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THE
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A

Short History

of

COMPANY A

38TH SIGNAL LIGHT CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

and

38TH SIGNAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION

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INTRODUCTION

Well, men: This Is It: a record of fact stranger than fiction, the history of Company "A". It isn't absolutely complete, because that would require a thickly-paged volume. What we've aimed at is to account for all the moves we made and all the places we stayed at while in the Army, hitting the highspots as far as we can recollect them, and so help you to recall your own life as a soldier.

It has been one hell of a time, when you look back on it. We have undergone experiences we would never have thought possible in our civilian days. There are plenty of things we will long remember and others we would just as willingly forget. There are times when we have laughed (usually at our own expense), cried, cursed everything under the sun, been tormented by contradictory rumors and ended up believing none of them, been pushed around, and thought of nothing but the lay we were going home. These things make up the real story for most of us, and will have to be filled in between the lines by each reader.

This is the story of Company "A" as an outfit. We have intentionally omitted names of and references to individuals. It was hard enough to recall all the important things that affected us as a group without entering into the complicated lives of the individual men. Once you begin remembering, the task becomes endless. Even now, as we read over what we have written we notice how much we have forgotten to include: Colonel Morrow's speech, for instance which in a way set the stage for our whole Army career; the Manchester detachment that lived away from us throughout maneuvers; the cadre we sent out from Tennessee to form the 25rd Signal; the Texas beer party; the Food Crisis No. 2 in Normandy. All this has already grown dim in our memories, and as the months pass, more will be forgotten. So while our recent existence is still fairly fresh in our minds, we want to set down what we can remember of it. The final chapter is still unwritten in Time, and we have left it unwritten in our summary. If this sketch helps to jog your memory as it does ours, it will have served its purpose.

Okinawa
4 November 1945

THE SUMMING UP

(Company A, 38th Signal Construction Battalion)

GREETINGS!

15 July 1943: RECEPTION CENTER - This was the day when many of us were reporting to Reception Centers (Upton or Dix) and getting our first introduction to early hours ("All civilians up"), Army chow and chow lines, KP, details, "the Hook", a mistaken impression that a PFC was really somebody, forms and uniforms, quizzes, USO shows, "Mickey Mouse", and the duffle bag as a handy seat. We learned to double time to wherever we were going so that we'd have longer to wait.

23 July 1943: Found us headed South in Long Island Railway day-coaches.

24 July to 29 Oct 1943: CAMP TOCCOA - For most of us, Georgia will always be associated with Basic Training. It was during our stay at Camp Toccoa that we really started to learn about the Army and our new jobs.

Our problems were mostly psychological. If Reception Center seemed like a bad dream, this was the rude awakening. It was a period of fast and drastic adjustment. The old life had gone with our civvies; all we could see ahead were months and months of boredom, loneliness and restrictions. Very few of us realized, at that time, that almost without knowing it, we would gradually become adjusted to this new life. Soon we would start to take an interest in our work, our surroundings and our new friends. While always retaining the subconscious tie with home and the past, we would begin to live, a day at a time, and things would go easier for us.

The pattern began to form. Whistles got us up in the morning and moved us from place to place through days of calisthenics, meals, Sick Call, classes at the boxing ring, double time, the sweat box where we saw training films, hikes (heat, sweat and aching muscles), shining shoes, haircuts, gigs, GI parties (Friday nights), Saturday inspections, weekend passes, beaucoup dogs, obstacle courses, Pay Day and contributions, the Rifle Range, overnight bivouacs, night problems, the Dance Band, the USO and pool at Cornelia, our first pole line, paratroopers, "hut! two! three! four!", waiting to call home, and the fickle finger of Fate in the form of the Duty Roster. We began to figure the angles. Almost before we had settled in our new surroundings, we were asking about furloughs, promotions and transfers. Men with ERC credit put their rosy dreams of Radio away in moth balls and learned how to dig post holes, because we'd also learned that you can't sue the Army for breach of promise.

That was Toccoa.

30 Oct 43 to 24 Jan 44: TENNESSEE MANEUVERS - We moved into the maneuver area a week before completing our Basic Training. The schedule called for a week's bivouac--suppose it didn't really make much difference (on paper). whether it was Georgia or Tennessee mud we lived in.

For troops that are not designated as combat units, maneuvers can often come close to the real thing. In fact, viewed in retrospect, the months spent on maneuvers were much tougher than actual service overseas. Our job was to maintain the lines of communication between Director Headquarters at Cumberland University, Lebanon, and the Red Army CP. It meant working twenty-four hours a day, in all kinds of weather, seven days a week.

Life took on new values. Warmth came first, with cleanliness of secondary importance. Mud and cold were our worst enemies. The little things became important: a dry pair of socks, a steaming cup of coffee, overshoes, showers in the barber shops of Lebanon, and a slit trench replaced by a Chic Sales job under canvas, complete with stove and lantern.

Some of our lasting impressions of maneuvers: the cry of "Motor Pool!" in the wee hours of the morning, those weeks at the Red CP, the never-ending search for firewood and the Coal Rush of '43, the dirty work in the Operations Tent (You're on first alert!), transfers to the Air Corps, the historic food strike and the March in the Mud, outdoor movies, three Company Commanders in ten days, the flood, fluid top-soil, the PX (and good old chocolate milk), Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's, packages from home, visiting wives, jungle suits, trips to Nashville, and that problem on Mosquito Control which happened while the fellows were trying to prevent frost bite.

Maybe you recall the hit tune of the season:

(To the tune of "Ten Little Fingers")

I've got ten frozen fingers
And ten frozen toes,
Cold as I can be, way down in Tennessee.
When the weather's zero,
I'm such a hero
'Cause it takes a lot of guts
When you freeze your . . . (knees)
The wind's like a sharp knife,
The ground's like cement,
You really lead a dog's life
When you live in a pup tent.
If this is what they call the bright
and sunny South
Ship me to Alaska and just "Shut my
mouth"
'Cause I've got ten frozen fingers
And ten frozen toes
Chilling me way down in Tennessee.

24 Jan to 27 Jan 44: ENROUTE - No rest for the weary. Manuevers behind us, we entrained for Fort Bliss, Texas. Three days in a troop sleeper was all the rest we'd get for the next month. Let's see what we can remember about the trip: Pullman berths with pillows and sheets the Mississippi at Memphis, exercises in the freight yards at Texarkana and San Antonio, icecream and more exercises at Del Rio (Texas), the Pecos and Rio Grande rivers, cactus and sage brush, the "stop over" at Valentine (Texas) where we visited the school, how large Fort Bliss looked to us that first day, the welcome we received, and then the midnight ride into the desert.

27 Jan to 28 Feb 44: TEXAS & NEW MEXICO - This time we were on our own, functioning as a detached Company. The assignment: replacing field wire lines used to co-ordinate the training of searchlight crews at Otero Range (New Mexico) with open wire. Without benefit of preliminary survey or even a map of the area accurate enough to plot angles on, we completed 90 miles of pole line in just 25 days. During the last half of the job, it was necessary to step-up the working schedule to a twelve-hour day in order to meet an advanced date for completion. Pass privileges were cut to a minimum (This is where we came in).

At the end of our stay on the desert, our pole line complete, the Fort Bliss News could speak of us as a bunch of Brooklyn bums who had learned construction the hard way, and shaped up into a crack pole line outfit. With this training under our belts, we were ready for whatever job might be given us overseas.

Many times, we would look back to this period as one of the most pleasant we had spent in the Army. There was a free and easy life on the desert, a friendly climate, an unlimited fuel supply, the BONDOCK OASIS (remember those fried pies and sleeping bags?), tasty steaks and comely señoritas on passes to El Paso, the bars of Juarez (Old Mexico), ten gallon hats and bull fights. There was the thrill of new places, people, and customs, in the exhilarating setting of the Southwest.

28 Feb to 2 March 44: Enroute to Camp Crowder from Texas.

2 March to 30 March 44: CAMP CROWDER, Mo. - "Shanty Town" and furloughs (There are such things). But anything in the Army has its price, and at Crowder its price was POM (preparation for overseas movement). Remember that mad rush? There were the dental and physical screenings, marking of clothing, the infiltration course, cargo nets, classes and training films. We first met our "sweetheart" (carbine or sub-Thompson) and tried her out on the Range. Our days were punctuated with malted milks at the PX and those nightly excursions to Joplin. Some of you fellows joined us at Crowder.

Our exit would have gladdened the heart of any Hollywood producer. Remember that "hike" to the station: the band, people waving, Colonel Coe with his riding boots and crop, and the straps on your pack cutting into your shoulders?

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Furlough experience does not come under Company history but in several cases it has had its "points".

30 March to 2 April 44: ENROUTE - More troop sleepers and more travel. Seems that the shortest route to New Jersey is through Arkansas, West Virginia and Pennsylvania.

2 April to 6 April 44: CAMP KILMER, or POE, is something that happens to most soldiers sooner or later. It was there that we were first subject to censorship, something that was to stick with us all the way across Europe and to the Western Pacific. What a feeling it gives you, first frustration, and then isolation. Days were taken up with orientation classes, show-down inspections, abandon ship drills, a sprint past the Medics to prove we were physically fit, and checking over allotments and insurance commitments. Some of the fellows took a last, lonesome walk in the nearby fields, found a hole in the fence, and were in New York City before they realized it.

6 April 1944: Entrained for the docks. Our hearts and bags were
(heavy).

7 April to 16 April 1944: ATLANTIC CROSSING - We made our North Atlantic crossing, without escort, on the former French luxury liner "ILE DE FRANCE". The trip was quite uneventful. Highlights could be the WACS, crap games, "cokes" on the aft deck (fantail to you, soldier), unlimited PX, or "bootleg" beer and a chicken sandwich before retiring. Of course, we might mention the meals--or should we? Remember those letters you wrote and rewrote?

Then there was the morning when we awoke to find our ship anchored in the Firth of Clyde. Remember looking out across the water to where the hills of Scotland lay half-hidden in the early morning mist? Greenoch was off to our right, its grey-stone buildings nestled at the water's edge.

Once ashore, there was plenty to see and remember: British train with their high pitched whistles and 3rd Class compartments; American RC girls with donuts and coffee; the view from the heights above the Firth; the swarms of children by the tracks giving us the "Thumbs Up" and "V for Victory"; the Blackout.

17 April to 15 July 1944: BRITISH ISLES - England, for most of us, meant Somerset; Frome and The Tannery, Pounds and Shillings, a pint of "mild and bitter" at the local Pub, fish and chips, our first ration cards at the PX, route marches through the English countryside, "You really cawn't miss it", tea and a bun at the WVS Canteen on Sundays, the "stone walls", women in uniform, "Any gum, chum?", the WRENS at the Company dance, brief naps during classes (on a wealth of subjects). Piccadilly Circus, and the long evenings.

Regardless of what part of the States we were from, we began to think of ourselves as "Yanks".

We learned that English, as it is spoken, can be different: a chow line could be a queue, a truck a lorry, garters were suspenders, a hardware store was an ironmonger, and when the telephone operator asked "Are you through?" she meant, were you connected and not have you finished.

The weather we found that Spring in England was everything that the poets had claimed. As for the rest of the year--well?

We learned that in English theatres, the cheapest seats were down front and the best seats in the balcony. We recall one of the song hits of the season was something about "lay me down, roll me over.

ENGLAND (Cont'd) - We saw our first "blitzed" cities on trips to Bath, Bristol and London. Eating was a real problem on pass and we began to appreciate more fully the Red Cross Clubs in the various cities. We experienced our first air raid and saw massed flights of Allied planes and gliders during the days before the Invasion.

D-Day found us "Somewhere in England", calmly marking equipment. From then until we moved to the Marshalling Area at Southampton, we were restricted to the Battalion area. There were alerts dryruns and several outings-on-a-leash. But for the most part things were so peaceful that sometimes it was hard to believe that we were actually only a few miles from the greatest war in history.

At Southampton, we had our first experience with a buzz-bomb.

15 July 1944: SOUTHAMPTON, ENGLAND - Our first anniversary found us poised for the hop across the Channel.

16 July to 18 July 1944: CHANNEL CROSSING - Events were beginning to pile up quickly--so quickly that memories of this period are apt to be a bit confused. What most of us will doubtless remember, however, was that our (Company HQ) trip to France on LST No. 306 was hardly what we had expected. It was all too simple. We anchored off the harbor that first night and dropped down river the next day. Got a cheer from the other detachment on the liberty ship "Thomas Bailey Aldrich" as we passed. The convoy formed off the Isle of Wight, while we sat around on deck and sun-bathed, read, talked, and listened to radio programs coming over the PA system. It was a perfect summer day. The food was good and plentiful (the C-ration addicts in the liberty ship group can skip that last bit). There was also extra coffee.

At about 2130 on the 16th, ships started to move out past the Needles--dozens of ships moving in formation, barrage balloons floating above like a numner's parade. Remember the fog in the early morning and how it suddenly cleared by noon, with sunlight shimmering on the water and the coast of France a long, gray smudge on the horizon? There were lines of ships as far as the eye could see.

Remember Utah Beach and its grim reminders of D-Day and the dozens of LST's nosed onto the beach, like cars parked along Main Street, waiting for the tide to run out so that they could unload; small craft scurrying impatiently across the water from ship to shore; protective clothing; ack-ack fire and searchlights thrusting their probing fingers into the night, searching for planes?

Remember how it felt groping our way across the shell-pocked beach and down the twisting roads of France (under blackout conditions) to the Assembly Area at Ravenoville? K-rations? our first souvenirs?

18 July 1944: LANDED IN FRANCE - If Lafayette was still interested
(we had arrived.)

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A tangle of sagging field wire lines paralleled the roads over which we travelled to our first bivouac area. These roads, unlike so many others in Normandy over which we were to travel in the days ahead, were fairly free of evidence of the fighting which must have surged across the countryside during those early days in June. The

FRANCE (Cont'd) - whole section was being shaped-up by thousands of troops. Bulldozers were chewing out level stretches for air strips. Food and ammunition dumps were being established, water points set up, road blocks removed, wreckage cleared, and fields swept for mines.

Even the town of Carentan showed little evidence of total war. In the half-light of early morning, as we saw it that first time, its deserted streets reflected none of the intense concentration of artillery fire we were to see in Isigny and St. Lo. Here and there a building showed where it had been bombed or shelled and set afire. Shutters hung askew. At some of the upstairs windows, the Tri-Color's of France hung limply from their staffs.

We were through the town and into open country again almost before the holding men were fully awake. We passed the road to Isigny, made a detour around a bombed-out bridge and shortly afterward turned left off the main road. Presently, a town appeared on the ridge ahead, the square Norman tower of the church standing stark against the skyline. It proved to be Neuilly la Foret, our new home for a spell and the first link in a chain of bivouac areas which would mark our trail across the width and breadth of Northern France.

19 July 44: Arrived Neuilly la Foret, 7 miles from St. Lo: assigned to Advanced Section Communications Zone. Pitched shelter-halves along the hedgerow and spread camouflage nets over the trucks. Spent some time cleaning out and improving old foxholes--just in case. (Before the week was over, we had been in and out of them so many times that we were considering applying for jumping pay). During the day, French children had begun to appear around the camp. The men gathered around and a few who knew a little French made some feeble attempts at conversation. Pretty soon the chewing gum and candy appeared--along with the French phrase book. It was then we first heard the request "Cigarette pour papa?" We learned that the local name for apple-jack was Calvados and it really packed a punch--as some of us found out.

21 July 44: We received our first job on the Continent. The ATC wanted a line connecting their HQ in Cherbourg with the various posts along the coast. Our section ran from Grandcamp-les-Bains to St. Laurent-sur-Mer. (Hitler escaped assassination--better luck next time).

22 July 44: First casualties; Sgt McDermott seriously wounded clearing mines and five others injured.

23 July 44: Picked up our first French money ("Shoot you a hundred francs"--how's that for sound?)

25 July 44: "Jerry" caught Hell. We saw the air armada which smashed the stalemate at St. Lo.

28 July 44: Company "B" was bombed (5 dead and 8 wounded). The fellows dug deeper.

31 July 44: Holds the record for letter writing - 475.

4 Aug 44: Left Neuilly via motor convoy, arrived St. Samson de Bon Fosse. Had our first look at St. Lo. There was little left of the town except standing walls and piles of rubble. The main road winds down hill in the center of the town. From the high ground, all you could see was desolation. The River Vire was choked with wood, stone and plaster from buildings. The Church had its tower shattered and roof caved in. Bedding fluttered from the houses whose fronts had been blown away. Household and personal effects were scattered about. Tired, bearded GI's sat about in the sun, cleaning their weapons.

Now we began to see the other side of war. The refugees straggling back along the roads to what were once their homes. They travelled alone or in small groups, carrying suitcases and bundles or pushing their few precious possessions in hand-carts or baby buggies. They were the women and children and the very old.

We also found our first American dead. The line we were working on ran down through Percy and Villedieu. Foxholes edged the hedge-rows; shallow, hastily dug shelters which had been thrown up by our infantry (29th Division) during the days of fighting after the Lessey-Perrier-St. Lo line had been pushed back. They lay beside the hedge-rows and in the corner of an orchard that had been blasted by artillery. In the debris at the bottom of the foxholes, there were the usual personal things--like photographs and letters from home. Somehow these personal things made you feel the tragic pathos of war more than the scenes of destruction.

25 Aug 44: After the Falaise Gap had been closed, we moved on to the next job. Overnight bivouac at Chateau de la Guidiniere near St. Anne

Once out of Normandy, the whole of northern France began to unfold before our turning wheels. We were never in one place for very long. At one point our route lay through sweet smelling pine woods, carpeted with banks of ferns. (Where the fighting had been heavy, trees were shattered and great gouges had been torn in the black earth). Sometimes, we would climb for what seemed like hours to emerge on the crest of a ridge with a wonderful panorama spread before us. There were the wide expanses of rich farmland, light lines were highways, dark blocks where woodlands cut odd shapes across the picture, while here and there villages were spaced like buttons on a patchwork quilt.

We drove for miles beside fields in which sheaves of wheat were stacked in orderly rows. The crops must be harvested, war or no war, to feed empty bellies the next winter.

Burned-out equipment which lined many of the roads was a constant reminder that the war had passed that way only a few days or weeks before.

In towns where the Germans had been travelling too fast to turn and make a stand, there was little destruction. There the inhabitants were in a holiday mood. They lined the sidewalks and waved to us, threw kisses and flowers, and gave us the now familiar two-fingered salute for victory, as we drove past. It gave you an odd feeling to pass quickly from a blasted area, where the smell of death still hung

avy in the air, to a town that was decked out with the flags of the Allies; where the women were dressed in their gay summer prints; where the kids had clean hands and fat faces; where the old men could sit and sleep in the sun.

FRANCE (Cont'd) - Nights we curled up in our blankets and slept out under the clear heavens. The air was fresh and there was hardly any dew. Stars were still bright overhead, when the whistle blew for Reveille.

26 Aug 44: Arrived at Acon (Nonancourt). That's where the snipers were in the fields. This was our first experience with French railroad signal lines: a repair job on the Cherbourg-Paris Railway. Company A's section was from Bourth to Dreux (27-1/8 miles). We learned about French transposition schemes. Some of us managed to get our first trip to Paris, strictly on the QT.

31 Aug 44: Arrived at Villequoi (below Chartres), bivouacked in the Bois St. Martin. Around here the people live in small villages and go out to work in the surrounding fields. This gives the farmer a community life he would otherwise miss if the farms were strung out along a road as they are back home. (It's something that's been handed down from feudal days, when the lords owned the land and the peasants worked it for a percentage). Haystacks tower beside the roads, built like round houses with thatched roofs. At a distance they resemble a group of cup-cakes with dark frosting. For the harvest and field work, the farmers use immense two-wheeled carts drawn by a pair of horses, harnessed so that one walks between the shafts and the other directly in front of him. Oxen are as common as horses.

We were picking up a working knowledge of the language which helped us with our bartering, for by now we had learned that cigarettes and chocolate could be exchanged for, among other things, eggs, fresh fruits, and vegetables. We acquired a taste for the native bread. In France, bread comes by the yard; a long loaf made from a coarse grain and bean flour--hard-crust-ed but tasty.

The Sunday we spent in this area was like Old Home Week. All the people from the surrounding villages dressed up and paid us a visit. They looked everywhere imaginable until we began to appreciate the privacy of a goldfish bowl. No place was free from their investigation--got so you just tipped your hat and kept on sitting.

Most of us had homes we could visit and there were glowing tales of homecooked meals circulating about the camp. All you had to do was take a walk along the road and someone would wave you into a house and set pancakes, waffles or roast chicken before "les Americains". Whenever we ran short of eggs or tomatoes, a short-walk in the evening was sure to put several layers in the bottom of a helmet.

Our job was more railway signal rehabilitation work. This time from Chartres to Janville (34 miles) and Voves to Orleans (30 miles).

9 Sept 44: REIMS - Arrived at Muizon (8 miles from Reims). On the trip from Villequoi, we had our first official glimpse of Paris because the city's bridges across the Seine were the only ones not destroyed by the retreating Germans. We entered the capital by the Porte D'Orleans and drove down the Blvd. du Montparnasse. Route N-2 took us up through some of the places made famous during the American offensives of 1918--Miller-Cotterets, Soissons, Chateau Thierry.

Memories of our stay at Reims include: Champagne, nightly passes (first good passes we'd had on the Continent), the Cathedral, ten-in-one's, movies under the trees at Battalion, a 2:30 AM inspection by a colonel from Advance Section, hot showers, our first electric lights from a German generator we'd picked up, AWOL's from the Paris move, guards on a crashed bomber. (souvenirs), nice area for a bivouac (pine

FRANCE (Cont'd) - trees and sand; easy digging), and visits after dark to nearby farms and villages where we found that life went on, despite the blackout, behind closed doors and drawn curtains.

The only work we did in the immediate vicinity of Reims was a repair job on a German defense line, to provide the Army with communications between Vregny and Reims. To complete this run, though most of it was on the German-built line, it was necessary to run some field-wire through the rail yards at Soissons and along the tracks which ran northeast from that city, between Margival and Vregny.

The rest of our time was taken up on side trips; the 1st Platoon to Morangles and Savigny-sur-Aisne; the 2nd Platoon on a secret mission to Versailles.

14 Sept to 18 Sept 44: MORANGLES or VERSAILLES - We had to repair the railway signal system between St. Cyr and Trezy-sur-Oise (41 miles) in the fastest possible way. Using spiral-4, where too many spans of wire were missing, and rebuilding the line only where absolutely necessary, the job was completed in 3 days.

The Company CP was with the 1st Platoon at Morangles. We lived on K-rations and the countryside, had hot showers at an Engineer outfit, and saw that German airdrome which had been camouflaged to look like farms and villages (remember the buildings of wood, canvas and trick paint jobs?)

The 2nd Platoon had its first chance to bivouac on the Palace grounds at Versailles, while they tied-in the main line from La Havre to ATC Headquarters in Paris.

24 Sept to 27 Sept 44: SAVIGNY-sur-AISNE - This was a 1st Platoon assignment: repairing railroad signal lines (over toward Verdun) between St. Menehould and Liart (64.8 miles). Completed in two days because there was little to do. We trimmed some trees and pulled up slack on several spans. As one man remarked "They just sent us up here to admire the line."

We were the first Americans to stay in the vicinity, so we were somewhat of a novelty. We arrived on a Sunday and promptly climbed back into the goldfish bowl, for the villagers gathered around to watch us make camp, eat and clean up, and do all the other little personal things one is apt to do in the course of a day.

Everyone was very friendly and the fellows were laying in fresh stocks of eggs and vegetables. We also took advantage of the nearness of the town to have some much-needed laundry done. We supplied the GI soap and madame did the work for a few francs or a few cigarettes.

We were invited to homes, where the people extended their cordiality to the point of throwing a dance for us. The dance started out badly, with much awkwardness on our part, but strong-arm tactics resorted to by the girls brought even the shyest of us out onto the floor and by the end of the evening, there were few of us who weren't experts in French dances, including a dance version of Post-Office. This was the first party we'd ever had where there was a surplus of girls.

But, in the Army one makes friends and then moves on. We went back to Reims.

21 Sept to 8 Oct 44: VERSAILLES - Nothing too good for the men. Versailles, once the ornate pleasure-ground of Louis XIV, was now a crowded military area occupied by SHAEF. The 2nd Platoon bivouacked

FRANCE (Cont'd) - in the Royal Forest on the Palace grounds while working on their secret mission--to set up cable communication between Supreme Headquarters and Army trans-Atlantic radio installations. The Baroque splendors of the Palace and the Palace grounds put up a losing fight for our spare-time interests against the Red Cross Club, the theatre, and the hospitality of the local families. Long after we have forgotten the names of the Petit Trianon and the Grand Trianon, we will remember the sudden interior loosening caused by our too rich diet; the lines of hungry Frenchmen hovering near the kitchen, drooling as we passed with loaded mess-kits; The Black Market in cigarettes, soap and candy, that flourished all day around the edges of our encampment; the crippled children from the convent who visited us; the throngs of British troops in the Service Clubs; and most vivid of all perhaps, our first real contact with Paris.

1 Oct to 2 Oct 44: ENROUTE - October found us retracing our steps--Fismes, Chateau Thierry, La Ferte, Foutenay-tres-Igny, Melun, Miuy, Etampes, Ablis, Chartres, Nogent-la-Rotrou, Pre-en-Pail, Donfront, to Tinchebray, with an overnight bivouac at Courville. The Battalion had been assigned the job of building a line paralleling the gasoline pipe-line from St. Lo to Corbeil (20 miles southeast of Paris). This pipe-line followed generally the route of the old Red Ball express highway.

2 Oct to 11 Oct 44: TINCHEBRAY - High on a windy hill. The 1st Platoon and Hq Company bivouacked in a smooth field of short grass which turned to the usual mud when the rains came. Drivers began to get expert at bucking Red Ball traffic, going the wrong way, with the "Wire Patrol" sign on the front of their vehicles. Things to recall: Election Day, Supply issuing mackinaws, no mail, sabotage of the pipe-line, unfriendly civilians, listening to the World Series by short-wave from Boston on the new Special Services' radio.

The 2nd Platoon joined us on the 8th (from Versailles).

During the latter part of our stay in this area, it rained most of the time, so we welcomed our next move, to billets in the Grand Hotel at Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.

11 Oct to 1 Nov 44: BAGNOLES-DE-L'ORNE - Here amid the ruined luxury of a fashionable peacetime Spa, where European society had once gathered to take thermal baths, we spread our blanket-rolls on the bedroom floors and slept peacefully. We learned all over again what it was like to come back wet and shivering from a day's work, not to a sodden pup-tent, but a dry room with four walls, a log fire, and electric lights. We experienced real plumbing for the first time since leaving England and were introduced to that unique device of French sanitation--the douche-bowl. We ate our meals in the windowless dining salon, washed our mess-kits on the marble terrace, and pitched a Motor Pool in the hotel gardens.

Instead of dreading evenings, we began to look forward to them, when we might drink cognac at a local cafe, go to a movie at the Casino-du-Lac, or roast chestnuts or popcorn over a grate fire.

Occasionally, we had a steak-and-French-Fried with wine, or shopped for perfume and other souvenirs at shops in town. Home photography began to flourish now that we had private baths with our rooms. We organized our own dance and invited the local mademoiselles, who came with their parents. We began to have dates. All our back mail arrived in one colossal deluge.

FRANCE (Cont'd) - The leaves turned and fell. Then the weather grew colder and rainy. The drivers busily completed winterizing their vehicles with bits of wood, metal, and glass, begged or borrowed, or filched from abandoned wrecks. The huge German munition dump in the nearby woods supplied hinges, hasps, and ready-made chests for foot-lockers.

While in Bagnoles, we worked chiefly between POL stations 21 and 24, where we had to overcome several obstacles. The first few miles of the line past Couterne ran along a railroad that was so full of curves and so inaccessible, the wire had to be pulled by hand. Further on, between Pre-en-Pail and Alencon, we ran up against an elaborately constructed German pole line. Here frequent push-braces made the poles clumsy to climb and work on, and the presence of the original wire--still intact--required some tricky maneuvering when it came to elevating our cross-arms: we had to remove some of the original upper wire, then, work our cross-arms through the remaining network and up into the clear. Lastly, we had to run our own wire clear of the maze.

1 Nov to 18 Nov 44: PONTGOUIN - From Bagnoles, the first Platoon travelled further along the pipe-line to Pontgouin, a small village near Chartres. Here the men were billeted in a feudal manor, complete with outer and inner courts, moat, battlements, and a graded dwelling-place--the entire community set in a dense forest.

This time, however, the plumbing facilities could not accommodate 100 men, so we had to dig an annex in the open air. Before long we were even drawing our water in buckets from the well. We were still further inconvenienced by a squatter detachment of MP's, who occupied the choice central part of the building until only a day before we ourselves departed.

This area was less palatial than the hotel at Bagnoles, and the inner court slowly churned itself into a sea of mud from the constant passage of wheels and feet. But we were thankful enough for the mere shelter and warmth of our billets. During the day, we sawed off the tops of overlong poles and used them for firewood in our rooms at night.

Pass days we spent in Chartres (new area of Battalion headquarters) and on Sunday mornings, some of the teams attended Mass in Chartres Cathedral, leaving their K-43's parked incongruously under the East Portal.

The weather grew steadily worse. Each day more vehicles got stuck in the mud. Drivers of those that didn't sweat it out so intensely they would have felt relieved to have actually been stuck. We encountered our worst stretch of terrain so far, crossing the plains near Chartres, between POL stations 31 and 32 (7 miles). We had to work over newly-ploughed land, making it difficult to walk or use vehicles when it rained. There were no roads in that area.

The cigarette shortage, attributed chiefly to Black Market activities in Paris, began to grow acute.

Lt Col Moody replaced Major Rich as Battalion Commander.

1 Nov to 18 Nov 44: NOGENT-LA-ROTRON - From Bagnoles, the 2nd Platoon went to Nogent. The Company CP and one section of the Platoon were quartered in a chateau and adjacent garage a few miles from the center of town; the other section lived in a theatre on the edge of the Square. The Mess facilities were set up in the chateau kitchen and we ate

FRANCE (Cont'd) - out-doors or, in bad weather, in the dungeon-like basement. We were still sleeping on the floor and liking it. There was a Day Room and we had the use of the Battalion record player. Due to a lack of proper bathing facilities, some of the fellows contracted a mild form of scabies.

We too wondered whether the cigarette was here to stay.

There is a fascination in numbers and some of the lads found amusement at No. 66, Rue de la Something-or-Other.

On the job we ran into a few problems: just north of Nogent, our pole-line crossed an electric railroad and we were forced to place and H-fixture on either side of the track and pull the wires over the cantenary. The Huisne River was in flood due to the heavy rains.

18 Nov to 7 Dec 44: VERT-LE-GRAND and ST,CHERON - We were nearing the completion of our job and our next move brought us to within a stone's throw from Paris.

The Company CP and part of the 1st Platoon set itself up in a battered mansion on the edge of Vert-le-Grand, which had been used more recently by the Germans for storage of airplane parts. The rest of the Platoon found space in a deserted house in town, while the surveying team continued to live alone as it had been ever since we left Bagnoles (could it be B.O?) None of these places matched our previous billets, although at one time the buildings and grounds where our CP was located must have been quite an estate--impressive iron gates with a crest and stone lions sitting atop the posts, a tree-lined drive, an attractive garden with shady paths beside the moat, an outdoor swimming pool, and a manor house of 30 rooms.

The 2nd Platoon was the self-appointed guest of a French Count--quite a colorful character with his knickers and clipped English accent. But when we arrived, we found the chateau proper "Off Limits" our billets were in the servants' quarters over the barns, the storage room and the loft. With a little improvising, we were soon quite comfortable. There were fireplaces or stoves in each of the rooms and the Count's woodpile and sawing machine close at hand. Our host was rather annoyed, however, when we used his cattle watering-place, in the center of the courtyard, for washing vehicles. We had showers in the municipal baths at Dourdan, first hot water baths since Versailles.

It was in this setting that we celebrated Thanksgiving, 1944. The cooks excelled themselves with the turkey and fixings. Some of the 1st Platoon men decorated the tables in their Mess Hall with white tracing paper, holly and autumn leaves.

The cigarette shortage grew desperate. We smoked cinchers or not at all.

This final section of the POL line taxed our ingenuity as well as our humps. We had to get the line across another electric railway, a high tension power line, and the Seine River in flood. We hired a team of horses to pull the wire across one exceptionally muddy stretch of farmland. The river crossing was made with H-fixtures, special cross-arms, and special wire. The cross-arms were pieces of timber 8x10 inches by 15 feet. The wire, .145 steel, was towed across the Seine by launch. The span of the crossing was 700 feet. The 2nd Platoon had a spur line to build after completing their mainline section. Crossing the electric railroad, they found it much easier to run cable through a buried pipe under the track than to hump the

RANCE (Cont'd) - wire across the catenary as had been done before.

The pole-line completed, we turned our efforts into lighter channels and went on day passes to Paris, where we soaked up the last dram of cognac, couchez, and cosmopolitan life.

We spent a week preparing for an inspection, reconditioning our vehicles and equipment, and washing off some of the mud.

At breakfastme, on Thanksgiving Day, an airplane crashed and exploded on the edge of town. One of our crews assisted in pulling apart the wreckage, in order to get at the charred bodies of five crew-members.

Quite a few of the Toccoa "originals" were transferred out as infantry replacements and we received limited assignment men in return.

Shortly after December 1st, the Battalion was attached to the 9th Army and ordered to Holland.

* * *

Another chapter of our Army life was fast drawing to a close. We'd spent a little less than five months on the Continent; months rich with experiences. France had been an introduction to a new kind of living. Everything seemed old. Yet the impression one got was not that of decadence but just of great and contented age. At times it was difficult to remember that we were seeing the Old World through the eyes of strangers: soldier-conquerers and liberators from a young, fresh country which prides itself on its progress. Here were coming up against age-old tradition and a country which was practically destitute after four years of occupation by an enemy.

When we formed opinions of people, we didn't always consider, for instance, that the Norman farmer is regarded by other Frenchmen somewhat as the Scot is by the English, or the New England Yankee by other Americans. He isn't given to exuberance but is likely to be a self-sufficient fellow, well satisfied with his fertile farms and good living. We were sometimes slow to realize that if the girls we met were immoral, they no more represented the majority of French girls, than do the camp-followers or Times Square commandoes represent the girls back home. (This goes as well for the people we met in England, Belgium, Holland . . . and, perhaps, Germany).

Now that the "lecture" is over, we have a few more impressions of France which we'd like to sandwich in here before moving on: blue smocks and berets, wooden shoes, bees (especially in Normandy), long straight roads lined with poplars, signs with the legend "Roads cleared to hedges", cement telephone poles, and the shiny brass helmets of the firemen.

Then, of course, there was Paris.

PARIS to many of us meant wine, women, and song. True, the girls were just as beautiful as reports had painted them. Their hair was crazily done and their clothes were worn imaginatively. They dressed in riotous colors, and when the flag-draped holiday streets were packed with people, the color made everything in the world seem gay too. Montmartre, was like a carnival any night in the week. But Paris was more than that.

Most of us saw the capital sometime during the summer of 1944, not long after she had been liberated. The sun shone brightly and

FRANCE (Cont'd) - warm on the domes and boulevards, and people crowded the streets and cafes. (Give a Frenchman a flag and a fountain and he's happy). There were a few scars left from the fighting but they were being cleared up. The kiosks (newsstands) had postcards of de Gaulle and maps of the city. The old women on the Place de l'Opera had flowers for sale. In those days most of Paris travelled on foot or bicycles; thousands of bicycles, billowing skirts, and shapely knees. Traffic was circular and frantic.

The graceful arches of her bridges, the small bookstalls along the Seine embankment, Notre Dame Cathedral, troops bivouacked under the Eiffel Tower, perfumes. The Rainbow Corner, artists sketching in the Latin Quarter, curb-service pissoirs, the Metro, zig-zigging your way back to the trucks in the Blackout, women attendants in the Men's Rooms, and the Bois de Boulogne: these are some of our memories of Paris.

Paris holds a unique place among cities; she is the heart of France.

* * *

8 Dec to 9 Dec 1944: ENROUTE - Our motor convoy skirted the southern edge of Paris, passed through Fontainebleau (once the hunting grounds of the kings of France), and on to Soissons. From Soissons we were in new territory. In succession, the cities and towns came up on our horizon and dropped to the rear: Laon, Merle, Vervins, Hirshon, Chimay, Couvin, Phillippeville, Charleroi, and Namur. Just before leaving France we passed through a completely-walled medieval town (Rocroi).

Around midnight, we made an overnight stop at Marche-les-Dames, Belgium, spreading our blanket-rolls on the floors of a castle which once belonged to a German prince. We were on the edge of the Ardennes Forest, high in the mountains, and it snowed during the night. A white world greeted us that frosty morning, when we turned out the unsavory hour of 5 AM to make coffee and heat a K-ration over the blow-torch. It was really cold.

Then we were on our way again--St. Trond, Tongres, the Albert Canal, Maastricht--arriving at Noon in Banholt, Holland.

9 Dec 44 to 2 March 45: HOLLAND - Our first glimpse of Holland was not too promising: muddy roads winding through small muddy towns the hedges dense with a tangle of field-wire, the orchards and pastures torn up by tanks and heavy equipment, billeting space scarce and not too elegant.

With the help of the local priest, we found temporary shelter for the night, a few men here and a few men there, with the bulk of the outfit in a large hall over the cafe. Before many days, however, we were able to take over quarters vacated by an armored regiment, and the Company CP, the 1st Platoon and the 2nd Platoon moved into school-houses at Banholt, Mheer, and St. Geertruid, respectively. The 1st Platoon Motor Pool established itself in the town "cafe" at Banholt, amid the embellishments of a bar (no beer), a billiard table, and a half-demented proprietress.

We discovered that the language of Holland is a melange of English, French and German; that the Hollanders are a pious people whose passion for cleanliness has not been exaggerated, who liked cigarettes, chocolate, and soap as well as any other liberated people. Before long

HOLLAND (Cont'd) - we became a part of the community. Some of us attended Mass in the local church and struck up firm friendships with the priest, while the inhabitants, for their part, became regular patients of our Medics.

We had hoped for a quiet winter in Holland, with possibly a bit of social life, as Maastricht was not too far away. But on the 17th of December, "The Bulge" opened up. The Battle of the Ardennes continued through the Holidays and into the new year. A munitions dump blew up on the morning of the 18th. From then on, when the men were not running communications for the Armies, they formed roving patrols to look for Nazis who might have dropped behind the lines. We lived in a world of alerts, blackout driving, passwords (signs and countersigns), and mysterious questionings of GI guards ("Who is Betty Grable's second husband?). To add to the confusion, an ack-ack battery and armored group moved into town. Their firing at German planes disturbed what little sleep we managed to get. They also won some of our best fatigues in an exchange of laundry done by the local hausfraus.

One foggy night during the Bulge, the 1st Platoon worked until dawn to establish communications between First and Ninth Armies. Not long afterward, another all-night job involved crossing the Albert Canal with spiral-4. There were no bridges, so we borrowed a rowboat. The 2nd Platoon ran lines between Maastricht and Neuf Chateau, Belgium, linking up Army Groups. They also worked between Ninth Army and General Montgomery's HQ. Other jobs in this area included working in the city of Aachen, where our teams advanced the cable connections of the Ninth Army and started on the rehabilitation of under-ground cable, in preparation for the Spring offensives.

Those who worked in Aachen enjoyed, as an occasional treat, the steaming hot mineral baths for which the town had been famous. The rest of us showered in Maastricht or at the Quartermaster's shower tent in Gulpen.

We took time off to eat turkey on Christmas Day, 1944. The Company handed out cigars and cokes to celebrate the announcement of our having been recommended for a Meritorious Service Plaque. Later, however, we would learn that humps plus backs do not always equal plaques. The 2nd Platoon had a pleasant surprise in the form of a gift of pies and cakes especially baked for them by the people of St. Geertruid. The fellows responded by getting up a gift box of food, candy and cigarettes for their benefactors.

Our cable-splacers, who had left us back at Bagnoles, came back to the unit for the Holidays. When they left the next time, we didn't see them until the Company was reorganizing at Hannover, Germany.

New Year's Eve: we drowned our sorrows in Belgian cognac.

The Sunday before New Year's more closely resembled the 4th of July when Jerry dropped a 500-pound bomb in a field a few hundred yards from the Company CP. A nearby barn absorbed the main force of the blast, so that fortunately no one was hurt, and a few windows suffered the only damage.

HOLLAND (Cont'd) -- There were days when buzz-bombs seemed to be constantly in the air over our billets, bound for Antwerp or Leige. The trouble with those things was you could never tell just how they would act. If one cut out overhead, it might drop straight or glide for nearly a mile. Down by Leige, a few of us met the bombs half-way and have sported a Purple Heart ever since as a reminder.

As December wore into January, the cold grew more intense, and vehicles cracked up almost daily on the icy roads. Sick Call for coughs and colds swelled to frightening proportions. Supply issued us overshoes, sweaters, and a sleeping-bag. We hauled queer-looking coal from a mine in Germany and burned it all day long in our stoves. The 1st Platoon published a weekly blackboard edition of its miseries entitled "Helmets and Leggins". Battalion got out "The Spur".

On pass days, we climbed into the back of a two-and-a-half to visit Maastricht, home of Ninth Army HQ, GI Joe's and The "Dutch Treat" Red Cross Club. Maastricht also meant a choice of movies, concerts, and the Katherine Cornell presentation of "The Barretts of Wimpole Street". Maastricht played host to a Battalion Dance which turned out to be a mammoth crap game. In addition to these urban amusements, we had our own movies three times a week, both within the Company and at Battalion (Noorbeek). PX rations and mail were plentiful. We participated in an inter-company quiz contest and an "A" Company man walked off with the prize--a bottle of champagne. We had enough distractions to keep us either in or out of mischief.

"Conquer", "Cross-arm", "Cross Talk" and other words beginning with C entered our vocabulary.

Passes to Brussels and Paris started just before we moved out.

The day the Ninth Army crossed the Roer, we spent 48 hours laying lines to support the advance. One stretch followed the Canal for 40 miles from Maastricht to Neerpelt (British 2nd Army HQ).

Early in March, we received our orders to move ahead. Only then did we realize how much we had enjoyed Holland, how little we wanted to leave.

2 March 45: ENTERING GERMANY -- Leaving Holland, the Company moved by "infiltration": each team packed and took off on its own, whenever ready. Our route lay through the towns of Vaals, Aachen, Kerkrade, Eigelhoven, Linden, Linnich (where we crossed the Roer), Baal, Erkelenz, Rheindahlen, to Engelsholt.

Inside the Reich, the destruction seemed more complete than anything we had seen to date. It was almost as though the troops had felt that now they had the chance to strike at German soil, they'd make a good job of it. Maybe on the other hand, it was the Germans who had stiffened their defenses. Whatever the reason, hardly a farm or village had escaped untouched, while many of the larger towns were gutted.

Near Aachen, we passed through the "dragon's teeth" which stretched for miles along the Holland-German border. We saw large areas marked off with white tape by the Engineers where potato-masher grenades and their mesh of trip-wires formed ankle-high entanglements.

GERMANY (Cont'd) - They had been placed there during the winter snows to catch unsuspecting infantrymen. There were newly filled holes in the road where bomb craters had recently yawned and in other places the pavement had been chipped by 50 calibre bullets from strafing planes. Dead animals, with bloated bellies and rigid limbs, lay in the fields, fouling the air we breathed. Ammunition to support the advance stood in piles beside the main roads. Air fields were crowded with planes.

This time the refugees who streamed along the roads like pedlars with their boxes and bundles were either Germans seeking some new place to live or displaced persons from occupied countries whom the Germans had forced into slave-labor groups to work their farms and plants.

2 March to 8 March 45: ENGLISHOLT - Our new area, between Rhein-danlen and Munchen-Gladbach, proved to be a former German Air Force Training Center. Large rambling buildings clustered around the Main Hall and kitchens, looked like a college campus. There the similarity ended. The large auditorium had been used to house Polish and Russian slave-laborers. Men and women had been herded together like animals, existing on bread and turnip soup and sleeping on mouldy straw. The filth of their living conditions, the scraps of clothing left behind, and the small leather whips discovered by some of the fellows, gave mute evidence of how they must have been treated. When we arrived, they were wandering around the place in search of food and clothing.

Some of us found small rooms in one wing of the main building, others moved into a smaller adjoining house, and a few slept in the projection booth above the room where the dead Russian lay, forgotten by his countrymen. There was a shed full of coal which we shared with the DP's.

For three days, we worked in and around the newly-captured town of Munchen-Gladbach. There we had a chance to observe other Germans, whose homes had not been touched by the advance. These prosperous citizens were a different story from the refugees of the road. The women dressed in furs and silk stockings (doubtless loot sent home by their victorious armies in their heyday). The men wore Homburg hats, chesterfield coats, and carried genuine leather brief-cases.

Many of us picked up autos, motorbikes, bicycles, typewriters and office supplies. Supply issued us cots and three battle-stars.

8 March to 28 March 45: ERKELENZ and EIGLESHOVEN - We left Englisholt rather hurriedly. The 9th Tactical Air Force (Gypsy), searching for billets, happened to pass our area, liked it and quickly dispossessed us. We had to go back along the line a bit to find suitable billets for the Company.

In Erkelenz, the Company CP and 1st Platoon occupied a whole block of blitzed buildings on the main street. Instead of finding whole houses to live in, we set ourselves up in the best rooms available and foraged through the town for furniture and other items of domestic comfort which might tend to make life more pleasant. The fleeing Herrenvolk had thoughtfully left behind great piles of

GERMANY (Cont'd) - coal, heaped in the cellar of every house; There were also potatoes, which the cooks picked up and used to piece out our rations. We ate our meals in the open, seated on the curb or from a convenient windowledge. Some of our billets were well stocked with books, others with paintings, and several even had pianos.

Artillery fire had destroyed the plumbing, so we had to dig outdoor facilities. It had also wrecked the electrical system, so again we improvised; rewired the rooms and tapped in on our own generator. The Oh So Peachy Laundry Inc. replaced its utility model washing machine (which had been put together during our stay in England from odds and ends, a 55-gallon drum, and an old motor from an RL-26) with a new Master Race model found in the ruins of the town's laundry.

We watched the lines of Displaced Persons file past our billets, under Belgian guards, on their way to a temporary camp where they were fed and deloused. We saw the hopeless looks on their disease-ridden faces. Few of them had really survived the four years of slavery. Spiritually they were dead. In our minds, we contrasted them with the sleek, well-fed German civilians we had seen in Munchen-Gladbach: Germans who had painted slogans on the walls of their houses and factories urging sacrifices for the Fuehrer, who cringed and fawned on the conquering Americans, who disclaimed loyalty to the Nazi Party and to prove it, commenced busily erasing the signs from the walls and loudly declared their eagerness to co-operate with us.

Through Military Government, we acquired a mascot and handyman, Paul. He was a DP whose father had been Russian and mother, Swiss. Paul worked for us as an orderly, doing odd jobs and waiting on the Officers' table. We paid him in food, shelter, and GI clothing.

Our job while at Erkelenz consisted of maintaining a long stretch of spiral-4 connecting the Ninth Army's rear and forward echelons. As the Army's communications lengthened, intermediary stations such as Conquer "Mike", Conquer "Nan", Conquer "Easy" added themselves to the original bases of Conquer "Forward" and Conquer "Rear". Our repair crews left on DS with the Conquer Signal Section, the better to patrol these vital lines. With the same object in view, we set up test-stations all along our section of the line. When the Army moved inland, in preparation for the Rhine crossing, we spent hectic days and nights trying to restore overhead lines as fast as the assault boats (carried over the roads on huge trailers) tore them down. We laid 10 pair spiral-4 from Munchen-Gladbach to Venlo but after two days' work the job was given up, due to the Army's rapid progress.

Through most of our stay at Erkelenz, the weather was beautiful. Nature did her part in covering Man's mistakes and early Spring flowers began to appear growing amidst the ruins. With all the work, we still found time to wander through the town looking for souvenirs. Higher HQ had published circulars forbidding looting, but to most of us, what we found was ours.

GERMANY (Cont'd) - Motor Pool had a little excitement when a German soldier took refuge in the basement of the garage where they operated and had to be flushed out by the guards. In another part of this garage, we used to gather to see movies or have refresher courses in gas.

In Eigleshoven, the 2nd Platoon did all right for themselves in a former Girls' School. Each man had an individual compartment for his cot with a window and curtains, closet for his clothes, and electric lights. We took hot showers at the nearby coal mine and washed down the rest of the dust with good beer in the neighboring cafes.

Several new men joined us at Eigleshoven and one of them was quickly transferred out again as the victim of a mysterious grenade throwing incident. Then, of course, you'll remember the day Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands visited the nearby town of Heerlen and the people dressed in the Royal colors.

There was plenty of work, some of which took us up through blasted portions of the Siegfried Line. The Roer River lines were broken twice. We suffered several mine casualties while working along the railroad lines.

Around St. Patrick's Day, advance elements of the Ninth Army crossed the Rhine and formed a bridgehead. The main forces followed quickly and fanned out on the other side. The lines of communications began to stretch thinner and thinner. We had new missions assigned to us; establishing communications for XIII, XVI and XIX Corps, the other side of the Rhine. This proved rather difficult from our present billets, so we moved forward.

From this time on, every new billet we occupied excelled the previous one in comfort and modernity. Those of us who had lived in the ruins of Erkelenz could look back on our quarters as barbarous--which they were.

28 March to 1 April 45: LINTFORT - We had expected to cross the Rhine on this move as most of our work was now on the east bank. However, the advance party brought back word that good billets were scarce, the towns had either been flattened or else were at present occupied by other units. We found temporary quarters at Lintfort. Here we were close enough to commute back and forth to our job of throwing up spare lines of spiral-4 from Wesel as far east as the Army had advanced.

For those who had time to observe it, Lintfort was a small suburban town, a main street and tree-shaded residential side streets, a movie, and shower facilities. What more could we want?

Both platoons were billeted on the edge of town in large houses on opposite sides of the same road. Quarters were cramped but otherwise quite comfortable. The 1st Platoon drew the home of a wealthy German industrialist (he lived in the basement while we were there) a strikingly fine house with many of its original furnishings. We even had a bath tub, with electric heating unit, which called for a special Saturday night roster.

While we were at Lintfort, men of the Hebrew faith attended Passover Services which were held in Dr. Goebbel's home in Munchen-Gladbach.

GERMANY (Cont'd) - Five men went on seven-day furloughs to England.

At the end of three days, most of us were exhausted from the bumpy, dusty truck ride across the Rhine, necessary twice a day. Our cable lines were receding further and further into Central Germany. So once again we threw our belongings onto our vehicles and pushed on.

1 April to 7 April 45: DULMEN - We moved across the Rhine. Wesel was a smoldering ruin. Beyond the city, German dead lay by the roadside and we saw GI's dug in in the fields. There was still a pocket of resistance at Dusseldorf, but the spearhead had moved on and the main fighting centered around Munster. We could see flashes on the horizon at night where the artillery was having a little work-out.

Our new home was in Dulmen, once a sizable town of 20,000 or so, which had been reduced to rubble in a single night by a concentration of Allied bombing and artillery fire. Only the outskirts remained undamaged.

The Company CP and 1st Platoon found billets in a series of small (honeymoon) cottages that had formerly served to house German textile workers from the nearby mill. Once again we found more living paraphernalia than we needed. After picking out the essentials, we stored the rest in a garage.

The 2nd Platoon finally found quarters in a small hotel. Once the place had been shined up it was quite cozy. We fixed four men to a room and everyone had a mattress on his cot. The dining room had white linen cloths on the small tables, gay curtains at the windows, and a snack bar. Some of the fellows had found a cache of Rhinewine, so evenings we sat around the bar and sipped while listening to a jam session by some of the Company orchestra.

A detachment from the 2nd Platoon which had been with XVI Corps up around Sittard returned to the fold. They'd been among the first troops into Roermond, working under artillery fire repairing bombed-out sections of a line later used by the 21st Army Group.

By the time we reached Dulmen, a change had come over our role in the Battle of Germany. Previous to the Rhine crossing our work had been crucial to the success or failure of Army operations: Conquer depended on us for much of its communications. Now, on the East bank, the Ninth Army found a complete network of underground cable ready to be used with only minor repairs. From here on in, until the final victory, we took a backseat. Our time for hectic night jobs and midnight deadlines was over. Our work consisted chiefly of sending repair teams out to patrol the lines, doing local jobs for Army HQ and erecting occasional spare lines of spiral-4 to be used when underground cable went bad. Suddenly, and with relief, we were playing second fiddle to Operational and cable-splicing units.

We had a chance to settle down and read "Forever Amber".

The Company was all packed and ready to move to the next billet, when orders came through that the 1st Platoon would stay behind to repair a breached section of underground cable crossing the river at Munster. That meant unloading and working from midnight to noon

GERMANY (Cont'd) - the next day, repacking and following the Company to Gutersloh. What a night!

The entire Battalion was together at Dulmen for about 24 hours. First time that had happened since Reims, France. It gave us a chance to visit with friends in the other companies.

7 April to 14 April 45: GUTERSLOH - The Army was advancing so swiftly that many towns were by-passed each day without even the mildest fighting.

Gutersloh proved to be an immaculate little town, with architecture dating back to the Renaissance, almost unscratched by the war. We were among the first Americans to enter the town. The Company found billets in a huge, dank school-house, less comfortable than most of our former German billets due to draughty rooms without heating arrangements. However, a week of sunny weather helped us to ignore these drawbacks.

In this area souvenir-hunting (sometimes spoken of as looting) began in earnest. One learned quickly to say "Wo iss die Burgo-meister?"

Here, too, we came face to face with a new and puzzling problem whether fraternizing with liberated Russian and Polish girls was the same as dating a fraulein. The Army said "Yes". But we had our doubts, and acted on them.

Signal work at Gutersloh revolved around Conquer's newest and most stylish headquarters: the former Gestapo hang-out on the edge of town. We performed some small jobs connecting this Center with radio stations in the mountains.

For the most part, we had rather a quiet time with enough leisure for a good deal of exploration. The Company acquired a German fire-fighting trailer, complete with four hoses and a motor unit. From then on whenever trucks needed a bath, we'd just haul this contraption to the nearest creek and start to work.

To have some fun with the civilians, a few of the fellows dressed a human skeleton found in the school in old clothes and set it out on the sidewalk.

Gypsy (9th TAC) came along and took over our billets for a second time. So we hit the road for Braunschweig.

14 April to 27 April 45: BRAUNSCHWEIG - Our route lay through Hamelin on the Weser (Pied Piper Country). The women working in the fields wore old-fashioned skirts which reached to their ankles, brick-red in color with a black stripe around the hem. On Sundays, they added a black silk cape with attached hood to their costume and the men wore silk hats and carried canes. It was like a page from a story book.

We entered Braunschweig close on the heels of the 30th Infantry Division. Military Government had not yet established headquarters in the city so there was little law or order. The nights were disturbed by riots between civilians and displaced persons, snipers, or trigger-happy sentries.

As soon as the Company had settled in the new billets most of the fellows visited the local Burgomeister. Merely a routine check

GERMANY (Cont'd) - because by this time the whole outfit had become pistol-conscious. Braunschweig's supply was presently cleaned out and we turned our attention to the smaller villages out on the job. Soon there were few of us who didn't possess at least one Luger, Mauser, or Walther.

Along with the weapons, cameras, field-glasses and even microscopes began to appear around the billets. Pistols were traded for cameras, and cameras for pistols. One Luger was worth one Rolleicord.

While on the prowl, some of our more eminent cellar-smellers unearthed cases of cognac, gin and red wine. Evenings our Lotharios paid social calls on the "Russkis" and "Polskis" living in a nearby basement.

We also visited liberated GI's and Tommies in a Braunschweig hospital. There we met Americans who had been caught in the Bulge and Australians who had been prisoners for five long years. Still under the care of German medics, their emaciated bodies showed only too well to what extremes they had been underfed.

Aspiring hunters from the 2nd Platoon were out in the fields one day shooting jack-rabbits and flushed a Nazi paratrooper from cover. Neither incident was exceptional for in that region the hunting was good and it was not unusual for an individual or small group of German soldiers to try and surrender to the men on the job.

Answering an emergency call at 4 AM, a couple of volunteers tried to race the stork to a hospital but the German woman delivered her baby in the back of a K-43 before they got there.

The Germans staged a brief counterattack during this period, cutting the main Braunschweig-Magdeburg supply route, and forcing the 2nd Armored Division to fall back toward the city. We had visions of another Bulge and spent a tense afternoon under alert orders with the trucks lined up on the street and our gear packed, ready to pull out at a moment's notice. But the Germans were stopped and we took a deep breath.

27 April to 20 May 45: HANNOVER - Our last station in the Reich proved to be our best. We had learned by now that the way to get good quarters in Germany was to find buildings still occupied by civilians, see the local Military Government billeting officer and have the civilians evicted, then move in ourselves. Billets acquired in this manner could usually be counted on to have dependable plumbing, heating, and electrical facilities.

That's how we found billets in Hannover. The advance party located a quiet street, near the large lake on the southern edge of the city. There were three groups of semi-detached houses facing a railway embankment. The civilians were moved into one block of homes, while the 1st and 2nd Platoons found comfortable quarters in the other two. Some of the homes had been slightly damaged when a bomb landed in the street behind, but necessary repairs had already been made by the owners.

The war in Europe was now racing to a conclusion. Unless you were stuck with detached service, the jobs were few and far between. We concentrated on recreation: there were nightly movies at either the theatre run by the 35th Infantry Division or at the Quartermaster Gas Dump down by the Sports Field, tennis courts with racquets supplied by Special Service, basketball, baseball, motorcycles, and home photography. When a truck was available, groups went swim-

GERMANY (Cont'd) - ming in a nearby lake. Some of the fellows began figuring the odds on the \$64 question, while others didn't bother with mathematics. We ate exceptionally well.

We witnessed a scene that was being repeated all over Germany: the digging up by Nazi officials (under the watchful eyes of American MP's) of hundreds of slaughtered slave-workers from subjugated nations whose mutilated bodies had been dumped into long trenches and covered over. The Nazis were forced to get right down into the hole and uncover the corpses by hand and wrap them in sheets. The bodies were then loaded on trucks and driven through the city's streets followed by a funeral procession of German civilians. These civilians had been gathered at random by MP's (and DP's) from people who happened to be on the street at the time the procession passed. Finally, Army Chaplains conducted burial ceremonies in a regular cemetery on the other side of town.

During the last days before the final surrender, many of us saw thousands of German soldiers, some accompanied by women and children, streaming back along the roads, trying to cross the Elbe into American and British territory before the Russians caught up with them. Truck after truck, rank after rank, they moved past: a broken-spirited and sagging lot of humanity. Their clothing was filthy and many of them had shaggy beards. There were young boys and men with grey streaks in their hair. Here and there, you'd see a two-man American MP detail in a jeep, not that they were needed, however, for there was no more fight in Jerry. He was thoroughly beaten. Even to the casual observer, it was quite obvious that the end was not far off.

VE-Day came and went--and with it went our hopes of getting home.

We settled down for a long stay on the Continent. Nearly half our personnel was out on various assignments. Then overnight the picture changed (the Bubble). Orders came through changing the Battalion to Light Construction and a new T/O meant a complete reorganization: dropping quite a few men and adding several vehicles. We recalled all the men on DS: repair crews, cable splicers, radio station guards and switchboard operators. High-pointers and men declared surplus were transferred to the 39th. We had to cut down our personal effects to what we had been issued. Goodbye to all those lovely mattresses and footlockers and other items we had picked up on our travels.

A Circular was posted calling in all unauthorized weapons. German pistols disappeared from our hips but somehow the Orderly Room only collected a few odd pieces of ancient vintage.

On May 16th, the rest of the Battalion left Camp Moody (Bielefeld) and joined us in Hannover. The wildest rumors began to circulate. We got a royal brush-off from 9th Army and received our orders to move out.

We were headed for a new theatre but the same old show.

* * *

Take a break, fellows.

20 May to 24 May 1945: ENROUTE - The first leg of our journey to the Pacific took us back through France to the Staging Area at Marseilles.

We left Hannover the morning of the 20th, travelling by motor convoy via Northeim and Gottingen. At Munden, we picked up the autobahn and followed it through Kassel to Giessen (Germany), where we bivouacked the first night. Since it was a nice evening, most of us just set up cots without shelter-halves. You'll remember the rain and what a sorry, sodden-looking lot we were the next morning.

The second day, we travelled by way of Frankfurt. We crossed the Rhine at Mainz, drove through miles of vineyard country, and found billets for the night in an old Cavalry Barracks at Sarreguemines, France. There was a dance in town and 50% of the men were allowed in on pass--the rest of the Company went anyway.

The third day found us crossing Alsace-Lorraine. Poppies grew in the fields, as common as the daisy back home. Our route lay past the towns of Nancy, Neuf Chateau, and Langres, to billets in Dijon. Most of us spent a pretty good evening in Dijon, where we visited the "21 Club" run by the 21st Army Corps, a Red Cross Club, and a GI restaurant. Fresh and frustrated from three months of "non-fraternization" in Germany, a few of the boys went a-hunting for Off Limits signs and wound up in the arms of the MP's.

The fourth day we drove along tree-shaded roads (poplar and maple) down the Rhone valley, shut in by mountains cultivated to their very peaks with here and there a bare, rocky crag raising its head to heaven. This section had been little touched by the fighting but like the rest of France seemed down-at-the-heel. We passed through Chagny, Chalon, Macon, Lyons, and Vienne. At Chalon, we stopped at a GI service-station to gas our trucks for the day's run. There, instead of using 5-gallon cans, a relay station on the pipeline had erected feeder-pipes with nozzles along a 100-yard stretch of highway. Convoys were serviced a dozen trucks at a time. During the day we traded cigarettes for bread, strawberries and wine. We billeted that night at an airstrip outside St. Rambert d'Albon. Officers and EM had a ball game.

On the fifth, and last day, we saw the towns of Valence, Montelimar, Donzere, Avignon, and Aix. There were stretches where the sides of the road were littered with burned-out tanks and trucks; reminders of the 7th Army's drive during the previous summer. A little past Aix, we turned off the main highway and, escorted by MP's, followed backroads to the Staging Area.

24 May to 7 July 45: MARSEILLES - We arrived at the Calas Staging Area one day before it was scheduled to open and learned (the hard way) that it doesn't pay to pioneer in the Army. Our new home had been highly over-rated. We failed to find the promised cement floors for each tent, and during our six-week stay, put up with sand-storms and water shortages, indifferent food, and mass competition for all recreational facilities. Then too, other things conspired to shape our moods. The authorization for two more battle-stars brought a last-minute reprieve for a few more high-point men. Around the Red Cross hut of an evening, we'd see the fellows who were waiting to be flown home (three days via Casablanca and Natal,

MARSEILLES (Cont'd) - Brazil, and they'd be back in the States); You can't keep a fellow from thinking; A few lucky men spent seven days at the Rest Centers in Nice and Cannes, but to most of us the playground of Europe was just another jumping-off spot for overseas duty.

The terrain around the Camp reminded us somewhat of the American Southwest: sparse vegetation, dry air, and a horizon cut by a jagged line of mountains (foothills of the Alps). The amphitheatre, where we saw USO shows and movies and attended Church on Sundays, could have been imported direct from California; It lay cradled in a canyon pocket just like the Hollywood Bowl. The stratified rock had been graded and banked with tiers of wooden seats, and a stage had been erected at the lower end.

Lasting impressions of our stay in the area will doubtless include: well-fed German MP's, swimming parties to Mediterranean beaches, news reports on the San Francisco Conference, the sale of pistols and cameras to other GI's fresh from the States, the surprise shakedown in which our loot was gathered for crating, Black Market activities in PX rations, the fact that the majority of first-three-graders were now Toccoa originals, and numerous trips to Marseilles (details of which can be filled in by the individuals concerned.)

7 July 45: LEFT FRANCE--AT SEA - The day we had looked forward to (and dreaded) arrived at last. We loaded into "semi's" for the trip to the docks in Marseilles. Red Cross girls served us with the usual benediction before sailing: donuts and coffee. A greater blessing was the chance to talk with an American girl once more before we shoved off for the unknown. (If we'd known then what we know now). Our transport was the USS Butner. Maybe she is one of our more modern troopships but try spending eight weeks on her; eight weeks in the tropics, in wartime, with some five or six thousand other unlucky souls aboard. We sailed about 1500 hours.

9 July 45: AT SEA - Gibraltar and the hills behind Tangiers was our last sight of the Old World.

15 July 45: AT SEA - Our second anniversary in the Army found us in mid-Atlantic, bound for our second front.

19 July to 20 July 45: PANAMA - Impressions of Panama were restricted, perforce, to the dock area and our trip through the Canal.

We arrived in the early morning on the 19th and docked at Colon. It seemed odd to be in the New World again; to realize that north and south of us stretched a continent which had not been ravaged by war. An Empress ship at the next pier, carried Australian and RAF personnel. They were going home.

After days at sea, we welcomed the chance to go ashore and walk around a bit. The Naval Reservation was like one huge carnival. Will you ever forget how that mammoth PX looked to us after months of rationing? Memories of our short stay will include: cartons of candy bars, bananas and coconuts, icecream and iced cokes, hotdogs, Latin-American music, smartly uniformed MP's with shining buttons and badges, the varied types of girls behind the counters, and most important of all, mail from home.

PANAMA (Cont'd) - Going through the Canal was in the nature of a Cooks' Tour: a harsh, metallic voice coming over the PA system explained the locks, lakes, and other points of interest along the way, while we looked out over stretches of jungle, small settlements, Army cantonments, and palm trees waving their fronds as we passed.

On the 20th, some of us had our first look at the Pacific.

20 July to 7 Aug 45: AT SEA -- Once through the Canal, there was nothing but endless days of sky and sea until we dropped anchor off Eniwetok in the Marshals.

3 Aug 45: AT SEA - Our ship crossed the International Date Line (180th Meridian) and Friday night was followed by Sunday morning. We became members of the Honorable Order of the Golden Dragon.

7 Aug to 8 Aug 45: ENIWETOK - We anchored off Eniwetok in the Marshal Group one month out of Marseilles. What a trip it had been. When we tell about it at home, people will doubtless say we exaggerate. Yet where else could you sleep 600 to a compartment, eat non-descript food in Turkish Bath surroundings while your own sweat dripped into the plate, toss through steaming nights on your shelf-bunk and awaken the next morning worn out to start another day of boredom? Things came to a pretty pass when we divided our dreams between the girl-friend and a chocolate soda. The uniform-of-the-day was underdrawers and combat boots. Meals became mere formalities Ptomaine put in an appearance and many of the men spent a trying night. We had our days for the movies in the sweat-box they called a theatre. Rumors circulated throughout the ship, day and night.

We lived through endless hours of cards, reading, or just standing by the rail; heat rash and Impitago; Saturday inspections (field day) and abandon ship drills; KP, when we demoralized the kitchen's routine; roaches in the bread. Worst of all, however, was the thought that it all had to be repeated before we could get home.

way, while we looked out over stretches of
11 Aug to 28 Aug 45: MOG MOG - Our next stop was the Ulithi Islands in the Caroline Group (100 miles south of Guam). We stayed there 17 days. Convoys were formed from the scores of ships anchored around us and sailed either East or West. But we just lay at the anchorage and made repairs to the ship. The Navy worked a fast shuffle to get their details taken care of. We were fed twice a day, morning and night, during the entire trip. You could have the Noon meal if you did a day's work. Each sailor had about four or five soldiers working under him. While at this stop they even had GI's in whaleboats removing barnacles from below the waterline and putting on a coat of red lead. The Honorable Order of the Golden Dragon

On the 12th, they put thousands of GI's and gobs ashore on a tiny postage stamp of island, Mog-Mog. It's known as the Fleet Recreation Area--but that's not what we called it. It's small and shallow. It's too shallow for the big ships to dock, so we climbed down a cargo-net from a port into LCT's which bunted their rusty sides against the Butner and were ferried ashore. There was still another obstacle awaiting us. Before we hit the beach we had to transfer to

PACIFIC (Cont'd) - a smaller assault craft (then go through the same procedure on the trip back).

You saw the sights during the first five minutes ashore. There were palm trees and thatched native huts. A more modern touch were the empty pop bottles and beer cans lying around the beach. Speaking of beer, they'd run out the day before we arrived. Not that the island was entirely dry, you understand, for there were three bars: one for lieutenants, one for captains, and one for field-grade officers. The Navy had brought its own beer. As for Joe: well if he was thirsty enough, there was always warm water from the Lister bag. The stout of heart, who went ashore on subsequent trips, did get beer (and cokes) and then were thoroughly searched by marines when coming aboard to be sure that they didn't bring any cans with them.

Usually the first thing we did after landing was to take a swim. The water was perfectly clear, but too warm to be refreshing. About 200 yards out was a coral reef (the atolls which made up this group were connected by a reef). The bottom was coral shingle and you had to watch that you didn't cut your feet. Besides swimming, almost every type of recreation had been arranged for: baseball, volley ball, horseshoes, handball, and even a swing band--but no girls.

Around this time, the news came through about the atomic bomb, Russia's entry into the Eastern war, and the first talks of Peace. Our hopes rose like the Stock Market, rumors started working double shifts again, but we moved on to Okinawa according to schedule.

1 Sept to the present date (November), 1945: OKINAWA SHIMA -

A first and lasting impression of Okinawa was that there everything was done the hard way. We had to climb down the cargo-net again and come ashore in a landing craft. We landed on a floating jetty which went underwater from the swells of each passing boat, soaking the duffle bags. Each man carried his gear a good quarter-mile to the Assembly Area, where we sat in the sun and waited. We had a K-ration for supper. After dark trucks arrived and drove us into the country, leaving us to spend the night wrapped in a blanket by the side of the road. About midnight, a vehicle brought us ammunition for the guards. Someone had suddenly remembered that there were still stray Jap patrols wandering around that section of the island.

VJ-Day passed without celebration (it was our second day on the Island).

We went back to shelter-tents and field rations for a few days because the sea was too rough for us to unload our TAT equipment. We learned (after washing in it) that the water in all streams and rivers on the Island was polluted and that a continued use of it, without proper disinfectants, could lead to any one of several strange and deadly diseases. We saw our first "Gooks" (native Okinawans);

Hardly had we set up a permanent camp when the first of a series of typhoons struck. The tents were flattened and the camp area flooded. Food became scarce, forcing us back to a diet of field rations.

We moved to a new, improved area which had been vacated by another outfit and things began to look up. Jobs were scarce and we

A (Cont'd) - had time to spend on our living accommodations. Alien Special Service began bringing in more and more things for our spare time amusement: games, books, sports schedules, movies every night in the week, and several visits by a Red Cross Mobile Canteen.

We learned that we were a part of Tenth Army and we had been scheduled, before the Jap surrender changed the whole set-up, to move into the southern-most island in the main Japanese Group with the invasion forces early in November. Instead, most of us became eligible for discharge under the point system this November. When Tenth Army deactivated, we were quickly transferred to Army Service Command Island and would not be declared surplus until December. Then the Battalion would be deactivated if it hadn't already disintegrated.

After the second typhoon struck and flattened nearly everything we had built in the area, most of us semi-winterized the tents with wooden floors and frameworks.

Orders started coming through transferring out high-point and overage men. They reported to the Separation Center but three weeks later only seven men from the Company were known to have actually left the Island. The redeployment set-up was really Snafu.

For a while we thought that the food situation had been licked for we had a run of steaks, roasts, canned chicken and turkey, fresh fruits and vegetables. Then came the day when we went back to ten-in-one's and we realized that on Okinawa it was either feast or famine.

We had calisthenics one morning a week, Retreat each Thursday and as a special Saturday matinee, a Battalion Commander's inspection. Mail was quite unpredictable. Much like the weather which alternated between hot days, cold nights, liquid-sunshine, and high winds.

After two months on the Island, we began to realize what made the Pacific war seem tougher than the ETO. It was the monotony: days, weeks, months, with nothing but the Army. No cities or towns to visit and see how the other-half lives.

* * *

Date Redeployed _____ Name of Ship _____

Landed in States at _____ Date _____

Separation Center _____

Date Discharged _____

OTHER NOTES: