

## LAST STAY AT MACKALL

My first letter from Mackall to home after maneuvers was written on March 5th, 1944 and contained both good and bad news. The bad; it was raining - the good; there was talk of furloughs going around.

In that letter I wrote that we had had a couple of easy days but expressed my doubts about this condition lasting very long.

The "17th Airborne Division" has been dropped from our address. It is now official that we are a combat team and no longer part of a division.

One of the fellows in our battery read that Betty Hutton, the movie star, was about to marry a fellow who was quite a bit older than she, so he wrote to advise her against such a marriage. To his surprise, about two weeks later he got a beautiful, autographed photograph from her through the mail. Poor Peters walked around in a daze for weeks after receiving the picture.

We had a rather unusual and interesting group of men in our battery. We had the first and only Japanese-American paratrooper (at least at that time), Junie Kawamura who was from Minneapolis. One of our lieutenants claims to be a fourth generation descendant of President Polk. The lieutenant also claims that his father was a lieutenant-general. This officer was Lt. Perry I. Polk, more often known as Perry I. And there was S/Sgt. Bill Westbrook, platoon sergeant from Florida, who insisted in telling the fellows from the north that down in Florida they spend the summers skinnin' 'gators and winters 'skinnin' Yankees, but he was an O.K. guy. Westbrook served with a division, before he became airborne, where some of the men had hooted at some women in shorts who were playing golf with a general. Two things developed from this incident - the entire division had to make a one hundred mile march and it became known as the "You Who" division. Then there was Phil Kennemer who was released from jail on the condition that he join the paratroops. Phil had a little racket of his own - he bought war bonds, had them mailed to him in Italy, sold them to Italian civilians, then put in a claim to the Treasury Department that the bonds had been lost or stolen and the bonds were then replaced. As fate would have it Phil was the first enlisted man to be killed in action,

Bud and I have a new hobby, We borrow blotters with pin-up pictures on them, draw skirts on the girls, then return the blotters. It is getting so a person can hardly borrow a blotter around here anymore.

From the 14th of March until the 28th in 1944 I must have been home on furlough. In a letter I mentioned returning to camp very early Tuesday morning on the 28th but did not mention the month or year in the letter. On my return that morning I discovered that the barracks were nearly empty except for a few bunks. The men had moved while I was on furlough and I didn't know to where. I spent the rest of the night on an empty cot with only a mattress as my bedding. The battalion was out in the field and only a few of us remained around the barracks. Later that morning those of us left in camp were told to get ready to go out into the field and join the others. However, they omitted to tell us where to assemble or at what time so we goofed off until noon. Then we went to chow. This was not the smartest move and the mess-sergeant caught us and ordered us to report to him at 1300. After eating we went to the P.X. and bought a sundae, a bag of marshmallows and six candy bars for the sergeant. Then we reported and presented our gifts. He must not have been impressed because the next thing we knew we were mopping the officers' quarters.

After eating chow our entire plan caved in and we were forced to join the battery in the field.

When we did catch up with the battery it was just in time for the rain so Mac and I put up a tent, climbed in and wrapped ourselves in our blanket. During the night Mac began to talk in his sleep and woke me up. It went something like this, "Where are you going sergeant? Want me to come over there? All right, wait a minute until I get my cap". The first thing I knew his hand was all over my hair, shoulders and in my eyes; it was then that I started to laugh and woke him up. Mac then told me that he had been dreaming that he was going home on a furlough and sitting across from him on the train was a W.A.C. sergeant. In his dream he was looking for his hat so he could move across the aisle and sit with her. I did not know it until later but Mac had trouble with dreams.

Bud finally made it back from his furlough. I was pretty lucky, they have cut the furlough time for those who live in Minnesota from fourteen to eight days. I'm glad I got mine in before the cut.

One game we played while home on furlough was to see how many officers we could pass without saluting. On a few occasions I was challenged but nothing ever came of it.

I was on K.P. in the officers' mess again on March 30th and not only tried my hand at cooking but got my fill of bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwiches. As far as cooking goes I made some toast and tried some pancakes. The pancakes were so big that by time I had succeeded in turning the first ones over, by sections, the last ones were burned. This ruined my cooking career. The fact remains that there is very little difference between a cook and a K.P. except that the K.P. works.

One of my most notable feats is the special way I prepare the biscuits from K-rations. First you take the biscuits, K-1 and K-2 biscuits out of the package, fill the water-proof carton with water, put the biscuits back into the carton, boil the combination for nine minutes and 4.7 seconds, drain the water and eat the carton. It still tastes like cardboard but is much better than the biscuits.

The colonel who commanded the 517th has been relieved of his command. It is said that Col. Walsh was the youngest regimental commander in the United States Army and all of the 517th men and officers will miss him.

On April the third I sent a postcard home which remarked about the beautiful weather we were having at that time. The interesting thing about the postcard was that at the top this message was printed: "These postcards are FREE to Service Men and Women in uniform. Furnished by the Kiwanis Club of Minneapolis, Minnesota the city of Lakes and Parks".

On the sixth of April the governor of Connecticut, some other governors and a few ex-governors came to our camp to watch a parade ground jump. For some reason I did not jump with that group.

We saw a P.W. camp with German prisoners. They do not have too bad of a life, it looks like they play volleyball all day.

We had a good demonstration of thermite, which is used in grenades and incinerating bombs earlier in the week. To demonstrate the heat a thermite grenade generates they used a G. I. helmet. It burned a hole through the helmet in about five seconds, then they piled about six inches of sand on the helmet, coal was added on top of the sand and in about a minute the coals were glowing red. To top it off, lime was added, and the sand turned into glass.

I had guard duty on the second and third of April and after I got off duty Bud and I went on pass. We went to Rockingham where they had a carnival which turned out to be expensive evening and there was a sideshow dancer that was so suggestive that I did not

bother to watch her. Bud had his problems with a game that he, or anybody else, could not win but he kept trying. He was shaking a board with holes in it; each hole had a number assigned to it, which meant that several holes had the same number, and the object was to have the numbers total a given amount. Each time he would shake he would fall short of the total by just a small amount and the barker would show him how, if just one marble had fallen into a hole of higher value he would have won, but the barker never did subtract the value of the hole from which he had taken the marble. Actually Bud was shaking six marbles but the barker was totaling seven. He didn't stand a ghost of a chance.

It was on April the fifth that we went on a cooking problem - what a mess! It took three of us two hours and twenty-five minutes to cook three pork chops, three onions, three potatoes and to warm half of a can of beans. We had to cook the food in our mess-kits and the mess-kits got so hot that the plating on the kit blistered. For dinner we ate tomatoes and cold wieners. We got to bed at 0100 and they said we could sleep until 1100. Not so. At 0700 we had to get up and police the area and at 0730 we were assigned details. Almost everyone had a detail and nobody had a chance to sleep.

I could not overcome the temptation that came to me on the sixth of March so I bought an Eversharp pencil at the P.X. It is blue with 14K gold, works the same as the other one, but is a little larger. It had a \$5.00 price on it but my cost was only \$2.50.

I must throw in this story because it concerns Camp Mackall but the exact time is not important, even though the incident lasted for forty years. In the army it was a mark of prestige to be the first to know and divulge information so I played the game but pushed it a little further. By simple observation I would draw a conclusion and come up with some fairly accurate predictions. As an example, we only had chicken on Sunday so if I saw chickens being unloaded at the mess-hall on Tuesday I would wait until Thursday or Friday, then announce that I would like to have a chicken dinner next Sunday. Sure enough, we would have chicken. After a few successful guesses I had gained the confidence of some of the fellows and they started asking where I got the information. My answer was, "My uncle told me". By this I meant Uncle Sam, the symbol for the United States. However, it was interpreted to mean Col. Gumby, a colonel in our battalion. At one of the Saturday morning inspections Lt. Roberts asked, "Houston, what relation are you to the colonel?". I had to answer "None, Sir". That should have ended the farce but for some reason S/Sgt. Bucher never did get the word. At a reunion in 1984, forty years later, Bucher admitted that he had "treated me with kid gloves" because he thought that I was the colonel's nephew. To this day the incident is mentioned every time we get together.

On Easter Sunday I wrote home and complained about the lack of Easter spirit at Camp Mackall. There were no new and colorful clothes around and only a few lilies. We had turkey instead of ham for dinner but I missed out on most of the dinner because of an accident. While I was entering the mess-hall, that tells you how close I came to having turkey, I stabbed my thumb on the spring on the screen door and a medic took me to the dispensary. The medic did not wait until I had been treated, but went back to the mess-hall and joined the others for dinner, while I waited to be treated. By the time the wound had been attended to and I returned to the mess-hall there was very little left, so I was just S.O.L.

Bud had returned from his furlough on Good Friday and on Easter Sunday afternoon we went to a movie. We went but did not see the movie because the sound track failed to work so the movie was called off. Instead we ended up at the service club where a cat named Trouble had some new kittens. They were as cute as could be and each had a ribbon tied around its neck. Trouble spent all of her time carrying the kittens to new hiding places but the guys kept bringing them back to pet them. Trouble couldn't win.

I had written home to tell the folks that we could take our watches overseas but that I had planned to send mine home. Also, we could take cameras but could not use them on the ship.

We were out in the field on the tenth and eleventh of April and when we came in we went to a movie. We saw "You can't Ration Love", not exactly a four star picture but a cute one. It was about some college girls who dealt with the manpower shortage by issuing ration cards to three guys. At least it took our minds off of the war.

One incident that happened at Camp Mackall, during one of our three tours there, stands out in my mind because it was so typical of the army. I was on detail as the battery runner - this meant that I was to stay in the vicinity of the battery commander's office and deliver, or pick up, messages to or from anyplace within the camp. On that particular day our regular first-sergeant was not available for duty so another sergeant was working in his place. It was the duty of this sergeant to fill out and send the "Daily Report" to battalion headquarters each morning. The sergeant did so and told me to run, and he meant run because we always had to double-time wherever we went, the report to headquarters. I did so. At headquarters I waited for the response but got a response I did not expect. The officer looked at the report and yelled, "Moral good?". He then continued in a loud voice, "The moral is excellent, go back and have it changed". This I did, then I had to return headquarters and still make a fourth trip back to the battery area. This was a trip of about five city blocks each way and at double-time.

There had not been a jump since the 25th of January so I did not miss anything while home on furlough. One of the D battery men must have gotten lonesome for a jump, or had a few too many, because while on a week-end pass in Charlotte he rigged up a parachute from a bed sheet and jumped from a second story window of a hotel. He spent all day Sunday at the police station while they investigated him.

The under-secretary of war, I don't even know his name, was supposed to visit Camp Mackall on Saturday, April 22nd and I volunteered to work on a gun crew to fire the salute. I hoped for good weather and maybe a chance to take a picture. No further mention was made of the event which leads me to conclude that I was not selected for the gun crew and may have missed the event completely. It may be that the visit was canceled, I don't remember.

Our training switched to a heavy concentration on infantry tactics. Classes were held on the 60mm and 81mm mortars, the .30 caliber machine-gun, the M-1 Garand rifle and the .45 cal. sub-machinegun. Along with learning about the arms of the infantry there were lessons on hand-to-hand combat with knives and some judo. It's like insurance and you hope you don't have to use it.

Sometime between the twenty-second of April and the tenth of May mother and Dad came to Mackall for a visit. I still had to continue with my normal training while they were in camp but did not draw any extra duties such as guard or K.P. It was great to see them and they seemed to enjoy seeing the camp and meeting some of the officers and men that I was with every day.

My last letter was written on the 28th of April and soon after that we left for our port of embarkation at Hampton Roads, Virginia. I wrote home from Camp Patrick Henry and said that it was almost like a reception camp and that the food was an improvement over Camp Mackall. Our training went on as usual and the one day that stands out in my memory, was one, if not the last day at Patrick Henry, when we had to run through the obstacle course. I could not get through the course because of a sinus headache. Every time I moved my head it felt as though it would split open, even the sunlight was painful to me. I was afraid that

they would not let me go overseas with the 460th if I did not get through, but somehow I squeezed by and shipped out with them.

## WE SAIL FOR EUROPE

For about ten days we waited at Camp Patrick Henry to ship out, ten days with very little to do. A few of us took a walk around the camp to see what we could - there was nothing to see. Then we went to the P.X. but the lines were so long that we decided we weren't hungry after all. Our next stop was at the service club which looked rather plain from the outside, but was very nice inside.

Even at Camp Patrick Henry poor Bud ended up on K.P. To be honest it was nice to have one or more of your own men on the serving line, they took good care of you when you went through the line by giving out generous servings.

The 460th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion boarded the Panama Canal ship "Cristobal" on the 17th of May for an unknown destination. We sailed down the James River and out to sea but it was not until the third day at sea that they announced that we were headed for Italy.

Life at sea was not too bad considering that we were aboard a troopship and the ship was not overloaded. Unlike most wartime troopships where troops had to share their bunk we had our own. The bunks were pipe frames anchored to vertical posts by means of a hinges. The vertical posts were located between two bunks or on the side nearest the bulkhead. A chain, from the vertical post to the opposite side of the frame, anchored the frame at the head and foot of the bunk. The mattress, or rather what should have been a mattress, was a piece of canvas which was laced to the pipe frame on all four sides with a rope. As there was not much room between the person above or below you or the floor, only about two and a half feet, it soon became evident that the best way to gain a little extra space was to loosen the ropes of your bunk and tighten the ropes on the one above you. This worked well but it was not long before everyone got wise to the idea and the scheme lost its value. The best approach was to adjust yours and climb into the bunk early so the person above you could not loosen his, which he would not do if you were present. A tactical error was to come to bed late because, not only was it impossible to adjust the bunks with so many people around, but the ship was blacked out and even if there was nobody in the area you could not do a good job in the dark. Another trick that was pulled in the dark was to untie the ropes of a bunk, being careful that it was not the one above you, so that when the guy got into his bunk the canvas would fall through.

There was not much to do on the trip over except to read, that is if you had any reading material. I had a paperback book, "Withering Heights" which I never did finish because someone took the book before I had a chance to finish it. The sad part is that I was using a picture of Bobbie as a bookmark and that went too. We did wonder around the ship as much as possible to see how the "other half lives" (the navy). The ordinary seaman had pretty good quarters with two to four to a cabin. There were sheets on the bunks, a light over each bunk, shelves for storage and one sailor even had a big rag doll on his bunk. Of course our officer's quarters were off limits to us. We did spend a lot of time on deck in the sun. The weather was warm and sunny and I don't think there was a wave over five feet high all of our way across the Atlantic or through the Mediterranean. While crossing the Atlantic the ship zig-zagged as a precaution against submarines but none were sighted. There were several abandon ship drills and never was because of a real threat. The drills did help to fill the extra time we had on our hands.

There was a P.K. on board which was open at designated hours. The P.K. was not at all like a civilian store, the prices were very low and you could not buy just a single candy bar or one package of cigarettes, you had to buy a box, carton or even a case.

On board we were served only two meals a day. The chow lines were so long that most of the day was spent waiting in line for the two meals. To make matters worse there was an officer stationed at the mess-hall door and if your hair was too long or you were not clean shaven the officer would pull you out of line and you got a haircut or shaved before you could get back in the line - at the end, naturally. What we got to eat had no relationship to the time of day. It could very well be chili, pickles or boiled potatoes for breakfast and everything was piled on one tray. We ate standing up at tables about four feet high and had to hurry so there would be room for others. Bud knows about that better than I do since he spent so much time on K.P. He probably did not know that there was more to the ship than the mess-hall.

There was a public address system aboard ship which played music all day. Every evening they had a regular news broadcast and played transcriptions of radio programs such as Jack Benny, Henry Aldrich or Bob Hope. That was about the extent of our entertainment. There were two things I did not like about life aboard a troopship. The first was the toilet facilities. Instead of stools there was a trough with toilet seats on it, somehow it reminded me of a large out-house. Water ran through the trough, from one end to the other, which provided a constant flush. Because of the rolling action of the ship it soon became evident that the more desirable positions were at the water inlet end of the trough. Since our passage was on such a calm sea it did not make a great deal of difference but it would be something to consider on rough water.

Also the showers were rather crude. They were crowded and the water temperature was poorly controlled. The water in the enlisted men's showers was saltwater for which there was a special soap, "saltwater soap". This soap felt like sandpaper on your skin and there was no way on earth, or at sea, that you could work up a lather. The saltwater left a residue on your skin that made it hard to decide whether it was better to take a shower or to go dirty and sweaty.

On the way over to Italy two men tried to process some medical alcohol by filtering it through a loaf of bread to make it safe to drink. There was a flaw in their method and as a result both died from poisoning.

As we neared the end of our cruise we passed through the Strait of Gibraltar and entered the Mediterranean Sea. About a day before we passed Gibraltar we were joined by our first escort, a Dutch destroyer, which left us soon after we entered the Mediterranean. We hugged the African coast, close enough to be within sight of land, then turned north and headed for Italy. After thirteen days at sea we docked in Naples, Italy.

## WE ARRIVE IN ITALY

It was on the thirty first of May that we docked in Naples, Italy. At the station we loaded into railroad cars which took us to Bagnoli, a suburb of Rome. From the railroad station we hiked to the "Crater", an extinct volcano which it was claimed that it was a hunting grounds for Italian royalty. The Crater itself was a picture postcard scene, round, full of lush vegetation and about 800 feet below the rim of the volcano. On the floor of this beautiful crater we set up our tents, all in neat, straight rows. A road ran along the steep slope of the crater and up to the top - the road was not always used by the G.I.s who went to town, drank too much vino and then tried to take a shortcut straight down the side of the crater. Usually they could be identified the following morning by their cuts and bruises.

Sometime during the first or second week of June, I am uncertain of the date because we could not name locations or dates in our letters, I had a chance to go to Naples or Pompeii for a day so I chose Pompeii and feel that it was a good choice. On the way from Bagnoli to Pompeii I did get a chance to see the Italian countryside. It was interesting but visiting Pompeii itself was the most interesting experience of the trip. I saw a mosaic of bear in the doorstep of a house which I recalled seeing pictured in one of my text books. I was fascinated to see plumbing with lead pipes used in some of the better houses built before the birth of Christ. I even visited a house of ill fame but it has been closed for about 2,000 years - either poor management or business was too slow.

It was June and I was spending early summer in Italy! In a sense I consider myself lucky. The scenery was beautiful but I don't like the people very well. It was not all their fault, it's the war and its effect. Most of the people seem to speak a little English - about the first thing I heard was, "Hey Joe, gotta cigarette?", and they go around singing, "Pistol Packin' Mama" and "Oh Johnny" just as plain as I could.

We had a ride in a third class Italian train with wooden seats and doors on the side of the railroad car - just like in the movies.

We had our first payday overseas and we got paid in "Military Currency", money printed by the Allies for use in occupied countries. When we used it in town for our little business deals, the Italians would not accept Italian currency, but when it came to giving change they always tried to pass the Italian stuff off on us. At first we did not know what they were trying to do but soon we learned and, from then on, we refused to accept the Italian stuff.

Italian money strikes me as funny. It seems that the greater the value of the currency the larger the size of the piece of paper it is printed on. It makes you wonder if they could cut two pieces of paper to the same size, even if they tried. Most of the money was so large that we could not get it into our billfolds. Thank heavens they were more realistic with the military currency.

Our P.K. supplies were supposed to come in on the night of June the eighth so two of us were detailed to pick up the goods and take it back to our area. Like everything you do in the service we had to wait for the stuff. You would have a hard time believing all of the things they have at the P.K. - it makes you wonder how they got so much merchandise over to Europe.

My tent mate was the bugler and he tried to teach me how to blow the bugle. My progress has been extremely fast: within two days I went from being unable to blow a single note to where I could blow two sour notes. The bugler not only talked in his sleep but



he also sang. I had a large piece of rough concrete which I keep in the middle of the tent to keep him on his own side.

I saw a billboard! This may sound silly because there are so many back home but I saw my first one in Italy after being here for almost a month.

Finally the guns and vehicles, which had been shipped separately, caught up with us and on June 14th we shipped out of Naples on LSTs and headed north for Civitavecchia. The trip took all night and about half of the next day and was anything but a vacation on a cruise ship. As we boarded the LST we were issued C-rations and from then on we were more or less on our own. There were no bunks on board so we had to make out as best we could. I found a 3/4 ton weapons carrier and spent the night in the back of it. I did find some rations in the truck which included chocolate bars - these helped to make the trip more enjoyable in spite of the heat.

Around noon of the second day we pulled into Civitavecchia where the LST dropped its ramp and we marched ashore. It was here that I started to form my opinion about the local population, an opinion that was not too complimentary. While marching through the city a boy about ten years old dashed into our ranks and snatched a carton of cigarettes from one of our men. The man was two or three ranks ahead of me and the cigarettes were strapped to the outside of his musette bag. In a matter of seconds they were gone - it was probably not the first time a carton of cigarettes had been obtained in this manner. It was then and there that I decided that the Italians could not be trusted. Our bivouac area was only a couple of miles from the beach and while hiking to it I saw how much damage had been done by the bombing and shelling.

From Civitavecchia we were trucked to a location near Grosseto where we went into action along side of the 36th Division. The 36th was made up of Texas National Guard units. They were battle seasoned veterans and were only too willing to relate their exploits. This took place on the 17th of June and later that day I was lying in a wheat field wondering what I could do to amuse myself when suddenly a German 88mm shell landed close and solved my problem. I decided to dig a deep foxhole, one so deep that I may have to install an elevator, but the shells stopped flying and I stopped digging.

That evening, at about dusk - a German plane dropped its auxiliary gas tank, and it landed about fifty yards from me and in our bivouac area. It sounded like a bomb, movie style, coming down and scared me but after I crawled out from under the truck I found that it was only a gas tank. I could hear the plane but could not see it and the tank had German markings on it.

One evening at about this time, although I don't remember the exact date, we had pulled into a bivouac area after dark and as we were pitching our tents an officer cried out, "Gas, phosgene!" so we quickly put our gas-masks on. A short time later we found out that the over conscientious officer was standing near a haystack and mistook the smell of new-mown hay for that of phosgene gas so sounded the alarm.

One day, early in our combat experience, we were shelled by the Germans and they scored a direct hit on our mess truck. The truck went up in a huge pillar of black smoke and we were condemned to eating C-rations and K-rations for a period of time. Fortunately, nobody was killed or injured by the shelling.

The civilians are always on the move in Italy. The roads are clogged with people and their possessions. Some are walking, others are on bicycles, some are pulling two wheel farm carts by hand and still others are riding on donkey carts. There is always the wine jug in a wicker basket, which reached halfway up the side of the jug, with them. The twenty-sixth of June was a day of mixed events. Some German shells landed in our area but not close

enough to worry us. Then an American artillery outfit to the rear of us, had a misfire and gave us a close call. At that point we started to reequip ourselves with M-1 Garand rifles, '03 Springfields and German Mauser rifles. From this we learned a lesson. If you fired a German gun, rifle in this case, Americans can identify it as German by the sound and soon there was a large number of G.I.s looking for the Germans. It just is not a good policy to stir up so much action. Later that day we took a short walk and found a German half-track which had a cab and hood identical to our Ford trucks at home. We also went for a ride on a German bicycle and a motorcycle to round out the activities of the day.

That evening another outfit moved in to relieve us. They had been a National Guard unit from Duluth which had been activated and shipped to Italy. I was told that there was a similar outfit from Minneapolis but I was not able to find any of them. After we were relieved we went back to a rest area: our time on the line was simply considered part of our training - very realistic training, I'd say.

On June 28th I went swimming in the Mediterranean Sea during the afternoon and to a movie in the evening. It was a thrill to swim in the Mediterranean but I don't like the taste of salt water and of the feeling it leaves on your skin after you get out of the water.

My twenty-first birthday was not a great event. In the evening the band put on an outdoor concert before it got dark and after dark there was a movie, also out of doors.

Since the 517th was in reserve I was able to spend some time in Rome. On the fifth of June Jim Andersen and I set out to see the city together. We went to the Vatican first and Jim, a Mormon, reminded me at a reunion in 1989 that, as we stood in the center of St. Peter's Square, I told him that this was the center of the Christian world.

From St. Peter's Basilica we went to the Vatican Palace where the Pope held an audience and gave his blessing in Italian, French and English. The colorful Swiss Guards were on duty, dressed in blue, red, and yellow uniforms with black helmets.

Jim and I then took a horse drawn cab to the Colosseum. On the way we passed by the Victor Emmanuel Memorial and the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. We also visited the Amphitheater of Imperial Rome and the Arch of Constantine before taking a cab along the Appian Way to the Catacomb of St. Callisto where we had to pay six cents for candles which we used for light in the catacomb.

The cab which we took to the catacomb was an old motor car, I don't know how old but it had a right hand drive and the driver had an assistant. The assistant was a young lad and it was his job to hold his hand out the left side window to signal a left turn when the driver told him to. If the driver chose to make a U-turn on a narrow street, which could be almost any street in Rome, the assistant helped him to turn the steering wheel. If there was a horn it probably did not work. I deduced that the horn did not work because when someone was in his way the driver pounded on the outside of the door with the palm of his hand - sometimes this could be heard over the noise of the motor.

We went to a G.I. restaurant where the meal was free but we had to pay ten cents for table service.

After eating we went to the Roman Forum and then to the Castle of Angels. By that time it was time to meet our trucks and as we left Rome the moon came up over the city. It had been a full, exciting and interesting day and one of the best history lessons I have ever had.

There was an incident on July the 26th which caused me to write home and express how thankful that we were fighting in Europe rather than in the U.S.A. A small Italian boy had his thumb blown off that day by a shell. It may have been a German or American shell

but that made little matter to him, his thumb was gone forever. The boy was too young to know that shells are dangerous.

One day while in Italy, I went to an Italian barber for a shave. First he shaved me with his straight razor then wiped my face off, sponged it, put on a couple of kinds of lotion, combed and brushed my hair and put so much tonic on it that it ran down my ears, then sprinkled cologne all over me. He also trimmed my moustache - all for fifteen cents.

On the seventeenth of July we were treated to a U.S.O. show. I did not record anything about it except that it was pretty good and I enjoyed it. It was a treat to hear some of the recent songs.

Around the middle of July we moved to Frascati, a town about eleven miles east of Rome. The bivouac was in an olive grove on the side of a steep hill. At the top of the hill was our eating area and the mess truck. After we finished each meal we dumped our garbage into a G.I. can. At this point there were always a few children standing near and asking for the scraps. I never did find out whether they ate them or fed them to the farm animals. Nevertheless, most of us gave the kids what we had left in our mess-kits then washed our mess-kits on one G.I. cans of hot water and rinsed them in the second can.

At the bottom of the hill was a flat field which served as our drill field and training area. At one end of this field was a spring but we were not allowed to drink water from it - water which looked so cool and refreshing. The local women would stop at the spring to wash their clothes but I cannot recall seeing them drink the water either. A short distance away less than a city block, was a large house surrounded by a stone wall. The top of the wall had the bottom sections of wine bottles cemented in place with the jagged, broken edges in an upright position to discourage anyone who might attempt to climb over it. This house served as our headquarters. We lived in tents in the olive grove but they were not the usual pup tents, instead the shelter halves were tied to the branches of the olive trees to keep out the sun and dew. It was warm enough to sleep outside comfortably and I do not remember of it raining once. Who I tented with I do not recall but I do remember that both our tent and yard was well furnished. We had a low fence around our property, a mail-box, and a lawn chair sitting out in the yard. Inside we had a bed, a wine cellar and a crude water-cooler which cooled drinking water by evaporation. The fence, about a foot high, the lawn chair and bed were made from tree branches which were tied together. The water cooler was a can filled with stones and tied to a low branch of the olive tree. Directly under this can there was a second can and between the cans there was a string. The string was anchored to a stone in the can, passed through a hole in the center of the bottom of the upper can and ended up in the lower can. We would pour water into the upper can, the water would flow over the stones and follow the string to the lower can. During this process the water would be cooled several degrees. It was a slow process and did not remove the water purifying chemicals, it only made the water seem better because it was cooler.

Our training continued. One "game" that was played over and over went like this: the parts of our howitzer were spread out on the field, as if they had been dropped by parachute, the whistle would sound and all four gun crews would compete to see who could find the parts and assemble their gun in the shortest time. Even those in sections other than the gun crews had to take their turns. This was in case of an injury or fatality on a combat jump.

Occasionally Father Guenette, our Catholic chaplain, would come around in his jeep and say Mass. This was done out in the open and the hood of the jeep served as the altar. At

Mass general absolution was given as a matter of routine and all fasting and abstaining was suspended.

While in Frascati a new business developed, that of stealing jeeps from other outfits, stationed in or visiting, Rome and bringing them back to our area. Once in our area, the original unit designation on the bumper was painted out and our unit number stenciled on in their place. Our officers looked the other way and, at the same time, furnished the stencils, then the renumbered jeeps had to be dispersed in wooded areas in case of an inspections by higher headquarters. When we left for the jump into France we had to leave numerous jeeps behind, it was too risky to turn them in and we could not take them with.

We were able, rather required, to go swimming in a beautiful lake about five miles from our bivouac area near Frascati. This meant a hike over the mountains and through the vineyards to Lake Albano in the July and August heat, the hottest part of the year. Lake Albano was beautiful, nearly a perfect circle of blue water in an extinct volcano with a large castle near the shoreline. It was not until 1984, while visiting the area, that I found out that the castle was Castle Gandolfo, the summer residence of the Pope. Because we swam in this lake which is so close to the castle, I often make the statement that I used to swim in the Pope's swimming pool. On these hikes we were allowed only one canteen full of water but that order was easy to beat, we simply did not drink any water on the way to the lake, then while swimming we "accidentally" swallowed enough water to satisfy our thirst. The trip back was not so bad because we knew we had a canteen full of water and could ration it accordingly until we got back. On the first trip to Lake Albano we decided to shorten the trip by taking a shortcut through a railroad tunnel. There was no danger of trains because the tracks had been destroyed by shells or bombs in many places, so we marched through the dark tunnel. Stumbled may be a better word to describe the trip since only the lead man had a flashlight and the rest of us followed by holding our hand on the shoulder of the man ahead of us. It saved a trip over the top of the mountain and seemed to be such a good idea that we used the same route on the return trip. Before we got all of the way back to our area we found a good reason to avoid the tunnel - it was full of fleas and we all had at least some fleas on us. As we neared our bivouac area we were called to a halt on the opposite side of the road from our camp, ordered to strip and put our clothes in piles, then both we and the clothes were sprayed with D.D.T. Next came the dash across the road, in the nude, to our tents. After that incident we had the choice of going through the tunnel or climbing over the top of the mountain - we chose the climb.

That was not the end of the flea story. A short time later I was on pass in Rome and while there was bothered by an itching sensation under my belt buckle so I stopped at an army first aid station for a quick check. Sure enough, one lone surviving flea had decided to make his home in that warm area. After he was removed and some medication applied I felt better and within a few days the red spot disappeared.

If you could not get to town there was always Merle "Mac" McMorrow to turn to. Mac was our battery barber but he certainly was not a professional barber - other members of the battery will back me up on that statement. At times we were so desperate that we had to chose between one of Mac's haircuts or no haircut and a gig. One thing, Mac did make house calls. He would come right to your tent with his tools in hand and ready to work. Just to make sure that he would be compensated for his work he required that each person pay in advance and once the money was in his hand there was no recourse - he had the money and you were stuck with the haircut, regardless of how it looked. Of course the customer furnished the towel and a box to sit on, this entitled the customer to his choice of seat location. My personal preference was to sit with the loud speaker and music to my back and

a softball game in front of me. Then Mac would start in, chop away wherever he pleased and in a few minutes you had a haircut (?). Neither the customer or the barber seemed too concerned as how the finished job looked because you were not going anywhere important anyhow.

It was my unfortunate luck to have K.P. again on August first, but some good came with the bad - it was also payday and P.K. day.

Early in the morning on the 8th of August, so early that the sun had not even thought about getting up, Sgt. Westbrook sent a message that three of us were to report for K.P. At first it was not too bad, just the regular run of things, but later I found myself cooking. I had never seen so many chickens in my life! First into the pan of flour went each chicken, then into the pan to fry - some came out raw, others burned and some even came out just right. They must have forgotten how hard I worked and slaved over the hot stove during the day because that evening they had me making pancake batter and syrup for breakfast the following morning. Some big lumps developed in the syrup so we fished them out and threw them away - it made no difference since I did not plan to show up for breakfast anyhow.

All of the dastardly deeds of Sgt. Westbrook were overlooked the following day when, as I was writing a letter, he tossed a can of beer into my tent. That evening a few of us went to a movie in town and saw "The Male Animal". It was pretty good even though most of the actors were from the army.

On the tenth of August the entire combat team was restricted to the bivouac area. There were no passes and any letters written between then and the upcoming jump were held until after the jump had been made. We were issued small books with French phrases in them such as "Where are the Germans?", "How many are there?", "How many tanks do they have?" along with useful phrases to be used in civilian relations and hints on how to act in France. With this help we were supposed to be able to ask questions, but how were we supposed to understand the answers?

Sand tables were set up to give us an idea of the layout of the area we would be jumping into but we still were not told of the location of our D.Z. Our only hint was that it would be in France, this we knew because of the phrase book. The battalion was then moved to an airfield at Canino, near Rome, where we waited for the order to load the equipment and board the planes. The airfield was merely a pasture with a dusty runway, but the grass of the pasture made a good place to rest on. A short time before we boarded the planes we received some beer and there was a movie shown, "Stage Door Canteen" if I remember correctly.

## JUMP INTO FRANCE

I slept for a couple of hours and at about 2300 hours we boarded the planes. It was still the 14th of August. One by one each man climbed aboard the plane with his heavy pack and a parachute harness so tight that you could hardly walk and took his place in the assigned seat on each side of the aisle, facing the man across from him.

The plane roared down the runway, a dusty runway with lights about as visible as flashlights, marking the right and left side, and finally we lifted off. The time was between 0136 and 0151, depending on the position of your plane in the flight, on August 15th, 1944 that we became airborne and set course for France. By this time we knew that we were supposed to land near the town of Le Muy but I still had a "lost" feeling, for I had no idea where Le Muy was. Try as I may it was impossible to sleep in the uncomfortable metal seats with the equipment I was carrying and with the tight parachute harness cutting into my legs so I just prayed and watched the exhaust flames from the plane's engine as they shot past the open cabin door.

Somewhere en route over the Mediterranean one of the three cargo chutes in the cabin came loose and the air rushing in through the door caused one of the chutes to bellow out. It took several men to collapse the chute and keep the load from being pulled out of the plane. If the first chute had been pulled out it would have pulled the other two cabin loads with it. Once under control there was no problem and when it came time to jump we simply pushed the load toward the door and let the wind drag the containers out.

As we approached the coast of France I remember the fear growing inside of me and of praying harder. Outside it was dark, it was still before sunrise, and when we passed over the coastline there were no lights to be seen. We did not encounter any anti-aircraft fire and as we neared the drop zone the red light came on to indicate that we were nearing our target and it was time to get ready for the jump. We stood up, made the equipment check and waited for the green light. It flashed on, we moved toward the door and jumped - the time was 0450. At that point I was pretty busy but I worried about what might be waiting for us on the ground and about the chances of landing in the vicinity of the drop zone. Once out of the plane and after the parachute opened things seemed to be all right for the first few seconds, I then realized that I could not make out any ground features. My first thought was that I had jumped out over the Mediterranean and was headed for a water landing but I could not hear any waves. All of a sudden I broke through a fog bank, for it was fog that covered the land and had prevented me from seeing any details. Suddenly there was the ground! The fog was so close to the ground that I had no chance to prepare for a landing.

The landing was not too hard but it was definitely in an undesirable place, it was on a hillside in a terraced orchard. Within a few minutes I had joined up with three or four men from my battery and it was only a short time before we found the parts of our field piece which had to be hand carried down the terraces to a road at the base of the hill then assembled. Our training paid off - the gun was assembled and we set off in a southeasterly direction. We joined with other gun sections and proceeded toward St. Roseline, our rendezvous point. We had landed about five miles northwest of the village of Trans-en-Provence but we were able to march nearly ten miles through the confused German positions with very few incidents. One gun section, while pulling the 75mm howitzer by hand, had marched through the town of Les Arcs without firing a shot, only to discover that they had taken the wrong road when leaving town. They retraced their route back to the town and the fork in the road and took the correct road, At that point they were fired on by the

Germans. There was a fire fight during which the gun crew fired any shell with any fuze that happened to be handy. Some rounds were equipped with time-delay fuzes, which did not explode on impact, but at a preset time after the round was fired. The gun crew did not have time to reset the time so they simply loaded and fired. These shells, with the time-delay fuzes, went through several houses before exploding somewhere down the street. Outnumbered by the Germans, the artillerymen were forced to destroy their field piece. They tossed a white phosphorus grenade down the tube, then divided the firing mechanism between three teams of two men and each team and set out on independent courses. Each team found its way back to Chateau St. Roseline without the loss or injury of a single man.

Shortly after daybreak Lt. Moore, a small but vicious man who had often expressed his hatred of the Germans, and PFC Kennemer ran into a machine-gun nest and tried to wipe it out. In this attempt both men were killed.

We tried to bring down some telephone or telegraph wires by shooting at the insulators. This failed, the bullets from our carbines only bounced off the glass insulators, so we chopped down the poles and cut the wires. By evening we were operating as a battalion from a position in a field near St. Roseline. At about 1800 we got a little action but it was the wrong kind. The 551st Parachute Infantry Battalion jumped into our position - they had heard that we had been wiped out so, when they saw troops beneath them as they floated down, the 551 pulled the pins from their grenades and dropped the grenades on us. In spite of the "bombing" we were glad to see them.

That evening I was assigned to an outpost along a railroad embankment. Passing under the tracks was a large culvert which caused me a great deal of worry - all night long I worried that a German patrol might use the culvert to get over to our side. To add to the fear was the sound of a German patrol signaling to each other by clicking the bolts of their rifles. This was a common method of signaling used by the Germans and made us jittery because we could not tell where the sound was coming from or how far away it was.

I experienced my first sight of a dead German soldier a day or so after the jump into France. He was an enlisted man spread out next to his slit trench. He had probably been killed during the early hours of the invasion and the corpse was already badly bloated from lying in the hot August sun. There was a ring on his finger which I contemplated removing, but because of the swollen finger I changed my mind. I had heard of G.I.s cutting off fingers to get the ring and, in some instances of the flesh coming off with the ring - my stomach could not stand this so the ring remained undisturbed.

In the evening of the 16th of August, D+2, the airborne phase of Operation Dragoon ended when American tanks linked up with the paratroopers in Les arcs and Le Mugy. The 1st Allied Airborne force was ordered to hold the area bounded by Le Mugy - Draguignan - Les arcs, an area of about twenty-five square miles, until the 36th Infantry Division arrived and passed through. The 468th bivouacked near La Motte until the 18th of August. We, along with the rest of the 517th Combat Team, started out for Peget. This operation was the reverse of the normal mode of operation, the infantry rode and the artillery marched, always pulling the 75mm howitzers by hand.

## LIFE IN THE MARITIME ALPS

As we marched east along the French Riviera I could not help but to be amazed by the beauty of the landscape and of the perfect weather. The sky was blue, ever so clear, and temperature was comfortable for an August day. That area was not damaged by bombs or shell fire and the undamaged homes were beautiful. Each house was surrounded by a large, well kept lawn with gardens which were in full bloom. The thing that probably stood out most in my mind was the was the sculptured trees. The designs of these trees included balls, squares and circles and looked as if the designs had been slipped over the trunk and fixed in place with an open area left between each design where the trunk of the tree could be seen.

Near Grasse we went into bivouac and had a four day rest. Following the rest we moved east in pursuit of the Germans. In this area we saw more of the anti-airborne defenses of the Germans. These consisted of poles with wires strung between them and connected to artillery shells which would explode if the wire was disturbed. There was a trench system, similar to an irrigation system, with drums of gasoline located so the gas could be spread over large areas and ignited. For defense against gliders there were poles implanted upright in open fields, piles of rocks and even wrecked cars to obstruct a field and make landings both difficult and dangerous.

By September 5th we position in the mountains and living a rather dull life. We were near a mountain stream which was very shallow and had a smooth rock bottom, you might say it was an excellent bath tub, however the running water was forever cold. Late in the afternoon we decided to cook a little treat for ourselves, some corn. Somewhere we had found a pot which looked suitable for cooking corn in so we put water in the pot, added the corn and waited anxiously for the corn to cook. What followed was not normal, as the water and corn came to a boil they started to give off a black smoke, it was then that we discovered that the pot had tar in the bottom and the tar began to melt. The end result was that we did not have any corn for dinner.

It was in this position that a very unfortunate incident took place - one of our men, Merle McMorrow, had turned in for the night and was sleeping near the perimeter of his gun position when he had a dream. He dreamed that he was on guard and someone was threatening the position so, in his sleep, he picked up his gun and fired at the intruder. When someone called for a medic Merle woke up only to find that he had actually fired his gun and hit one of the C battery men. The man was fatally wounded. McMorrow stood court-martial, was found guilty, fined one dollar and given a carton of cigarettes then transferred out of the 460th Parachute Field Artillery. In such cases this was the normal procedure - the person was fined one dollar so he could not be tried for the same incident later and the cigarettes were given to offset the cost of the fine. It was also policy to transfer the person to another outfit for moral purposes of both the person and the rest of the outfit.

At the time of the accident we were in a position on a mountain trail at the end of a valley, a position which would look like a horseshoe on a map, with the field pieces at the closed end of the horseshoe. I was at an outpost at the end of one of the arms and McMorrow was at another outpost at the end of the other arm which was about a hundred yards away as the crow flies. In spite of the distance between our outposts, I, like every other man in the battery, could swear that the bullet passed only a few inches from my head. Regardless of who you talked to the feeling was the same.



We did have a scare in that position. We could hear noise from somewhere along the mountain trail and got set to meet a German patrol but it turned out to be bells around the necks of a herd of sheep with a shepherd close behind.

A week later Bud did something which deserves mention - he volunteered for K.P. Usually the sergeant "volunteered Gallwas' services for K.P." but on this occasion Bud did it on his own. More power to you, Bud!

It was in France and about at this time that we were moving by truck to a different position. We traveled along a typical French rural road which was lined with trees. The trees had been notched and explosive charges attached to the trunk so the trees could be made to fall across the road simply by detonating the charges. I was riding in a 3/4 ton weapons carrier and in the back on the left side when a tank retriever, moving in the opposite direction passed us. It was a tight squeeze and after the trucks passed I looked at my musette bag, which had been hanging on the outside of our truck. What a mess! The bag was torn and everything inside ruined. My ink bottle had been broken and the ink was covering almost everything. The chocolate bars were a total loss and chocolate had been squished into an extra magazine for my carbine. Cleaning the mess up was a major problem out in the field and much of the contents of the bag had to be thrown away.

By the nineteenth of September we were in a position overlooking Luceram, a small mountain village near the French-Italian border. Our mission was to liberate the southeast corner of France from the Germans and to prevent any Germans who were in Italy, and fleeing north, from coming back into France. This was mostly a defensive position and we had time on our hands so Jim Mohr and I decided to improve our outpost by building a new shelter and a bunker, just in case the Germans should lob a few shells in. For building material we used the wood from the cases in which the 75mm shells were shipped in and some cut stone which formed a guardrail on the road that passed through our position.

The side walls and the ends of the shelter were made of the wood from the shell crates as was our genuine soft-wood floor, while shelter halves formed the roof. One side of the shelter was dug into the side of the mountain so it was better protected than the other, but there was still a wood wall used. Both of the ends were made of wood, but one was plain while the other end included an entrance along with a stone fireplace. For the chimney we used the cardboard cases in which the individual 75mm shells were shipped. Each shell contained four bags of powder and to control the range of the shell you removed one, two or three powder bags. Before turning in each evening we would take one or two of these unused powder bags, empty the contents into our fireplace, then add a few twigs or pieces of wood. In the morning we would flip a match into the fireplace to ignite the powder which, in turn, started the wood. Within a minute the tent would be warm. Of course the chimney would burn up every time we used the fireplace and we would have to replace it, however there was plenty of material available for replacements after a night of fire missions. As the fall weather got colder we appreciated the fireplace more and more each morning.

We also discovered that the fall wind often blew through the cracks of our exposed side wall so we undertook a remodeling project. Since the wall was about two feet high and made up about half of the height of our shelter it became urgent that we plug these cracks. We used wallpaper from the shelled out barber shop in Luceram. Pin up pictures completed the interior decor.

The bunker was a short distance down the hill from our shelter. It started out as a German slit trench. We cut out a side entrance, beefed up the roof with stone and sandbags, then added a ventilation system. Inside we installed two seats for our personal comfort.

While in this position we were able to visit Nice several times and do a little shopping. Perfume and film were the main items, the film for me and the perfume to send home.

On the way into Nice we would pass a house which became known as the "peanut-brittle house" because of its tan walls with white rocks embedded in them. While in Nice we stayed at the villa of the king of Belgium, a huge villa with a small guardhouse at the main gate to the premises and a large pool just outside of the dining room windows. The pool was not a swimming pool and was surrounded by statues and a beautiful garden. The floor plan of the villa was very symmetrical, the ceilings of the rooms were high and the rooms had unusually large windows which made the rooms bright and helped to provide for better ventilation. The dining room was no exception and the large windows overlooked the outdoor pool. There were six doors to the dining room, two in the wall opposite the windows and two on each end of the room. We ate our humble 18 in 1 rations in this luxurious room. For sleeping quarters we used any room that we could find space in and we slept on the floor in our sleeping bags.

While in Nice I must admit that I did a little black marketing. A carton of cigarettes cost me fifty-five cents and I sold them for the going price of \$20 in Nice. This is where I got the money for the presents I sent home. One nice feature which I saw in French stores was a sign in a window, usually near the door, which listed the languages spoken in that store. I am not sure how helpful it would be in the States, but it was convenient in our case.

All of our sightseeing was done on our own, either by walking or by hiring a horse drawn carriage. The beach was sealed off from the rest of the city by walls built from building to building across the streets where the street started at the beach. The walls were designed to slow down any invading force and had only a few small openings. The harbor was also well defended, even to the degree that there was a turret from an American tank mounted near the water's edge. The harbor itself was dirty, filled with debris and had a film of oil floating on the surface.

On one trip to Nice I decided to get a haircut, have my handlebar moustache trimmed, then have my picture taken to send home. Things did not work out well - the barber did not speak or understand English and I had the same problem with French - so when I tried to tell the barber that I wanted the moustache trimmed and a haircut, he seemed to understand but his actions proved otherwise. He got the haircut right but when he came to the moustache it was a different story. He took one side between the fingers of one hand, stretched it out as far as it would go and then, with one swipe of his straight edge razor, he cut it off. He then stepped back and said, "Bon". It was at that point that I felt like taking his razor and working him over. However, the damage had been done, so I had my picture taken with a small, trim moustache. On one visit to Nice I was hit by a tram while walking on the sidewalk. Well, really I was hit by a passenger hanging on the outside of a streetcar as it proceeded down a very narrow street.

Since our jump on August 15th until September 20th we had been on a ration of two meals a day, but on the 20th we went back to the normal three meals.

By this time I had learned that I should have learned some French. Two young boys, about ten years old, came by our gun position one day and asked if we had seen their "shovel". Now the French word for horse is "cheval", which sounded like shovel to us, so we tried to give them a trench shovel. At that point they began to cry and ran off.

Another activity we engaged in was the gathering of, and roasting, chestnuts. To bring the chestnuts down from the tree we would throw our steel helmet up and knock a few down with each toss, these we would collect in our helmet liner. When we had enough we would transfer the chestnuts from the liner to the steel helmet and place the helmet on an

open fire until the nuts were roasted. For some reason the green chestnuts never did seem to get fully cooked and always tasted soggy.

September 24th, 1944 fell on Sunday and I went to Mass twice that morning - first to one said by father Guenette and then one in the church in Luceram. The church was one hundred and ten years old (in 1944) and, like most churches in Europe, was located on the highest hill in town. This meant a hike of about half a mile through narrow cobblestone streets, streets so narrow that at almost any point you could extend your arms and touch the walls of the buildings on both sides of the street. There was only one road through the town wide enough for a car or truck and that was at the base of the hill.

The church was a pretty little church with the conventional floor plan in the shape of a cross. The main altar was located at the top of the cross, as viewed in the floor plan, or at the front of the church. In the left arm was a monument to the French soldiers who had lost their lives in World War I. Along side of the monument was an altar and a large crucifix with an honor roll listing the names of the dead in gold on a blue background. The remainder of the church, from the arms to the main entrance, had three altars on each side.

The seating arrangement was unusual. The first ten or fifteen rows were merely chairs with kneeling benches. Behind the chairs there was an assortment of pews, all different, for about ten more rows.

The Mass was a High Mass with two priests and four altar boys. One priest celebrated the Mass and the other stood on the left, or Epistle, side of the altar and read almost all of the time during Mass. One outstanding feature was the candles - they were electric instead of wax candles. People talk during Mass in European churches and the European churches are noisier than their American counterparts. At this particular Mass the altar boys laughed and talked throughout the Mass.

It was interesting to watch two young girls, eight or nine years old, who came in after us carrying a baby. The baby was about a year old. One girl held the baby for about five minutes then passed it to the other. She held it for a few minutes then passed it on - the poor baby was passed around the church like a collection plate. Finally it ended up in the arms of the original carrier who felt the baby's diapers, then rushed out of the church. After Mass there was a Benediction and, as we were leaving the church, the Germans started to shell the town. Bud and I tried to act calm and walked down the street in as casual manner as we could but with our knees knocking together. Suddenly there was a loud WHAM! as a German shell hit nearby and shell fragments ricocheted off the building walls. We picked up a shell fragment as a souvenir took cover and when things cooled down we headed back to our foxholes.

I did receive a good supply of magazines from home but most of them were special editions for overseas servicemen and, in order to save space and weight, there was no advertising in them. It made little difference because most of the advertising during the war pointed out how the company was supporting the war effort or what their product would be like after the war. But, I did miss the advertising, it was a personal connection with home and civilian life.

There was a small resort town a mile or so up the mountain from our gun position by the name of Piera Cava so I made a few trips up to look around. There was not much to see but it was a pleasant way to spend a few free hours. Between our position and Piera Cava part of the 442nd Combat Team was in position. This was an outfit made up of men of Japanese-American descent and by the time the war had ended they had earned an usual number of citations for their valor. On several occasions I had stopped at their position to talk to some of the men.

On about the fifteenth of October I went on pass to Paris. Mention was made in letters to home, of the luxury of soft beds in hotel but no details about the city or what we did while there.

Some things I recall while writing this account in 1993 included seeing the Louve, with a burned-out German tank in front of it and a visit to Notre Dame. My first thought when I saw Notre Dame was to look for the gargoyles on the exterior which I had once in a movie. This I did and sure enough they were there. The Rose Window had been removed during the war and stored in a safe place so I missed seeing it until there on a visit in 1984. I was also impressed by Napoleon's tomb. I think the most disappointing sight was the Eiffel Tower, not because of the tower itself, but because of the fact that the army had installed a radio transmitter on the second level, therefore the entire tower was declared "Off Limits". To make matters worse, the army painted the tower an O.D. color.

There was a saying in the army, and it probably holds as true today as it did in World War II, which covers the Eiffel Tower situation rather well. It states, "If it moves salute it, if it doesn't move pick it up and if it is too big to pick up paint it". This probably prompted the army to paint the tower O.D. and now it looked like any other piece of G. I. equipment.

To me the three day pass to Paris was more than a sightseeing trip; it was a few days of freedom when I did not have to sign in and out and had hot water, a bathtub, electric lights and a soft bed to sleep on. The food was outstanding too, such as chicken and apple pie ala mode which I had one evening and a steak dinner I enjoyed with a dessert of cake with a sauce over it, at noon the following day. The ice cream was the first I had had in five months and it sure tasted good.

On October 21st I was back in Southern France and writing home by the light of the electric lights we had rigged up in our tent. My energy was directed to finding a better way to shell and roast chestnuts but without much success - the chestnuts still tasted the same.

Probably our biggest mail-call took place on October 26th when almost everyone netted eight to ten letters. I did note that only one of my letters from the States had been censored but nothing had been cut out from it. I did not hear of anything ever being censored from the mail I had written. Our own officers were supposed to act as censors of the outgoing mail from the battery but they could not read each and every letter so many went uncensored. By this time the officers only looked at those letters written by a small number of guys who had tried to slip something through when we first arrived in Europe. While I was on pass in Paris a number of magazines had arrived so I had plenty of reading material.

On the same day as the huge mail call Jim Mohr and I had to move our house across the road and about seventy-five yards up the mountain side. No sooner had we removed the roof than it began to rain. At that time we decided that we should replace the wooden ends of our house so we went into a small roadside chapel to escape the rain and build new parts.

Two days later, on October 28th, the Germans abandoned their fortifications in the Sospel Valley, including Fort St. Roch, a part of the Meginot Line. This action liberated the town of Sospel which was the last French town to be liberated from the Germans in World War II. I did see the exterior of Fort St. Roch once while in the service and then, only from a great distance. The fort was so well camouflaged that it looked like the top of a mountain rather than a fort. In 1984 I, along with others in Sospel for the fortieth anniversary reunion, I finally had a chance to see the inside of the fort. It was a firsthand chance to see how the French army once lived.

The first snowfall of the season came during the night of October 30-31, 1944. There was enough snow to spawn a snowball fight. Some of the fellows built a snow man and we had to shovel the snow from our tents to keep them from caving in.

The 468th celebrated Armistice Day of 1944 by having each howitzer fire eleven rounds into the German positions in Italy at 1100 hours, just to remind the Germans of what day it was.

In the middle of November I wrote home to recount my good fortune of being in the artillery rather than the infantry. The artillery did not move as often which gave them a chance to build more comfortable living quarters. True, when we did move we had to kiss all of our handiwork good-bye, but it was nice while it lasted and the construction had helped to pass the time.

On the nineteenth of November I was again complaining about Bud and threatening to leave him behind when I went to Mass unless he changed his ways. On that particular Sunday morning we started out on foot for the town of Luceram. When we discovered that Mass was to start in the French church in about five minutes, so we went there knowing that it would be an hour or so before our chaplain would come around. Just before the priest came out on the altar Bud got the bright idea that the balcony would be a better place to sit than the main floor. Later he told me that the reason was because the collection plate was never passed in the choir loft - it may be true but I think the real reason was the girls in the choir. This, I believe, had more than anything else to do with the move. In fact he made eyes at one girl so often during Mass that I was forced to nudge him several times. Then Bud laughed at a friendly dog that came into the main part of the church and tried to make friends with every G.I. When all the dog got was nothing for its efforts, except dirty looks it proceeded to curl up in the center aisle and take a nap.

After ninety-seven days on the line and after liberating Sospel, we had a chance for a rest but, like most of our rests, it included more training. Eighteen days later we boarded 40 G-8's and headed north. After three days we arrived at Soissons in northern France. The weather was cold - maybe we had been spoiled by the wonderful weather in southern France. It was here and at that time, December 9th, that we became part of the XVIII Airborne Corps, now every airborne unit in Europe was part of the XVIIIth.