasture fence.

The 2 weeks were eventful and fast moving. I rode with Mr. Albert to Wilson one day. He needed something from a farm supply store. Was good to see the old town again before moving on to Fort Meade and back to the Army life.

At Fort Meade, we experienced a period of waiting to be shipped out to the war arena. To utilize those days, we were trucked up to the mountain area and took in more training. The weather was messy and cold. Little did I know that the mountain area in Europe, which was our final destination, would be even colder. Next, we were sent by train to Camp Shanks, NY to wait for a few days for a troop ship. We were issued new M-1 rifles, just unpacked from wooden crates and still covered with cosmeline, a greasy substance used to retard rust during shipment.

I was in the process of cleaning mine, when I walked Leon Lane Gunter. He was a Corporal and stationed at Camp Shanks. His entire military time was spent there. His duties were with the Army rail system. After being discharged after the war, he continued working in railroading and retired from the Norfolk-Southern railroad. He had the privilege of going home quite often on the weekends. His home was in Lucama and he was married to Agnes Watson, my wife's sister. He told me that he had a weekend pass and was going home. Lucama was about 7 miles from Wilson.

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I told my first cousin, Willard Kirby, that I had received a post card from my mama and she had stated that she was ill and in bed. Well I knew if my mama was sick enough to be confined to her bed, that she was in pretty foul shape and I was very concerned about her. I told Willard that I was going to see the CQ and ask for a weekend pass. Willard said, "If you're going, so am I." The CQ told us he would issue a pass to us but for no further than Richmond, VA. We boarded a train and headed south. When we arrived in Richmond I told Willard that he could get off if he wanted to, but I was going to Wilson. Willard said, "If you're going, I am too." Not long after the train pulled out of the Richmond station, Willard decided he would take a stroll through the cars up front. Pretty soon, he returned with news that Leon Lane was in a car up front, so we went up where he was and the three of us rode together to Wilson. Then we hired a cab to take us home. Willard got off at his parent's house and Leon Lane and I proceeded to our wife's parent's home, which was another 2/3 miles. Leon's wife, Agnes was staying with her parents this particular night and my wife was there all the time until I returned from Europe.

The next day, I borrowed Mr. Albert's car and journeyed over to my parent's home to check on my mama. No telephones were available, so I motored over. She was yet confined to her bed and was glad to see me of course. I was her baby boy.

The next day, I rode to Wilson with Mr. Albert in the afternoon and while he was visiting and shopping at the Johnson Supply Store, I walked down Nash Street to Dick's Electric to spend a few minutes with Uncle Dick and Aunt Irene. Upon entering the store, Aunt Irene walked up to me and told me that she was sorry to hear about my mother. I was shocked and did an about face and walked out to the sidewalk and Ava Williamson, who was a member of our church and a friend of our family, was walking along in front of the store and stopped and asked me how was my mother getting along. I said, "I reckon she's dead."

She stepped into the store and confirmed that they had received a phone call from Walter Kirby (the only person in the area who had a phone in the country near my family) informing them that mama had died. As I recall, someone had been to Mr. Albert's house with the news and in as much as we

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were in Wilson, they had a pretty good idea that I would go to see Uncle Dick and Aunt Irene, so they called there from Walter Kirby's phone.

Upon returning, I borrowed Mr. Albert's car again and went to Walter Kirby's to ask permission to use his phone to call Camp Shanks. For a reason, which I can't recall, I could not reach anyone who could help me. I had to make a decision, take the train back to Camp Shanks and avoid serious problems with the Army (after all, I was home illegally) or stay on and attend my mother's funeral. Walter told me that he would continue to call and tell them the facts. In the meantime, I knew I must go to the Wilson station and prepare to return to New York; funeral or no funeral. What a decision!

While sitting and waiting for the train to arrive, the pay phone on the wall behind me began to ring. After several rings and realizing that no one was getting up to answer it, I did so myself and wow, it was Walter Kirby. He had good news. Camp Shanks had extended by pass for an extra week. Mama was buried on my 21st birthday, Dec. 23, 1944.

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Chapter 10

Off to War

By the time I returned to NY, all of the guys I had basic training with had shipped out with the exception of one, which I learned later had a similar situation in his family. His name was Joseph Tedder from the Bailey area. (Bailey is a small town which was 15 miles from Wison.)

We met on the ship on our way to Liverpool, England. It was good to be with someone I knew. We rounded up 2 more guys from our area whom we knew-one was from Elm City and the other one was from the rural area of Wilson. A photographer learned about us four guys and made plans to take our picture and assured us that it would be printed in our local newspaper, The Wilson Daily Times and it was printed. I have a copy of it in my photo album along with lots of pictures which I took in various countries I visited after the war ended. The Photographer asked the four of us to don our helmet liners but mine was not available, so someone tossed one to me and I put it on just before the camera snapped the picture.

Joseph and I pretty much stuck together during the entire trip, from NY to Leige, Belgium.

Our ship was the luxury liner, Manhattan, which had been converted to a troop carrier. It was huge and withstood the storms of the North Atlantic very well. As a troop ship, it was renamed, The Fairfield.

Our first sighting of land was when we saw the White Cliffs of Dover. What a sight. We docked at Liverpool, England and breathed a sigh of relief. We had crossed the Atlantic in 10 days. Could have been quicker if it hadn't been for dodging the German U-boats. But we were alive and well.

We dis-embarked, loaded onto an English train and traveled all night to Southampton. There, we loaded onto a Dutch ship and traveled across the English channel to LeHarve, France. Some ships were still burning in the harbor. I don't know why, D Day was 6 months ago.

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We offloaded from the Dutch ship and kept in our memory the manner in which we were fed while on board. I don't remember why, but we spent 2 days aboard and traveled only 15 miles. We ate twice per day. Our diet consisted of a good sized hunk of white broiled fish and a piece of French bread. Yummy.

We loaded our duffel bags onto Army 2 ½ ton trucks. I jumped up into the truck which was assigned to us and caught the bags as they were tossed up. As soon as they were all loaded, I yelled to the driver-let's go. I road on the truck and all the others had to march up to our tent city. It was a rather steep climb and upon arrival, they were exhausted. I was leaning against the truck waiting for them and not tired at all. When they saw that I made it before they did someone asked how I got there so fast. I replied, I used my brain.

We were quartered in large tents with 4 or 5 army cots per tent. The floor of the tents were dirt-correction-mud. There had been rain before we arrived and in as much as we walked the area pretty much, plus the ground froze at night and thawed during the day, it was little wonder that mud and slush was prevalent. We wore our combat boots which had been issued to us in NY but in a few days, they appeared to be a year old.

We were only there a few days. The chow was fine. Ground conditions were our only discomfort. We were issued a small French handbook with some sentences in French and the English translations. They were to enable us to converse with the French people as to the most frequent or most commonly used phrases. Such as, where is the water closet (rest room) The door had two letters printed on it WC There was also a sign mounted over each lavatory informing everyone to "Laver vous mans" English translation-Wash your cotton picking hands-close enough.

These events were taking place in January as I recall. The morning we loaded up on a French train for our journey to Belgium, snow began to fall. This particular train did not afford luxurious accommodations that for sure. We were herded into freight cars (boxcars) which were of World War I vintage. They were designed to carry 40 men or 8 horses. They were constructed of wood and had a large sliding door which seemed determined to shake itself completely off the track as we traveled on uneven rail tracks. The farther north we traveled the colder it got.

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Our first stop after leaving Le Harve was in a small Belgium village, the name of which I never learned, and the snow was well over ankle deep. The kitchen car personnel served lunch during this stop and the memory of this particular meal I will most likely never forget. There was no indoor facility, therefore, they were obliged to set the steaming pots of food outside of the kitchen car on the ground. The problem was the ground was covered with snow. By the time our mess kits were filled and our canteen cups filled with coffee, both our hands were full. In order to eat, it was necessary to set the coffee cup down in the snow. The result, of course, was cold coffee. The food didn't fair much better.

Some local kids came over to us and gave us apples and cookies. The German's had retreated from the village a few weeks before our arrival, but before leaving they committed a very, very awful atrocity.

It seemed someone had committed an act against the Germans which they didn't take kindly too. No one confessed to the crime, so they nailed the Mayor to the church door and let him hang there until he died. Orders were issued to the townspeople that if anyone attempted to render aid to him, they would be shot. The German soldiers were trained to be vicious. I apologize for mentioning this, but that was the way it was, not only in Belgium but in Poland, Russia and other countries.

The train ride was long but we finally reached the end of the line, so to speak. The train could travel only so far, then we were trucked to the 84th Infantry Division headquarters, which was a short distance from Leige, Belgium.

A note here, which came to mind. During stops on the train ride, some of the locals would gather to talk to us and, as I mentioned earlier, offered us goodies and engaged us in conversation. There was a few guys who could speak French and inasmuch as French was spoken by the locals, they welcomed the chance to talk to each other. At one of our stops, a small frail elderly lady, dressed in black, walked up to the box car door where we were gathered. To our surprise, she asked in perfect English – "Is there anyone of you from New Jersey?" We answered no. Then she gave us a short story about why she had asked. She had met a gentleman while on a trip to

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Belgium and they were married. He died during the German occupation and she was stranded in Belgium. She was anxious to hear from someone from the city in New Jersey where she was reared. Everyone of us shook our heads no and she moved on to the next car. Later, at another stop when the locals appeared and spoke to us, I noticed that none of our guys talked to them. I was puzzled so I asked why. They said that we were now in Flemish territory and they didn't know the Flemish language.

At headquarters, we were individually assigned to a battalion of the 84th. The Colonel in charged asked one of the Lieutenant's, "Where are your men, Lieutenant?" He replied, "Down the road somewhere, sir." The Colonel retorted, "Well we'll probably win this d--- war. We don't know what the h--- we're doing and the German's won't ever figure us out."

We remained at headquarters that night and the next day until dusk. It took that long for the company clerk to sort us out as to our destinations. After all, we were there as replacements. In order for a division to retain it's full troop strength, it was necessary to receive new troops from the states to replace the dead and wounded. Thus, we were referred to as replacements. In GI terms, we were dogfaces.

Chapter 11

Trip to the front

Before we loaded up on trucks to move up closer to the battalion area to which we had been assigned, the supply people issued to us a pair of wool mittens and a pair of rubber artics, except I didn't get any artics. They failed to have any big enough for my feet.

The Artics were worn over our combat boots and served two purposes. In as much as, our boots were leather and provided very little insulation, we needed the Artics for #1 to keep our feet dry and #2 to help maintain a degree of protection from the extreme cold. The mittens of course was to prevent our hand from freezing. They had a feature which I had never seen before and it was unique to say the least. Mittens have no finger placements, therefore when worn the hand is in the mitten all together. The result is that the fingers lie against each other and the warmth is retained. Compared to a glove, the mitten is better. To fire our weapon, we merely inserted our trigger finger into the feature provided. Otherwise, it would have been necessary to remove the mitten and that would have caused a bad situation.

The country of Belgium was experiencing the worst winter on record-1944-1945. Snow fell most every day and the temperature was near or below 0 degrees F.

Troop movements were conducted under the cover of darkness. The risk was less of course, because the enemy was less likely to know of your movements. Yet the journey was not risk free. The drivers were required to drive with subdued head lights. Let me explain. Army vehicles were equipped with headlights that provided very little glow. The light cover was black with a narrow slit of about an inch high which was horizontal and traversed the area of the cover. Imagine driving your car down a country road on a dark night with a small slit of light. We crossed rivers on pontoon bridges. They were very tricky to drive on even in the day light. We made a safe crossing and arrived at our destination at about 11:00 PM.

We found ourselves at a small Belgium village in a farming area with a few houses, barns and animal shelters all covered with new fallen snow. We

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were cold and miserable after rolling along for hours with no heat in temperatures just above zero. We entered a farmhouse and joined others who were already there. These guys had been fighting the Germans during the Christmas holidays and were in the "rest area". The people who lived there, a man, his wife and an eighteen year old daughter and an elderly gentleman who was her grandpa. The four of them moved into the rear of the house and we took over the front. They had no complaint as to the inconvenience because they were happy that we were there as their liberators. They had been under occupation by the Germans for about four years.

I was so exhausted that I immediately lay down on the tiled kitchen floor and slept like a baby. I awoke to the sound of rattling mess kits. Lots of fellows had already had breakfast and were washing their kits by sloshing them up and down in a large pot of boiling water. One of the guys asked another one who was entering the room, what's for breakfast. He replied-SOS. I had never heard of this before, but upon going through the chow line (in the snow) I soon figured it out. We had a piece of toast covered with some kind of hash. I will not give you the interpretation of SOS it would not be decent.

We were holed up here for 2 or 3 days and if the temperature ever exceeded 0 degrees, I don't remember it. I was cold constantly in the daytime, but at night I was more comfortable. I slept in the hay loft which was above the cow stable. There was about a half dozen milk cows in the stable and their body heat drifted up to where I was. Those few degrees of heat were welcome. All of us had sleeping bags and a wool blanket and inasmuch as we were inside and out of the wind-we survived. Our toilet was an outside slit trench. Great accommodations. HA! But this was war.

The Germans were still in the area and we had to be vigilant. Our rifle was by our side constantly. I really knew we were in a dangerous area when I heard the "chewing out" our Captain gave a jeep driver who drove up one night with his headlights on full blast. He gave him a good dressing down followed by a question and I quote: "How dare you drive up here with lights blazing. Don't you know there's Germans just over the hill and if they see your lights they'll start dropping artillery on our A---."

Chapter 12

Then I got sick

Cold weather has always been unkind to me, always messed up my sinuses. During winter weather on the farm much of the time was spent outdoors sawing trees down and sawing them in lengths for the cook stove, fireplace and for the tobacco curing barns. I always came down with a head cold, as we called it, accompanied by severe headaches and a fever.

On the day before we were scheduled to move up to relieve the 333rd battalion I was really feeling bad. One of the guys informed a medic and he took my temperature. He read it to me as 104.6. He had me loaded onto a stretcher in an ambulance and took me to a field hospital. I left behind my M1 carbine, my sleeping bag, my personal belongings, and my mortar.

The squad leader had assigned me to a mortar team and one day I had cleaned my mortar and my carbine and had leaned them against a plaster wall in the room up near the front of the house. As I turned to walk away, a bullet whizzed past me and buried itself in that plaster wall. It splattered white dust onto my mortar and carbine. Had I not turned when I did, the bullet would have passed through me at about the area just about hip level. I cleaned the equipment again as soon as I could stop shaking.

The field hospital was located in an abandoned school building on the outskirts of Leige, Belgium. The auditorium had been cleared of the seats and a large area of cots took their place. All the cots were occupied by soldiers who were wounded or sick. I estimate that there was 500 or more.

Two stretcher bearers brought in a soldier and placed him on a cot next to me. He had been sedated and appeared to be asleep. He was lying on his stomach. I instantly knew that his injury had occurred very recently because he was dirty as a person could be. Apparently the ambulances were bringing them in so rapidly that the medical team were unable to clean them up, so they did what was most urgent and moved them on to the nurses in the auditorium. I noticed that there was some movement by the soldier on the cot. He looked at me wild eyed and then looked at his behind and saw that

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his entire buttocks was one solid covering of white bandages. He looked at me again and said, "I remember what happened now. Our company had met severe resistance as we entered the Hurtgen Forest, so we called for artillery. As I was lying on the ground under a tree one of our shells hit a tree limb just above me and some of the shrapnel cut my a—off. How about that—got my a—whacked off by our own artillery."

A nurse brought a urinal jug to me since I wasn't allowed out of my cot yet. Then I heard an unusual commotion near by. Four guys in uniform were making their way up and down between the rows of cots, singing and shaking hands with the patients. Pretty soon someone announced that it was Mickey Rooney and his little troop doing their best to entertain a bit.

In the dull light of that old school building, I didn't recognize Mickey. He and his group failed to impress any of the patients I'm sure. If the others were thinking as I was thinking, they were of the opinion that they would much more effective in our efforts to win the war if they were out there in an infantry unit carrying an M1 rifle. Little did I know that in about six months, Mickey and I would be in the same Special Services Battalion in Chatou, France and that I would be his superior. More on this later.

While in the hospital in Liege, Belgium, I got my first sighting of a German "Buzz" Bomb. Their Air force had been decimated, both bombers and fighters, so in a last ditch effort to bomb important targets, they developed a plane about the size of a Piper Cub which was controlled remotely for several miles and then traveled on to its target on its own. The amount of fuel it carried determined where it would fall. Some of them flew all the way to London and caused considerable damage. Others were aimed at Brussels and Liege. Quite often, Liege would get more than its allotment because our anti aircraft guns, which ringed the city, would shoot some of them down. They were aimed at Brussels and Antwerp and when they fell, the windows of that old school would rattle.

We could see them at night as they came over. The jet engine was mounted in the rear and it shot out sparks as it pushed itself forward. The engine pulsated also, which was interesting to watch. It caused a buzzing sound. However, every time I saw one overhead, I would wave it on and yell at it "keep going". The fuselage was filled with high explosives and caused quite

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a crater where it hit. The city of Liege was a major supply site for our armies and thus the reason for it being targeted. We wondered every night, would one drop on our hospital. It was a great concern to us, as one can imagine.

I received treatment there for my sinus infection. The cold weather I had experienced day and night along with snow and ice caused me to have sinus headaches. Sometimes the headaches were so severe that I would just close my eyes tightly to keep out any light. My feet thawed out in a few days and I kept them both and kept my toes. Lots of guys were not so fortunate.

It was nice to have a cot to lie on again, with sheets even. Early on though, my toes tingled at the very touch of a sheet. I couldn't complain in the least though, after seeing hundreds of guys who were shot up and torn up very badly. There were some burn victims also. Some were bandaged to the extent that it was pathetic. There were many many amputees also, arms, feet and legs. Awful.

A few of the guys were there because they suffered from battle fatigue. I noticed one in particular who was sitting on the side of his cot with his head in his hands, near to where my cot was. I decided, after seeing that he didn't move, to try to engage him in conversation. It took a little while, but finally he responded. I asked him to talk to me about what was wrong. He sat back and straightened up and looked at me as if he was glad to talk to someone. The few nurses were very busy checking the wounded. I eventually got one to bring a urinal to me.

He talked at random with his head down, looking at the floor. He was in on the invasion of North Africa in 1942 and here we were in Feb of 1945. He had been involved in so much fighting and had experienced so much fear that his mind had almost ceased functioning. He told me that he could hardly remember his family, even remotely. He was almost sure that he had married just before being shipped overseas. I wished him the best and then they came for me to transfer me to another hospital.

My destination was a real hospital this time. It was modern and there were lots of doctors and nurses. Good thing, because when I arrived the army ambulances were lined up at the emergency entrance to off load the

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wounded. Apparently, the Germans had gone on the offensive and had good results from their point of view.

I was placed in a large ward with a dozen or so of other soldiers. A nurse brought a pair of pajamas and told me to put them on and that she had set up an appointment for me with EENT. I walked to my appointment and found a seat near to some other patients. I noticed right away that they were somewhat indifferent toward me. They had given me the "once over" when I walked into the room and were talkative to each other but very cool to me. A nurse came to the door and motioned for me to come into the doctor's office. I mentioned to her that everyone was shunning me and acting weird and I didn't understand why. She said, "it's because you are a German." I asked her why anyone would think such a thing as that and she said, "Well, you are wearing pajamas with a PW on the back of your top and a PW on the cheeks of your pants." I said, "Well, someone can get me another pair because I am not a German." She replied, "I saw you in the ward with some German patients, you have blond hair and blue eyes, you don't have dog tags and we don't have any paperwork on you." I told her that I had lost my dog tags, billfold, etc. That I was from Wilson, NC and had been assigned to the 334th battalion of the 84th infantry division. She was convinced and soon had another pair of PJ's for me. I am convinced that the primary reason she believed me was because (as she told me later), she was from Chapel Hill, NC and attended nursing school their prior to joining the Nursing Corp.

The treatment by the doctor consisted of nothing more than pouring some penicillin into a twisted bit of cotton and inserting it way up into both nostrils. It didn't help any at all. It only did harm really. I could get no air through my nose and the only way I could breathe was through my mouth. Very uncomfortable to say the least and actually caused my headaches to worsen. He showed the x-rays to me, which showed the upper lobes as a dark area of infection, which had built up over a period of time and was creating pressure in the sinus cavities. He continued these treatments for a few days and in as much as no progress was being made, I was transferred to the 40th General in Paris.

The doctors there tried a new approach. He inserted a long hollow needle up into the left nostril and pushed it completely through the membrane and into

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the sinus cavity. However, he first injected Novocain to numb the area. I felt nothing but I could hear the crunch as the needle punched through.

He then attached a rubber tube to the needle along with a bulb which was compressed and thereby forced a fluid upward and around and through the sinus cavities. The fluid exited through the right nostril and spilled into a basin which I held in my lap. The fluid came out clear which was a disappointment to him and also to me. The procedure was repeated for a few days but to no avail. A decision was made to transfer me once again. Soon, I found myself at Le Berge Airport. It was the primary airport in Paris until Charles de Gaulle was built.

I was scheduled to take a flight out on a C-47 to England on a pre-arranged date, but I was delayed due to an influx of wounded and of course, the wounded got priority over those who were walking wounded or those who had no urgent need for medical attention.

As I recall, the delay was 2 or 3 days and during this time I was billeted at a facility there at the airport. During this interval of time, I found myself wandering among those on cots and stretchers within the huge terminal. The floor was completely covered with wounded soldiers. Only a narrow walkway was available for the nurses to move between the rows and give aid to them. The nurses were too few for such a number of guys which numbered in the hundreds. Many were amputees, some were burn victims. Many had sustained head injuries to the extent that the only thing you saw was bandages with two holes for the eyes, a hole for the nose and a hole for the mouth. War can be devastating to humans as well as cities.

My first flight ever was this trip across the English Channel. The pilot was a young second lieutenant every bit of 21 years of age. The plane was loaded with each bench full. We sat on wooden benches-no cushions, the take off was very bumpy. There were holes in the runway not yet repaired from shelling by our army and the Germans. I had some doubts as to whether we would ever get air borne, but we did and in a short time we landed at an 8th Air Force Base near London. Their hospital was different from the traditional hospitals in that the structures were Quonset huts. They were comfortable and big. One hut housed 50-75 men. The nurses were efficient and polite.

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Events while in a Air Force Base, London

An appointment was made for me with an EENT doctor. As I was waiting for him to finish with his patient I could hear them talking-the office door was open. I had no concern as to this discourse so therefore I was not really "listening". But suddenly my ears perked up when I heard some very familiar town names mentioned. I heard Rocky Mount, Wilson, Richmond, Fayetteville and Smithfield. As you can imagine, I came to my feet and could not restrain myself from entering the doctor's office. I walked in and there behind his desk was the doctor and standing in front of him was his patient who was about to turn and walk out. I said, pardon me for butting in, but I heard some very familiar towns mentioned." The doctor asked me where I was from and I told him that I was a farm boy from near Wilson. He said, "What a coincidence that 3 people who are 3000 miles from home are here in a room together." He was from Rocky Mount, the patient was from Fayetteville. We talked a bit more and then I was ushered into the treatment room.

He used the same method of treatment as the doctor in Paris, no difference whatsoever, but the results were dramatic. You should have seen (no you shouldn't) you should not be subjected to a scene such as this one. Little wonder that I had such severe headaches. The fluids that spilled into the basin were thick and gray. The sensation which I experienced immediately was indescribable. I felt like a different person. Kudos to the good doctor from Rocky Mount, NC.

Occasionally some ladies who remained were off duty personnel who gathered on the grass with us and tell their stories of the war and how it affected their lives. Some were from Ireland, some from Scotland and some from locals. The only event I recall was told by a girl from London who said she was buried under rubble twice during the bombing of London by German Bombers and by the German V-1's & V-2's.

Another event was an occurrence that took place while we were in the hospital. One morning I was in the hospital with some other patients and we were all sitting in the hospital room. A nurse came in and said that there was a German V-1 that had landed on the roof of the hospital and it was about to explode. We all ran out of the room and the nurse said that it was a false alarm.

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The Surrender of Germany

A few days after the procedure I heard on the intercom the German would surrender unconditionally to the Allies and the entire ceremony would be broadcasted via radio. When the date came a few of us in our hut wanted dearly to hear it. The problem was, there was only one radio in our hut and it belonged to one of the patients and it was a crystal set. In the event you have never heard of such a contraption, allow me to clue you in.

I don't know much about the inner workings of this type of radio, but I do know that it was primitive even by the standards of that era. It had no tubes and it could be heard by only one person and that was by a set of earphones. This of course eliminated all of us with the exception of the owner.

Well the other guys walked away, resigned to their failure. But as for little ole me, I had a brainstorm. I told my radio friend that I had seen a gadget in the dispensary that would enable both of us to hear the surrender ceremonies. He seemed to be somewhat skeptical, so I said to him, "follow me." Once in the dispensary, which was empty at the time, I pointed to a stethoscope which was lying on a table. I picked it up and placed the earpieces in my ears and placed the flat disk under one of his earphones and the ceremony came through loud and clear. Together we heard it all. How about that?

My first flight ever was this trip across the English Channel. The pilot was a young second lieutenant every bit of 21 years of age. The plane was loaded with each bench full. We sat on wooden benches no cushions. The take off was very bumpy. There were holes in the runway not yet repaired from shelling by our army and the Germans. I had some doubts as to whether we would ever get air borne, but we did and in a short time we landed at an Air Force Base near London. Their hospital was different from the traditional hospitals in that the structures were Quaker huts. They were comfortable and big. One hut housed 50-75 men. The nurses were Quaker and polite.

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Events while in 8th Air Force Base, London

There were a few more events which I consider noteworthy enough to bring them to your attention while I was at the 8th Air Force hospital.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt died a few days after I arrived. That was sad news. As I recall it was about the end of April or early May of 1945.

Next, the war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945

The next was not of great importance to anyone but me I suppose, but anytime I have an encounter with a celebrity, I consider it notable from my standpoint. I was allowed by my doctor to spend a bit of time outside of the building on relative warm days. Well, one learns something about the weather patterns in Merry Old England after being there for only a few weeks.

During late April we enjoyed lying on a blanket in the sun at the rear of our building. I actually had a light suntan after a few days of exposure. Then in early May we had a snowfall. It was while our sunning one morning that I saw a Piper cub land in the cow pasture, which was adjacent to our building. The pilot walked over to one of the huts near ours and we recognized him. It was Charles Stewart. He was a B-17 pilot in the 8th and was dating one of the nurses in our complex. Mickey Rooney was the first movie star that I saw and Charles Stewart was second. There were others to follow.

Occasionally some ladies, who I assumed were off duty personnel, would gather on the grass with us and tell their stories of the war and its effect on their lives. Some were from Ireland, some from Scotland and some were locals. The only event I recall was told by a girl from London who said that she was buried under rubble twice during the bombardment by German bombers and by the German V-1's & V-2's.

Another event was an occurrence that took place in the hospital mess hall at breakfast one morning. I sat down at the table with some other guys and the one on my left had a cast on his right leg. As he moved his crutches aside and out of the way, I noticed that it was Joseph Tedder who was on the ship

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with me as we crossed the Atlantic. I asked him about his leg and he said that the company that he was in was advancing toward the Germans at night and he fell into a shell hole and broke his leg. The way the war was raging I had no idea we would ever see each other again. Coincidents will happen. Even now, 59 years later, I see him occasionally. The last time I saw him was at a funeral at Joyner's Funeral Home. He was somewhat feeble, but was well enough to drive a car. His wife died a few years ago and he lives alone. Sad.*

Another event occurred one Sunday morning as I was walking to church. The church was a pretty long way from the hospital, but I welcomed the exercise and I had always been an avid church goer. Ahead of me I noticed a soldier who was whistling as he walked and seemed to be very happy. It amazed me somewhat because he was bandaged from his shoulders and up. I asked him how he could be so happy. After all, it was obvious that he had suffered severe burns to his upper torso and head area. His answer was, 'Why should I not be happy? I'm alive.' With this said, he walked more slowly and related to me the events in great detail.

He was a crewman on a Sherman Tank and they had not experienced any problems until they entered a forest just beyond the autobahn. I believe he said it was the Ardennes. Anyway, the tank driver was passing by a huge tree and could not see a large, low limb and it came in contact with the gun turret. It warped it to the point that it would not latch down as it should. Soon afterwards, they were hit by a German 88 and the tank immediately caught on fire. He threw the turret up and jumped out. His clothes were on fire and he rolled in the snow until the fire was extinguished. He was unable to rescue any of his buddies. They were cremated. He told me that he was still having nightmares. He felt so helpless as he heard those guys screaming in the tank, but there was nothing he could do. The fire was too hot. He said if the turret had not been warped, it would have been locked in place and he would not have been able to get it unlatched and he would have suffered the same fate as the others. I doubt if his mother recognized him when he arrived home. Terrible.

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The Bombing Raid

I took a little trip on a B-17 Boeing Flying Fortress which was a joy to behold. I was like a child with a new toy.

About a half dozen of infantry guys, including myself, were on convalescence from the hospital and were treated to a tour of the base. It was huge. Our first stop was at the station where parachutes were kept and refolded when the occasion presented itself. Next was a view of the Norden bombsight facility. The Norden was the best and most accurate of any during WW2. Then we toured the bomb storage area-an amazing sight. We returned to our point of origin and we were asked if we would like to go on a bombing raid. The officer stated that a raid was scheduled to be made over the Netherlands. Our answer was a resounding-yes!! We were taken on jeeps to the Briefing Building where the huge map had been pulled down and an officer was giving the pilots their instructions. Then they issued each of us a parachute and one quick easy lesson on how to put it on in the event it might become necessary. Then, outside we boarded jeeps again and rode to where the planes were parked. Suddenly, our hopes were dimmed. An officer met us at the area and informed us that there would not be a bombing run in our future. Somehow, the Commanding Officer of the base had heard about our exotic plans and had "pulled the plug". He said he was not taking responsibility for military personnel who were not under his command. However, all was not lost. He granted to us the privilege of going up on a B-17 which had been refurbished after being shot up pretty bad on a recent bombing flight over Germany. Several patches were evident which had been riveted over bullet holes.

We stood and watched as the crew started the four engines. All this was new to us and we were in awe at these proceedings. A one cylinder engine similar to a lawn mower was cranked and an electric cord was plugged into each engine and they coughed out a bit of smoke and came to life. As soon as all four propellers were spinning, we boarded by pulling ourselves up through a hole under the fuselage. No steps to climb - just muscle power was all that was needed.

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The crew normally consisted of 9, but this flight consisted of only two—the pilot and an engineer.

We positioned ourselves in various parts of the plane as we took off. Then I began to explore the interior. First was the top gun turret. There were 2 steps to stand on which were fashioned to conform to a pair of flight boots. Apparently the crewman who was assigned to this gun was of short stature because the steps had been elevated about four inches.

It was quite an experience to put the gun through its paces (no firing of course). To swing the gun around was accomplished by merely twisting two horizontal handles in the direction you wanted the guns to turn. Next, the tail gun. Twin 50's again. However, the crewman had to be small. He lay in the prone on his stomach. I slipped into place but it was tight. I didn't investigate the belly turret, it didn't appeal to me very much.

Next, I went up front and sat with the pilot in the co-pilot's empty seat. He asked if I had ever piloted a plane. My answer was NO. He asked me if I would like to try it. I said Yes Sir. He leaned back in his seat and with his guidance I put the plane in some very slight maneuvers. He said, "I realize that you don't know what any of the gauges, etc indicate, but if you wish to know if you are flying level, just look out over to your right and if the tip end of the wing is in alignment with the horizon, then you are flying level." And I was. Hurray for me! As I watched those propellers spin on those two big engines, I asked myself, if for some reason all of those engines would cease operating, could I put my chute on and jump out of the door? I gave myself a silent and sincere answer—Yes!

We stayed up for four hours and it was cold. I went back into the area of the bomb bay and sat on the floor and dozed off to sleep. After a short nap, I sensed that we were flying much lower. I went back to the co-pilot's seat and talked a bit. Suddenly from out of nowhere, there was a four engine black bomber crossing in front of us and it looked as if it was as big as a barn. The pilot took evasive action and we went under the intruder. I recognized it as a British Lancaster. They were painted jet black and were used as night bombers. The British bombed at night and we bombed during the daylight. I'm sure some of those people who lived in those German industrial cities didn't get much rest or sleep.

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After 4 hours of flying over England, Ireland and Scotland and the North Sea, I suppose the pilot and the engineer were convinced that the plane was air worthy and we should return to base. I was in the area of the rear end of the plane looking out of a window as we were making our landing approach. My attention soon turned to the engineer as he ran past me with a wrench in his hand. I looked out the window and a jeep was speeding along the runway and a soldier was frantically waving a checkered flag. Then I felt a power surge as the pilot pulled the throttle all the way out apparently and pulled the stick all the way back and we began to climb. We were real low to the runway and both front wheels had been lowered for landing. What I didn't know was that the tail wheel had not gone down. The hydraulic system had failed and the engineer screwed it down manually with his wrench. We barely rose above the trees at the end of the runway. It appeared that I could have reached out and pulled a handful of leaves. Scary! We circled and made a good landing. Much better with 3 wheels down versus 2, that's for sure. In summary, it was interesting, eventful and memorable.

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Chapter 16

London

Some days later I took a trip to London and attended some shows at Piccadilly Circus. I can't recall them now, but I do remember that some were rather raunchy and not recommended (by me). A young lady approached me and offered to show me around the city. We took a double Decker bus and road the top section. We toured the part which suffered the worst from the German bombers, V1's and V2's. The devastation was indescribable. About half of the city was in rubble. Later we visited some old churches and cathedrals which had been spared. This was very interesting. I have always been nostalgic and appreciate old architecture.

On another visit to London, I took a stroll through an old cemetery and I do mean old. Many tombstones showed dates of death before Columbus discovered America. That is old!

I ventured back uptown and in as much as it was about noontime, I went into a place operated by the Red Cross with British personnel, whom I hoped would have some kind of food. They offered to me a cress sandwich. Food was a scarce commodity all over England. After all, they had a huge military contingent on two fronts, as we had and how such a small country managed to supply and feed such numbers is mind boggling... I suppose they received help from some of their colonies in various parts of the world. The green vegetation (cress) between two slices of bread resembled sea weed which can be washed up onto the sand at the seashore. The GI's, including me, began to refer to these sandwiches as Seaweed Sandwiches. It was good to get back to the mess hall for some good GI food.

A lady behind the food counter recommended that I take a weekend trip out in the country. I showed some enthusiasm when she informed me that there was an English doctor who quite often invited American soldiers to his country estate for weekends. She told me which train to take and where to get off. She would call him and tell him my arrival time. In as much as I was free to do as I pleased, I did as she suggested and proceeded to make the trip which was only about an hour's journey.

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The doctor was off duty on Saturday and Sunday and returned to his office Monday mornings. He had a French wife who was very pleasant and was delighted that I was there.

Their estate was nestled in a wooded area surrounded by farmland, with narrow paved roads, which were dotted with small stucco houses with thatched roofs. To me this was an unusual sight. In school books were pictures of houses with thatched roofs, but I had no idea that they were still in use during these modern times (1945).

As soon as the formalities were over, introductions and small talk, his wife ushered me out to her garden of which she was very proud. This was about mid-May and the veggies were growing good. One particular item I failed to recognize and she informed me that it was rhubarb. She asked me if I had ever tasted rhubarb pie. I answered in the negative and she told me that we would have it for dessert tonight. It was delicious.

They had a cook and a maid. Outback was their bomb shelter, a short distance from the house. All of this was an eye opener for this farm boy who, prior to his military experience had never been farther from home than Norfolk, VA.

At precisely 3 PM, it was tea time. (The English people pronounced it "tay time") The three of us gathered around the table on the patio and I had my first taste of hot tea. Prior to this, it had always been iced tea. I don't think the English know anything about iced tea.

Tea time being over, she asked if I would like to take the dog for a walk. I was eager to do so, hoping to see more of the area. While walking down a narrow road with the dog on a leash, I heard some kids (girls) talking and laughing in some thin woods to my left. It was a group of Girl Scouts enjoying an outing. Down the road a bit, was a farmer working in his wheat field. I stopped and engaged him in conversation. We grew a lot of acreage of wheat in NC and I wanted to know about this farmer's yields compared to ours. I learned that theirs exceeded our by quite a bit.

Back at the house, the doctor wanted to know if I had a love of music. I assured him that definitely I did. I studied piano and loved classical and

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Christian music primarily, but also enjoyed other types. We went into his living room, a beautiful room indeed. His piano was a very expensive Grand. He sat down and began to play an old Irish ballad- Danny Boy. He began to sing it and looked over to his right at me and I joined in (I knew all the lyrics as well as he did.) We made a right fair duet. He played-When Irish Eyes are Smiling and other Irish hits plus some Scottish dillies-what-ever that is. Anyone know what a dilly is?

I don't remember very much about the room except that the ceiling was schulchrged. I can't explain it very well, but I do know that he hired a talented Londoner to come out to do the ceiling during construction of the house. The chandelier hung from the center of it and it was unique. We had a good time in that room as his wife sat with us and enjoyed seeing us have so much fun.

At bedtime, I was shown to my room. There was a single bed, a night stand with a radio, a reading lamp and a book. I lay in bed and listened to the BBC news broadcast and read myself to sleep.

About 8:00 AM there was a light tap on the door and the maid cane in with my breakfast on a tray. Ah, breakfast in bed-my first. I felt as if I was being treated like a king.

I don't remember anything about Sunday. My next recollection was Monday morning when the doctor backed his car from the garage and I got in for the ride to London. I remember how awkward I felt getting in the passenger side of the car on the left side rather than right side. The steering wheel was on the right side in England as most people know, I'm sure, and they drive on the left side.

We talked all the way to his office. The war was the primary subject, the effect it had on his life and the lives of the English people and the jubilation everyone was expressing in as much as the war for Brittan and the countries across the channel was finally over.

As we entered London proper he remarked -look around at all the buildings and you will notice that not even one has escaped some damage. He was right.

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He dropped me off at the same train station from whence I departed and we said our good byes, but not before I expressed to him my thanks for a wonderful weekend. I assured him that it was an experience which I would never forget. My only regret is that I did not get his address, so that I could correspond with him. His last name is all I remember.

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In the year of our Lord: 2004-2006

Chapter 17

My Next Assignment-after the hospital

Back at the 8th Air Force hospital I was told of my next assignment. I was scheduled to return to France in a few days and would be stationed at Chatou, a town just a few miles north of Paris.

In the meantime to keep me busy, I pulled guard duty at the hospital. My first was for eight hours, from midnight to 8 am. It was not pleasant at all. An Air Force crewman had died and was lying on a stretcher fully clothed with an army blanket over him. However, the blanket was too short and his boots were showing. This doesn't sound like a big deal to some, but it was to me. The reason-well, visualize this: its night time, everyone is asleep, I am standing beside a stiff, there is a dim light and occasionally I looked at his shoes and I tried to wonder what I would do if suddenly one or both of those shoes would move. Get the idea?

I asked the question next day as to why was it necessary to stand over a dead someone, holding a loaded rifle. The answer was: earlier someone came to collect a corpse and was not authorized to and the unit he was from didn't get him. He had been taken to the wrong place. They should have told me all this earlier, but they didn't.

I was sent to Leitchfield, England next. I don't remember why-then on to Southampton. I boarded an old Dutch ship for the channel crossing. An army truck picked up all of the passengers and transported us to our various destinations-mine was Chatou France, as I mentioned earlier.

I was ushered to the headquarters building where I was checked in and told where I would be billeted. It was an old hotel, now taken over completely by the army. It was a comfortable place to stay. I was on the second floor (the top floor) in as much as it was a two story building. The entire floor was a large open area. All the walls had been taken out, thereby transforming it into one large room and it was filled with army cots. This was not the finest accommodations, but was okay with me. In the army you readily adjusted to most any conditions with no complaints.

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I was without rank. I went into the army as a private and I remained a private for a month or so.

Sgt Marsh got all of us who were new to the battalion for a briefing. Our duties were to make sure the town and the surrounding area was secure. Sounded pretty easy in as much as the war was over and we won. I actually believe that the objective was to keep us busy while we were building up enough points to enable us to return home.

There were several posts in and around Chatou, but there was no danger. Our primary duty was to maintain order among our own guys. The French were no problem. They were happy that we were there and even happier that the war was a thing of the past.

Let me back up a bit. Some of the French populace had a tendency to steal. I suppose one could attribute this to the fact that they had been occupied for 4 years by the Germans and many items were scarce or not available at all. Now, we Americans had arrived on the scene with our opulence and many of them were envious of our life style. The average Frenchman actually thought that we were rich. We had plenty of money to spend and we had our Jeeps to drive around at will. We ate well, dressed well and when not on duty we could be seen in Paris in great numbers- in restaurants, perfume shops, jewelry stores, movies, etc. We spent quite a bit of money at these places and helped "jack up" the economy. As a result, the business owners were elated. The poorer class were the ones who would take things. Clothes and blankets were the most popular items.

A case in point involved a soldier by the name of Richard Hogge. We engaged each other in conversation one day as I was relieving him from his post. He nonchalantly asked me where I was from and I told him I was from North Carolina. "Me too" he replied and asked what part. Kenly, I replied. "Me too" he said. What a coincidence. Later, after I had been promoted to Sgt, he told me he had received a letter from home informing him that his mother was very ill and he wished to apply for early discharge and get back to the states as soon as possible. Together we got the necessary papers together and the night before he was to depart, someone broke in his room and stole all of his clothes and his precious papers were included. The entire

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process had to be re-done. He finally arrived home, albeit later than planned.

Another consequence which involved Richard was as follows: After I was discharged I was in Kenly one evening and I heard someone call "Hey Sarge". I looked across the street and there he was. This was our first meeting since we had arrived home.

A short time later, he enrolled in an Agriculture Class at Rock Ridge School and I was his teacher. In as much as I had him in my Company while in Chatou, and now I had him in my classroom at Rock Ridge, we both considered this as being unusual and unique. How about that.

The majority of the time I pulled my duty hours at the main gate which incidentally was my favorite. I was to make certain every GI driving a military vehicle in and out of the battalion area had a trip ticket in his possession. Very easy-no problem. I had a desk, chair and radio in the guard shack and I kept the radio tuned to the Armed Forces Network. They played lots of good music. All the name bands were featured and I liked them all, including Spike Jones. Spike was a wacky guy and played wacky tunes.

There was a French lady who worked in an office in a building near by, next to the mess hall. She rang my phone one evening to notify me of something and heard my radio playing. She let me know that she enjoyed American music and asked me if I would leave my phone off the hook with the receiver near the radio. This was no problem because no one ever called me except from her phone. When her duty was over she would call me and I would hang up. Later on, she forgot to call me and soon her relief came over and asked me, rather tersely, to hang up the phone. I didn't attempt to explain, I just discontinued the ritual completely.

I had been at Chatau for a couple of months I suppose, when as I was walking through the gate one morning on my way to breakfast, the 1st Sgt. stopped me and said "Watson, the captain wants to see you." So, I walked into his office, which was near the mess hall and saluted him and he gave me at ease. He looked up at me from his desk and said, "Watson, it has been reported to me that you were uptown last night out of uniform." I replied,

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"not me sir." He countered with, "the MP's stated that you failed to wear your cap." "Not me sir" I continued, "I didn't go uptown last night. I was on duty until eleven o'clock and went straight to bed. There is another Watson in this company. She is a WAC." He gave me a gaze which told me that he was about to believe me but wasn't quite sure. He said, "Well, I'll check it out. You're dismissed." I clicked my heals, returned to attention, gave him a snappy salute, did an about face and walked out.

Two days later on my way to breakfast, the 1st Sgt. Stopped me and said "Watson, the captain wants to see you again." I said, "What didn't I do this time?" I went into his office and did as I had done 2 days before and he gave me at ease. He said, "Watson you were right. It was the WAC. However, I don't know if you're aware of it or not, but Sgt. Marsh will be leaving for home soon and I will need someone to replace him. I have noticed that you are always on time, never drunk or disorderly and always neat. I would like for you to replace Sgt. Marsh. The position calls for Staff Sgt. Rating but inasmuch as we are not a line outfit I'm not sure that I can go beyond Buck Sgt. For you, but I will try. Also, I will be unable to give you more than one stripe per month." I replied that I was honored to be selected but give me a night to sleep on it and I would let him know tomorrow.

Many thoughts ran through my mind during the night. I knew for instance that my pay would increase each month and that there was quite a difference between the salary of a private and that of a Staff Sgt. My official title would be Squad Leader. This farm boy had never been in a position of authority and I wondered how I would react. I had confidence in myself though and all in all I believed that I could perform even better than Sgt. Marsh. The next day I gave the Captain my affirmative answer and immediately conferred with Sgt. Marsh. We had been friends for a good while.

I toured all of the posts and talked to the men and was glad that I had accepted the position.

I made up my roster and posted it on a bulletin board outside my office. I instigated a change of duty hours from twelve hours on and twelve hours off to 8 hours on and twelve hours off. My men liked this very much. I informed each of them that I would be good to them if they would let me

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and also that I would be bad to anyone who tried to take advantage of me. It is a definite fact that there are a few who you can't be good to.

I also noted to them that Sgt. Marsh never put in for a promotion to anyone. All the guys were privates. Only he had a rating. I assured them that I would promote some, based on their performance and merit. Everyone whom I recommended received their rank.

An interesting and somewhat comical event occurred to Corporal Walter early on. He had been dating a French girl and suddenly her parents took a trip of a few weeks and his girlfriend went along. She promised to write to him while she was away. He approached me one morning with an envelope in his hand a grin on his face. He was amused at the manner in which she had addressed the envelope.

Before I go any further, I must tell how the address came about. I ordered a sign to be placed near the road entrance to the battalion area, to warn motorists, Military and civilians, of the situation up ahead. There was a very sharp curve in the street which sorta took you by surprise because you were on it before you knew it.

The sign read: 6817 Special Service Btn.
Slow Sharp Turn
US Army

Well, you guessed it. The address on the envelope was the same as was on the sign, including "Slow Sharp Turn." I said to the Corporal, "Well, there is no doubt as to where she got her address from."

There was an event taking place on the outskirts of Chatau one evening and for some reason a disturbance occurred and I was called because some of my men were involved. I strapped on my .45 pistol and drove to the area to investigate. In the meantime the ruckus had subsided and everything was back to normal. Word had got to those involved that I was on the way and all was calm and I decided not to pursue the matter.

A French couple was sitting on a bench and called me over and invited me to come over to their home at my first opportunity for a visit. This I considered was a good way to show some diplomacy. A few days later I went to the address which they had given me and was pleasantly surprised at what I saw.

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Their home was large and majestic. Surrounding it was a wrought iron fence which was about 7 or 8 feet tall. There was a large gate out front near the sidewalk. Entry was by pressing a button the gate and then the man of the house came out and unlocked the gate. Once inside we three sat and talked. I think they had taken a "shine to me" scuse me, (that's Suthurn tawk.)

They spoke fluent English. I did more listening than talking. I think that they really just wanted to tell someone how their life had been under German occupation. They appeared to be healthy (they were in their late 60's I estimate.) Their primary theme was concerning what the Germans did to their house. As the war progressed, the German war industries ran short of copper which was crucial to armament production. As most people are aware, small arm ammunition must have copper casings. Also artillery shells are made of copper. I'm not an expert on this but it might be aluminum, etc. But, they (the Germans) came into their house and removed all the copper plumbing. As anyone can imagine, this definitely created a problem for them for a long, long time.

My men were very efficient in executing their duties. Of course, their duties were not difficult. I had about 20-25 German prisoners who were confined in a barbed wire encampment not many miles from Chatau and I assigned a detail to drive out there each morning and bring a truck load of them to our area where they were assigned to various jobs, depending on their skills. Those who were cooks in the German army were assigned to the kitchen. Those who were mechanics were assigned to the motor pool. Those with no particular skills were relegated to policing the area. Military people know the meaning of this but to others I will explain. It is merely clearing the area of trash and sprucing up in general. I had an armed guard standing by at all times but this was actually not necessary. These guys were happy that the war was over just as we were. They were treated well and were fed well and had no reason to break and run. Where could they go and how would they get there?

One of my prisoners was captured in North Africa in 1942. He had been exposed to our language for so long that he spoke it very well. He was a real nice fellow, meek and polite. We talked a lot. I found it difficult to realize

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that he wasn't one of us. The subject of escape came up during one of our conversations and he said that he had no reason to even consider such action. As a result of all the events which had transpired in Germany during his four years of captivity, he anguished as to the conditions he would find once he was released. He stated that he wondered whether he had a family at all or if he had a home to go to. He was very uncertain about his future and justifiably after all, a considerable number of German cities had been reduced to rubble by allied bombers and by artillery barrages-all a part of war.

I actually gave him limited authority over those who were doing menial jobs. He put some of the prisoners to the task of washing jeeps and trucks. The area in which they were working was near a French gun emplacement which was under a mountain of dirt with grass growing over it. The mound was rather large and a young German kid who couldn't have been more than 16 years of age had finished washing a jeep and rather than routinely driving it to the parking area, he decided to have himself some fun. He would get up some speed and drive over that mound, turn around and come over from the other side. Adolph (a name I'll use because I don't remember his real name) nudged me and pointed toward the kid. We laughed in spite of ourselves but Adolph went over and reprimanded the kid and thus his fun time was over.

I had a soldier who had been nicknamed Whitey. His hair was white and he was a character to be sure. He was a fun type but mischievous also and could do some very unusual things. For instance, he was on guard duty which involved overseeing a small group of German soldiers who were clearing grass and weeds. Whitey handed his M-1 carbine to one of the Germans and then stooped to tie his shoe strings. The prisoner stood patiently holding the loaded weapon until Whitey finished his string tying task and then handed it back to him. I walked over and asked Whitey "why did you do that?" He replied "Oh, they're not going anywhere." He was correct in this of course and I just walked away after telling him to never do it again. To the best of my knowledge he never did it again.

Let me tell you of something he did do later. We had received a group of USO people into our keeping and the only one which I remember by name was a movie star by the name of Betty Hutton. She was a famous comedian

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who was cast in quite a few major movies – a real funny lady. (She is 83 years old now. I saw her on TV not long ago).

I feel that this is a good time to disclose to a reader that we, the 6817 Special Service Battalion, had as our primary duty to pick up all USO personnel from their port of debarkation (mostly Le Havre, France) and transport them via bus to our base at Chateau. All travel at this point in time was by ship, from New York to Europe. There was no air travel back then across the Atlantic Ocean.

We had our own busses and drivers. Upon arriving we assigned them to their hotel and they rested from their trip for a few days and then proceeded out to many different areas in France, Germany, Belgium and Luxemburg. We furnished transportation for their journeys by bus and sent 2 ½ ton trucks also which were loaded with sound equipment, generators, etc. We also furnished technicians and lighting equipment and anything else needed by them as they entertained the troops far and wide.

Now back to Betty Hutton. She was never seen without her secretary. As they walked through the entrance gate one morning on their way to breakfast (we all ate together in the same mess hall. I never knew during every meal who would sit with me at my table.) Whitey was on duty at that time and he remarked to Betty that her secretary was better looking than she was. She pretended not to hear. This occurrence was before I was in charge. Sgt. Marsh was still around.

After Betty returned from her tour, she had business in London and we provided her with a flight across the channel on a C-47. Sgt. Marsh gave Whitey the privilege of driving her to Le Berge airport in Paris. That was a mistake. Whitey drove down the runway full speed with planes taking off all around and Betty was standing in the jeep screaming. She almost had a nervous breakdown thanks to Whitey. As a result, she returned to the states prematurely. If Whitey received a reprimand or any form of punishment, I did not hear of it.

As aforementioned, control of the German prisoners was no problem, really. I went out to the encampment a few times on my quarter ton and brought in

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a small crew to work in the kitchen at the mess hall. I didn't even carry a weapon. It wasn't necessary.

I took note of the fact that in each tent there was a pot belly stove and a pile of coal outside to provide heat during cold months. By contrast, we had in our billets, fireplaces but no fuel. The nights were bitter cold but we had enough wool blankets to keep warm. Crawling out from under those blankets and stepping onto a cold floor with no heat at all would really awaken you. It was then that you thought seriously about the Germans who were experiencing much better conditions than we were. How do you bath & shave in a place where the room temperature was at freezing or below? The only way to get fuel (no coal available – only wood) was to steal it. Someone discovered a large stack of wood a few miles out of town and we would sneak out at night on one of our trucks and load up with wood for our fire places. I didn't feel good about it but it seemed to be the only alternative. We found a better place later which had steam heat. Heavenly.

Army ratings including Staff Sgt. and above were considered as "Top Three Graders." As such, we had a few perks of which I was not aware. I received a liquor ration each month. That was one perk that I definitely didn't need or want. I had a bar constructed in our building on the second floor for the enlisted men only and I donated my allotment to them.

The commissioned officers had a bar so why not have one for the non-commissioned. I didn't consult with my superiors, I just did it. As a matter of fact, our commander, Captain Richtor stayed drunk so much that I did what I considered plausible. I recall one evening of getting a phone call from one of my men who was on patrol duty. Someone had told him that Captain Richtor was at the bar again and was as drunk as a skunk and was causing a disturbance. "What should I do with him?" he asked. I asked him was he driving a jeep and he said yes. I replied, "Lay him across the hood of your jeep much like they did in the western movies when they would lay a drunk across the saddle of a horse. Then bring him to his room and tuck him in." He went back to the states at the time we left Paris for Germany, December 26, 1945. Good riddance.

Another perk was the privilege of having a vehicle assigned to me at all times. Inasmuch as I was on call 24/7, it was practical of course. We had a

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gasoline tanker (8000 gals) parked in the battalion area at all times. A filler hose, such as you see attached to a gas tank at service stations, was installed on the tanker for our use as was necessary.

A perk which I considered as my favorite was the maid who made my bed, did my laundry and kept my office and my room clean and tidy at all times and at no cost to me.

Another one was self instigated and was probably never duplicated by any other non-commissioned officer. I had my own driver. I had promoted him from private to corporal and he was the most dedicated person imaginable. He was always by my side when needed. He also had "sticky fingers." I will not say that he would steal but maybe one could classify it as liberating- especially in Germany. He would bring items to me or leave them on my desk and never gave any hint as to their origin. The items which I recall included a nice Kodak camera in a leather case with a shoulder strap, 5 Army Colt 45's with holsters, one .32 caliber German Walther pistol with shoulder holster and a M 1 carbine. I later learned that a small lake had been drained and the carbine was on the bottom in the mud. He had cleaned it up, oiled it and gave it to me. I suppose whoever was in charge of the draining project gave it to him or he possibly bought it and then gave it to me. I located some ammo and we went out and fired it. It performed perfectly. He also gave me a German Luger, a P-38 and a German Army issue weapon which was a combination pistol and rifle. It was unique in that it could be removed from its wooden holster and used as a hand gun or it could be clipped onto the wooden holster which was in the shape of a rifle stock and used as a shoulder weapon. The ammo was a 7.62 which was standard ammo for their infantry. I fired it at a target from shoulder position and found it to be very accurate. Then I decided to fire it as a hand gun. I have no idea whether I hit the target or not, because the flash blinded me for an instant and the kick was such that I almost lost it. The result was that I was standing there, barely hanging on to the pistol grip (handle) with my hand above and behind my right shoulder. That was my first and last time I fired that monster. By the way, his last name Lowe. To me, he was always referred to as Corporal Lowe.

Our new commander was a Major. I can't remember his name. Anyway, he wanted me to send a 2 ½ ton truck to Le Havre to pick up a load of Scotch

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whiskey which had arrived from Spain. Later some of the guys nicknamed it "Franco's Revenge." At the time Francisco Franco was the president or "head honcho" of Spain. The U.S. had provided him with barbed wire and other things during the war which elevated him to leadership. It was reported that the items from us were defective and in return he sent us bad whiskey- thus the reason for the description- Franco's Revenge. How much of this is true is anyone's guess.

I sent Corporal Lowe to Le Havre to pick up the load. I had no idea he would have any problems but a couple days later he called and informed me that he was in jail. As I recall, he had let his drivers license expire and had also got himself in disfavor with the French by insulting those in charge at the jail. As a result, they put him through some unpleasant circumstances. When he called he said, "Hey sarge, send someone to get me out of here. They get me up each morning at 5 o'clock and spray me with cold water." This was in December and I'm sure it really was cold. Anyway, he was very happy to be back. Believe me I never sent him anywhere again.

He drove me on my jeep locally however. Even then, he managed to have problems. I had business in Paris one day and he drove. As we were proceeding down the Champs-Elysees headed for Place de la Concorde, we heard a siren and an MP on a motorcycle pulled us over. He said we were speeding and he promptly wrote a citation and instead of handing it to Corporal Lowe, he gave it to me. I questioned him about this and he said I had allowed my driver to speed and therefore I was responsible. I don't remember the amount I had to pay but I let brother Lowe know that in the future he would be the one doing the paying.

I will now single out two of my men, Guy Crider and Stanley D. Mann who were very dedicated while on duty but a bit wild when off duty. They were both at the ripe old age of 18 and intent on having, what they considered, a good time. They would get pretty well "loaded" at the bar and would take a bottle with them to their room. It would take an entire day to sober up.

As Crider was walking or trying to walk through the main gate one morning on his way to the mess hall, I was walking toward the gate and saw him collide with a USO lady. He backed up a step or two, staggered to and fro a bit and said to the lady, "you could at least walk through this gate under the

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pretense of being sober.” He was so drunk that he didn’t even realize he was drunk.

Each Sunday I would transport a few guys to church at the nearest Military Chapel. In general the attendance was great. There was a pretty good mix of commissioned Officers and enlisted men and women. It was not unusual to see a number of high brass such as Colonels and Generals. We were attached to SHAEF, so that explains the presence of the brass. If the reader doesn’t know what SHAEF means, it was Supreme Headquarters American Expedition Forces. General Dwight D. Eisenhower was, of course, the highest ranking officer in SHAEF. As a matter of fact he was the highest ranking General in Europe. If he ever attended our chapel, I didn’t see him, but that’s okay. He and I wore the same shoulder patch. I was honored at that distinction.

I sat Pvt. Crider & Pvt. Mann down for a long awaited chit chat, hoping to convince them that their life style wasn’t what I approved of. I wanted to convince them that their drinking habit was not the way to go. Pvt. Mann responded “Sgt. before we leave this man’s army I’m going to get you drunk.” Then I responded, “Pvt., before we leave this man’s army, I’m going to have you two in church.” Guess who won out.

They went with me and my group to church and they changed their ways and I promoted them to Corporal. As long as I was there they no longer went back to their old ways, thank the Lord. They developed into two fine gentlemen. Crider played guitar and Mann was good on the piano. There was a piano in our theater and the three of us would go to the theatre, Crider would play his guitar and Mann would “tickle the ivories” and we would sing and have a swell time together.

Chapter 18

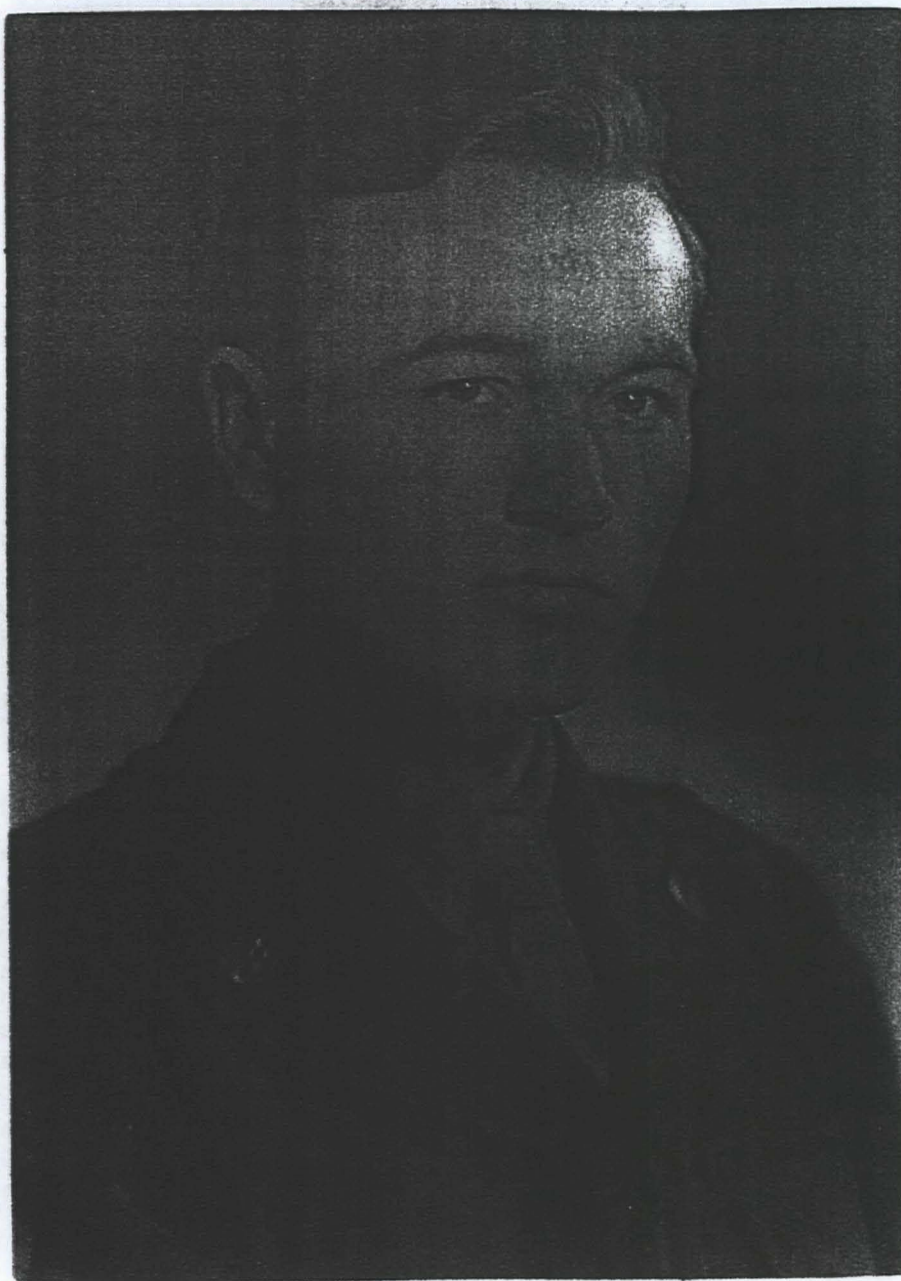
Party for an orphanage

I learned that there was an orphanage in Chatau which was operated by a couple of nuns. They were to be congratulated for their efforts primarily because of the difficulty which they encountered in acquiring the basic necessities for the children. Remember that France had been subjected to 4 years of captivity by the Germans. During this time, they (the Germans) had relieved the general populace of lots of their personal goods, food, etc.

Therefore, the nuns and the children survived on meager supplies. I had compassion for them to the extent that I posted a notice on the bulletin board that everyone should seriously considered chipping in some of their food items such as candy bars, cookies, and anything else that could be used by the children at the orphanage. I placed a good size cardboard box outside of my office and in one day we had enough goodies to take to the nuns. I contacted them and suggested we give them a party. At the agreed on time, we took cakes, milk and our box full of stuff and they had a ball. They had never seen chewing gum or candy before and some of them were sick from overeating.

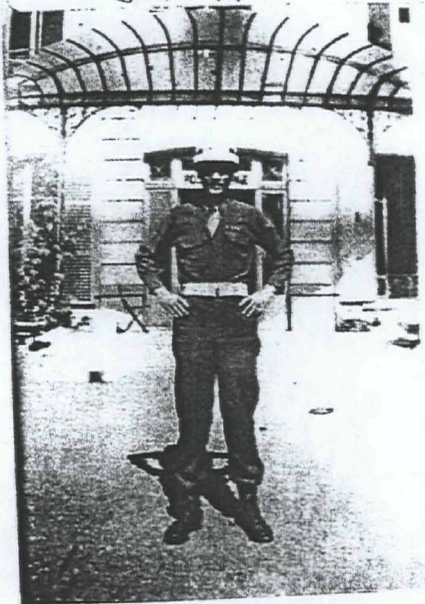
We continued to help in any way we could for as long as we were in Chatau.

The reason there was so many orphans was because, as with all war torn countries, many parents lost their lives due to bombings and other factors attributed to war. In addition, untold thousands of men and women were rounded up and transported to Germany where they worked as slave laborers in factories which produced items necessary for the German war machine. We can only imagine the grief experienced by those people who left their home and their children behind, not knowing either what their individual fate would be and realizing that the chance of ever returning to France was slim indeed. It saddens me to even put this on paper because of the memories. As long as I have a memory I will not forget seeing children, some with only one leg and others with an arm off, etc. bending over a garbage can and scraping with a spoon, desperately searching for a morsel of food. Thank your good Lord every day of your life that such traumatic conditions have never been prevalent in our lives!!!



Pvt. LANNIS B. WATSON 1944

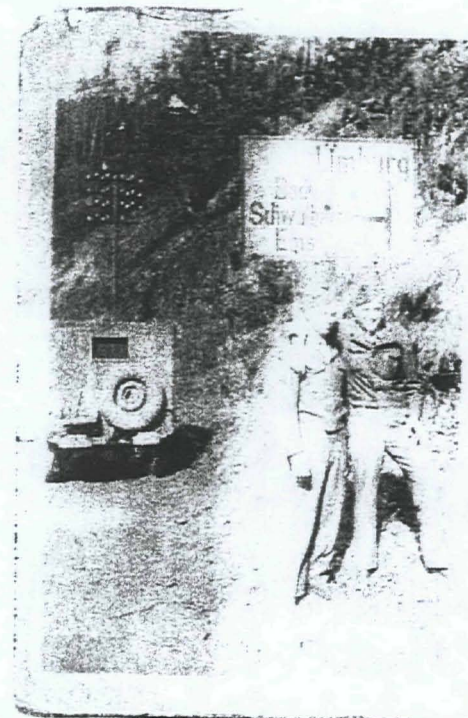
S/Sgt. LANNIS WATSON
 CHATEAU, FRANCE
 JUNE 1945



STAFF SGT.
 LANNIS WATSON - 1945
 PARIS, FRANCE

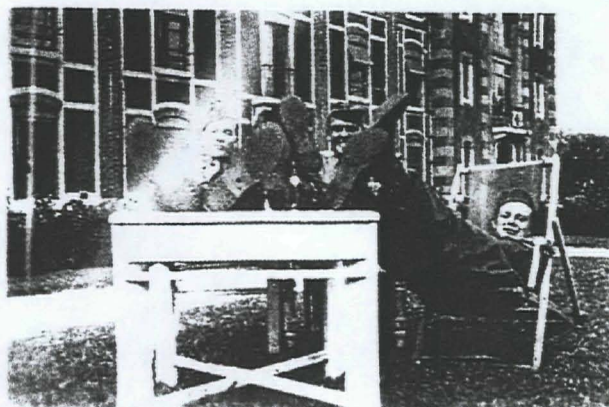


3 Jerks on a Jeep

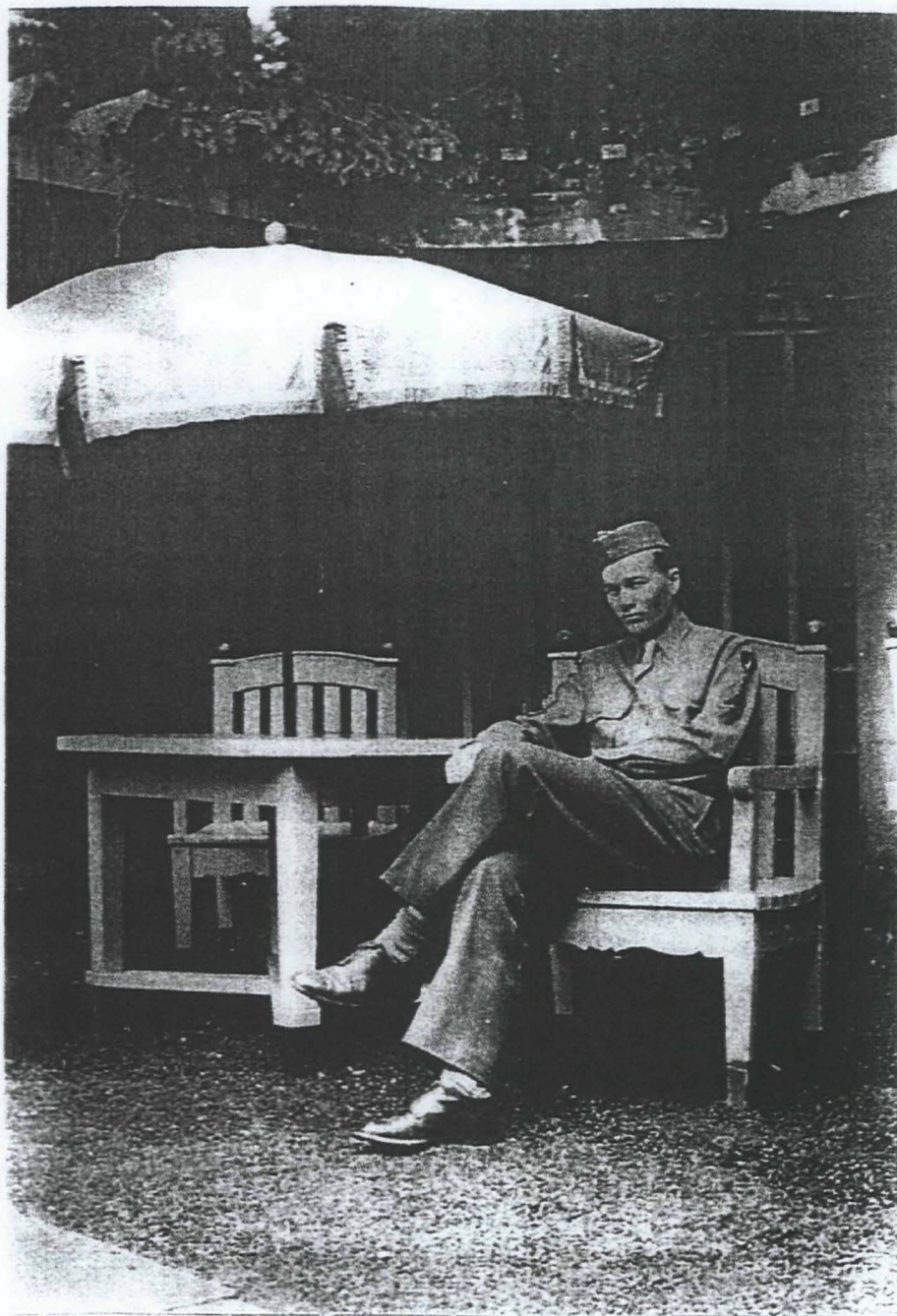


Sgt. LANNIS B. WATSON
 AND Cpl. [illegible]

40th Ger. Hosp.
 PARIS, FRANCE

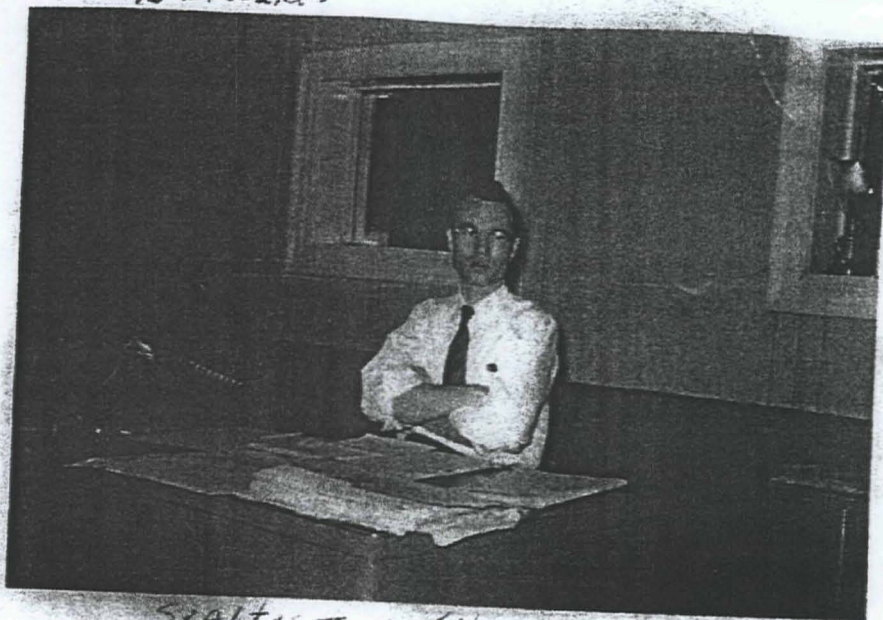


L-R Sgt. L. Watson
 Cpl. W. Peters
 Cpl. Lowe



STAFF SGT. LANNIS B. WATSON
at The Villa Lilly
Badswaldsee, Germany

Lewis B. Blake



SCAT test 1954



Lewis B. Blake
and
child
1954

A COUNTRY BOY'S STORY

Written by: Lannis B. Watson

In the year of our Lord: 2004-2006

We crossed into Germany and entered Metz at about dusk. We found a military base and they told us to park our truck in the barbed wire compound near some barracks. At the gate there were 2 MPs and we felt our truck and our personal items would be safe and we were not to worry. Back at base headquarters they filled our tank with gas and our two jerry cans. Then we were directed to their mess hall. We were ready for a meal because all day we'd had nothing by some K rations to munch on. Then we reported back to their CQ and asked where we could find a place to spend the night.

This place had been a German Army barracks and was a nice brick building built in an "L" shape. The CO told us that our room was at the very end of the building. First go to L. As we were walking toward our destination, I asked Crider and Mann – "Did you hear him tell us to go to hell? Ha Ha – corny.

We slept in army cots. I slept with my Colt .45 under my pillow. After all, we were now on German soil.

After breakfast, we hitched a ride to the barbed wire area and drove out of Metz. Snow and ice was yet with us and as I approached the main road which was at the bottom of a hill, I applied the brakes and kept going. There was no way to stop, it was so slippery. Luckily, there was no traffic and I got onto the road, albeit sideways.

We came upon a small town about noon time and we were hungry again, so I pulled into a restaurant parking lot. I chose a seat which was located so that I could see our truck. We ordered fried chicken and it was delicious. It tasted like our southern fried chicken. Apparently the cook had worked at Parker's or Bills at some point in his cooking career.

Soon the waiter returned to our table with three plates of something the likes of which I had never seen before. I remarked, after examining it pretty well with my fork that it was the most unusual chicken I had ever seen. Corporal Mann told me that it was tripe – an appetizer. I had never seen any before, plus, my appetite didn't need any help. At his urging I tasted it and then pushed it away. Good riddance. He told me that it was the lining of a calf's stomach. Gross.

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In the year of our Lord: 2004-2006

I was first to finish eating and I decided to step outside and look around a bit. I was standing just under the edge of the roof, looking at my map and suddenly a huge pile of ice and snow slipped off the roof and came down on my head. It almost brought me to my knees. The sun had come out and had warmed the ice to the point that it broke loose. Mann and Crider thought it was funny but believe me, I didn't.

The first large town on our route was Wiesbaden. The first citing I had of a B-29 was at Wiesbaden Airport. I thought the B-17 was large, but it was a piper cub compared to this monster. They were primarily used in the South Pacific Theatre of Operations.

We were still traveling on snow covered roads but by driving as the conditions warranted, we had no real problems. Our major concern was detour. Most all of the largest bridges had fallen down into rivers. Our air forces, artillery and our engineers with their explosives had done their job very well, but our little map didn't indicate any of this so we had to detour and read the signs on the secondary roads and neither of us knew a thing about the German language. I still, even to this day don't know how we made the trip successfully.

We had not seen the two and one-half ton truck since it left us behind, until we were in open country and as we came to a curve in the road, I saw it out in a field. The driver apparently entered the curve too fast and he went off the road, took the corner off of a brick house and was mired in the snow. I am sure he had to be winched out.

Our next big town was Frankfurt; it has sustained lots of damages. The train station and everything near it was a burned out hulk. A few days after we had reached Bad SchwaBach, I drove back to Frankfurt with Lt. Davis and he thought what the business district was once. He wanted me to see an amazing sight. In the middle of town was the I. G. Farber Building. It covered an entire block. Before the war it was the nerve center for all the American industries which had factories and/or sales outlets in Europe, i.e. Singer, GMC, Ford, Chrysler, etc. It was here that all of their records were stored. General Eisenhower had ordered that no air raid or any kind of bombardments were to occur near the building. At that point in time his headquarters (SHAEF) was in Paris. As soon as our armies had occupied

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Written by: Lannis B. Watson
In the year of our Lord: 2004-2006

the city, he would establish his headquarter in this building and it must be intact.

It was an amazing sight indeed. The building suffered no damage at all – not even a broken window pane. In contrast, every house, every business in the entire city was nothing more than rubble, even those adjacent to it. Even the lawn was immaculate with no damage. It was awesome. There was a rumor that the companies which had a great interest in it because of their records, etc. persuaded the General to leave it undamaged. Maybe so, maybe not. What I do know is that he did establish his headquarters in the building.

After Frankfurt, the topography of the land proved to be hilly, mountainous even. The road to Bad SchwaBach was crooked and dangerous. I had been doing all the driving all the way since we left Paris. Mann and Crider just sat there to my right with army blankets pulled up on them. None of the military vehicles had a heater.

The mountain reminded me of those in and around Boone, North Carolina. The roads too. Lots of hair pin curves and all were covered with ice and snow. Mann and Crider asked me if I wanted one of them to drive some, inasmuch as I had been driving all the time. I replied, "Heck No." I don't trust either of you 18 year olds behind this steering wheel on these snowy mountain roads. "After all, I was the "Old Man", of my entire outfit. I was 22 years of age. I had my 22nd birthday at Chatou on December 23, 1945. I have mentioned several times that I aged 10 years on that trip.

The scenery was great. On a very high point in the highway we could see Bad SchwaBach in the valley below. It was so scenic that I stopped and took a picture of it and it is in the scrapbook which Elsie prepared for me. Thank you Elsie!

As we entered the town, Crider asked me where we would be billeted. I admitted to him that I didn't know yet but as soon as we located my advance party, we would know. I dispatched a few guys to Bad SchwaBach a week before our departure and their duty was to reconnoiter the town and select a place for us. I saw our vehicles parked in front of an old hotel, so I drove up, parked and we went in. My guys were sitting at a telephone switchboard

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of all things. After a short greeting, I asked why they were pretending to be switchboard operators. They replied that they were not pretending. Seems an officer had decided to take the trip early also and had put my men to work for him. He was with the Signal Corp and needed someone in communications. It was okay with me. I had plenty of men anyway.

I took a private room which was near to the front entrance. I backed the truck up to the entrance and we began to unload. It was then that I discovered that my trunk was missing. My duffle bag was there but no trunk. All of Crider's and Mann's gear was accounted for. We quickly came to the conclusion that one of the MP's relieved me of my trunk while we were asleep at Metz. It didn't occur to me to check our cargo before leaving the encampment. After all, if you can't trust an MP who can you trust? Everything could be replaced though, so no tears. There was only one hitch. I had packed my electric razor in my duffle bag and the cord was in the trunk, so there I was with a nice Remington razor with no cord. I loved that razor. I bought it from a Frenchman in Chatou who needed some money and I wanted his razor. Oh well, live and learn.

We learned right away to like Bad Schwa Bach. It sustained no damage to speak of. There were a few road signs with bullet holes in them, but nothing else. There was a German hospital across the street which had been vacated by the Germans. A short while later, we took it over and moved the entire battalion into it. The first thing I noticed in my room was that there was a picture of Adolph Hitler hanging on the wall over the head of the bed. Believe me; it didn't stay there very long. Can you imagine what a picture frame and the photo looks like when it smashes against a wall at about 90 mph? It has a tendency to alter it somewhat.

Believe it or not, we were the first to arrive at our destination. The entire battalion left Chatou the day after Christmas as we did. Our progress seemed so slow, due to the weather, that we had no idea we would be first — last maybe but not first. My first objective was to assign some of my men to patrol duty on jeeps. Others manned various posts throughout the town more or less to show a presence. A sweep was made of the homes in an effort to confiscate any and all weapons. We gathered up quite an array of shotguns, rifles and hand guns. I took some of them to my office and occasionally I would take them into a wooded area and fire them just for fun.

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They were no longer in the hands of our former enemy who might be tempted to do something foolish.

I delivered each of the guys to their assigned posts until they became familiar with the area. Then they were required to walk to their individual posts. It was the same as it was in Chatou with one exception.

One autumn morning a dense fog settled in and I do mean dense because I walked down a street in Chatou and I could not see a building on either side of the street. I could have been walking down a country highway and not have known any difference. I had not seen a fog such as this even when I was in London and theirs have always been considered the worst.

In order to get each man to his duty station, I sat on the right front fender of my jeep with a flashlight, shining it on the curb as the driver crept along at a "snails pace" and this, mind you, was in broad daylight. This was the only way to determine where an intersection was. With the help of the flashlight I could see the street signs. Otherwise I would not have any idea where we were. I suspended all military traffic other than the posting of the guards. Some of our buses were scheduled to transport a group of USO people to their appointments but I grounded them. There was absolutely no safe way to make a trip in or around the area. Paris was at a stand still also.

There are two stories which I feel I must relate to you – one is somewhat comical and the other one was somewhat frustrating, at the time. No 1 – Some dastardly person or persons had the idea that breaking some store front windows at night would be loads of fun. I could not believe that the town's people were guilty of doing it. This was a quiet – gentle little town. My suspicion was that some of my guys were the culprits. A few would party at night and get a bit inebriated. I chose two guys whom I could trust and posted them in an inconspicuous place and told them to keep their ears and eyes open and nab whoever was having so much fun. The first night – nothing. The next night – ditto. I could tell that they were getting bored and rightfully so. I gave them one more night and if nothing happened we would call it off.

Picture this; I am in my little bed sleeping soundly when suddenly I am awakened by a scene which would have startled the wits out of anyone. It was about four or five o'clock a.m. and one of the guys rushed into my

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Written by: Lannis B. Watson

In the year of our Lord: 2004-2006

room, shouting, "I've caught the one we've been waiting for Sgt." I sat up in bed and Pvt. Murchison shoved a person in ahead of him and in the dim light filtering in from the street light, it appeared to be a woman. He pushed "her" up next to my bed and gave "her" a shove and into the bed with me. I jumped up and flipped on the light and they both began laughing. Those two idiots had found a mop head (unused) which Pvt. Keling had draped over his head and had donned a skirt which in combination had made him into a "woman". I threatened to murder both of them on the spot, but it's not easy to kill a person while they are laughing. No 2 - We were receiving a steady stream of Hollywood stars, entertainers from New York City (Broadway, etc.) big name bands such as Benny Goodman Artie Shaw, Guy Lombardo, Tommy Dorsey, and Jimmie Dorsey. We had Jack Benny, Bob Hope, The Rockettes, and other who I can't recall at this moment. We had some classical musicians such as, concert pianist, Eugene Liszt to name one; Negro soloist, Paul Robeson, and we even had a heavy weight world champion boxer. I shook hands with him once. He was a giant of a man and his hand as big as a ham. He was 65 years of age at the time. I was 21 and I 'm sure he could have pulverized me if he wanted to. He was a man whom you would want for a friend, definitely not as your enemy.

A few of the entertainers were not well known but were excellent performers. All of these people were in contact with us because we rendered them a service, such as getting their dollars exchanged for the currency of the country which they were currently in - French francs- German marks, etc. Also, as I have mentioned earlier, it was our responsibility to provide them with everything they needed to travel when they were out entertaining the troops. They would perform for us before leaving out. We ate at the same mess hall and naturally, a friendship often developed.

One particular gentleman was a nice, neat handsome fellow and big - not fat but big. He was about 6' 3" and I estimate him to weight about 225 pounds. I point this out because it is a part of this story and you will also realize why this No 2 happening was frustrating.

It began with a phone call at night; I was resting good in my bed and sleeping soundly. The soldier on the other end of the line said "Sgt., I'm at the officer's bar and there is a gentleman here who is causing a disturbance and I can't get him to leave - please come over and take him away. So, I

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dressed, drove over to the hotel and was pretty sure that I would get him to his room with ease because we were friends and his room was on the same floor as the bar was on.

I walked in and went over to where he was. He turned, saw me and said in a robust voice, "Ah Sgt., have a drink." I shook my head, no, and took the glass from his hand and handed it to the bartender. Next, I took him by the arm and began guiding him toward the door, all the time telling him that he had had enough and it was time for him to go to bed. He didn't get angry and I was feeling pretty confident that this was going to be any easy task. However, as we were about to exit, he turned back toward the bar and was pulling me along with him. At the time I was six feet and one inch and weighed about 170 pounds. I was not about to physically take him out. He began again to try to persuade me to have a drink. I came to the conclusion that I must begin to beg. I saw sympathy in the bartender's eyes and he of course did not offer to pour another drink. I told him in a rather loud and commanding voice, that we must go; the bar is closing. This time I got him into the hall and luckily his room was nearby. I could tell that he was acting drunker all the time and I was having a difficult time holding him up. Luck was with me again. His door was open and we struggled to his bed. I grabbed him by the shoulders, turned his back to the bed and gave him a shove. He was snoring the minute he hit the bed. What a relief. All this was frustrating indeed.

Mickey Rooney – Soldier

Mickey Rooney, as most everyone knows was a very talented and admired movie actor. Those who most likely remember him are those my age. Of course those who are 20 or 30 years younger than me will possibly recall him from his early movies such as *National Velvet*, co-starring Elizabeth Taylor. It appeared on the movie channel, last week (August 2004). He is now an overweight man who is 83 or 84 years old.

One thing that I'm sure few are aware of is that he had, at one time, a band and they were good. This was when he and I were members of the 6817 Special Service Battalion, stationed at Chatou, France. I heard of it and went to a ball where he was scheduled to perform. I don't know where he found those musicians but they were great.

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Written by: Lannis B. Watson

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Mickey traveled to various parts of Europe and as afore mentioned, he came through the hospital in which I was a patient. It was at Leige, Belgium just after the Battle of the Bulge. He was always in uniform because after all, he was a soldier. He was in the Soldier Show Company and was subject to all of the rules as anyone else regardless of his "star status."

Only twice did I have a problem with him. The rules pertaining to the use of military vehicles was that if a vehicle was needed, it was necessary to obtain a "trip ticket" signed by the Motor Pool Sgt. Mickey didn't seem to believe that this rule was to include him inasmuch as he was a famous person, so he would go to the motor pool and get into a jeep and drive out through the gate and would not stop for the guard at the gate. After a couple of episodes, I was notified by one of the guards. I informed all of them to enforce the rule regardless of who it involved and they did so by stopping him and demanding to see his trip ticket. He gave them some back talk, but when they forced him out of the vehicle and drove it back to the pool, he learned that we meant business.

The second episode occurred while I was in the chow line at breakfast time and I heard a commotion at the front of the line. Pretty soon, the Mess Sgt. came back to where I was standing and informed me that Mickey was trying to buck the line. Well, in the army this was a "no-no!" I told the Sgt. to send him to me. I asked what his problem was and he said that he needed to eat now because he was scheduled to be at practice in 20 minutes. The mess hall opened at 6:00 a.m. and I looked at my watch and it was 7:30 a.m. I asked him if he was aware that the serving began at six o'clock and he said yes. I said, "Okay, get to the back of the line. I do not buck the line, I take my turn and so must you". I did not have any problem with him again.

Bob Hope, plus trip to Switzerland

As I have mentioned before, our battalion received all USO people who came over to entertain our troops in Europe. My favorite troupe was Bob Hope's. Bob was accompanied by a comedian, Jerry Colona, and a violinist whose name I don't recall but she was great – very talented. Those three put on a wonderful show and it was a joy to talk with them and to have lunch with them, etc. We had a gentleman whom I had never heard of but his act was so unique that it deserves mentioning. He was an expert with a *Bull*

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Whip – the kind that stage coach drivers used as we all have seen in the western movies. I was fascinated at seeing him cut the fire off the end of a cigarette while it was being smoked by a very nervous soldier. He did other dangerous tricks also. Then he left us and went on his way to perform for the troops. Shortly after, we (the three stooges) took off on our trip to Switzerland at the Swiss Leave Center, low and behold; he was performing on the stage there. We saw the poster announcing the time the show was to begin and inasmuch as we had finished with our business, such as converting our money to Swiss Francs and securing a room for the night, we decided to see his performance again.

It was a large auditorium and we sat about half way back from the stage. The first thing he did was to call for a volunteer. Well, he had already gone through the motions with his whip, making loud cracking sounds with it – sounded like a pistol firing. He had the attention of the audience, that's for sure. No one volunteered (I think he had them pretty scared) so I told the guys that I was going up. They said, "No you're not." I said "yes I am. I've seen his act before and I trust him."

On stage he handed a cigarette to me and told me to light it. It was a Pall Mall and was long and I was glad. He backed away for about 15 feet and clipped the fire off the end, and the crowd moaned. Then he cut the remainder off and I felt a sting on the tip of my nose. The audience was aghast. Next, he asked me to lift my hands over my head with hands together. Then he wrapped the whip around my wrists with a loud crack. The sound was awful close to my ears, but no pain. His next, and last act, was to wrap the whip around my legs. After that, I left the stage and rejoined my two buddies (with a smirk). The audience applauded.

The next day we entered Switzerland (by train) and had a few minutes off the train which we used to explore the nearby area near the train station. We were in Basel, the first Swiss town within the Swiss border when you come in from the Alsace-Lorraine territory. Our attention was drawn to an automobile dealership show room where we saw a few Plymouth's, a Russian Ziss and a smithering of used French cars. All of the taxicabs were Plymouths.

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Speaking of the Alsace-Lorraine, it was an almost treeless terrain, very desolate as a result of the war. From my train window I observed that the ground, as far as the eye could see, was churned up. It was very rough and apparently was an area in which a major battle had taken place. There was no vegetation at all which was indicative of an intense artillery barrage. Then my eye focused on a GI helmet lying on the ground with a bullet hole through it. The train was moving rather slow and I guessed that it was because the rail track was not very sound and probably unsafe in this area because of ground conditions. As I saw that helmet, I said to myself, "Poor fellow, he didn't have a chance." It was then, once again, that I realized how fortunate I was to have escaped such a fate. I have been blessed.

After Basel and some picture taking we were off to Bern, the capital. Our tour guide did a good job of keeping us informed of the various towns and their history and high points. We spent one night in Bern and we (the three stooges) were invited to a seafood restaurant by a gentleman who, as I recall, was the hotel manager. All of our hotels and all of our activities were prepaid and all went smoothly. This was a winter trip (February 1946) and was very scenic as one can imagine. It was like a giant Christmas card; snow everywhere. I had never seen a passenger car with four wheel drive before but it was an absolute necessity over there during winter months.

I failed to meet even one person who didn't speak English and they were very cordial. The gentleman with us at the restaurant gave us some insight into the part that Switzerland played during the war. The country was bordered by France, Germany and Italy and of course they proclaimed their neutrality and as a result, escaped the damage of war with one exception. There was a town just inside the border which sustained quite a bit of damage as the result of an air raid by our bombers. The pilots made an error. They thought that they were bombing a German city. Oops!!!.

Our friend clued us in on some other facts which I was not aware of. He said that their government and our government had an agreement to the effect that if some of our aircraft were damaged over Germany and determined that they could not safely return to their home town they would be allowed to land inside Switzerland. The only condition was that they and their aircraft must remain until the end of the war. He said that they received distress calls occasionally and as soon as the plane landed, the crew

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was escorted to a briefing area and were given civilian clothes, places to stay and were paid their current pay for so long as they were there. For a few times, a call would come in, announcing that an engine or two was out but actually such was no the case. The crews had got tired of the war and wanted to sit it out in Switzerland.

Once we were settled in our hotel in Bern, we went down to the lobby to enjoy the music. There was a young man at the piano and he played very well. I asked him to play Flamingo and he did, plus two or three more selections. Then he took a break and the four of us took a table together. We were eager to know where he was from. He informed us in a pleasant manner that he was German who had been drafted into the German Army. His unit had been engaged in combat near the Swiss border and he slipped away and crossed over into Switzerland, found some civilian clothes and got a job in the hotel lobby entertaining the hotel patrons. After learning this, we separated ourselves from him and had no further contact with him. The fact that he was an army deserter, albeit German, was reason enough for us to cease our relations with him.

I will try to be brief in relating the other events of our Swiss vacation. Suffice it to say; that the country was scenic with its snow covered fir trees and lofty mountains – the Alps. We tried skiing (the Swiss call it she'ing). Notice please that I used the word tried.

We took a ski lift up to the top of one of the Grindelwald peaks. We had rented some skis. The locals made it look easy. My left ski felt a bit loose so I loosened the shoe strings and stepped off the ski and disappeared. I had no idea the snow was so deep and fluffy. A couple of guys nearby pulled me up and helped get me back in order. I don't recall what my two buddies did, but as for me, I eased over to a gentle slope and gave a push with my two ski poles and down I went. All was fine until a telephone pole got in my way and it wouldn't move. I could not do anything but travel straight ahead, so rather than wrap myself around that pole; I just sat down and dragged until I stopped. It was a short trip but sufficiently long enough to convince me that it could be dangerous to my health. The little kids were doing their thing with no problems. It was evident that they learned to ski about the time they learned to walk.

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Skating also appeared easy so I rented a pair of skates. There was a frozen lake near the hotel which behooved me. I made certain that no one was there but me. I sat down on a bench and put on the skates and stepped out onto the ice and began an awkward movement forward. Then my ankles began to buckle this way and that and I began to invent a brand new style of ice dancing. I looked about to see for sure that there was no one in sight and sat down on the ice and removed the skates, put my shoes on and returned the skates. The gentleman made the comment to the affect that I didn't keep the skates very long. I replied as I walked out that I was a fast learner.

Next was snow sledding. The three of us rented a sled and went directly to a snowy path in front of the hotel. This path had been made by people and cars over a period of time and each side was a wall of snow about four feet high. I sat up front and man number two sat behind me, close up, and man number three gave a push and jumped on the rear. We gained speed pretty quick inasmuch as there was quite a descent beyond the first curve. We were really whooping it up as we went faster and faster down hill. I guided it by kicking my heels into the packed snow. All was fun until suddenly we met a farm tractor headed toward us and there was not space enough for it and us. I dug my right heel in the snow and we missed the tractor but we didn't miss the wire fence to our right. When the sled hit the fence, it stopped and we kept going. We didn't know the fence was there. It was covered with snow. I had a slight scratch on my right hand and my two cohorts were unscathed.

We quickly decided to seek a safer area to do our sledding. Nearby was a hill which showed great promise, so I pulled the sled to the very top and pointed it downward. We jumped on and went down rapidly. What a ride! However, the sun had warmed the area at the base of the hill to the point that the snow had softened at the bottom and as a result, the sled did not stay on top of the snow as it had on our way down but instead it went underneath and stopped and once again we kept going – head over heels. We laughed at each other. We looked like three snowmen as we scrambled out and got on our feet.

The remaining days in Switzerland were rather routine. The people were nice, the accommodations were great and the scenery as I have stated before

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was breathtaking. We were in Geneva and Zurich plus some smaller towns and some of the museums were noteworthy.

We took a train ride which to us was unusual. It was a cog train. Between the two usual tracks was a middle track with slots in it. The engine had a rotating cog wheel which connected to the middle track and this way the train propelled itself up the steep grades. An ordinary train would fail in an attempt to climb such grades. The motion was jerky but interesting and it took me to places of interest. Otherwise we wouldn't have gone to those places.

Let me tell you about the vast differences between the German train which took us to Switzerland and the Swiss trains. The train we traveled on from Frankfurt to Basel was an antique. The seats were wooden and slatted, much like a porch swing. Comfortable? No. The windows rattled and let in soot and cinders from the smoke stack (was a coal fired engine). There were no sleeper cars. Our nights were spent on the floor. Very little sleep. One enterprising GI tied his blanket between two posts hammock style. All was well until the lurching car caused one end to work loose and down he went. These were not first class accommodations, that's for sure. By contrast, the Swiss trains were plush; very comfortable.

We (the three stooges) were definitely not looking forward to the train ride back to Frankfurt, but luck was with us.

The night before we were scheduled to leave the next day, we were in the hotel lobby gathered around a piano, played by a USO lady. Behind me I overheard a conversation between a Red Cross lady and a well dressed gentleman. He was telling her that he was leaving early next morning in a car and his destination was Frankfurt, Germany and did she know of anyone who would like to ride with him. I whirled around and said "say no more." "I and my two buddies would dearly like to ride with you. Anything will be better than that dirty German train." We were to meet him in the parking lot. He would be driving a blue Oldsmobile which he had been sent here to pick up. It was owned by the OSS which was the forerunner of the CIA. The car had been stolen.

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Oh boy, here we were, seated in a comfortable automobile and on our way back to Frankfurt in style and comfort. We were ecstatic. However, the trip didn't turn out as we expected.

I sat up front with the OSS man and learned right away that he was a notch above the ordinary bloke. He had led an interesting life.

After motoring for most of a day, the car engine began to cut out. He would press on the clutch and then let it out again and the engine would come back to life and we would get up speed again, but pretty soon it would cut off again and the same procedure would be repeated. However, we would gain less and less speed to the point that it quit completely. We three got out and pushed it across a narrow bridge and stopped in front of a German house. Darkness was settling in and we decided to inquire of those living there as to where was the nearest garage. The lady of the house answered our knock on the door and Shaky, the one from California, could speak German, so he talked to her and she summoned her husband to the door. So happened that he was a mechanic. He opened his garage door and the four of us pushed the car in. By now it was completely dark. He pulled a string and a dull light was emitted from a single bulb which hung from the ceiling. We were not very impressed. He removed the carburetor and proceeded to take it apart. We heard a sprung and a spring flew through the air and hit the floor. I said, "Oh No". The mechanic went down on the floor and began feeling around for the spring. At this point, we were pretty sure that this car would never run again. Apparently, the mechanic thought the same because he offered to tow us to an army base which was about 20 miles away. His car was an Opal made in Germany. He found a tow chain and attached it to the Oldsmobile after we got back on the road. Before he could move his Opal, he first had to start a fire in the heater which was mounted on a fender. All of this might sound strange and unbelievable to some, but the truth is that gasoline was practically impossible to obtain in Europe at this point in time, so some enterprising people altered the carburetor so that it would pass fumes from wood or coal into the engine. The engine did not generate as much power from these fumes as with gasoline, but they made the best of it. I don't believe we ever exceeded 20 miles per hour as we traveled to the army base. During the trip we came to a road block at a place where Germany and France joined. In other words we were at the French border and two French soldiers manned the checkpoint. We expected to be asked to

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show our papers but they did not. Instead they wanted cigarettes and candy bars and we complied generously.

It was well into the night when we arrived and bade our mechanic friend adios. We found the CO and gave him a full account of our problem. He promised to have it towed to their motor pool next day. In the meantime, we were ushered to the mess hall and then to the barracks for some sleep.

At the motor pool there were GI mechanics and also a German who was assigned to us. He too removed the carburetor, put it down into a container of gas, and pumped the lever up and down and a stream of gas squirted out. He said he may as well put it back on because it was working fine. He then road tested and it performed like a new one. So, we boarded and proceeded on our journey to Frankfurt. Soon we came upon another checkpoint. This one was manned by our own people, two enlisted men and a lieutenant.

The lieutenant was the spokesman and before he uttered a word, I noticed that he was giving our car the "once over." "A very nice car you guys have here," he said. Shaky (the California Kid), replied, "Yeah, don't you want to buy it?" I poked him in the ribs with my elbow and said, "Shut Up". We're in enough trouble already." (Due to our car problems, we were two days AWOL already). He asked to see our leave papers. I knew that the moment he looked at mine I would be in trouble. You see, I had been promoted to Spec. 4 which required three stripes down with a "T" beneath but our battalion commander told me to sew on my sleeves just three stripes down without the "T" because this way I could issue commands to my men and they would be obligated to obey me. My three stripes down indicated that I was a Buck Sgt. which was a line rating and only when we received a line rating could we give orders. So, my stripes on my sleeves indicated that I was a Buck Sgt. and my papers showed that I was a Spec. Sgt. (T) which was enough to cause suspicion.

The Lt. asked for the drivers' credentials first and noticed that he was AWOL. When he told the Lt. that he was an agent of the OSS he didn't believe a word of it, but he was convinced when he gave him the phone number of his superior officer and told him if he didn't believe him, to call that number and he would have his proof. That ended it and we went on our

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way. The car was not very cooperative, because it began to give us a repeat performance. However, we got into Frankfurt finally.

We unloaded our belongings, bided our OSS friend adieu and looked for a phone. I called my outfit and told them to send a jeep to pick us up. Soon we were back to good ole Bad SchwaBach.

I walked into my office and Sgt. Dougherty came in and started telling me about some trouble he was having with one of the guys who were always late for duty. I said, "Good Grief man, at least let me set my suitcase down before you begin telling of your problems, I'll attend to him tomorrow." I punished him by making him clean some dirty jeeps and $\frac{3}{4}$ tons, inside and out plus those greasy mud caked engines. I told him that later in the day I would personally inspect them and then Lt. Hudson (my superior) would inspect them also and if they weren't spotless he would clean them again. Later, I looked out my window (I was on the 3rd floor) and he had hired a young German boy to help him. I was amused at that and I passed on everything and he learned his lesson.

Label me cruel if you wish, but it's a fact that sometimes the punishment deserves extraordinary punishment in order to get your point across.

Four of my men went on a drinking spree and did some damage to some property; a bar as I recall. Their punishment was to spend the night in tents on the front lawn of the hotel in which we stayed. There was about four inches of snow on the ground at the time and the temperature was well below freezing. They learned their lesson also.

I attended a show at a theatre in town (Bad SchwaBach) which was definitely different than any I had seen before or since. The stage was completely black top to bottom. From the wings came a lady, "flying" gracefully through the air at a height of about six feet. She was wearing a white gown except for a black band around her waist. There was no visible support for her – no wires or ropes, etc., but by gazing intently just beneath her it seemed that I could catch a glimpse of something – just a flicker if there is such a word. I knew that she was not defying gravity and I was determined to figure this one out. Then suddenly I saw part of a hand appear just outside of the black band and then I knew that there was a man, a strong

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one at that, running from one end of the stage to the other and was dressed in black, with black gloves on his hands who held the lady up and he made a mistake and his black glove showed on her white gown. He did better than I could have thought.