THE 91ST MEDICAL GAS TREATMENT BATALLION

Without knowledge or application, on March 13, 1941, I was appointed “Assistant leader” of a contingent of selected men from Local Board No. 2 of Grayson County in the State of Texas”, by my local draft board. On March 18, I was among some 30 young men who had received draft notices for service in the United States Army, who were assembled in the lobby of the Grayson Hotel in Sherman. It was a tense moment for us. I don’t believe any of us wanted to join the army and most of us believed that mobilization was not necessary. We were not at war and our leaders had been elected as supporters of isolation. It was an unsettled time for in Europe, Germany was attacking its neighbors and in the Orient, Japan was also aggressive. We were protected by the vast Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. None of us wanted to join in the conflicts.

I was single and had practiced law in Sherman for three years. Employed by the firm of Webb and Webb, I had become financially self-sufficient and did not want to abandon a career which I thought was promising. It seemed to me that in rapid succession the United States Congress had passed the Draft Act, conducted a drawing and called me up for military service.

At the hotel we waited for the southbound interurban that would take us to Dallas where we would get our medical examination, be inducted into the army and classified for military service. By law we were conscripted for nine months service. I figured I would serve my time and return to Sherman to resume my legal career. Had I known that I was embarking on a fifty-one month military career, I would have been much more concerned.

That day we were among a large group of draftees (about 900 white men) who were funneled into Dallas and inducted into the army. I believe we were all classified as medics. The army's policy of placing draftees in assignments according to their qualifications was swept aside. At Camp Grant, in Rockford, Ill., contractors had completed construction of barracks to house recruits for the army's medical corps. After processing, we were sent to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, housed in old, damp barracks for about two weeks and then transferred to Camp Grant, where I was assigned to Company C, 27th Medical Training Battalion.

We moved into new barracks, one of the row upon row of them, all of wooden construction, all exactly alike. They were two story buildings, with each floor filled with cots and a foot locker at the foot of each bed. A small room on the ground floor was reserved for the platoon sergeant and a corporal's bed was at the head of the two rows of cots on each floor. Four such barracks housed a company and were positioned around its headquarters building.

There was an acute shortage of people to train us. All of the company officers were young doctors with limited military experience and each company had a very few regular army corporals and sergeants. So desperate was the situation that even though I had no previous military training, I quickly became an acting corporal and shortly thereafter, an acting sergeant, occupying the private room in my barracks. When the training period was over and the troops who had occupied my barracks were shipped out, I was retained to help train the next batch of troops. As a member of the permanent training cadre, I was beginning to enjoy my military experience although I counted the days when my nine-month tour would end and I could return home.

Within a week of the date of my expected release the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and my hopes of return to civilian life ceased.

I was selected to undergo officer training and was sent to Carlisle Barracks in Pennsylvania, which was a school used by the army to train Medical Corps officers. On July 24, 1942, as a sergeant, I was honorably discharged from the military service at the convenience of the government and accepted appointment as 2nd lieutenant, Army of the United States. My first assignment as an officer was to the hospital at Camp Walters near Fort Worth, Texas. I liked this assignment for it was little more than a hundred miles southwest of Sherman. My parents, who lived in a down-town apartment in Washington, D.C., gave me their car when I became an officer. This was a great sacrifice, for the nation was completely mobilized for war and cars for private use were scarce. I enjoyed the use of their only car as long as I would serve in the United States.

My assignment at Camp Walters terminated three months later when I was assigned to the 91st Medical Gas Treatment Battalion at Camp Livingston in Louisiana. In the pine woods surrounding Alexandria, three large camps, each holding about 50,000 troops, had been established where military units were trained for deployment to either the European or Pacific theaters. Alexandria was a small town and troops from Camp Livingston and the other camps completely consumed the town, particularly on week-ends. Quarters provided for officers and enlisted men at Camp Livingston were a far cry from those at Camp Walters and Camp Grant. Troops at Livingston were being trained for the rigors of warfare. When they departed they were considered to be capable fighters.

The 91st Medical Gas Treatment Battalion was being formed when I arrived in the early fall of 1942. I don't believe such a unit had ever existed before. We were to be a specialized medical unit trained to treat troops suffering from gas attacks. None of us had any experience in this field. Almost all of our officers were doctors, recently graduated from civilian medical schools, with little training or experience treating gassed patients.

I was assigned to one of the battalion's four companies and as a second lieutenant was placed in command of a shower. Can you imagine, in later years, answering the question of a child: "What did you do in the war?" "I commanded a shower unit." My command consisted of seven enlisted men equipped with a trailer containing a water tank, water pipes connected to shower nozzles, a small gasoline driven water pump, floor boards where people could stand while being showered, together with a canvas barrier which could be erected, encircling the showers and protecting the privacy of the bathers. All of the equipment was painted an attractive olive drab military color. We were trained to operate near creeks or rivers where water was available, only using water from our tank trailer when surface water could not be obtained. One of the gasses used in warfare was Vesicant Gas. This gas causes blisters on human skin. The only known treatment is to thoroughly wash the gas off as quickly as possible. This was my military specialty, although we were also trained to treat patients suffering from other known gases.

There was a constant arrival of divisions at Livingston which were trained and then transferred for duty elsewhere. The 91st MGTB became an enigma. No one from the top brass at the Pentagon on down throughout the army knew what to do with us. Every time a military confrontation in Europe, Africa or the Orient flared up our battalion was placed on alert in case gas was used. It never was. We stayed there in this hot, humid pine forest in central Louisiana, on almost constant alert, for about 18 months. A unit can practice unpacking, setting up, tearing down and packing a shower unit only a few times before an ultimate efficiency occurs. It is an understatement to claim that I commanded a proficient unit.

At Livingston the war was passing us by and we tried to invent ways to maintain our moral. It helped that I was placed on the camp's physical fitness team. Before being transferred, all units trained at Livingston had to pass a standard physical fitness requirement, the most difficult part of which was the forced march. The soldiers, carrying their full pack, in marching formation, were required to march a designated distance, at a fast pace in a specified period of time. It was a grueling test, especially in Louisiana's hot and humid climate. To certify a unit's compliance, Livingston's fitness team marched with them. There were many units to be tested and although the members of the team did not carry a full pack, we all became physically fit.

An occasional weekend pass to New Orleans or Shreveport helped break the monotony, but recreation had not been on the army's priority list when the location of Livingston was selected.

Each officer of the 91st MGTB was housed in a small wooden building, about 8 by 10 feet with a gable roof, containing a cot, small table and a chair. Black tar paper covered the sides. The huts were neither air conditioned nor heated. More than forty officers, billeted in several rows of these huts, staffed the battalion. Next to my hut was a vacant hut and it became our Battalion Officers Club. It was furnished with a small table and two or three chairs, a few cases of Coca Cola, a chest of crushed ice and a jar where the officers could leave money for their purchase. The club operated on the honor system, was never locked and there was never any shortage of money to pay for the supplies. Most officers kept a bottle of whiskey in their huts and almost all of us used Coca Cola as a mixer. At times during the war a small whiskey allowance was available for officers and I became the unofficial battalion Officers Club manager. Excessive drinking was not permitted and during the war I knew of no instance when it interfered with the performance of duty.

Among the constant rotation of units which passed through Livingston were many talented college and high school football athletes. A blocking back from a northern college obtained permission to form a Camp Livingston Football Team which we called the Third Army Spartans of Camp Livingston. Many soldiers volunteered to join the team. My only experience in the football world had been as third string end for one season on the Bonham High School Purple Warriors team. My only actual football experience occurred in one game when defending a kick-off return I failed to make a tackle which resulted in the opponent’s touchdown. I certainly was not qualified to compete with the many athletes, some of whom had received national recognition at the college level before being drafted. They permitted me to become equipment manager and we were able to assemble enough used and discarded football paraphernalia to field a rather shabby looking team.

Livingston’s recreation area was in a nearby field where a baseball diamond and football field had been created, where we practiced and played our home games.

All of us loved the game but we also joined the team because it permitted us to be relieved of military duty during practice sessions and on the days when the games were played. Our blocking back, a Lt. Bainton, was both a player and our coach. We had a full fall schedule, playing other military camps and some divisions. Although the team was physically fit for military service we were never able to get it in football condition. We played a good first half but were so exhausted by the second that we lost most of our games. Toward the end of the season we had a scheduled game with Northeast Junior College in Monroe, Louisiana, where the game was played. We liked playing away from camp, the further the better, for it provided us with at least an additional day free of military duty. The college's ROTC unit had organized their team, which we considered to be little more than high school boys which our talented players would easily defeat. At the end of the first half we were winning, but in the second half, which was much rougher than we had expected, we lost the game.

What happened at the end of the game is controversial. ROTC officials contended that when the final whistle blew, our blocking back coach walked across the field using foul and offensive language and in an ungentlemanly manner struck the opponent's coach and other players. Immediately all parties from each bench raced to the center of the field and engaged in a brawl. I did not join the fight and I tried to break it up.

The junior college had invited us to spend the night in their gymnasium and we were all looking forward to enjoying the night life in Monroe after the game. In view of the obvious animosity the fight had created we decided to load up our men and equipment and head back to Livingston. I checked into a hotel in Monroe, intending to contact the ROTC officials and try to calm things down the next morning. The next morning, not knowing who to contact and what to say, I returned to camp without making this effort.

The game had been played on October 16, 1943, and through channels court martial charges arrived at the commanding general's office at Camp Livingston.

In an old file a yellowed carbon copy of a defense of our conduct, written on November 4, 1943 reads as follows:

> **"Early in the game one of our backs made an end sweep close to the bench where Lt. Bainton and I were seated. He was one of the lightest players and had a history of a knee injury. For that reason we were very anxious about him and watched him very closely when he played. He was tackled high and slugged several times by one of the players from the Northeast Junior College team about 10 or 15 yards in front of the place where we were seated. Several players piled on and I thought our player was hurt. Lt. Bainton went out on the field and attempted to pull the players off of him. He did not strike anyone, and as far as I know did not use any profane language.**
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> **"The game was one of the roughest I have ever seen. The officials, who were selected by Northeast Junior College, seemed to make no attempt to control the game. Several of our players were injured. This, together with the conduct of the players from the Northeast Junior College team, caused our team to appear to be angry. Lt. Bainton and I were afraid that there might be trouble after the game and late in the fourth quarter he told me to**

be sure that all of our players got off the field immediately after the game.

When the game was over Lt. Bainton, Captain Delmore and I ordered all the players to face toward our side of the field and go back to the gym. This they did and most of the players completely left the field. I was in the middle of the field to make certain that the eleven men playing at the end of the game left in good order. They were all walking off the field when Lt. Bainton started walking toward the Northeast Junior College bench. He was walking slowly with his head down and seemed to be feeling badly about the way the game went.

"I noticed that several of our players were looking over their shoulders toward the Northeast Junior College bench as they walked off the field. One of our players yelled, "They got Lt. Bainton." I turned around and saw what looked to be the entire Northeast squad around someone. Several of our players ran over and a fight started. I ran over and attempted to break it up. It lasted a few minutes and several of our players helped to end it.

"I thought Lt. Bainton was going to the Northeast bench to congratulate the opposing coach as was his custom when his team lost.

"I know Lt. Bainton to be an officer and a gentleman and know he commands respect and obedience from his team. He had taught his team to play clean football and had instructed them to play clean, hard football before the game started.

"I do not recall his ever having used profanity.

"F.N. Rogers 01533660
1st Lt.,MAC"

Somehow no court martial occurred, but word came from camp headquarters that if the Third Army Spartans of Camp Livingston was to play out the remainder of its games, I was to be the head coach. We played our two remaining games and actually managed to tie one of them. The blocking back continued to call all the plays and make all the decisions. I could now claim that in addition to commanding a shower unit, I had also coached a football team, above the college level.

I was also placed in charge of the battalion's motor pool. Each company was equipped with tents, medical equipment and supplies which with its personnel could be quickly moved. Toward the end of our tour at Livingston I was transferred to battalion headquarters as operations staff officer.

In retrospect my eighteen months at Livingston left pleasant memories. I enjoyed the company of an attractive head nurse at a government hospital in Alexandria who introduced me to some of the citizens of the town. With some of our officers I learned to fish in the bayous located in the area. Alexandria's contribution to the war effort was considerable. The small town was completely inundated by the 150,000 troops which surrounded it.

Someone, high in the chain of military command, decided that if gas were ever to be used in this war, it would be used by desperate Germans when we invaded France. Orders were received transferring the 91st MGTB to the European theater. My car was returned to my long-suffering parents who lived in Washington, D.C. and had been without a car since I became an officer. The battalion with all of its equipment secretly moved by rail to a location north of New York City, to await shipment overseas. Everything was now cloaked in a cloud of secrecy based on fear that knowledge of the location or destination of our battalion would seriously impact the course of the war. I could not tell my parents where I was or where I was going.

It was enormous accomplishment, moving all our men and equipment from the pine woods of central Louisiana to a little town in rural England called Ross on Wye. In New York City’s harbor we were loaded onto a converted British cruise ship which became a part of a large convoy. I was assigned a space in a stateroom on one of the upper decks with four other officers. We were crowded as was the entire ship.

Security was extremely tight and as we left New York Harbor and assumed our place in the convoy I did not know our destination and only guessed that our ship was carrying about five thousand American men and five British women to England. The English women had been assigned a stateroom on the same deck and close to the stateroom which I occupied. One of them, extremely attractive and proper with a crisp English accent, became a friend of mine and was responsible for the limited social life that I enjoyed in England and in Europe during the following eighteen months. I never knew what her British work assignment was. She worked in London while our battalion was stationed in England, worked in Paris after that city was captured by the allies and while our battalion was on the continent, and after the war was over, the British government sent her to Washington, D.C. well before the 91st MGTB arrived home from Europe. She was obviously highly competent and intelligent. While on a rare pass in war-time, blacked out London, I was shown a city under air attack, which very few would see. Also, she was responsible for a few tours of Paris under Allied occupation, which I would not have seen but for her.

The voyage of our slow convoy across a stormy North Atlantic was uneventful. We landed in Liverpool, England, and ultimately arrived at a town called Ross on Wye. It was on one of the bends of the Wye River, about a hundred miles west and slightly north of London. The town was a beautiful English village with old winding roads along ancient walls enclosing small cottages and gardens. It had been built on a promontory overlooking the river. Its downtown consisted of a police station, a few business buildings and a typical, small, old English hotel. It was an insignificant military target and although larger towns and military instillations were often subjected to German air attacks, it was not close to any major military location of importance and it never received any damage. We could not have been stationed at a safer place.

Our battalion arrived there about six months before D Day, the beginning of the Allied invasion of France. An almost unbelievable build up of troops, their equipment and provisions was underway. So much so that it seemed to me the southern portion of this ancient island was in danger of sinking. It may have been the largest assembly of an invading military force in the history of warfare. All units were expected to be fully trained. I remember requesting gasoline so that the large number of vehicles and drivers in our motor pool could practice a convoy march. Several months had elapsed since our vehicles had been made ready for shipment from Louisiana to New York, shipped across the Atlantic, unloaded and shipped to Ross on Wye. It was embarrassing when headquarters replied that our unit should have been sufficiently trained before we were transferred to England. But the request was granted and our drivers were allowed to practice on the winding, narrow roads of England which were different from those we had used in Louisiana.

I continued my job as unofficial battalion officers' club manager. At Ross on Wye the officers of the 91st MGTB were housed in a newly constructed building which was cold and damp. Near the center of the village a small, old hotel building which was not occupied was available for our use. With the permission of our commanding officer, some of our officers were permitted to move into it. Several of us did. We each had private rooms which were more comfortable and this hotel became our battalion officers' club.

A trained military unit waiting an invasion has time on its hands. An exercise program to maintain physical fitness was followed. The engines on our vehicles were modified so that the air intake of their carburetors would be above the water level if they were forced to operate through the surf as they approached a shore. Classes covering topics, most of which we had studied before, were conducted. I was sent to a school teaching the art of camouflage which was conducted at an old English castle located on a large beautiful estate. All of us were housed and fed in the castle for three weeks as we enjoyed studying this subject.

As a staff officer, a driver and a jeep were available to me for any military duty. Off duty, I missed my parents' car and replaced it with a Raleigh bicycle. It had been manufactured in England and was better in all categories than any bicycle I had ever owned. It was very light and strong with three forward speeds. It carried me along the English roads in and around Ross on Wye. The countryside was checkered with small, well manicured fields, unlike anything I had seen at home. Interesting pubs were spaced along the way where bottles of whiskey (Scotch) could be bought in the event the army's sporadic ration was depleted at our officers' club.

Rail service to London was available and on day or weekend passes I enjoyed several trips to the city. Wartime London was almost eerie. Dense fog usually enveloped the city; often so thick that one could not see across a street. This famous London fog does not exist today. I understand that the pollution resulting from burning coal for heat and cooking had aggravated the problem. When I was there the Battle of Britton, somewhat abated, was continuing and warning sirens and exploding German bombs were commonly heard. Its great hotels continued to serve tea in the afternoon and provide a sparse meal for patrons at mealtime. London continued to endure the massive bombing of the German Air Force, took it all and demonstrated to the world its British courage.

Back at peaceful Ross on Wye only a rare fog existed and wailing sirens and exploding bombs were not heard. Although there was a nagging dread of the task ahead, I am forced to admit that I enjoyed my military service there.

We did not know when, but we all knew something big was about to happen. Major units were moved south, out of their comfortable quarters, and onto fields close to the south of England and around Southampton, a large seaport in southern England. We were placed on alert, but had not been moved south when another embarrassment occurred.

“Grandpa, what did you do on D Day?”

“Child, I liberated a case of whisky at a supply depot.”

During World War II the term “liberated” had a technical military meaning. It wasn’t exactly stealing; it was the taking of something which had been abandoned which a soldier wanted. At various times as we advanced across France, Belgium and Germany, I liberated three motorcycles, all in good condition with empty gas tanks and abandoned beside the road. In Germany, with one of our officers who was a pilot, we liberated a small German airplane. After filling its gas tank we flew it around the area. The remnants of the German army fleeing across France, Belgium and Germany abandoned things which the American soldier considered to be war souvenirs and most soldiers actively liberated them. Our supreme commander was a spoil sport and made us turn in these items which created a double standard. If the item was of very small value, the soldier could keep it, if it was of considerable value the army would take it and become the liberator.

The supply depot and I both knew the unit which should have received the whisky was gone. The depot had also been alerted for movement and needed to pack more important war materiel and actually wanted to get rid of the whisky. They were glad to give it to me. When my driver and I returned to Ross on Wye we learned that the long-awaited invasion of France had occurred.

The 91st MGTB was moved to a field near Southampton. The Germans had not gassed our troops as they landed in France. On D+17 (17 days after the beginning of the invasion) we were shipped across the English Channel to Utah Beach near the base of the Cherbourg Peninsular. As we were approaching the beach a naval vessel far to our right was firing its cannons. The port of Cherbourg had not been captured and it may have been supporting our ground forces there. Our landing craft skillfully followed a course which it had used before carrying troops and material to this beach. It encountered no opposition as it slid into the beach and lowered its bow. The troops of the 91st MGTB simply jumped ashore. First Army troops had secured the beach area, had advanced across a major portion of the peninsular and were advancing on Cherbourg. We assembled our men and equipment and moved inland where we occupied a predetermined field between hedgerows. We dug fox holes and waited. The field was littered with debris from crashed glider parts. The 82nd Airborne Division had crashed a glider in this area before dawn on D Day and we used their glider parts to cover our fox holes.

I was the most insignificant operations officer in France, assigned to a small medical battalion which had trained for two years to treat soldiers suffering from gas attacks that never occurred. We were in the middle of the most massive invasion in the history of warfare with nothing to do. First Army's VII Corps, using its 4th Infantry Division, 90th Infantry Division and 9th Infantry Division, had followed the predawn assault of the 82nd Airborne Division and the 101st Airborne Division, and had secured our safe landing at Utah Beach and present location between hedgerows near the base of the Cherbourg Peninsular. Many young men had died providing us with this safe field and I had actually done nothing more than hang around for the ride.

At last, the army found something for us to do. We set up our companies near hospital units and accepted soldiers with minor wounds. Most of them still had small pieces of iron shrapnel embedded in their bodies. These came from exploding shells and some of the fragments were very small and difficult to locate. Our young doctors, trained to treat gassed patients, now became surgeons performing debridements, and our large tents became surgical rooms and hospital wards.

As First Army advanced into France it became a massive fighting force with four corps, VII Corps, V Corps, XII Corps and XIX Corps. A field hospital was usually established with each of its corps and near it one of the 91st MGTB companies would be set up to perform minor surgery and threat the less seriously wounded. My job, as battalion operations officer, was to keep in contact with army headquarters and provide our battalion commander with current information as to the location of the front lines. As their locations changed each of our companies needed to be moved. The location of each company and our battalion headquarters had to be approved by higher headquarters in advance of each move.

It seemed to me that it took a long time for the above to evolve. Our battalion’s first field hospital was established close to the place where we originally camped near the base of the Cherbourg Peninsular. With the help of the 82nd Airborne Division the peninsular had been cut and Cherbourg captured.

One afternoon an 82nd Division soldier walked down the road toward our headquarters. He was a cousin of mine, Horace Neilson, from McKinney, Texas. He had an air about him that reeked of professionalism. He had landed with the 82nd in North Africa, Sicily, Italy and had crashed in a glider into the hedgerows beyond Utah Beach on D Day. On this day, he and another soldier were guarding a bridge across a creek some distance down the road. He had learned where my battalion was and came to visit me with a bottle of wine that he had liberated when his unit had captured Cherbourg.

Although I had several relatives in the army, this was the only time any of us met during the war.

I have never known a soldier who did not gripe. His life is a series of periods of hurry-up-and-wait. He spends little time fighting. It seems to him that the delays have made his fight more dangerous. Almost all think that they could have planned the operations better. Other units were not doing their job, making his more difficult. The food was bad. With all of the above, they have confidence in and an admiration only their own unit.

During our visit Horace explained that he had crashed in a glider close to the field where we later camped. I may have covered my fox hole with portions of the glider which had borne him from England. He stated that the 82nd had been told before the invasion that their job was to secure the beach so that the units of First Army could land, after which they would be returned to England. The implication, if not the actual statement, was that the units of First Army couldn't cut the peninsular and capture Cherbourg and that the 82nd had to stay and finish the job for them. I could not defend First Army because it seemed to me the 82nd had done just that. Every soldier I knew admired the 82nd and the 101st Airborne Divisions. During the Battle of the Bulge the 101st would hold its ground at Bastion which became the southern shoulder of the German penetration (the shoulders of any assault is where the most casualties are likely to occur; if held, attacks from there can pinch off the penetration and encircle it). The 82nd and 101st with other divisions contained the penetration. It seemed to me that when serious crises occurred during the invasion of Europe these two divisions preformed a critical role.

There were two ways World War II airborne troops were used in landing behind enemy lines. The most publicized drop was by parachute usually from a DC3. The other way was by crashing a glider into the ground. Airborne soldiers will tell you that glider pilots were crazy. There was a shortage of them and they were instructed after they crashed their expendable glider to find their way through the enemy lines back to their base where there would be other expendable gliders which they could crash somewhere else. Some of them had wanted to be fighter pilots and had busted out of flight school.

The World War II glider supplied to the American airborne divisions was monstrosity of aircraft design. It was an elongated, box like, engineless air plane with fragilely constructed frame covered with fabric and other light material, which was large enough to carry a pilot, assistant pilot, a jeep with a mounted 50 caliber machine gun, ammunition, gasoline and other supplies for the jeep and its gun, and an airborne jeep driver and lieutenant with their war time supplies. The glider had a fixed landing gear and could be landed safely if enough smooth terrain happened to be available. Such landing space did not exist at the planned drop zones on D Day. The nose of the glider was hinged so that it could be tilted upward allowing the jeep to be backed into it. When loaded a cable was attached to the rear of the jeep, which through a series of pulleys was attached to the glider's nose. When the jeep moved forward the cable would cause the nose to rise and the jeep could drive out of the glider. Four people, a jeep and necessary equipment loaded the glider to its capacity. A cable attached to the tail of a DC3 and the nose of the glider would pull it into the air. When the glider reached the landing zone the glider was disconnected from the cable and allowed to glide to earth.

The Germans had used the glider supporting airborne offenses and believing the cost in lives and equipment was excessive, had abandoned its use. Not so the Allies. On or before D Day it is probable that the first troops to be airborne lifted off from an air base about a hundred miles north of London near a town called Leicester. They were the gliders of the 82nd Airborne Division. The generals who had planned the invasion had selected the place where the gliders would be cut loose from their DC3s. A safe landing at this place was impossible. It was the French hedgerow country near Ste. Mere Eglise, close to the base of the Cherbourg Peninsular. Very small fields surrounded by ditched, wooded areas called hedgerows existed there. The area had been selected because it was poorly defended since the Germans had reasoned that no sensible person would try to land a glider there.

Once the cable pulling the glider is disconnected from the DC3 the skill of the glider pilot is severely tested. It was pitch dark when the D Day landings occurred. If the glider pilot is confronted with an obstruction he cannot pull up and select another landing area. He must select a touch down place which provides the least amount of damage to the glider, its passengers and crew. If the nose of the glider is severely damaged it will be almost impossible for the jeep to drive out of it. Some of these pilots were the best pilots of World War II.

During First Army’s buildup of equipment and men on Cherbourg Peninsular I had too much time on my hands. Our doctors were all busy treating a constant flow of casualties. On a rare occasion or two I assisted in providing anesthesia before and during surgery under the strict directions of the surgeon. As I mentioned our surgeons were having some difficulty finding small iron fragments embedded deep in a soldier’s body.

The fragment needed to be removed and the surgeon did not want to increase the size of the wound any more than necessary. I remember taking a pair of surgical scissors to our motor pool, wrapping a coil of wire around their tip, connecting the ends of the wire to a truck battery and magnetizing the tips of the scissors. This may have helped some of our surgeons locate the fragments, because the surgeon could feel an iron particle that he could not see.

Utah and Omaha beaches joined at a narrow place at the base of the Cherbourg Peninsular where a small creek flowed into the English Channel. There had been considerable fighting there for the Germans had resisted the connection. A German battery of 88s had this spot within range and occasionally lobbed artillery shells into it. Foolishly, I decided to go on a sightseeing visit to Omaha Beach. On our return, as my driver and I were crossing the small creek, the German battery of 88s fired. The roof of a building about 100 yards in front of us was blown off, and another shell exploded in a deep ditch, which was close to and in front of us. We were not hurt and got out of there as quickly as possible. Our battalion commander must not have known of this foolish visit, for he never mentioned it to me and might not have approved.

The 91st MGTB, as a part of First Army, would engage in the campaigns of Normandy, Northern France, Ardennes, Netherlands and Central Europe. It would make successive moves, following the front lines, for the better part of a year. After successfully establishing beachheads in France, First Army would be involved in three major battles which contributed to victory in World War II. They were The Breakout, The Falaise Gap and The Bulge.

The movement of the enormous amount of tanks, trucks, artillery, ammunition, gasoline, food and troops from southern England to the beachheads of France was necessary before a breakout could occur. Napoleon's famous statement that an army moves on its stomach was not true in this war. Our army moved on gasoline, ammunition and air cover. Their supply would limit our advance before and after the battle of France was won.

As a low ranking operations officer I had no knowledge of the grand plan and learned of our strategy only after the fact. As the buildup continued the ordinary soldier worried about the delay. Although we had advanced beyond our landing zones, the advance had been slow and we felt pinned down in a small area. The soldiers generally believed that the British had stalled and failed to properly advance into Caen, and I suspect that the British soldier griped because the American army had not captured St. Lo. Security prevented the troops from knowing that when adequate supplies and troops were in place, First Army's COBRA operation would be set in motion.

What happened next, for all practical considerations, was two battles resulting in the capture of France. One is unable to determine by studying the books written by the generals involved ("Crusade in Europe" by Eisenhower and "A Soldier's Story" by Bradley) how much of the battle plans had been incorporated in OVERLORD (original invasion plan) and how much was improvised as a result of strategic conditions that existed at the time the battles occurred. The first battle, code-named COBRA was called The Breakout by soldiers in the field. It was followed by a second battle which ended in a massive entrapment and resulted in the destruction of almost the entire German army in France. In it the American and British forces encircled the German army, defeated it and forced it to retreat through a narrow gap. The soldiers in the field called this second battle the Battle of Falaise Gap. The American and British air forces, based in England, engaged in their most massive coordination and involvement with ground forces in both battles, with devastating results.

On July 25th, 1500 British bombers saturated a five-mile blanket of French soil, west of St Lo, with sixty thousand 100-pound bombs. Some of them had missed the blanket and killed and wounded our troops, but the attack devastated the German positions. Our troops advanced across the bombed blanket. The German panzer divisions that had defended Caen with other troops attacked to the west toward Mortain seeking to cut through to Avranches, isolating a portion of First Army and Third Army, which had sent its VII Corps southwest toward the Brittany ports and its XV Corps southward to Laval and then northward toward Argentan. The British 21st Army Group pushed forward past Caen forming a shoulder near Falaise. Between the U.S. troops at Argentan and the British troops at Falaise a narrow gap existed through which a major portion of the German army in France had to pass if it was to retreat. Retreat it did, resulting in complete destruction of its effectiveness.

First Army maintained the base and the rear sides of the large pocket.

In August the general commanding First Army (Bradley) took command of the United States Twelfth Army Group, commanding First and Third Armies, and another general (Hodges) took command of First Army. Third Army's general (Patton) had secretly assembled the Third Army in a part of the area controlled by First Army in Normandy. As a part of the planned pre-invasion deception the flamboyant Patton was supposed to be in command of a huge concentration of fake assault forces in the Dover area of England where the English Channel was only about 20 miles wide. The deception had worked and German troops were concentrated in France opposite this area, expecting the ultimate attack. Actually, more than a hundred miles to the southwest, on D Day, the British Second Army, consisting of its 1st Corps and 30th Corps, landed on Sword, Juno and Gold Beaches, near Caen, France.

While all this maneuvering was taking place the companies of the 91st MGTB, as a part of the United States First Army, was establishing its field hospitals. Each company moved forward with each corps and it seemed to us that our casualty load was heavy until well after the Battle of Falaise Gap.

The decisive victory at the Battle of Falaise Gap presented the allies with two problems. The first was assembling and containing the large number of prisoners of war. A group of these prisoners were delivered to the 91st MGTB. They had apparently been classified as less dangerous than the average prisoner. They were all former Russian soldiers who had surrendered to the Germans on the Russian front. After being trained they became German soldiers and were sent to fight the Allies in France. They had surrendered again to the Allies. None of the officers and men of the 91st MGTB could legally possess fire arms and we could not be considered a proper garrison for a prisoner-of-war camp. Never during the entire life of our battalion had we known such luxury. The Russians dug our fox holes, tore down our tents when we moved and then erected them at our new locations. They were so happy to be alive and with us that they were willing to do any task we assigned to them. After a few delightful weeks some high-ranking officer took our servants.

The second problem confronting the Allies was Paris. There were no German troops between the U.S. First Army and Paris and the small German garrison there wanted to surrender. All supplies sustaining the Allies (principally gasoline and ammunition) were arriving in France through its beaches and were then trucked to the troops. Failure to adequately supply our troops would ultimately halt our advance. Four million hungry people resided in Paris and supplying their needs would tax the already stressed army supply system. I believe the allied generals considered by-passing Paris along with other locations that were by-passed as we advanced toward Germany.

First Army drove up to near the outskirts of Paris and came to a screeching halt. Political and propaganda considerations controlled the situation. First Army would wait and let a small French unit liberate the city. Only after this ceremonial entry were we permitted to enter the City of Light. In addition to politics and supplies, Paris presented another military problem. No invader has ever elected to destroy Paris and no troops who entered the city have ever wanted to leave. A convoy of trucks carrying much needed ammunition to the front in Belgium upon entering the city might find reason to stay for a few days. Agencies of all Allied governments would find reasons to open offices there. The supreme headquarters of the allies would be housed at Versailles, a famous palace near the city. All hotel rooms in the city would immediately become booked. In wartime in this lovely city, which had been a magnet attracting Germans, would in only a few days attract and be consumed by the Allies. Everyone who visited the city was affected by it.

After our extended stay in the Normandy hedgerows and with First Army through the Breakout and the Faliase Gap, our entry into Paris was an almost unbelievable experience. Everything was beautiful, adorned with flowers and happy people. It was as though no death, rubble or bomb craters existed. All was orderly and nice. One day, while enjoying the liberation of Paris with my battalion commanding officer, we visited a store which exclusively sold Guerlain Shalimar Perfume. At my commanders suggestion I bought a small bottle and shipped it to my mother. She would receive a gift of the same product each Christmas and birthday for the rest of her life and each time I purchased the gift my memory of Paris would be revived. Paris has a special effect on invading soldiers.

Reluctantly, the 91st MGTB departed Paris and with First Army we headed for Belgium. There was a general feeling among the troops that the road was clear and time was of the essence. We felt we needed to take advantage of the disarray of the defeated German units and advance before they could establish defensive positions. Everywhere there was evidence of German panic and the failure of their supply system. I had left my bicycle in England when we left for Normandy and now, not far from Paris, beside the road I liberated a small, one cylinder motorcycle. The only thing wrong with it was its empty gas tank. A few days later another larger German motorcycle was liberated, abandoned for lack of gas. Shortly thereafter I picked up yet a finer motorcycle, again immobilized for lack of gas.

The advance was not as easy as it sounds. Although it wasn’t as bad as it had been during the Breakout and Falaise Gap, we were treating wounded soldiers and we were going through towns which were piles of rubble.

We all sensed the ultimate, inevitable and slowly evolving end. Our advance from the beaches of France had been slower than expected and the port of Cherbourg had not been as usable as we had hoped. For all practical purposes our supplies were coming across the beaches of France where inadequate and limited loading equipment was available. Eisenhower's "Crusade in Europe", at Pg. 290 explains the problem as follows:

"These meager facilities could not support us indefinitely and there was bound to be a line somewhere in the direction of Germany where we would be halted, if not by the action of the enemy, then because our supply lines had been strained to their elastic limit.

"A reinforced division, in active operations, consumes from 600 to 700 tons of supplies per day. When battling in a fixed position, most of the tonnage is represented in ammunition; on the march the bulk is devoted to gasoline and lubricants, called, in the language of the supply officer, POL.

"With thirty-six divisions in action we were faced with the problem of delivering from beaches and ports to the front lines some 20,000 tons of supplies every day. Our spearheads, moreover, were moving swiftly, frequently seventy-five miles per day. The supply service had to catch these with loaded trucks. Every mile of advance doubled the difficulty because the supply truck had always made a two-way run to the beaches and back, in order to deliver another load to the marching troops. Other thousands of tons had to go into advanced airfields for construction and subsequent maintenance. Still additional amounts were required for repair of bridges and roads, for which heavy equipment was necessary."

First Army was halted (D+120), primarily for like of supplies, on a line just beyond the town of Aachen, near the German border with Belgium and about fifty miles from Germany's Rhine River. As had occurred in Normandy, we now waited for another buildup of supplies.

In this war two vehicles were the primary beasts of burden; one was a truck (the army's 6x6) and the other was an airplane, the DC3 (called the C47 by the air force). The medical corps had established its principal general hospital at Paris. As we advanced beyond Paris the most seriously injured soldiers, after being stabilized in a field hospital near the front, were transported by ambulance to the Paris hospital. As the front's distance from Paris increased, ambulance transportation became too slow. At the same time replacements and urgently needed supplies would be flown in DC3s to the front. Since these planes were often empty upon their return, the medical corps used them to transport wounded soldiers to the Paris hospital. The 91st MGTB was assigned the duty of transporting the wounded soldiers from the field hospitals to the forward air field and supervising their loading onto the DC3s.

The DC3 was the air force's work horse of World War II. It was not pressurized (it generally flew low, below 10,000 feet) with a large cabin which was easily adapted for many uses. Its two powerful engines could haul airborne troops and pull a glider for airborne landings. It could land and take off from short, undeveloped landing strips. If a military unit had to have badly needed replacements, a particular type of ammunition, badly needed medical supplies or a vitally needed mechanical part, the DC3 could get it there. As we transported our patients, I enjoyed visiting with their pilots, whom I admired. They were some of our very best, often flying unprotected within rifle range of the enemy.

During this second buildup of supplies, troops and equipment I jumped at the opportunity to enroll in the University of Paris. This famous school had been taken over by the army for the purpose of educating one officer in each unit in the subject of Bomb Reconnaissance. Throughout France, where military targets or battlefields existed, most bombs dropped by airplanes, artillery shells and hand grenades had detonated, but some had not. Those that had not exploded were either lying on or buried in the ground and were very dangerous. Some of our soldiers had been killed while attempting to liberate or dispose of these objects. The purpose of the course was to educate officers in the mechanics of these explosive devices so that the officer could determine which were dangerous, isolate the area where the devise was located and notify special units who would either defuse or explode the device. To me this course was a delightful, paid, three week vacation in Paris.

With orders in hand I boarded a DC3 at a forward landing strip, landed at an air force base in Paris and was billeted in a University of Paris dormitory which was located in a very interesting portion of the city. After graduation a DC3 delivered me to the landing strip near my battalion where I resumed my usual duty.

During this buildup our casualty load was very light and we had too much time on our hands. Using the DC3 shuttle to Paris I could have a three day pass any time I asked for it. The catch and problem was that the army required proof of a hotel reservation for the duration of the pass before it would be granted. Every hotel in Paris was booked solid for the duration of the war. The army had reserved blocks of rooms mostly for men on leave from rifle companies, which were not available to me. Every army, navy, air force headquarters of consequence as well as Allied government offices had succumbed to the lure of the city. The lure was so great that I began to wonder if it would become a major impediment to our war effort. While discussing the availability of hotel rooms in Paris with the pilots of the DC3 shuttle, I learned of a hotel the pilots used while on leave.

It was a small hotel, about four stories high, well located on one of Paris's attractive circles, which for some reason, the Allied army had not commandeered. Air force pilots apparently exclusively used it. With the help of my friends, the DC3 pilots, I was able to get a hotel reservation which allowed me to procure a pass. Armed with two cartons of Camel cigarettes (cigarettes were abundantly available to soldiers in the field but almost non-existent in Paris where an expensive black market existed) which I gave to the hotel owner or manager when I checked into his hotel.

I enjoyed the company of my friend, the very straight and proper English lady whom I first met on the North Atlantic convoy enroot to England. She was very familiar with the city and as had occurred in London, I had a tour of this beautiful city which few soldiers would see.

My room at the hotel was on the second floor and nicer than any accommodations available to me in Europe. On the hotel's ground floor, next to the small lobby and check in desk was a well-furnished parlor which I only observed from its entrance. While I never saw a single instance of impropriety at this hotel, beginning in the late afternoon and extending into the late evening, a group of U.S. Air Force pilots and attractive French ladies would assemble in the parlor and party into the early morning hours.

“Old man, is it true that during the war while on leave in Paris you stayed in a house of ill repute?”

"While some, with ulterior, evil motives, have attempted to degrade our brave war-time pilots by calling it a U.S. Air Force Brothel, there is no concrete evidence supporting this scurrilous attack."

During the fall of 1944, as our build-up continued, we knew our next obstacle was the Rhine River and the German Siegfried Line.

Our feeling of complacency was rudely shaken on December 16, 1944, when a German attack occurred against First Army's VIII Corps position. It was in a region called the Ardennes. It was a major assault. Germany's General Von Rundstedt commanded the thrust of the Sixth Panzer Army and the Fifth Panzer Army in the center with Germany's Fifteenth Army on the right and its Seventh Army on the left. Its goal was to break through to the port of Antwerp on the North Sea. The ensuing battle was called The Bulge.

One of the 91st MGTB companies had established a field hospital in the Ardennes which was directly in front of the German advance. It was in imminent danger of being captured with all of its patients and equipment. For my contribution as staff officer in helping with the planning and the evacuation of personnel and patients of this company, I was awarded the Bronze Star. Immediately before the arrival of German panzer tanks, our 6x6 trucks evacuated all personnel and patients from their endangered location. Although the company lost all its equipment and supplies, none of our soldiers or patients were captured or wounded.

The 91st MGTB retreated to the west and east on the right side of the German penetration where the U.S. First Army with the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division defended this side and shoulder of the German advance. The left shoulder of the German advance was at Bastogne, where the U.S. 101st Airborne Division maintained its famous defense, as the left side of the attack was defended by the U.S. 12th Army Group. On December 26, close to Diant on the Muse River, the U.S. 2nd Armored Division stopped the point of the German advance and the U.S. 3rd Army broke through to Bastogne. These troops with others, assisted by clear weather and U.S. and British air attacks defeated this last major German offensive against the Allies in the west.

The German plan, from a military standpoint, had been excellently planned and carried out. Their troops had been secretly assembled, they had surprised the enemy, they attacked the weakest point of the Allies front, the attack occurred at a time when fog and snow would protect their locations and provide cover from air attacks and they knew the terrain. They failed because their army had been drained by the campaign on their Russian front and because they were now confronted with superior Allied forces on the ground and in the air.

As the battles of Breakout and Falaise Gap had resulted in the capture of France, the Battle of the Bulge brought the Allied forces to the border of Germany. But, much fighting remained. The Siegfried Line (Germany's fortified positions on this portion of its border) had to be breached. Beyond it the Rhine River had to be crossed and behind it, on U.S. First Army's front, was the Ruhr Valley (Germany's largest industrial complex which supplied its war effort.) Winning the Battle of the Bulge helped in completing these tasks because the German army units were forced to retreat under constant Allied artillery, infantry and air assault.

The U.S. First Army pushed through the Siegfried Line and up to or near the Rhine River. The Rhine was a major German river, important as a military barrier and as a transportation artery supporting its war effort. Between Strasbourg and Duisburg there had been 26 bridges crossing it. They had all been allied military targets and some had been damaged and destroyed by British and American air attacks. No allied military planner expected to acquire a single bridge across the Rhine because if allied attacks had not destroyed them, a retreating German army would certainly finish the job. A considerable portion of our second build-up had been pontoon bridge equipment which our engineers expected to use as our army established beachheads upon crossing this formidable barrier.

On March 7 U.S. First Army's 9th Armored Division reached the Rhine at Remagen and captured the Ludendorff Bridge intact (called the Remagen Bridge by the soldiers). Although a small explosion had occurred, the German attempt to destroy it had failed and the bridge had survived. The usual hurry-up-and-wait occurred because before a major bridgehead across the Rhine could be attempted the Supreme Allied Commander must give the order (necessary because a large deployment of troops might conflict with the general war plans). I could not contain my excitement and my jeep headed down the road to Remagen. Parked closely, almost touching one another, along the side of the road were the 9th Division's tanks. Their guns were pointed toward the Rhine. Had German planes been available these tanks would have been a tempting target. And, then, along the road there was nothing, an eerie quiet with no living person in sight, and suddenly there it was, our gateway into the heart of Germany.

A dead German soldier lay on the pavement near the entrance of the bridge. In later years I have not been able to erase the thought that this young man had wasted his life defending his fatherland. Was he a German soldier who should have blown the bridge or had those in charge of its destruction waited too long for him to retreat across it?

The bridge across this large river was not being used by anyone and no one could be observed. To cross this river without having to fight for a bridgehead on its opposite bank would save the lives of countless soldiers.

First Army was authorized to send five of its divisions across the bridge and promised four more which were in the vicinity of Cologne. The Remagen Bridge would ultimately collapse from heavy use and German air assault, but by that time our pontoon bridges ensured the delivery of our troops and supplies across the Rhine and into the heart of Germany.

Downstream where the Rhine was broader the Canadian First Army, British Second Army and U.S. Ninth Army created a bridgehead. It was a costly assault but succeeded. Upstream, where the river was not so broad the U.S. Third and Seventh Armies with the French First Army created bridgeheads across the river above Mainz.

First Army, advancing out of its beachhead across the Rhine, encircled the Rhur Valley on its right and the U.S. Ninth Army encircled the valley on its left. The two armies met at the German town of Lippstadt, surrounding this industrial heart of Germany, and taking 325,000 prisoners.

The 91st MGTB made successive moves as First Army advanced to the Elbe where it halted. The Russian army was advancing through Berlin and when it met us at the Elbe, for all practical considerations, the war in Europe was over. Although there remained pockets of resistance, it had been said that the war in Europe ended at midnight, May 8-9.

When it all ended the 91st MGTB was located in a very small farming village in the First Army sector, several miles west of the Elbe River. All the wounded soldiers in our company units were evacuated and we had nothing to do. There was only one two story brick house in the village and with several of our officers, I moved into its second floor.

It is difficult to explain the affection we had for our commanding officer, Col. Charles Gingles. He was a regular army medical doctor who had organized our battalion in Louisiana. There was no precedent to follow and it was created with limited instructions. He had supervised its training and movement to England, across France, Belgium and into Germany. I don't believe we lost a single man due to sickness or injury. We had only one casualty, which was not serious, when a buzz bomb struck a building we were planning to use for a mess hall during the Battle of the Bulge. In this war we had been the poor boy on the block; there had been nothing for us to do. After the invasion of France we had adapted to assigned duties which we had preformed well. Our commanding officer was given a promotion, which he deserved, and we lost him. He was transferred, for in the military scheme of things a MGTB can be commanded by an officer ranked no higher than Lt. Col. and he had become a full Colonel. To us it was almost as though there had been a death in the family.

We expected to be transferred to the Pacific theater and were hoping to be sent through the United States before receiving our assignment. While waiting in this isolated German farming village my duties as unofficial battalion officer club manager became difficult. For some time we had not received our expected officer's allotment of whisky. One of the emoluments of being an officer in the Medical Corps is the adequate availability of hospital alcohol. It is a pure form of alcohol, about 160 proof (good quality whisky is usually about 80 proof), which has many medical uses. A well-trained physician can dilute it with water or a mixer and make it palatable for drinking. It is supplied to the medical unit in a square five-gallon container. The war had starved the farming community where we were stationed. Even the old men had been used up in the German army, food was scarce and no alcoholic beverages were available. There was available a thing called German beer. The German population had been so restricted that this beer had been created without any alcohol content. Our physicians were able to inject just the right amount of hospital alcohol into this German beer. While in Germany it became a staple product in our officer's club.

The Allies had transferred to the European continent a massive amount of military equipment, supplies and troops, most of which needed to be transferred to the Pacific. Although it seemed the 91st MGTB was stuck in this small German village forever, there was a fear and dread of a protracted war against Japan.

It came as a pleasant shock when we learned that on August 6 an atomic bomb had devastated Hiroshima, Japan. Another bomb and suddenly warfare ceased everywhere. None of us knew such a weapon existed. Suddenly the nagging fear born by all soldiers at war was lifted. All soldiers fear death and pain. Warfare is nothing more than the infliction of terror, pain and death upon the enemy. For many months, even the bravest of us had included as a part of our life the acceptance of terror, knowledge that the terror we were inflicting upon our enemy was also being inflicted by him upon us. It's a strange indescribable feeling, a hidden fear of death, which was erased too quickly. It occurred almost too quickly to be accepted.

Of course, we celebrated in our makeshift officers' club.

The length of the life expectancy of soldiers in the U.S. Army of World War II was not uniform and was not and could not be fair. The infantry divisions' rifle platoons fought in the front lines and were primarily responsible for winning the war. They fought in the most dangerous places and suffered the most casualties and deaths. The danger gradually decreased as the distance behind the front increased. A World War II division of 14,000 men would have only 3,240 in its rifle platoons. Only 1 in 5 of its troops were most likely exposed to danger. Behind the division the army maintained an elaborate support structure that was necessary to keep the division's rifle platoons and other troops properly supplied and directed. When these additional troops are added, 15 soldiers, behind the front, were required to supply and maintain one man in rifle platoon. During the major battles of the war in Europe the casualties sustained in rifle platoons were high and often depleted their strength because replacement were not available or were slow to arrive.

When I was drafted in 1941 the odds were 15 to 1 that my life expectancy would be longer than that of a man in a rifle platoon.

When I was sent to a medical unit for training in the Medical Corp my life expectancy increased further. While some Medical Corps soldiers working in aid stations close the front were in considerable danger, most of us were well to the rear. We were unarmed, protected with large red crosses and not considered to be combat troops.

When I was assigned to a Medical Gas Treatment Battalion in a war where gas would not be used, my life expectancy increased more.

When it was all over I was proud of my service. I had been a private, corporal, sergeant, second lieutenant, first lieutenant and captain in the army. Upon returning to my parent's home in Washington, D.C., the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives gave me two tickets to the Army Navy Game and, although I had forgotten most of my earlier legal education, my father saw to it that I was licensed to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court, the Court of Claims and the Tax Court. I did not feel entitled to the respect I was given. My service had subjected me to very little danger and it was apparent to me that my parents had suffered more during the war than I had.

Now, over half a century has passed, memory has faded and only the indelible events remain.

To me, the two great cities of the war were London and Paris. When I first saw fog shrouded London it was cold and damp, a battered victim of the first large air assault on a major city. It had born the carnage with brazen courage and was being threatened with a new German terror machine, the buzz bomb (the first un-manned jet propelled aircraft carrying a bomb). The buzz bomb's jet engine made a rattling sound which could be heard as it approached its target. It took off from France with its guidance system set in the direction of London. It carried a measured amount of fuel which would be depleted when it arrived over the city. When its fuel expired, its engine ceased to function and it would fall to earth and explode. The people of London could hear it coming and had a little time to take cover when its engine became quiet. A later German terror invention gave no warning of its approach. The first German rocket propelled missile was its V2 bomb. It blasted off from France into space and fell in the vicinity of London. Its explosion, as it struck the ground, was the first notice of its approach.

London was an eerie town that was suffering as it bound it wounds. The last time I saw London its historic buildings, the palaces, government buildings, museums, churches and entertainment halls had been repaired and bore no evidence of the carnage that had been inflicted upon the city. It was the vibrant citadel of the English speaking world and seemed to exist as though no war had occurred. It is a beautiful monument honoring the stamina, culture and spirit of the English people.

The first time I saw Paris it was the most beautiful city I had ever seen. Its people were beautiful, hilariously happy, mostly smiling while some joyfully cried. Entering this oasis, a sanctuary from death and destruction, was the embodiment of peace and beauty. On recent visits the city is as it was, except somehow it isn't. The method of arrival and the circumstances are different. The last time I saw Paris I had traveled from England crossing below the English Channel on a luxurious train. As an old man, an American tourist, I observed the same great monuments, avenues, museums and structures along its great river that had been there before. To me this city can never be as great as it was when I arrived there from the killing fields of war as a liberating soldier.

"Old man, what World War II accomplishment are you most proud of?"

"I never killed anyone."

"What a cop-out."

For the better part of five years I had been a part of one of the most massive human slaughtering machines ever devised by man. We do not know how many humans we killed, maimed or crippled. The most powerful nations on earth had devoted their entire energies creating machines, instruments and the training of soldiers for one purpose: to destroy, kill and maim human beings. While in that small German village I would have favored dropping a dozen atomic bombs on Japan had it been necessary to end that war. For many years since the war I have displayed in my Sherman office a large portrait of President Truman. I believe he was our greatest Twentieth Century president. That poor man had to make the decision to drop the bomb. He had to order the use of the Atomic Bomb because of me – and you. We would have impeached him had he failed to use the bomb with full knowledge that casualties could amount to a staggering total had we established beachheads, buildups and breakouts on the islands of Japan. Using the atomic bombs was the largest terrorist acts in the history of mankind. I feel responsible for that and other similar sins incident to World War II.

Looking back on the record of the United States during the Twentieth Century, one is forced to say that we were a war-like nation. By my third birthday, my father a lawyer, was in France, a Major, Judge Advocate of the U.S. 35th Division, during World War I; a war to end all wars. My mother had six brothers; five of them were in that war. Her youngest brother was in the U.S. Army in France while I was there during World War II; a war dubbed by our supreme commander a “Crusade in Europe.” These were followed by the Korean War and the Viet Nam Wars. Between each of these wartime ventures we usually lived in a war-like threatened condition; the Cold War, the Cuban Missile Crisis. There was a continuation of wars and revolutions between and in other nations. I don’t believe there was a single year in the Twentieth Century when all the nations of the world were at peace. Does the human being demand war and is he incapable of creating peace on earth?

Also troubling, it is politically advantageous for our country to be at war because the voters in the United States support wartime presidents. President Roosevelt was reelected so many times during World War II that after his death a constitutional amendment was passed limiting the presidency to two terms. It was feared a long war might result in the creation of a monarch.

When I face my maker, with full knowledge that I have violated the great commandment (THOU SHALL NOT KILL), how can I plead my case?

Dare I say: “Dear Lord, if you will forgive me of my sins, I will forgive you for creating humans who are incapable of living in peace.” Better not try to barter with the Lord for I believe he knows what I have done.

This leaves me with only a plea for mercy.

Neilson Roger

June 1, 2005