

MARVEL B. ROWLAND'S STORY OF WW II

I had taken notes of the dates when I moved from one place to another and with these notes I wrote this story.

I registered for the draft on June 30, 1942 at Cleveland, OH and was working for Proctor and Gamble Company that day. I returned to my hometown, Zanesville, OH on June 31, 1942.

Marvel B. Rowland

On January 15, 1943 I was told to report for my blood test at Canton, OH. I was working at Republic Steel in Canton, OH and staying at the YMCA with my nephew Forrest Aber.

On February 8, 1943 and still working at Republic Steel, I received my Induction Papers.

The next day, February 9, 1943, I received my classification as 1-A. I quit my job at Republic Steel and went home to Zanesville on February 15, 1943. My mother was bad sick and in hospital.

I took my final exams at Akron, OH on February 16, 1943. They sent us there by bus and had dinner at a hotel. Passed the exam and was sworn into the army reserve for one week. We were given papers to report to Ft. Hayes, Columbus, OH on February 23. They gave me a 7-day furlough to finish any unfinished business.

I went to see a girl friend in Mansfield on February 19 and she gave me a lot of stuff to use, such as stationary etc.

On the afternoon of February 20, 1943 I received a phone call telling me that my mother had died that

day and I went back home to Zanesville, OH. From there I went to Chesterhill, OH on February 21, 1943 with my Uncle Dick's daughter to make arrangements for my mother's funeral on February 22.

The next day, February 23rd 1943, I boarded the train at Zanesville for the ride to Ft. Hayes, at Columbus, OH at 1209 p.m. My sister Arlene went to the station with me to see me off. Arriving at Fort Hayes that afternoon. We got our shots and uniforms on February 25th. Some of us went downtown to an Army Navy store. I cannot remember what for after so many years. I guess we were just proud to be wearing the U.S. Army uniform.

On February 26 we were loaded on a train. No one knew where we were headed for, but we ended up at Camp Swift TX. (Near Austin) where I took my basic training with Service Company, 387th Infantry Regiment, 97th Infantry Division. Service Co. consisted of clerks, truck drivers and mechanics. The train pulled into the station at the camp where we were met by the 97th Division band playing "Deep in the Heart of Texas".

We took a number of tests to see what we were best qualified for in the army along with taking such tests for color blindness, eye test etc. Since I had worked as a meat cutter at a grocery store at one time, I was given a MOS of 055 (General Clerk) and took my basic along with working as ration clerk in the S-4 section where my job was to go to the quartermasters every - morning, along with 4 trucks and a detail made up of ten men that had guard duty the night before, and pick up the rations for the 387th regiment (20 kitchens about 1400 men). Then back to the S-4 section where I had to see that the rations were broken down according to the number of men in that company. Then put back

on the trucks and see that they were delivered to the 20 kitchens.

I, Edmund Saneski and Nelson Specht were assigned the same job so we could switch days and still take the necessary basic training. We had full training requirements, but not as much of it. I even fired expert on the rifle range with the M1.

So many things happen during basic. We did so many calisthenics that you could drop when you got back to the barracks. Fall out for roll call every morning before sun up, make your bunk just so-so, mop the floor around your bed, and then go to the mess hall for breakfast. One thing you did not do was be first in line for a meal because the Mess Sgt. would pick the first soldiers in line to serve the food. We marched everywhere we went, even to the rifle range. We then wait our turn to fire. We fired two hundred yards in standing, kneeling and prone positions. We then fired three hundred yards in kneeling and prone position. The last five hundred yards we fired in prone position only. That took all day and then the march back to the barracks. Another day we went to the rifle range and pulled targets (when the bullet hit the target we had to mark the hole with a large round disk so the shooter could tell where the bullet hit and he could mark it in the book he was keeping score in). I still have my scorebook. We would then pull the target back up for him to shoot again. Then we would have the long march back to camp. If I remember correctly basic lasted 3 months. Everyone had to take the 25-mile hike. Since someone had to be there to break down the rations our company had to have two hikes. Ed asked me if I would like to take the first or second one. I chose the second one, which was never taken so I got out of taking that hike. The hike was taken in 8 hours at night because it was so hot in Texas in the summer.

While working in the Regimental Supply section at Camp Swift strange things happen. Sometimes when I wanted a truck to deliver something I could not find the driver, so I drove the truck (6X6) myself. One day the Motor Pool Officer, Lt. Valentine, said. " I have seen you driving a truck all over camp so I had better give you a license." It listed everything up to a tank.

My job was to see that all the food for the 387th regiment was distributed to the 20 kitchens in the regiment. I was assigned the men that had guard duty the night before. I had made out slips the night before about how much or how many was to be given to each company. For example: A company might get 5 large cans of peaches, 20 pounds of beef etc. when all the rations were divided into piles by the guard, they were then loaded into the 5 trucks I had assigned to me and delivered to the companies.

Another thing that happened while I was working at the Regimental Supply: One end of the building was used for food distribution and the other end was for the officers, S-4 Major Hood and Assistant S-4 Capt. Reynolds. The space in between was used for distribution of clothing and other supplies. The officers always left early and the em stayed an hour or so later.

There was not much to do after the officers' left. So most of the time we just sat around and talked, or played, I guess. One day we were just messing around and we had a bunch of caps for rifle shells (the little cap that goes in the end of a shell casing). We began throwing one at a time into the gravel parking lot. Then we would throw little pieces of gravel at it. When someone hit it, it would crack like a firecracker. One time one of the caps flew back and hit me on the shinbone and went

under the skin. M\Sgt Hoffman said that I had better not go to the doctor, as we would get in trouble. He said that he could take it out. I put my leg upon the desk. After sterilizing his knife, he cut it out. It was not bleeding and it never did bother me but I still have a small scar. In the Army you are either in the hospital or able to do your duty.

After basic was finished we all got a 7-day furlough. Since we could not all go home at the same time the First Sgt. said that if we had a certain time we wanted for our furlough to put it on the bulletin board and the reason why. S/Sgt. Louis Varosi from Cleveland, OH had the same date for his birthday as I had and he suggested that we put that date down. We were both surprised that we got the dates we requested. On July 13, 1943 I left for a 7 day furlough to Zanesville, OH to visit my family and friends. It felt strange to be home for my 20th birthday.

There was a small town nearby (Bastrop) where we sometimes got an evening pass. The town was so full of soldiers that we were shoulder-to-shoulder most of the time. The bars were always full.

On October 16, 1943 we left for maneuvers in Louisiana arriving at the maneuver area on October 18. The weather was nice there for a while and then I developed kidney infection and was sent to the hospital at Camp Poke LA. I was there for a couple of days and then transferred back to the hospital at Camp Swift. I was there 55 days and then returned to the 97th, who were still on maneuvers, and it had turned cold. One night it rained and froze ice on the trees. Me and another fellow had set up our tent between two trees and one of the limbs had fallen off and was on top of our tent. In the morning the 1st Sgt. asked us who was sleeping

in the tent. We could not see because it was still dark. When he told us not to try to get out because of the tree limb. We could feel that the top of our tent was only about a foot from our faces. Of course they had to remove the limb before we could get out.

One little instant that happened while we were on maneuvers: A master Sgt. wanted me to drive him into Shreveport, LA. He said that he would get the jeep from the motor pool. I was afraid that I would get in trouble but I drove him into town. Coming back I drove fast. The speedometer only went to 50 mph and when it reached 50 it went back to zero and started over again.

I had the same job on maneuvers but we had to deliver the rations at night without lights. It was awful muddy and the army trucks were always getting stuck in the mud. There was a winch on the front of each truck and they had to wrap a cable around a tree to get out. History proves that that 1943-1944 was an awful winter in Louisiana.

Maneuvers are for practice in combat. The division was divided into 2 army's (red army and blue army) of course we did not use live ammo but a battle was fought and prisoners were taken and there was a winner.

We sure were glad when maneuvers were over on January 26, 1944 and on January 28th we moved to Ft. Leonard Wood, MO. Things went along good there as I was on the job permanently.

I got a few weekend passes into St. Louis where there was always something to do. One day I was met at the bus station by a man and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Shadburns, wanting to take a soldier out for the day and having dinner at their home. They had a

teenage daughter that added to the pleasure. Remember that I was only a teenager myself at 19. Many families did these things for the soldiers that were so far away from home.

I was given a furlough on March 9-20, 1944 to Marion, OH where all my family had moved.

I had to report to the Regimental Surgeon before I got the following orders. He asked me if I was having any problems with my kidneys. Of course I said no and on June 1, 1944 I received orders to leave the 97th Div. and be sent overseas as a replacement for one of the divisions that had had lots of casualties or KIA (Killed in Action). I was given another furlough (June 9-23,1944). I was caught with very little money but decided I would go home even if I had to hitch hike. I went to the Red Cross to see if they would lend me the needed money but was turned down. I had sent a telegram home to my father and the money came through just in time.

After returning to camp it was about time to leave for overseas and on July 5th I left Fort Leonard Wood and arrived at Fort Meade, MD on July 7th where we received some advanced training. We went on the course where we walked through the woods and targets popped up everywhere and we had to fire at them. I also fired the BAR for the first time. I also spent my 21st birthday there.

Getting closer to Port of embarkation every move, I was sent to Camp Patrick Henry, VA on July 18th and arrived on July 19, 1944. We were sent down to the docks to help load ships one day and another day I went to a movie "Stormy Weather" there at the camp starring Lena Horne. Another day we spent at the beach where I was stung by a jellyfish. The camp

was in a pine tree forest where it could not be seen from the air.

On July 28th we were loaded onto Liberty Ships. Mine was the USS General Black (troop transport) and set sail with a large convey for someplace in Europe. (No one knew at that time where we were headed). We spent two weeks on that ship. There were troop ships as far as you could see in all directions with navy ships around for protection from subs. Conveys are for better protection from Nazi Subs. The ship was very crowded and we only got 2 meals a day. We lined up for the first meal in the morning and by the time we got our food (hot C-rations) it was time to get in line again. The rooms had hammocks 4 high with just enough room for a body. You could not raise your knees up for hitting the person above you. There was quite a few thousand on board. We spent most of the days on the deck and it was hot on the steel deck. We each had a live preserver around our waist and it could be filled with air by pushing on a lever on the side.

There wasn't much to do but sit on the deck and look or play cards and my money did not last long at cards.

One time we all had to go below as they thought that Nazi subs was in the area. Lucky for us they did not attack. If they had hit us with a torpedo we would all have drowned as we were packed like sardines. We had been told that if we had to go in the water that the ship would not stop to pick us up as we were in convey and all the ships had to keep the right space from one another. We passed through a school of whales and saw lots of flying fish. They jumped up out of the water all the time and it looked like they were flying.

We finally knew where we were headed when we went through the Straights of Gibraltar.

On August 12th we arrived at Naples, Italy. They were about ready to invade Southern France and the harbor was filled with Hospital Ships. We were the replacements for the casualties or the ones killed in action (KIA). As it turned out there was no resistance to the invasion, but they were still fighting around Rome, Italy.

We were then sent to the 24th Replacement Depot north of Naples near Santa Maria and were placed in the 550th Replacement Co. It had been the farm of Mussolini's son-in-law but all that was left was the barns. Since I had a clerk's MOS (055) I was put to work in one of the offices there, which was in one of the dairy cattle barns that were converted into offices. During most of the classes we would set under the Olive trees and throw the hard olives and hit other soldiers on their helmet, which sounded like rocks.

We were given passes into Naples and since we did not receive any pay, except an advance of \$10 a month, until you were permanently assigned to a unit, we had very little money to spend and one way to get some spending money was to sell your blood to the army in Naples for wounded soldiers. They gave you \$10 a pint, which was all we could give in one day. There was more than one place to give, so I went to both but after the second pint I almost fainted but I was able to enjoy the rest of the day. Little kids were pimping for their sisters on the street and asked you "Joe do want to go to bed with my sister, big tits"? And "Joe do you want to eat"? Or "Joe to you want a drink". They had a place to take you for all these things. If you said no, they would say "Joe, why did you come to town"?

One day I was going to town and had a carton of cigarettes that my dad had mailed to me. The standing price for cigarettes was \$10 a carton, which cost a soldier 50 cents in the PX but there was no PX. About half way there a MP stopped the truck and told everyone to get out. Another soldier had a box of candy sent from home. The MP asked him what he was going to do with the candy. He said, "I am going to eat it". At that the MP told him that when he finished eating the candy he would put him on the next truck, so he stood there and ate it all. When he asked me what I was going to do with the cigarettes, I told him that I was going to sell them to get spending money, which was illegal in the army. But he said that I could go on but not to tell anyone that he let me go.

During the war Naples was awful dirty. Not too many places to go. One place was a tour of Pompeii, the ancient city that was destroyed by lava when Mt. Vesuvius erupted in 79 A.D. and was covered with lava. Most of the city was still covered but since that time quite a bit of it has been uncovered. I will never forget that trip. The lava had come down so quickly that all the people were covered. They found places where the lava had cooled so fast that there were imprints of the bodies in the lava. They found impressions of mothers holding their babies. They later filled the cavities with clay and were able to see how they looked at the time they were covered.

There is a new small Pompeii built nearby and some of the people met us and played music.

Some of the streets were cleaned and at one place there was a watering trough where horses and people drank and got their water. The water came out of the mouth of a boy stone statue at one end. His shoulder was worn down from people putting their

hand on it to lean over to get a drink. The houses were built in a square with the back facing the street. There was only one entrance to the houses. In the middle of the square was a flower garden. I remember one of the buildings had a bigger than life painting of Sampson painted on it in color.

Back in camp there were no toilets but we had a slit trench (a ditch dug a few feet long and you had to straddle it when you used it). When you finished you put a shovel full of dirt on what you had left. You were out in the open and the civilians going down the road, which was about 500 yards away and they could see you.

One of the things we did was clean a shipment of M1 Rifles of cosmoline. All the barrels were filled with it in shipment to keep them from rusting.

I was still held in that camp until October 12, when I was put on USS LST 656 headed for Nice, France, arriving on October 15. The LST was taking a mule pack outfit to Northern, Italy and we were just assigned to the ship for transportation to France. They were still fighting in northern Italy at that time. We replacements were sleeping on the deck because we did not have a bed. We took hospital litters from the hole of the ship and put them on the deck to sleep on. A storm came up on the trip across the Mediterranean Sea and that flat bottom ship started rocking and our beds started sliding off into the sea as there was nothing but a cable for railing. They had 6x6 trucks chained down on the deck and I thought they were going to tear loose. We all opened the hatches and went below and slept on the floor in the hallways. Of course in the morning our cots had all slid off the ship into the sea.

Another thing - We were eating c rations, but one of the sailors (A cook) was from Crooksville, OH, a small town near my hometown Of Zanesville, OH, and we got to know each other. He told me that some of the replacements were assigned to the Navy for details and they were eating Navy chow. He told me to get in the Navy chow line and eat their food, as they would think that I was one of the soldiers assigned to the navy. The food was good the rest of the trip. This fellow had jumped ship at some port and was restricted to the ship and had been sentenced to time in the brig (jail) but since this ship had no brig he was waiting until he was assigned to another ship that had one.

The LSTs had flat bottoms and they landed on the beaches at Nice, France on October 15, 1944. The Germans had sunk lots of ships in the harbor. Some were up side down.

There were two LSTs and two escort ships along. One of the French escort ships broke down and we had the run of Nice for 3 days while they fixed the ship. The Germans had not destroyed any of the city. Loud music was playing from the nightclubs but the whole town was blacked out. You could hear machine gun fire from there.

We had a good time for a few hours but after the mules were taken off we were put back on the ship for the trip to Marseilles, France, on October 18, and arrived on October 19th.

On October 20 we were sent to the 2nd replacement Depot at Epinal, France, arriving on October 26. On December 5, I was forwarded to the 3rd Bn. and placed in another office assigning men to divisions that needed replacements. We were housed in 10 man tents. Each man had an army cot and no heat.

SOLDIER TAKES OWN LIFE

One day when everyone was outside one soldier in the tent next to mine took his M-1 and laid down on another man's cot and put the muzzle of his rifle to his head and pulled the trigger and blew his brains out. He just couldn't take the tension of being assigned to a combat outfit and maybe getting killed. They left his body in the basement of the building I worked in (which was an old school house out in the country) until they found an outfit that would take care of his burial. Most soldiers considered him a coward. The soldiers in that tent were told to clean the brains off the ceiling of the tent, but they refused and they finally burned the tent.

I spent Christmas at this camp in 1944. The chaplain took the lids off cans and attached them to a pine tree in the schoolyard. It did give us the feeling of Christmas. We also had a good Christmas dinner but no place to sit our mess kits to eat.

We were close to where the Germans broke through at the Battle of the Bulge and each soldier was given one clip of ammo for his M1. Just about enough to commit suicide. I was told that I had to be assigned also, but was told that since I was the one doing the assigning to pick out the Division I wanted to be assigned to. There were a number of Infantry divisions that needed replacements and the 12th and the 20th Armored Divisions.

I don't know why, but I picked the 12th Armored. I guess I thought that the Armor was not as bad as the Infantry. I think I made a mistake, but I thank God, every day that he watched over me and brought me back home safe and without a scratch.

On January 23, 1945 I joined the 12th Armored Division which had pulled back to get replacements for the ones wounded or killed in a terrible battle at Herrlisheim. I was sent to HQ where they wanted me to work in one of the offices. I guess I was crazy, but I did not want any more office work at that time. They did the same thing in BN. Headquarters and I still gave the same answer. So I was assigned to B Company, 56th Armored Infantry Battalion, Combat Command B.

When I reported to the company commander, he asked me what my MOS was, and when I told him I was a clerk (055). He said, "We don't need any clerks up here--do you know how to fire a M1?" When I told him that I had fired expert on the rifle range he assigned me to Red Grenfell's 60mm mortar squad as second gunner. A squad consists of about 10 men, Squad Sgt., half-track driver, 1st gunner, second gunner, and the rest is either riflemen or ammunition bearers. Those in my squad were Squad Leader Robert "Reds" Grenfell, Half-track driver Robert Clare, Robert Hunt 1st gunner, Marvel Rowland, Bernard Donoher, Orlando Speranzini, Thompson and Billy Quinn. I might mention that as of this date I have been in contact with Reds, Robert Clare (passed away in 2000, Bernard Donoher and Orlando Speranzini.

The first gunner sites the mortar and the second gunner drops the shell down the mortar tube. If I remember correctly, a mortar will lob a shell 300 yards or more. The 1st and 2nd gunner carried 30 cal. carbines while the rest carried M1s. The 1st and 2nd gunners carried the mortar.

About everyone in the squad were replacements. I don't know why to this day, but Red made me second gunner and another new replacement [Hunt] as 1st gunner. I have asked Reds since the war why he made

me 2nd gunner, but he doesn't remember why. I had never fired a mortar in training. Anyway, the first gunner Hunt and I practiced dry runs long hours, but it was only 2 or 3 days before we were on our way to the front. The division had pulled back for replacements after the battle at Herrlishem.

Most of the time the commanding officer of B Company was Captain Bob Beach and the 56th Inf BN. commander was LTC Jean G. Norton. When Bob was wounded and after the war other officers took over. Capt Russell Blair and Capt. Floyd Vanderhoff were two of them.

The following account of the 12th Armored Division Battle activities were broadcast at 1100 and again at 2300 on 17 April 1945 by the Seventh Army radio station.

WITH THE 12TH ARMORED DIVISION ON THE WESTERN FRONT -- The "mystery division" armored spearhead of much of Lt. Gen. George S. Patton's drive to the Rhine today was revealed as the 12th U.S. Armored Division.

Borrowed from the Seventh Army to augment Patton's thrust into Germany, the 12th Armored led the Third Army drive to the Rhine cities of Ludwigshaven, Speyer and Germersheim. Commanded by Maj. Gen. Roderrick R. Allen, the 12th was termed the mystery division since it was one of the few units taking part in the gigantic push, which could not be mentioned by name in the press for security reasons.

Known as the Hellcat Division, the 12th halted only when the Jerries had been pushed across the Rhine, and contact had been made with the Seventh Army forces driving up from the South. The division

averaged from 20 to 25 miles a day in its swift forward movement.

IN the space of one week, from March 18 to 25, the 12th took dozens of towns, captured approximately 6,000 Prisoners and disarmed half as many more, sending them back to surrender to trailing infantry outfits while the armor pushed on.

In one day, March 19, the Hellcats captured an estimated 2,500 prisoners, three ammunition dumps, a regimental supply train, 400 horses and 700 trucks and wagons. In addition, they captured an enemy hospital with patients and equipment intact. The bulk of the prisoners and material was taken in the vicinity of Birkenfeld and Baumholder.

The next day was another field day for the Hellcat Division. Moving from Birkenfeld to Ramsen the division took approximately 2,200 prisoners, killed an estimated 1,000 Germans, and destroyed a locomotive and six cars, 20 tanks, 20 anti-aircraft guns, 15 artillery pieces and 50 wagons. On March 21, about 1,000 prisoners were taken, two enemy planes were knocked down, and 12 nebelwerfers (rocket guns) were captured.

It was at Ramsen that the division's mission was changed. Originally slated to attack Worms, the 12th was ordered to seize Ludwigshafen instead and proceed south along the banks of the Rhine to take Speyer and Germersheim. Forward elements of the division reached the Rhine the night of March 20. First elements to reach the river was a platoon from Company B 56th Armored Infantry Battalion led by Lt. Charles Peischl of Nazareth, PA. (Every time we got close to the Rhine River you could hear the Germans blowing up the bridge across the river.)

On the following day the combat command of Brig. Gen. Riley F. Ennis seized the outskirts of Ludigshafen against heavy resistance. The town was cleared by this force and the 14th Infantry Division, which had been mopping up captured towns in the Hellcats wake.

Two other combat commands penetrated to the Rhine on the north and south of Ludwigshofen, then pulled back and attacked south.

Climax of the drive came on March 24, when Combat Command "B" took Speyer and Combat Command "A" entered Germeshim. At the same time the 92nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, which had led the division's march most of the way, made contact with the Seventh Army forces coming up from the south.

Turning mopping up operations over to the infantry divisions, the Hellcats withdrew for a short breather before taking off again--this time across the Rhine.

The 12th Armored Division was activated September 15, 1942 at Camp Campbell, KY, and later trained at Camp Barkeley, Texas. Every state in the union and the territory of Hawaii is represented among its personnel.

(Marvel note:) When we took a breather for a couple of days, I was given a pass to go into Nancy, France for the day. While there I ran into one of my friends Dalton Wilkins from back home. He had been assigned to the medics. His C.O. gave him the day off and he showed me the town. Nancy is a beautiful city.

The following was printed in the European Stars and Stripes during the war.

37 DAYS WAS ALL IT TOOK

In a little more than a month the 12th Armored Division, good right fist of the American Seventh Army, punched most of Bavaria off the German map and drove from the Rhine clear across the alpine border of Austria.

Major General Rodrick R. Allen's armor had won glory in Aslace and Lorraine as far South as the Colmar Pocket and North into the Seigfried Line. It had been spearhead for Patton's Third Army dash encircling the Saar, then reverting to Patch's Seventh for the final push across the Rhine.

From then on in there were 12th Armored units in action every minute until the Germans collapsed along the Austrian frontier 37 days later.

GREAT BLOW AT DILLINGEN

It was at the Danube bridge at Dillingen that the 12th struck one of the great blows of the war by seizing the span, cutting wires to nine 500-pound bombs and much dynamite, then poring troops across to rob the enemy of the "redoubt" area of vitally needed time. Dillingen bridgehead was considered second only in importance only to Ramagen.

While demolitions had been completed, our engineers built new spans. They threw a 228-foot tread way across the Lech in record time on 30 April, and then boarded over a nearby railroad viaduct to keep a double stream of traffic on the move.

Here and there the Germans had prepared defense lines, but opposition was mostly in concentrated doses from units dug into favorable positions. During the drive the enemy threw at the 12th everything in the book from panzerfaust and sniper fire to planes and heavy artillery. During the defense of the Danube bridgehead ack-ack half-track

claimed six planes shot down on the single day of 23 April. During one week in April 47 enemy tanks were kayoed

Hundreds of towns capitulated without a shot, greeting the Hellcats with white flags flying. Scores of others in which the Germans chose to fight were blasted to rubble. When ground action looked too costly, the artillery with its observation-plane eyes, and deadly Thunderbolts operating from German airfields that the 12th had captured, were called in to clear the way.

EVERYBODY HELPED

All important but less spectacular, supply trains kept the food and the ammo and the gas pouring up to the front. Signalmen stretched lines of communications clear across the Nazi fatherland. Ordnance kept the wheels turning. MPs shuttled incredible numbers of prisoners to the rear--on 5 May alone they evacuated 21,742 captured enemy soldiers. Administration men kept the division a cohesive unit in contrast with the disorganization and confusion through the Hellcats kept surging.

The 572nd AAA Bn., who was with us most of the way, downed most of the planes at the Danube Ridge Bridge at Dilllingen. Their AA guns were mounted in half-tracks. The first German JET plane I ever saw flew over us one day at treetop level. We took turns in the track on the machine gun. (Each track had a machine gun on a round turret, some 30 cal watered cooled or a 50 cal machine gun). It was my turn and I fired at it. I had had no experience at moving targets and I missed it by 3 plane lengths. Another 12th combat command on another road shot it down. The 12th Armored Division consisted of 10,937 men

Remember that this is being written in January 2001, some 56 years after the war. From here on, this writing is about what happened to me and not about my division or the war. At that time most of us did not know where we were at in Germany or where we were going and it made no difference. We just wanted to get the war over with and get back home. I will try to tell you some of the things that happened to me.

My first time on the front in France happened shortly after I joined the 12th. It was in January or February. The first gunner and I were put next to a tank and I remember that we were put there to guard the tank from the enemy slipping up on the tank and destroying it. It was awful dark and awful cold and we had to dig a foxhole. It was as wide as your shoulders, as long as space for 2 men and 3 foot or more deep. One would stand up to keep watch while the other slept sitting down in the hole. We had to put brush over the hole where the one was sleeping. We could hear the radio in the tank taking orders from someone. We did not know when we could expect an attack but nothing happened that night and the next morning we moved somewhere else.

We then moved back into a village for a day or two and I stayed in a French home with them. Sgt. Grenfell and Clare had a bedroom and we all three of us had to sleep in the same bed. There was no heat in the house and it was very cold. The cover was a feather tick and that kept us warm.

Since we had little experience with a mortar, Hunt and I practiced setting up the motor and zeroing it in. The first gunner sighted it and I had to know how to site it in case the first gunner was killed or wounded. We did this without being told to do so as it might save our lives sometime.

We were told that we were going to the front and we all loaded up in our half-track. Each squad had a half-track. It had about 1/4 inch, or less, of armor with side window and windshield armor that could be put up and used. They both had slots that could be opened and closed as needed. The radiator had slats that could be closed at times if needed. We did not go into combat with them but they were for transportation. (Half-track had front wheels and a track in the rear.)

On the way up to the front Reds told us to get things ready. As he was sitting up front with the driver he could not see us. We took the shells out of their cardboard boxes and put them on the medal floor. There is a pin through the front of the mortar shell to keep it from exploding. I had to take this out before I dropped them in the tube. When Reds looked back and saw that we had taken the pins out he was excited and told us to put them back in quickly. This is lesson number one. If one had rolled around and the plunger hit something, it could have blew us all up.

Our Battalion was in reserve when we entered Colmar, France on February 3, 1945. When we entered the main gate to the city dead German soldiers were lying everywhere. They had defended the city to the last man, I guess. They had been pulled out of the street by American soldiers and were sitting on the sidewalk, leaning against buildings and about everywhere else (stiff). I guess they had been pulled off the street to keep our vehicles from running over them.

As I remember it, one platoon was held in reserve and when you were you rode in the half-track. You were close enough if they needed you. One time when we were in reserve I was sitting up on the side of the half-track and as we stopped beside a German

vehicle that was on fire the vehicle exploded and boy did we get down inside the half-track. There were many German vehicles and other equipment on fire that had been knocked out by our forward units along that road. About everyone had been collecting souvenirs and I did not have room to sit down. I started throwing thing out until I had room to sit.

I believe it was Spire were we were just in the city when German snipers fired at us from a church steeple. This was a no-no, even for the Germans but they did it and we returned fire with machine guns from the half-tracks. The tracer billets from the 50 caliber guns set the church on fire and the Germans come running out the front door with their hands up. One fellow close to me was killed.

Then there was the time when we were firing the mortar over a house to keep the enemy from seeing the muzzle blast and fire at us. Reds was in the upstairs looking out the window with binoculars to direct the firing. We were firing into a group of trees where the Germans were. It was spring and the ground was soft. After a few rounds the base plate of the mortar sank down into the ground so far that Hunt almost had to lie on his stomach to site it. We decided that we had better move the mortar to a different spot. We could see when we set it down that the shell would miss the roof of the house. Donoher was on the steps of the house passing down firing orders from Reds. The order came down to fire 3 rounds for effect so Reds could see how much we had to adjust the mortar to hit the target. I dropped the first shell in the tube and heard an explosion. Thinking that it was an incoming shell from the enemy and too late to hit the ground, I dropped another one into the tube, and about that time tree limbs started falling. The first shell I had put in the tube had hit a tree limb above us. Of course there were no leaves on the tree. Reds

came running down from the house, thinking that an incoming shell had hit us and he expected us all to be dead or hurt. We had forgotten to look up the barrel to see if the shells would clear the limbs. The ammo bearers had confiscated a German bicycle to haul the ammo from the half-track somewhere in back of us so they kept us supplied with ammunition.

On Easter, 1945 we were way ahead of the infantry divisions and our supply train so we stopped for a day or two for them to catch up. I was sent out with a detail for reconnaissance. We ran into some small arms fire and returned with machine gun fire. Out came a bunch of old men and young boys with their hands up. By this time the Germans had pulled out and left them there for rear guard. Of course they were all wearing uniforms, but they were not interested in dying for the fatherland and Hitler. They just wanted to get it over with.

As I said I cannot remember or did not know the names of towns we were in but this is what happened at one. We had captured, or took in army language, a small town. We had driven the Germans out and they were up on a hill outside the town. We were receiving lots of fire from there.

Hunt and I thought that some of the fire was coming from a house situated out in an open field about 500 yards away. We thought we should take a look and ran to the house. We found no enemy but while looking for them a shell exploded just beside the house and a piece of shrapnel came through the window casing and landed on top of the piano I was standing beside. We took off in a hurry and bullets were landing by our feet as we zig-zaged across the open field. When we got back to the town the last half-track was leaving and we just made it but our outfit came back again and that time we held it.

Hunt and I were checking out a small hospital and checked the basement where all the patients had been taken. We could not find any soldiers but there was a kettle of ham on the stove. We made use of the ham quickly. There was a knife lying on the table and I thought I could make good use of it also. I had broken the blade off my trench knife and only had the handle stuck in the holder. The knife just fit my holder so I carried it the rest of the war and I still have it.

A few years ago a friend who was collecting German WW II equipment visited me and he told me that it was a German trench knife. You were not supposed to carry any German equipment with you because if you were captured they might think that it had been taken it off a German soldier you had killed. I still have that knife today and am going to give it to one of my great grandchildren.

The story that was told earlier about the broadcast by the Seventh Army Radio Station tells about us reaching the Rhine and taking a break before taking off across the Rhine. While on the break (very few days) I was given a pass to Nancy France for 1 day. It is a beautiful city with many beautiful buildings. I was lucky to run into one of my old friend, Dalton Wilkins, from school days. His commander let him off that day and we ran around together. This was kind of strange to run into an old friend when there were millions of soldiers in Europe. Then back to my outfit and out across the Rhine.

CROSSING THE RHINE ON 28 March, 1944

The engineers had put a pontoon bridge across the Rhine and I was told there were three infantry divisions stalled in four square miles and could not break out. As I was told, they called on the

12th to come and break them out. It was dark and I was asleep in the half-track when someone woke me up and said that we were crossing the Rhine River. I looked over the sides of the half-track and could only see water. Since I could not see the pontoons I thought that the half-track was floating on the water. (A pontoon bridge is 2 tracks laid on little pontoons, or boats) The Rhine looked like it was a mile wide. We got across and got the job done.

There was a rack on the back of the half-track where we stored mortar, rifle, machine gun and bazooka ammo. One day we were riding along in the half-track and one of the soldiers threw a lighted cigarette over the side and it landed on the canvas covering the ammo and set it on fire. We were not long stopping to put the fire out.

We also had a small gasoline stove in our half-track where we could heat coffee from our K rations. Every time we put something on the stove, we got the order that we were moving out and we could not have it lit when we were moving. Some times it was hours before we got any hot coffee.

Another time on the front we were expecting a counter attack and we had to dig a hole big enough for the mortar, Hunt and had I to get in to fire if necessary. It was raining, dark and in the middle of the night. We were not going to get in that hole when it was filling up with water. I wanted to find something to lie on where I was not in water. We were in an old orchard and I finally found a ladder. I laid on that and put the one blanket I had over me. In the morning the wool blanket had soaked up so much water it was very heavy.

Part of the French army came up with their truck lights burning (on the front). They were told by Capt. Beach to turn them off, they refused and Capt

Beach said, "turn off your lights or we will shoot them out" and we had a machine gun pointed at them. Of course they turned them off.

There were the awful sights of seeing dead soldiers and civilians lying around. One man had his head and arm missing. Another civilian who had hit a land mine while riding along the road on a bicycle had one leg missing and bone sticking out. You never got used to seeing things like that.

We were attacking one town and we had to cross an open plowed field. As I remember, it must have been a few thousand yards to the edge of town. The tanks were all lined up across the field and all the armored infantry in between. We all started across the field and the battle began. The tank guns were firing and most of us were firing our rifles. There were a few telephone poles across the field that held telephone wires. They were really poring the lead at us and shells were landing everywhere. Hunt and I started running toward the town when bullets were getting close. You could hear them whistle around us. (It was said that the bullet had to be within four inches of your head to hear them). We headed for one of those poles where the ground was a little lower than the rest of the field. We hit the ground with Hunt behind the pole and me beside him. I was a little forward from him and I saw the bullets hit the pole and run up it. (Machine gun firing at us.) He did not believe me and had to take a look for himself. This is another time that I prayed.

After a while you could hear the German vehicles starting up and most of them retreated, leaving behind a rear guard. We finally got into the edge of town and about a dozen Germans surrendered to us. We lined them up with their hands over their heads. We search them for weapons. One had a German

Iron Cross on his uniform. I grabbed it, threw it on the ground and tramped on it. I often think that soldier must have thought that he had had it.

One town we were about ready to attack. I was in a house on a small hill and there was a light tank outside. I was carrying the binoculars for Reds. The artillery forward observer was watching a German Mark V tank pull up a little grade, fire and back down out of sight. He fired once and hit the light tank. No one was hurt but he put the US tank out of commission. I was watching also and it was hard to believe that he could hit our tank with one shot. The Observer radioed back to our artillery. They started firing their 105mm at the German tank from about 10 miles back and we never saw the German tank again.

Another time we were ready to attack a town and we were up on a hill quite a distance away. I was next to one of our tanks that had rocket launchers on top. There were 60 tubes for rockets (like a honey comb on top) The tanker stuck his head out the turret and asked everyone in back of the tank to move as he was going to fire the rockets. When he fired the rockets fire came out the back of the tubes for at least 20 feet. The enemy started firing at us and Hunt and I got pined down in a ditch. We could not move for fear of getting hit. The tanker saw that we were in trouble and pulled the tank between the rifle fire and us. Rifle fire could not hurt a tank. I think this was where Capt Gagliardi as killed.

Later on we started for the town. I think it was the same place but me and another fellow was pined down and we saw a man walking back and forth in a window on the top floor of this house. There was a white flag flying and usually the civilians went to the basements. It was not unusual for the Germans

to fly white flags which was to mean that there was no resistance from that house). I will not use the name but he said that the next time he crossed he would get him. He fired and we rushed to the house to see if there were any more soldiers in the house. Women that were crying and screaming met us at the door. Of course we could not understand them and we went up stairs. The man was lying on the floor and had been hit in the head. I did not know that there was that much blood in a persons' body.

Capt. Beach came by in his half-track and told us to get in for the rest of the way into town. As we entered the town he stopped and as he pointed to a house he told everyone in the track to burn down a house. I went in the house and set the curtains on fire on the cupboard and went into the bedroom and set the clothes on fire in the closet. When I came out the civilians were putting the fire out in the kitchen. I did not try to stop them and hoped that they would put the fire out and they did. When I went out on the street I could not see a US soldier any-where. I had to ask some German where they had gone. I did find them farther down the street.

The Germans had left the town by now and our squad stopped at a house that the German civilians had left. We were all tired so we took turns sleeping on the bed inside. There was always someone watching. Two of our squad was sitting on a stone wall by the steps into the house. A shell landed in front of them and killed on of them. The other one could not hear for a long time.

When we were the lead company we usually rode on top of the tanks until we ran into some resistance. It only took a second to dive off the tank into a ditch along the road. Then we walked until it was safe to ride again.

We were always picking up things along the way. We had cleared a factory one time and they had put all the typewriters and bookkeeping equipment in the basement. I had always wanted a typewriter so I took one. It was always in the way so one time we were sleeping in this empty house I left it in a clothes closet. I often wondered what the family thought when they moved back into the house.

Lots of times when we were moving along the road in the spring we saw gardens that had onions growing. We took them and put them in our C rations. It sure made a great change in our food.

The first time I saw a German Jet fighter it was my turn to be on the machine gun. Each halftrack had either a 50 cal or 30 cal air-cooled machine gun mounted on it. The plane came through at almost tree top level. Since I had little experience on the machine gun I did not take a lead on the plane, but fired directly at it. I missed by at least 3 lengths. The next column over from us shot it down.

We were way down in Austria when the war ended and we were sent to Lauingen, Germany, which was close to Dilligen where the 12th captured the bridge over the Danube intact, to serve in the Army of Occupation. The 56th AIB was assigned Fullingstrassa St., where the Germans were told to move out so we could have a house to live in. Each squad was assigned a house.

There was a fish hatchery close by along the Danube River where we did a lot of fishing for rainbow trout. They had not been fed for a long time so we could use about anything for bait and catch all the fish we wanted. Red Grenfell had a piece of fishing line and a spinner, which he used to catch the fish. The Germans had posted Polish displaced persons and a dog at the hatchery to keep people

outside the fence. One of our officers shot the dog when he attacked him and from then on the soldiers fished when they wanted to. Of course they always gave some to the Polish guard, as they were not fed very good. Our house had a pile of potatoes in the basement and a shed full of wood out back. When we left, both were missing. A company cook, Jim Read made sure we had lard from the Mess Hall, which was used to fry the fish. So fish and French fries were nothing new.

I remember one time at Lauingen when a German Girl and I swam across the Danube River. We made it across but on the way back I got awful tired and almost didn't make it back. We had been warned not to fraternize with the Germans but it didn't do any good. I wonder why German civilians did not kill more American soldiers after the war.

I picked up a guitar somewhere and one of the other soldiers had an accordion. There was a displaced persons camp close to Lauingen, and since all of the DPs were Russian and Polish, we went over there one night and played polkas for them. They seemed to have a good time and I bet that was the first time in a long time that they had a dance.

In a few days the 2nd platoon (Lt. DeWitt's platoon) was moved to Baldern, Germany on occupation duty to guard a castle where the Germans had put the Stuttgart Library during the war. This is where I spent a lot of time hunting deer with an ex-German soldier who had been cleared of being a Nazi. I had made friends with his family (wife, eight year old daughter, mother and father) and I was furnishing deer meat for our platoon and the little town.

The man that owned the castle had his own private hunting ground with lots of deer. I first tried

hunting with my M1 carbine, but when I shot my first deer I knocked him down but he just got up and ran. I then borrowed an M1 from a friend and that time he did not run. The German skinned the deer and carried it back to town. The Germans were not allowed to have a sharp knife, gun or camera.

I asked the ex German soldier to clean my rifle and our bazooka. He had had experience in the German army. There was a German teenager in the small town (about a dozen houses and a small hotel and bar) that spoke English and I used him as my interpreter. I became friends of almost everyone in the village. One of the men mounted a set of deer antlers that I shot. I still have them.

The man that owned the castle had moved out during the war and left one man to guard the castle. The contents of the castle could not be replaced. Some of the books were written by hand before type was invented. Things like gold silverware and gold silverware were placed there also. All the people that lived in Baldern worked for the owner of the castle (Duke, Earl or something). He came back one day in a beautiful carriage pulled by 2 beautiful horses with fancy harness.

While there I was given a 48-hour pass to go to Stuttgart to see a school friend. I had no way of getting there so I rode as far as I could on U.S. Army vehicles and even rode in a German civilian truck that was powered by steam. I found my friend but his outfit was just ready to move. I then started back to my outfit but could not find any transportation. Remember there was very little traffic besides U.S. Army vehicles.

I managed to get a ride in an army duck across the Danube River and stayed overnight with his outfit. They were having a party that night, but the next

day I headed back for my outfit. I was a day late but when I reported back to my outfit, Capt Vanderhoff said that he thought it was a long way to go in that amount of time.

Good things had to pass and on August 6, 1945 I was sent to Camp Top Hat, at Antwerp, Belgium. I was destined to go to the USA for a furlough and then go to the Pacific. While on the trip to Antwerp the atomic bomb was dropped and since I only had 54 points I was sent to Linz, Austria where I served as chief clerk in a Railroad transportation battalion with headquarters in Linz. I really had it made there as I worked 4 12-hour days on and 3 days off, and the days off I spent in Vienna.

Linz was on the border of the U.S. section on the Danube River. The river was the dividing line between the American and Russia sector. We sent 3 trains a day into the American sector of Vienna. (Austria was split like Germany was for occupation for a while after the war).

My job was to get a train together that carried supplies that the American sector of Vienna needed. The railroad cars were scattered at many rail yards throughout the American sector of Austria. I could only put 50 cars on a train, as they were small cars compared to American. There was one passenger going to Vienna for American Soldiers only. The Russians would only allow it to go through their sector at night.

I had to make reservations for all our soldiers going on that train. I called LaHarve, France to make reservations. When I was going to Vienna I made my reservation for a Pullman. I believe the train left Linz about 10 pm. When I woke up in the morning the Pullman car was setting in the yard in Vienna. It went back when it got dark.

In January 1946 I started home and was transferred to an Engineer Outfit to return to the US and discharge. They were stationed near the Wolfgung Sea in the Bavarian Alps Mountains. It was a beautiful place, but nothing to do. We were only there a few days until we were put on trains and left for LaHarve.

We left LeHarve, France on February 26, 1946 on the USS Ernie Pyle and arrived at New York on March 7, 1946 and taken to Ft. Myer, VA. We spent 3 days there and went on to Camp Atterbury, IN. where I was discharged on March 13, 1946.

After that, things went about the same as it did with most GI's. Got married and had 2 children. After a few years a friend in the VFW talked me into joining the guard and I was given a T/Sgt rating. From there I was promoted to 1st Sgt. and was then sent to OCS at Ft. Hayes and commissioned a 2nd Lt. Later I was promoted to 1st Lt. and I was sent to Bn. Hq. as Communications Officer and from there to Brigade as Signal Officer on Brigade Staff and promoted, first to Captain and then to Major after attending Staff Officers School at Ft. Hayes, Columbus, OH.

Counting the time in the regular army and the guard, I spent 20 years in the Service.

ADDITIONS:

After the war Austria was divided up into 4 sectors, American, Russian, English and French. Vienna was in the Russian sector and it was also divided up into four sectors also. We in Linz, which was on the Danube River that divided the American and Russian sector, sent 4 supply trains

and one passenger train a day across the Russian sector to Vienna.

In the American part of Austria the trains were run by electric while they were steam in the Russian sector.

The Russians only allowed the American passenger train to cross their territory at night and one night when the train had to stop for water, two Russian soldiers boarded the train and demanded that they be allowed to ride in the train. When the Sgt. in charge of the train told them that the train was for American personnel only, they drew their guns and pointed them at the Sgt. He drew his 45 and shot one dead and wounded the other one.

There was a lot of flack about this so the American Army Court Marshaled the Sgt., found him guilty and fined him 2 cartons of cigarettes and gave him the money to buy the cigarettes. A person cannot be tried for the same offence twice.

We had a transportation office in Vienna also and I stayed in a hotel on the Danube again. The Russians were on the other side and they were building a bridge across the river. They had a curfew at dark and everyone caught out after dark was shot. The only way across the river was to go down the river and take a ferry across. I always crossed on the partly finished bridge by bribing the workers with a cigarette or two. Cigarettes were worth more than money in Vienna.

Vienna was a beautiful city but the Russians had bombed it and the only thing left were the walls of the buildings. Blocks and blocks of bombed out building with the St. Joseph Cathedral standing in the middle, hardly scratched. I spent Christmas

1945 there with members of my outfit and an Austrian family.