
Shared Reminiscence

My World War II Experience: Part IV¹

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Greetings

Like millions of other 18-year olds, I received my "GREETINGS " letter from the President of the United States during the summer of 1943, informing me that I had been classified 1-A by the local Draft Board and would have to report for induction into the United States Armed Forces on August 3rd, 1943. On that day, I, with several other men from Hightstown, boarded a train at the passenger station in Hightstown for the trip to Camden, NJ. (I believe that the train was the local affectionately known as the UT which stands for The Union Transportation Company and for which my Grandfather Joseph Oubell was the engineer.) We were taken to the Armory where we were given physicals to determine if we were fit enough to serve in the Armed Forces.

After we passed the physical, we were interviewed by recruiters for the Army, Navy and Marines who tried to convince us to join their branch of the service. I remember being interviewed by each recruiter and deciding against the Navy and the Marines and accepted the invitation to join the Army. My primary reason for not selecting the Navy was that I had a feeling of the vulnerability of a person serving in a vast ocean, on a ship that would appear to the enemy to be a lonely target. I did not sign up for the Marines because they required that I would be sent to Boot Camp that very day and would not get a chance to return home before reporting for duty. I was not mentally prepared to do that although I felt proud of being considered fit enough to be accepted as a Marine. I declined. That left the Army which I accepted, probably for the reason that they gave a 21-day furlough before requiring that I report for active duty. I also, for some unknown reason, liked the Army and actually believed that serving in that branch would be safer than in the other two branches. How naive I was. In retrospect, I was an 18 year-old youth raised in a small town, protected by an extended family and even though I wanted to get into the war, I was not ready mentally to leave home that day. I thought that the 21-day furlough would give me time to adjust.

After being accepted by the Army, I joined my friends and others in a large room where we were sworn into the Service of the United States Armed Forces. I was instructed to report for active duty on August 24th, 1943. My group from Hightstown then were taken back to the train for the trip back to Hightstown. I remember how excited we were and pleased that none of us had been classified 4-F which would mean that for some reason a person was not deemed fit enough to serve in the military.

The 21 days passed quickly. Having said good-bye to family and friends and feeling especially sad with the thought that I did not know when I would see my girlfriend, Margaret Hoffman, again, my parents drove me to Princeton, NJ, the assembling point for draftees. We draftees boarded a bus and were transported to Fort Dix, New Jersey, to begin our military service. The day was Tuesday, August 24, 1943. I was no longer a civilian but now was a person who the Army was going to try to turn into a good soldier.

My first letter home was dated August 25, 1943, the first day after arriving at Fort Dix.

¹ This article is the fourth part of the author's memoir of his experience in World War II. Part 1 was published in Volume 2, Issue 1; Part 2 was published in Volume 3, Issue 1; and Part 3 was published in Vol. 4, Issue 2.

Dear Mother and Dad, We did not arrive at Fort Dix until the afternoon on Tuesday. After we arrived, we were fed, given our uniforms and assigned to a Company and to a barracks. I am now in Company B. We sleep in double deck bunks, and I am sharing one with a boy from Princeton. Today we were given the rest of our equipment and received three shots in the arm. We are not through with being processed yet but will be finished tomorrow. I do not know how long I will be here before I get shipped out to the place where I will receive Basic Training. It may be tomorrow or it may be a week from now. If I am here for 21 days, I might be able to get a weekend pass to go home. I have spent 16 cents since I have been here. Enclosed is my Government Insurance Policy which you are to keep. I will close here because we have "lights out" at 10 o'clock. We get up at 5:30.

Love,
your son,
George

I have included the entire first letter above but will not do so with the following. From this point forward my memoir will be excerpted from my letters home and drawn from my memory of events. I will present my story in the form of a diary.

August 28, 1943 (Saturday)

Today my processing was completed. Processing consisted of being issued clothing, getting various shots in the arm, taking tests and receiving quick physical and dental examinations. Yesterday I was put on K.P. (kitchen police which means working in the mess hall kitchen) with my bunkmate. We got up at 4:15 AM and did not quit work until 7 PM. My jobs were to scrub the floors, wash dishes including pots and pans and then help to bring the food to the servers who were working at the counter serving the endless line of men going through the chow line. The food was good. I was lucky to be assigned to this mess hall as it was the General Headquarters Mess where the food was the best and I got to eat all that I wanted. We had to scrub the floors for the second time before we could leave. It was now 7 PM. This was the longest day of work I have ever had.

August 31, 1943 (Tuesday)

Today my detail was to be a barrack orderly. That means that in the morning I helped clean the barracks including the latrine. The shots that I had received did not make me sick as they did with some of the others. We wash our own clothes and make our beds according to military requirements and then sleep on top of the beds so that we don't mess them up too much; that way we can straighten them up in the morning and only have to make them up completely three times a week. Already we were teaming how to take short cuts.

Bob, my bunkmate, and I have been to the movies twice and for the past three nights we have had apple pie and ice cream at the Service Club. When we go to the company chow we have to stand in line for at least forty minutes before being served. Today marks the beginning of the second week of the Army and I still like it so I guess that I will always like it.

September 1, 1943 (Wednesday)

At last we have settled down to the Army routine. We get up at 5:30 AM, make our beds and help clean the barrack. Then we go to breakfast. After eating, we come back to the barrack and wait for the call for detail. Detail is another word for morning assignment of work. Today, I am a barracks orderly. It is my job to clean the latrine. After cleaning the barracks we wait for inspection which is around 10:30 AM. After that we are free until dinner. After dinner, we go on afternoon detail which lasts until about 4:00 o'clock.

then we come back to supper. After supper we are free until 10 o'clock unless we are put on special detail.

Today I got my fourth shot instead of going on afternoon detail. Anything we do here requires standing in a long line. When it was my turn for the shot, I stood before the doctor and he asked me what I was waiting for and I said "the shot" and he said that he had just given it to me. He was very fast and it didn't hurt. I don't know how many shots he gives each day but it must be very boring for him but not for the guy receiving the shot.

September 2, 1943, (Thursday)

Last night Bob Hoffman and I discovered a new place to spend a pleasant hour. It is at the recreation hall. Here Jack Leonard and his orchestra (he had been a singer in the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra) play and they also put on a small show. The show "This is Fort Dix" is broadcast on the radio from here every Sunday. After we listened to his orchestra for awhile, we went to the open air stage where there was a variety show going on. All of this takes place outdoors and we all sit or lie on the ground and enjoy it. It sure doesn't seem like being in the Army, but things will change when we are shipped out to where we will receive our Basic Training.

Fort Benning, Georgia

September 4, 1943 (Saturday)

My letter home this day started with "Surprise! Here I am at Fort Benning, Georgia. I made the A.S.T.P. (Army Specialized Training Program). We left Fort Dix 7:15 AM Friday morning and arrived here at 4:30 PM Saturday.

At this point in time, I really didn't know what the A.S.T.P. program was all about or how I had gotten into it. I guess it had something to do with the tests that we were given at Fort Dix. The area in Benning that we were assigned to was only for the A.S.T.P.

My life was changing very rapidly now and this trip to Fort Benning was very exciting. Never having traveled far from home before, I wanted to describe the trip to Mom and Pop in great detail so that they could share it with me. This is what I wrote:

We took a Trenton Transit bus from Fort Dix to Trenton, then we got on a Washington train and rode to Washington. We got there at 1 P.M., ate and left on a Southern train by 1:30 P.M. The train was the dirtiest thing I was ever on. It was crowded so much that you could not walk up the aisle of the cars. There were fourteen of us shipped from Dix. Nine of us were put with 26 barracks bags full of our clothes in a space smaller than our bathroom at home. The coal dust covered us in a short time. (the engine for the train burned coal and the smoke and sparks coming from its chimney blew back over the train into the open car windows.) We ate on the train and then four of us finally got a seat. We sat up all night because we could not sleep. We passed through Virginia at 7:30 P.M. I do not care whether I ever see that state again. We continued through N.C. and S.C. and on into Georgia. It rained all the way to Georgia. We arrived at Atlanta, Georgia at about 8:00 AM. Here we changed trains. We ate breakfast in a small shop that wasn't very clean. To me, the South seems to be a very poor part of the country. We got on a better train in Atlanta and went to Columbus, Georgia where the Army met us and took us by truck to Fort Benning.

Most of the travellers were soldiers. We saw a lot of horses on the way. At Atlanta, we went into the U.S.O. while we waited for our train and they gave us free food, magazines and they had a phonograph radio playing there. They had a big map on the wall and every soldier was to stick a pin into his home town. There were thousands of pins in the map but none in Hightstown so I stuck one in there. I am very lucky because I am with two Peddie boys that I went to school with. Bob, my bunkmate, is still at

Fort Dix because he was not shipped with us. The country from Virginia to here is sparsely populated. It is very hilly and has many trees. The crops of Georgia are corn and cotton. The place is covered with pine trees and this state is the best that we passed through. The Negro population here is 3/4 of all the people. The southern accent started in Washington and has never stopped. We had four meals on the way. The food was not too bad. Out of the fourteen of us shipped here, five of us are in the A.S.T.P., the rest are in the Paratroops.

We are the first soldiers to arrive in the new part of Fort Benning built especially for the A.S.T.P. Our basic training, which is to last 13 weeks, will not start until our part of the fort is full. The ground here is all sand, the same as at the shore. It is very hot. The food so far has been better than at Fort Dix.

Tomorrow is Sunday and I guess we can sleep till noon. We do not have to eat breakfast, which is at 7:30 AM, but we are going to church at 9:45 AM. After that, I do not know what we will do. I guess we go to bed at 9 PM and get up at 6 AM. This fort is the largest in the United States. After our 13 weeks of basic training, which is for the infantry, we will be sent to school if we do not flunk out in basic training. I do not know anything about the schooling program but I know that you can flunk out of it very easily and if you do then you go back to some branch of the Army. It is not the infantry, but some branch which you are fitted for.

I am about 30 hours away from home and only a few miles from Alabama. Florida is also very close.

You will have to excuse my spelling and the order of my writing because I am in a hurry and am trying to remember everything that I can.

Basic Training

1st Platoon, 5th Co., 2nd Bn., 4th Tng. Regt.
ASTP BTC TIS
Ft. Benning GA (5 Sep 43 - 1 Jan 44)

I had now reached the place where I would be given Basic Training. At this point in time, I didn't know what that would entail, except that the training period would take 13 weeks. The area in which we were to receive Basic Training was relatively new. It was in a remote part of Benning and had been assigned specifically for ASTP candidates. Our Basic was to be the standard Infantry Basic Training and we were to be treated as any other draftee would be if not assigned to the ASTP.

Upon arrival in the training area, the group that I was traveling with was assigned to a platoon in our training company. The platoon listed above became my home for the next 13 weeks. I was assigned to the 1st platoon, 3rd squad and was told what barracks I would be in. A platoon has four squads and each squad has approximately 12 men not counting officers and non-coms. My squad was assigned to the second floor of the first barracks and we occupied all of the bunks on one side of the room and another squad occupied the bunks on the other side of the room. Two other squads occupied the first floor in the same manner. The non-commissioned officers, a sergeant, and two corporals occupied a small room at the end of the barracks on the first floor. The latrine was also on the first floor. One of the first shocks that I had was the lack of privacy in the latrines. The latrine served all of the approximately 50 men in the barracks. There were wash basins, toilet bowls, and a group of urinals lining the wall. One area of the room was partitioned as the shower and had a number of shower heads. The floor was concrete. All of this was in the open. There were no stalls or doors separating the different areas that would offer a minimum of privacy, and it took some time before most of us adjusted to this arrangement.

The other three platoons of our company were each assigned to a barracks identical to ours. The four barrack buildings were located on a quadrangle with two barracks on opposite sides and our mess hall on the third side. The area enclosed by these buildings became our training area where we learned how to drill,

do calisthenics, stand inspection, stand Reveille and Retreat and do anything else that was demanded of us. The only time that we left this area was when we went on hikes or went out into the field for training problems.

For the first few days after reaching camp, we were issued all of the clothing and equipment that we would need including our M-1 rifle and full field pack. We were shown how to make our beds, how to line them up to an invisible line on the barrack floor, how to fold our clothing and how to hang it up. We were told that the barrack had to be cleaned each morning before we went to breakfast and that we would scrub it down each Friday. Our shoes must always be shined, our clothes clean. We must be clean shaven each morning and when Reveille was played, we were to dress as quickly as possible to be ready to fall out into the quadrangle, where we would form up into platoon formation to answer to roll call. We would stand at attention and when the platoon sergeant called our name we would shout "HERE !!!". If all of this was not done properly, we were punished by being given extra duty like K.P. or losing a weekend pass to town.

September 8, 1943 (Wednesday)

Today when we were called out of the barracks, we were formed up in platoon formation and marched off to the camp barber shop where we were all given the famous G.I. haircut. The barber used only the clippers and shaved our heads in about two minutes. My hair was cut so short that I could not grab it with my fingers. Next, we were marched to a large building filled with long tables and chairs. When we were all seated, we were told that the rest of the day would be used to take tests. The tests were used to determine what specialty we would be considered for after completion of Basic Training when we would be sent to a college or university to continue our training. We were given three tests. One test was a general test, one a science test and the third a math test. The general opinion after taking the tests was that we were being considered for training as Engineers.

We were becoming very fast in our barrack cleaning now. We get up at 5:30 AM and by 10 minutes to 6, we have made our beds, washed and swept the floor, dusted, replaced the bed in line and touched up the room for inspection. After that, we fall out for roll call and when dismissed we go to breakfast. We were learning the routine very rapidly.

September 12, 1943 (Sunday)

Sunday is a day of rest for us at this time because we have not started our Basic Training yet. I could sleep as late as I wanted; however, to get breakfast I had to be at the mess hall at 7:00 AM. After breakfast, I washed all of my dirty clothes. That took about an hour and a half. Then I went to a church located in our area. The church could hold about 400 men. It had a Hammond Electric Organ and is played by any soldier who knows how to play. The service lasted about an hour and the sermon was given by a Protestant Chaplain.

After church, I went back to the mess hall for dinner. Today's dinner was very good. We had roast lamb, sweet potatoes, spinach, Grapeade, soup, bread, gravy and ice cream. The rest of the day I spent writing letters and getting ready for Monday morning.

September 14, 1943 (Tuesday)

Yesterday they told us how we made out on the tests we had taken. I passed them all and have been accepted to take the Basic Engineering course after Basic Training. The course consists of three twelve-week courses in Science, Physics and Math. If I pass these courses, I go to advanced engineering and if I pass those courses I get a chance to specialize in a branch of engineering. I have no idea how long the whole program will take. We will be tested very often and if I fail anywhere along the line, I will be sent back to the infantry or whatever branch I am best suited for.

Today I had KP. I was on from 4:30 AM. until 8:30 PM. It was quite a day. The work wasn't hard but my hands got as tender as if I had used a pick all day. It was my job to wash the pots and pans and the cooks use hundreds of them. Some of the pans are so big it is hard to lift them. I also had a crack at the great army pastime of peeling potatoes but not too many, just a 15 gallon can full. It was a long day but I got all that I wanted to eat.

We had a little work Sunday night. The lights go out at nine o'clock now by a new order and when it came time for them to be turned off someone started to yell and said something about the corporal and the corporal heard him. The corporal did not know who had shouted so he made us all fall out to the quadrangle and asked who had shouted. No one spoke up so the corporal said that the whole squad would work until the guilty person owned up or until someone pointed him out. We scrubbed two latrines and carried logs across the quadrangle and stacked them until 10:30 PM. Finally, we were sent back to bed so I guess that the guilty party confessed or was betrayed by someone.

This incident taught all of us that every infraction or failure to conform to orders would result in some form of individual or group punishment and that we had no recourse. Our platoon non-commissioned officers had the duty to carry out this policy. Most of them had been chosen because they had a sadistic nature and would carry out this policy. It was the Army's way of converting us from being civilians into being good soldiers who would obey authority without question.

September 20, 1943 (Monday)

The big day has arrived. Today we started our Basic Training. Up to this time, our training has not been organized and has consisted mostly of calisthenics, short hikes and a few lectures. From now on we would be put through organized training that would emphasize physical conditioning, proficiency in the use of weapons that we might be required to use, infantry tactics, and lectures regarding health, dress, conduct, and any and everything relating to survival during our training.

We were advised that by the end of basic, we would be required to hike 20 miles carrying full field packs and our weapons. We would have bayonet drills, run obstacle courses, crawl under barbed wire with machine guns firing live ammunition over us, go to the rifle range and qualify with our rifle (the M1) and carbine. We would also see demonstrations of mortar and artillery fire and see the Sherman Tank in action. The last five weeks of basic would be spent in the field on bivouac where we would live in two man tents, eat C rations except when our cooks would truck hot meals to us. There would be no electricity, running water, or indoor latrines. We would run field problems each day that were designed to simulate combat conditions. We would study and practice tactics for squads, sections, platoons and companies.

At the end of 13 weeks, if we survived the above training, there would be a small graduation exercise and a parade. We would then be given light duty until orders came for us to go to the location for our next training. We would leave Fort Benning a much different person than we were when we arrived and proud of it.

September 23, 1943 (Thursday)

Our first three days of basic were easy. We had a 2½ mile hike with rifle and light pack. That will be increased to five miles in a few days. Most of our time is taken up with classes and demonstrations. We are learning to do the Manual of Arms and Close Order Drill. When we are doing the Close Order Drill, I am amazed at how many of the guys don't know their right foot from their left. Every day we have up to an hour of calisthenics. That gives us quite a workout, and it is designed to build up our endurance.

Saturday, I and several of the guys I have made friends with, got passes to go into Columbus Ga. to see what it is like. We took the bus from Benning. The bus was so

crowded that I did not have to try to stand, I was so wedged in that there was no way I could fall. It took about a half hour to reach Columbus.

Columbus is supposed to be a big city but compared to Trenton it is quite small. The houses are old and some are very nice. We were there for about four hours and in all that time we only saw a couple of civilians; everyone else was in uniform. Many of the soldiers were officers, probably recent graduates from the Officers Candidate School at Fort Benning. It became very awkward for us because we had been told to salute all officers when we met them and to hold the salute until it was returned by the officer. Not wanting to run afoul of Military Protocol, we saluted all officers, even on the other side of the street. This got to be ridiculous and we soon decided to salute only those officers too close to ignore. I think that the officers appreciated that also otherwise we would be doing nothing but saluting; there would be no time for anything else. We walked around the town and went into three U.S.O.'s. They were crowded but nice and we got punch and cookies at each one of them. We all had ice cream sundaes at the first Candy Kitchen that we came to. That was a great treat. We had our biggest treat that night. We went into a U.S.O. and bought a big T-bone steak with French fries and a salad. It cost \$1.25 and was worth every penny of it.

September 30, 1943 (Thursday)

Today was the first time that I have been paid since entering the service. I received \$42.17. That's the most money that I have ever been paid at one time in my life. We get paid \$50.00 a month. Some of the other things that we are learning in Basic Training besides hiking and endurance are the basics of gas warfare, map reading, training of the individual soldier, squad and platoon tactics and things like that. The practical experience will come when we go on bivouac. I have also concluded that the most liked men here are the cooks and the mailman.

October 6, 1943 (Wednesday)

We had our first night problem last night. This problem was nothing more than a class in which they showed us how far sound carries, how far away you can see matches and how we should operate when working in the darkness. They marched us out at 8 P.M. and we got back at about 10:30 P.M. This afternoon we have a four-hour hike which means that it will be about a 7 to 8 mile hike. Next month we, that is the A.S.T.P. trainees, are going to be given our colors to wear on our uniforms. The shoulder patch will show what branch of the army we are in. Up to this time, we felt that we were a part of nothing and really couldn't have much pride in our outfit.

October 8, 1943 (Friday)

Tonight we had another night problem. We had to walk through about a mile and a half of Georgia swamp without a map, light, or guide. The object was to go through the swamp and go to a certain point where we were to meet with the others and then march back to the barracks. The morning before we had the night problem, the sergeant took us out to the swamp and led us through it placing pieces of paper along our trail which we were supposed to find when we repeated the walk that night. That night we found only one piece. On our morning trip most of the boys fell into the mud and water up to their waist. I did not fall in. That night everyone I fell in. I went in up to my knees. Two boys of the squad pulled me out because the suction held me so that I couldn't get out without help. I pulled another fellow out, he went in up to his waist. We finally got out and came to the meeting point. It took us about an hour and a half. It was so dark that we could not see the fellow 10 feet ahead or behind us.

On Friday we had our 10 mile hike. The last mile I felt as though I had two manhole covers tied to my feet. When we got to the barracks we staggered to our bunks and fell into them for the night. Most of us were asleep before our heads hit the pillow.

It is our platoon's turn to have K.P. again so I will get it sometime this week. There are four platoons and we rotate that duty every week. Every platoon feeds its own platoon better than anyone else when they go through the chow line. When we are on K.P., we get to dish out the food. Now that our fellows are on K.P., we sure are eating well. Last night we got so much that we could just about move.

We are also now being taught all of the tricks of hand to hand combat. The instructors show us the grips and demonstrate them and then we have to practice them on each other. We can't put too much into it because if we did, everyone would get hurt. Each maneuver is designed to injure or kill the enemy. We still throw each other around pretty well.

October 15, 1943

Today we had our fifteen-mile hike which took all day. We carried all of our equipment too. We walked to our bivouac area and put up our tents, and dug shelters into the ground. We ate out there and in the afternoon we came back to our barracks. During our march, we had about eight air raids in which planes dove on us in a strafing run. We ran like rabbits to take cover. Of course, they did not shoot at us but it really demonstrated how quickly we can be caught in the open by the fast moving planes. I guess we did not respond to the air raids quick enough because even though we had walked six miles to get back to the barracks we had to scrub them thoroughly to get ready for Saturday inspection. We came in first in the inspection and that means that we eat first next week.

October 20, 1943 (Wednesday)

We are in our fifth week of basic now and it is very interesting. The other day we had a forced march and we hiked 3½ miles in 48 minutes. Almost every day we go out into the field and stay all day. We eat in the field and come back to the barracks for supper. Last night we had a 4-hour night problem. We did not get back until after 1 A.M. This morning was supposed to be free time for us but we had to drill for an hour, have our company picture taken, and police up the area. Now we are waiting for chow call.

October 29, 1943 (Friday)

Tonight is the night that we scrub the barracks. I do not have to scrub because I have to stand guard for two hours. Standing guard is very formal. We have to look our best and have a very clean uniform, a clean rifle, and bayonet. Before we take our post, we are inspected by a lieutenant and then we have a very colorful changing of the guard when we relieve those presently standing guard at the post that has been assigned to us. Our posts are not very long but we have to walk around them for two hours. We have to stop everyone and ask them for the password before we can allow them to proceed. My hours are from 4 A.M. until 6 A.M. I have to sleep in my uniform but this is next to the best shift because I do not have to go back to bed after my guard tour. The good thing about being on guard duty is that you are boss of your area. You can challenge anybody when they enter the guard area. If they do not know the password they could be in trouble. In that case, we call for the Officer of the Day who responds to the problem.

November 3, 1943 (Wednesday)

Today was my birthday. I am now 19 years old. I don't feel any older yet but one thing that has increased with my age is my appetite. I guess that I eat twice as much as I ever did before. At home, I was a very picky eater. I learned very quickly that in the army if you don't eat what is presented you don't eat at all. I now am eating things that I had not seen before. There are two things that I just cannot get down and they are mustard greens and hominy grits, two of the favorites in the South. I always go through the chow line at least twice if possible. Tonight, I had 6 hot dogs, 2 helpings of creamed potatoes, 4 slices of bread, 2 plates of apple pudding, a glass of water and 2 cups of coffee. Since I have been here at Benning, I have gained about 15 pounds. I got several packages from

home and lots of birthday cards. It is always a real treat to get packages from home and letters and cards because it makes me feel as though I am still connected to my home.

Our training continues. We are now learning how to fire our rifles on the range. All week long, we haven't done anything but practice sighting the weapon at the target, pulling the trigger and getting into the firing position. There are four firing positions. They are standing erect, kneeling, lying prone on the ground and sitting. Each position requires that the rifle be held in a certain way locked to the body so as to eliminate any wavering when sighting the target. The position of the body, legs, and arms is well defined for holding the rifle and sighting the target. Some of the positions are very difficult to get into and hold especially if the body is not used to being bent that way. We do not have bullets in the rifle and have to imagine that we do as we squeeze the trigger.

November 8, 1943 (Monday)

We are now on bivouac. We left our camp yesterday and marched about 9 miles with our full field packs, rifle, rifle belt, and full canteen. I had carried a full field pack before but this time it contained a blanket and food in the form of C rations. The equipment weighed over 60 pounds. It seemed like a ton at the end of the day. After hiking the 9 miles, we had to pitch tents, dig a hole in the ground to protect ourselves from airplane attack and cook our supper. C rations are canned food that only has to be heated before eating. I think that there were three choices. We had corned beef hash, beef stew, and hot dogs and beans. The size of each can is approximately half the size of a can of Campbell soup. Everyone said that it didn't taste too good, but I didn't mind it. It looked like something that would be given a dog at home but you can't see it at night; all I had to do was heat it and eat it. As soon as it got dark, we had to go into our tents and try to sleep because there was nothing else to do. The hard ground felt good.

At 3:30 AM we got up and broke camp. We hiked 2 hours in the dark. Most of us were still asleep but we followed the fellow in front of us. We got to our next camp at 9 AM. Now we would be living in 6-man tents and would be sleeping on cots instead of on the ground. We will be here for two weeks and then we will have to hike the 16 miles back to our barracks. While we are here we will learn how to fire our rifles, and that is what we are all looking forward to doing.

November 12, 1943 (Friday)

We are still on bivouac, and it has rained for 4 straight days. Monday was the first day on the firing range. We were out there all day. We go out to the range at 7 AM in the dark and don't come back until 7 PM in the dark. I have not gotten to bed before 11:30 PM this week. We have to clean our rifles every day after we come back to camp and it takes a lot of time. Tuesday we fired our rifles for experience and Wednesday we fired for our record. The targets are 200, 300, and 500 yards away. The highest score possible is 210. To be classified as an expert you must score 180 or more; to be a sharp shooter you must score 165 or better and to be classified a marksman you must score 140 or better. I am just a plain marksman because I scored 164 just 1 point less than sharp shooter. I was very disappointed because I thought that I would be a good shot. There are 6 men in our platoon who qualified as experts. The first day we fired all day in the rain and my score was 175, but that was for practice and it did not go on my record. While I was shooting for record and was firing at my last target 500 yards away the sight on my rifle came apart and I could not take time to fix it. Each time we fired at the different targets we had to fire so many rounds in a given time. I had no time to repair the sight and had to keep firing so I sighted down the barrel of the rifle. I still hit the target but not well enough to get the extra points I needed to be a sharp shooter.

We are still in our tents, and of course there was no electricity; we have one candle in our tent. There are no fires and it is cold now. We sleep in our clothes and pile everything that we have on top of us. Every night I have to shave in the dark with cold

water. We get two canteens of water a day for washing and for drinking. We are really in the rough now. We have frost every night even though it is warm during the day. I didn't expect that we would have frost in Georgia. We eat out in the field when we are doing our problems and we have learned to clean our mess kits with sand.

Today we had to take a bath. The only place for this was in a stream that ran near our camp. We went out there and built a fire before we jumped into the stream. The water in the stream was as cold as ice. After we had finished we really felt good.

Yesterday we went to a firing range where there were targets shaped like men located at various distances from the firing line. We had to estimate the distance to each silhouette, adjust the sight on our rifle and fire at the targets. We had 2 minutes to hit 6 targets with 10 shots. I estimated that the targets were at 200, 250, 300, 350, 400 with a final target at 450 yards. I hit the first 5 with 5 shots. I could not see the target at 450 yards so I did not shoot at it. I went back to the 350 yard target, hit it 3 times and missed once. Time ran out before I could fire my last round.

While on the range, we also had to fire the machine gun. We practiced firing in the morning and in the afternoon we fired for record. The perfect score is 260. To qualify for expert we must get 218, to be a first class gunner the score must be 200 and to be a second class gunner we must get 180. I am a second class gunner because my score was 192. I missed two of the targets. The machine gun certainly is a good weapon.

We also had to fire the mortar. This class is not too good because we only had one round for every three men. We were instructed how to set up the mortar, how to estimate distances to targets and how to adjust the distance controls on the mortar and how to drop the mortar shell down the mortar tube. Each man got to set up the mortar and adjust the range control but only one man of each group of three got to drop the shell down the tube. We all learned to duck.

One of the final things that we did while on bivouac was to go through the course that we had waited two weeks for. It was called "the mentally conditioning course". It is a good experience and I had seen it performed in movie newsreels at home when the public was shown what the trainees were being taught during Basic Training.

We had to take the course at night. The course required that we crawl 75 yards under live machine gun fire. We crawled under barbed wire and while we were crawling, quarter-pound blocks of explosives were detonated around us. The object is to get us familiar with the sound of the bullets as they passed overhead and the explosives which simulate artillery shell fire. I was right next to an explosive when it went off. It threw dirt and dust all over me, but it didn't bother me because I knew that this was only a test. Besides, the explosives were buried in the ground and each one was surrounded by barbed wire to prevent anyone from actually crawling on them. The explosives are set off by observers using electrical charges. The machine guns fired tracers mixed in with the regular bullets. When the tracers passed overhead we could see the light given off by them. Each machine gun was fired by a trained gunner and the gun was blocked in such a way that it could not be depressed below a certain level; therefore we were safe unless we got up on our knees or stood up. Of course, we did not know that at the time we took the test.

We had demonstrations with the bazooka. I did not get to fire one but I did get to hold it and aim it.

Our first bivouac training was now over. We left our camp at 4 PM in the afternoon and hiked 16 miles back to our barracks. We got in at 9:30 PM and boy were we tired. We hiked the 16 miles without stopping. This morning I could just about walk because my feet are so tired. I am very lucky because I did not get blisters like some of the other fellows did.

November 23, 1943 (Tuesday)

We have been resting in the barracks for two days except for doing our usual details. Today we went to the Carbine Range to fire that weapon for our personal record. I qualified as a sharp shooter with a score of 171 out of a possible 200. We will not be going out on bivouac again until after Thanksgiving dinner.

November 25, 1943 (Thursday, Thanksgiving Day)

The Army had made a promise that every soldier in the United States Army, no matter where he is, China, the South Pacific, Europe or anywhere would have turkey for Thanksgiving so we will eat good today. For the first time since I have been here we are going to eat off of china in the mess hall instead out of our mess kits. There are about 260 pounds of turkey for 250 soldiers in our company. We had turkey, mashed potatoes, stuffing, salad, peas, corn, gravy, rice, cranberry sauce, bread, biscuits, lemonade, pumpkin pie, ice cream, fruit salad, three cookies and an orange. We also had coffee for those who wanted it. It was quite a meal and we all were stuffed afterward.

December 2, 1943 (Thursday)

We are now on our final two weeks of bivouac. We are living in two-man pup tents and the ground is our bed. We are not allowed to have any lights so as soon as it gets dark we go to bed. Almost every night we have a night problem. Our meals are prepared back in the barracks and brought out to us at meal time. Everything that we do is tactical; we must be quiet at all times, we cannot have any lights, we cannot make new trails, we cannot stand around in groups, and the problems that we are to run are designed to make it seem as though we are in actual combat. The final phase of this bivouac will be an all-night problem that will last about 30 hours and then the bivouac will be over and we will return to our barracks.

December 12, 1943 (Sunday)

We are back in the barracks at last. We had our final 30-hour problem which actually lasted 42 hours. The problem pitted two companies against each other. Each company was supposed to scout the other and determine where its lines were and to locate its weapons and, if possible, its headquarters. After this information was acquired, the companies were supposed to develop a plan to attack the other. Our officers were to lead our attack against the other company while at the same time the other company was trying to do the same to us. After a certain time limit, the problem was ended and referees who had been observing the two companies and their activities had a conference to decide which company had won the battle. It was a little humorous at times when we would capture some of the men in the other company and tell them to surrender and they would just turn and run away. We would run after them shouting BANG-BANG simulating shooting at them. It was kind of silly and reminded me of playing cowboys and Indians when we were kids. Of course, we had to do it this way because no live ammunition was used during the problem.

After the problem was over we hiked back to our barracks and were happy to get there.

December 15, 1943 (Wednesday)

There only three days of basic left. Tomorrow we go on our 20-mile hike. Friday, we have tests to determine how physically fit we are. We have to do 33 push-ups, run 300 yards in 45 seconds, carry someone our own weight 75 yards in 21 seconds. After we do this, we have our forced hike that requires we hike four miles in 50 minutes carrying a full field pack and all of our other equipment. Saturday, we graduate, I hope. I still do not know where or when I will be shipped to a new location after the conclusion of Basic Training. It seems certain that I will still be here at Christmas.

December 16 & 17, 1943 (Thursday and Friday)

We have now completed our final 2 days of basic. We completed the 20-mile hike in eight hours. We hiked 10 miles in the morning, ate dinner, and hiked 10 miles in the afternoon. They brought our chow out by truck.

We completed our physical fitness tests described above and I scored 100%. I did the 33 push-ups in 20 seconds. I ran the 300 yard test in 47 seconds which was 2 seconds over the limit but I still got 100% because only a few made it in the required time. I carried someone my size and weight 75 yards in 17 seconds. This was 4 seconds faster than required. Another test required that we run, crawl and creep 60 yards in 30 seconds; I made it in 25 seconds. After we completed these tests we had to do the 4-mile forced hike in 50 minutes. It took us 52 minutes. The reason for this was that we were a little slow on our start. We were plenty tired when we finished and to keep our spirits up they gave us a lot of exercises to do.

December 18, 1943 (Saturday)

Today was the last day of basic. Our basic is over and boy am I glad. One thing that I have gotten out of my training is a little weight and good health. Today we had an inspection that lasted all morning. This afternoon we had our Graduation Review before Lieutenant Colonel Jacobs, our Battalion Commander. As a climax to completing basic, we are restricted to our barracks for the J weekend because we did not have a good inspection this morning. Never let it be said that those in charge of basic would complement us for doing a good job.

Christmas is rapidly approaching, and today I received a sleeveless sweater from Peg. I wrote to Robert and asked him to get a present for her for me and to send it to me so that I could then send it to her. That is really long-range Christmas shopping. I had to resort to this method because I had no chance of getting into Columbus to shop for a present since we were restricted to our barracks for the weekend that would have been our final opportunity to go into Columbus.

December 24, 1943 (Friday)

We are doing nothing now but waiting around getting ready to leave here. I still don't know when or where I will be sent. We have scrubbed the barracks until they are spotless. My shoes shine like glass and there isn't anything left for us to do. Today we had two hours of drill and exercise and then we were sent into the barracks and told to look busy. Tonight is Christmas Eve but it doesn't seem like it. We have decorated our barracks with Christmas decorations and a Christmas tree. Tonight I think I will go over to the Service Club to watch the Christmas program that they are sure to have. We are going to have a good dinner tomorrow and it should be exactly the same as our Thanksgiving dinner. Today the weather outside is very wintry and if I were home I would say that it is going to snow in about 1/2 hour.

Rumor has it that we are going to be shipped out of here on the 28th. That is not definite but it gives us hope of getting out of here.

December 30, 1943 (Thursday)

I am still at Fort Benning. I hope that this will be the last time that I will have to say that. All that I have done for the last two weeks is lie around in the barracks. I have found out that I am going to go to school but I don't know where it will be or how long I will be there; that will depend on my ability to pass the subjects that I will have to take. I have been to the movies here at the camp a lot lately. It is a great way to kill time.

My stay at Fort Benning was finally over. I had survived Basic Training and was now on my way to Niagara University located in Niagara Falls, New York for the next

phase of my military experience. Looking back at Basic Training, I have concluded that it wasn't too difficult.

Niagara University and the A.S.T.P

Basic Training was over and now I was being sent to Niagara University located in Niagara Falls, New York. It was here that I would participate in the Army Specialized Training Program better known as the A.S.T.P.. I knew very little about this program except that it was to give us an accelerated college education in special fields. Aptitude tests we had taken during basic training indicated which we were best suited for and which the army had special needs for. I had never heard of Niagara University and had no inkling of where Niagara Falls, N.Y. was located in that state. I had heard of Niagara Falls before but only in reference to honeymoons and the place where some adventurers tried to go over the falls in a barrel.

I, with 29 others from our basic training company, had shipped out from Fort Benning on January 1, 1944. After arriving at Niagara University, I wrote home to tell Mom and Dad where I was. My letter dated 1/4/44 follows.

January 4, 1944 (Tuesday)

I have been shipped at last and am now stationed at Niagara University, Niagara Falls, N.Y. There are 29 of us from Benning and a lot of others from different basic training bases.

Our group left Fort Benning on January 1st at about 11:30 A.M. We were the third shipment to go. The others left on December 30th and 31st. We hiked five miles to the train station. It was one hike that no one minded taking. The train was an eight-car troop train and each car held groups of men who were going to the same schools. All of the men shipped out that day were not going to the same school. The train broke up at Cincinnati, Ohio where each car that held guys going to the same school was coupled to a different train that was to take it to the city in which their assigned college or university was located.

We went into Alabama from Columbus, Ga. Alabama looked to be the same as Georgia with its red clay soil and pine trees. When we went through Birmingham it was night and we could see the glow of the big steel mills there. I fell asleep just after we left Birmingham and didn't wake up until we were in Kentucky. I didn't see any of Tennessee. The whole state of Kentucky was covered with snow and it did look good. I guess we left the red clay and pine trees in Tennessee because Kentucky has nice dark soil and oak trees. Kentucky seems like a nice place with its small towns and painted houses. Some of the houses that we could see in the distance still had Christmas tree lights showing through the windows and that looked good in the dark of the night.

When we passed through Louisville, our train was about nine hours behind schedule. It was about 5 P.M. when we crossed the Ohio River and came into the Cincinnati station. It certainly did feel good to be up north again. When we left Cincinnati it was dark again, and we were able to see the arc lights from the Cincinnati stadium. By the time we got to Cleveland it was about 1 A.M. and the engineer drilled the train there for about an hour. He was uncoupling cars to be transferred to different trains and coupling cars from other trains that were going to Niagara Falls. The train jerked so much we all had to hang on to something to keep from being thrown out of bed. We got into Niagara about 9 A.M. on January 3rd and were bussed to the university which is about 3 miles from the city of Niagara Falls. Canada is across the Niagara River which is very near the university.

The university is small but the buildings are swell. Our living quarters couldn't be better. We have been told that the food here is very good, even better than we received at Fort Benning. Our classes start on Monday so I will have to wait to see what that will be all about.

It sure is good to be north again. On December 31st, there was a shipment of 82 men from Benning to Princeton University but it was not in the books for me to go there.

Upon arrival at the university, all of us from Fort Benning were assigned to the different dormitories that had been set aside for our A.S.T.P. company. There were four dorms located on a quadrangle a short distance from the main building of the university. There were four rooms in each dorm, two on the first floor and two on the second floor.

Six men were assigned to each room. In addition, there was a complete bathroom on each floor. Each bathroom had a number of wash basins, several enclosed toilets which offered privacy and a shower area with several shower heads. All in all, the layout gave us a good degree of privacy which was welcomed after the complete lack of it at Benning.

I was assigned to a room on the second floor of house number 1. The room contained three double-decker beds and two tables to work at. I think that we had foot lockers for our clothes. Six men filled the room; it was crowded, but we managed. My five roommates were Donald Dickenson, Robert Doerr Jr., John Eykholt, Jim Stern and Howard Brahman. We all became friends and Don Dickenson and Bob (Red) Doerr and I became buddies and did many things together while at Niagara. We did not know it at the time but eventually all of us would be sent to the 104th Infantry Division at Camp Carson located at Colorado Springs, Colorado, where we would be separated. Three of my roommates did not survive the war. Jim Stern was killed in a training accident at Camp Carson. John Eykholt was killed during our combat in Holland and Howard Brahman was killed during combat in Germany near the end of the war. Howard was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for bravery in action. This award is second in rank only to the Congressional Medal of Honor. Don and Red got through combat without injury. At this time in our training, none of us was worried about the future except that we might flunk out of the program. We were having a good time at the university and it sure didn't seem like we were in the Army. Don, Red and I have remained friends even to this day. We were reunited a few years ago at one of the 104th Infantry Division's annual reunions.

Our A.S.T.P. company was centered around the four dormitories. Everything that we did originated there. We were in effect segregated from the civilian students, even in the classroom. There were no civilian students in our classes. I think that this was due to the fact that we were participating in a very accelerated learning program. I don't remember where the civilian students were housed and in fact, I don't remember seeing many of them at all.

Our classrooms were located in one large building located across the campus from where we lived. Classes started at 8 A.M. and ended at 4:00 P.M. every day including Saturday. Our subjects were Algebra, Physics, Chemistry, Geography, Trigonometry, History, English, Military Science and Physical Training. We had a lot of homework to do each night and most of us worked at it until lights out at 11 P.M. After the last class on Saturday, we were free until 10:45 P.M. Sunday. We were given passes that were good to travel anywhere within 100 miles of the campus and Don, Red and I went to Buffalo N.Y. several times to see big band concerts or basketball games. Our schedule for learning was pretty intense but the reward was great. We learned that if we did not flunk out of the program we would stay at Niagara for 9 months and then be transferred to another school for 9 months of advanced study. At the end of all of this we would graduate and be commissioned as second lieutenants.

The military side of this experience was not too difficult. Military discipline was in effect all of the time. We dressed in our winter O.D. (olive drab) uniforms. We got up each morning at 6 A.M. in response to the bugle call "Reveille" We dressed quickly and fell outside in front of our dorm to a company formation for roll call. Each platoon was led by a non-student sergeant and the company commander was a non-student captain. After roll call, we went back into the dorm to make our beds and clean the room. Spot check inspections were made during the week and a white glove inspection was made each Saturday. Niagara Falls was very cold while we were there with most days being below freezing and very often being down to zero degrees. Falling out for roll call felt like a slap in the face especially when there was snow on the ground. After morning inspection we fell out to company formation and marched across campus to the dining room for breakfast and did not return to our dorm until our classes ended at 4 P.M. At the end of the day we formed up and marched back to our dorm for a break. At 5 P.M., we fell out again into company formation for the Retreat ceremony during which our flag is taken down and upon being dismissed our official day was ended. We then went to dinner in the school dining room if we so desired.

Our military duties were very light. We did not have to stand guard at any time. There was no K.P. duty. We found out that this was because the food service to the university was supplied by Howard Johnson. When weather permitted, we did a little close order drill and went on hikes two to three miles long. On these occasions we wore fatigues, field jackets, cartridge belts with water canteens attached, and slung over our shoulder we carried our gas masks. We never carried a weapon and had not had one since we turned them in at the end of basic training. Most of our exercise was achieved during the physical training class which consisted of an hour-long series of strenuous exercises led by an expert who wanted to make sure we did not lose our muscle tone gained in basic training.

I have forgotten how it came about but on Thursday, January 6, 1944 I was given a weekend pass starting at mid-night, Jan. 7th which was good to travel anywhere within 50 miles from Niagara Falls. The reason for issuing the pass was probably because all of the men needed to fill our class hadn't arrived and there was nothing scheduled for those of us who were there so passes were issued to get rid of us for a few days if we wanted to take advantage of the pass. Several of the men lived within 50 miles of the school, and they jumped at the chance to go home. I had not been home since going into the army and decided to take a chance that no one would check my pass and see that it was restricted to a 50-mile limit and go home even though home was more than 500 miles away. The risk was worth it if I could get to see my girlfriend if only for a few minutes.

After Retreat on Thursday night, I took a bus to Buffalo, N.Y. to get to the New York Central Train Station. I went to the U.S.O. in the station and there a hostess looked at the train schedule and found that a train was leaving for New York City at midnight. I had several hours to wait for the train so the hostess suggested that I go to one of the couches and take a nap and that she would wake me in time to catch the train. True to her word, she woke me in time to board the train.

It was very crowded, but I managed to get a seat. The trip to New York took about five hours, and I was nervous the whole time afraid that the M.P.s riding the train would check my pass and charge me with being A.W.O.L. (absent without leave). I must have looked innocent because no one looked at my pass. From Grand Central Station in New York City, I got over to Penn Station and took a train to Princeton Junction, N.J and from there hitch hiked to Hightstown arriving home unannounced early Friday Morning. What a surprise it was to everyone. It was great to be home. I think that before the weekend was over all of my relatives that lived near-by came to see me.

The best part of the visit was that I got to see my girlfriend, Peg Hoffman, on Friday and Saturday nights. That made the trip worthwhile and lifted my spirit, and confirmed what I already knew, that I was in love with her. Sunday afternoon Mom and Pop took me to Princeton Junction to catch the 5:17 P.M. train to Pennsylvania Station, NYC. I took a taxi from Penn Station to Grand Central. About a half hour after I got there the other fellows that came down from Niagara arrived and we all caught the train back to Buffalo. This time the passenger cars were not crowded and I got a soft reclining seat. I slept for most of the trip back.

We arrived in Buffalo a little before 8:00 P.M. The train for Niagara was due to leave at 8:50 P.M. and I arrived back at Niagara at 10:30 P.M. It had been a great trip and even though I was dead tired (the return trip had taken about 14 hours), I was ready for my first class which was to start Monday morning. Classwork was very hard for most of us in the beginning. The civilian professors were good and covered a lot of ground during their class. They also assigned a lot of homework and tested us almost every day to make sure that we were not goofing off.

The most difficult subject for me was physics. It certainly was far different than the physics class I had had in high school. We studied till midnight most of the time in order to get the work done and some of the guys studied longer. After a few weeks, an order came down that lights had to be out at 11 P.M. to prevent some from studying all night. At the end of each week, we were given a test to be graded for the record. At the end of each month, we got slips showing us our grades to date for each course and to alert us if we were near flunking out of the program. My grades were not great but I managed to pass every course with an average grade of 74.

All of our time at Niagara was not spent studying. On weekends, after classes ended, Don, Red and I usually took a bus into the city of Niagara Falls and went to a restaurant for a meal and then to a movie. Niagara Falls was a nice city. The local people were very friendly and treated us, who were in uniform, very well. It was not like Columbus, Ga where every person on the street was in uniform and the locals sort

of resented us. There were no large military bases nearby so we in uniform did not overwhelm the city. One of the first things that we did when we arrived at the bus stop which happened to be right in front of a coffee and donut shop, was to go into the shop, sit at the counter and have a hot cup of coffee and several donuts from the good selection that they had. Today a coffee shop like this one would be called "Dunkin' Donuts," but this was years before they were even thought of. What made this first stop so good was that Niagara Falls was very cold and the hot coffee immediately warmed us up.

Of course, while we were in the city we went over to look at the falls. They were really impressive, especially this time of the year when the spray from the falls that covered everything was frozen. At the bottom of the falls, the buildup of the frozen spray created mountains of ice as high as 40 feet along the banks of the Niagara River. The three of us climbed down to the Niagara River, downstream from the falls, on several occasions and took pictures of the falls from below. I still treasure the pictures of the three of us standing on the river bank. It was a lot of fun.

The warmth of the locals to make our stay at Niagara pleasant was expressed in many ways. The nurses at Mount St. Mary's School for Nurses on two occasions sent an invitation to our captain inviting our class to attend dances at their school. The captain, at one of our formations, read the invitation to us and told us in no uncertain terms that he would accept the invitation for us and that we were all going whether we liked it or not. A poor turnout by us would be an insult to the school and he would not stand for it. Needless to say, we all went to the dances and had a great time.

On another occasion, The Fraternal Order of The Eagles at Lockport, N.Y. invited us to a dance to be held at their Lodge Hall. Again, our captain accepted for us and the Lodge sent a bus to take us to the dance and then to bring us back to the university. The Lodge had obtained a live orchestra to provide the music and there was plenty of food and lots of girls, many were daughters of the Lodge members. Again, we had a great time. Our captain, being so sensitive to hurting the feelings of the locals who were being so good to us, organized a dance to be held in the gym at the University and invited the Lockport people to attend. Again, we had no option of not attending, but then no one wanted to miss it. We all had a great time.

Our captain was older than we were by a few years and he was all spit and polish. He probably made the army his career. I can't remember his name but we had given him the nickname of "Coat Hanger Joe" because his uniform was always pressed with creases where they should be, and he wore it proudly. His posture was straight up, shoulders back and chest out. He looked good and we were envious. His uniform fit him so perfectly that it looked like he had a clothes hanger across his shoulders and thus, he earned the affectionate nickname of "Coat Hanger Joe" used by us only when he could not hear us.

Everything was going along smoothly and it was now the middle of February. All of us were receiving passing grades, plenty of mail was coming from home and we were receiving many "care packages" from home filled with good things to eat. Then we heard rumors that the A.S.T.P. program was going to be terminated. Articles appeared in the newspapers confirming that the rumors were true. Our captain informed us that we would be shipped out of Niagara by April 1st. Don, Red and I learned that there was an Army Air Force program similar to the A.S.T.P. being conducted at Fort Niagara which was not far from our university and that we might be able to transfer into it. We decided to try. We went to the fort and filled out the applications for transfer, had an interview, were given a blood test and chest x-ray. We were told that we would be scheduled for a complete physical examination in a few days and that if we passed the physical the chance for the transfer was good. We returned to the university with a feeling of optimism. Unfortunately, a few days later, a notice was received that all transfers were stopped and that when our class was terminated we would all be sent to an army infantry division somewhere in the United States.

Classes continued but the enthusiasm was gone. All of us still tried to get good grades because at the end of March we were to be given an exam to determine if we had passed the first three-month term of the program. I think that our teachers realized where we were going and eased up on us a little. When the final exam was scheduled for April 1st we felt pretty certain that we would not be shipped out until then. On Friday March 4th, I got a weekend pass and once again used it to go home to see my parents and especially my girlfriend Peg Hoffman. I was dead tired when I got back to school on Monday, but it was worth it just to see Peg. I got back just in time for my first class in the morning. I walked into the classroom put my head down on the desk and fell asleep. The professor was very understanding of our situation and gave me a passing grade for his course.

The last week in March we took our last exams. They were four hours long. We all passed and were issued certificates indicating that we had successfully completed the first term of our schooling. If the program would not have been terminated, we would have continued for another three-month term. At the end of every term of school there is always a big banquet paid for out of company funds. We had ours and it was a special turkey dinner. During the days following the banquet we were sort of killing time waiting to be shipped out.

March 20, 1944 (Monday)

Today we were told that we would be shipped out of here this Sunday, March 26th. I thought that we would be at Niagara until April 1st as earlier rumors had it. We don't know where we are going and other rumors have it that we are getting three Pullman cars on a train for three days and two nights. This time the rumor might be true because there is a strong feeling that we will be traveling west.

March 26, 1944 (Sunday)

This morning we boarded buses that took us to the train station in Niagara Falls. It was a clear, warm, sunny day. We boarded a troop train and rumors still had it that we were headed west, where to and to what was still a mystery. I had been at Niagara University for almost three months and was kind of sad to be leaving Niagara Falls but not as much as some of the guys who had fallen in love with some of the local girls. There were a few tearful farewells on the station platform. Finally, the train pulled out and we were headed to a new destination, unknown to us, and I was anxiously wondering what the new camp would be like.

Camp Carson and the 104th Infantry Division

I left Niagara Falls by train on Sunday March 26, 1944. The ASTP program had been terminated and I, with my buddies and other classmates, were being sent to a new base to rejoin an army unit which would undoubtedly be an infantry unit. None of us knew where we were headed but rumor had it that it would be somewhere in the West. I don't remember too much about the train or the trip except that I was on a troop train and the accommodations were pretty good. It was better than traveling on a regular passenger train because everyone had a seat, and there was no standing in the aisle as was common on a regular passenger train serving the general public during the war. We slept in bunks and ate our meals in shifts in a dining car. I don't remember having to do anything other than look out of the train windows at the passing countryside. That, in itself, was enjoyable to me because I had not seen much of the country before going into the army. As was my custom at that time, I wanted to tell Mom and Pop about the trip and what I was seeing so while we were traveling I wrote them a letter detailing the trip as best as I could. The following letter, dated March 29th, was my effort to tell them what I was seeing.

Well we are almost to our new camp now. Although we still haven't been told where we are going, we know that it might be some camp in Colorado. By the time we reach Colorado I will have gone through eighteen states since going into the army. We left Niagara at 12 noon Sunday. The weather was perfect, just like a spring day. Saturday, I saw two robins there. Everyone was sorry to leave there except the fellows that live out west and there are only a few of them. We went through Buffalo and down to Jamestown NY and then over to Meadville, Pa. It was getting dark when we started through Ohio so I couldn't see much of it.

When we woke up the next morning we were in Chicago and also in a new time belt. The time in Chicago is one hour earlier than in NJ so we were able to sleep one hour longer. We couldn't see much of Chicago, but it is a big place. We found out from the porter that we had passed through Akron, Mansfield, Kenton and Lima, Ohio and Huntington, Rochester and Gary, Indiana during the night. After we left Chicago, we went through Elgin and a lot of small towns in Illinois. It was very cold in Chicago and

there was snow on the ground. Starting in Indiana the ground starts getting flatter than a pancake.

Yesterday at about noon we crossed the Mississippi River and entered Iowa. The Mississippi river has overflowed its banks where we crossed and there were hundreds of acres under water. Iowa is slightly hilly in the eastern part but as we came west it got very flat. You can look across the plains and see for miles. The towns here are small and far between. No matter where you look, you see a farm house but they are so arranged that they are two or three miles apart. The chief crop is corn and we have seen some hogs. Some of the towns that we passed through in Iowa were Vinton, Tama, Ames, and I think Council Bluffs. It was dark again when we went through Nebraska, but I had to stand fire guard from 2 AM till 4 AM so I was awake when we hit Lincoln. It is a pretty big city, but I couldn't see much. It was snowing here too. We also went through Omaha. Since then we have been going slightly south through Hastings and down to McCook. At McCook, the time belt changed again so now we are two hours behind you. The U.S.O. at McCook brought a lot of cookies and cigarettes on the train for us. We can't leave the train and boy did the cookies taste good. We are now a few hours from McCook and we should reach Denver this afternoon.

It is starting to get hilly again here in southern Nebraska and I guess it will be very hilly around Denver. I will finish this letter when I reach the new camp. When you send me a letter send one air mail and one the usual way. I want to see which one gets here first.

Our train is a troop train but it is a lot better than the other ones that I have been on. We have regular beds and good washing facilities. I almost wish the trip would last a day longer. You will have to excuse my writing but it is not all my fault, the train is rocking like a lifeboat and that doesn't help.

Well, I guess this is all for now. When we reach camp, I will put my new address on this letter and mail it. So long until later.

Our train trip ended during the evening of March 28th when we reached the train station in Colorado Springs, Colorado. We had been on the train for two days. The order was given for us to gather our gear, meaning our duffle bags, and get off the train.

Once off the train we were organized into columns and marched to an area where trucks or busses, I don't remember which, were waiting for us. Once we were loaded, we were driven to our new camp located about 10 miles from Colorado Springs. The name of the camp was Camp Carson, and it was to be my home for the next six months.

It was about 10 PM when we arrived at the camp. It was a very dark night and cold. We all went into a building where we were classified and assigned to a unit in the infantry division that we were joining. It was here that I was separated from my two buddies. Bob Doerr was sent to the 413th Regiment, I was assigned to the 414th Regiment, and Don Dickenson was sent to the 415th Regiment, all units of the 104th Infantry Division. After the classification, Don, Bob and I joined our respective groups and were led in different directions to barracks in our regimental areas where I was assigned a bed and was told to get some sleep. It was now about 10 PM, and I had no trouble sleeping.

The next few days were pretty confusing. The barrack that I had been assigned to was one of three that housed Company "G" of the Second Battalion of the 414th Infantry Regiment of the 104th Infantry Division. In addition to the barracks, there was another building that held a supply room and a day room available to all for letter writing, reading or playing cards or ping-pong. A fifth building was the most important of all; it was the mess hall. The buildings and a limited area of open space around our buildings was the company area and it was here that I spent most of my time unless I was out in the field away from the camp with the rest of the company doing training exercises.

There were about 20 other guys in the barracks with me. We quickly learned that we were all transfers from the A.S.T.P and had come from colleges or universities from all over the United States. We soon met the non-coms (non-commissioned officers) who had been assigned to take care of us until we began training with the rest of the company. The first thing that I noticed was that the non-coms treated us like human

beings. This was quite a surprise and was completely different than the way we were treated during basic training where the non-coms treated us with contempt and berated us most of the time. I now realize that it was their job to change us from being civilians into soldiers. Some of them enjoyed their job too much. We were given a series of orientation lectures where we learned about the 104th Division. We were told that the division was a new one being organized for service either in Europe to fight the Germans or in the Pacific to fight the Japanese. The division, having completed intensive training and maneuvers in the rough country of the northwest, had arrived at Camp Carson a few weeks before we did. The division had been built up with many men who had been drafted earlier. They were a little older than we were. The division had never been at full strength, and after the rugged training they had been put through, many of the men had to be discharged because they could not cope with the physical requirements of the training. We, who had been in the A.S.T.P., were their replacements. We learned that the division commander was General Terry De La Mesa Allen and that his specialty was night fighting. Prior to taking over the 104th, he had been the commander of the 1st Infantry Division and had led them in the fighting in North Africa and the invasion of Sicily. He had been sent back to the states to train a new division for the war and had been given the newly formed 104th Infantry Division.

It took several weeks for all of the A.S.T.P. students being transferred into the division to arrive. During that time, those of us already there were organized into a new platoon that was to be put through basic training all over again only this time it would be intense and rugged. We would not be integrated into the rest of the company until our new basic was finished and we had demonstrated that we could keep up to those who had been with the division on maneuvers. We referred to them as the "old guys" and they called us the "College Kids" and we had to prove ourselves before they would accept us as equals. We were given new uniforms and all of the equipment, including rifles, that we would need for the training that we were about to undergo. Of course, our first order of business was to clean the rifles and get them ready for an inspection. None of us passed the inspection, and we had to do it over again. This happened quite often. In the beginning, the inspections were intended to give us something to do and to make us realize the seriousness of our training.

Each morning after chow our group was led through a series of light calisthenics, followed by a hike of two or three miles. I noticed immediately that I got out of breath very quickly as did most of the other guys, some even had nose bleeds. Our instructor explained the reason for this was that Camp Carson was 5000 feet above sea level and that the oxygen content of the air and the atmospheric pressure was much lower here than it was in most of the places that we had come from. We were told that we would soon adjust to the new conditions and we did. We were soon doing strenuous calisthenics and taking five to ten-mile hikes.

By the middle of April all of the A.S.T.P. transfers that we were going to receive had arrived. Our platoon now had about 40 men and our four weeks of basic training started. The training exercises were almost the same as our original 13-week basic training except that it was much more rigorous and intense. We went out in the field almost every day and practiced attacking villages or defending them from attack. We learned to fire every weapon that we might have to use. We had to qualify on the firing range demonstrating our proficiency with the rifle and pistol. We had bayonet drill hoping that we would never have to use it. There were simulated gas attacks requiring that we put on our gas masks and continue to do whatever it was that we were doing. A large part of our training was done at night because if we did go into combat that would be our specialty. General Allen believed that night attacks would keep casualties down. We were now hiking 10 to 15 miles every day going from company area to the training area and returning to our barracks. At the end of four weeks, our basic ended with a 25 mile hike with each of us carrying a full field pack and rifle. We completed the hike in 8 hours, walking 50 minutes and resting 10 minutes each hour so our actual hiking time was 6 1/2 hours. With our basic training completed, it was now time to integrate us with the "old men" of "G" company.

Just before our basic training was completed, we were told that there was going to be a lecture and demonstration on the 30 caliber light machine gun including the disassembly and reassembly of the gun and if any of us would be interested in going to the lecture, we could. Jerry Wells, my new friend, and I with several others decided that we would do it. Jerry and I were assigned to a machine gun and as the lecturer explained the different parts and demonstrated how to take it apart and put it back together we were asked to duplicate the procedure. I had always been pretty good at taking things apart so I was able to do

what the instructor was showing us. A few days later when our training platoon was being reassigned to platoons with the older guys, Jerry and I were told that we were being assigned to the 4th platoon in the machine gun section. I guess that our mechanical skills impressed the lecturer and the 4th platoon needed some replacements so we were assigned, not given a choice, but assigned.

Up to this time, I did not have a clear understanding of the makeup of an infantry company (what follows may not be completely accurate; my memory is slipping). I soon learned that "G" Company consisted of four platoons. The 1st, 2nd, and 3rd platoons were rifle platoons and the 4th platoon was a weapons platoon. The weapons platoon, to which I was now assigned, had a machine gun section and a mortar section. The machine gun section had two, 30 caliber air cooled light machine gun squads, and the mortar section had three, 60 millimeter mortar squads. There were five men in each squad, including a squad leader, usually a sergeant, a gunner, assistant gunner and two ammo carriers. Each section was led by a section leader, usually a staff sergeant. The platoon sergeant was a 1st sergeant and the platoon leader was a lieutenant. The men in the rifle platoons were armed with M-1 rifles and BAR's (browning automatic rifles, three to a platoon). Each rifle platoon had four squads of 12 men including a squad leader and an assistant squad leader. The platoon was led by a platoon leader with the rank of lieutenant and the company was led by the company commander, usually with the rank of captain. A company had approximately 180 men and a division approximately 16,000 men.

We new men were now integrated throughout "G" company. Now our training as a unit would begin. The men in the machine gun section all lived on the first floor of one of the barracks. I got to know them all and found that they were a great bunch of men and that even though we came from different parts of the country and from different backgrounds we had much in common. We all became great friends. Jerry Wells and I had been assigned to the second squad of the machine gun section. Much to our surprise, Jerry was made gunner and I was the assistant gunner. Our squad leader turned out to be a great guy. His name was Donald A. Kohanke. He was a little older than the rest of us and had been with the company when they had been training in the rugged training grounds of the North West before the division had moved to Camp Carson. He was a sergeant but never held his rank over us. Most of us would say that he was a regular guy. He would joke with us and we with him. He would give us orders only when he had to, and we tried never to let him down.

Our training as a unit started with enthusiasm. The training was much the same as we had been doing in the training platoon except that it was much harder and more complicated. Most of our time was spent out in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. We would hike out of camp five to eight miles and practice attacking or defending some hill or village, then we would hike back to our barracks where we had to clean our equipment, our clothes, and ourselves and prepare for the next day.

As our performance improved, our problems got harder and we would stay out in the field for several days before returning to camp. Many of the problems lasted all night, and we learned how difficult it was to function in the dark. We got stronger physically, and our endurance increased significantly, but it never seemed to satisfy General Allen. He had been in combat and knew that what we were doing paled to what we would be exposed to if we ever did fight the enemy. There was a certain pleasure in being in the foothills of the mountains. At night the stars seemed to be twice as big as I remembered them in New Jersey and there were so many more of them. The moon was bigger and brighter. The sunrise and sunsets over the mountains were beautiful and the mountains were overwhelming. The tree line on the mountains ended at 9000 feet and above that the mountains were covered with snow. It was May, and the weather was cold at night, and sometimes we could see the snow falling in the mountains. All of our training was done in the foothills of the Rockies and wherever we were I felt that I could reach out and touch Cheyenne Mountain which was only nine miles from camp. I was so impressed with Colorado that I thought that I might relocate there after the war ended.

As the company was going through the intensive training period, rumors began to circulate that all of those who had not had a furlough since entering the service would soon be allowed to request one. The rumors were true, and as soon as I could I put my name on the furlough request list. Another rumor was that as soon as everyone had been given a furlough, the 104th Division was going to be shipped out of the country.

Everyone could not be given a furlough at the same time so each week the list would be posted with six or more names of men who were to go on furlough. The furloughs were for 17 days including travel

time. My name was entered on the list for a furlough starting on May 22nd and ending on June 7th, the day I had to be back in camp.

On May 22nd, I went to the train station in Colorado Springs, bought my ticket, and waited for the train along with a thousand other guys going on furlough. Two other guys from my company were going east so we got together for the ride. One was going to Philadelphia, the other was going to Newark, and I was going to Princeton Junction. The train pulled into the station and there was a stampede of soldiers trying to board the train. Somehow the three of us got on board and even found seats which we did not leave until we got to St Louis where we had to change to a train going to New York City. The train was the famous "Jeffersonian," a Pennsylvania Railroad train. Our arrival time in St Louis and the departure time for New York was very close. When we arrived in St Louis station the three of us ran, just like in the movies, to the Jeffersonian and climbed aboard just as it was leaving the station. Once again we found the train packed full of uniformed men and there were no seats so we sat on our duffle bags, which we used as suitcases to hold our clothes and waited for seats to become available.

Sometime in the evening, the dining car opened and as men went there to eat we moved up in the waiting line to get in. As luck would have it, the three of us were among the last to be allowed into the dining car before it closed. We had our meal and since there were no seats available in the passenger cars and since no one had asked us to leave our table, we decided to stay there at our table. We slept through the night with our heads resting in our arms on the table, and in the morning, when breakfast was being served, we were the first to get breakfast. We were really lucky. After breakfast, we went back to the passenger cars and found seats now available because men were getting off at their home town stations. We went into the lavatory on the train. washed and shaved and then waited impatiently to reach Philadelphia. I reached Princeton Junction in early morning on May 24th, hitchhiked to Hightstown, and was home before noon. My furlough was about to begin. I had not told anybody that I would be coming home because we were never told ourselves until the last minute, and it made me happy to be able to surprise everyone. It was great to be home, to see Mom and Dad and the rest of the family. Best of all, I knew that I would be seeing my girlfriend, Peg Hoffman, who I had been thinking about ever since I had gotten notice of my furlough.

The furlough passed very quickly. Every day Mom and I drove to the St. Francis Hospital in Trenton to visit with Dad who was recovering from an operation he had on his back. Mom and Dad had not told me about his problem before because they did not want to worry me. Word soon got around that I was home and my relatives and friends started to drop in for a visit. It was great to see them all. Best of all, each day I got to be with Peg. Sometimes I would go up to the High School to be with her at lunch break and other times to walk the halls of the school while she was in class. I had a date with her each evening. Sometimes we would go to the Princeton Playhouse in Princeton to see a movie; sometimes we would double date with my best friend and his girl and sometimes I would go to her home in Cranbury to talk and listen to records. I hated to leave her for a minute.

Peg was a senior at Hightstown High and in the early part of June, there is always a Senior Prom, a most important event when you are a senior. I had no way of telling Peg that I was coming home in the early part of June so she had accepted an invitation to go to the prom with one of the boys in her class. I learned about this after I got home. I felt badly that I would miss taking her to the prom, but she did not want to miss going to the prom and I understood her position. I had nothing to do with what followed. One of my two best friends, both of whom I felt were like brothers, realized the situation and he suggested to Peg's prom date, that it would be a fine gesture on his part if he would release Peg from her acceptance of his invitation. Peg's date very generously agreed that it was the right thing to do so he told Peg that if she wanted to go to the prom with me she was free to do so. As a result of all of this maneuvering, I got to take Peg to her senior prom I wore my dress uniform and she was in a beautiful evening gown and was by far the most beautiful girl at the prom.

Time passed quickly and it was time for me to return to Camp Carson. One of the most difficult things that I had to do, up to this time in my life, was to say goodbye to Peg. I was deeply in love with her and hoped that she might have a feeling of love for me. I realized that my future was unknown and she had college ahead of her. It is difficult to pursue a girl from distant places, but I felt that I had a chance as long as Peg kept writing to me. My letters to her expressed my love for her.

On June 5th, I took the train out of Trenton at 6:01 PM and arrived at Camp Carson on June 7th, the day after D-day, the day that our armies started the invasion of Europe. I learned of the invasion when my train

stopped at a station somewhere in Ohio, and people on the platform were shouting the news. I did not realize the significance of the event at that time.

Not much had changed at "G" company while I was gone. The training continued and now more time was spent out in the foothills learning how to function at night. We would leave camp in the afternoon, hike out 10 miles or so, attack or defend some hill, dig foxholes and return to camp the next day. A lot of our training now required firing live ammunition, observing live artillery and mortar fire, all under very restrictive control to minimize accidental injuries. The objective was to make our training conditions as near as possible to what we would experience in actual combat. In addition, we learned how to fire the mortar, the bazooka, and the 50 caliber machine gun. Throwing live hand grenades was also required. Several of our classes required that we learn how to fire the 105 and the 57 millimeter artillery pieces. I'm not sure that any of us would have been able to do it in combat, but the training certainly increased the possibility that in an emergency we could.

Sometime near the end of June, I was promoted to the rank of private first class. Several others in the machine gun section also were promoted. This rank required that I wear one stripe on shirts and jackets. The only real benefit of having the rank of PFC was that my pay was increased 4 dollars a month. My pay would now be 54 dollars a month.

Rumors began to spread through the camp that we would soon be leaving Camp Carson. A sort of confirmation of this was that we were getting a lot more inspections of equipment and clothing. If anything showed any signs of wear new replacements would be issued. We were also told to start shipping personal possessions home such as radios, books, and other items that we did not want to carry or lose. We were told that soon the mail that we sent out of camp would be censored.

Our training intensified. Near the end of July, we were given a series of proficiency tests to determine if we could be classified as Expert Infantrymen. The government had passed a bill that gave a soldier an additional 5 dollars a month pay if he could pass the Expert Infantryman's test. The tests were designed to determine our ability to think, to administer first aid, to react quickly to unexpected threats, and to carry wounded men a specified distance. Our powers of observation were tested by requiring us to observe some distant activity then report what we had seen. We were tested on map reading and our ability to find our way by using a compass. Getting a passing rating in these tests meant a 5 dollar a month pay raise and a medal indicating that we were considered to be Expert Infantry Men. I and most of my friends achieved the required level of skills and were classified as Expert Infantry Men, and my pay was increased to 59 dollars a month.

All was not work at Camp Carson. Most of the time we were given free time after standing a Saturday inspection that ended at noon. If we did not have special duty, such a KP or guard duty, we were free until Sunday night and could do whatever we wanted to do. Most of the time, I and my new friends, Jerry Wells, Bob Teasck, Sid Stem, Jack Sturm and others would go into Colorado Springs for the day. The days were getting pretty hot now and we would go to the famous Broadmoor Hotel just outside of Colorado Springs where they had a great manmade lake and we were allowed to swim in it. Only officers were allowed to go into the hotel itself so I never got to see what it was like inside, but that didn't matter to us; we were happy that they allowed us to swim in the lake. After a good swim we would go into town and have a big steak dinner at the Black Angus restaurant. It was not just a steak dinner, it was a filet mignon, all you could eat, and it only cost \$2.00. After dinner, we would go to the movies or go bowling and then return to camp. We did this whenever we could. Once we went to Denver which was about 60 miles away.

The company had a fast pitch soft ball team. I made the team, and we played teams of other companies and units in the battalion. The competition was good and many of the players were excellent. I played the outfield for my team and managed to have a fair batting average. Some of the games were very good. There would be quite a number of spectators watching and betting on the game. There were a few exceptionally good players.

One was a pitcher who threw a no hitter against us. He had blinding speed and another fellow hit the longest drive that I had ever seen hit in a softball game. I enjoyed playing for company "G." It made me feel good that I could represent my company.

There was only one thing that was more important than going to chow. We had the best cooks and the meals were always good. However, when we heard the mail clerk call out "mail call" everything stopped and we formed a circle around the clerk who would call out the name on a letter or package and sail it to

the person yelling "here." I was extremely fortunate because I received letters from home and friends almost every day. Most important were the letters I received from Peg. She would write to me at least twice a week and sometimes more often. Her letters would always lift my spirit and in reality made my life in the army a happy time, at least as long as I was reading her letters. Her letters really carried me through the war, especially when I got to Europe. In the beginning of August, the level of rumors indicating that we would soon be leaving Camp Carson increased dramatically. Final inspections of our equipment were being made. Deadlines for sending packages home were issued, and our training had almost stopped. Everyone was on edge because our routines had been disrupted. Finally, the division received orders directing the move by rail commencing August 15, 1944 to our new destination, Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. Training was over. We were now getting ready for the big event. We were headed for Europe.

Camp Kilmer, New Brunswick, New Jersey Final Staging Camp for the European Theater of Operations

I remember nothing about the trip from Camp Carson to Camp Kilmer, located near New Brunswick New Jersey. The division left Camp Carson on August 15th and arrived at Camp Kilmer on August 17th. The division history "Timberwolf Tracks", page 35, states that the division moved out of Camp Carson in 24 trains that proceeded east over several routes. Some of the trains proceeded to Kilmer by way of Canada, some directly through Pennsylvania and some went south and then north, passing through Washington D.C. before reaching Camp Kilmer. All of the trains were troop trains and had facilities for sleeping, eating, sitting, and, of course, bathroom accommodations. It amazes me, even now as I write this, that I have no recollection of leaving Camp Carson, the train ride, or of arriving at Camp Kilmer. Actually, I have little memory of what Camp Kilmer was like.

Camp Kilmer had been established to process troops who were going to be shipped out of the country – primarily to the European Theater of Operation, better known as the E.T.O. Final checks of equipment, clothing, and medical status (shots, dental records etc.) of all troops were made here. I had no duties to perform while at the camp, and most of us sat around in the large pyramid tents that we were assigned to. We wrote letters and listened to the radio programs broadcast from New York City. I remember what a treat it was to listen to "The Make Believe Ballroom," a program of big band music presented by Martin Block who selected the records and the orchestras to be played. He was a disc jockey although that term was not used in 1944. This program was my favorite before I went into the army. It was on the radio every night during the week for two hours and the records of the famous big bands were played. My favorite orchestra was Tommy Dorsey, with Frank Sinatra as his vocalist. Other favorites were Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Count Basie, Jimmy Dorsey, Harry James, and many others. The music of that time was called "swing" and was pretty lively with a great rhythm. It was happy music and was great to dance to if you knew how to dance.

Dancing in those days required that the boy held the girl in his arms and that made dancing very desirable. The orchestras also played great ballads with beautiful melodies and lyrics, many of which were love songs. The music fit the times; it brought gaiety and romance, which offset other emotions caused by the war.

Camp Kilmer was located near New Brunswick, N.J.. Fifteen miles away was New York City and fifteen miles in the other direction was Hightstown, my home town. As soon as we were settled in on August 17th, I wrote a letter to Mom and Pop telling them that I was at my new camp, and that I was nearer to home. I could not tell them where I was, but I mentioned that I had heard Martin Block and the Make Believe Ballroom hoping that the clue would tell them that I was in the New York area. I also told Dad, who worked at the Raritan Arsenal near New Brunswick, to look closely at all soldiers that he saw hitch hiking when he drove home from work because he might recognize one of them.

The next couple of days were spent completing final inspections of our clothing and equipment. When that was finished, we were told that we could apply for 12-hour passes to go to New York City or any other place as long as we got back within the 12-hour limitation. I immediately applied for and was given a pass to go home to Hightstown and on August 20th, a Sunday, at 6 PM, I hitch-hiked home. It was great to be home even though it would only be for a few hours, but my primary goal was to see Peg once again.

In our exchange of letters while I was at Camp Carson, Peg told me that she and several other girls from Cranbury had taken summer jobs as waitresses at a hotel in Ocean Grove, N.J. which was located adjacent to Asbury Park at the Jersey Shore. She was now there, and I didn't know how I was going to get there for a short visit and still get back to Kilmer by 6 AM the next day, before my pass expired. Fortunately for me, my best friend Robert Byrne, who lived with his parents on a farm just outside of Hightstown had a motorcycle and after I contacted him, he agreed to take me to Grove Hall sitting behind him on the motorcycle and hanging on to him. Fortunately, in those days there was very little traffic, especially on back roads, through the pines leading to Asbury Park. Robert had a heavy foot and we flew through the pines in the dark. When we got there, I was unbelievably lucky because Peg was there and was not busy. She was really surprised when she saw me, and I could not believe how beautiful she looked to me. We walked on the boardwalk at Asbury Park and talked until it was time for me to leave. It was extremely difficult for me to leave her because every time I saw her, my love for her grew. Robert got me back to Hightstown in record time so that I could have a few more hours with Mom and Pop before they took me back to Camp Kilmer. I think I passed through the entrance of the camp at 6 AM. I have never had a better friend than Robert; he was like a brother to me.

On August 22nd, I applied for and was given another pass to go home. This time the pass was for more reasonable hours. The pass started at 12 noon and ended at midnight. Once again, I hitch-hiked home and was able to spend more time with my family. Mom cooked a big dinner for me and a lot of my relatives dropped in to say hello. It was a great visit but once again my goal was to see Peg. Mom and Pop realized that I wanted to go to Grove Hall to see Peg and they said that they would take me. We got to Grove Hall in the early evening and Peg was waiting for me. She was so beautiful when she came down the porch steps to join us. Mom and Pop left us and once again we walked the boardwalk until we found a grassy area off of the boardwalk where we sat and talked. I don't remember what we talked about, but I am sure that it was a more serious talk and had much to do with our future. I knew that this might be the last time that I would get to see her because the rumors of our pending departure for going overseas were very strong. Again, saying goodbye to Peg was very difficult. I was deeply in love with her and struggled with the idea that I might never see her again. Mom and Pop took me back to Camp Kilmer, and I walked through the gate at midnight.

Our division was now on high alert and no more passes were authorized. One incident still stands out in my memory of Camp Kilmer and that is of a USO show that was put on for us shortly before we shipped out. Most USO shows had big band orchestras and featured Broadway, movie, and radio stars, with emphasis on comedy, good music, and beautiful, scantily dressed, women. The announcement for this show named one of the performers to be Marlene Dietrich. The show was to be performed in the early evening in an outdoor amphitheater built for these events. Some of the guys in my company decided that in order to get good seats we would have to go early which is what we did. It's a good thing that we did because before the show started there were several thousand soldiers jammed into the amphitheater. My group had seats right up front in the 3rd or 4th row which was about 20 to 25 feet from the front of the stage. Six or eight of us had binoculars for better viewing. The show started with a piano player playing an introductory number to bring out Marlene Dietrich. She walked to center stage dressed in a diaphanous gown and a great cheer went up from the men. She looked startled and began to look over the audience finally looking at the first few rows up front. She started to laugh and couldn't stop when she saw us looking at her through field glasses even though we were almost close enough to touch her. I am sure that she enjoyed that moment as much as we did. When she stopped laughing, she presented her program of songs sung in a sultry fashion with her deep throaty voice. I don't think many remembered the songs that she sang but everyone certainly remembered the flowing, see-through dress and the way she moved in it. It was certainly good for morale.

There were to be no more passes for anyone to leave Camp Kilmer. The division history "Timberwolf Tracks" records the following on page 35:

The entire division assembled at an open amphitheater on August 24 for final religious ceremonies in the United States. During this solemn hour the Division chaplains asked Almighty God for His blessing and guidance of our gallant men.

On August 25th and 26th the Division filed into coaches at Camp Kilmer and rode to New York harbor. Marching into ferry boats, the men, heavily loaded, rode silently to

the piers. By early morning, August 27th, all troops were loaded. At noon on this bright Sunday the ships slipped away from the docks and the Timberwolves were on their way. For many of our men it was farewell to a beloved homeland. Fifty-six ships made up the convoy, including troop transports, freighters, battered tankers, aircraft carriers, and destroyer escorts.

We were on our way to Europe to do that which we had been trained to do. It was very difficult for me to realize that I might actually be fighting the enemy in the near future. In my mind I still thought that that would never happen to me.

Boat Ride to the ETO The USS George Washington (My First Boat Trip)

My memory of our train ride from Kilmer and the ferry ride to the piers in New York is hazy. I do remember standing in line waiting to climb up the gang plank to board our ship. While we waited, Red Cross workers passed out coffee and doughnuts to us. That simple act did wonders for us. It relieved the anxiety that many of us had about the coming voyage, and it gave us a good feeling to know that there were people, who did not know us, who would see us off and wave goodbye. Besides, there is nothing better than coffee and doughnuts when you are waiting around.

It is difficult to visualize how many men were to board ships that day. The Division History states that my regiment, the 414th Infantry Regiment, "along with elements of the 415th Regiment, Field Artillery Battalions, 104th Headquarters Company and Quartermasters Company, the 804th Ordnance Company and the 329th Medical Battalion were all packed onto the USS GEORGE WASHINGTON". I would estimate that there were 8000 to 9000 men on my ship. The remainder of the Division were aboard the USS LEJEUNE, the USAT CRISTOBAL and the SS OCEAN MAIL.

Finally, it came time for "G" Company to board the ship. We were told to pick up our gear and to advance single file up the gang plank. I climbed up the gang plank, wearing my cartridge belt and full field pack and carrying my duffel bag and weapon. At the top of the gang plank, I gave my name to the non-com who was checking our names on a roster as we entered the ship. Once on the ship, we started, in single file, to go down flights of narrow stairs that led to the interior of the ship. I think that we went down four levels or to what seemed to be the very bottom of the ship. We went into a large area that was filled with row after row of bunks about two feet wide and six feet long. The bunks were made of a sheet of leather stretched between four posts anchored from floor to ceiling. They were stacked in layers of five with about two feet between each bunk. The first bunk was almost on the floor and the top bunk almost touched the ceiling. Each of us was assigned a bunk and were told to stay put until new orders were received.

As we waited and tried to settle in, it soon became apparent that no one could possibly believe that we could spend much time in this compartment. There wasn't enough space between the bunks to sit, so we either had to stand in the aisle or lie down on the bunk. When we lay down on our bunk there wasn't enough room to turn over without hitting the guy in the bunk above you. The aisles between tiers of bunks were so narrow that two people could not pass each other without great difficulty. The air was foul and the smell was making us sick. There were a lot of very unhappy guys who were beginning to let their feelings be known. I don't remember how long we were in the bunk compartment before the ship began to move. The date was August 27, 1944. From somewhere above, shouts reached us that we were on our way and would soon be passing the Statue of Liberty.

That was all we needed to hear and immediately we all climbed up the stairs to the deck so that we could see that great statue. I think that everyone on board was up on the various decks of the ship. Those closest to the rail waved to the ships that were seeing us off. We were all yelling and waving to the people along the shore and those who were waving to us from windows in buildings along the shoreline. It was an exciting time.

Once we passed the Statue of Liberty, things calmed down, and it came time to return to our quarters. My friends in the 4th platoon got together to discuss what we were going to do. We decided that we would stay up on deck until we were told that we could not. We found an area on deck and made it our home for the entire trip to Europe.

We slept on deck and whenever we had to leave our area someone would stay there to ensure that some other group would not take it over. Other groups were doing the same thing. I don't know who got permission for us to stay on deck, but it was a good solution to the problem that faced us below deck.

As our ship moved out into the Atlantic, I remember standing at the rail looking back at the coast and wondering if the people on the beaches could see our ship. I tried to visualize the coast line to judge what beach I might be seeing in the far distance but not knowing whether we were moving north or south I had no idea of where we were. Night came on and we learned that the ship's blackout rules were in force and since we had decided to stay up on deck there was nothing to do but to get comfortable and sleep. When we woke up the next morning, we were surprised to see other ships near us. During the night we had joined the convoy that was forming up for the trip to Europe. We had no idea as to how big the convoy was because the ships were separated by several miles between ships; however, it stretched to the horizon in every direction.

Sometime during the early morning our officers got "G" company together and told us what our routine would be. We were told that due to the number of men on board, we would only get two meals a day and that the time between our meals would be about 12 hours. I remember eating what was supposed to be breakfast at 3 AM. The food was good but there were some weird combinations of food. I had never had sour pickles for breakfast before that time.

The mess room was several decks down into the ship. There was a continuous line of men on the stairway leading to the mess room and there was no loitering once we got our food from the servers who sort of threw it into mess kits as we passed by. All meals were eaten while standing at long tables that were about four feet high and two feet wide. We ate quickly and there were no seconds; however, there was always fruit or something that we could save and take up on the deck to be eaten later.

There was really no fixed schedule for anything but meals. The ship's bathrooms (heads in the navy) were huge and there was never a waiting time to take a shower or shave. We were expected to keep clean and occasionally our officers would assemble the company for an inspection. We had no assigned duties such as standing guard or K.P.; however, we did have a training program that included ship drill, air raid drill, French classes, calisthenics, and care of weapons classes. Most of the time we just read, wrote letters that would be mailed when we reached land, played cards, and slept. During the day there was always good recorded music broadcast over the ship's P.A. system, and, twice a day, movies were shown on deck. Religious services were held for anyone who wanted to attend. All in all, it was a restful but pretty boring time.

During the first days of the trip, each of us had been given small packages made up by the Red Cross. Each one contained soap, cigarettes, candy, a sewing kit, a book, writing paper, pencils, packs of playing cards and a few other things. We were also given tobacco and cigarettes put up by different people, clubs, and organizations. Each box or package had the name of the person or club who had sent it and where it had been sent from. Another organization had packed a big box of magazines for us. They had gotten the magazines in magazine drives because some were new and others old, and they came from all over the country. It really made us feel good that so many people were thinking about us.

It was probably the night of August 6th that I saw the first sign that we were approaching land. We must have been in the English Channel headed for Cherbourg, France. The night was black and, of course, the ship was blacked out. Off in the distance I saw search lights shining into the sky. The beams of light from many search lights converged at a point in the sky. I could hear no sound nor see land, only the beams of light off to the left side of the ship. The lights must have been in a coastal city in southern England. I didn't know where we were, but I did realize that our boat ride was almost over.

TIMBERWOLF TRACKS, our division history, records the following: "Land was sighted on September 6th and the following day the division, less the 415th Regiment and the 387th Field Artillery Battalion, anchored at the French Port of Cherbourg. The USAT Christobal and the USS Ocean Mail anchoring at Utah Beach."

The sight that greeted us as we entered the harbor was one of total destruction. Sunken ships, destroyed docks and burned out buildings were everywhere. The Germans had destroyed the harbor completely. They did everything they could think of to make the harbor useless for delivering men and supplies to our armies. Our ship did not have much room to maneuver in the area of the harbor that had been cleared of the debris. The captain had to anchor some distance from the shore. I and my friends were amazed at the destruction we saw. This was our first view of the real war and, while not speechless, we were pretty somber as we got ready to disembark. It had taken our convoy 11 days to reach this port. We stepped on land on September 7, 1944 just 94 days after "D" day, June 6, 1944. Our convoy was the largest to cross the Atlantic and the first to sail directly from the United States to France. Prior to this time, all convoys had terminated in England.

On September 7th, we disembarked walking down the gangplank carrying all of our equipment, including duffel bags, and we boarded flat barges that proceeded to take us to a pier. We left the barge and walked to an area where we were told to leave our duffel bags, that they would be given back to us at a later time. That was the last time that we saw them; now the only possessions that we had were those that we wore and carried in our field packs. I was glad to be rid of my duffel bag because it was heavy and difficult to carry, and none of us knew how far we were going to have to hike before we got to what we thought would be our barracks. We hiked, route step, up a muddy road past destroyed piers, sunken boats and great activity as American rear echelon troops unloaded ships and stockpiled supplies to be loaded on trucks and hauled to the front.

We moved inland for what seemed like miles and finally came to a line of two and a half ton trucks which we boarded and were driven to our bivouac area. That first night we pitched two-man tents in the rain and tried to sleep. The days of living in a barracks were over. We were now in France, and the fighting was not far away. The USS George Washington, the ship that took me to Europe, I later learned, had been a luxury liner in its day. It had also been used as a troop carrier during World War I. My uncle, Asher Wilson, shipped out to Europe on it. President Woodrow Wilson traveled on it to attend the League of Nations meeting in 1919 to deliver his concept of the objectives of that new International Body.

