This book is dedicated to my best army friend T/5 Harold K. Wells and to my late loving wife Rita, my late daughter Margaret Elizabeth (Peggy), and my daughter and guiding star Joann. Each was and is an important part of my life and has assuredly made me a better person.
Time continues to march on for all of us old veterans. It is not so strange that the lyrics to the old song "My Buddy" become more meaningful as the days go by.

In many, many ways we are members of the greatest generation.

"...My buddy, my buddy,
Your buddy misses you..."

"My Buddy “
by Henry Burr (1922)
ABOUT the AUTHOR

My name is A. Edward Pierce. I entered the United States Army on October 12, 1942 at Fort Dix, NJ. After a few days, I was shipped to Camp Campbell, KY and became a member of Headquarters Battery of the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion of the 12th Armored Division. After the Tennessee Maneuvers and a brief time at Camp Barkeley, TX, I was transferred to A Company of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion where I became a member of the first rifle squad of the second platoon.

I sailed with the division to Europe on the Empress of Australia. I served in combat as a rifleman with Company A of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion. After the hostilities, I remained with the 12th Armored Division until its deactivation. I was transferred to the 2nd Armored Division for the journey back to the United States. I was honorably discharged at Fort Dix on February 7, 1946.

I am a lifetime member of the 12th Armored Division Association and I have served as Unit Representative of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion from June 2010 until the present date. I am also beginning my ninth year as Treasurer of the Association. In 2009, I was honored by the Association by being named “Mr. Hellcat” for the year, and in 2011, I was honored by receiving the Association’s highest award when I was named “Distinguished Member” for the year. On May 8, 2012, I received an Honorary Master in Military Arts Degree from Cumberland University for participation in the Tennessee Maneuvers in 1943 with the 12th Armored Division. Again in 2013, the Association honored me by awarding me the title of “Mr. Hellcat.” I am a recipient of France’s highest military award, the French Legion of Honor.

The vignettes in this book took place both in the United States and in Europe. The writings were and are a labor of love. I confess that I served with some of the finest individuals that God ever placed on this earth and I considered each of them as a friend. They all deserve a place in Heaven.

A. Edward Pierce

October 15, 2014
Ed Pierce
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Exodus from the 12th to the 2nd Armored Division

Upon the deactivation of the 12th Armored Division, good friend, David Kronick [A] and I were among the members of the Division transferred to the Second Armored Division for occupation duties and the subsequent journey homeward. David and I were transferred to Headquarters Company of the 41st Armored Infantry Regiment that was billeted in a Castle Estate owned by a Baron and Baroness and located in Sterbfritz, Germany. It was located in the vicinity of Frankfurt, Germany. Actually, we were situated between the cities of Frankfurt and Fulda. Our First Sergeant was a Californian whose last name was Racies and he was the real power behind the scenes of Headquarters Company. The 41st had been awarded the Presidential Unit Citation and the Belgian Fourregere which we were able to wear as newly assigned members of the unit.

David and I had some very nice visits to Frankfurt while we were members of the Second Armored Division and we also had a wonderful five or seven day pass to Brussels, Belgium. While we were in Brussels, Sir Winston Churchill was visiting there, too.

Do any of you remember our canteen cups? Well, the originals were made of honest-to-goodness aluminum while the later issue was made of an inferior alloy of some sort. The aluminum ones would not rust whereas the other type would and did. Let me preface this by saying that we had not used our mess kits or canteen cups in many, many months. Keep in mind, the war in Europe ended officially on May 8 and this is now the month of October. Well, on one Saturday morning those of us with passes to Frankfurt were preparing to board our six by six trucks. Just as the convoy was about to depart, First Sergeant Racies decided to call for a mess kit and canteen cup inspection. Needless to say, I was gigged for a rusty canteen cup. No trip to Frankfurt for me unless I could produce a rust-free canteen cup to Sergeant Racies. My friend Dave fortunately for me had one of the old aluminum ones, so after a brief time, I borrowed Dave’s cup and took it to Sergeant Racies. I am certain that he knew he was being snookered, but he okayed my pass to Frankfurt, so off Dave and I went to the big city and had an exceedingly great visit.

While with the Second Armored, I went by motor convoy to Berlin allegedly to see the 2nd’s football team play the team of the 82nd Airborne Division, but this is a story for another time.

Before closing and to clear up any pipe dreams, the 2nd Armored Division was the division that met up with the Russians at the Elbe River in the vicinity of Magdeburg, and they resent any member of the 12th attempting to take credit for this singular feat. That’s it. I am done for this time.
Berlin, the Divided City

The time is November 1945; the location is Sterbfritz, Germany where Headquarters Company of the 41st Armored Infantry Regiment of the 2nd Armored Division is billeted in a beautiful, picturesque Castle complex. The Second Armored Division of which I am now a member has a football game scheduled with the 82nd Airborne Division at a converted soccer stadium in Berlin, Germany. A truck convoy of the 2nd Armored members is scheduled to make the trip to Berlin to support our team. It must be borne in mind that the Second Armored Division occupied Berlin before being relieved by the 82nd Airborne Division.

Carl Jenkins from Tampa, Florida and I signed up to be members of those going on the trip. Our destination in Berlin was Templehof Airdrome where we were to be billeted during our brief visit to Berlin.

The truck ride from Sterbfritz to Berlin was rather uneventful, but I do remember our convoy having been stopped at a Russian checkpoint some miles before actually entering Berlin and arriving at Templehof.

Upon arrival at the Airdrome, we were assigned a cot for our night’s sleeping comfort. Shortly thereafter, we were on our own. Rather than attending the football game, Carl and I opted to see the sights of Berlin. The city’s subway system was still intact, but because of the way the city was divided as a result of earlier agreements by the British, French, Russians and the United States, it was not possible for an American Serviceman to exit the subway in the Russian Sector and vice versa. There were certain things that Carl and I wanted to see that were situated in the Russian Sector, but were unable to do so. We did, however, ride the subway.
Subsequently, Carl and I met two young ladies who were gracious enough to show us around the city. We spent the evening with them until it was time to return to Templehof for a good night’s sleep before our return trip in the morning to Sterbfritz.

The morning ride from Berlin to our home base was likewise uneventful. Carl and I saw no football game, but we saw much of Berlin and met some rather nice people in our very short stay in the divided city. Both of us were glad we had signed on for the trip.

By the Hair on my Chinny-Chin-Chin

This is a very brief story about the very early days in my military life. The time was November 1942. The place was Camp Campbell, Kentucky and at the time I was a proud member of Headquarters Battery of the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion of the 12th Armored Division. I was just twenty years of age and had been a member of the military only since October 12.

It might be wise at this time to say that I had light blond hair and my skin was described as fair. Assigned to our battery was a likeable Second Lieutenant named Joseph A. Zanetta from upstate New York. Lt. Zanetta, I believe, attended Officers Candidate School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where many of our Field Artillery Officers were trained.

Now that the background material is out of the way, permit me to relate the story. On a somewhat brisk November morning, Lt. Zanetta was inspecting the men of headquarters battery as we were lined up in formation. Down each row he went along with First Sergeant Thompson, a native Kentuckian, eyeing the men intently. When he came to my location, he stopped, looked me directly in the eyes and said, “Pierce, when is the last time you shaved?” Remaining at rigid attention, I replied, “Sir, I have never shaved in my life.” The Lieutenant then asked, “Weren’t you issued a razor and blades?” I answered, “Yes sir.” With that he said, “Well, you’d better start using them!” He then walked on as did Sgt. Thompson.

Immediately after the episode, I ferreted out the razor and supplies and commenced my first experience at shaving. I have been doing so ever since. Now at age ninety after having this flashback, I’ve been pondering just how many razors, blades and Norelco Electric Razors I have dealt with and all because of Lt. Joseph Zanetta’s earlier admonition.

Lt. Zanetta was a great officer and very well respected by the men who served with him. Despite being one of his admirers, I put the blame on him every time I experience a razor nick. Sorry, Joe.
There was a 1940 film titled “The Long Voyage Home” that starred John Wayne. I was part of a sequel titled “The Long Voyage Home II” while a member of Headquarter Company of the 41st Armored Infantry Regiment of the Second Armored Division. This is a tongue-in-cheek title that has to do with the lengthy time it took to get us from Sterbfritz, Germany by way of Marseilles, France to the good old U.S.A.

We left Sterbfritz by truck convoy for Marseilles in ample time that would have insured our being home before Christmas 1945. As bad luck would have it, we spent Christmas and the New Year of 1946 in a very large military camp just outside the city of Marseilles. We were permitted to visit Marseille daily from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. At any other time, the city was off limits. It was a very dangerous port city, much of which was off limits even at the hours we were permitted to be there.

Prior to our arrival, most of the ships carrying troops home were sailing into Marseilles. Because of a clamor about this situation being raised by the troops sent to Le Havre for redeployment, a large number of the ships suddenly were rerouted to that port. This resulted in our being in Marseilles for a far longer a period of time than originally contemplated. Many of us collectively sang “I’m Waiting for Ships That Never Come In.”

Finally on or about January 20, a group of us boarded the M.I.T. Victory, a brand new Victory ship, for an eleven day north Atlantic crossing. We sailed on the Mediterranean Sea and through the Strait of Gibraltar out into the Atlantic Ocean. While a couple of the days were exceedingly rough, we were most assuredly headed in the right direction. On this crossing, we had three rather good meals each day along with three-high bunks for sleeping. This can be contrasted to the two poor quality meals a day that we received on the Empress of Australia when we were being transported to Europe. Add this to the fact that many of us slept on the deck of the Empress rather than utilizing the hammocks that were provided.
The M. I. T. Victory

On arrival in the United States, we sailed into New York Harbor past the Statue of Liberty and docked at a pier in Brooklyn. From there, we were transported by ferry boat to New Jersey where we boarded trains to Camp Kilmer. Camp Kilmer was situated in New Brunswick, NJ. After a two-day stay at Camp Kilmer, the men were dispatched to Camps close to their homes. I was shipped to Fort Dix, NJ for processing and ultimate separation from military service. I was honorably discharged at Fort Dix, on February 7, 1946. Thus, my long voyage home was ended.

Lieutenant Snead, Yes, Indeed

Even in war time and in the heat of battle, humorous things often do happen and in many respects such occurrences help one retain his sanity. The ability to smile and even chuckle at times tended to boost morale. That having been said, I remember an instance involving Lt. Kenneth C. Snead and me that I thought humorous because the outcome did not result in any of us being wounded, captured or killed. I might add that my good friend, Floyd C. Van Derhoef who was a Captain at the time, although not present when this took place, is aware of this occurrence.

The time was late March 1945, the place was somewhere in Germany, and the cast of characters was those occupying half-track number A-10, the first rifle squad of the second platoon of A Company of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion and Lt. Snead. It was a moonlit night at which time we were driving in convoy without headlights on. Lt. Snead was standing in the front of the vehicle as I was driving. We were moving at a relative good pace when suddenly the convoy came to a halt. I applied the brakes and brought the vehicle to a smooth stop. We were stopped for a considerable period of time when Lt. Snead said to me, “Pierce, you’ve been driving for quite some time. Put your head down on the steering wheel and take a snooze. When the convoy begins to move, I will tap you on your steel helmet.” I followed Lt. Snead’s order to the letter and fell sound asleep. What seemed a very long time later, I felt a rapid tapping on my steel helmet, I awakened, looked ahead and there was no vehicle to be
seen. I said to Lt. Snead, “Where did the rest of the convoy get to? When did they leave?” Lt. Snead on occasion and this was one of them, was known to stutter or stammer. He answered me by saying, “How the hell do I know, I fell asleep too!”

With that I put the half-track in gear, took off as fast as the vehicle would go, and attempted to catch up with the portion of the convoy that was somewhere ahead of us. Luckily, within one-half or three quarters of a mile ahead, the convoy was halted again. We linked up with them without any difficulty. Lt. Snead and I both heaved great sighs of relief.

This has nothing whatever to do with the just related narrative, but rumors circulated throughout “A” Company that Lt. Kenneth C. Snead was related to ‘Slammin’ Sammy Snead, the golfing legend. Whether this information was authentic or just another of the many latrine rumors that circulated from time to time, I do not have the answer. I do know that Lt. Snead was a good officer and that he had the respect of his men, and that was far more important to all of us. I last saw Lt. Snead at a battalion party held in Gerstetten, Germany just prior to my being transferred to the Second Armored Division.

Our Battlefield Angels

I have heard it said that the Garand Rifle is the infantryman’s best friend, and I have no qualms with that statement, but the infantryman had another loyal and wonderful friend as well. It was the combat medic. How many lives they saved by their heroism and on the spot medical procedures is unknown even to this day.

From my own personal experience at the Speyer, Germany engagement, I know full well that Lt. Frank H. Deeds and Sergeant Charles Trusty would never have survived their wounds were it not for Pete, the medic, and his counterparts. Both would have undoubtedly bled to death or died as the result of going into shock.

Our army surgeons also did remarkable work, but had it not been for the combat medics, our surgeons would have had far less seriously wounded but still alive servicemen on which to perform their miracles.

I very well remember talking with our medic, Pete, one afternoon after we had been engaged in a brief fire fight in which one of the men of another squad lost his life. Pete said to me, “He really didn’t have to die. His wound was really superficial. The bullet entered one side of his leg, missed the bone entirely, and exited the other side. Instead of lying down and using his morphine syrette, he got up, ran about 25 feet, and fell over dead. He simply went into shock and died as a result.”
Most all of us old combat infantrymen can tell you that our combat medics were outstanding and that many, many more lives would have been lost had it not been for the dedication, excellent training, and valor of our medics. God bless them all. They were our battlefield angels.

A Too Brief Encounter

The year is 1945, the place is somewhere in Germany, and the Mystery Division, is making its mad dash toward the Rhine River and Ludwigshafen. We are in a lengthy motor convoy, but I am not at this time behind the wheel of our halftrack. Rather I am seated among the other members of the first rifle squad of the second platoon and my position is on the right-hand side of the vehicle.

Prior to our departure, we had just received a rifleman from the replacement center. He introduced himself and in the conversation, he mentioned that he was from Philadelphia, PA. Being from just across the river in Camden, NJ and having been born and raised in Chester, PA, his comment piqued my interest. I said to him, “Great to have you with us. I am from Camden. I am going to doze off now, but I’ll talk more with you in the morning.” He said, “Okay.” That was the end of our conversation.

What seemed like a very short time later, the convoy stopped abruptly and I was aroused out of my abbreviated slumber. It seems some enemy resistance was encountered, so we were ordered to dismount and take care of the situation. As we exited the rear door of our halftrack, I remember the new man going to the left with some of our other members. I exited and went to the right with some other members of the squad. There was considerable rifle and machine gun fire for a rather brief period. The enemy scattered leaving a few of their dead and wounded behind. I returned to our halftrack as did the others who exited to the right. When the men who exited to the left returned, our new replacement was not among them. When I inquired about him, I was told that he was badly hit with rifle fire and probably had died. I felt really bad about the situation and I knew then that we’d not be able to have our talk in the morning.

No doubt, the individual was wounded. Just how seriously, I shall never know. I do know, however, that he was not to the best of my knowledge killed in action, because our killed in action records for the 56th A.I.B. do not show anyone, as far as I have been able to determine, from Philadelphia, PA. I do hope that he survived his wounds, was able to return home, got his life in order, and was a very productive member of society. He seemed like a very likeable young man in our very brief encounter, so the least that I can do is to wish him the very, very best.

War, as we all know is a dirty, dirty business, but I suppose someone has got to do it.
The Shrinking of the Shrink

After having had a very lucid flashback to my pre-induction physical exam that was given at the Induction Center on Wright Avenue in Camden, NJ, I'd like to relate this story.

The series of events took place on October 12, 1942 at about mid-morning. After having undergone a series of physical check-ups, it became my time to be interviewed by the psychiatrist on duty. He welcomed me by saying “Sit down, Amos. How are you feeling today?” I responded by saying that I felt well but a bit apprehensive. He then said to me, “Do you get very much?” I asked him while looking him directly in the eyes, “Get much of what?” He said, “Oh, you know.” Where upon I answered, “Not enough to share with anyone else.” He then said, “Amos, do you like boys or girls best?” I said, “Boys socially, girls sexually.” With that he said, “Get the hell out of here. You are too normal.”

Following the frivolous exchange of words with the Head Doctor, I was accepted for General Military Service and sworn into the United States Army.

In all honesty, before this instance, I never saw a psychiatrist and I have never to my knowledge had any need to see one since that time; although, I am certain that there are those who know me who would disagree with my assessment.

John W. Thompson, a Remarkable First Sergeant

The brain is a very unique part of the body. It can hide events from an individual for long periods of time only to return them to one’s memory at some future point in time. The condition is frequently caused by trauma and in rare cases it is selected memory on the individual’s part. Of late, I frequently have these flashbacks of my time in the military and one I had recently concerned Headquarters Battery of the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion and more particularly one, John W. Thompson, our First Sergeant, a native of Morganfield, KY.

Let me relate the incident that recently came to mind. It would have been late January or very early February of 1943, when I was given an emergency furlough from Camp Campbell because of a death in the family. I remember going to Hopkinsville, KY to catch the train homeward. My train ride took me through Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and finally terminated in Philadelphia. I was home in ample time for the viewing and the funeral service with a few days to spare.
On my return to Camp Campbell, I ascertained that my canteen cup, canteen and mess kit were missing, so as a very green young soldier, I went to our Orderly Room to speak with First Sergeant Thompson. Permit me to digress from the story briefly to tell you some things about Sergeant Thompson. John was one of the finest First Sergeants in the 12th or in my opinion, in the entire army. His problem solving ability was uncanny. He was astute and observant and rarely missed anything that was happening, particularly in Headquarters Battery or to the men under his care. Now back to the story. Upon seeing Sergeant Thompson, I said, “Sarge, I am just back from my emergency furlough and the first thing that I observed is that my canteen and mess items are missing. John looked me straight in the eyes and asked, “Pierce, what do you think happened to them?” Being as honest and sincere as I was able, I replied, “Sarge, I believe they were stolen.” He again looked me in the eyes and said, “Get ‘em back the same way!”

Other little and other not so little things that I remember from my days with Headquarters Battery of the 494th are as follows:

1. The accidental drowning death of Virgil Hammond.

2. The accident with an illegally procured Duck when Lester Gibbons and a few others decided to go on a fishing and boating expedition. One of the individuals was injured so badly that he required hospitalization. The proper penalty was meted out to all concerned.

3. A former Sergeant who was found guilty of being AWOL being shot for attempting to escape from his prison guard. This occurred inside the barracks.

4. A new recruit who was obviously homesick and depressed attempting to commit suicide in the neighboring Post Exchange bathroom by slashing his wrists and ingesting the contents of a bottle of Iodine. On recovery, he was immediately given a Medical Discharge.

5. Then there was the time at the Owensboro, Kentucky railroad station when Monchy A. Lis, two young ladies and I were saying our goodbyes for the weekend. I planted a couple of my finest kisses on one of the young ladies before boarding the train. Little did I know that Sergeant Thompson was watching from the train car window. He had a few choice things to say to me when I boarded the train, all of which he said in his own inimitable manner.

There are lots of others but the main thrust of this story is to get across what a fine First Sergeant the late John W. Thompson was. I feel certain that if asked, Alfred R. Tyler, a battlefield commissioned officer and former Staff Sergeant James H. Sheridan will echo my sentiments.
The Fish and Chip Episode

There was an earlier short story about our trip across the Atlantic Ocean via the Empress of Australia. The earlier story did not tell about our being diverted from the port of Le Havre to Liverpool. Our awaiting military vehicles in Le Havre had been commandeered by the Fourth Armored Division to replace many of their own lost in combat.

On our arrival and debarkation at Liverpool, “A” Company of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion was marched to an awaiting train and we were transferred to Hungerford Air Force Base for a stay of two or three days’ duration. During our brief stay there, we were billeted in pyramidal tents.

After the short stay at Hungerford where I saw my first jet propelled fighter plane, we boarded a train for Tidworth, England. At Tidworth, we were again housed in a large pyramidal tent complex. Tidworth is situated on the Salisbury plain and lies between Salisbury and Andover.

While in Tidworth, Troy B. Criss of the first rifle squad, Harold K. Wells of Service Company and I discussed going to either Salisbury or Andover for one of those famous English Fish and Chips dinners. As it turned out, on our first free time, the three of us took a double-decker bus to Salisbury where we entered a very nice but quaint English restaurant. Troy and Harold ordered a typical fish and chips dinner whereas I opted for a sausage and chips dinner. When the meal was delivered to our table, we each dug in as though we had been suffering from starvation. Very early into the meal, Troy began to choke and at first, Harold and I began to laugh because we thought Troy was joking. Soon his color changed and he took on a purplish hue whereupon Harold arose from his seat and gave Troy a hard punch just below his shoulder blades. The result was that Troy egested a rather large fish bone. Following the episode, Troy said, “I didn’t realize the fish had bones in it. I thought they all had been removed.” For the balance of the meal, I can assure you that both Troy and Harold were on the lookout for fish bones. On the contrary, my sausage was tasty and completely bone free. The three of us agreed that the meal had been a good one, but it certainly was not without a frightening few minutes.

While still in Tidworth, we were also given overnight passes to London, but I was unable to make my trip to London with any of my close buddies. On my return from my London trip, the following morning I was hospitalized due to a high fever and chills caused by acute tonsillitis, but that is a story for another time.

After our few weeks stay in Tidworth, we were off to Southampton for our trip across the English Channel to Le Havre.
A Friend in Need

Looking back on it, my best guess is that this all took place in the early part of the year 1944 at Camp Barkeley, Texas. At the time, we were living in those beautiful plywood, one-story barracks on the military reservation. In the same building that housed the first rifle squad of the second platoon of “A” Company of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion, were members of our 60 mm. mortar squad. One of the mortar squad members was named Ernest J. Munoz from New York City, New York. Ernie bunked at the far end of the barracks.

In our barracks as well was Charles W. Burns who hailed from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in the neighborhood of 23rd and Wharton in the southern part of the City of Brotherly Love.

While not at all unfriendly, it never appeared to me that Ernie and Charlie were very close friends. This is all introductory material that leads in to the gist of the narrative.

As additional background material, Charles W. Burns was an early inductee having been drafted prior to Pearl Harbor and our entry into the war with Japan and Germany. His original term was to have been for a year and one day’s duration; however, once war was declared this was changed to the duration and six months. This change never sat well with Charlie and it preyed constantly on his mind. In addition, and this is only conjecture on my part, I never felt that Charlie relished the thought of serving in combat situations. I know that Charlie was married, but whether there were any children involved, I just don’t know.

When it became quite apparent that we would soon be preparing to serve overseas in either the Pacific or European theaters of operation, Charlie began to conjure up various methods to secure his release from the military service. He could not avail himself of reasons of health because he was hale as a horse. Somewhere along the line, the idea came to Charlie to feign horrific nightmares, sleep walking and various other violent tendencies. Each waking hour in any spare time, he worked on fine tuning his nefarious plan. It became abundantly clear to him that in order to act out his scheme dramatically and for full effect, he needed an accomplice. Who could have been a better one than the proverbial barracks clown, Ernie Munoz? It would be a serious role for Ernie, but Charlie knew that Ernie would play it in the Barrymore style. The two with their heads together constructed a very simple but thoroughly workable scenario.

The plot scheduled for some hours after bed check called for Charlie to have another nightmare, walk in his sleep with a machete in hand to Ernie’s bunk, shouting “C. W. rides again” while all the time swinging the machete toward Ernie’s head. Ernie would then feign awakening to this frightening scene, jump from his bunk, begin running from Charlie while at the same time screaming, “My God, someone help me. He’s trying to kill me!”
A few nights later the plan was executed to perfection, so much so when the authorities heard of it and were given eye witness descriptions and depositions, it wasn’t many days before Charles W. Burns was separated from the service.

Ernest J. Munoz, on the other hand, shipped to Europe with the rest of us when it became time for our departure. Very little was ever said about the prize winning performances and there were just a few of us who were privy to what actually had taken place. Nothing further was ever heard from Charlie. Perhaps that was a good thing.

Please know that before releasing this story that I made absolutely certain that the statute of limitations had taken effect and that both men who were involved are no longer living.

I Too Received a “Dear John” Letter

To the best of my recollection, it occurred sometime in August of 1945 while “A” Company of the 56th was billeted in Gerstetten, Germany. My friend and fellow Bopfingen devotee, Staff Sergeant Edgel Stambaugh and I just returned from an especially nice weekend visit to Bopfingen where we had spent time with persons with whom we had become particularly close during our stay in the area.

On my arrival at our quarters, David Kronick gave me the mail that he had collected for me while I was away. Among the letters was one containing familiar penmanship, but with a strange name and return address. When I opened the envelope, I found that it was from the young lady that had vowed to be true to me and wait for me until the war was ended and I was able to come home to her.

Suffice to say, when I learned from the letter’s content that she had married a sailor who had been stationed at the Philadelphia Navy Yard and whose home was in upstate New York, after the initial shock wore off, I burst into uncontrollable laughter. When I related the information to Dave and some of the others that I believe included Troy Criss, they asked how I could laugh about something of that importance. I explained to them that for a few months my conscience was full of guilt because of the relationship with the young lady from Bopfingen with whom I was most assuredly smitten. Now at last I was free of the guilt because the one that I felt I was betraying has, in essence, betrayed me! Isn’t it remarkable just how problems have a way of solving themselves? Now if someone would have just abolished the “no fraternization” policy in Germany, all would have been right with the world!

I tossed the letter aside and began reading others that I had received. Shortly thereafter, I wrote my ex-paramour a letter of congratulations and thanked her for being so candid with me.

The sordid end of the tale is that within less than a year after their marriage, with his wife being with child, he began to cheat with a local girl that he once dated. This girl, likewise, became pregnant with his child, despite being unmarried. It was a real kettle of dead and decaying fish, and it reeked to
high heaven. A rather speedy divorce ensued, and I believe he subsequently married the other young lady.

I’ve been told there is an old saying that in part states when one lies down with dogs one sometimes get fleas. In my humble opinion, there were enough fleas for everybody and I thank the Lord that I was not part of the infestation.

Sometimes the “Dear John” emerges the winner. I know full well that I did.

No Meat for Me

Joseph E. Halfmann, one of the former A.S.T.P.\(^1\) members who joined “A” Company, related this story to me about another A.S.T.P. classmate who also joined the 56th, but with what Company I am not at all certain after all of the intervening years. Again this story came to me second handed, but I never found any reason to doubt the word of Joe because he was always very upfront with everyone, particularly his fellow bridge players.

Since the story was merely related to me, I will not use the principal’s name. Rather, I will just use his initials which are E. L. B. It seems that this person was quite brilliant with an exceedingly high I.Q. and a very extensive vocabulary.

E. L. B. was quite happy while in A.S.T.P. because academia was far more his element than being a member of an armored infantry company, particularly one that was nearing the time for shipment overseas into prospective combat situations. I believe that while E.L. B. was attending A.S.T.P. classes that he ate everything and anything, but when becoming a member of an infantry company of the 56th A.I.B., he opted suddenly to become a vegetarian. This was all part of his nefarious scheme to extricate himself from membership in the armored infantry or any part of the armed forces.

E.L.B.’s plan did not work that well so long as we were in camp and eating our regular menus in the mess hall because we always had a variety of vegetables and one did not have to eat meat if they chose not to, but his plan worked exceedingly well as we began to spend more and more of our time in the field simulating battlefield conditions. Performing field training activities for days on end required our eating K-rations entirely for extended periods of time. If you recall, the breakfast ration consisted of chopped ham and eggs; the lunch ration was made up of a solid wedge of cheese, but it too contained flecks of meat; and the dinner ration was corned pork loaf; all great items just tailored for one feigning to be a vegetarian. To make the charade all the more real, E. L. B. refused to eat any of the K-rations allegedly because of their meat content. He did lose appreciable weight, and after a sufficient period of time, he collapsed and was ultimately hospitalized.
As I understand it from Joe Halfmann’s account, after E. L. B.’s hospitalization and meeting with a battery of military physicians, he was given a full set of civilian clothes and supplied with his Medical Discharge.

Whether E. L. B. remained a vegetarian enroute to his home or if he had a filet mignon dinner in the Pullman Dining Car, I shall never, never know. I suppose that a person has to do what he has to do, but I have little or no respect whatsoever for a person of that ilk. He assuredly avoided having to dodge the bullets in combat, but if he possessed any conscience whatever, pangs of guilt must have frequently haunted him in the very quiet hours.

To sum up the entire set of circumstances, I am very pleased that E. L. B. was not a member of our rifle squad. Surely, the army lost an individual, but the 56th lucked out in the long run! Someone that spineless, we certainly didn’t want or need.

1) The Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) was a military training program at a number of American universities to meet wartime demands for junior officers and soldiers with technical skills. Beginning in the spring of 1944, men were withdrawn from the program and sent to the Army to fill the gaps in the ranks in training divisions and as replacements for casualties. (Source: partly from Wikipedia).

The Mop Wielder Got Wrung Out

The place is Camp Barkeley, Texas, and the time is June 1944. It is just after evening chow when my very close friend Harold K. Wells from Service Company came over to my barracks and suggested that we go into Abilene for the evening. Since I had no other assignment or anything better to do, I readily agreed. Soon thereafter, Harold and I were on a bus enroute to Abilene.

While we were gone, word was passed along that in the morning there would be a barracks inspection performed by the Commanding General and his staff, so the individuals still in camp began performing the chores necessary to get each barracks in tip-top condition for the next morning’s important inspection. That meant mopping the floors, cleaning and dusting, and all of the other elements that precede a barracks inspection, particularly one conducted by the Commanding General.

After our evening in town, Harold and I returned to camp and more particularly, our barracks area. I noticed as we approached my barracks that all of the lights were on and all of the single beds were outside of the barracks. This should have been a tip off for me. I said “goodnight” to Harold and he headed off in the direction of Service Company. Suddenly, I noticed all of the lights in my barracks go out. That should have been another tip off. As I opened the barracks door and started to enter, something very wet with dirty water hit my face and chest with a resounding swish. With that all of the lights came on, and there was John Toomey, a member of our squad and our halftrack driver, standing
before me holding a wet mop in a port arms position. I was so disappointed that a member of my own squad would hit me like that and soil my khaki uniform that I just plain and simply lost it! Although all of the single beds were outside the barracks, our wooden foot lockers lined the floor. In my rage, I grabbed the mop which John held on to quite tightly. I wrestled John to the wet floor knocking his head and neck against one of the foot lockers. I then proceeded to put my knee on his neck and exert pressure. John’s eyes bulged out, he gasped for breath, and I could have very easily broken his neck because of the way he was positioned. It was then that I gained my composure and removed myself from him. While all of this was happening, I was verbally telling John that he had better never ever do anything like that to me again. He got the message, and some of the others got it as well.

John made a very poor decision. I reacted badly, but decisively, and the whole incident was over rather quickly. There were no repercussion or hard feelings between us. We had been friends before the altercation and we remained friends; but we undoubtedly knew, understood, and respected one another more than prior to the incident.

The next morning came. The barracks inspection insofar as we were concerned went off without a hitch, and John Toomey and I went on with life in the army as members of the first rifle squad of the second platoon of “A” Company of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion.

A Quick Glance Backwards

In my earlier book “Reminiscences of the Big One”, there were two stories in which I had planned to put pictures, but for some unknown reason I neglected to do so. One story was titled “The R. & R. Pass to Nancy.” In it I spoke of a middle-aged Frenchman at the U.S.O facility in Nancy who was an extremely skilled sketch artist. He made charcoal sketches of the American soldiers entirely free of charge. Below is a sketch he did of me back in late January or early February 1945.

In another story titled “The P-47 Fiasco,” I had planned for a picture of a vintage P-47 airplane. That, too, fell by the wayside. The omitted photo of the P-47 is shown below.
It is said that to err is human. I know that in my case that axiom is all too true.

A Farewell From All Of Us, Frank

The 12th Armored Division lost a stalwart upon the passing on July 11, 2011 of Frank W. Barndollar, Editor Emeritus of the “Hellcat News” and past Unit Representative for the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion. Frank was 87 years of age and he resided in Keene, NH. He was a true “Live Free or Die” individual and to say that he was well respected and well-liked would be an under-statement.
On his discharge from the service as a corporal in A Company of the 56th, Frank continued his college education after which he began his newspaper career with Foster’s Daily Democrat in Dover, NH in 1950. Frank joined The Sentinel in 1959 and two years later he was appointed Managing Editor. He retired from The Sentinel in July of 1989. In essence, Frank had a 39 year career in print journalism. It is not surprising with all of his experience that he made such a great Editor of this publication.

In his final years, Frank was stricken with Alzheimer’s disease, but he was a true soldier to the very end.

Frank was predeceased by his loving wife, Rita, and by a daughter, Heidi. He is survived by daughters, Linda and Sherry, and a son, Steve.

We all feel the loss of Frank and extend our most sincere condolences to the members of his family. Truly, another seat in our halftrack is left vacant with Frank’s passing.

The 12th A.D.A. Lost a Great One

When Robert Edward Head passed away on March 24, 2012, the 12th Armored Division Association lost a great one. Bob, as he preferred to be called, was born on April 28, 1924. He was the association’s president in 1983 and he also served the association as its Executive Secretary and Editor of the “Hellcat News.” Bob was the first Lifetime Member of the association as the pictured dues card shows.
Bob was number one in many other ways as well. He was a very proud, dedicated member of the association, but he was plagued with major health problems in recent years that kept him from active participation in an organization that he loved so dearly.

On January 12th, the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion proclaimed Bob as a beloved and trusted friend and honored him by issuing a certificate bearing this information. A picture of Bob’s certificate appears in this month’s column for the 56th A.I.B.

Bob served with Headquarters Company of the 714th Tank Battalion after joining the 12th at Camp Barkeley, having first attended the A.S.T.P. at the New Mexico School of Mines.

After the war, Bob returned to college to complete his education. Upon graduation, he entered the field of education and made it his lifetime career.

Robert Edward Head is survived by his beloved wife, Betty, and a daughter, Lynette, and a son, Mark. Bob was a member of the local Masonic Lodge in Kingman, AZ.

Though Bob, very much like me, had his share of detractors; even they had to admire his honesty, loyalty, and strength of purpose.

I am fully confident that Bob is now with our Lord in that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens and that he is shaking hands and chatting with other members of the 12th who passed on before him.

I know that I lost a true friend, and that we all shall miss him. May he rest in peace always.
The Relocation of Father Cherry

Father Cherry was a Roman Catholic Chaplain in the 2nd Armored Division and a rather revered one I might add. He was, I believe, a native of the Chicago area. When the 2nd Armored Division was making definite preparations for leaving Germany and redeploying to the United States, Father Cherry was reassigned to a Base Hospital situated in Goppingen or Geislingen. I do know that it was in rather close proximity to Bopfingen where many of us former members of the 12th Armored Division had vested interests of the amorous kind.

A soldier whose last name was Dillinger was assigned to drive Father Cherry to his newly assigned area. Learning in some manner unknown to me that I would be interested in making a trip to the Bopfingen area for perhaps the final time, Dillinger contacted me and asked if I would like to accompany him as assistant driver in seeing to Father Cherry’s relocation. Needless to say that I seized upon the opportunity and I shall always be most grateful to Private Dillinger.

The day arrived on which we were to make the journey. The peep was gassed up and the mini-trailer that contained the Father’s footlocker and other possessions was attached. Private Dillinger started off as the driver with Father Cherry seated next to him. I sat in the back of the peep along with the SCR radio and its auxiliary wet cell battery. Off the three of us went. The autobahn was not utilized because we opted for secondary roads through a myriad of small towns and hamlets. Each hour or so, Dillinger and I exchanged places.

I do remember vividly as I was seated in the rear of the peep that Private Dillinger made a rather sharp right turn after almost having missed the route we were to have taken. The result of this action saw the auxiliary battery, still connected to its cables, leave its housing and strike my left leg mid-way between the ankle and knee with a mighty force. When this occurred and quite instinctively, I yelled something truly not meant for a clergyman’s ears. I immediately apologized to Father Cherry for my thoughtlessness. He replied, “Son, I think if that battery had struck my leg in a like manner that I would have blurted pretty much the same thing.” This brought the entire episode to a close, and I emerged with the slightest of cuts but with a rather distinct bruise.

We drove on and on, and at about 6:30 p.m., we arrived at the hospital. The trailer was unloaded and Father Cherry was greeted by the hospital personnel. He was invited to the officers’ mess hall, but he refused to accept the invitation unless we were permitted to accompany him. Finally, permission was given and we were all adequately fed. Father Cherry wanted to make arrangements for our evening’s lodging at the hospital, but we declined. We said with thanks that other arrangements had been made. After saying our goodbyes to Father Cherry, Private Dillinger and I made a beeline for Bopfingen.

Upon arrival in Bopfingen, Private Dillinger dropped me off at my destination on Aalenner Strasse. He told me that he’d pick me up in the morning at 6 a.m. for our return trip to Sterbfritz.
After a most wonderful evening on what turned out to be my final trip to Bopfingen, I was picked up promptly at 6 a.m. by Private Dillinger and we were on our way to the location from which we started our trek.

It is really difficult to believe that these events took place back in November 1945, and in a country that had just lost its war with the allies.

**Chicken What?**

The story that you are about to read took place in the Alsace region of France in February 1945 at the height of World War II and when the weather was snowy and quite cold. We had just completed the Colmar Pocket campaign and were situated in a small, rural community resting a bit for what would be our next encounter with the enemy.

Most, if not all of our World War II veterans, have heard the expression “chicken shit.” It is defined by the urban dictionary as behavior that makes military life worse than it need be.

Before I arrive at the gist of the narrative, permit me to say that the commissioned and non-commissioned officers of A-Company of the 56th were exceedingly well-trained and performed their duties and made most of their decisions professionally and quite well.

There were exceptions and I will now cite one for you that inspired the ire of all in the first rifle squad, second platoon of Able Company. They aired their gripe, had the Acting First Sergeant back down and literally swallow some of the chicken droppings that he intentionally and unwisely created.

Our regular first sergeant John H. Becker for reasons unknown to me was not currently with our unit. He was replaced by T/Sgt. Stephen A. Thompson. It was Sergeant Thompson who caused the ruckus.

Here is what went down. Our squad members were situated in an abandoned home with company headquarters billeted in an abandoned home just across the street. We were working on our weapons, catching up on correspondence and doing a myriad of things that needed to be done. I remember having on a pullover knit sweater that was not Government Issue, but rather was knitted by someone on the home front for the troops overseas. It was made of olive drab yarn and it was quite warm and comfortable to wear. I believe that it was S/Sgt. Bill Amason who had an urgent message that was to be delivered to company headquarters. He asked me if I would be the runner to deliver it. Since the delivery point was just across the street and since its delivery was urgent, I took the envelope, dashed out the front door and headed for company headquarters hatless and with only the sweater as outer covering.
I arrived at my destination rather quickly and handed the envelope to Acting First Sergeant Thompson. He began lashing out at me that I was being put on report because it was against army regulations to wear a sweater out-of-doors as an outer garment. I responded by saying, “My God, Sarge, I was just attempting to get this message to you as quickly as possible, but by all means, do what you have to do.” With this, I departed for the building from whence I came. Upon arrival, I told my tale of woe to S/Sgt. Bill Amason and the rest of the squad members who were present. A resounding cry of “CHICKEN SHIT” ensued after which Bill Amason said, “Do not concern yourself with it, Pierce. I will talk with Sergeant Thompson and get the situation resolved.” While I cannot say so with any degree of certainty, I strongly suspect that First Lieutenant Charles “Chuck” Willis likewise counseled Sergeant Thompson on the subject.

Obviously, Bill did just what he said he would do because I heard nothing more about the incident. That sweater became so endeared to me that I brought it home with me after being discharged from the service.

Squad leaders like Bill Amason do not come along every day. Unfortunately, Bill was killed in action on April 4, 1945 while leading the first rifle squad of the second platoon of Able Company. May he rest in peace always.

Major William G. Raoul

Does the name Major William G. Raoul mean anything to you? Well, if you were a member of A Company of the 56th, were in Herrlisheim holed up in the basements of abandoned homes, and were looking for an escape route out of the area to keep from being captured, seriously wounded or killed, you’ve likely heard the name but perhaps forgotten it. Major Raoul, I believe, was the Executive Officer for the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion. It was he with others who designed our escape route on that overcast, extremely cold night in January 1945.

I remember well the 494th laying down a smoke barrage that enabled us in single file and in complete silence, each man holding on to the other’s rifle belt so as not to become lost, to cross the partially constructed foot-bridge over the frozen Zorn River. The bridge was quite hastily set up by units of the 119th Engineer Battalion, but despite its incomplete assembly, it did the job of getting us across the narrow Zorn River without incident. Along with the smoke shells, fired as well were some high explosive shells, so it was extremely important that we all followed the route that was designed for us. It was a well-drawn up plan and it enabled the remnants of A-56th to make what I believe was its initial tactical withdrawal. The word “retreat” was never part of our vocabulary. I honestly don’t believe a single man was lost or injured in this well-planned and well-executed operation.

Those who survived those few days of complete isolation, and I am one of them, owe Major William G. Raoul a deep debt of gratitude. He made it possible for us to regroup and to fight another
day. To put it quite succinctly, Major Raoul, the men of the 494th and the men of the 119th got us safely out of an extremely dire set of circumstances and literally brought us back from hell.

An Honor Truly Merited

New York City has its Museum of Modern Art, Washington, DC has its Smithsonian, but Monett, MO has its own national treasure. Monett has Floyd C. Van Derhoef, a First Lieutenant and Captain of A Company, 56th Armored Infantry Battalion where he served as Executive Officer and Company Commander during World War II both in training exercises and in combat situations in the European Theater of Operations.

Floyd was feted on Thursday, March 28, at which time he was presented with a framed certificate proclaiming him an Honorary Board Member of the 12th Armored Division Memorial Museum in Abilene, TX. Floyd’s certificate fittingly reads in part “for his devotion and his many generous contributions to our Museum and for his service to our country during the World War II conflict.” Floyd, incidentally, retired from the military service as a Lieutenant Colonel.

A photograph taken at the event by Sharon Van Derhoef follows. The Patriarch, as I sometimes refer to him, looks as though he could still command an infantry company without too much outside assistance.
On hand to honor Floyd on this special occasion and pictured are standing: Tom Van Derhoef [L/56], Monett High School Jr. ROTC cadets, 1st Sgt. John Marbut, Instructor and U.S. Army Viet Nam War Veteran, K. C. Caldwell of the Monett Senior Center and World War II U.S.N. Veteran, Mike Van Derhoef [L/56] U.S.M.C. Viet Nam War Veteran and Aaron Oberman, Monett High School History Instructor. Bottom row: kneeling are more Jr. ROTC cadets and Dan Van Derhoef, Agent with the Missouri Department of Conservation and seated is the honoree Floyd C. Van Derhoef proudly displaying his well-earned certificate. Present at the ceremony but not pictured was Ken Gauthier, U.S.N. Ret., a Korean War Veteran.

Few people know of all the good things that Floyd has done and continues to do because Floyd C. Van Derhoef is a doer and not a talker.

Floyd’s grandson, Dan Van Derhoef, made the presentation on behalf of the 12th Armored Division Memorial Museum of Abilene, TX.

While in the service, I addressed Floyd as “Sir,” “Lt. Van Derhoef,” or “Captain Van Derhoef”; nothing, however, gives me greater pleasure than having the opportunity to call him “my friend” and that he most certainly is.

I last had the honor and pleasure of saluting Floyd back in 2011 in the lobby of the Hyatt Hotel in Arlington, VA at the annual reunion. Whether he is aware of it or not, I am saluting him today on this singular occurrence. Welcome to the Board, my friend. You have added a distinct touch of class to an already august assemblage.

This Is Your Life William Georgov, Jr.

According to information gleaned from the internet, the 2010 census population of Bear, DE numbered 14,873. Among that number is one named William Georgov, Jr. I have the honor and privilege of knowing Bill; and with the hope that you will get to know him better as well, I am going to tell you a few things about him. Don’t duck down and shudder, Bill, it’ll all be the good stuff.

On April 22, 1926, William Georgov, Jr. was born in the city of Newark, NJ. He was the youngest of four, two boys and two girls. Bill’s father was a barber, and while attending school, Bill helped in the barber shop as the clean-up person. He also delivered milk. Bill always had a fondness for baseball, and was an aspiring major league pitcher. He almost wound up at New York’s famous Polo Grounds because he had a tryout with the old New York Giants. As you know, they now reside in San Francisco. Giant management told Bill to come back to see them after his return from military service. Unfortunately, Bill was wounded in the arm and leg as a member of A Company of the 56th A.I.B.’s third platoon on March 23, 1945 at
Speyer, Germany. As a result, he lost velocity in his pitching arm which ended any dreams of a career in major league baseball.

Bill was graduated from college in New Jersey, and on June 24, 1956 married Concetta Maria Pulitano. Bill and Connie have two children, daughter Luisa and son Bruce. Bruce is married to Diane and they have two sons, Matthew and Ryan. Thus Bill and Connie are the proud grandparents of two grandsons.

Bill and Connie moved to Bear, DE in 1967. Bill has had a remarkable career in industry that spanned many years. He was employed by E. I. DuPont, Harshaw Chemicals, and J.M. Huber. He was a Technical Service Representative and later became Industry Manager for Coatings. The business required him to travel extensively both nationally and internationally. Bill has had a paper published in the Journal of Coatings Technology and he has twice been guest lecturer of a paint course at the University of Missouri. Upon his retirement from J.M. Huber, Bill was a sales consultant for Sullivan Associates/Scott Bader Ltd. He is a past president of the Philadelphia Paint Society and a past president of the Washington Paint Technical Group.

In addition to an illustrious career in industry, Bill and Connie found time to be involved in their children’s education. They have been involved in PTA, been band parents, etc. You know the drill.

Presently although supposedly fully retired, Bill manages to find time to help his son Bruce with his business endeavors and he likewise assists daughter Luisa with deliveries for her travel business. In addition Bill looks closely after his 96 year old sister and is there weekly for shopping and bill paying.

As for other items of interest, Bill is an ardent reader of both fiction and non-fiction (I do hope he’s read “Reminiscences of the Big One”). Bill has helped with renovations of our Museum in Abilene and he is past president and a current member of Glasgow Lions Club. He is a member of the Masonic Fraternity and a member and the current Commander of his Purple Heart Chapter.

Sara Lee’s slogan is “Everybody doesn’t like something, but nobody doesn’t like Sara Lee.” This could be Bill Georgov’s as well.

William Georgov, Jr. epitomizes the Boy Scout Law in that he is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent. For all of these reasons and many, many more, I am pleased to call Bill my brother and my good friend.
Some Additional Interesting Statistics

A vignette has already been written and published as it related to the killed in action members of the 12th Armored Division, broken down by specific unit. This writing is an attempt to present the same basic information, but as it relates to the members of the 12th Armored Division that became Prisoners of War and were so classified. The information was gleaned from our Museum’s website.

There is a total of three hundred twenty-seven (327) individual names listed, but it was noted that one individual’s name is duplicated, so only three hundred twenty-six names were used as our base.

Following is the total number of prisoners by unit and the applicable percentage of the total.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Number of Prisoners</th>
<th>Pct. of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17th A.I.B.</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43rd Tank Bn.</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56th A.I.B.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66th A.I.B.</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>38.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Other Units</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>326</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A sizable number of our men were taken prisoner on January 16, 1945 in the Steinwald area near Herrlisheim and held until April 13 or 14, 1945. The division is credited with 102 days of combat operations. Through their being captured, these fighting men missed a goodly portion of the division’s time in battle situations, but the condition in which they found themselves was certainly no day at the beach. According to information received from Charlie Fitts and George O’Bryan both of C/66 and themselves prisoners, they know of only one man who died of wounds sustained at Steinwald while being held as a prisoner of war. That man was PFC Carl Beisman [C/66]. He died on January 20, 1945.

Although many are no longer with us we do have quite a few former POW’s who are active members of our association. One of those is Museum Board Director Charles Middleton Fitts of Jackson, Mississippi. Another is Robert F. Hoeweler, Treasurer of our Museum Board of Directors.

As of the August 2013 edition of the “Hellcat News,” we are credited with having three hundred eighty-one veteran members of our historic association. This is a fact of which we are exceedingly proud. We have never forgotten our fallen brothers, and we never shall.
Our Pact

Harold K. Wells and I had been friends ever since the days of our inductions, he from Michigan and I from New Jersey. We met in November of 1942 at Camp Campbell, Kentucky as members of Headquarters Battery of the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion. Shortly after participating in the Tennessee Maneuvers and moving to Camp Barkeley, Texas, he was transferred to Service Company of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion and I was transferred to “A” Company of the 56th. Despite being members of different companies, our friendship continued.

In August of 1944 at the Camp Berkeley parade grounds, we were awarded the Expert Infantry Badge together from the hands of Major General Douglass T. Greene. Prior to being shipped overseas and while stationed briefly at Camp Shanks, New York, Harold and I received 24 hour passes that enabled us to visit my home in Camden, New Jersey and for him to meet the members of my family and my girlfriend at the time.

To digress for a moment, while still at Camp Berkeley just prior to our leaving for Camp Shanks each member of the Battalion was asked to make a cash contribution toward the purchase of a 16 millimeter sound movie projector and a short wave radio. The solicitation was a success and the items were purchased.

Harold and I were able to see one film on the new projector. It was prior to our initial assault on Herrlisheim. We were in a small town in France and the picture that was shown was “Rhapsody in Blue.” It was about the life of George Gershwin and it starred Robert Alda, Alan’s father. After the film ended and Harold and I were on our way to our billets, he said to me, “I would like to make an agreement with you that if either of us does not survive this war that after the war ends the survivor will visit the other’s family for the purpose of explaining to them just exactly what happened.” Jokingly I retorted, “Do you really want to make another visit to Camden?” He assured me that he was quite serious, so I agreed and we shook hands to make it official.
To make a somewhat lengthy story a bit shorter, Harold was killed in action on the 26th of April 1945 when German artillery bounced a shell on to the hood of the half-track he was driving. After the war’s end, I performed occupational duties with the 12th and 2nd Armored Divisions. I was mustered out of the service at Fort Dix, NJ on February 7, 1946. I was somewhat reluctant to make the trip to Michigan, but my parents insisted that I fulfill my part of the agreement so before returning to work, I took a train trip to Holly, Michigan where I met Harold’s mother, dad, brothers and sisters. It was a very pleasant and comforting visit and I have remained a close friend with the members of the Wells family right up to the present time.

Harold was a wonderful person, a good soldier, and a remarkably loyal friend. I shall never, ever forget him.

Meeting My Former Company Commander and Executive Officer for the First Time in 66 Years

Both Floyd C. Van Derhoef and I would be attending the 2011 reunion held in Arlington, VA. We hadn’t seen one another since the year 1945 and under entirely different circumstances. At various times both in training in the United States and in battle situations in France and Germany, Floyd had been either our Executive Officer or Company Commander. Both jobs, I might add, he did exceedingly well. Floyd, as many already know, was definitely a firm officer, but he was a most fair one as well. Permit me to add that while we hadn’t seen one another in all of that period of time, we had corresponded with one another for several of the more recent years.

Unbeknown to Floyd was the fact that as soon as I saw Floyd at the reunion, I planned to favor him with one of my better hand salutes. Unbeknown to me was that Floyd, his son and daughter-in-law, Tom and Sharon had planned to meet and greet me as quickly as I entered the hotel lobby doors.

To my very great surprise when entering the hotel accompanied by my trusty walking stick, I saw seated in a lobby chair in front of me one that I knew while in the military as either First Lieutenant or Captain Van Derhoef. Despite being seated in the chair, he rose. Floyd had a very strong grip and he immediately latched on to my right hand and seemingly was never going to release his grip. He was so elated to see me and the feeling was reciprocal. Finally, and Tom and Sharon can attest to this, I said to Floyd, “Will you please let go of my hand?” Floyd looked a tad surprised and complied with my request. Then I took a step backward, straightened my posture, and gave Floyd the best hand salute I could muster. He gave me a big smile and with a tear in his eye, he returned my salute in a most military manner.
Needless to say that Floyd and I along with other members of the Van Derhoef family spent as much time together at the reunion as was possible. Although Floyd is no longer with us, I think of him quite often and I must say that I miss him very much. It pleases me to say that I remain in contact with Tom and Sharon and Bill and Gwen Van Derhoef, most certainly each chips off the proverbial old block.