Chapters

Prologue

This is the autobiography of a soldier from small town America who served his country in the Army of the United States during the World War II era. The intent of this chronicle is to provide some historical insight during that tumultuous period when the destinies of peoples and countries throughout the world were being challenged to the utmost.

Each person who has ever experienced the tragedies of a war-torn country has a unique story to tell, and this is just one of them. It must be recognized that the memories related herein have the advantage of several decades of maturing, but they are all factual. Some historical comments have been inserted, where appropriate, to provide the reader with a brief insight into the world situation as it existed at that particular time. These are based upon selected excerpts from historical references, many of them made available after the war.

As I was reviewing the events that occurred during my wartime experiences, the thought came to mind that there was much more to relate than just one afternoon of combat. Accordingly, you will be subjected to a five year adventure that is a potpourri of family history, basic training, romance, troop movements, combat, capture, escape, and finally return home to be reunited with my loved ones.

The intent of all of this is to provide documentation for the benefit of our five wonderful children who arrived during the post-war period. They were, in order: Beth Ann, Scott, David, Susan and James. God bless each and every one of them. May they never be exposed to the tragedies of hostile conflict. My heartfelt thanks are submitted to our benevolent God for giving me the time to relate these experiences for the benefit of our present and future generations.

The Call to Arms, and Family Memories

Registration day for the "draft", as it was now called, was 16 October, 1940. Concurrently, the National Guard units of each state were placed on active duty, supposedly for one-year duration. On that day all men ages 21-35 were required to present themselves to the local draft board to answer a few basic questions relevant to their service eligibility. Deferments were given for certain situations such as physical disabilities or family circumstances. A more comprehensive questionnaire was subsequently completed and returned to the local draft board for their review and determination of one's status.

A national lottery was established from which the sequence of numbers drawn determined the order in which a "draftee" was called to report for active duty. By this means it was intended to eliminate the possibility of preferential treatment in terms of deferments which always were an option available to the influential and wealthy. (During the Civil War it was possible to pay someone else to go to war for you, if you had sufficient money.) As it turned out, the sons of many of the wealthy individuals were quickly put into positions of authority in the family businesses, and were thus classified as exempt from military service because of their need in essential wartime support industries.

At this point, it might be appropriate to digress a bit and share some family history, because it too was adversely affected by the circumstances of the period. The decade of 1930-1940 was not a particularly happy one for our family. My father, Frank Lawrence Durgin, Jr., had worked his way through college and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, Class of 1910, as a Civil Engineer. He worked on many construction projects including railroad track layouts, cuts and fills, bridges, buildings, etc. By the mid-1920s, Dad and a coworker, Carl Simon, founded a company of their own in Philadelphia called the Delaware Form Company. Dad was in charge of architectural design and construction. His partner, an Electrical Engineer, was responsible for the heating, plumbing, air conditioning and lighting design functions. They really got off to a great start. They won contracts for constructing several large State hospitals, and then branched out to building opulent million-dollar homes in what was known as the "Main Line" of Philadelphia, and were doing quite well. About 1927, Mother and Dad mutually designed and had built a beautiful Tudor-style home at 300 Cleveland Avenue in Palmyra, New Jersey, and we all loved it. My recollections of Mother are of a very sensitive and loving lady who was well-bred, mannerly, and artistic. She played classical music beautifully on her beloved Steinway grand piano, and she could cook in a truly gourmet style. During hard times she made clothes for herself and Sis, and she took good care of me, too. She had a younger sister and brother. Her maiden name was Helen Stevens Sawyer. Her ancestry was basically English with a Quaker religious influence. Several tragedies occurred about this time. Our dear mother was diagnosed as having cancer. In 1930, this word was hush-hush, sort of like leprosy. People only talked about it in private. I was just a pre-teenager and only knew something was wrong, but no details were forthcoming. For the next ten years, our dear mother was in and out of hospitals, home sick in bed recovering from operations, and in constant pain. There were not the facilities or the medical expertise available then as now,

so the experience was heart-rending. As would be imagined, this placed a severe financial strain on my father too, because in those days medical plans were non-existent. Emotionally, it was an extremely traumatic time for the entire family.

At this point Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected president of a nation in the deep throes of the "Great Depression". His immediate response to this situation was to stop the rapid "run" of people pulling their savings out of the banks by declaring a "bank holiday" on March 5, 1933. This was the first in a massive series of government-mandated and controlled "New Deal" edicts. Federal agencies sprang up almost overnight, such as CCC, AAA, TVA, FDIC, SEC, WPA, NRA, ad infinitum. And they're still growing today! A very personal effect of this action was to impound Sister Mildred's high school senior class fund, thus preventing the class from taking the traditional 3-day trip to visit Washington, D.C. I also lost my meager $101 savings account earned by mowing lawns, shoveling snow and selling magazines. But the greatest impact of all of this was that my Dad's business and personal bank accounts were "locked up". His business folded, he had to sell his construction equipment for peanuts, and pay off his employees with what he had left. With his business ruined, his wife terribly sick with cancer, and no source of income evident, he was, to say the least, a devastated man.

His brother George, an insurance salesman, tried to get him into his business. Dad tried, but he was so devastated he just could not settle into the role of a salesman. Next, my mother's brother Elwood tried to get him in with his company, selling plumbing and heating equipment, another sales job. No gain. Dad was furious at the Democrats and Roosevelt, and it's little wonder. His friends told him not to take it personally, to just flow with the tide, and to look into the possibility of a job with the WPA (Works Progress Administration). "Who, me? Work for Roosevelt's 'New Deal' government?" Even the thought was repugnant to Dad. However, with the cash flow at home dwindling, he finally had to "eat crow", as the saying goes, and he got a job with the Camden County WPA. Yes, he was now an official bureaucratic engineer charged with the responsibility of designing and constructing benches, foot bridges and fencing for local city and county parks. What a come-down. He was devastated.

I do not recall how long he was able to hang in there; not too long, I imagine. One day, one of his friends told him there were real jobs available in Washington, DC, with the Federal Government, of course! By this time my Dad's morale, spirits and finances were so low he forced himself to check into it. I would estimate this would have been about mid-1934 and I would have been 15. Dad did go to Washington, filled out the usual forms, was interviewed, and got the job. By this time another bureaucracy had been formed, the Public Works Administration, or PWA. These were trying times. Dad would take the train to travel the 150 miles south to Washington, DC on Sunday afternoon, stay in a rented apartment all week, then take the train back to Palmyra, NJ on Friday night. This meant we only saw him on weekends, but I have to credit him for being so thoughtful of our mother. She was at home, in familiar surroundings, and in close proximity to her mother, brother and sister, which was extremely important to her. She was also under medical supervision and needed constant attention. My sister Mildred was a great support to mother during

this period. She was in charge of all of the household duties – shopping, cooking, and maintaining order in the home. I was the "lawn boy" and furnace-stoker.

In the summer of 1935, Dad found a very nice house to rent in Bethesda, MD, so we all piled into the 1929 Nash and drove down there for the summer. This was a trial run to see if it would work out for all of us to be together again. It wasn't to be. Mother was not in any physical or emotional condition to handle such a major relocation at this time. I was 16 now and still had two years of high school to complete, and Sis was going to college in Philadelphia. That summer Sis and I had had a good time touring all over Washington, Arlington, VA, and Mt. Vernon. So, at the end of summer, we went home to Palmyra. I suspect Mother was very much aware that her days were numbered, and she was only 47 years old at the time; how very sad.

Dad kept up his faithful commuting back and forth until the end. Mother died on December 12, 1940. As could be expected, Dad certainly aged during this period and never regained his happy and upbeat demeanor. I remembered him when I was a youngster as a fun guy to be around. His family ancestry was basically Scots-Irish with a Presbyterian influence. He was the eldest of five boys and was an excellent baseball player. He pitched in the Palmyra Field Club, a parent sponsored youth club. He taught me how to throw curveballs, floaters, and so forth, and I vividly remember how proud I was to show him off to my buddies when I would talk him into walking, balanced on his hands, up and down terraces, or steps. He was great! He could also play the piano and guitar. I well remember him playfully sounding off with a couple of his college pep yells: "Lick 'em once, lick 'em again, Pennsylvania 1910!", and "Three cheers, three beers, Pennsylvania Engineers!" This last one horrified my very puritanical mother, but it was fun to us kids anyway. He was also a skilled wood craftsman and electrician, but the mechanics of automobiles were out of his realm. He turned that over to Mother's brother, Uncle Elwood, the family mechanic!

Introduction to the Army

In the winter of 1940 there was a young man who, along with thousands of others, just happened to possess the requisite skills deemed essential for induction into the military service of his country; namely, he was of sound mind, had acceptable physical attributes, and was within the prescribed age group for combat duty: Classification 1A. His name was George Lippincott Durgin, age 22.

My "lucky number", pulled from the lottery bowl, indicated that I was to be at the induction Center on 29 January 1941. I was one of the first to leave from my little old town of Palmyra, New Jersey, population 5,000.

There are certain events in one's life that are never forgotten, and this episode is no exception. My sister Mildred, age 26, who was a kindergarten teacher in the local school district, walked with me to Palmyra's little train station of the Pennsylvania Railroad. I did not want Sis to have to drive the car because icy road conditions made it too treacherous. It was a very cold day with snow and ice everywhere. I had no luggage to carry because we "draftees" were told we would be issued uniforms and supplies when we arrived at the Army post.

The familiar sound of the old Pennsylvania Railroad steam engine chugging up to the station platform indicated it was time to say goodbye. Parting with my sister was especially heart-rending at this time and a few tears were shed. Our father still worked in Washington DC, and our mother had just died the previous month, which was probably a blessing in disguise that she didn't have to worry about me going off to who-knew-where. Leaving Sis all alone made it an emotional leave-taking.

All aboard! (At least I had a free ticket to Trenton, NJ, compliments of Uncle Sam.) An hour later, the train pulled into the switching yards at Trenton and I was left off at a siding. The conductor pointed to a National Guard Armory across the tracks, which was designated as the Induction Center. Welcome to the Army, Private George L. Durgin!

Everything about the Induction Center was quite military, of course, but this didn't bother me a bit; it is what I had expected and it is what I received. After all, I had been a Boy Scout, had attained the exalted rank of 2nd Class, and was 22 years of age! What more could one ask regarding past experiences? Actually, I was looking forward to this as a whole new challenge in life and I did not resent it one bit. As it turned out, I received a lot more challenges than I had anticipated.

There were many other "draftees" in the armory and the first thing we were given was a form to fill out that already had some of the basic information printed thereon, taken from the original draft board questionnaire. I thought that was a pretty good sign of military organization, and to prove the point, we were assigned our own personal identification number, which I'll never forget - #32066778 – and two metal tags to go with it, known as "dog tags". I asked why we needed two tags. The Master Sergeant in charge

informed me pointedly that when killed one tag stays with the body and the other is sent home. Thanks, Sarge!

We were all lined up and ordered to strip. A medical officer and assistant gave us the most complete physical examination that I had ever had. Nothing was missed. All of this time one is wondering what the next step would be. We learned fast not to ask questions, just do as we were told. It made Army life much more bearable. In the course of the physical examination, we were given a series of injections. Lord knows what they were for, probably everything shots were made for! This inoculation sequence continued as standard procedure at every camp we entered. The same needle was used repeatedly from soldier to soldier and as a result, the points became rather dull and not too comfortable. This was long before the discovery of AIDS and its transmission by needle from one individual to another.

Our introduction to the Army systems required several hours. It was cold and there was no provision for food or drink, except water. Eventually we dressed and were ordered to board a train that carried us 18 miles from Trenton to Fort Dix, NJ. This installation was established in 1917 as Camp Dix to prepare troops for service during WWI. My Uncle Elwood Sawyer was trained here for combat service in France during WWI. It was named in honor of Maj. General John Adams Dix, a 19th Century soldier. An Army camp is a temporary installation; a fort is a permanent one. Here we disembarked and were marched into another warehouse along the siding. Essentially, this was a repeat of the first experience. Strip down, physicals, shots, dress, more forms to fill out, and it was *still cold!*

At this point we came under real Army jurisdiction. A sergeant directed us to line up and follow him. We were delivered to a supply building where we were issued uniforms, such as they were, mess kits, razors, soap, a towel, and a tooth brush. We were then marched down to a row of pyramidal tents, in the deep snow, and separated into 6-man units for each tent. We were instructed to change into our uniforms and put our civilian clothes into a box for shipping home. Well, we could not believe the uniforms we were issued. We looked like a throwback to WWI! That's because we were actually issued old surplus stocks of equipment from the previous war! I had cavalry breeches and wrap leggings; *how in the world do you wrap leggings??* It was like a 4-foot long, 2-inch wide piece of belt webbing. My jacket was either WWI Belgian or French, the buttons were not embossed with the American eagle, and the color of the material was mustard brown, not the dark olive drab of the US Army. Our helmets were of the "dish pan" type issued during the previous war, and my shoes were 2 sizes too large. All of us in the tent looked at each other and cracked up. The sergeant broke up the frivolity and ordered us to get our mess kits, fall in line, and march to the mess hall. Food at last! Well, food yes, but cuisine no! It was my first lesson in learning about food in the Army and away from home: If you're hungry enough, you'll eat anything. The washing of mess kits and utensils was also rather basic. Outside of the mess hall were three cut-down 50-gallon drums filled with water heated over burning logs, really like the Continental Army soldiers with General Washington at Valley Forge during the Revolutionary War must have done. The first two drums were filled with soapy water, and the third with clear water for rinsing. The trick was

to get in line at the mess hall as close to the head of the column as possible so you could eat fast and get to the wash barrels before they got too gunked up.

We were at Ft. Dix approximately 10 days, but it seemed much longer. There were no officers in charge that we ever saw. We were directed by non-commissioned officers of the Regular Army during this period, and they were hard-pressed to know what to do with us. Obviously we were a glut on the market, and the system for processing all of these "draftees" just had not been developed at this point.

During the days the non-coms would try to introduce us to close-order drill commands: how to salute, stand at attention, parade rest, at ease, columns of fours, etc. However, the snow was so deep on the parade ground that these experiments were to no avail. We had no rifles to use for training. We were cold, the non-coms were cold, and finally they would tell us to just go back to our tents. These were heated (?) miserably by a very small, cone-shaped stove in the center of the tent, designated as a Sibley Stove, possibly from the manufacturer's name. We would walk down to the end of our row of tents where chopped wood was brought in daily for us. The stove was so small it had to be stoked frequently to keep it going. We slept on canvas folding cots with only two blankets. We obviously slept fully clothed. At night we would sleep with one man on stove duty to keep it from burning out. Every hour and a half the next man in line would be awakened to do his duty, and so on. The temperature here in January hovered around the zero mark…cold! Personal hygiene too was a bit of a problem. The wash house was barely heated, just enough to keep the water pipes from freezing. All we could do was shave and quick rinse. No showers, no hot water, no bath towels. It took some getting used to!

To keep us occupied during the day, the non-coms would come get us and assign us to help in other areas doing mundane tasks: the plumbing shop, carpentry shop, janitorial duties, K.P. (Kitchen Police), and mess kit wash tub maintenance. This last duty was not particularly looked forward to as you were required to fill the three tubs with water by bucket, chop the wood to kindling size, keep the three fires going, and all the while be working outside where it was very cold and snowing. I'll never forget one day when I was assigned KP duty. I had to peel two 50-pound sacks of onions. My eyes burned for two days afterward, and no showers were available!

There is no doubt about it; America was in no respect capable of going to a military parade in Madison Square Garden in January 1941, let alone engaging in a war! And to think, at this point, Hitler had already been waging war in Europe for over two years with very little, or no, opposition. We were pitifully ill-equipped and completely untrained. All the time more draftees were pouring into Ft. Dix every day, and the situation became quite out of hand.

One of the great problems, of course, was where to send all of these young men for their real basic training and future assignments! The few other military bases throughout the country could not have been much better off than the situation here at Ft. Dix showed. They too were understaffed and under-equipped. This was the reason for keeping us at Ft. Dix so long with nothing to do.

Actually, it was an interesting phase of my indoctrination; I only wished some of our congressmen had been required to experience the same things. America was pitifully unprepared for *any* military action.

The most fun was hearing how the other draftees talked. Most had arrived from the heavily populated North Jersey/New York City/Brooklyn & Bronx metropolitan areas. They used terms such as: *Youze Guyz*; or *Hey, watcha say buddy; Yeah, I comes from Toidy-toid and Libuddy Streets in da Bronx…wherz youze guyz frum? Oh, I lives in Joisey Ciddy, 'cross frum Na Yawk.* This dialect was quite foreign to me as I had been raised in the southern part of New Jersey and we did not speak in such a manner. However, it was just one of the many interesting experiences to which I was about to be subjected. I learned much later that their method of speaking was traceable to the Dutch settlers of New Amsterdam (New York), and subsequently the merging with the London Cockney immigrants after the British takeover.

After approximately a week of this regimen we were marched to a wooden barracks a short distance away where we thought we were going to at last be billeted in something other than a tent. No such luck! We were interviewed for the first time by an officer for the purpose of assigning us an MOS number, which meant "Military Occupational Specialty" number, and this was based upon the type of work you were involved in during your civilian life. At least the building was warm. I guess the officer was able to demand a little comfort. Another form to be filled out! Well, as I read the form while mentally reviewing my three previous jobs, I placed the greatest emphasis on the one I had held for the shortest period of time, but liked the most. The three jobs were: a bank file clerk; a department store pet shop clerk; and a Harley Davidson motorcycle mechanic. I didn't want to be in the Finance Department as a clerk, I didn't want to take care of horses in a Cavalry unit as a stable boy, so that left me being a motorcycle mechanic as my first choice. I was hoping this would get me an assignment to some sort of a mechanized outfit rather than just being a "Doughboy" as in WWI. We were also informed of our pay scale - $21.00 a month – wow! Out of this would be deducted our G.I. insurance premiums and a $5.00 per month laundry fee. Not much left over for spending money. Many used up the balance in a day or two by gambling & drinking, or other forms of entertainment!

The next day was Sunday, and visitors were allowed to enter the post. I was assigned to tend the wooden stoves in the small building set aside for visitors. Imagine my surprise when I came into the building with my arms full of wood, and there was my sister Mildred with a friend to see me. I don't know how they would have found me other than this pure chance meeting. I contacted the Sergeant and requested that someone else take my place so that I could be with my visitors, and he graciously obliged. It was a nice visit and I promised Sis I'd write as soon as I got my assignment and permanent address. Parting was emotional again. I was glad our home town was only 25 miles away and that it had stopped snowing for a few days.

The following day our draftee contingent of several hundred men was mustered out onto the snow-covered parade ground. We were assigned by name to different Sergeants who told us what division we would be attached to for Basic Training. As luck, or design,

would have it, I had been assigned to the Second Armored Division at Ft. Benning, Georgia. I did not know what an armored division was, but it sounded interesting and it wasn't Infantry, so I was quite excited about this turn of events. Hooray Harley Davidson!

We were directed back to our tents to collect the few belongings we had and then reported back, on the double, to our assigned Sergeant. He then proceeded to march our rather small contingent to the railway siding where we boarded the train and bid Sarge farewell. Goodbye Ft. Dix; Ft. Benning, here we come!

The Fort Benning Experience

The railroad car we boarded was, of all things, a Pullman car! At last, we would be introduced to some first-class treatment. However, our elation was short-lived. Unfortunately, this Pullman car was a wreck, and must have seen service during World War I or before. It had torn seats, tattered shades, and minimal heat. I wonder how much the railroad charged Uncle Sam for this "service"? Food was prepared somehow, and sleeping accommodations were sparse; the only time I recall the Army permitting two soldiers to occupy the same berth! The upper bunk my partner and I were unfortunate enough to be assigned had an enormous hole broken through the interior wall, and the cold winter air poured in through it. We stuffed a barracks bag into the void.

The trip lasted two days and nights, and we looked forward to the warm Georgia climate. Not So! We pulled onto a siding at Ft. Benning in a new area designated as the Harmony Church section of the base. There was snow on the ground here too. It was not as deep as it was at Ft. Dix, but it seemed just as cold. This was verified when we saw a thermometer with a reading of 6 degrees!

Now we were introduced to the *real* Army. A drill sergeant lined us up, looked at us, shook his head and marched us about a mile up to our quarters amidst the strange stares of the regular soldiers we passed. Wow! We learned we were going to live in relatively new two-story wooden barracks with heat, showers, and beds; we were a pretty excited group!

We were lined up in two rows at "Attention" and our Company Commander, a Captain, came out of his office to check us over. He slowly walked up and down in front of and in back of us, and had a rather puzzled look on his face. Finally he said "At Ease", and asked where we had been before coming to Ft. Benning. We told him Ft. Dix, New Jersey. He could not believe the uniforms we had been issued. It's too bad I don't have a picture of that motley crew to show.

The Captain was very professional and told us we were now officially assigned to the 2nd Armored Division under the command of General George S. Patton, and that we were to become the top division in the Army by order of the General himself! We would be in the basic training company for six weeks, and then be assigned to our permanent battalions at the completion thereof. Obey all orders and directions of the officers and non-commissioned officers and there would be no problems. It was all as simple as that, and the Captain had it right.

The next step was to line us up in alphabetical order for bunk assignments. The Captain then told us to report to the Supply Sergeant, get a complete set of new uniforms, underwear, towels and toilet articles. Next, go back to the barracks, strip down, and throw *all* of the Ft. Dix clothing out the back door into a waiting 2½-ton truck. Shave, shower, dress in the new uniforms, and fall out in two ranks within the hour. We couldn't stay in the nice warm showers as long as we would have liked, but it was far better than no shower

in almost two weeks. We completed our assignment, dressed in our new uniforms and went outside.

We lined up and felt much better about ourselves, a big boost to our morale. The Captain was very pleased with what he saw now compared to his first impression, with one exception. He told us very clearly that we were now in the Army, and would be expected to not only act like good soldiers, but to also look that way. Therefore, the next day we would report to the Army barber shop to receive the regulation haircut, one-half inch maximum length! He told us about the division, the General, what we would be learning, and certain rules and regulations. He explained the locations of the Post Exchange (PX), the chapel, and the recreation hall. We were restricted to our specific barracks area during the 6-week training period, and no passes to Columbus, GA, the nearest town, were permitted. We then were dismissed to relax a bit, and to get to know our barracks mates a little better.

A bugle blaring over the loudspeaker system heralded mess call. We anxiously lined up wondering what the food would be like. We were shocked to know we did not have to bring mess kits along. We had dishes and eating utensils at the tables. Food was dispensed family-style from large bowls, and you could have as much as you wanted. Now this was first class after the mess at Ft. Dix – and no dishes to wash! The food was plain but substantial, and we really had no cause for complaint. We did have to rotate on KP duty, however, but this wasn't all bad. We at least were inside where it was warm.

"Haircut Day" arrived and we were marched off in compliance with the Captain's orders. This was no problem for me, because I hadn't worn long hair since I was in Kindergarten. However, we had a fairly large number of draftees from the metropolitan areas of New York City, Philadelphia and Chicago who *really* had long hair compared to us country boys; shoulder length hair, pigtails, shaggy moustaches; styles completely foreign and weird-looking to us. We had a laughing good time watching these city slickers getting their locks shorn; screaming, kicking and crying, and having to be strong-armed and held into their chairs by a couple of big and muscular non-coms; it was an amazing spectacle. Yes, there was quite a pile of hair to be cleaned up by the time our platoon finally returned to the barracks. Now we were true GIs! No one could flaunt his "goldilocks" or pigtails! We all fit the same mold, with the exception of personalities.

The regimen was pretty standard. Reveille at 5:30 am, lights out at 10:00 pm. We had three meals a day and the balance of the time we were being trained in the basics of becoming a soldier in an armored division. We learned close-order drill with and without rifles. We were taught to lead off with our left foot when given the command: *Forward March!* The purpose was to assure everyone was in sequence and maintaining proper cadence. The Drill Sergeant would keep time as we marched by yelling "*Left-Left-Ya Hadda Good Home But Cha Left-Left"*, etc. Dismayingly, many draftees didn't seem to know the difference between their left and right foot! We disassembled and re-assembled 1903 30-caliber Springfield rifles, old Colt 38 revolvers, 45-caliber semi-automatic pistols, 45-caliber Thompson automatic sub-machine guns (Tommy guns), 30-caliber machine guns, and the latest 30-caliber semi-automatic Garand rifles.

We trained with all of these weapons on the shooting range. Bayonet practice was a bit gruesome if you thought in terms of skewering a human body instead of a straw sack, but then, since when has war ever been humane? We also practiced putting on gas masks and going through a tent full of tear gas. At the exit we were directed to remove the masks to experience a little whiff of the gas. Yes, it burned your eyes and made you choke…Imagine having no gas masks during a gas attack!

We were also introduced to the military 24-hour time system. This was completely new to us, but it certainly was convenient and assured the correct designation of AM and PM times without having to so define it. From midnight to noon times were regular 01:00 hundred to 12:00 hundred hours. The noon to midnight times progressed from 13:00 hundred to 24:00 hundred hours. Thus, 6:00 pm would now be 18:00 hours, etc.

I was pleasantly surprised one day when I was told to report to the Company Commander's office. Your first reaction of course is "Oh my God, what have I done wrong?!" Well, it was a very pleasant surprise indeed. My dear Dad had come all the way down to Ft. Benning just to see me! He wanted to take me into Columbus, Georgia for dinner, but the CO would not hear of it. Against regulations, etc. Well, we made the best of it. We visited in the company day room and finally had to part. I asked about Sis; she was doing fine. Dad was a neat guy!

Toward the end of our basic training phase we were marched to the parade ground to participate in an official division review spectacular. We were pretty excited because it essentially was our graduation ceremony. At long last we would be assigned to our regular battalions and we were officially 2nd Armored Division soldiers at that point! There were military dignitaries from Washington on the reviewing stand with General Patton, all decked out in fancy uniforms and medals. The Army band was playing marching music and the flags were waving in the breeze; all very impressive. We were lined up along one side of the parade ground and watched as companies, battalions and regiments of tanks, motorcycles and trucks drove past. Then it was our turn. We brought up the rear in nice straight rows of trainees in correct formation to march past the reviewing stand. Our Captain commanded: "Eyes right - - -Forward!" And the General saluted us as we marched by; we felt very proud. I had never seen armored vehicles before and I vowed this was where I wanted to be. I was a bit surprised, however, to see how antiquated they appeared to be compared to the German tanks we had seen in the newsreels. Ours were small tanks and scout cars with either no guns, or just machine guns, which were reminiscent of those seen in an old WWI movie! We learned later just how outdated our armor really was compared to Germany's.

In all honesty, I must say that our six weeks of basic training were conducted in a very professional manner and at a high level of efficiency. Our classes were informative and practical in their content, and the officers and non-coms were all very well trained in the performance of their duties. We had no harsh treatment, we were not hazed or punished for minor infractions, and the entire concept was based upon the fact we were being trained to be combat soldiers. I'm sure this was the philosophy that General Patton

handed on down from the top, and based upon his successes in WWII, he was certainly correct!

My assignment was to the 17th Ordinance battalion which disappointed me because it was not a tank battalion. It was a medium duty maintenance and repair unit for guns and technical gun sight equipment. Well, somehow my motorcycle mechanic background landed me here, but it was not the logical placement for me. No one seemed to know what to do with us newcomers, so we just did nothing except go to the motor pool each day and talk to the old timers. One day I noticed four Army type Harley-Davidson 45 cu. in. motorcycles stored over in a tent and asked the Maintenance Sergeant what was wrong with them. He said nobody knew anything about them so they were just out of action. I told him that, if I were allowed to work on them, I could fix them because I had been a motorcycle mechanic in civilian life. He was ecstatic and had me check out a complete, brand new tool box full of every tool one could imagine. Two of the bikes were very simple to fix. I had them running in no time and entertained all of the troops in the motor pool with my "expertise" at bike handling; figure eights, bike layovers, side slips, jumps, and standing on the saddle. All this from my days as a member of the "Meteor Motorcycle Club" of Runnemede, New Jersey! When I worked for the Harley-Davidson motorcycle dealer in Camden, NJ, we were all expected to join the Club as a matter of good customer relations. Actually, in that day and age, it was not a group of toughs, like the "Hells Angels" of today per se, but just a group of individuals who participated in cross-country rallies, bike shows and general social activities for fun.

Word soon got around the battalion that "Durgin" was quite a character, but I made some good friends and we all got along very well together. The other two bikes had more serious problems, so I started to take the engines apart. One had a burned exhaust valve and the other had a broken primary (internal) drive chain. I was working on the burned exhaust valve engine and Lt. Cotton, the young maintenance officer, stuck his head into the tent and was horrified to see the engine partially disassembled. This is the first time I had even seen him in the shop area. He demanded to know what I was doing and who gave me the authority to dismantle the motorcycle. I told him very politely that I was repairing a disable bike and that I thought that was what I was supposed to do because I was a qualified motorcycle mechanic. He was very upset, probably because he knew nothing of mechanics, and was afraid that he would get into trouble. As an aside, there were also some very inept, and green, ROTC officers drafted into the service at this same time. Apparently we enlisted men weren't the only "country bumpkins" in the military! In retrospect, I can see why my experience as an enlisted man held me in such good stead afterwards as an officer, because I could relate so well to the regular soldiers. In any event, the Lieutenant directed me to do no more work on the engine, put it back together again, and leave it alone. He then stalked away. I had not seen him before this incident, nor afterward. Well, I had the engine all apart, so I figured I might just as well reface the exhaust valve and seat, complete the job, and fix it right then; it wouldn't take that much longer. So, I did. I told the maintenance sergeant about the episode and he just laughed. He said the Lieutenant was no maintenance officer. That was obvious. I cranked up the bike and took it for a spin; besides, it was fun to put it through its paces again, like a young

colt going out for a frolic - the bike, that is - not me! When I came back the sergeant said the Lieutenant had seen me ride off on the bike and had asked him if that was the one I had just been working on. He said that it was. Several days later I was called into the Company Commander's office and handed orders to report to the 14th Quartermaster Battalion where I had just been re-assigned. I was a bit surprised and asked what the reason was for the transfer. He just said that the Quartermaster Battalion was the outfit charged with the heavy maintenance of vehicles rather than his unit. So much for that. As it turned out, it was a blessing in disguise because I was able to work on all kinds of vehicles, to include tanks. I was checked out and licensed to drive any vehicle in the Army: tanks, wreckers, trucks, jeeps, motorcycles, armored cars, everything. I loved it! Thus I was truly able to get to know details of the inner workings of armored vehicles, the *real* workings. It was a good experience that was of great benefit to me in later life. *Every* experience can be a positive one if you so choose it to be!

In the course of performing my new duties, I was aware that we seemed to be getting an inordinate number of motorcycles in our shops for major repairs. Some were complete wrecks. I questioned the Maintenance Sergeant as to why this was happening; it just seemed to be unusually excessive. He explained that the division was staffed, from General Patton on down, with ex-Cavalry officers who still envisioned we needed the Cavalry approach in the armored division for scouting and patrolling functions. The closest they could come to a horse in a truly mechanized unit was a motorcycle. Accordingly, they designated that the Reconnaissance Battalion be equipped with motorcycles. This amounted to about 400 bikes. The concept no doubt had merit when visualizing how the Cavalry operated on horseback; scouting probes through the forest, end runs around enemy lines to get to his rear, and so on. The only trouble was that motorcycles could not leap over felled trees in a single bound, ford streams over a foot deep, climb a sandy hill reliably, or maneuver through very rocky terrain.

Very few of the soldiers assigned to the reconnaissance Battalion had ever ridden a motorcycle before coming into the Army. Therefore, they were being subjected to a very strenuous training program which involved jumping over obstacles, making high speed sliding turns, and various other risky maneuvers. The end result was not surprising: serious accidents, damaged motorcycles, and hospitalized riders.

It did not take long for the general staff officers to realize the days of horse cavalry were over. The motorcycles were relegated to the task of messenger service between units, and the Reconnaissance Battalion was reorganized by issuing Jeeps to carry three of four men and a machine gun, a much more effective and safer utilization of manpower. The term "Jeep" was derived in typical GI fashion from the military designation of this small four-wheel drive scout vehicle designated: Truck, 4WD, GP - the GP meaning "general purpose". So, the GIs quickly called them "Jeeps". Good ol' soldier humor in action.

Soldiering Under the Command of General George S. Patton

Spring had arrived at Ft. Benning, finally, and work was interesting. We knew nothing of what went on in the division other than within our own battalion, which is normal in any large organization. There were bits and pieces of information relayed down to us by some of the regular Army non-coms about General Patton. We knew he was originally in the Cavalry branch of the service, and although the Army was phasing it out and replacing it with armor, the General still clung to his love of horses and Cavalry tactics, and applied his Cavalry knowledge to armor with great success. He did all of his traveling around the base riding his beautifully groomed white horse, and of course he wore Cavalry boots and breeches, and carried his ivory-handled pistols!

One day as I was head-down in the engine compartment of a tank, I heard a strange noise, and a shadow fell across my line of sight. I craned my neck around to see what it was, and there, peering down into the compartment where I was, appeared a white horse's nose and the General right behind it. I struggled to get up and the General said "At ease, soldier". He then proceeded to ask some basic questions about supplies, clothing and food. I allowed as how the cooking wasn't quite like mother's, but it was certainly adequate; no complaints. He asked what I was repairing in the tank. I told him the generator was burned out and needed a replacement. He asked if I had a new one. I told him it had been ordered, but no new ones were available. He thanked me, saluted, told me to "carry on", and trotted off on his horse to the maintenance officer's office at the end of the main shop building. He dismounted and went inside. By this time all work in the Motor Pool had stopped and heads were popping out all over the place to see the General. When he finally cantered off on his white steed, everyone clustered around the maintenance sergeant to learn what had transpired. It seems that the General questioned the maintenance officer on the parts he had not been able to procure. He obtained a big list, got on the telephone right there to Washington, contacted the Quartermaster General, read him the riot act, transmitted the shortage list to him verbally, and said in his own definitive style what he wanted done – immediately! In a very few days we had our parts.

General Patton was a prime mover. He was a disciplinarian, a true military man, a decisive commander, and he did not tolerate any individual who failed to do his utmost to excel. This made him unpopular with many in the "politically correct" high command, and got him into trouble with them in later years, but he was a true soldier in every respect and was exceptionally competent in his field.

By this time the division was up to strength and General Patton was anxious to subject us to a training maneuver off the reservation. We were ordered to dress in Class A uniforms and were marched to what was designated as the "Pine Bowl" for a talk by the General himself. This was quite an eye-opening experience. The Combat Engineer Battalion had selected a natural bowl-shaped section of the pine-covered rolling terrain for the site. They then felled the trees, trimmed the logs, and arranged them in semi-circular rows up the side of the bowl. At the bottom was constructed a flat platform about 6 feet

off the ground, 15 feet wide, and 35 feet long. At the back of this stage were sliding panels about 8 feet wide and 15 feet tall.

We were seated by battalion, in the designated sections, and awaited the next move, which was not long in coming. The division band played military music and suddenly we were called to "Attention!" General Patton strode onto the platform, saluted us, and bid us be seated. His uniform was quite spectacular compared to ours, and most impressive. His full-dress blouse was adorned with all kinds of decorations from WWI. He wore a Sam Brown belt with an ivory-handled pistol in its holster, light gray Cavalry breeches, and black leather boots with spurs in place. He probably rode his horse to the assembly. He gave us a very spirited presentation as to why we were in the Army, how proud he was to have us in his command, and discussed his philosophy of how an Armored Division such as ours was to operate. He minced no words, talked the language of the soldier, and left no doubt as to what he expected of his officers and men; unquestioning obedience to orders, attention to duty, cleanliness, and above all, faith in the democracy of America. He had the whole division laughing, cheering, and being most attentive. One aspect of his talk really struck home to us all. He was telling about the role of Cavalry tactics being transferred to Armored Force applications. General Patton said it was all quite basic; you grabbed the enemy by the nose (a distraction by frontal skirmishes), then made end runs around his flanks and kicked him in the ass! The whole division roared at this description. He was noted for his command of the language of the GI, and he really used it to good effect! He then gave us an old Cavalry adage to keep in mind: "If you don't take care of your horse, it can't take care of you!" The General went on to say this same advice holds true with tanks, vehicles and weapons. I have never forgotten this little truism.

The General then went on to tell us what he had in mind for the 2nd Armored Division this summer. He walked to the back of the stage and a couple of his staff officers rolled several movable screens to the left and to the right to expose a large-scale map of Georgia, Tennessee and Alabama. With a long pointer he showed where we were going to go. The whole purpose of the Tennessee Maneuver, as it was called, was to pit our division against another task force. The General said that his primary objective was to give his 15,000-man division an opportunity to test its ability to work together as a unit, both officers and men, a true team operation. He stressed the challenge ahead would demand everyone's cooperation to effectively move tanks, artillery, trucks, motorcycles, Jeeps and men, plus handling the logistics of gasoline, food, maintenance and medical supplies. We were quite impressed at being included in the "Big Picture" so to speak. It was a real psychological boost! As a matter of fact, I never heard such an exposition as this from any other commander that I served under in any other unit.

In closing, the General said we were going to make this first maneuver through Tennessee and back which would cover about 700 miles. He complimented us on how well we men had learned our lessons during Basic Training, and how he expected us all to be ready to move out in an orderly manner tomorrow. We were called to attention, the military band struck up a march, the General saluted the Division, and left the stage. We were then marched back to our barracks and dismissed to prepare for the morrow. All of

us soldiers were very favorably impressed with our introduction to General Patton; he was a true leader of men.

We all were pretty excited about the prospect of actually going out in the field on maneuvers. We also commented about the high pitch of the General's voice; we were a bit surprised. Actually, it made no difference to our receiving his message, which was loud and clear; no mistaking his intent!

Tennessee Maneuvers – June 1941

The big day arrived, and we marched to the motor pool with our duffle bags loaded with the usual equipment one would need to go on a camping trip; blankets, extra clothing, toilet articles, mess kit and half of a pup tent. Each man carried half a pup tent and at bivouac you paired off with another soldier and buttoned each tent's half together for your shelter. This worked fine in good weather; when it rained or snowed it was a different story.

Our Captain addressed us before we mounted up into our vehicles and gave us some more interesting data on the maneuver. He explained to us that General Patton was quite a scholar of the history of warfare over the centuries. He also knew that the German Army Staff Officers had been required to study our Civil War Cavalry tactics very thoroughly, and this was the basis for their development of the "Blitzkrieg", or lightning warfare strike methods of armored vehicle deployment.

In retrospect, the world has had many historical examples of leaders who tried to achieve their goal of world domination by the use of smart tactics and, wherever possible, overpowering force. In this respect, four who come to mind are: Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Genghis Khan, and Napoleon Bonaparte. The early use of Cavalry striking forces employed by Genghis Khan is one of the first examples of "Blitzkrieg" at an early stage.

The Captain went on to say that we would be going over much of the same terrain where Civil War battles were fought 80 years before, and that we would be given some historical facts along the way. I was quite pleased to hear this because I had always enjoyed history lessons in school, all of them; Ancient, Medieval, World, American, and anything else.

We were ordered to mount up and follow a specified vehicle in the column during the entire maneuver. This assured an orderly sequence of traffic control with no concern of cutting someone out. I was the driver of the vehicle that carried a total of (14) personnel plus barracks bags. The vehicle was a 2½-ton GMC 6x6 truck vehicle which meant it had (2) single-tired front wheels and (4) dual-tired rear wheels in tandem. Drive power could be transmitted to all six wheels by engaging a transfer case which also permitted a lower gear ratio to be attained when required for rough terrain operation. This GMC truck was the true workhorse of the U.S. Army in all theaters of operation during the entire war. It was also a most popular truck used by our British and Russian allies as items of "lend-lease". (We haven't received the "lease" payments yet!)

The convoy was a long one and we had to space our vehicles at 50-yard intervals to not seriously impede civilian traffic. In 1941 this did not pose any problem because traffic was so light. It would have been an entirely different story in 1995!

The individual battalions of the division were assigned different start times to permit gaps to exist in the long column. Each battalion was also assigned to a different bivouac area along the way to eliminate over-crowding of a camp site. This procedure worked quite well and we never had any big traffic jams, which is a tribute to the officers in headquarters charged with the task of planning for this maneuver.

At noon time we would pull off onto the shoulder of the road and the kitchen truck would come alongside and hand out sack lunches to each vehicle crew; they were adequate.

On one of these rest stops, of all things, we got "bombed" by a flight of P-38s using small paper sacks filled with flour! Fortunately, their aim wasn't too good and the sacks burst in the trees or on the roadway near us. I wonder what would have happened if a "bomb" had hit someone on the head! A mess to clean up, no doubt. Also, what about injury? In any event, apparently top command got the message this was not too smart a thing to do because we never had that experience again. Maybe the Colonel's command car got hit!

Another surprising experience later on was to see a company of *real* Cavalry troops riding *real* horses. It was like a chapter out of a Civil War story, a real throwback!

The second day of the maneuver my truck developed a burned out rod bearing while we were climbing a long hill on the way to Chattanooga, Tennessee. We pulled over along the side of the road to let the remainder of the column pass. The good old maintenance truck following at the rear pulled in back of us, and we immediately set to work; drain the oil, drop the pan, remove the faulty bearing inserts, install a new set, reinstall oil pan and gasket, add oil, and off we go. This required about two hours' effort, and good field repair experience!

We reached the assigned bivouac area to the Civil War National Park at Lookout Mountain that evening. We ate supper and several of us, wanting a little exercise, elected to climb up a knoll where we had spotted a Civil War cannon emplacement. It was a nice view and away from the noise of the rest of the main bivouac, so we decided to bed down right there. The next morning when we awakened we discovered we had been sleeping over the grave marker tablets where the gun crew had been buried; yes, it gave us an eerie feeling.

As an aside to this event, whenever we were issued new shoes, our platoon Sergeant would immediately lead us off on a forced march. First we would walk through a streambed until the shoes became quite soggy. This would soften the leather and enable it to conform to our own feet more readily. We would then walk for what seemed to be miles until the Sergeant had had enough of it. Then, return to the barracks and change uniforms. I guess it worked, or our feet were young and adaptable, and didn't know the difference!

The next day we were told by one of our officers some interesting historical facts about the Civil War battles of Chickamauga, Chattanooga, Missionary Ridge and Lookout

Mountain. These were tough encounters over rugged terrain and there were very heavy losses to both the Union and Confederate forces. We were all quite interested.

Day by day we made our way north until we reached Murfreesboro, Tennessee, where the Stones River/Murfreesboro Battle was waged during the Civil war, 78 years before. We spent several days here and it was a good rest stop. We washed our vehicles by a stream and performed check-outs of our gear. We were told to prepare for an inspection the following day so we had time to swim in the nearby stream, wash up a bit, and shave. The inspection went off quite well, with the exception of one minor problem. As our platoon lieutenant was checking on us before the main inspection he looked down at my shoes, and asked in a startled manner, "What's the matter with your feet?" I looked down, and as I had gotten so used to the size 12 shoes issued to me at Ft. Dix by this time, I thought nothing of it! I took a size 10 ½ in civilian life. The result was that the extra-long shoe toes turned up on the ends and did look a little goofy. I explained it to the lieutenant, and he positioned me in a rear rank after this! He did order me a correct size shoe after we returned to Ft. Benning.

During this several day rest period our Civil War buff officer explained about the terrain and how the Cavalry maneuvering was instrumental in causing victory or defeat in any given battle. He also showed us where to look for possible battlefield souvenirs. A lot of the area was farmland now, and we wandered over these plowed fields looking, for what we knew not. Then the officer picked up a conical shaped piece of lead, sort of like the end of a thimble, and said, "Here's a Minnie ball!" What's a Minnie ball, we all asked. "Well," he replied "This was one of the most devastating bullets of the Civil War. It fit over the ball in a musket and when it hit someone, it tore a hole in them, knocked them down, or ripped off an arm or a leg". Not a very pretty thought. It was amazing how many of these artifacts were still lying there in the upper 12" of soil!

The next day we broke camp and headed south back through Huntsville and Anniston, Alabama to Ft. Benning, Georgia. A few days later we were ordered to dress in class "A" uniforms and were marched off to the Pine Bowl again. It was a similar experience to the first one, only in this one the General told us about all the high level decisions that were being made during the maneuvers while we were waiting in bivouac for the next move order to be given. It was most interesting because he pointed out on the big maps again where we had been, where the "enemy" was located at any given time, and why we were required to move about at night in some instances. It made a lot more sense now. He proceeded to tell us to continue to sharpen our skills because by late summer we would be embarking upon a much larger-scale maneuver into Louisiana. He also commented about the fact that German forces had just invaded Russia as of 21 June, and this was really going to expand the overall war effort. So listen to your officers and pay serious attention to your training!

The General closed by commending us all for doing our part so professionally as a team, and said that the Command & General Staff officers, who were the referees for this maneuver, gave the 2nd Armored Division top honors for out-maneuvering the other team. We all cheered and the General dismissed us. We appreciated his obvious interest in us.

Between Maneuvers

We settled into a standard routine of working in the motor pool on the heavy maintenance operations, as required, on vehicles throughout the division. We also pulled guard duty at intervals which involved being on duty for two hours and off duty for four hours during a 24-hour period. This was standard procedure throughout all of my Army guard detail experiences.

After being in the Army for four months we received a pay increase from $21.00 to $30.00 per month; really big time now! It was interesting how we were lined up to receive our pay, which was always in cash. First, the Regular Army men fell in line in alphabetical order; next came any National Guard men, and finally, us "Draftees". We were at the bottom of the Totem Pole in everything because we had not enlisted. That was discrimination at an early stage! This was eventually phased out.

With money in their jeans once a month, most soldiers went a bit wild. Coming from a rather conservative family background, I was not used to the excesses of gambling, drinking, and loose morals I observed in some of my fellow soldiers' behavior. Pay day was the real pay-off in this respect. Not wanting to be a prude, I naturally joined the gang to show I was with them, even if I was not one of them. We would take a bus into Columbus, Georgia on a Saturday and come back to the post that night, or early Sunday morning. The bars and fleabag hotels did a roaring business. The true dens of iniquity were over in Phenix City, Alabama, a short walk by a bridge over the Chattahoochee River. The most notorious of these night spots was Beachy Howards, a garish, tough, red light district saloon. To me, this was a rather good place to stay away from. Much of my attitude in this respect I can attribute to one of my favorite uncles. He was a career naval officer who had been around and could speak with authority. Some of my happiest experiences as a small boy were when Uncle Eddie (Lt. Cmdr. Edward R. Durgin, USN) would come to visit us. He had fascinating stories to tell, would take me to baseball games, and was loved by the whole family. During our times together he would never preach, but he would intersperse little bits of wisdom with his stories. For instance, he said he did not smoke, or drink alcoholic beverages, because they impaired one's physical well-being, thought processes, and judgments. At a party he would politely refuse an alcoholic drink and request a soda instead. When teased by his fellow officers he'd merely say he didn't need a drink to have a good time.

Well, this is how I handled the potential drinking problem in the Army and throughout my life, and I pay tribute to my Uncle Eddie for his good example to me. As it invariably turned out, I was the one who herded my drunken buddies back to camp so they wouldn't end up being picked up by the MPs (Military Police) and taken to the Guard House. This would result in a pay reduction and loss of rating, if any. Some of the G.I. language was beginning to be picked up. G.I. of course meant Government Issue such as clothing, bedding guns, trucks, and in our case, soldiers. The term "Gold Brick" meant an individual who was a "goof-off" and was always finding a way to get out of doing anything.

Many of this type would even feign illness so they would be placed on sick call to report to the medical dispensary. A trick sometimes used by them was to place a half-bar of G.I. soap under their armpits until they got a high temperature. This was obviously not too smart a thing to do, but it landed them in the dispensary for a couple of days without them having to do any work. The belligerent, non-conformist, types always seemed to try to defy the orders given to us. Consequently they generally wound up in the guard house. Some preferred this to learning to do something productive. Another problem we had with a few Neanderthal slobs was personal cleanliness. Some GIs just would not take a shower, and their body odor became most repugnant. After talking to them and their still refusing to shower, we had to resort to strong-arm methods. A group of us would each grab an arm or a leg and haul them into the shower. One such experience was enough to convert them!

One day as I was reading announcements on the company bulletin board there was one that caught my interest. It stated that any enlisted man interested in attending a school to become an officer could obtain an application at Company Headquarters. I thought for a moment and said to myself that I felt that I could do as good as, or better than, some of the officers I had been serving under. Also, did I just want to remain a mechanic all of my Army career, or achieve a higher goal? Decision! I walked into the Company Headquarters office and asked the 1st Sergeant for an application for the Officer Candidate School. He said I would have to speak to the Company Commander about that. So, I approached the Company Commander, saluted, and said "Private Durgin would like to request an application form to complete for admission to OCS". The Captain asked me a series of basic questions and then told me to report to the Lt. Colonel at Battalion Headquarters and state my request. This I did, and realized this was a preliminary screening procedure I was being put through. I finally received the application form, filled it out, and submitted it to my Company Commander. I was not to hear any response to this for some weeks to come.

I had been in the service for six months by now, so I was eligible for a 10-day pass which I applied for and was granted. I took a train to Philadelphia and then a commuter bus, old familiar Route #9, to my home town of Palmyra, NJ. My sister Mildred was living with some other school teachers in a private residence several blocks away from our old home. She had moved out shortly after I left for the Army. Yes, the old home was just too large for her to handle by herself, and the sad memories were too strong for her to suppress. My father in Washington, DC finally sold the old homestead; he had no choice.

This meant that my place of residence was to be at my Grandmother Sawyer's, who was being taken care of by my Aunt Emma Sawyer, the younger sister of my mother. Both ladies were very dear to me, and I loved them very much. They had a spare bedroom in the old 3-story Victorian home, so that was to be my base of operations. In the barn in back of their house was my 1940 45 cu. In. Harley Davidson motorcycle that I had bought the year before going into the Army from my former boss at the motorcycle agency. It cost me about $400, and I was still paying on it. That same motorcycle today would be in the $4,000/$5,000 price range today (1995 dollars).

Being home again was a welcome relief from Army routine, but not the same as before I left. Life is full of changes and one has to adapt. It was good having the motorcycle for transportation again, and I saw all of my friends and relatives briefly. It occurred to me that if I rode it back to Ft. Benning, I'd have wheels once more and be more independent. So I bid farewell to all, tossed my gear into a bag on the rear rack, and started off on a 1,400 mile trek back to Ft. Benning.

At the 150 mile mark I stopped by Washington, DC to stay overnight with my father. This was a nice visit talking over old times, and then I headed west toward Louisville, Kentucky to spend a day with my basic training friend Gus Breuer, who was now stationed at Ft. Knox, Kentucky. He was a supply clerk so I had no problem bedding down in the supply room. After the 650 mile trip from Washington, DC, I slept well. With my miniscule income, a free night's lodging, plus food, was always welcome.

The next day I headed south to Ft. Benning. This was only a 600 mile leg to my trip, so I made it nicely and reported back from leave just in time. It was great having my motorcycle with me again, because on my days off I could take trips off the reservation and explore some of the countryside thereabouts. I did not know it until after I brought my bike back with me to Ft. Benning, but privates were not supposed to have a motor vehicle in their possession. The Army really wanted to have a choker collar around our necks. I very quietly parked it unobtrusively down by a wooded stream across the trail from our barracks. No one ever said anything. I think they ignored it on purpose!

It was mid-summer by now, and it is quite hot and humid at this time of year down south and all along the eastern seaboard region. This didn't bother me as it was quite similar to the New Jersey climate in which I was born and raised.

One day the company commander called me in and informed me that I was on the list of potential candidates for OCS. I was to dress in Class A uniform and report that afternoon to Battalion Headquarters for an interview by members of the OCS selection board. Well, I was one excited soldier as one could imagine. I reported as directed, saluted to the six-man board of officers, and was told to be seated. The questions asked seemed to never end. The one they seemed most interested in dealt with my ROTC experience during the one year I attended Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ. I also had to explain why I did not continue at college. I told them it was because my mother was terminally ill with cancer, my father was hard-pressed financially with medical bills, and I felt it prudent to cancel the education expense at this time and go find a job. These were the latter years of the depression, jobs were scarce, and as mentioned previously, medical benefits at that time did not exist as we know them today. The review board was very professional, thanked me for presenting myself, and dismissed me. I saluted and left, wondering what kind of an impression I had made.

Back to coveralls and vehicle maintenance tasks again, wondering all of the time if I were going to be selected or not. As it turned out, I wasn't to learn for some months to come. Obviously, all other divisions throughout the US Army were going through the same procedures and the determination of who the finalists would be was a time-consuming process.

Louisiana Maneuvers – August/September 1941

The division was mustered out again for another assembly at the "Pine Bowl" where General Patton escorted us through a pre-maneuver exercise. It was similar to the first experience, only this one was more detailed and dealt with the Louisiana Maneuver we were about to embark upon. The maps covered a larger area this time, and the General pointed out how we would be moving from Georgia, across Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and into east Texas. The General estimated that it would cover about 1,500 miles and require almost two months to complete. He described how this maneuver would involve many more divisions throughout the Army and would be much more demanding of us than the previous maneuver.

The General concluded his presentation by requesting we check all of our vehicles and equipment very carefully to be certain everything was in order. He complimented us on our appearance and told us he had no doubt we were the best division in the Army; we agreed and cheered! The band played a marching tune, the General saluted, and off he went.

We returned to our normal duties in the motor pool performing repair and maintenance operations on all types of vehicles. Periodically we would be marched off for a day of practice at the shooting ranges. The latest weapon we were introduced to was the 30-caliber semi-automatic Garand rifle, which became the prime weapon in the Army during the War. It could fire a clip of 30-caliber bullets as fast as you could pull the trigger. This was quite an improvement over the single shot, bolt action, Springfield rifle that was standard issue in WWI.

As the day of departure for Louisiana approached, I was called aside by the Company Commander. I was told to take a Class A uniform along, in good order, because there would be several OCS candidate screening board sessions convened during maneuvers. This was one way of letting me know that I was still in the running, I suppose. Great! How do you carry a Class A uniform in a GI truck full of troops and barracks bags and have it presentable on call? I contacted one of my buddies, Pvt. Harry Fisk, in back of me, who was driving the supply truck of spare parts. We managed to arrange one of the cabinets such that I could hang my uniform up in a protected manner rather than have it stuffed into a barracks bag. Aha, necessity is the mother of invention!

There was one other personal problem that arose, what to do with my motorcycle hidden in the woods? I didn't want to leave it out there unprotected. I fortunately was in good standing with the Supply Sergeant and he very graciously allowed me to park it in the Supply Room…Hooray!

During our trek west we followed the main highway through Montgomery, Alabama, Vicksburg, Mississippi, and Shreveport, Louisiana. An interesting aside to all of this is the fact that an extremely large portion of the personnel stationed at Ft. Benning was now

missing from the area, of course, and would be gone for approximately six to eight weeks. The result was a serious drop in customers for the young ladies of the night - they remembered what happened during the Tennessee maneuvers! How could they maintain their lavish standard of living under these conditions? Voila! They hitched a flashy new travel trailer to the back of their Cadillacs, and followed the troops in convoy from bivouac to bivouac. Thus the name: "Camp Followers"!

They also had VIP service provided them in the form of MP (Military Police) escort. Whenever the convoy would be halted for any reason, and this occurred frequently, the MPs on their motorcycles would guide the young ladies' convoys ahead of us to assure they got set up in a choice area before the troops got there. Now that's capitalism and early-day Political Action Committee in action! As they would drive by the convoy they would lean out of their windows waving their arms and screaming pertinent comments. The GI responses to them were heart-warming, to say the least!

We made bivouac along the way in small isolated areas. We then headed for Camp Polk, located at Leesville, south of Shreveport, as apparently this was to be our base of operations. We did not camp at the base however, but out in the reservation on our own. This was true swamp-land; thick underbrush, wet, lots of mosquitoes, chiggers, coral snakes, water moccasins, and all things miserable in a hot, humid environment. Not nearly as nice as the Tennessee experience! I guess the General really wanted to test us. In retrospect, after having read our Great-grandfather George Walton Durgin, Jr's Civil War letters, he had experienced the same discomforts in the same area 80 years before!

We participated in a number of small, short-notice maneuvers which included some night marches, as they were designated. There were the usual numbers of accidents, in some cases requiring pulling mired vehicles out of swamps and repairing same. It was valuable first-hand experience not attainable short of a true combat situation. I recall one case where a tank broke through a bridge along a main highway, not just a little back road bridge, either. The Army Engineers were called in to evaluate the design and concluded it was faulty to begin with. From that day on the Army Engineers went ahead of us and inspected all bridges along our proposed line of advance, and all were declared unsafe! They had to install additional supports to make them structurally sound, but this caused unavoidable delays. The word was passed along that it was apparently quite well known that Huey Long, the governor of Louisiana in the 1930s, was quite a "con" artist. Many of his "New Deal" government projects were given to his political cronies who gave poor quality work for their contracts. Hence, broken bridges and sleazy highways…times don't change very much!

This did not please General Patton one bit, being limited in his ability to maneuver. Apparently he had his sights set on making an end run around the "enemy" task force to our north. We were bivouacked in the swampland south of Camp Polk for several days, and were told to prepare to move out early next morning for a quick strike, we knew not where, as always. We headed west along some narrow, winding, country roads. We eventually came to the banks of the Sabine River which forms the boundary between eastern Texas and Louisiana. There in front of us was a pontoon bridge the Engineers had assembled and

secured the previous day and night. We drove our vehicles over this structure with a certain amount of trepidation, but all went well, no problems. The pontoons sank into the water a bit, and our vehicle was in a pocket going downhill and uphill at the same time, but other than a strange sensation, the river was traversed satisfactorily. Good old General Patton had come up with a solution to his "end run" plans after all! As a rear echelon unit, our Quartermaster Battalion was in the support group that never would be in an advance position. However, our officers would attend the command and staff briefings to inform us of the "big picture". It seems this tricky method of getting our division across the river really threw our "enemy" for a complete loss! General Patton moved his armored combat vehicles rapidly north, up an East Texas highway, cut across into Louisiana again at Shreveport, and completely overran the enemy to his south, from the rear, just like he told us we were going to do in combat. We were top dogs after this victory!

While the General was chasing the enemy, we were bivouacked for several days in a field outside of Jasper, Texas, a quaint little town where oil had been discovered not too many years before. The fascinating thing about this very small town was that it had nothing but well-built, although small, relatively new homes throughout. Each home had a capped oil well in its front yard with a see-saw type pump slowly pulling "black gold" out of the ground. On the front porch, invariably, the would be a middle aged ex-well driller, no doubt, sitting in his rocker, smoking his pipe, sipping a drink, and watching the convoys go by. What a life! Obviously they had struck oil here, set up claims over their old shanty, and the rest is history; new homes, money in the bank, and leisure!

The town was quite well-to-do as we soon found out. Laughing young ladies slowly drove past our stopped convoy in fancy convertibles, and handed out their names and addresses on pieces of paper. We were invited to come to their little junior college that afternoon for a swim party. My, such patriotism, it was almost breathtaking! One can imagine how long it took us after pulling into our bivouac area to get back to the swimming pool festivities! Yes, we did have swim trunks for just such an occasion. It was a very nice event and, I'm happy to say, a very well-mannered group. Many of us maintained a correspondence for some time afterwards with these fair young damsels. This ceased abruptly for me after meeting my wife to be, of course!

We stayed in the area a couple of days and were able to walk around and see the sights, such as they were. It was a very flat oil land country. Outside of Jasper the situation was a bit different. There were oil well drillers and their families too, but these were different. They obviously had come to the area later looking for riches too, but missed the boat. The oil rights had already been grabbed up and all they could do was eke out a miserable existence doing the hard work. They lived in little wooden shanties, and everything in the area reeked with the smell of crude oil; the ground, the clothing, the children, everything. My friend and I walked up to the base of an oil derrick to check it out more closely; we had never seen one before except at a distance, so nothing would do except to climb up. Nearby was an oil well driller's shanty and a young woman was outside doing some wash, and two small children were playing in the oily soil. We went up and chatted with her briefly, but she obviously was not very comfortable with us there. The thing that fascinated me was the heating arrangement for the metal wash tubs in the side

yard. It was just a piece of 1" diameter pipe driven into the ground, and a flame was coming out of it under the wash tub. I asked where the gas was coming from and she just pointed to the ground. All they had to do was drive a pipe into the ground and natural gas was right there. It certainly smelled like it too. Not a very pleasant place to live and raise a family. We wandered back to the bivouac area, which was much more pleasant.

During this maneuver period I had occasion to report to three OCS screening boards in all kinds of open-air field locations. I would dig out my Class A uniform and the only good pair of shoes I had, be driven to the evaluation session by the company clerk in a Jeep, and be dropped off. The number of officers would vary from four to six, and they would never be the same ones as previously convened. The questions were similar but not exactly the same, of course, each officer would have a different approach. I felt I fended them off pretty well each time, but you never knew how you were doing. After this third "interrogation" session my company commander informed me I had been selected to go before the final board, which would be held at Camp Polk, but he didn't know when this would be. Phew!

We were now in bivouac back at the reservation and it apparently was a final rest stop before heading back to Ft. Benning. My one and only Class A uniform was beginning to look a little less than top notch so I figured I'd better get it in shape for the final review board. How do you wash and iron a uniform out in the swampland of Louisiana? Well, I recalled seeing an old shanty about a mile back on the road we had used in reaching our bivouac area. There was laundry on the line to dry. That's it; I'll bundle my clothes up and walk back to the shanty to see if I can make a laundry deal. I walked up to the little shack and knocked on the door. A large black woman came to the door and asked suspiciously what I wanted. I told her I needed some clothing washed and ironed, and that I would be willing to pay her to do it. That was the magic word; her face brightened up, and she allowed as how she'd be pleased to do it, and it would be ready tomorrow at about the same time. I just hoped we wouldn't be ordered to break camp before then. I do not recall the price of the transaction, but it must have been two or three dollars; 10% of my monthly pay! The next day I walked back and my laundry was done perfectly. I paid her and carefully returned my uniform to its supply truck cabinet ready for its next showing.

During this respite there was nothing to do except read, or write letters home. I guess the officers were wondering what to do to keep us occupied too. Furthermore, payday was upon us. The only logical thing to do was to give overnight passes, right? The passes were issued and GI truckloads of soldiers were transported to Shreveport for the two day respite. The trucks were then to pick us up the second day at the same place where we were dropped off, at a pre-determined time. Well, it was a wild time in the old town that night. The soldiers either got drunk, holed up in a motel, or got "rolled". Now this was a new term to me, but it was duly explained in our basic training. We were warned to NEVER go in to town and wander about by yourself; always have at least one other soldier with you, preferably more. The reason was that, lurking in the alleyways or dark enclaves in back streets, gangs of local toughs often would jump upon a lone soldier, beat him unconscious, and rob him of his pay. Not too pleasant, but quite a real fact of life.

Well, my friend and I were pretty "straight" individuals. We wandered around the town, patronized a few diners, chatted with some young ladies, but had a rather uneventful evening of it. We were getting tired and didn't feel like getting "taken" by the one-night inflated costs of a motel, so what do you do in a situation like this? We just happened to be wandering past the main post office building, it was late at night, the doors were open, and no one was in there. We went in, climbed up on a couple of desktops, and off to sleep we went. No, it wasn't comfortable, but it was free and not in the street. No one bothered us and we made it back to the bivouac area the next day none the worse for wear. Other soldiers had not fared so well. The usual number of arrests were made for various and sundry violations.

I was eventually informed one day to report to Camp Polk for the final OCS review board examination. The camp was named after Confederate General Leonidas Polk. It was established in 1941 in anticipation of the WWII basic training demands and Louisiana Maneuvers. We GIs called it "Camp Swampy" because of the atrocious amounts of bayous, swamps and mosquitoes! The area was also infested with "Honky Tonk" towns such as Leesville and De Ridder with their "camp followers" in abundance. I was to be at Camp Polk for two days. I thought that meant I was to be grilled for two days, but all it meant was that all applicants that had been chosen from the division were to be present so they could be scheduled for their review with no wasted time in between. By pure chance I picked up a newspaper that was lying on a table in the Day Room of our barracks, and read the current events, the war in Europe, the U-boat warfare in the North Atlantic, national news, everything I thought might be of interest. My name was called to report to the board. With heart pounding I entered the room, saluted the eight officers seated behind a table, reported my name and rank, and stood at attention. I was directed to stand "at ease", which I did. No chair was offered and I almost felt I was about to be court-martialed! A number of questions were asked by each of the officers relating to things learned in basic training, on maneuvers, and about current events. How fortunate that I had been able to read the morning newspaper in the day room prior to reporting to the review board. I informed my interviewers that the big headline of the day was the attack on an American destroyer, the SS Greer, by a German U-boat off the coast of Iceland of 4 September 1941. They were pleasantly surprised I was abreast of current events. I was pleased too, even though it was one of the few times I had seen a newspaper during maneuvers. They also questioned me thoroughly on my one year's ROTC experience at Rutgers University, the subjects covered, grades made, and reasons why I wanted to become an officer. I phrased my answers simply, spoke in a clear voice, and looked them straight in the eye at all times. The whole experience took about half an hour, but it seemed forever. I was thanked for my time and dismissed. I saluted, about faced, and left.

I guess it's only natural after such an experience that one feels they could have done better, but at the time, all I could hope for was that I had passed muster. Only time would tell.

Back to the bivouac area and the usual camp-out routine. I can only presume these slack times were for the General and his staff to prepare for the next move. We troops

were glad for the slower pace. Sometime in early September we headed back to Ft. Benning, taking approximately the same route we had used going west in August.

We would bivouac in the vicinity of small towns along the way and the local residents remembered our passing through their hamlets earlier in the summer. The hungry and thirsty GIs would inundate the small stores and saloons buying everything edible, drinkable and smokeable; clean them out. This placed a severe drain on supplies for the townsfolk and many store owners closed shop when we went through. In the case of saloons, they would stay open of course, but they would hang up signs such as: "DOGS AND SOLDIERS NOT ALLOWED", or "YANKEE GO HOME". This latter one surprised us quite a bit. We had not realized Civil War emotions and resentments still ran so deep in the South. Their knowledge of the historical causes of the Civil War was sadly lacking. Actually, the first aggressive shots were fired by the South Carolina militia in the bombardment of Fort Sumter, a Federal garrison, in the Charleston harbor, 12 April 1861. The scars of defeat do not readily heal. It only occurred to me some time afterward that essentially all of us new recruits to the 2nd Armored Division came from north of the Mason-Dixon line. Also, essentially all of the non-commissioned officers, Corporals and Sergeants were from the south. This may have been due to there being more southern enlistments during the 1930s than northern enlistments because jobs were more readily available in the heavily industrialized north.

We got back to Ft. Benning in due time and immediately set about cleaning and greasing vehicles to get everything ready for a big division review. We were marched to the "Pine Bowl" one more time and General Patton reviewed all we had done during the maneuvers that we had wondered about. I certainly appreciated the value of maps in describing a maneuver and never forgot the lesson. He said our division had performed admirably again and he commended us all heartily. He did make it all sound a bit more noble than what we had remembered, but perhaps from his position of seeing everything spread out before him, it must have been like a big game of chess! Furthermore, he didn't have to take cold water baths or sleep on the ground, I presume. He thanked us again, gave us a pep talk in his own inimitable style, and ordered us back to our duties as soldiers. With a sharp salute, he marched off the platform with the band playing. We all gave a rousing cheer and were then marched back to our barracks once more.

I was most happy to get my motorcycle back on the road again and thanked the Supply Sergeant for his cooperation, and offered to take him for a ride around the Post on it, but he declined; he wasn't bike-oriented!

We settled into our routine of maintenance duties, guard duty, and range practice with various guns. We never did get to shoot the 37mm or 75mm tank guns because the limited supplies of ammunition dictated these be reserved for personnel of the armored tank battalions.

Officer Candidate School (OCS)

In the latter part of September I was told to report to the Company Commander's office. I entered, saluted, and reported. The Captain said: "Private Durgin, you have been selected to attend the Officer Candidate School at Ft. Knox, Kentucky, congratulations!" I was speechless! After all of the screening sessions I had attended, the trepidation, the waiting, I had finally made it! I was naturally elated and thanked the Captain for relaying the good news to me. He informed me that I was to be ready by the following afternoon to have all of my gear packed and then be transported to the train station at the specified time. Orders for my transfer could be picked up in the morning.

I was one excited soldier and I told a few of my closest friends what was going on as I started packing my gear. They were all happy for me and said I'd better not try to pull my rank on them! As it turned out, the Army had foreseen the possibility of such a problem arising, so, after an enlisted man was commissioned as an officer, he would never be reassigned to his former Division, a wise move.

There was one other problem that I had to resolve: What to do with my motorcycle? I would never be allowed to ride it up to Ft. Knox from Ft. Benning. That would be highly irregular and place you out of the Army's jurisdiction and control. The only thing I could come up with was to have my buddy, Harry Fisk, also a good motorcycle rider, keep my bike until he could get a leave of absence, and then ride it to Ft. Knox for me. I'd buy him the gasoline for the bike, and a bus ticket back to Ft. Benning. This we agreed upon, although I wasn't too pleased with such a loose arrangement.

The next day arrived and I was driven to the train siding for loading, my friend Harry Fisk following on the bike to see me off. To my surprise there were only about ten of us men selected for OCS from the entire 2nd Armored Division. We looked at each other in utter amazement. On top of that, our car, which was ready for boarding, was a combination half passenger and half baggage car. A bright light went on in my head; let's lift the bike into the baggage section! I checked briefly with the conductor for his concurrence to let me do it, and he was a bit reluctant. I pressed a little harder; soldiers going to war, patriotic duty, and so forth. He finally yielded providing I drained the gasoline out of the gas tank. This we did, with the exception of a one-gallon reserve section which I quietly retained for when I got to the post at Ft. Knox. Four of us grabbed the bike, lifted it up into the baggage compartment, and leaned it against some barracks bags!

The trip was uneventful. We had a sack supper and traveled all night hunched over in coach seats. At least they were softer than the wooden bench seats in a 2 ½-ton GMC truck.

We arrived the next day along a siding at Ft. Knox, Kentucky. I had never given it any thought before, but of all the trains I was on during my military career, it seems we always took off from, or landed on, railroad sidings, never at a station!

We were greeted by a Sergeant and driver in a good old 2 ½-ton GMC truck. We were directed to load our baggage into the truck and climb in after it. All went well until we came to the motorcycle. It was duly unloaded and I went over to it, opened the reserve gas tank, and started it up. The Sergeant gasped, emitted a few choice epithets, and asked what he was supposed to do with that. I informed him he did not have to do a thing; just drive off in the truck and I would follow. This was out of sequence with his orders and he was really upset. He finally shrugged his shoulders, got into the truck and drove off with me following. My buddies hanging over the tailgate got a real kick out of this episode.

We arrived at the OCS barracks and training area and were told to unload the barracks bags and line up in front of them. I parked the bike in back of us with the barracks bags and fell into line. The Sergeant called our names in alphabetical order and gave us a barracks number and a bed assignment. We were then dismissed to take our gear to the assigned barracks, which we did. We were all split up into different locations. We finally figured out the real reason; we were positioned in ranks by our height. Thus, when we lined up in drill formation, you always knew exactly where you were to stand, and it made everyone's head form a straight line falling evenly from the tallest man to the shortest. Real regimentation! It did make for a uniform line of troops during full dress parades, however!

I parked my motorcycle in back of my barracks in a small grove of trees. The only problem I had was initially when the OCS Commandant called me into his office one day and informed me that officers did not ride motorcycles. I was surprised at his reaction but was not about to take issue with it. I did mention, however, that in General Patton's 2nd Armored Division Reconnaissance Battalion, the officers did ride motorcycles. He just grumbled something and let it pass. I was careful to only ride the bike during off-duty periods, and unobtrusively out the back exit of the training area, out of view of OCS headquarters. It was a means of having some time to myself to explore the countryside, and I enjoyed every minute of it.

The month of October was approaching, which would be the one year anniversary of the call to arms by Uncle Sam. At this point the evidence of any great enthusiasm or patriotic display in support of our troops was completely lacking. Much anti-war, isolationist-type propaganda was apparent on radio and in the news media. Therefore, it was not surprising to hear a great outcry from the National Guard troops of: "OHIO!" meaning "Over the Hill in October!" They were fed up with basic training, poor food, and boredom and they said they were only required to serve for one year. They wanted *OUT!* Congress reacted immediately and modified the bill to consider the National Guard the same as us "draftees"; you're in for the duration, Buddy; welcome! Conjecture had it that these flames of discontent were fanned by pro-Nazi sympathizers. Who knows, propaganda tricks such as this, and worse, were perpetrated upon all of us all during and after the war. They still are!

There had only been one OCS class graduated ahead of us. This meant that the curriculum had been refined and modified by the time our number two class arrived. We were kept busy, six days a week, full bore! Calisthenics, classes in Civil War and WWI

history, and the current German Blitzkrieg tactics of the day, gunnery, artillery indirect fire operations, forward observer techniques, armored vehicle maneuvering, forced marches in all kinds of weather, map exercises, night maneuvers, maintenance, close order drill commands, military courtesy and discipline, first aid, and on and on. It was quite a concentrated bill of fare. I well remember the difficulty some of the candidates had yelling out commands loud enough for the Company to hear while the Captain would be observing; we quietly would encourage the classmate to "sound-off", and we would follow his weak commands. It did work! We did have homework every night and tests were given periodically. There was no slack time during that three-month period. That is where the term: "90-Day Wonder" was coined after we graduated. There were no passes or leaves given during this time.

The food was typically Army rations, perfectly acceptable, no real basis for complaint. We were expected to keep ourselves in a neat and orderly manner at all times.

Each afternoon after the last class we would go back to our barracks, change into our fatigues (coveralls and combat boots), throw on our back pack, grab our rifle and "fall-in" out on the parade ground. Our drill Captain would tell us to follow him. He would take off at a trot and head across country, up and down hill and dale, at a pretty good pace. Incidentally, *he* did not carry a back pack or a rifle! We were in pretty fair physical condition to start with, but after this sequence five days a week, we really were in good shape.

An interesting development occurred during this daily cross-country steeplechase exercise. It will be recalled that we were lined up in the order of our height. The tallest were assigned to the 1st Platoon and the shortest were in the 4th Platoon. At 5'11" I was right in the middle at the top of the 3rd Platoon, almost in the 2nd. Well, the Captain always led off the steeplechase with the 1st Platoon, the long-legged guys; then followed 2nd, 3rd and 4th Platoons. Like any long column, even of cars or tanks, due to elasticity of spacing and movement between the units, the tail end of the column has to go like mad to keep up; this was called a "whip" in the column! That is what happened to the poor guys in the 4th Platoon. They were not short, perhaps 5'8", but they had to run the whole distance instead of jogging it. They never complained but put out their best every day. The 1st Platoon sort of looked down their noses a bit as they'd glance back and see the 4th Platoon struggling to keep up. On the last day before graduation, the 4th Platoon soldiers came up with a great idea: They asked the Captain if he could reverse the platoon order of march and let them lead the steeplechase, then the 1st Platoon would be last in line and get a taste of what the 4th Platoon had been experiencing all along. He thought that was a good idea and off we went. Well, you can imagine how hilarious it was. The 4th Platoon really took off and left the 1st Platoon in the dust! This was no problem for the rest of us in 2nd & 3rd Platoons. It was a great day for the 4th Platoon…we cheered them loudly on that one!

Some years later I read an Army report in which it was stated that a research study made of soldiers and their states of origin in America disclosed the following: *Those soldiers from the northeastern part of the country were the more adaptable to severe climate/weather conditions than those from any other area of the United States.* I can

believe that, having come from New Jersey. We had the complete spectrum of weather changes; cold winters, snow, sleet and hail; hot summers, high humidity, thunderstorms and high winds. We had sustained a large variety of inclement weather while growing up, so I guess I was fortunate to not be surprised or distressed when these conditions occurred while in the Army.

Sundays were the only free-time periods we had. We took this opportunity to relax, write letters home, and visit. It was most interesting to talk to the variety of classmates with whom we shared barracks living. There were other draftees as well as regular Army enlisted personnel assigned to OCS Class #2. Numerous divisions throughout the Army were represented. We had men who had served in the Panama Canal Zone, the Philippines, and Alaska. The stories they told were most fascinating. But the most memorable Sunday morning I recall was December 7, 1941, now known as "Pearl Harbor Day"! Someone had their radio on and the music suddenly stopped and the announcer broke in to report in an excited voice that the Japanese had just bombed Pearl Harbor! We looked around quietly at each other, and then everyone started talking at once: *"Where in Hell is Pearl Harbor??"* No one really knew. Then the next radio report told more about the situation. Pearl Harbor was the main Navy base of the Pacific Fleet located in Hawaii; ships were being sunk, airplanes destroyed, utter havoc! But why were the Japanese doing this to us? We hadn't done anything to them! Apparently we were as naïve as our own government was with regard to our knowledge of Japanese intentions in the Far East as well as the Pacific Islands. We were soon to learn more, and all kinds of conjectures were put forth as to where we might be sent to fight. At this point we were not even at war with Germany or anyone else, yet that had been the focus of our attention all along. We figured we would now have two choices from which to pick a theater of operations. As the record has shown, the United States declared war with Japan on December 8, 1941. This then gave Germany and Italy the opportunity to rattle their sabers too, and declare war on the United States on December 11th. The result was an immediate patriotic uproar here at home, and the support of the nation in the war effort suddenly was overwhelming.

Our OCS classes took a bit of a turn in tactics and a greater effort was placed on amphibious landing craft techniques and maneuvering, but there was no equipment to use for practice!

There were only a few more weeks remaining and there were no such things as a Christmas/New Year holiday break. We did get those two days off, but I do not recall any special celebrations at that time.

We were informed a couple of weeks in advance that we were in the Commandant's list for graduation and could order our officer's uniforms. I can still recall Levy Brothers men's store representatives coming out from Louisville to take our measurements. Then we were allowed to go in to their store the following week for fitting, getting shoes, a hat, and all the accessories. I liked the quality of the Hart, Schafner & Marx uniforms the best, and the price was only a little more expensive than the other brands, so I went for it. I was happy with the choice I made ever after. We were one excited group as you can very well imagine. Naturally the cost of all of this was put on the tab until the Army paid us our

uniform allowance, three months later, my second experience at purchasing something on a time-payment basis, the first being my motorcycle.

New Year's Eve was a time of celebration! Here we were, essentially having completed our OCS training, right on the threshold of being commissioned as officers in the Army, and everything was coming up roses. Well, for most, yes; for a few others, no! Very early New Year's Day morning, some OCS staff officers came in to our barracks for a bed check. They were looking for "passed-out" OCS candidates and of course, they found a few. Not only that, but one unfortunate fellow had not only gotten sick all over his bed, he also had a half bottle of booze under his pillow. This was an inexcusable offense according to OCS regulations and he was ordered right then and there to pack up his gear and report to headquarters. We never saw him again, and to think that he only had one more week to go for graduation! My Uncle Eddie's advice to me years ago was verified once again. Needless to say, we were all shocked and saddened at this development. It certainly made an impression upon us though, and the military concept of "conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman" was certainly driven home to us if ever there was a doubt.

Things were winding down at OCS now, our final examinations were completed, and we were given a choice as to our preference for assignment to an armored division. I was disappointed that I could not return to General Patton's 2nd Armored Division; the 3rd Armored Division was being formed at Camp Polk, Louisiana, which did not interest me at all; and the cadres of the 4th and 5th Armored Divisions were just being formed. I wanted to be in an active, combat-ready division, and therefore the 1st Armored Division here at Ft. Knox was my choice.

On the 7th of January 1942 we were ordered to dress in our new Class A uniforms and assemble in formation in front of our barracks. The Commandant and staff gave a few short speeches, we raised our right hands and took our Oath of Office, and we were then declared commissioned officers of the Army of the United States. We all cheered, 2nd Lieutenant's gold (brass) bars were handed to us, and we pinned them onto each other's epaulets or shoulder straps. We shook hands and congratulated each other. We had finally made it through the "College of Hard Knox" as we called it. We were also issued our insignia designating the branch of the Army to which we had been assigned. Of all things we discovered we were now to be Cavalry officers! I couldn't even ride a horse, let alone handle one. It just showed how far behind our military preparedness was. Here in 1942 we had not fully developed an armored branch of the service. That was to come later on in 1942. The Commandant then proceeded to tell us that we were to be guests of the Armored Force School at a dinner at the Brown Hotel in downtown Louisville. This was the most prestigious, high-class hotel in town and we naturally attended in our Class A uniforms, with gold (brass) bars! Dinner was superb, speeches by various Army dignitaries were brief and appropriate, and the entertainment was excellent. We had a great time and returned to Ft. Knox feeling like it was all a dream.

The next day we were issued our orders designating where we were to report at the conclusion of our ten day leave of absence. Mine stipulated that I was to report to the Commanding General of the 1st Armored Division right here at Ft. Knox. I was pleased to

receive this assignment to the home base of the Armored Force. The orders also changed my serial number from the original enlisted man's (#32066778) to (#0-451854). Fort Knox was established in 1918 and named after Maj. Gen. Henry Knox, General George Washington's Chief of Artillery. The 1st Armored Division was given the nickname of "Old Ironsides".

We cleared out our gear in foot lockers and barracks bags in short order. One of my friends had a girlfriend in Louisville whose parents were kind enough to let us store our gear in their basement until we returned to Ft. Knox. Someone had stolen my motorcycle in the meantime, so that posed no problem of storage. I reported it to the Military Police.

The Lieutenant Takes a Leave of Absence

Off to the train station for a ticket to Philadelphia. It was a different feeling traveling with some money in my pocket after a year of next to no cash. We had been given an advance on our monthly salary after graduation, which was most welcome.

The trip home was routine by now, and I believe I slept most of the way. My Uncle Elwood L. Sawyer was living at the old homestead now, helping Aunt Emma Sawyer financially in taking care of their elderly mother. This meant there were no spare quarters for me there at this time. Uncle Elwood was also very special to me. He was the mechanic of the family and taught me, as a boy, all of the basics of automotive repair and maintenance. He also taught me to drive a car at age 12. They were foot clutch and stick-shift cars in those days. He had been an Infantryman in WWI and had suffered physical disabilities due to poison gas exposure in the Ardennes campaign in France.

My Grandmother Sawyer was a dear little old Quaker lady, with an English background; Morgan, Lippincott and Stevens, and was very attentive to me as a small boy. She played checkers, Old Maid and Parcheesi games with me and was a fun person to be with. Grandma had difficulty threading a sewing needle, so I very proudly performed this function for her. Another thing I vividly remember is how she taught me to make tea. You get the water boiling, and then toss the tea into the water; you do *not* pour the water onto the tea! She said this was to commemorate our patriots of Boston Tea Party fame! I follow her injunction to this day. She also said if you add sugar and milk to your cup of tea, it is called Cambric Tea. Her husband had been killed in Mexico, thus leaving her with three children to raise; not easy. Helen, my mother, taught piano lessons and played the organ in church. Elwood had to quit high school and go to work for a plumber. Emma, the youngest, did eventually go to college and became an art teacher. I have fond memories of each and every one of them.

On the Durgin side, which was basically Scotch-Irish, my grandmother, Sarah Boal Durgin, had died when I was a young boy. She and grandfather Durgin had raised six boys: Frank, my father, George, Calvin, Charles, Allen (died as a young child) and Edward, plus a nephew, Calvin Boal Jr. We did not see much of my uncles as I was growing up because of their professional demands in other locations. Calvin and Edward were Annapolis graduates and had very successful careers in the US Navy during WWII. We did see them when they got leaves and came to visit their parents before the war.

I remember as a small boy, Uncle Calvin, who was in the Naval Air Wing at the time. He would fly over our house in the 1920s in a little old Navy biplane and show off for our benefit with loops, barrel rolls and falling leaf maneuvers. It almost did Grandmother Durgin in, she was sure he was going to crash! He didn't, he just waved over the side of the cockpit and winged off to the Philadelphia Navy Yard, and a safe landing.

My Uncle Edward was very special to me as I mentioned previously. In his travels throughout the world aboard Navy ships he invariably would send me postcards from various foreign ports. I'd show them off with pride to my classmates at school. Whenever he did come home on a visit he'd take me to some event such as a baseball game, or get me an ice cream cone. No wonder he was a favorite!

On one leave of absence he took me with him to the Philadelphia Navy Yard where he had to take care of some Navy business. While there he took me through a submarine secured to the wharf. I was really fascinated; torpedo tubes, periscope, and engine room and deck gun. I guess to him I was the son he never had. At the time he was assigned to submarine duty. I think he took me under his wing because he knew my Dad was away most of the time, so he was the pinch-hitter. Also, in retrospect, he was the youngest of the six brothers and my Dad was the eldest, so this made him almost a son to my Dad because of the age difference.

My grandfather Frank L. Durgin lived by himself in a big old house just a few blocks away. He opened his home to me and that is where I set up my headquarters during my stay. In a small town such as ours it was not difficult getting around by walking to visit friends and relatives. My sister Mildred was doing fine and had a good support group among her teacher friends which gave me a better feeling about her status.

A few days after I arrived in Palmyra, my father, Frank L. Durgin Jr. drove up from Washington DC to visit with Sis and me. He was very proud of his son's accomplishment and just had to make certain he showed me off to family and friends. I could understand his feelings and tried to be most obliging. We had a great time visiting with each other and Sis. He took us to dinner and it was the first time we three had been together since Mother had died. It was time for Dad to return to Washington and he insisted upon leaving his car at my disposal. How could I refuse an offer like that?! He took the train back to Washington and the arrangement was that I would leave his car at grandfather Durgin's and he would come up and get it the following week.

That car provided me with much-appreciated wheels which enabled me to visit friends farther afield. I dropped by one of my Army friend's house to tell his parents I had been with their son, Melvin Mays, a few months before and that he looked great and was doing fine. His mother was home and very pleased I stopped, but the father was working on the other side of town. She was so excited about this little bit of news that she begged me to go tell Mel's father too. I agreed, naturally. I had no idea that this small act of consideration would open the door to the most rewarding experience of my life!

I drove to the small machine shop where Mel's father worked and pulled up in front of the little building I recognized as Mr. Seel's Print Shop. Mr. Evans' machine shop was located in the basement. One must realize that this was truly a small town. Everyone knew, or knew of, most everyone else; it was most unusual by today's standards. I greeted Mr. Evans, the machine shop owner, and Mr. Mays. They were machining military parts for the Frankford Arsenal over in Philadelphia. Since Pearl Harbor, the attitude of the people throughout the country was quite a bit different than in 1940. Patriotism was back in style,

and as a soldier in uniform I was welcomed everywhere I went. This made me feel pretty special.

As I walked through the snow to the front of the building to get into the car, I heard a man's voice calling to me. I turned around and saw it was Mr. Seel. He said "Aren't you Frank Durgin's son?" I replied that I was. He then asked me to come on in out of the cold; he'd like to talk with me. By this time I was getting "visited out", but could not ignore the man. He had grown up with my mother and my father. So, I climbed the steps up to his printing facility and entered.

Now say what you will: Fate, chance, destiny, spiritual encounter, whatever comes to your mind, but the devious route I had taken this afternoon brought me face-to-face with the girl I was going to marry, although I did not know it at this time, of course. Mr. Seel introduced me to his secretary. I was duly courteous but could not avoid observing that she was a very attractive and shapely blond young lady with a pleasant voice, a beautiful smile, and sparkling eyes! We spoke animatedly and I answered questions put to me by both Mr. Seel and his secretary, whom I now knew to be Miss Virginia Tees. We laughed a lot and I could not resist looking at the third finger of her left hand; it was lacking any sign of jewelry! Now why would that be any concern of mine? Marriage was the farthest thing from my mind. There was a war in progress, I was assigned to a combat division, my chances of returning in one piece were uncertain; what am I doing? I'm crazy! Well, who said anything about marriage; at least she wasn't spoken for at that time! Full speed ahead! In retrospect, I must admit there was a definite aura of magnetic attraction about my future bride to be, and there still is! I looked at the clock and it was 4:40 pm. We had been visiting for 20 minutes and I wanted it to be longer, and alone. Why not ask? So I did; I said: "Mr. Seel, do I have permission to escort your secretary home?" He hesitated a moment and then allowed it was a bit early, but if she delivered some papers to Mr. Warner's insurance office, and dropped the mail off at the post office, he figured it would be alright. Zoom – off Miss Tees went to the cloak room and brought her coat back to me. I can only presume she wanted to check to see if I would have the good grace to help her on with it. I did! Her beautiful long hair would have been covered by the coat collar, so I gently lifted it over it. I could feel myself starting to swoon and attributed it at the time to the lovely aroma of her perfume. I admitted to myself later that the perfume was not the cause of my dilemma; I had been smitten by the young damsel! Speaking of later, it must have been twenty-five years later while reminiscing and enjoying the memories of those courtship days, my dear wife suddenly realized I had not asked *her* if I could take her home, but had asked her boss! I jokingly informed her that I already knew by the look in her eyes she'd accept my offer; and besides, just having been commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant, I had to first go through channels to get approval for my request! We've chuckled over that one ever since.

We bid farewell to Mr. Seel and walked through the snow to my Dad's car. She was impressed. The car was a relatively new 1941, forest-green Chevrolet coupe, and I've been partial to Chevrolets ever since. We took off and I made a U-turn at the end of the block. I was so distracted by the fair young lady to my right that I could not quite make the turn, so

I had to back up and repeat the maneuver. I thought she'd think I didn't know how to drive. It didn't faze her one bit; she had other things on her mind at the time, thank the Lord!

We completed the errands for Mr. Seel, dropped off the mail, stopped at a store to get some large drinking glasses for her mother, met a couple of friends, and then cruised slowly toward her home, taking the long way around. In that short period of less than an hour we covered the waterfront; it was a non-stop summary of each other's families, schools and friends. I wanted madly to have a date with my newfound friend "Ginnie" that night, but I was to be at Grandma's and Aunt Emma's for dinner that evening, and I certainly could not, or would not, stand them up. Ginnie understood and I made a specific date for the next evening, which incidentally was the last night I had remaining of my leave. How fortunate a circumstance to have one last chance! So the date of our first meeting has gone down in our mental book of historic events in our lives as Wednesday, 14 January 1942, and I could never forget it. The next evening I was to pick her up at 7:00 pm. Wanting to prove I could be true to my word and be on time, I parked around the corner until 6:59 pm, at which point I pulled up in front of her house. I got out of the car, walked up to the door and rang the bell. I idly wondered, as I walked up to the door, if I was going to be kept waiting as is usually the case when arriving at a young lady's door for a date. I found out immediately. No sooner had the bell tone diminished than the door opened and there was Ginnie in all her beauty, a big smile on her face, fully attired, coat on, and ready to go. Frankly, I was taken aback, but recovered quickly and told her she would do well in the Army, being ready on time. She laughed and invited me in to her home where she introduced me to her father, three young brothers and two young sisters. Her mother was sick at the time and thus missed the show. It was quite a cultural shock for me. My folks only had two children and my sister was the eldest by four years. Ginnie's family had six children, and she was the eldest, so you could say she had mastered her basics of family training at an early age!

I gave her several choices as to what, if any, show she would care to see. We finally settled on one entitled "Playmates" at the Earle Theater in Philadelphia; how appropriate! I cannot remember anything about it except the stage show which featured Phil Spitalny and his All-Girl Orchestra. How would one forget a name such as that? They were very good and played our kind of music from the 1930s, and of course by now the war-era songs popular at the time were also being played.

After the show I suggested we stop somewhere and get something to eat. Neither one of us was hungry; we just were too excited at the way we could talk, and that we did. We haven't stopped since!

We walked to the parking lot, got into the car, and just looked at each other. The temptation was too great, and I could not resist her any longer, so I leaned over and gave her a very gentlemanly kiss, which was reciprocated, I might add, with a very ladylike kiss! Suddenly, the lights, which were bare bulbs strung around the parking lot, flashed off and on! Had our kissing caused this? Startled, we looked around the lot. At the far end we saw the attendant standing near his guard shack. We were in the last car on the lot and he

wanted to go home – he wasn't interested in amorous couples, so we left. History will record that our relationship became more amorous as time went by!

We obviously were in no hurry to get home, so instead of driving back through the city and over the Delaware River Bridge to Camden again, I thought it would be more special to take the ferry boat across the one mile stretch of river. This was the mode we agreed upon, and as luck would have it, we just caught the last boat to make the crossing that night. Ours was the only car on board and there were only a few passengers who remained inside. We wanted to be different and alone together, so we stood on the front deck leaning on the security gates. The wind was cold but invigorating, and we laughed at everything, especially the thought that this was our first cruise ship. Actually, it was closer to Washington crossing the Delaware experience! Everything we saw was beautiful: the lights outlining the graceful curves of the suspension bridge cables, the stars overhead, and even the lights of the Camden skyline to our immediate front; and of course, my newfound love, Ginnie.

We drove off the ferry boat and started for home, but somehow the route home was not too direct. This would be our first and last date for months to come, and we didn't want the magic to stop. We parked at a nightclub outside of Haddonfield, NJ, Ginnie's home town. We decided we didn't need the din of a cabaret, so we just talked. We started homeward again and parked once more beside Strawbridge Lake in Moorestown, NJ, another quaint Colonial-era town, and talked some more. We made one more stop at the Riverton Yacht Club along the Delaware River. We wanted to dance on our first date, and we did, on the driveway to the yacht club. We played "Big Band" music from the car radio. Very romantic! By this time we had learned everything there was to know about family, friends, schools, attitudes, and each other. We were, to put it mildly, completely compatible, no doubt about it.

I looked at my watch and could not believe it was 4:45 am. I respectfully asked the fair young lady if she thought it prudent we head for home. She agreed and we arrived at her house at 5:00 am. I expected her father to be standing guard at the portal, but fortunately he wasn't. Ginnie and I parted with a heart-felt embrace and we vowed to stay in close contact with each other. She had to go to work in the morning at 9 o'clock and I had to catch a train shortly thereafter. I said I'd stop by the printing shop for a last goodbye, but she begged me not to because she felt she'd look dreadful. I said I couldn't believe that to be possible, but that if she were, I wouldn't care a bit.

That Friday morning I bid farewell to my grandfather, left Dad's car keys with him and the car in his garage, and walked over to the print shop. Yes, Ginnie was bedraggled, as was I, but still gorgeous. We looked into each other's eyes and there was a bonding we felt, and it has never left. We kissed and said good-bye once again and agreed we were in love with each other.

I walked to the station for the train, which took me to Camden, then to our "favorite" ferry boat across the Delaware in the opposite direction from last night to Philadelphia, got the subway train to the 30th Street station of the Pennsylvania Railroad, then a train to Washington, DC, and passed out during that leg of the trip.

My father met me at the Union Terminal in Washington and introduced me to a lady who was later to become his wife; her name was Gertrud Schicht and she worked in the same office as Dad. We ate lunch at the station and then my dad wanted me to go to a nearby photography studio to have my picture taken. I said I was certainly not in my best form to have a portrait made, but I obliged. The picture was hilarious; even though I tried to look alert, my eyelids drooped halfway over my eyes. Little wonder, I'd had no sleep to speak of in the last thirty hours or so. We had a good time together, short though it was, and I thanked him for the use of his car, and bid farewell.

I boarded the train for Louisville and Ft. Knox, arriving there the next morning, which was the day my orders specified I was to report to the 1st Armored Division Headquarters, Saturday, 17 January 1942.

Assignment: 1st Armored Division

I arrived at Headquarters, 1st Armored Division, prepared to report to the Commanding General as directed by my orders. I envisioned in my mind's eye how exciting it would be to report to a General, someone the likes of General George Patton! Well, one soon learns you don't ever go wandering into a General's headquarters, orders or no orders, expecting to meet him! There are various levels, known as the "Chain of Command" that one must traverse first. In this instance there was a Captain sitting at a desk in a room with a number of other military personnel also working at various desks. I couldn't even see a sign indicating a General existed in the area. But the Captain could tell a new Lieutenant when he saw one, and asked what my business was. I indicated I had orders to report to the CG of the 1st Armored Division. He said "Let me see your orders". I handed them over to him, he read them and said: "Oh yes, you have been assigned to the 1st Armored Regiment. With this he handed me a folder with all sorts of information regarding the BOQ (Bachelor Officer's Quarters), Officer's mess, Officer's Club, the Post Exchange, and Ft. Knox. He then informed me I was to report to the CO of the 1st Armored Regiment, Colonel John Davis, and described how to get there. It was at the far end of the parade ground, which was about three football fields long. Next stop, Regimental Headquarters, another Captain, more paperwork, and finally I was told I was assigned to the Maintenance Company of the Regiment and was to report to First Lieutenant Harry G. Foster who commanded this Company. I was given directions on where my assigned company was located.

The bottom line to all of this sequence of events was, I never did get to meet the General! I was a bit disappointed, but this was only the beginning of my training that a Second Lieutenant is truly the bottom rung of the ladder in the chain of command in military rank. The one positive aspect of this is that you are also given the greatest variety of duties to perform in the Army. Your life is never dull as a tank Platoon Leader of 24 men, either in garrison or in combat. You are responsible for their training, welfare, and behavior on and off duty.

I slowly walked from Regimental Headquarters to the Maintenance Company area taking in the details. There were older, but well-kept, brick buildings all around the parade ground perimeter. This was quite different from the tents or wooden barracks that had greeted me one year ago at Ft. Dix and at Ft. Benning. This was "Old Army" and the home of the Armored Force which had been activated here just eighteen months before on 15 July 1940. I was duly impressed and happy to be assigned to the 1st Armored Division, and the 1st Armored Regiment.

As I strolled along the row of brick, three-story buildings, I came upon a nicely printed sign in front of one section that announced: MAINT CO – 1ST AR. This must be the place! I walked up the steps with a little trepidation, not knowing just what to expect at this next confrontation. As I entered the building and glanced around I saw a sign over a doorway to my left which indicated: C.O. MAINT CO! I entered and there at a desk was the 1st Sergeant.

He immediately rose, saluted, and said: “Sgt. Steffen, sir, how can I help you?” This was all new to me, of course, because tables were reversed; I was used to being in his position! I recovered quickly and said: “Sergeant, I am Lt. Durgin reporting for duty and would like to be presented to your company commander”. He walked to Lt. Foster’s door and announced me. The Lieutenant bid me enter, I saluted and said: “Sir, Lt. Durgin reporting for duty”. He stood up, saluted, shook my hand, bid me sit down and said he had been looking forward to meeting me after reading my 201 File. That is the record of all the information the Army had on file relating to my background in civilian as well as Army life. I wondered what he had read in my record; was it good, or was it not so good? I guess few individuals feel truly confident when treading new and unknown territory such as I was doing at this point.

Our meeting was pleasant enough & we discussed a number of topics relative to the function of the Maintenance Company within the 1st Armored Regiment. He could sense I was exhausted and I explained I had traveled overnight from New Jersey and had not taken the time to check in at my BOQ as yet. He was most understanding and, noting that tomorrow was Sunday, suggested I get my personal business of settling in accomplished and report for duty at 6 am Monday morning, the 19th. I thanked him, saluted, and departed for the BOQ. I was very favorably impressed by his demeanor. He never failed me!

Walking along the sidewalk toward my newly assigned quarters was a welcome relief and I could feel myself starting to relax a bit. All of the necessary preliminaries had been taken care of and I could now start upon my second phase; the excitement and anticipation of a whole new experience!

The BOQ was not one of the older, original Post brick buildings, but one of the later vintage, standard WWII two-story wooden barracks-type structures. It was different from the standard GI soldier’s barracks, however, in that it was divided into individual and private rooms. They were small, but perfectly adequate to accommodate a cot, a desk, a chair, a bureau and a closet. Compared to what I had been provided over the past year, this was sheer luxury!

It didn’t take me long to get settled; there wasn’t that much to unload! I looked up a few of my fellow officers from OCS; we swapped experiences, went out for a bite to eat, laughed a lot, and looked forward to our respective assignments. Next, a shower, then to bed for a real night’s sleep.

Sunday was a “get organized” day. I did manage to locate a fellow officer, Lt. Stan Stetson, who was fortunate enough to have a car. He very obligingly drove me into Louisville to retrieve my foot locker and other baggage I had stored at a mutual friend’s girlfriend’s house during my ten-day leave of absence. This was a great help as one could imagine.

Upon returning to the Post we took advantage of this “free-time” period to wander around and get acquainted with the territory. We visited the Post Exchange, the very high-class Officer’s Club, the Country Club, the Officer’s Guest House and the Main Post layout.

It was all very interesting and made me feel more at home now that I knew my way around. During this tour I did learn one more thing. There was a very fine, imposing-looking, multi-floored brick building along one side of the parade ground. I was told these were the quarters for the Regular Army West Point graduate officers. No problem, they had earned the right. They had successfully completed a rigorous four-year military college program at West Point to become professional soldiers and therefore deserved to be suitably rewarded. Soon enough us low-ranking 2nd Lieutenants were introduced to the acronym "RHIP" meaning: *Rank Has Its Privileges*.

I returned to my quarters to relax a bit and get organized before reporting for my first day of official duty on Monday. I then began to read some of the literature I had received from the Division Adjutant. It was most interesting from an historical point of view.

Now that I was a permanent resident on the Post, the Military Police were able to locate me and informed me of the fact that they had found my stolen motorcycle. Apparently a soldier familiar with how to bypass the ignition switch had made off with it on Christmas leave and ditched it when he returned. It was only mildly damaged so I contacted my old boss in the motorcycle shop in Camden, NJ and explained what had happened. He told me to ship it back to him and the insurance would cover everything. This released me of a big burden; no more payments! Phew!

The 1st Armored Division experienced a rather painful growing-up period. During WWI a crude type of tank was used by the AEF (Allied Expeditionary Forces) in 1918 as an infantry support weapon. After the war, nothing was done to activate a mechanized force of any kind until early in the 1930s. Then there was a conflict of opinion as to how tanks should be employed; as an Infantry, or as a Cavalry support unit. As late as 1940 each of these arms of the service could only field a brigade of woefully inadequate armored vehicles. And to think, at this late date, Nazi Germany had already torn Europe apart with its blitzkrieg tactics using armored forces! Apparently this situation enabled the Army to press successfully to have Congress authorize the development of an Armored Force. Thus, on 15 July 1940, the 1st Armored Division was officially activated at Ft. Knox, Kentucky. Yes, it would appear now that we were truly a bit naïve in terms of coming to grips with the real life situation in Europe and the Far East as well as a bit remiss in developing a viable production capability.

Units were brought in to Ft. Knox from throughout the Army based upon their background in mechanization. The unit to which I had been assigned was designated the 1st Armored Regiment as stated previously. Its lineage went back to the US Regiment of Dragoons, 2 March 1833; then it became the 1st Cavalry Regiment where they fought in the Black Hawk Indian wars. This resulted in the design of the regimental insignia which incorporates a black hawk in its crest. Next was added the term "Mechanized" to their title when they acquired tanks in addition to their horses. Finally the old line Cavalry officers had to admit that the days of the horse cavalry were at an end and they became the 1st Armored Regiment. Their illustrious combat history was demonstrated by the 69 separate battle streamers attached to their regimental colors or flag at this point. During one of our

trips through California many years later I was pleasantly surprised to stop by a historical landmark designated Ft. Tejon and learn that the 1st Cavalry Regiment had been stationed there with the mission to guard the mountain pass while the early settlers made their way through the hostile Indian Territory.

The Cavalrymen certainly must have been a dashing and romantic group based upon a toast they would drink to their lady loves before riding off to battle: "May our arms be your defense, and your arms our recompense". This is the source of the third word in the title of this book. That toast certainly stated the case quite well, and I have tried to carry the tradition over into my married life.

As a point of interest, the now-obsolete term "Dragoon" probably had its origins from a short carbine carried by cavalrymen in 1554 in Europe. The legend has it that the muzzle was shaped like a dragon's head and thus spouted fire. The French introduced the mounted soldiers in 1585 and called them Dragoons. The British followed suit in 1661.

Monday morning arrived in due course and I was going to be present for reveille without a doubt. Wouldn't that be a terrible way to start your new company responsibilities to be late for reveille?! I fell in with the other officers of the company, the troops were mustered out, and all went well. After falling out, 1st Lt. Harry Foster introduced me to the other officers of the company. There was 1st Lt. Berry Stapp, 1st Lt. James Thompson, 1st Lt. John Shinn, and 1st Lt. George Simmons. These were all ROTC graduate officers about ten years older than I was who had just been called to active duty. This meant I was truly the junior member of the group and, as a brand-new 2nd Lt., was called, jokingly, a "shave tail". This was in reference to a young, unbroken mule in need of training. As a newcomer you took all of this good-naturedly. Was there a choice?

With my mechanical background I was assigned to be the Maintenance Officer of the company. This was right down my alley so I proceeded to the Motor Pool to see what I was getting into. My first contact was to meet the Maintenance Sergeant. That was quite an experience! I went into the shop area office to introduce myself and here was this huge, overweight, about 50 year-old Master Sergeant sitting at his desk, smoking a cigar and eating some snacks. He saw me, struggled to stand up, and I told him to be "at ease". I introduced myself and told him I was to be the new Maintenance Officer. He was quite a character and a jokester to boot. He tested me good-naturedly and I proved I was his match, especially when it came to matters relating to vehicle care and maintenance. I let him know I had been a mechanic in the 2nd Armored Division. He was pleasantly surprised. I showed him how I wanted his routine maintenance check files kept and we discussed engines, tracks, guns and supply needs. His name was Sergeant Brutscher and we became mutually supportive of each other as time went on. I planned maintenance classes for the men of the company to attend and I'm proud to say we developed into a top-rate Maintenance Company. Apparently this was not enough to keep me busy so Lt. Foster also made me the Mess Officer responsible for assuring the kitchen crew did its job. The next assignment was as Supply Officer, and that was a real demanding task. In all of these cases I must say that the old-line regular Army non-coms and soldiers were quite professional and experienced, and it certainly made my job much easier. We had a platoon of M3 light tanks

of which I was also assigned as the tank platoon leader. Our mission was to serve as protection for the Maintenance Company when in a combat zone. The tanks were equipped with a 37 mm gun in the turret and two 30 caliber machine guns, one mounted co-axially with the 37 mm gun in the turret, and one controlled by the assistant driver in the bow; not a very threatening arsenal!

These 1930s vintage light tanks were powered by a radial, air-cooled Continental aircraft engine modified with Guiberson cylinder heads that enabled it to operate on diesel fuel. This was most unusual in itself, but starting was even stranger. A blank shotgun shell was inserted into a chamber, locked in place, and then the tank driver energized a switch and fired the charge. This in turn compressed a heavy-duty coil spring, the explosive pressure was then vented, and the spring recoiled through a gear train that caused the engine to turn over. This often had to be repeated several times to effect a start. In cold weather, starting was extremely difficult. When one tank finally got started, it was used to tow the other tanks to jump-start them. This was quite a time-consuming process.

The armor plate was only thick enough to resist 50 caliber bullets. The sections of armor plate were fastened together with rivets. Our 1st Battalion crews learned to their dismay during early encounters with the Afrika Korps in North Africa that an enemy projectile could shear off the exterior rived head and drive the body of the rivet into the crew compartment. This made for a very effective projectile in itself. Not too good a design! It did make us wonder if our tanks were subjected to any significant tests at the Ordinance Proving Grounds, such as the adequacy of armor thickness, armament, and other critical design considerations. Fortunately our later model tank had the armor plate welded together; no rivets!

Training consisted of reveille, calisthenics, vehicle maintenance for regimental vehicles, gunner range, tank training and maneuvers on the reservation, inspections, and Division Reviews. I also served as a Courts Martial recorder on occasion. As calisthenics officer each morning, I noticed there were many older non-coms and regular Army soldiers in the Company who were having difficulty keeping up with the younger men, so I would put them in the rear ranks to let them slack off a bit. The younger, new arrivals were up front where I could keep a good watch on them. Fortunately, I was in my prime at the time at 23 years of age. In retrospect, I wonder where all of my fellow officers were? I guess a 2nd Lieutenant wasn't expected to ask!

About this time the Federal Government purchased large acreages around the eastern borders of the reservation to provide much needed room for the expanding armored school and division activities. The displaced farmers were ecstatic because the farmland was poor, rocky, red clay soil, and the reimbursement they received in return enabled them to buy much higher quality farmland elsewhere. We tankers had a ball! We could tear all over the place now, going through barns and houses with complete abandon. The first day out all was going well when I noticed that one of the tanks in my platoon was missing. I radioed to each tank commander to report his position and return back to my Command Post. All was well with one exception. Sgt. Pease, my Platoon Sergeant, ruefully reported that his tank was stuck in the basement of an old red farmhouse! We all laughed

about this one, moved over to where he was, and attached cables to his tank and pulled him out. When word got up to the Commanding General what some of his wild cowboy tankers were doing to the old farm houses, he was furious! An order came down forbidding any further house and barn damage.

In addition to the above duties, periodically I would post 24-hour guard duty with my platoon within the Regiment, and once I had to be on duty in Louisville, 35 miles away, on payday night. That was a real experience, working in conjunction with the MPs and the local police trying to keep some semblance of order among thousands of GIs who were intent on having a good time at any cost, and trying to keep them from getting into serious trouble. Not easy!

Another brief assignment one day was to get my platoon together and drive our tanks over to the Ft. Knox Gold Depository in a simulated emergency tactic that was timed by an umpire. If the required elapsed time figure was exceeded, you had to repeat the run until you succeeded. With my seasoned crews there was no problem. With sirens blaring we certainly scared a lot of vehicles off the roadway ahead of us! The depository was where all of the gold bars were stored that were the fiscal support of the US Treasury Department. This concept is a thing of the past now. We have been in the deficit spending mode for so long that apparently no one is concerned about such things as fiscal solvency. We operate on faith that all we need to do is rely upon an act of Congress to print some more paper money to keep us rolling, and increase taxes to keep the system going! I wonder where all the gold went? I learned years later that the actual "Declaration of Independence" was also stored here for safe keeping during WWII.

During my free time most evenings and Sundays I maintained contact with my fair young damsel in Palmyra, NJ by letters and an occasional telephone call. Our letters were becoming a bit more personal as time went on and it was quite evident we missed each other's company and had truly fallen in love!

During March of 1942 the orders that came down from Division Headquarters, plus the resulting activity that ensued, indicated we were getting ready for a big move. There was no word of a maneuver, and the situation in the Pacific Theater was grim, as was that in Europe. We were ordered to become combat ready within the month. Dispose of all items of equipment not designated on the TO&E (Table of Organization and Equipment). We called in local auction dealers from Louisville to bid on the items of company non-military equipment: baseball and other sporting goods, pool tables, a piano, sewing machines, ping-pong tables, .22 caliber rifles, and so forth. The moneys from the sales went into the Company Fund which was used for parties and special events for the good of the Company at large. The Company Fund received its money from a percentage of the Post Exchange profits each month and it was diligently accounted for by the Company Commander and his Executive Officer, plus the Regimental auditing office.

There were two items that I could not throw into the "junk" pile; one was a specially made throw rug that was placed in front of every man's footlocker. This designated the unit's insignia. The other item was a 3"x4" brass plate that was riveted to the Cavalry light tank turret, vintage 1930. I acquired them as a keepsake of days gone by.

With the obvious preparations for a move of some sort, Pacific or European Theater we knew not which, I wanted to see my love before I departed, but no leaves were being approved at this time. Accordingly, I contacted her and invited her to be my guest at the Ft. Knox Officer's Guest House on April 2nd through the 7th. Much to my delight she accepted my offer. It turned out to be a hilariously wonderful experience for us both, with me trying to fulfill my demanding military duties on the one hand, and balancing our private times together on the other.

My True Love Comes to Ft. Knox

Ginnie left Palmyra on April 1, 1942 for the 800 mile train trip to Louisville, Kentucky. I had written her previously to inform her of the arrangements I had made. As it would not be possible for me to take any time off in the middle of the day to meet her train in Louisville, I sent her meticulous instructions on what to do. After all, this would be the farthest she had ever been from home – and alone! I felt like a daddy looking out for his little girl! My instructions to her were to get a taxicab at the Louisville train station and have the driver deliver her to the Hotel Henry Clay. Then she was to check in at the lobby desk for a room I had already reserved for her. I would meet her at 5:30 pm.

Everything worked according to plan. I had been able to borrow my friend, Lt. Stan Stetson's car, bless him, and then drove the 35 miles into Louisville. I went into the hotel lobby and asked the receptionist to please connect me with Miss Virginia Tees' room, which she did. As soon as I heard that lilting voice on the other end of the line, all I could think of was "It's really true! She's here!" I told her I would meet her in the lobby at the elevator exit. I slowly walked toward the elevator wondering if I would recognize her. How silly! Of course I would, I hoped! But then, would she recognize me? I was trying to remain calm, yet getting more excited as I watched the floor monitoring hand above the elevator door slowly drop down; 5, 4, 3, 2, (lobby)! I waited for the door to open. The elevator was full, but right up front, out stepped my "True Love"! Yes, I certainly recognized her, even in her fancy new hat and travel attire. We each gasped, embraced each other and kissed – and laughed! What a reunion! Our feelings toward each other had only gotten deeper, and it had been 10 weeks since we had last been together!

My next thought was to get us something to eat, so we went into the hotel coffee shop and ordered something, but we were both so excited, and tired, that we had to leave most of the food. At this point I had to inform her that I was due back at the base by 7:00 pm for some sort of special night maneuver. I disliked having to act like I was trying to rush her along, but that's the Army. She understood, and was most cooperative as always, so we picked up her luggage, checked out of the hotel and "hit the road"!

We drove out of Louisville on good old Highway 31W, passed through quaint little towns like West Point, climbed Muldraugh Hill and entered Ft. Knox. We didn't stop talking the whole time (and we haven't stopped since!) By this time it was about 6:55 pm, and I just drove up to the front of the Officer's Guest House and apologetically informed her she'd have to go in and sit in the lobby until I returned. She was still most understanding.

I dashed on down to Regimental Headquarters, bailed out of the car and double-timed up the stairs to the assembly room which was full of other officers. I had just slipped in under the wire! Our regimental commander, old "Black Jack" Davis (I don't know how he got the name) told us we would be seeing combat shortly and he wanted to be sure we were up to performing night reconnaissance and scouting missions properly. Accordingly, we would be given a printed format to follow with instructions thereon, starting at the

front door of Regimental Headquarters. We would go from check point to check point where the different requirements would be signed off and the whole procedure would be timed. "Any questions? Who would like to be the first to start off?" I immediately stepped forward and said "I would". All of the others seemed to be reluctant to go. I had a real good reason to get out of there. My goal was the Officer's Guest House and the young lady awaiting me therein!

The exercise was pretty basic. Find the North Star, estimate distances, find the check points by going north, east, south or west certain distance and so forth. For an old 2nd Class Boy Scout this was duck soup! I made the course in record time and passed all of the hurdles. Back to Regimental Headquarters, get Lt. Stetson's car, and drive back to the Guest House. I entered the front door and went into the lobby area and immediately saw the back of my sweetheart's blond head as she was sitting on a sofa busily knitting away while awaiting my return. I slowly walked up behind her and quietly said, "What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?" She jumped a little, but knew who it was. I came around in front and we greeted each other.

I checked her in at the front desk and then took the luggage to her room. An officer was allowed to reserve a room for a guest for three nights only. As Ginnie was going to be at Ft. Knox for 5 nights, I pulled a fast one and had Lt. Stetson sign her up as his guest for three nights. It worked!

By this time we were both hungry and the only place open at this time of night was the diner down by the Greyhound bus terminal, just a short drive from the Guest House. So off we went, talking, laughing and enjoying the beautiful spring evening and the smell of the flowers in bloom along the way.

We parked the car and walked into the diner and of all people, who should we see but a fellow Company officer Lt. Johnny Shinn with a young lady. We approached them, introduced ourselves, and asked if we could join them. Of course we could. It turned out the young lady was Johnny's wife, Minnie. She came from Columbia, South Carolina. We talked, ate, laughed and had a wonderful visit. We remained close friends the rest of our lives.

In the course of our visit we learned that Minnie had also arrived at Ft. Knox this same day. The problem was that Johnny had not been able to get a room at the Guest House because all were taken. What to do? We drove back to the Guest House and talked to the clerk to see if there was anyplace else where we could possibly find sleeping quarters. The clerk finally suggested we check with the Army Nurse's barracks, which we did. Sure enough, there was one room they used for their overflow that was available. This was good for only one night. In the meantime, the Guest House clerk did some more checking and came up with the idea of using a back-stage property room as an interim measure. It was pretty crude and Johnny said sleeping on a single army cot with his wife wasn't exactly the best of accommodations, but they were young and survived it.

I returned Lt. Stetson's car to him the next day with a full tank of gasoline and many thanks. I really appreciated the favor he had granted me.

Our military and personal time schedules had to be carefully coordinated. As previously stated I had plenty of military duties to perform starting with 6:00 am reveille followed by mess hall monitoring, calisthenics, motor pool maintenance classes, gunnery range duty, tank field maneuvers, supply room monitoring, ad infinitum. At the same time we were preparing to ship out. In the meantime my sweetheart was spending time with Minnie Shinn, doing the things all young ladies do; shopping at the Post Exchange and visiting with other young ladies at the Guest House.

In the evenings when finished with the day's occupations, I would drag myself back and we would go to supper, then head out to a movie, or just walk and talk. It was a fantastically wonderful change from my normal military duties. Fortunately the Guest House was only a short walk to the BOQ, so this made it very convenient.

Easter Sunday, April 5, 1942, Ginnie and I had lunch in the Guest House dining room with Lt. Ted Armstrong and his wife Priscilla, another fine couple. In the course of our eating and visiting we learned where each other lived. When he learned our home state was New Jersey, he couldn't resist confiding in us that we would be seeing each other again very shortly. It seems he was assigned to the Quartermaster Battalion and was deeply involved in getting trainloads of supplies and equipment shipped back to Ft. Dix, NJ! Wow! We were sworn to secrecy of course because this type of information was not to be discussed carelessly. By this time our war efforts were in full swing and reports of sabotage activities abounded. We thanked him and said it would be a secret kept in our hearts. We were overjoyed as can be imagined and made our parting on the morrow much more acceptable! Imagine, here we were in the threshold of parting, yet knowing we were shortly going to meet again!

The days just flew by and before we knew it the time to part arrived. Before saying farewell, I did propose marriage to the fair young damsel, and would you believe it, she accepted! But the date would have to be decided at a later time.

Johnny and I walked our young ladies to the train station, which was only a short distance away. We put them on board and stacked their luggage in the overhead rack. They had traveled light so this was no big problem. As an historical point, I noted as ladies matured, their travel luggage also increased!

The conductor called out loudly down the aisle, "All non-passengers off, train's moving out!" The engine whistle tooted, and the train started to move. I gave one more parting kiss to Ginnie and ran for the door. I leaped off the step in the direction of train movement fortunately, and was able to attain the same speed as the train. Thus, I did not fall flat on my face as I was waving to my sweetheart who was in the window laughing hysterically at my feat of showmanship! Once a Cavalryman, always a Cavalryman, or at least a motorcyclist!

So off Ginnie and Minnie went to Louisville to catch their respective trains home. It had been a wonderful experience, one I shall never forget. The good part of the parting was the knowledge that I would be back in home territory with her again. We were both looking forward to our reunion for which we felt very fortunate.

Ft. Dix, New Jersey, Here We Come Again

By this time we knew our ultimate destination would be somewhere in the European Theater of Operations, but just where we knew not. At least it did not appear we would be heading for the Pacific Theater. How lucky a break for me, I was heading back to an Army post that was only 25 miles from my sweetheart's family!

There was 24-hour activity at Ft. Knox getting all of our supplies, equipment, vehicles and men prepared for the move to Ft. Dix, New Jersey; what a project! The day finally arrived and we got the troops loaded up into their tanks and support vehicles and drove down to the railroad loading platforms. The tanks and vehicles were driven onto flatcars and secured with steel cables to the beds of the cars. Personnel were loaded into coaches. This took quite some time. There was a kitchen car up front followed by coaches for the troops, then flat cars for the tanks and trucks. Unfortunately it started to rain, a cold rain, and it was required we have a guard stationed on each flat car to assure there was no chance for saboteurs to try to impose damage on our vehicles. Well, this posed one heck of a problem. The guard contingent rode in the last coach. Every time the train pulled over onto a siding, the guards on duty on the flat cars were relieved by fresh guards in the last coach. The reason we were pulled over onto sidings frequently was to allow passenger and commercial freight trains to pass us. Perhaps that was a blessing in disguise. The wet guards would come inside, get warm and eat. Now guess who the Officer of the Guard was? Correct, 2nd Lieutenant G.L. Durgin was it! So be it. At least we had raincoats and rain hats, but it was unpleasant duty to have to sit on the flatcar bed, between a couple of tanks, and be pelted by a cold rain. Well, nothing lasts forever. I always went out and changed the guards personally.

There was only one untoward event that took place during the trip. On one stop just outside Philadelphia, as I was changing the guard, I came to the second flatcar and the young guard there was hysterically shouting about something. His eyes were big and he was talking incoherently. I finally calmed him down to the point where he excitedly pointed to the undercarriage and said: "Broken wheel, broken wheel!" With my flashlight I did discover a huge section of the wheel flange was missing on one wheel. I immediately sent the man into the coach and called for the conductor. He came out and I showed him the problem. He agreed we were darned lucky the car hadn't jumped the track. Based upon past experience with these trains shunted off for military tasks, I'm sure they had not been maintained as well as they should have been had they been used for a more lucrative commercial enterprise. I may be unduly harsh in my judgement, but so be it.

Because of the wheel issue, the next step was to slowly continue our trip, which now included a side trip to the Baldwin Locomotive Works in Philadelphia down near the Delaware River. The flatcar with the defective wheel was moved onto a siding and disconnected. It was to be repaired there and brought up to Ft. Dix later on. The other problem was that we could not leave the tanks unguarded, so we had to have a Sergeant

and three enlisted men to handle a 24-hour guard detail. They were given cans of "C" Rations and their bedding rolls, and were bid farewell as our train pulled out.

Our train, less the one flatcar, continued on its journey. Now this was home territory for me. We followed the Delaware River up to North Philadelphia, over the bridge at Delair, NJ, then up through Moorestown, Mt. Holly, and finally Ft. Dix. I had a terrific urge to jump train in Moorestown, which was only five miles from where my sweetheart was; temptation, get thee behind me!

We set the men up in their new quarters, organized the Mess Hall and then off to our BOQ which was just another GI barracks. However, we could shower now and have a clean, warm Army cot to sleep on. Heaven! Well, almost; as soon as I was able to locate a pay phone, which was about ¼ mile off the corner of the reservation, I called my sweetheart. She sounded just the same as she always had; happy, upbeat and excited! We talked for some time and I told her I was extremely busy and patience would be required until I could get time off to come see her. This was painful. Fortunately she understood the problem, as always, which was a great relief to me.

By this time the war effort in the United States was moving forward at a rapid pace. As more and more young men were called into the service, the voids were being filled by women in the workforce and lovingly called "Rosie the Riveters". They worked in shipyards, automotive factories, locomotive works, aircraft factories, tank/armament factories, and support industries.

The men and tanks did catch up with us several days later, with a new wheel on the flat car. They informed us they didn't have to eat their C Rations after all. The "Rosie the Riveters" made such a fuss over them they had all the home cooking they needed! They had a ball. They wanted to know if they could be transferred back to the Baldwin Locomotive Works for guard duty during the war; Request denied!

Now we had to keep the troops busy; quite a project! We had to follow a strict regimen of close order drills, calisthenics, gunnery and maintenance. We were told we were to be shipped overseas, but we were not told of our destination. We were aware of the world situation and it did not appear to be too good.

Since the first of January, 1942, the Germans had made great inroads into Russia and North Africa, and Europe was essentially in their possession. The Philippines were under Japanese control as well as large portions of China, Southeast Asia, and many South Pacific islands. All of this bad news put greater emphasis upon field training exercises. The possibility of our Division being shipped out to somewhere overseas was now a certainty.

Moving my light tank platoon out into the reservation area for gunnery practice and cross-country maneuvering brought back vivid memories of my childhood. My father and Uncle Elwood would take me with them on hunting trips out into the "Pine Barrens" of New Jersey. This was a large area in the center of the state that was a sandy, generally swampy, lowland region covered with small, scrubby pine trees. It was not a fertile region. However, it was a good hiding place for wildlife. Speaking of hiding places, this was also a

great place during the Revolutionary War for the unobtrusive location of small iron smelting furnaces where cannons and cannon balls could be made. One such place nearby was Hanover Furnace. Our Boy Scout leader, Mr. Branson, used to take our summer camp troop here to dig through the slag piles for souvenir pieces. The source of iron for the furnaces was called bog iron ore. It was formed in the numerous swamps and bogs in the area by the reducing action of decaying vegetable matter on soluble iron salts. The quality of the iron produced was certainly not good by today's standards, but it served the purpose for use in Revolutionary War weapons.

Another interesting fact we were taught was that the people who lived in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey were called "Pineys" by the nearby residents. I knew from the infrequent contact we had with them when hunting as a youth that they tended to be very reclusive, spoke with a rather unique accent that was foreign to us, and gave the definite impression that they would rather we get lost and leave them alone. By talking to residents in the small villages around the periphery of the Pine Barrens the story goes that the "Pineys" were descendants of the original Lenni Lenape Indian tribes, the British "Redcoats", as well as mercenaries like the Hessians, who had deserted their armies and hidden out here during the Revolutionary War. I'm sure this is possible, and it's also very likely this included some Colonial army deserters as well. In Colonial America at this time there were elements of the citizenry sympathetic to the British Crown and these were called Tories. The Colonial "rebels" if you will, or pro-revolutionary advocates, were called Whigs - those in opposition to the King of England. It can therefore be understood that a deserter from either side could be "protected" by civilians of either sympathy. What better place to hide inconspicuously than in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey? Naturally, some of the local young ladies of the area looking for a mate were instrumental in promoting the beginnings of a whole new culture, the "Pineys"! In this respect, such village names as Atsion, Batsto, Chatsworth, Indian Hills and Whitesbog come to mind and to this day are rather unique and interesting places to visit.

Back to training and special exercises, one in particular warrants description. It was called "bore-sighting", the purpose being to assure the tank gun and the telescopic sight were in perfect alignment. We had to await the occurrence of a full moon. When the moon was visible in the center of the gun barrel, the telescopic sight was adjusted accordingly by aligning the cross-hairs temporarily added to the end of the gun barrel with the telescopic sight cross-hairs.

Our gunnery range practice sessions were long and intensive. The men were trained with 30-caliber rifles, 30- and 50-caliber machine guns, 45-caliber Thompson machine guns, 37mm and 75mm tank guns. After days of being exposed to the sharp crack of these hand weapons and the blasts of the tank guns, severe headaches and ear-ringing were the end result. My ears still buzz and ring to this day!

The dating game played between my sweetheart and I was rather hectic. The only free time available was at night. Whenever Ginnie could pry a car loose from anyone, she'd drive up to Ft. Dix and pick me up. We'd go to a show or to the Benjamin Franklin Hotel in Philadelphia for a late dinner and dancing, or just visit. These times together were precious

to us. On one Saturday we went to Philadelphia to S. Kind and Sons jewelry store. My father and mother had given me a diamond ring on my 21st birthday. This was a traditional thing to do back in those days, if it could be afforded. Well, what better thing to do than to have this made into an engagement ring? Better that than go to war with it! We were both excited, the ring was ready a week later, and it was presented to her on the bank of the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia right then and there! The date was 25 April 1942.

Wedding Bells Are Ringing!

Back and forth between Palmyra and Ft. Dix, Ginnie and I got together whenever possible. In the meantime the lure of this engagement ring really started my young lady's bonnet to twirl. We discussed marriage. My first reaction was yes, but. Here I was getting ready to go to war, and who could know the outcome? Was this a fair thing to do, or should we just remain engaged? The resounding decision was: Let's get married and keep the faith that all would work out for the best in the future. And so it was. Within five days after the decision my beloved set the wheels in motion and we finalized our commitment!

We had to go to Camden one night to see a doctor who was considerate enough to give us an after-hours appointment for our mandatory blood test. This was a funny experience in retrospect. I'd had so many shots in the Army that I wanted my innocent little girl to know there was nothing to be afraid of, so I would give my blood sample first so she'd know how quick and easy it really was. Fine, rolled up my sleeve, blood sample taken, Band Aid applied, voila. She very bravely walked over and sat down to have blood sample taken. Everything went smoothly; the doctor filled up the vial with her blood, and removed the needle. She was fine! But, would you believe it? As soon as I saw *her* blood going into the vial, I started to get dizzy and felt that I was going to pass out. The doctor saw my distress and told me to lower my head toward the floor. The big, brave, macho Lieutenant was a pass-out when it came to viewing his sweetheart giving blood. We did have a good laugh about it afterward!

The next step was to go to the Palmyra Town Clerk's house to get our marriage certificate. By this time it must have been 10 o'clock or later, and we *did* awaken him. We could see him coming down the stairs in his nightshirt and night cap. It looked like something out of an old time movie! All he needed to complete the picture was to be holding a little night lamp! His name was Mr. George Spencer and we were most apologetic. We introduced ourselves and I mentioned our mothers' and fathers' names, and of course he had known all four of them over the years. Fortunately we were from a small town and family names meant a lot. We explained our dilemma, my being in the Army and only having limited time off to get the necessary paperwork completed quickly and so forth. He was very nice and had us step into his parlor, went to the old-fashioned desk and filled out the necessary papers. We signed them and his "official" stamp was placed thereon. We paid the fee and were off again. Ginnie would then drive me back to Ft. Dix and return home. It's fortunate we were young enough to withstand this demanding regimen; well, almost. Yes, we both were exhausted most of the time.

On the Saturday before the wedding we were able to take a quick trip to S. Kind and Sons again to get our wedding bands. They must have been pretty good quality because we still have the same wedding bands, and each other.

A few days before the wedding, one other task that had to be accomplished if we were going to have *any* honeymoon, and that was to get some money. Well, all banks

closed at 3 pm on weekdays, and they were closed on weekends of course. I remembered a friend of my Dad who was President of the Cinnaminson Bank and Trust Company in the next town of Riverton, NJ. His name was Mr. Herb Kemmerle. We timidly drove up to his house about 9 pm, as usual, knocked on the door and he answered. I introduced us and of course, he knew our mothers and fathers, too; small-town connections again! He invited us in and we told him we were going to be married the following Saturday and would like to request a loan from the bank of $100. Now in 1942 that was big bucks! He was very nice to us and had us fill out the necessary paperwork right there. I said that Ginnie could come to the bank the next day it was open and pick up the money. He said that wouldn't be necessary and counted out the money right then. Imagine trying to do that nowadays. Well, the war was on, he knew our families, and he saw the need for doing a good deed. We were certainly thankful he did and we let him know it. Yes, the debt was duly repaid in the future by Ginnie. I certainly wanted to be sure my new little wife was taken care of in my absence! As I recall I was making about $250 per month as a Second Lieutenant. I made out an allotment to Ginnie of $220 per month and kept $30 for whatever I might need, which wasn't much. I was even able to buy trinkets along the way to send home from overseas to my bride. I also assigned her as the beneficiary for my GI Insurance in the event it should be issued, which I hoped that it wouldn't be!

The rest of the week before the wedding was a busy one for Ginnie. I was doing my full-time Army duties at Ft. Dix and was completely out of it. She arranged for the church and minister, the flowers, the cake, her Maid of Honor, and the reception details. Wow, what a job.

The magic day arrived, 16 May 1942, a Saturday. My company commander wanted to be the Best Man, and my fellow officers wanted to be the ushers, and so it was. I also requested my boyhood friend Jim Wynkoop to be one of the ushers. As luck would have it, that very day was scheduled for a Division Review at Ft. Dix, wouldn't you know it? Lt. Foster, my CO, had to go to Regimental Headquarters and get permission for us to go to the wedding and miss the Division Review. He left one company officer back to take charge, Lt. Berry Stapp. Permission granted; that was a close one!

The Regimental Commander, Colonel "Black Jack" David, was a good old boy and even loaned us his command car and driver to deliver us to the wedding, a very big help. We piled in; Lt. Foster, Lt. Thompson, Lt. Shinn, Lt. Simmons and, of course, Lt. Durgin plus driver, and off we went the twenty-five miles to Palmyra. We were late getting started and the wedding was at 4 o'clock. We zipped along at a lively clip, arriving ten minutes before the hour. We bailed out, my buddies in at the front door of the Palmyra Central Baptist Church, and me wandering around to the back door figuring that's where the minister would be. As I had never met him before, I figured I needed a little introduction to the procedures to be followed. Yes, there was the minister, S. Dan Morgan, and a very nice gentleman. I introduced myself and asked what I was supposed to do. He smiled and said: "Well, at this late hour, just watch me and listen as we go along to any instructions"! That sounded easy enough. Needless to say, with all the rush to get to the church on time, find the minister, plus the anticipation of getting married, I was a pretty out of breath young man!

The minister stepped out of a door onto the podium in front of the congregation and signaled me to follow him. I looked out upon the assembled guests and couldn't believe my eyes! The church was packed solid and there was standing room only in the back, which was also full! My fellow officers and my good friend Jim Wynkoop as ushers were lined up and our little Maid of Honor, Carlotta Lirio, shyly walked down the aisle and stood up front awaiting the arrival of the bride. In the congregation were my family members and Ginnie's very large family, plus so many friends it was difficult to comprehend.

Next, the organist played the well-known prelude "Here Comes the Bride", and the whole gathering stood to see the beautiful young bride walk down the aisle escorted by her father, Milton L. Tees. It was a most beautiful sight to behold. She was the loveliest bride that I had ever seen, and I was having a hard time computing it all. Was this really happening? It was! The wedding ceremony was beautiful and we were pronounced husband and wife. We were officially "bonded" at last; not bad considering we had met only four months before!

We had our reception right there at the church, cut the cake, had pictures taken, and got lots of hugs and kisses from friends and relatives.

After the reception we left the church amid a shower of confetti and ran to the car provided by my good old buddy, Jim Wynkoop; we had been friends since third grade. Typical of my Army buddies, they'd rigged up an explosive smoke bomb to a spark plug wire so it ignited when the engine was started. The engine then missed badly so nothing would do but I had to go out and straighten the ignition wires out. After all of this commotion, the car was put into gear, clutch pedal let out, and nothing happened! I had to get out and check the car again. You see, they figured any Armored Officer worth his salt could solve such a maintenance problem. I did! My "Buddies" (?) had jacked one rear wheel off the ground, thus no car movement. I was ready to beat 'em all up. I pushed the car off the jack, got back in and prepared for the next event! They took us around town with horns blowing in the usual post-wedding fanfare, and then we drove to Ginnie's house where her folks had set up a very lovely buffet for family and wedding participants to enjoy.

During this phase of the festivities Ginnie, Carlotta, Lt. Foster and I drove down to Camden to visit Ginnie's Aunt Trude Tees who had just delivered her first baby. Aunt Trude had been kind enough to let Ginnie wear her wedding dress and it was a perfect fit, so she wanted to show her how she looked in it. Well, this was a very thoughtful thing to do, but it didn't dawn on us until we saw the wide-eyed expression on the nurses' faces when into the maternity ward trots a newly wedded young lady! Was she ready to deliver? We all got a kick out of this!

After the visit we drove over to a professional photographer's studio for an official picture-taking session, then back to the party in Palmyra.

After several hours of mixing with the group, Ginnie changed into her going-away honeymoon clothing and we bid farewell to our friends and guests. By this time some of my buddies were having fun on this rainy, but beautiful day, floating their Army caps down the flooded gutters. Their blood alcohol content was getting to be pretty high. I'm glad

they had a reliable Corporal driver to get them back to camp safely. We left them to their own ends!

We were exhausted, of course, so we felt the best course of action was to check in to our favorite Benjamin Franklin Hotel over in Philadelphia. We only had that one weekend off for a honeymoon. Actually, half of the weekend was already gone by this time. I was due back at Ft. Dix by 6 am reveille Monday morning. Another complication was the fact that gasoline rationing had just gone into effect that very weekend. You were allocated 5 gallons of gasoline per week for your automobile. Emergency vehicles and doctors were exempt from this restriction. Ginnie and I have always been fortunate in being at the right place at the right time. It just so happened that a friend of Ginnie's family operated a gas station. They presented us with several gas ration coupons which gave us the opportunity to get a little farther out than Philadelphia. My good friend Jim Wynkoop had filled up the gas tank of his car before he loaned it to us. What a wedding gift…thanks Pal!

We both loved the ocean, having been taken there by our families as children each summer. So, why not? Let's go to the ocean for our second honeymoon night? We selected Seaside Heights because that was the closest resort to Ft. Dix, and it would make it easier to return Monday morning.

We drove across the familiar Pine Barrens countryside and reached our favorite Atlantic Ocean seashore by afternoon. At this time of the year it was not difficult to find an oceanside apartment; the summer vacationers had not flooded the resorts at this early stage. We took a blanket, spread it out on the beach, and just relaxed… it seemed like for the first time since we had met. The weather was beautiful and warm but the ocean was still too cold to go bathing. The beach was completely vacant, it was ours to enjoy, and we did. We talked about our wishes for the future, our family to be, how many children, but that was so far into the future we decided to just take our lives one day at a time. We laughed, talked about our high school experiences, our teachers, our friends, we just went on and on; it was a beautiful "getting to know each other" period. We were just ecstatically in love, and we wanted it to remain that way always.

One lone stranger came along the beach, an old shepherd dog. We befriended him and gave him some cookies we'd brought with us. He enjoyed them and then went on his way.

There was one other interesting observation we made there on the beach. At the high tide water mark, there were large deposits of oily seaweed and sand. It must be recalled that the German U-boat threat was a very real one, and Allied shipping all along the coast from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to the Florida Keys was being attacked. The oil residue from the sinking of all types of ships is what washed up onto the shore. The US Navy and Coast Guard were attempting to fend off these attacks, but the equipment we had at hand at this stage in the war was pitifully inadequate.

Ginnie and I folded up our blanket and walked back to our cottage. We did drive down to a little restaurant for supper, then came back to try to get some early sleep in anticipation of getting up at 3 am to head back to Ft. Dix for reveille. As we were preparing

for bed there was a knock on the door, and the landlady told us the Block Warden had told her the window shades were not drawn closed in her second floor apartment. That was our room and we were remiss. We did not know it, but *all* lights showing through windows of buildings in view of the ocean had to adhere to the "Blackout" regulations. We apologized and closed the curtains. This rule was quite valid because German U-boats could use these lights to get a more accurate reading as to their positions. We certainly were naïve, weren't we?

3 am came only too soon so we packed our gear and headed west toward Ft. Dix. It was quite foggy driving across the Pine Barrens, which is not unusual this time of the year, so it took longer for the return trip than I'd planned. We pulled up in front of the BOQ and, as luck would have it, I had missed reveille by just a few minutes and my officer "buddies", who were just returning, surrounded our car and made a big "welcome home newlyweds" fiasco right there. They shook the car, laughed and shouted; they put on quite a show. I got out of the car and a very embarrassed Ginnie scooted into the driver's seat, put the car in gear, tooted the horn, and away she went back to good old Palmyra!

I was not reprimanded for having missed reveille; as a matter of fact I think the CO was surprised at my having returned that day at all. But remember, I was an officer and was supposed to be attentive to duty. Well, I made up for any deficiency because we worked long hard hours preparing for moving out in the near future.

One never forgets one's wedding day, and I'm no exception. In looking back it is difficult to realize that my beautiful bride was only 20 years old; and I was 23. We thought we were so mature, and I guess considering our mutual experiences up to that point, we must have been. But it sounds so young now!

Overseas Duty – Preparation and Movement

Excitement started mounting around Ft. Dix at this time in mid-May, and apparently it was not only related to my getting married, either. Rumors were rampant about possible destinations, but we were warned to not believe, or talk about, any of them.

At this time we were again subjected to a whole new series of immunization shots; one in particular I'll never forget was for Yellow Fever. We thought this might indicate we were headed for the Pacific Theater of operations. No one really knew at our level of operations, and also we were too busy preparing for our ultimate movement.

A whole new experience occurred one day when we were visited by General Daley, the Commander of Ft. Dix. He was having a ball asserting his authority over us on the reservation at all times. Not only was he a nuisance, but he actually hampered the performance of our mission of preparing for our moving out. He would show up unexpectedly anywhere on the base with his staff of five or six field officers and accost any personnel in his way by shaking his riding crop in their faces and demanding the immediate response of a salute. When you saw him you could not just walk up to him and salute; you had to run on the double to him and then salute. It sort of reminded me of some of Hitler's shenanigans with his Nazi underlings.

The best course of action was to avoid him if you could. The word soon got around when he was in the area and everyone who could, just lay low.

One day a memorandum came down from the General listing all of the deficiencies he had noted in our Division. One of them that really hit home related to the mess halls and the number of flies present. Well, it's hot weather at this time of year, there were no screens on windows and doors in the mess hall, so what could be expected? His memo very directly stated "flies will not be permitted in the mess halls"! I couldn't believe it! I was the mess officer of course, and therefore I was responsible for adhering to the direct orders of the General. It was laughable to think such an order was meant to be taken seriously, but I had to do something. My only solution to the problem was to pass the order along. I red-lined the specific order on the memorandum and placed a red arrow in the margin and a small notation saying: "FLIES PLEASE NOTE"! I then tacked it to the entrance to the mess hall that night. Well, the troops got a big kick out of the whole thing next morning, and the memo remained there until the next afternoon when the General's entourage passed by. When the General saw his desecrated memo, he flew into a rage and wanted to know who was responsible for it. No one knew of course because no one saw who tacked it to the entryway! The memo got torn down and that was the last we heard of it. Someone higher up must have told the General to get with it!

I suspect the General was one of those frustrated professional soldiers who were classified as over-age in grade, which meant he had reached the end of his career and was not going to be promoted any farther up the chain. He was gently phased out by retiring, as was the case with a number of the older officers considered to be unfit for combat duty.

At the same time we received a most distressing bit of information from our 1st Armored Regimental CO, good old Col. "Black Jack" Davis, stating that he too would not be accompanying us overseas. He wrote a very fine memorandum to us describing his feelings and told us to support our new CO, Col. Peter C. Hains, as we had done for him. He commended us for our professionalism and wished us God's protection in our services abroad. We were all saddened by this news, but life marches on. Our new CO was a fine gentleman for which we were also most thankful.

While all of this activity was going in, I tried every way I could to keep in touch with my dear wife. I walked to the corner store just off the Post to make calls at the pay phone, as there were no phones on the base connected to the outside world. Once we made a furtive date to meet at the Walt Whitman Hotel in Camden. Ginnie took a bus from Palmyra, and I caught one from Ft. Dix. We met for a late dinner and a one night stand at the hotel. Any time together was a gift from Heaven! We missed each other even *before* the big separation. Well, we tried as best we could to let each other know of our undying love, and still do. I had to get up real early to catch a bus to get back to Ft. Dix before reveille. The bus came from Philadelphia and was already loaded with service personnel heading back as I was; standing room only! I made it back in time, but as always, I was getting pretty exhausted. My good old Supply Sergeant took me under his wing one day and said: "Lieutenant, you've got to get some rest. I have a mattress hidden in the back of the Supply Room. Go back there and flake out. I'll be sure no one knows about it." I was sorely tempted to take the Sergeant up on his offer, but I just couldn't. I thanked him profusely, told him how much I appreciated his concern and said we would make it somehow. All of my men were a neat bunch of guys. We looked out for each other as best we could, a tribute to *real* soldiers!

The time for moving out was drawing very close now and I got one more signal that I'd better move rapidly if I hoped to get one more glimpse of my little bride. The lines of communication were difficult to connect. There were no lines open on the base except at Division headquarters, which was out of my loop. Fortunately, Ginnie worked at the Palmyra/Riverton telephone office and her co-workers made a wonderful "mission control" for me. I would call there from my faithful phone booth just off the reservation and ask to speak to her. If she was on duty, fine. If she was not, I would say I would return the call in 15 minutes which would give them time to try to track her down. She always left word where she could be reached. She could either call me at the pay phone in the meantime, or I could contact her at a number she would leave with her operator friends. It sounds a bit cumbersome, but it worked.

I could not possibly take time off to go to Philadelphia, so I suggested she try to line up a room in the quaint little village of Pemberton, just off the southern boundary of Ft. Dix. Bless her heart, she managed to get us a room in a little old Revolutionary War-era house on the main street of Pemberton for the night of 28 May 1942! She drove up there in her Uncle Rasche's car, and I got a taxi to deliver me there from Ft. Dix.

We spent a beautiful night together knowing this was the time of parting. We repeated our wedding vows, said a prayer together, and went to sleep. Five AM came too

quickly, and the taxi I had pre-chartered was due in 15 minutes! Shave, dress quickly, embrace my wife, and down the stairs I went and out to the waiting taxi. I glanced up at my sweetheart standing there in the window looking like a lovely little angel, waved, threw her a kiss, got into the cab and off I went. It was a strange feeling not knowing when we would meet again, but I just *knew* it would have to be! Life is so unpredictable, isn't it?

Preparations were hectic and frantic. We had very tight schedules to meet for getting our trucks, tanks and crated equipment to the railroad yard. Word was received that on the next day, 30 May 1942, the 1st Armored Regiment would march to the rail head, board coaches, and head for our debarkation destination. All window shades in the coaches had to be drawn so any "spies" along the way wouldn't suspect a troop movement! Good grief, they knew already! And it was stifling hot and humid in those closed-up coaches, and there was no ventilation! We certainly put our troops through unnecessary miseries at times. That's why a GI has to be tough!

We rolled into Hoboken, NJ after dark, got off the train and boarded ferries which took us across the Hudson River to the troop ship docked in New York Harbor. We passed within a short distance of the Statue of Liberty, which was all dark. Everything was blacked out, so it gave one an eerie feeling. We got off the ferry boats and lined up along the pier awaiting the proper loading sequence by Company. As each man started up the gangplank his name was checked off a troop-loading manifest by a military personnel clerk.

We were directed to our quarters by a member of the boarding crew. This became a bit confusing as the men had to carry a large barracks bag and miscellaneous equipment down the steep steel stairs. We kept descending deeper and deeper into the hold until we reached our assigned level, "F" deck. It so happened this was two decks below the water line, not a very encouraging thought! We learned also that we were aboard a peacetime luxury liner known as the "Oriente". There was no evidence of luxury now. We also learned that this was the sister ship of another peacetime luxury liner, the "Morro Castle", which caught fire and was scuttled at Asbury Park, NJ in 1934. I only hoped the "Oriente" was at least a bit more fire resistant! The "Oriente" had been converted to a troop transport carrier assigned to the Merchant Marine with a name change to "Thomas H. Barry". All of the accoutrements of a luxury liner had been gutted. All deck levels had now been fitted with triple-decker bunk beds. As good fortune would have it, the officers were assigned to double-decker bunk beds in what had formerly been cabins above deck. In all fairness to the troops, a company officer was required to be on duty with them on "F" deck at all times. We would rotate this assignment. If one thought too much about being two decks below the water line, you could start to become a little claustrophobic, like being in a submarine!

Another surprise in store for us was being informed that, due to severe shortages of troop ships, we were "double-loaded"! In other words, we had an estimated 6,000 troops on board and only 3,000 bunks. A schedule was formulated whereby half of the troops stayed in their bunks or below decks for 12 hours, while the other half had to stay out on deck for 12 hours. At high noon a switch was made, then again at midnight. By this means each group had some daylight, some darkness, and some bunk time! Sound like a neat

arrangement? It was horrible! Had the weather been mild, things would have gone better. But, the North Atlantic in late May and early June is NOT the Caribbean!

Finally, in the very early morning hours of 31 May 1942, we pulled out of New York harbor under cover of darkness and headed out to sea. We still had no word of our destination but I could tell by observing our relationship to the North Star that we were headed generally northeast. This would mean we were traveling parallel to the shoreline of the New England states. I could also see there was a Navy destroyer escort on either side of us.

As previously noted in discussing Ginnie's and my too-brief honeymoon visit to Seaside Heights, New Jersey, it was quite evident German U-boats were having some considerable successes in sinking Allied shipping. That night we pulled in to a fairly large harbor where a number of other ships were at anchor. We learned from the deck hands that this was Halifax, Nova Scotia. We were apparently to remain here while a convoy of troop ships and freighters was consolidated prior to being escorted across the Atlantic by US Navy destroyers as protection against possible German U-boat attacks.

It wasn't until after the war that I learned just how serious this U-boat threat was. The Germans were having considerable "kill" successes from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to the Florida Keys, plus the shipping lanes south of Greenland and Iceland to Ireland, our route of travel. In 1942 the U-boats sank 21 merchantmen in January, 28 in February, 50 in March, 50+ in April, 102 in May and 111 in June; pretty serious threats. Yes, June was the month when we crossed the Atlantic!

Life aboard ship was tedious to say the least. Having the troops lining up for mess call was a disaster as can be imagined. Every effort was made to have the troops adhere to a firm schedule. It didn't work. The end result was they just wandered around and ate when they could and what they could. The mess kitchen just had food prepared at all times and the troops ate when they could get to it; pretty awful! The bathroom and medical facilities were over-extended and deplorably inadequate.

The officers at least had the dining room of the old "Oriente" at their disposal. Dinner was the main meal of course; breakfast consisted of juices, coffee and sweet buns, and lunch was cold cuts and breads. One thing of interest was the biscuits we got for dinner. We noticed little critters running around the biscuit basket and we found out quickly, if you dropped the biscuits on the table, more would run out! We broke the biscuits into pieces and tried to maintain a vegetarian diet by that means.

There were six of us officers eating dinner at one of the tables near the dining room entrance when one of my friends pointed toward the open double door and said: "What's that about?" I turned around to look and there were the ship's Captain, General McQuillen, Colonel Hains, and a Navy officer standing there and pointing toward our table. I thought this could have nothing to do with us so I turned back to the table. One of my friends then said, "That Navy Officer is pointing at *you!*" I turned around again and looked more closely and I couldn't believe my eyes! It was my Uncle Eddie, the Navy Lt. Commander, my favorite uncle, and he was smiling and beckoning for me to come over! Well, of course I got

up and went over. With all of that brass out there I didn't know whether to salute, genuflect, or what. Uncle Eddie solved my problem by extending his hand. He shook it warmly and had me come out into the foyer with the other top brass. What he said was that he was trying to talk my Commanding Officer into letting me go overseas in the convoy on *HIS* destroyer! When the trip was completed, he'd return me back to the troop ship. WOW! That sounded fantastic! However, Uncle Eddie said my CO could not agree to that because I had duties to perform here with my own troops. Uncle Eddie said that he understood this, but as a second choice could he take me over to his ship for the evening and show me around? The CO said that permission would be granted only if he could be assured I'd be back on board before the "Oriente" moved out. Uncle Eddie told my CO that the convoy would not leave until he gave the order, and that he was the Convoy Commander. So, he assured the CO that I definitely would be back within a couple of hours. Wow! Pretty heady stuff for an Army 2nd Lieutenant! With the assurances just given, my CO gave permission for me to visit the Convoy Command ship. I saluted the CO and thanked him, and Uncle Eddie guided me toward the open access door at the side of the "Oriente". My buddies were sitting at their table agape taking all of this in. I turned around with a big smile and gave them the thumbs up sign!

We climbed down a rope ladder and into the waiting dinghy. The bosun guided the small powered dinghy over to the anchored destroyer. We pulled up alongside, climbed up another rope ladder, and then Uncle Eddie told me to follow what he did. The bosun's mate piped him aboard, he stepped onto the deck, turned toward the American flag at the stern of the ship, and saluted it. I followed suit, all very proper of course!

I asked my Uncle how in the world he found me aboard a troop ship. He said "Easy. I knew elements of the 1st Armored Division were going to be in this convoy, so I had one of my officers contact the Port Authority in New York to check the shipping manifest. This they did and indicated you were aboard the "Oriente"- Amazing!

Uncle Eddie took me on a tour of his destroyer, a relatively new ship of the Mayo Class. He took me to the bridge, introduced me to some of his staff, showed me his quarters just off to starboard rear of the bridge, and then we went below. He took me through the crew's quarters and mess area. He told me the vessel was longer than a football field and I obtained the following data after the war:

Length: 348'

Beam: 35' 6"

Draft: 10' 2"

Displacement: 1,630 tons

Horsepower: 50,000

Speed: 37 knots (approx. 43+ mph)

Guns: (4) Five inch

AA guns: 50 caliber

Torpedo tubes: (10) 21”

Hull plates: ¼” thick

Construction completed: 1 August 1940

As can be observed, destroyers were constructed extremely lightweight and fast and were rough riding in heavy seas. The sailors dubbed them “Tin Cans”!

Uncle Eddie showed me the engine room; very compact! Next came the ammunition stowage racks and the gun turrets. Compared to our 3” tank guns, these 5” destroyer guns looked impressive. Too bad we didn’t have them in the desert warfare of our future!

We walked from stem to stern and back, me asking all sorts of questions as we went. Finally the time had come to say goodbye. Before I left, Uncle Eddie said: “I know you can keep a secret; you’re an officer and a gentleman. Observe that unusual-looking screen affair on top of the mast. It’s called RADAR, which is an acronym for Radio Detection and Ranging. It’s a brand new direction-finding device developed jointly by the British and US. It can locate enemy surface ships at great distances in the dark, in the fog, anytime. This will be the first convoy equipped with it and I’m very excited about it.” I was duly impressed, thanked him for the tour and assured him the “secret” was secure. He also informed me that we were due to land in Belfast, Ireland, but knew nothing of any future assignments, of course. He said it would take about ten days for the crossing because we would be taking a zig-zag course to evade German U-boats. Also, we could only go as fast as the slowest freighters in the convoy, which would be about 10 mph. I was traveling on a “slow boat to Ireland”!

Uncle Eddie summoned his bosun and we climbed down into the little dinghy again and headed off for the “Oriente”. I climbed up the rope ladder, turned around, thanked him for the tour, saluted my uncle, and said I’d see him after the war. He responded in kind. The little dinghy turned and headed back to the Niblack. Now *that* was quite an experience!

I reported back to my commanding officer and spent the rest of the evening describing my experiences to my fellow officers. As I was on duty that night down of “F” deck, I entertained the troops by telling them of my visit to Uncle Eddie’s destroyer, but made no mention of RADAR or Ireland. At least I knew now we were heading for the ETO (European Theater of Operations) and not the Pacific!

In the very early hours we could feel a rumbling throughout the hold and figured we were being positioned in the convoy ready for departure. This was truly the first time since I left my sweetheart in Pemberton that I had laid back in a flat-out position and had an opportunity to think a bit and meditate. So much had happened in such a short space of time, it was almost overpowering! In just the past five months I’d been commissioned as an Army officer, met the girl of my dreams, gotten betrothed, married her, and now off to war and who knew what! Rather breathtaking I’d say!

My reminiscing was short-lived. The troops were now aroused and wanted to see what was happening on topside, so up we went. It wasn't our turn, but how do you stop hundreds of GIs wanting to do something in such an unregulated environment? Hell, let 'em go! We piled up on deck and were able to see the dark hulks of other ships in the harbor maneuvering into position. All I could think of was the massive logistical responsibility Uncle Eddie and his officers had directing each ship into its position and maintaining convoy control. Slowly, we left Halifax harbor and entered the North Atlantic. There were no lights apparent, but by keeping perhaps 400-500 yards apart, the ship's navigators, with the help I presume of coded radio instructions from the convoy commander, and his RADAR, we were able to fan out into the open sea without colliding.

Daylight came and ships were visible fore and aft and on both sides. The destroyers were knifing back and forth throughout the convoy and everything seemed to be under control. Periodically on order of the convoy commander, the ships would change course either to port or starboard. As the days passed, the temperature dropped noticeably. I could tell by the route we were generally following that we must have been passing close to the final resting place of the Titanic which collided with an iceberg and sank thirty years previously. I was trusting we weren't going to collide with a German torpedo and become bunk mates!

While wandering around the shop getting more acquainted with my new environment, I happened to see a sign on one of the doors: "ENGINE ROOM"! It was two decks below and reached by a long staircase. I climbed down the steps and was approached by one of the ship's crew. I introduced myself and stated that I was interested in having a brief tour of the engine room if that was possible. The man introduced himself as the ship's engineer and was quite hospitable. I felt very lucky. He took me all around the area and explained that the vessel was driven by two gigantic electric motors, about 20 feet in diameter that were attached to two 24" diameter drive lines to the twin propellers. The steam boilers were fueled with coal that was ground up and mechanically fed into the furnaces. The steam generated by the boilers was diverted into steam turbines which drove the massive generators which powered the electric motors. I had a wonderful time asking questions and seeing all of the ship's propulsion system. I thanked the gentleman profusely and wished him good luck on this and all other trips during the war. He wished me the same. I bid him farewell and returned to my more mundane duties on "F" deck.

Pay day in the Army was the first of the month. As we were moving out of Ft. Dix on May 31, and we were in a disorganized state on June 1, the pay didn't trickle down until Halifax harbor. At least the ship was stable and quiet. Well what do you think happens when soldiers have funds at hand with no towns nearby in which to spend them? Of course, they play poker, shoot craps and just have fun. This was fine, it occupied their time. An interesting aside to all of this was an encounter I had with our Company Clerk, Ben Edelman. He was a neat guy, a diligent and attentive soldier, and funny. He came from Chicago and was apparently quite "street-wise" in terms of pool hall and card room knowledge. No, he was not a card shark in the derogatory/cheating sense, but he was sharp in terms of keeping track of the numbers of cards and suits played. Anyhow, he was so good at winning in poker games that he amassed quite a bundle of money in a short

time. He would not play cards with his own buddies in the company, but would join poker games throughout the ship in other units. Pretty soon he didn't have the room in his mattress to keep all of this booty safely, so he came to me one day to explain his dilemma. He feared, and justifiably so, that it would be stolen while he was asleep. He asked me if I would be so kind as to secure it in the Purser's office until we landed and then he could send it home by way of a money order to his parents after we reached Ireland. You see, enlisted men were not permitted in the area where the Purser's office was located. It was gratifying to me that he put that money in my trust. It worked out just fine. I do not recall the total amount accrued by the end of the trip, but it was hundreds of dollars. We met years later and he told me that the money was used to finance the post war wedding to his sweetheart and started them off together. Our families still visit and stay in contact with each other to this day.

About this time the convoy must have arrived in the vicinity of lurking German U-boats. The Navy destroyers were darting about in a flurry of activity and dropping depth charges. One was dropped about 200 feet or so to the rear of our transport and the shock waves actually caused the stern of our ship to lift slightly. Of course by now the whole shipload of GIs knew my uncle was their convoy commander, so whenever a destroyer came near us a giant yell, like one would hear at a football game, would rise up to the heavens: "Go get 'em Uncle Eddie; sink the SOBs!!"

The seas started to get rougher and seasickness became an epidemic; I wasn't missed either! The latrines were overflowing and the 50-gallon drum trash cans located throughout the ship became the backup. To add to the nausea, there was one other feature that bears mentioning. Down on "F" deck we were unfortunate enough to have to share our sleeping quarters with stocks of crates of frozen chicken in the aisles. There was not enough room in the kitchen freezers to hold the large quantities of food required for the overload of troops aboard ship, so our quarters had to be cooperative. These extra crates of frozen chicken were loaded aboard in New York harbor and I'm sure the intention was to utilize them immediately. Of course, this never happened. They were still there when we arrived in Belfast. Now you can imagine how long those chickens stayed frozen! Within a couple of days they had thawed and the bloody juices were leaking all over the "F" level deck. This, plus the end results of seasick soldiers and the condensation of body sweat against the ship's hull plates, made an unholy mess to say the least. Nothing could be done about it, and it wasn't. I think this caused more repulsive sickness than the rough seas. After being in Northern Ireland for a while, word passed through the Division that there had been a certain number of deaths that had occurred during the transatlantic passage. These bodies were put into the freezers and transported back home. I wouldn't be surprised; seasickness, dehydration, lack of adequate medical facilities, over-crowding, and so forth. The poor soldier just lay in his bunk and succumbed to the elements. His buddies probably thought he was sleeping. It was a disastrous experiment and, thank goodness, was never repeated.

The day finally arrived when we could see land in the distance, at last! By this time we were in "safe waters" as it were, and the British Navy took over. At this same point I was summoned to the bridge where the communications officer handed me a message. A

message! For me?! Who in the world would be able to send a message to me? My wife? That was my first crazy thought! It turned out to be a message from Uncle Eddie, of all people! He indicated he was sorry but would not be able to see me in Belfast. He was wishing me good luck in whatever my military duties required and said he was looking forward to seeing me after the war. I was really stunned! The signalman asked if I would like to respond. I said that I would, of course, but how? He said: "No problem, we can't use radio, but we can use our powerful signal light. I was still amazed but wrote a brief note to the effect: "Thanks for a successful convoy escort, good luck in your future naval duties, and I'll see you after the war". The signalman then took me out to the port extension of the bridge and opened up a large enclosed searchlight with shutters on it, and pointed it toward a destroyer way out toward the horizon. This ***had*** to be Uncle Eddie's! The signalman took my message, then opened and closed the shutters rapidly, I presume using Morse code. He completed the message, awaited a response from the Niblack, turned back to me and said: "Message delivered, sir!" I thanked him and went back to my quarters thinking how wonderful we humans can be but also how positively inhuman at times. Why?

A few more hours of maneuvering into position were required because this was an enormous harbor. We notified the troops to get their gear in order in preparation for disembarking in Belfast, Northern Ireland. All the troops could say was: "Ireland? What are we doing in Ireland?" Well, no one at our level knew, but here we were! I must say, this was quite an introduction to my first ocean cruise. The date was 10 June 1942.

Northern Ireland (Ulster) "The Land of the Leprechauns"

The "Oriente" pulled up to a dock in Belfast, was securely moored in place, gangways were lowered, and the troops disembarked in an orderly fashion. We made it successfully! Hooray! The troops were happy to be standing on terra firma once again. We were marched off by Company units and mounted up into good old Army 2½-ton GMC trucks, the trusty transport vehicle for the duration of the war. These were used by all of the Allies in all countries, both during and after the war; true work horses!

Almost two years previously, 10 July 1940 to 31 October 1940, the Battle of Britain was in full swing as the Luftwaffe was bombing London and all major manufacturing cities and seaports. Belfast also suffered heavily from these bombing runs and the damage was still quite evident.

In due time the trucks pulled out in column formation and headed for our new bivouac area. We were all a bit startled by the fact we were driving on the "wrong" side of the road! In "Jolly Olde England" and its colonies, everyone drives on the left-hand side of the road. This took some time for us to get used to. This was only the first of many new customs we would be introduced to in the land of our ancestors.

As we drove through Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland, the buildings and housing units were similar to some pictures I had seen of areas in London; brick and stone construction, all of similar architecture. As we headed south into the countryside it was quite beautiful in a pastoral sort of way. Rolling hills of farmland with cattle and sheep grazing in the pastures and small stone and timber cottages scattered throughout. Occasionally a small village would come into view and the Mourne Mountains rose in the distance. The lush green vegetation made for a very pretty scene. The primary mode of transportation for the locals was by foot, bicycle, or the use of a small, two-wheeled cart pulled by a small horse. It was an open vehicle with the driver facing forward and the two passengers sitting back to back facing outward. They called it a "Jaunty Cart". Nothing was big and there were no cars or trucks available except Army transports.

Our ultimate destination was to be a quaint little Irish village named Downpatrick. It was 21 miles south of Belfast. It was the residence of ancient kings of Ulster, even before the arrival of St. Patrick in the 5th century. It is claimed he is buried beside the cathedral in Downpatrick, but I think this same claim is attributed to other churches as well.

The column of GI trucks unloaded us at a group of Quonset huts (the British called them Niessen huts) next to a race track. An interesting location we thought, but why here? We learned that it was more correctly designated as a Steeplechase track when used in peacetime. We were obliged to use it every morning for our own calisthenics. Great! A mile and a furlong loop over hedges, ditches and up and down hills. Also at the end of the run there was an 8 foot high barricade to climb over. It is fortunate we were young. Guess who was designated as the calisthenics officer? Right you are, the youngest one!

We were stationed here for about five months and wondered why we were here at all. The word finally trickled down that our primary mission was to replace the British 8th Army soldiers who were desperately needed in North Africa to combat Field Marshal Rommel's Afrika Korps which was threatening to overrun the Suez Canal, and they almost did!

This raised another question. Why do we have to be in Ireland at all? It's a part of the British Empire, isn't it? Well, yes and no. As additional questions were raised we got the true story. Ireland has been a divided country for generations. It seems that historically, wars are perpetrated over religious, ethnic or territorial differences. In this case, Northern Ireland, or Ulster, is basically Protestant and Southern Ireland, or Eire, is basically Catholic. Since 1921, Eire has been separated from England and is independent. They want Northern Ireland to belong to them. As such, they organized a militaristic group called the Irish Republican Army, or IRA, based upon the paramilitary groups of 1916 when Eire was in a state of rebellion against the Crown. At the time, Germany was supporting them with guns and ammunition to use against the British during the WWI period. It is therefore understandable that England did not want a recurrence of this situation in WWII. The possibility that Eire would allow German U-boat "pens" to be built there was no idle conjecture. Furthermore, the existence of German spies working in conjunction with the IRA was a definite possibility. Eire was technically neutral, so Germany promptly assigned an ambassador to Dublin. Therefore, the Americans of the 1st Armored Division were the "stand-ins" for the British "Tommies". Essentially we could have been designated as an Occupation Force Army in Northern Ireland!

Our initial response was: "Good Grief, how paranoid can the Brits get?" Well, within a very short period of time we learned. A convoy of US GI trucks carrying supplies of food and ammunition to our 2nd Battalion was stopped one night at gunpoint, along the border between Northern Ireland and Eire. Fortunately, the American drivers were not hurt, but the supplies were looted by a band of the IRA and transported south. When word got back to our 2nd Battalion Headquarters, the GIs were furious and were ready to move their tanks down into Eire and retaliate in some military way. It took strenuous action on the part of the Battalion Commander and his staff to pull them back and calm them down. So, we learned we were needed after all. The British did assign a guard contingent of their own specifically to patrol the border after this incident. It seems that the lessons of war have to be re-learned time and time again! And to this very day there is still active violence by the IRA in an attempt to take control of Northern Ireland. The sectarian differences between the Catholics and Protestants continue to be as active as ever.

I shared my quarters with Lt. Johnny Shinn and he was a great guy to be around. He was also one of the ushers at Ginnie's and my wedding. Being a southern boy from South Carolina, he certainly introduced me to all kinds of funny stories, jokes and songs. We were friends the rest of our lives. He loved Southern Comfort and Old Grandad whiskey. As we were rationed to one bottle a month through the PX, I was a popular guy for Johnny to have as a roommate. I would turn my ration over to him as I was a non-drinker. He reimbursed me of course.

We could only take our tanks out to a gunnery range in the mountains on one specified road. It was determined very early on that the tanks rumbling near some of the farmers' cottages could cause them, and their stone fences, to crumble. There was one of these demolished cottages we passed numerous times; it was quite badly damaged. The Army erected a large pyramidal tent for the family to live in until repairs could be made. The negotiations must have been tenuous, because the cottage had not been repaired by the time we left Ireland! The farmland was extremely rocky and over the centuries the farmers had picked the rocks up as they plowed and moved them to the edges of the field. By the time we got to Ireland these fences were four to five feet high and about the same width at the base. Obviously they had not planned on them withstanding vibrations from heavy tanks going by. Some cottages were made of slabs of peat. The peat bogs abounded throughout the area and when the peat was dried, it was also used as fuel in their cottages. That is what we were issued to heat our quarters with, in a little stove. It did not burn very well and had to be prodded frequently. It rained most of the time or was foggy and misty; therefore, everything was cold and soggy. Not a pleasant place to soldier.

On the first trip to the gunnery range we passed a row of open water pits by the side of the road that farmers were throwing bundles of flax cuttings into. The stench was horrible. We learned later that these were called retting tanks; we called them rotting tanks. The flax was soaked in them until the flax fibers in the stems could be separated out. These were then cleaned, dried, and used to fabricate linen cloth.

The gunnery range was located way back in the isolated hill country and was cordoned off with warning signs and a single wire perimeter fence. Our tank gunnery practice could not use the 37mm tank ammunition because it would be too dangerous to the surrounding countryside. What we did was use the coaxially mounted 30-caliber machine gun because its range was shorter. We would send a moving target tank out onto the range and the remaining tanks in the platoon would shoot at it. The bullets were tracer type and when they hit the tank you could see the point of impact and the ricochet.

Two things occurred that put an end to this method of target practice. One day while the troops were having a ball firing away at the target tank, up over the hill in back of this tank we could see a flock of sheep and the sheepherder waving his arms frantically and running toward us, right in the field of fire! My God, have we hit the man?! I immediately ordered a ceasefire and went out to make contact with the shepherd. He was hysterical but I didn't see any wounds. He spoke in his native Gaelic tongue, which obviously was incomprehensible to us, and I spoke slowly and loudly in English to him. He finally calmed down to the point where he was able to explain roughly what happened: We had killed one of his sheep! I was glad it wasn't one of the sheepherders! I wrote my name and unit number on a piece of paper and told him to tell the nearest Army unit about it. I never heard from Headquarters about it, so presumably the sheep was shorn and eaten.

As we continued gunnery practice that day, I received a frantic radio call from my target tank commander. The message came across quite clearly: "Cease fire, cease fire!" We ceased fire and the tank came back to the firing line. The Sergeant hopped out of the turret and came running up to me. "Lieutenant, that tank leaks bullets!" "Come on now

Sergeant, a 30-caliber bullet can't penetrate our tanks!" I climbed into the turret with him and the Sergeant pointed down around the turret ring bearing sleeve. He told me the hot metal from the bullets hitting the exterior turret bearing guard were able to work their way past it and bits of hot metal sprayed inside of the turret! Great – just what we needed! That was the end of our gunnery practice using a tank as a target. If it couldn't protect a tank crew from 30-caliber bullet fragments, how would it stand up against anti-tank guns?! This was not a comforting thought to the tank crews, myself included. I duly reported the incident up through channels, but no corrective design measures ever showed up even by the time we got to North Africa six months later. I guess there were more pressing problems confronting our war machine at that time.

We were allowed to write letters home which were censored to assure no war-sensitive material was divulged. I faithfully kept in contact with my sweetheart back home and she responded in like manner. Her letters were a real morale booster to me!

Life at the Steeplechase campsite got to be a bit routine. With no gunnery range practice, and limited road maneuverability, we had to try to figure out how to keep the troops occupied. Passes were given to go into town a short distance away. There was a movie theater and taverns or Pubs, of course. The Irish had ale called Guinness that they dispensed to the Americans. It was a dark brown color and was a very strong brew, quite unlike the light beer they were used to at home. The GIs said it should have been poured back into the horse! The old Irishmen would be sipping their brew at the bar and looking askance at us Yankees as though we weren't to be trusted. I think they resented our being in "their" country. This may have been the influence of the IRA so close by. Yes, there were Catholics in Northern Ireland too, as there were Protestants in Eire.

On payday the troops were given passes to spend the evening in Belfast. Wow! I was one of the selected officers to monitor their behavior of course. In to town we'd go in our special limousine, the good old 2½-ton GMC! We'd bail out at the Belfast parliament park grounds with instructions to be back by 11:00 pm, or miss the ride back to Downpatrick. There were many more young ladies in Belfast than in Downpatrick so it took little time for our not too shy GIs to find a dance partner to take to the local nightclubs. The Irish girls were most hospitable to the American soldiers and were very well mannered. There were no instances of street brawls with any of the local young men, probably because there weren't any there. They were off to war, and the young ladies were lonely for male companionship.

The girls were very attractive and loved the challenge of meeting American soldiers with our strange manner of talking in comparison to theirs. There were so many of them that our GIs could afford to be a bit choosy. As blackout conditions were being enforced all over England and Ireland, the soldier would take his prospective date into a storefront entryway, light his cigarette enough to check out her face and other features, and then make his decision! Pretty crass, what?!

The city double-decker buses or trams had instructions written in English and Gaelic which was also rather unique. Many of the Irish spoke in this dialect which was completely unintelligible to us, but it was in keeping with their Celtic heritage.

I just wandered up and down the streets of the city center, and popped in and out of the taverns to make my presence known. At 11:00 pm the troops wandered back to the truck, mounted up, and back we went. In retrospect we had a very good group of young soldiers who never gave us any trouble, I'm happy to say.

Another interesting experience came to pass one day. I was ordered to move my platoon of light tanks up to Belfast and report to the port authority there. I was directed to move down to the harbor and report with my tank crews to the Harland & Wolff shipbuilding company. As a point of interest it might be noted that Belfast had the distinction of providing the largest shipbuilding harbor in the world. Belfast is situated on the River Lagan where it empties into Belfast Lough (lake). The shipbuilding docks stretch along 8 ½ miles of this waterfront. Harland and Wolff built the RMS (Royal Mail Ship) Titanic in 1912, which, unfortunately, was short-lived. It struck an iceberg in the Atlantic, as stated previously, and sank on 15 April 1912 on its maiden voyage. The purpose of my mission to the shipyards was to conduct a real-life test of tanks debarking from a newly designed LST (Landing Ship Tank). At this time the Allies were trying to decide where the best place would be to initiate an attack against Nazi forces. No matter when or where you made contact with the enemy, it would have to be by an amphibious landing. Europe was out of the question; we had insufficient manpower and equipment at this time. North Africa was the most likely point of entry at this stage. Therefore, landing craft for personnel, equipment and tanks were critically needed. Harland and Wolff apparently got a contract to design and build such a craft and they came up with an entirely new design. Instead of a single large engine in the center of the ship, they located two smaller engines in the port and starboard bays of the ship. By this means they could load two parallel rows of tanks inside the length of the vessel with loading and unloading ramps in the bow. My platoon of tanks was loaded into the landing craft and unloaded off using the newly designed ramps. The engineer in charge was very pleased, pictures were taken, my tank crews and I were thanked profusely, and off we went back to Downpatrick. These LSTs were a blessing, and were used successfully in numerous future amphibious landings during the war.

Back at the campsite area things had become fairly routine. The food was basically "C" Rations, sort of like canned dog food, but it must have been nutritious; we survived. This was supplemented with mutton periodically, which was a staple of the local Irish community. The Army must have been provided with the oldest sheep in the herd because on those days when we had it for supper one could smell the strong odor of the mutton cooking as it wafted over the barracks area. When chow call came, the troops, banging their mess kits on their knees, would come toward the mess hall bleating like sheep: "Baaaa, Baaaa, Baaaa!" GIs always seemed to have a crazy sense of humor, ironic though it was. It was a big help at times, ribald though it may have been.

Another unique experience occurred one night as I was changing the guard. Each of our platoon leaders would take a 24-hour hitch at guarding our outpost. As the platoon came off duty, they were lined up, at attention, and then the order was given to elevate the handguns and clear the ammunition from the chambers. The final act was to pull the trigger to prove the gun was cleared. I was standing in front of the corporal of the guard at

this point when a flash of light and a loud bang exploded right above my face. To say the least, I was startled. The whole platoon was startled! Apparently the corporal had not removed the magazine from the 45-caliber semi-automatic pistol when he pulled the slide back to clear it. This then re-loaded the chamber. Well, we watched the tracer bullet go flying up over the top of the Steeplechase stands and, as luck would have it, up at the top was where Lt. Col. Schorr, the Battalion commander's quarters were located, and he had been out on his balcony watching the changing of the guard. The bullet just missed him! I was glad the bullet missed me, too! I chastised the corporal and had him review three times how to clear a 45-caliber semi-automatic pistol. That was not the end of the event. The next day the Lt. Col. Came down to Company Headquarters and had the Company Commander demote the Corporal to the rank of Private. That's Army life!

Another rather unusual operation was the emptying of the latrine storage vats. I apologize for even mentioning this. Periodically, an old Irishman would show up in back of the latrine with a dilapidated wooden tank cart pulled by two horses. He would dip the vats out by hand with a bucket on a rope, and dump the contents into the cart, dripping and leaking all over the place. Not too sanitary. The GIs, always great at making a joke out of everything, called him "The Honey Dipper"! He had a faithful old dog that followed him to his duty station; the GIs called him a "Blivot Hound". In their lingo a "blivot" was 10 pounds of shit in a 5 pound bag! How about that? Rather descriptive in GI terminology!

Where did the Honey Dipper take his cargo of the day? We found out subsequently that it was spread over their farmland as fertilizer. I'm amazed there wasn't more sickness. Maybe they built up a resistance over the centuries.

Speaking of sickness, ever since we got to Ft. Dix and then on into Ireland, an inordinate number of service personnel were periodically coming down with what was termed yellow jaundice. The symptoms were closely related to influenza with the addition of a yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes. The men lost their appetites, weight, and strength. It became very serious and many more soldiers had to be relieved from duty and sent to the hospital. Each morning as we jogged around the steeplechase track, their weakness became more evident, especially when they couldn't climb the 8 foot high barricade at the end of the run. Every morning at reveille the Battalion doctor would look at each soldier's eyes and skin to detect if there was any yellowing. When he did observe any, off the soldier went to the hospital. It began to get pretty scary; what's this all about, we wondered? Finally it caught up with me. I felt helpless. I knew my strength was waning and I was really sick; diarrhea, nausea & pain. I couldn't perform my normal duties. Off to the hospital I went, first to Belfast for a couple of weeks, then to a larger one out in the country near a little town called Lurgan. That name fascinated me because it was almost the same as mine. The doctors told us we had contracted something that was called hepatitis, which was adversely affecting our liver function. It was unable to remove all of the blood impurities as was normally done; therefore the bilirubin from the liver was backing up into the bloodstream. I'm sure this is an over-simplified explanation of the problem, but our livers did swell and they were painful. There was no medication they could give us so they provided us with a very bland, essentially vegetarian diet, and we had free access to hard candies. The British called them "boiled sweets". Apparently the sugar

helped the liver in some way to perform its function. We just rested, ate lightly, and did some mild exercise. Many extremely sick soldiers were transferred back to the States after 60 days in the hospital if there was no improvement. Yes, there were also some deaths that were not divulged. If you were improving but reached the 60-day limit, you were transferred to a Replacement Depot. From that point you were reassigned to an entirely different unit. On my 59th day I pulled the doctor aside and successfully convinced him I was well on the road to recovery. I felt fine, and I did not want to go to the Replacement Depot, or "Repo Depot" as we called it. I wanted to go back to my old outfit where I knew my men and fellow officers. He gave me a quick check, believed my story, and then phoned our company clerk and requested that he send a Jeep and driver to come get me. I was quite relieved that I was not going to the "Repo Depo"!

After the war I read in one of the military publications that the epidemic of yellow jaundice experienced by a very large percentage of the 1st Armored Division was attributed to a sabotaged batch of yellow fever serum traced to one drug company. The Army medical corps designated this as serum hepatitis. I have no knowledge of the details of this disclosure, or if the individual or individuals responsible for this act of sabotage were ever apprehended; possibly not. In any event, it certainly put a large wound into the heart of the Division's manpower for six months.

The Jeep driver came to the hospital, I checked out, and off we went back to Downpatrick. I asked how things were going back at the Company. He informed me things were not too good because our former Company Commander, Lt. Foster, had been promoted to Captain and assigned to Regimental Headquarters. I was happy to learn of his promotion but was quite disappointed to know he was no longer with us. Lt. Foster had been Best Man at my wedding and was liked and respected by all. The driver told me we had been assigned a new Lieutenant as CO who was quite different. I gathered by the tone of his voice that this was not too good; I soon found out! We pulled up to the Company Headquarters office and I went in to report to my new CO. I saluted and said: "Lt. Durgin reporting back for duty, Sir!" He was looking down at his desktop reading something and didn't bother to respond in any way. Finally he slowly looked up with a scowl on his face and said: "Lieutenant, you have Regimental Headquarters Guard duty tonight; get your platoon ready and march off to HQ within the hour. Dismissed!" Wow, welcome back Lieutenant! I will not divulge the name of this officer; suffice to say he was really "different" and was disliked by officers and men alike. He had a *real* personality problem. What a way to start my return to active duty!

Well, my men welcomed me back anyway, and that was truly rewarding. I told them I'd missed them and now we could start our military lives together all over again. I continued by saying that was the good news, but the bad news was that we had to march the 10 miles to Regimental HQ within the hour for a 24-hour guard detail. The men groaned. I told them to pack lightly and of course to carry their rifles.

I went to my quarters and tried to make a little sense out of what had just transpired. I wasn't able to do so. I just assumed that my new CO wanted to let me know who was boss and that perhaps he thought I had been having a vacation for two months and was

now ready to move out. Well, I'd lost weight, was still weak, and not in A-1 shape. There was a knock on the door and I opened it to be greeted by our Company Clerk, Pvt. Ben Edelman. He had been in the Company HQ office when I had returned so was well aware of what had transpired when I reported to the new CO. Pvt. Edelman said: "Lieutenant, having just come back from the hospital, you are in no condition to walk that distance to Regimental HQ, stay up all night, and walk back tomorrow. I have talked to our Supply Sergeant and, with your permission, we have come up with an idea to submit to you for your approval. The Sergeant has a load of supplies to deliver to Regimental HQ today, so here's the plan: There is a wooded area about a mile up the road on the left-hand side. You and the platoon hide out there until 5 o'clock when the supply truck will stop there. You all load up and he will take you to within a half-mile of Regimental HQ for a drop off spot in some more trees. You can wait a reasonable amount of time, and then walk to Regimental HQ on schedule for the guard change. Tomorrow the supply truck will reverse the sequence and bring you back to within a mile of our bivouac area. How's that sound?" Well, I was caught between wanting to be real macho and militaristic and say that I couldn't do that, but I knew I'd be more realistic admitting I'd have one helluva time making that 20 mile round trip with a no-sleep 24-hour guard detail responsibility in between. I told the Company Clerk "What a great idea. I accept the offer and my sincere thanks to you and the Supply Sergeant; how thoughtful of you!" Here's a perfect example of "quid pro quo", or fair play in action. I had assisted Pvt. Ben Edelman in safeguarding his monetary winnings during our North Atlantic crossing, and here he was saving my butt in return. My men were more considerate of me by far than the new CO we had just acquired. Because of this my conscience didn't bother me a bit. The Mess Sergeant packed us sack lunches and off we went heading for the one mile rendezvous in the forest. The men thought this arrangement was great, of course, and we all receded into the wooded area off the road and just flaked out for a couple of hours. We talked about each other's homes, families, schools and future hopes. It was a most unique "quiet" period in our sometimes hectic lives.

The supply truck pulled up, we boarded it, and it delivered us to the second drop-off point. The arrangement was that we'd meet the truck on the morrow at this same location for pickup at about 6 o'clock.

The 1st Armored Regiment commanded by Colonel Peter Hains was headquartered in a picturesque old country estate, named Seaford House with Quonset huts located prudently in the forests around the perimeter. The owners apparently lived in the upstairs area and HQ took over the lower floor. There was adequate room for all. I imagine Uncle Sam was able to reimburse the owners, or the British government, adequately for the accommodations provided.

It might be interesting to note that our 13th Armored Regiment under Colonel Paul Robinett was stationed at Murlough House, and the 1st Armored Division HQ under General Orlando Ward was stationed at Castelwellan. All of these rather opulent estates were in stark contrast to the surrounding dwellings of the common folk. They harked back to the days of the landed gentry when royalty granted them tracts of land for development. The physical labor thereof was provided by the peasants, of course. In any event, time marches on, and here we were in the land of our ancestors!

The guard detail went off perfectly, everything operated like clockwork, no glitches! I was fervently grateful for the high-level planning demonstrated by our Company Clerk, Supply Sergeant, and the Mess Sergeant with his sack lunches, and I thanked each one profusely for their assistance. We retained a solid "bonding" from that day onward. No one else at Company HQ was ever knowledgeable of this little episode.

My strength gradually returned and basic training courses continued. The biggest morale booster continued to be writing letters home and receiving replies in return; very important!

At about this time in the August/September period, our 1st Battalion was moved to a much larger British military base at Ballykinler on Dundrum Bay, just a few miles south of Downpatrick. The scenery was more picturesque because we were located right on the bay and could see the Mountains of Mourne reaching down to the sea on the opposite shore. The 13th Armored Regiment under Colonel Robinett had just been moved to England to prepare for the pending invasion of North Africa, called Operation Torch, thus the space for us.

We knew from news reports that the situation in North Africa was reaching a critical point and we were told to prepare the combat units of our 1st Battalion for amphibious landings. We only had light tanks in the 1st Battalion to prepare at this time with special waterproofing kits designed by the British. These provided long air intake pipes and exhaust stacks with waterproofing kits for the electrical components. This enabled the tanks to unload from LSTs (Landing Ship Tank) at the beach and travel a short distance through the not too deep water until they reached dry land.

Another rather unique experience I had at Ballykinler was, of all things, a "real" mosquito bite on the calf of my leg. It became infected, my leg swelled, and a red streak developed. I knew this was a bad sign so checked in with the doctor at the dispensary. He said: "Yup, it gotcha alright". The next thing I felt was a very painful stab. No pain killer, nothing. Ouch. Medications and released. All better - thanks Doc!

While stationed here the quarters were more comfortable than at Downpatrick. Also, in view of the fact this was a more permanent military installation, the village around the camp was more used to having soldiers about. As a consequence the young ladies would organize dances and our Mess Sergeant would prepare snacks and cookies for the occasion. The Company Fund would be tapped for beer and soft drinks from the PX and it made for a festive occasion for all. The troops loved it as you'd expect. This was a far cry from what they had experienced during the last five months or so. Yes, we officers had to keep our sharp eyes as the evening wore on. Fortunately some of the more mature ladies of the village would also attend as chaperones, and we certainly welcomed them!

Jolly Olde England

By now it was about September and we were directed to prepare for a move to England. This was good news; we'd had enough of Ulster and were ready to explore new pastures. About this time we were paid a visit by a photographer who came down from Belfast. I'm fortunate my dear wife retained the picture I sent home taken of my crew there at Ballykinler.

We packed our gear, loaded up our tanks and trucks and headed off for a port town named Larne, 18 miles north of Belfast. We drove onto the fairly large ferry boat-type steamers and were transported across the North Channel of the Irish Sea to the port town of Stranraer in Scotland. We were pleasantly surprised as we debarked to be greeted by a contingent of Scottish lassies in their kilts and native costumes who entertained us with singing and "Highland Fling" dancing. Then they tossed flowers to us and passed out cookies. We were never expecting anything like this! We all cheered and applauded them, and then walked to the trains for our trip south, although we knew not where. The troops approached the trains reluctantly because they had wanted to socialize a bit longer with these unique young ladies. This is understandable considering the long period of time since they had left home.

As a point of interest we learned that this steamer line was a link in the peacetime route between Paris, France and Dublin, Eire. One could board a sleeper car in Paris, be loaded onto a steamer to cross the channel to England, then continue by rail to London, then Stranraer, Scotland, take the steamer to Larne, Ireland, then by train to Belfast and on down to Dublin. This was all completed without having to leave your original sleeper car. Sounds like a rather devious route, but no doubt quite interesting! Since the advent of aircraft, this mode of travel has faded into oblivion.

We loaded our tanks and trucks onto flat cars and the troops piled into the coaches. We were surprised to see how small the cars were. There were only two track wheels at each end; we were used to the American trains having 4 wheels at each end!

Travelling all night and the next morning, we finally arrived in a quaint little English village, Northwhich. This made us feel we had reverted back to the Elizabethan era. Our trucks and tanks were unloaded and we were guided to a rather large mansion on the outskirts of town where some more temporary buildings were scattered around the grounds. Judging from the appearance of the old mansion it was evident it had either been reclaimed by the government or was being leased from its owner. We moved into the buildings and set up our HQ, mess hall and recreation/game room. We were just held in limbo here awaiting further orders.

On 7-8 November 1942 the "Operation Torch" invasion of North Africa began, and our 1st Battalion tanks were right in the middle of it. We who were back in England eagerly listened to the news reports.

At this point the Allies did not have the transport ships, the manpower, or the tanks to make a larger invasion force possible. We had units of the Division scattered all over the midlands of England and these were the first American troops the inhabitants of these picturesque little villages had ever seen. Having suffered from the German bombing raids of the July-October 1940 period and lost many of their servicemen and relatives, the English welcomed us with open arms.

As a point of interest it might be noted that Northwhich was within 15 to 20 air miles of the heavily industrialized cities of Liverpool, Manchester and Stoke-on-Kent, so the Axis bombing attacks could be heard and the fires seen by the native population and was very traumatic. It should be noted that many of the residents of Northwhich commuted to these cities each day to work in the defense industries.

There was really nothing much for us to do - no gunnery range, no place to maneuver our tanks. It was rough trying to keep the men occupied. We did ease up on the pass restrictions and more free time was given. This also posed some additional problems as one could well imagine, but nothing very serious.

The pay of an American soldier or officer was far above that of a British soldier or officer of equal rank. The grateful young ladies soon learned of this and preferred dates with the American soldiers as would be expected. They loved American beer, American cigarettes, American candy and American soldiers! Much of this merchandise was available to the American GI through the Army Post Exchange (PX) system, and not available to the British who lived under very strict wartime rationing conditions. Naturally, the British soldiers still on duty in England resented us and said in disgust: “You’re overpaid, over-sexed and over here!” The typical GI response to this was: “It takes two to Tango”! The young ladies then would sing a ditty, I don’t recall all of the verse, but the bottom line was: “Oodles of Boodles and Batches of Scratch”! The name “Boodles” referred to an expensive London gin, and “Scratch” referred to money. So, the English girls knew where the source of fun and games really was! Their British men had already been in the war three years by this time and their losses had been most severe. The girls were mostly thankful for any male companionship.

Before the war you did not see ladies in the Pubs; that was “man’s” territory! However, as the war progressed and the male population diminished, the Pub and Innkeepers opened their doors to all; ladies welcome, just bring money!

Another impact of the war was to open up vast new job opportunities for women to fill the voids left by the absentee men. This also gave them the financial independence they craved; the beginning of a whole new social order!

We were given a great challenge trying to figure out the British monetary system. Their pound was equivalent to about four American dollars at that time. Then we had to deal with shillings, pence, tuppence (two pence) and threepenny bits (three pence). Also their standard measurement for weight was a “stone”, or about 14 pounds. It was confusing!

The next assignment was to take a Jeep and three of my maintenance crew in to Liverpool dockside to assist in the unloading of a shipment of new M4 medium tanks for our battalion. This turned out to be a most interesting assignment and lasted about a week. We located the dock and drove into the warehouse reporting to a dock official. I soon learned the British called them quays, not docks. There was a Liberty ship moored at the dock - correction, *quay* - so I contacted the ship's captain and told him I was there with a tank crew to assist in getting the tanks serviced and ready to move out of the area. He said: "Great, all I have to do is get a lot of other gear off-loaded first before I can get to your tanks". He took me aboard and showed me the cargo. No wonder a loaded freighter sank almost immediately or exploded if hit by a German torpedo. The tanks were loaded into the hold first; then cases of ammunition of all types were stacked solidly between the tanks and the sides of the ship. These were then covered with heavy sheets of plywood and 5-gallon GI cans of high octane aviation gasoline were loaded to the top of the hold. It took quite a while to unload all of the ammunition and gasoline as would be expected. Also, the port authorities did not believe me that the large hooks welded on the four corners of the tank were strong enough to support the tank. I told them they were used in America, why not here? They would not listen and wasted several days fabricating a double sling-type harness to fit under the tank belly. Oh well, this gave us some free time to wander around the dockside (quayside?). The dock official pointed to a little office-like empty room in the corner of the warehouse and said we could sleep there. Nice accommodations! No cots, no heat, and no latrines in close proximity. We were hardened to such arrangements by now. We had our bedding rolls with us, of course, so bed down, Lieutenant! The ship's captain invited me to use the First Officer's ward room because he was off on shore leave. I thanked him but felt I should be in closer proximity to my crew; he understood.

Liverpool was a very large and important harbor on the Mersey River. It had seven miles of quays and warehouses which also included those in Birkenhead across the river. Gasoline was severely rationed in England at this time because of its critical need by the armed forces. Only essential wartime needs could be justified; police, doctors, or high-ranking military and government officials were allowed to get gasoline. Of interest on the quays was a lack of trucks. The only means of moving cargo from the ship's holds to warehouses was by horse-drawn wagons. These were very large and loaded to the brim with all sorts of supplies. They were pulled by teams of 4 to 6 Clydesdale horses, a massive, muscular, beautiful animal. The teamster would be sitting high up on his seat, cracking his whip and yelling at the horses to encourage them to pull harder as they struggled to get those heavy wagons up the slopes around the quay to the high ground. The roads all over the English countryside were paved with cobblestones and Liverpool was no exception. As the horses heaved into their harnesses and pulled at the load, the wet and misty weather common to this area made the rounded cobblestones quite slippery. The horses' hooves would slip and slide and sparks would actually fly from under the steel horseshoes; I guess there was some flint in those cobblestones!

We brought a supply of "C" rations with us of course, but that gets pretty tiresome after a while. As stated previously our accommodations were a bit Spartan to say the least. After a few days of this boring routine awaiting the unloading of our tanks, I noticed my

three-man crew had gotten a bit sparse lately, especially at night. Well wouldn't you know, just a few quays away there was an anti-aircraft battery emplacement, a holdover from the 1940 air raids but still needed in the event of the possibility of a repeat performance. And guess who manned them? Yes, some fair young ladies from the British ATS (Army Territorial Services). With so many men gone to war, positions such as this, lorry drivers, factory workers, telephone operators and so on, were filled by patriotic young ladies! They were so excited at having American soldiers right here in the same quay area, what were they to do? English hospitality took over and my men were treated royally; food, companionship, and modest housing I'm sure. When they told me about this and invited me to join them, I was truly surprised that they would even want me. I was supposed to be like a father figure to them and told them I appreciated their thoughtfulness but did not want to be intrusive into their socializing. They laughed but also understood, I think! I told them I just wanted to know where they were, and to come "home" before 2 am! They also brought me treats from the ATS members! I spent my time either reading or walking around the quays.

I knew the men were bored so I suggested we drive in to the mid-city section of Liverpool one evening and "case" the town. They gave a resounding "YES!" to this.

It wasn't hard to find where the action was. We parked the Jeep and, as any experienced maintenance officer would do, I removed the distributor rotor, coil wire, and ignition keys and put them in my pocket. With all of the other knowledgeable GIs throughout the area, one had to beware of "Jeep-jackers"! Yes, the Jeep was the closest thing we had as a stand-in for a sports car! I told the men to be back at the Jeep by midnight, stay together, do not get involved in any hassles with the locals, and off they went. I went to a movie theater. At midnight we all regrouped and went back to our "Hilton by the Mersey". The men were very happy, had a good time, and had not gotten into any trouble. I might add, the local "Bobbies", as the policemen were dubbed, were quite visible as they patrolled the streets. I think this is a definite deterrent to street crimes and should be reinstated in our country today.

The waiting period took about three days while the harbor officials had their tank slings fabricated, so we were ready to unload the tanks. A large barge with a massive crane was moved alongside the Liberty ship. The slings were looped under the tank and it was hoisted up and over the side of the ship and down onto the quay. A small tracked vehicle then towed the tank inside a nearby warehouse.

My crew then went to work. It turned out to be a real job. We had to move a lot of pre-packaged gear out of the driver's compartment and stow it into the turret. We also had to burrow through other equipment in the turret to get to the massive storage batteries under the turret and connect them. Next we had to bring GI cans of gasoline and pour enough into the empty tanks to drive them back to Northwhich, about 35 miles. Now these lumbering tanks of about 35 tons guzzled 3 gallons of gasoline for every mile traversed. Therefore, to go from Liverpool to Northwhich we had to load at least 100 gallons of gasoline into each tank. We had to service 15 tanks in all, so you can imagine the

energy, and patience, required to carry twenty 5-gallon cans of gasoline and pour it into each tank! As I was a part of the crew, I did my share of heavy work too.

I contacted company HQ and informed the Sergeant that we would have all tanks serviced and ready to go on the morrow. I would need two men for each tank to bring them back to the maintenance pool. All went according to plan and the British government allowed our tanks on their roads because we had solid rubber track blocks that would not damage their surfaces. British tanks had steel cleats on their track treads. I might add, these were much better for rough terrain operations and our tank designers finally adapted this style on our later models.

The troops arrived in 2½-ton GMCs and climbed into the serviced tanks. We headed off for home and were guided out of Liverpool by British MPs, which was a big help through those narrow city streets. The MPs told us we would be allowed to take the short route to our base in Northwhich by going under the Mersey River through a tunnel to Birkenhead because our tracks were equipped with rubber blocks as mentioned previously. Down into the tunnel we went, driving slowly behind our guide. Much to our surprise we saw up ahead of us a traffic light, right in the middle of an intersection, of all things! I'd never seen anything like this before or since. It was a crisscross of the two tunnels deep underwater! Apparently it connected two diverse sections of Liverpool with their counterparts in Birkenhead. We got through this safely and out the tunnel on the opposite side. The MPs waved us on and we headed southeast through an old town by the name of Chester. This had been a strongly fortified town with a wide and high stone wall around its perimeter constructed during the 1st century Roman invasion and occupation period, and it is still in existence. Very interesting and picturesque.

In this connection it might be of interest to note that the typical layout of a Roman town was defined by the need for military encampments or "castra". In Anglo Saxon the term "castra" is translated into "chester". Therefore, all of the towns in England today with names ending in "chester" were at one time Roman camps: Lanchester, Leicester, and Manchester for example.

As I was studying my maps of the route of travel I noticed that we were just a short distance from the border of Wales. Of all things my mind took me back again to times spent with my Grandma Sawyer when I was a boy. She would read me stories and entertain me with little verses I still remember. Being near Wales, I had to repeat it to myself:

Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief

Taffy came to my house and stole a piece of beef

I went to Taffy's house, Taffy wasn't home

Taffy came to my house and stole a marrow bone

I went to Taffy's house, Taffy was in bed

I took the marrow bone and hit him in the head

We completed the rest of the journey to Northwhich, parked the tanks in the motor pool and headed for hot showers and sit-down meals again. Mission accomplished.

I no sooner got settled into a regular routine again than the 1st Sergeant informed me I was being transferred to "E" Company of our 2nd Battalion, effective tomorrow. Well, this was a surprise, no meeting with my Maintenance Company CO to discuss any details, nothing. Actually I was pleasantly surprised and glad to be leaving this CO, and hoped my new company commander would be of better quality. Furthermore, I was getting fed up with only maintenance responsibilities for the whole 1st Armored Regiment, and I was looking forward to the excitement of a tank combat unit.

Well, my hopes were realized. I reported to my new company commander, Captain Harris O. Machus, and I can assure you, *he* was of superior quality. He responded to my salute by standing up behind his desk, returning my salute, shook hands, and welcomed me very pleasantly. He had me sit down and then reviewed my 201 personnel file with me. He asked many questions and made me feel quite at ease. We talked about the company mission, its duties, and its possible future. At the conclusion of our meeting, he had the 1st Sergeant round up the other company officers and introduced me to them. They were: Lt. Champlain, the executive officer, Lt. Marlowe, 1st Platoon Leader, and Lt. Holder, 3rd Platoon Leader. They were all great guys and we got along famously. I was assigned as the 2nd Platoon Leader to replace an officer who had been transferred out. I do not know the details of this matter, but from information learned later, he was also another 'different" individual, not too well liked by his fellow officers or his men. Whatever that may have been, I was fervently glad to be in "E" Company under the command of Captain Machus, whom we respectfully called "Captain Mac", off-duty.

The next morning at reveille Capt. Machus introduced me to the troops. This was so entirely different than the behavior displayed by my former CO. I just couldn't believe it! The men and officers in "E" Company got along together as a team, and it was most rewarding. Quite a different atmosphere than in the previous company!

In reviewing this abrupt change of assignments I got the distinct impression that my first CO, and "Best Man" at our wedding, Captain Harry Foster, who was now in Regimental Headquarters, was definitely responsible for looking out for me, "Lucky" Durgin. Thank you Captain Foster!

Our accommodations at the "E" Company compound were far superior to any previous ones that I had experienced. We were also billeted in a quaint, and large, English Tudor-style mansion with many rooms. The main structure housed the Company Headquarters, officer's quarters, mess hall, recreation room, and non-commissioned officer's quarters. There were sufficient surrounding Quonset huts for the remainder of the company personnel. We also had plenty of room for the new tanks that were just being delivered from Liverpool in subsequent shipments from the US.

Lt. Marlowe, Lt. Holder and I shared the same large bedroom on the second floor of the old mansion. We had the same standard double-decker bunks as the troops did only we used just the bottom bunk. We got along very well and talked about home, friends and

family experiences. Jack Marlowe was a 1st Lieutenant and he tentatively attempted to impose his rank occasionally because Howard Holder and I were at the bottom of the heap as 2nd Lieutenants. We jokingly said Lieutenants could not be distinguished rank-wise unless one of them became a unit commander. We did keep him in check. It all worked out amicably.

Howard Holder and I had graduated from the OCS school at Ft. Knox; I was in class #2 and Howard in class #3, so we had common ground from which to grow. As it turned out, we were with each other through all of our combat, POW and escape experiences, and still are as bonded as brothers to this day. Now that is true friendship! We talked about how we met our wives, about our parents and siblings, and about our sections of the country. Howard was a Mid-western lad from Moline, Illinois, known as the Tri-City area with Rock Island and Davenport, Iowa as close neighbors. I was a country lad from South Jersey across the Delaware River from Philadelphia. So, we both had access to the "Big City" life while growing up and had much in common to talk about, thank goodness!

We were still in limbo awaiting further orders with little to do except stand guard duty around our compound. There was no room to maneuver or fire our guns, so the troops were given as much freedom as possible. They had been forewarned to act like gentlemen because they were representatives of the United States Army. We got through this period quite well with a minimum of infractions.

We were not far outside of the town so the troops could hop a bus and go see a movie or browse around the town looking for entertainment. Speaking of buses, they were all double-deckers as stated previously, and they had a strange-looking, rather large device attached to the rear of the frame. It looked like a vertical steam boiler. Actually what it turned out to be was a means of burning coke at a very slow rate which would drive off the gas from a separate reservoir of coal above it which was then diverted to the bus engine as fuel. Clever, what?

During this period of waiting for move orders, a few of the officers in the 2nd Battalion were directed to report for a special staff meeting at a British Military Intelligence installation. It was located in a nice mid-sized building just a few miles away. We were transported to the meeting in the Colonel's staff car and spent the afternoon at a seminar.

The British Intelligence Officer welcomed us and then told us why we were there. He said we would be in the combat zone of North Africa very shortly and there were a few things he would like to emphasize, even though we probably already knew about them. In combat an individual either survives, is killed, wounded and survives, or is captured. To be truthful, I had not thought of any of those possibilities except survive! The officer went on to say that he was going to concentrate on the aspect of capture. Based upon their dealings with British prisoners of war in Germany during the last three years, they had been able to devise a means of transmitting important military information back to England by means of a secret coding in the POW's letter to their home. We listened carefully how this was done. To make it more difficult for the code to be "broken", we were told to pick a two-digit number of significance to us and a unique closing signature that would tip off the Secret Service that this letter contained a coded message. We practiced all afternoon, filled

out a Top Secret card with all significant de-coding data, and were told to keep this information in our heads, don't write it down. Class dismissed. We just assumed we would never have occasion to use this information again, but it made for an interesting afternoon. As luck would have it, I *did* use it!

Occasionally we officers would walk down to a quaint little pub called the "Blue Bottle Inn". The elder proprietor and his wife were most hospitable to us, and would put a little dinner together for us and that, combined with some English "spirits", helped to break the monotony of our daily routine.

The Captain knew we did not have much time remaining before being shipped out, so he called a staff meeting for all of his officers. He said we still had some "company funds" remaining, what should we do with them? We won't be able to use them in the desert. The unanimous decision was to have a big party for the whole company, right here at the main house. The Mess Sergeant was brought in and plans were made. He prepared fancy cakes, hors d'oeurves and candies. Beer, soft drinks and cigarettes were on the house. Local ladies clubs were contacted as the most likely source of eligible young ladies! We told them to pass the word around, but please limit the number to about 150, and chaperones were requested. They responded beautifully and it was a most successful party which included dancing to music of the 1930-1940 era played on phonograph records! The troops had a wonderful time, the company fund was put to good use, and the young ladies departed in a most festive mood, and with high esteem of the American soldier! Thank you, "Captain Mac"!

The situation in early December in North Africa was not too good. Our 1st Battalion and other division units had made the landings in North Africa on 7-8 November 1942 for Operation Torch and had advanced to Teboura, only 15 miles from Tunis. However, with massive Axis reinforcements being brought in by Luftwaffe & navy transports, they were pushed back and suffered serious losses in both manpower and equipment.

This entire operation was made in an attempt to appease Josef Stalin somewhat, who had been urging Churchill and Roosevelt for some time to invade Europe to help take some of the pressure off of Russian forces, which were being overrun by Hitler. The US and England were in no way capable of making an invasion of Europe at this time, so the next best action to take would be to invade North Africa which would lock up the massive German forces of the Afrika Korps. Thus Operation Torch came into being and the North African ports of Algiers, Oran and Casablanca were the sites of landings by American and British forces. Within three days all of North Africa, with the exception of Tunisia, was under Allied control. The politics of this operation were complex, especially in dealing with the French. To whom shall we make contact that will be acceptable to both the Allies and the French populace? None could be found! The choices were Marshall Petain of the Vichy (pro-Nazis) French, General de Gaulle who was anti-Nazis, & General Giraud whom it was hoped could unite the de Gaullists and Petainists into a solid support group. This was not to be. General Darlan, Commander-in-Chief of the French armed forces in Africa was finally determined to be the logical choice for the top French contact.

Rommel's Afrika Korps was gradually withdrawing from General Montgomery's British 8th Army advances in Libya and concentrating its forces in Tunisia during this period.

Transport to North Africa

Our time of leisure had come to an end in England and we were ordered to get combat loaded and prepare for shipping out. We moved all equipment for transport back to Liverpool where we loaded freighters with everything we had. It was a massive job of logistics to keep everything identified for proper retrieval upon arrival at our destination, which was kept secret as always.

We were escorted to a loading quay in the harbor and all personnel were loaded aboard a rather large peacetime ocean liner equipped for troop transport. The name of the ship was the "Duchess of York" and this was pure luxury compared to the "Orient", our double-loaded troop ship from America. We settled in, and under cover of darkness the convoy fleet headed out into the Irish Sea, through the North Channel, and out to the North Atlantic. As daylight approached we could see a vast convoy of freighters, troop ships and naval vessels stretched from horizon to horizon, a most impressive conglomeration.

The weather was cold, rainy and windy. By now we knew we were headed for North Africa. Where else? That's where the action was! As we lumbered southward the weather worsened and the seas became rougher. Seasickness was widespread throughout the ship and meals were sparse because the kitchen was in complete upheaval and the cooks were unable to prepare the food. We ate cold cuts and bread. Even the merchant marine sailors aboard had never seen waves so high as this. To our portside was the troop ship, "Duchess of Kent", and on the starboard side was another troop ship, the "Empress of Canada". It was larger than ours, having three smokestacks to our two. When our ship would be in the bottom of a large swell, the Empress and Duchess would disappear from sight. We were angling at about 45 degrees across the swells to minimize the roll of the ship. As it climbed to the top of the wave the bow would extend way over the crest, then as the rest of the ship would rise on the swell, the bow would crash down to the bottom of the next wave with a resounding "boom"! The whole ship creaked, groaned and shuddered. When looking down a long companionway you could see a twist in the ship's length. While this was continuing we heard a loud crash. We learned later it was the grand piano in the main ballroom that had broken loose from its moorings and crashed against the wall, breaking its legs. No, this was not a good month to be taking a cruise ship anywhere!

This inclement weather continued for the entire duration of our trip until we reached the Strait of Gibraltar. Relative calm at last! All of our stay in Ireland and England had been under blackout conditions. What a surprise to see the city of Tangier in Morocco, off our starboard beam, brightly lighted. Upon further analysis this was determined to be not too surprising. Tangier and surrounding environs had been ceded to Spain years earlier. As Spain was a neutral country during WWII, so was Tangier; thus, the bright lights!

A short time after entering the Mediterranean Sea we arrived at the port of Oran in Algeria, North Africa; the date was 21 December 1942. It was a real eye-opener to see the hulks of ships that had been destroyed during the November Allied landings resting on the

bottom of the shallow harbor. Prior to debarking we were issued a small US Army pamphlet intended to prepare us for the entirely new and foreign culture to which we would be exposed. It was a very smart idea because this gave us ample warning of what to expect in the basically Arabic/Muslim world.

Very briefly we were told to seriously observe the following warnings:

1. Never look at an Arab woman wearing a veil.
2. Never enter a mosque, or Arab church.
3. Never walk down back alleys, day or night.
4. Never go outside of British MP patrolled perimeters.
5. Never get involved in an argument with the natives, in a bar, in a store, anywhere.
6. Never eat any food from an Arab market except fresh fruit, and then wash it well before eating.

There were other warnings given, but those listed are sufficient to give one the idea that we were now in a dangerous and hostile country, even among the non-combatants. The impact of the French colonialism days was prevalent everywhere in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. French is the dominant language in the big cities and marketplaces, with Arabic tolerated. The natives were not at all pleased with the French influence and the violent differences in their religious beliefs. Not too compatible an arrangement!

The troops were led off the ship by ground personnel for mounting up into good old GMC 2½-ton trucks for transport to our designated bivouac areas. We learned at this point that we were part of a massive troop and support equipment movement from England as well as the US in preparation for a stronger assault on the Nazi forces withdrawing into Tunisia.

I was assigned the task of remaining aboard the Duchess of York to monitor the off-loading of our company equipment to assure its safekeeping until our supply trucks could pick it up. This was a hectic job because it was quite commonplace for equipment from one outfit to be furtively whisked away by another outfit before you knew what had happened to it! I had a guard detail with me, but it was still a 24-hour job. It took three days and nights, but I'm happy to say we did our job well; all equipment was accounted for with one exception.

In checking the loading manifests for our particular company, one complete freighter of 2nd Battalion equipment was missing. Had it been sunk? We'd received no word of such a thing. Was it lost somewhere, like at another port? We were not to find out until some weeks later. Lt. Holder's 3rd Platoon Sergeant R.C. Sullivan had been assigned the task of traveling with and monitoring the load of equipment on the Liberty ship that had turned up missing. Days later he wandered into the "E" Company bivouac area out in the desert and had quite a story to relate. It seems that in the middle of the severe storm at sea, on our trip from Liverpool, the freighter lost control over its rudder. What a dilemma! By some means the ship's crew was able to rig up some kind of makeshift device for altering the

steering of the ship. They had to drop out of the convoy and make their way back to England for repairs, unescorted! During the voyage back to port the rough seas caused one of the armored tanks to break loose in the hold. The Sergeant said it was like trying to lasso and secure a raging bull at a rodeo, only worse. They finally made the trip back to Oran and all equipment was delivered.

On the second night in the harbor there was quite a bit of shouting above deck. We climbed up to see what the fuss was all about. Here was a US Navy destroyer pulling alongside our ship. There were people hanging onto all parts of the destroyer; the rigging, the guns, the railings, the decks, anything. They clambered aboard and were immediately escorted to quarters throughout the ship, which had obviously been pre-arranged. We learned very quickly that these were British nurses, ATS, and military personnel who had been aboard a troop transport that had been torpedoed by a German U-boat! Right out there in the Mediterranean Sea where we had just been! Lucky us! They were fortunate to have been rescued.

Our Company supply trucks finally made it back to us and we loaded our equipment onto them and headed south about 15 miles on the road to Sidi-bel-Abbes, the headquarters of the French Foreign Legion, which was formed in 1831 during the French conquest of Algeria. We were assigned to an area that was on the northern foothills of the Atlas Mountains, completely void of any vegetation except sparse outcroppings of cactus.

We remained here outside of Oran over Christmas and without anything to celebrate with, or about, we just awaited further orders. There was one small incident that occurred which broke the monotony one day. An old Arab came into our bivouac area with a donkey pulling a small two-wheeled cart full of fresh oranges. The troops were all excited and wanted the load of oranges. How do you barter in Arabic? Finally Captain Machus' orderly came up with a real blockbuster of an idea! We were supposed to dispose of everything that was not of military issue. He knew the Captain had a bright blue bathrobe that he cherished, so he approached him and suggested that it might be a neat bartering chip to swap for the oranges. The Captain was a bit surprised, but when all the men in the company yelled and cheered, he didn't have much choice. He figured our days were numbered anyhow, so why not! The royal blue bathrobe was shown to the old Arab with fingers pointing to the oranges. His eyes bulged, he tried the robe on, he gave a shriek, dumped the cart full of oranges, grabbed the mule by its rope, and off he went at a trot back to wherever he came from. The troops went ape eating oranges, and there were plenty to go around. Captain "Mac" had a big smile on his face; our real hero had come through once again!

The story does not end there. About an hour or so later that afternoon the old boy came back to the bivouac area attired in his royal blue bathrobe and riding in his donkey cart. However, this time he had a shy little Arab girl with him holding her head down. I'd guess she might have been about 14 years old. In any event, he was pointing to the Captain's tent and acted like he wanted to talk to him. Captain Machus was summoned and between hand gestures and broken French, the message came across that the old Arab with the "Royal Blue Bathrobe" was now elevated to some higher rank in his tribe and he

wanted to reward the Captain by giving him the little girl, period. Well, you can imagine what happened after it was discovered what the old Arab was about. He was chased out of the bivouac area in no uncertain terms with signals to never return. The little girl returned to her tribe with him. We were just beginning to learn some of the basics of the Arab world; women had no status whatsoever in this tribal culture!

Our food was good old Army "C" rations, sort of like canned dog food. With no choice, we ate it. I guess one could say it was nutritious; no one seemed to lose weight!

We were living here in pup tents south of Oran for about a week, and then we got the order to move out. We were directed back to Oran where we boarded another ship that could carry a full company of tanks, 17 in all, plus a couple of 2½-ton GMC trucks. The British ship was unique in that it was a modified oil tanker known as a Maracaibo, because that is the name of the shallow lake in Venezuela that is famous for its large supply of oil fields. The vessel was of very shallow draft and had its bow modified by installing a loading and unloading ramp, so it made for a great tank landing craft, (LCT). We boarded the ship on New Year's Eve, 31 December 1942. The troops were restless because they wanted to celebrate. No way could passes be given; we were due to pull out on New Year's Day! Well, the ship's Captain let his First Officer take Captain Machus and myself in to Oran to visit some night spots. My old buddy Lt. Howard Holder with Lt. Champlain and Lt. Marlowe were relegated with the task of keeping order aboard ship. Lucky me!

Well, the First Officer took the Captain and me to the places where the action was in Oran. He had been there before so he fortunately knew his way around. We saw some girlie shows, and the town was loaded with Army and Navy personnel of all denominations. For all I knew there may have been Germans there too...at least a few spies! There was much drinking by all, except us. After midnight Mac and I had had enough and wanted to go back to the ship. The First Officer wasn't ready to give up yet, so we went back alone. I guess he staggered back to the ship by morning. We hoped he wasn't going to pilot the ship! Incidentally, I was surprised when the ship's captain invited us to his quarters for a drink to welcome in the New Year. His liquor cabinet was very well stocked and I wondered if all ships at sea had similar accoutrements! It sounded a bit dangerous to me. No wonder we have unexplained maritime disasters at times!

In the meantime, Lt. Holder was having his hands full. We were not moored right at dockside; there was another freighter beside us but about ten feet away. Our GIs, being resourceful individuals, were not going to lose out on the fun. They could not get off the front of the ship because of the officers on duty there. But….they made verbal contact with the crew members of the ship next to them and negotiated a deal: By cleverly rigging ropes between the two ships, they could swing back and forth with empty 5-gallon water cans, go down to dockside, knock the stops out of gigantic wine casks, fill up the 5-gallon cans and bring them back to the ship. By the time Lt. Holder became aware of this maneuver it was too late. The men had a memorable New Year's Eve celebration after all and were very sick at sea on New Year's Day!

Tunisia – Prelude to Battle

We departed Oran on 1 January 1943 and were not escorted by any Navy vessels. We hugged the shoreline fairly closely and the scenery was actually very beautiful. It would be somewhat similar to that of the coast of California. There were gentle slopes of farmland where orange groves and vineyards abounded with a backdrop of the Atlas Mountains in the distance. The water was calm and the weather was quite mild. A far cry from the North Atlantic Ocean a couple of weeks before! This leg of the trip was only about 400 miles long.

We pulled into a small harbor in Algeria by the name of Phillipville, a typical French name. The Arabs have since gained their independence from France so they have changed the name back to the original one of Skikda. This was the closest seaport to Tunis that was not under German control.

We were issued standard rations, our canteens were filled with water, and we mounted our tanks and headed south into the mountain passes of the Atlas mountain range toward Constantine. Nightfall came by the time we were climbing the twisting road into the mountains, and we were under blackout conditions. The road was only wide enough for one tank width and fortunately there was no oncoming traffic. Our small blackout lights were essentially marker lights to indicate the presence of the other vehicle ahead of you; it did not illuminate the road.

In some areas there were steep drop-offs and it was a bit scary sitting there with your head sticking out of the tank turret and praying that the driver wasn't dozing! He wasn't, we made it safely to our bivouac area in the high desert south of Constantine, and we were still in Algeria.

The next day I had to take a Jeep and four 2½-ton trucks and go back down to Phillipville with Captain Jim Fraser, our Battalion S-4, or Supply Officer, to supervise the offloading of the remainder of the Battalion supplies having just arrived on other freighters. This was an interesting experience in itself. The responsibility for the warehouses was under British control. All materiel coming into the port and all allowed to leave was at their discretion. The end result was that American-supplied foodstuffs were being shunted off to British troops, and their "weird" food supplies were assigned to us! When I finally wised up as to what was happening, I was furious. I could see all kinds of wonderful American canned goods such as apricots, peaches, tomatoes and beef stew being loaded onto British Lorries, and we were directed to stacks of British Compo (compound) Rations, which were terrible.

I approached the British Captain in charge and questioned the validity of this maneuver. He was quite huffy, of course, and said that this was in conformance with his orders. I said in essence, we were Americans, we supplied that food, and we were going to take it! I directed my crews to load their trucks with the American supplies and leave the British rations in the warehouse. The Captain was furious and said he was going to report

this infringement of his authority to higher headquarters and demanded my name. I gave it to him and suggested he submit the incident to Roosevelt and Churchill to resolve! After all, who was bailing England out of the war? I never heard anything of this at any later dates, which isn't surprising.

We loaded up our convoy and headed back to our bivouac area south of Constantine, a long haul! But at least we had good old American food!

We had been exposed to the British Compo Rations in bivouac south of Oran just a week or so before, and we never forgot it! One memorable event was oxtail soup. It was like a strong vegetable-beef soup with 3-4 joints of oxtail in it, and bristling hair was still clinging to the last joint! Not a very appetizing dish. American GIs are coffee drinkers, the stronger the better. The British are tea drinkers, with cream and sugar. As a matter of interest, word was passed around that the Brits just *had* to have their afternoon tea break, no matter what! We jokingly wondered if they stopped in the middle of combat for such an event. Typical GI humor! Well, our cook was issued, along with the other Compo Rations, a large, square, 5-gallon-sized tin of a very strange, dry concoction. "What 'n Hell am I supposed to do with this?" he said! After a round table discussion with the officers in the Company, Lt. Durgin had a solution based upon his expertise at making Cambric Tea as taught to him by his Grandma Sawyer! I explained that the dry concoction in the tin was a mixture of tea, sugar and powdered milk. I suggested boiling 20 gallons of water and dumping the contents of the 5-gallon tin into it. Well, the troops preferred plain water after all of this fuss!

Another interesting item of British issue was rather large, square biscuits they called "hardtack". Yes, it was hard and quite dry. Fortunately they gave us marmalade to go with it. Interesting!

We were issued maps of the areas in which we were to be in contact with the enemy, Eastern Algeria and Tunisia. Upon studying them quite carefully I noticed in the margin their origin was the French Topographical Society; everything was in French and Arabic, distances in kilometers, and the date of publication was 1898! As we were to find out later, roads to the major towns were defined, but some of the back roads we were obliged to traverse either had long since disappeared, or new camel trails had sprung up and made for some puzzling study. One could not get too far off the beaten path or you could wind up in a dry stream bed, a deep wadi, or in deep yogurt!

The 1st Armored Division at this time was in a state of total disarray as a result of the imperfect conclusion of the initial landings in North Africa during Operation Torch on 7-8 November 1942. Our 1st Battalion of light tanks was fed to the wolves during their drive toward Tunis, so that just left two medium tank battalions remaining in the 1st Armored Regiment back in England. There were not enough landing craft to carry the entire regiment, and this was the start of our piecemeal decimation.

So here it was, utter reorganizational chaos reigning during November-December 1942 as to who was where, and who was with or against whom. The "Vichy" French (pro-German) were opposed by the "Free" French North Africa forces of Admiral

Darlan. The Italian troops vacillated between Axis and Allied sympathies and the British and American high commands were having a time of it trying to keep from threatening each other's sphere of influence. All in all, it was a military command nightmare!

So here we were in Tunisia in early January 1943, being shifted from one area to another, completely unaware of the "Big Picture", because apparently no one knew at the top side either, or if they did, it was not transmitted down to us ground troops who were the designated combatants! Essentially, we were in a holding pattern awaiting further orders.

At about this time we were shown pictures sent down to us by British Intelligence of the latest German heavy tank design. It was most impressive! As I recall it weighed about 62 tons, had massive armor plate, and mounted their extremely powerful 88 mm gun. We were told none of these had gotten to North Africa at this time. We learned later how incorrect this information was!

We were directed to take up positions in Ain Beida, 60 miles southeast of Constantine. Word was passed down that the possibility existed that an eastward thrust by our Division might be made toward Sfax in an attempt to sever the main supply line from Tunisia to Field Marshal Rommel's Afrika Korps fighting a fierce withdrawal action against General Montgomery's British 8th Army in Libya and Tripoli. With this information, I had a 10-foot square marked out in the desert sand and kept my platoon busy making a terrain map of the east-central portion of Tunisia, from Ain Beida to the sea at Sfax. We included the mountain ranges, the passes, wadis, and roads. It sure kept the troops busy and it reminded me of my childhood days playing in the beach by the ocean during family summer vacations! Well, Captain Machus was impressed, but it came to no avail. Higher command never approved such a plan and we moved our encampment farther southeast to Firyanah. I thought the idea was a great one, but apparently we must not have had the resources to follow through with such a plan.

The Germans had control of all the mountain passes in the Eastern Dorsal segment of the Atlas Mountains parallel to the Mediterranean Sea coast south of Tunis. This was imperative to maintaining the coastal road open for their Afrika Korps supply line. As they were withdrawing northward into Tunisia they needed more maneuvering space and the Allied forces were too close for comfort. As a consequence, they started aggressive activity all along the areas where they would be vulnerable to potential Allied attack.

Our American forces were separated into Company-size units in Tunisia and placed in locations where they could theoretically be called upon to be put into a rapid reinforcing position. This resulted in our Company "E" shuttled periodically over a 150 mile front from Gafsa to Firyanah to Sbeitla to Fondouk and finally to the Ousseltia Valley southwest of Kairoun.

During all of this shifting about I tried to work in some practice time for our Bow Gunner/Assistant Driver to give our primary driver a bit of a respite. Driving a tank was a tough and demanding job. The transmission was a 4-speed, manual shift design and the clutch was foot-operated like the old "stick-shift" automobiles. This required one healthy

push of the left leg to disengage it. Also, steering was accomplished by pulling back on one of the two vertical control levers to turn the tank left or right. The mechanism that accomplished this task was called a "controlled differential". One would pull back real hard on the left, or right, lever to effect the desired turn. No such thing as automatic shift transmissions or power steering tanks at that time! Engine power was still delivered to both tracks, so by pulling on one lever, you merely slowed that particular track down and the other "free" track was the one to cause the tank to turn. The net result of all of this was that you had to have a pretty muscular driver to handle the job, and that's why he needed to be given a break periodically. Well, my little assistant driver tried to do the task, but had one heck of a time; he just didn't have the "push", or was it "pull"! So what to do? Well guess who else in the tank was a qualified tank driver? Yep, the Lieutenant! I actually enjoyed it very much and our regular driver was glad to become a tank commander periodically during our repositioning activities!

A point worth mentioning is the fact that we frontline troops received absolutely no allied Air Force support whatsoever during this entire period in North Africa. Yes, we did see airplanes occasionally, but these were German reconnaissance planes keeping tabs on our strengths and movements. We learned later that our bombers were concentrating on destroying harbors in Sicily and Italy where future landings were to be accomplished. Unfortunately for us, it would have been better had they been bombing the Tunis airport and harbor, Afrika Korps buildup in Tunisia where the fighting was being carried out first!

The threat of German Stuka dive bombers striking our bivouac areas was a constant concern, so we always had to locate some form of cover, meager though it was, in palm and olive tree groves or scrub brush. This also posed a problem of refueling our tanks, which were thirsty rascals. You can imagine what energy was required to move a 36-ton vehicle through rough mountainous and sandy terrain in low or second gears. As I mentioned previously, we averaged about three gallons of high octane aviation gasoline per mile. We had two large fuel tanks inside the armor on each side of the vehicle.

Gasoline supply trucks would unload 5-gallon gasoline cans at night as close to our bivouac area as possible. The next requirement was for us to walk to this drop-off point, grab two full gasoline cans in each hand, walk them back to our tanks, and empty them into the filler spout. It's fortunate we were young; the weight of the gasoline plus the can equaled approximately 50 pounds each, times 2, equals 100 pounds for each arm; 200 pounds total. Ouch! (Experiences like this gave rise to the soldier's lament, "My aching GI back"!

I must say, the Quartermaster (Supply) Battalion performed a superb job of keeping us supplied with all of the requirements; high octane aviation fuel, ammunition, food and filtered/chlorinated water. They had special water treatment trucks that would locate an oasis or stream, fill the tank truck with the contaminated water, filter and decontaminate it, then deliver it to the Battalions in 5-gallon water cans. Quite an operation! Chlorinated water doesn't taste too bad when you are thirsty enough!

I've mentioned high octane aviation fuel several times which warrants a little elaboration. Why would an armored tank battalion use such volatile aviation fuel? Well,

because our tanks were powered with Continental 9-cylinder radial aircraft engines! Sound strange? It was! It seems that America had an adequate supply of aircraft engine manufacturers at this point, but not very many heavy duty diesel engine manufacturers. This posed a very serious problem to us, as we were to learn in actual combat. An enemy projectile penetrating the sides of our tanks not only entered the tank but brought the volatile, flaming high octane gasoline with it; end of combat for the crew!

Another thing we learned at a later time was that America was concurrently shipping diesel-powered tanks to the British and Russian forces because they could not accept gasoline powered tank; they were too dangerous to the crews, and they knew better! I guess we were more expendable than our allies. At a later date, all new American tanks were diesel-powered.

While on the subject of tanks and their construction, we discovered another unique design feature that did not have the crew's comfort in mind. The radial engines did not have a crankcase as an automotive type engine does; the oil was in a separate reservoir, pumped through the engine, then recirculated through an oil cooler radiator which was located in the rear of the crew compartment. This meant that the fan on the air-cooled radial engine also drew air from the crew compartment to pass through the oil cooler. In so doing, this air had to be pulled through the openings of the driver's and bow gunner's ports as well as the tank commander's turret port. So what's bad about that? In inclement weather, in came the rain, or the heat, or the hot desert sand, or the frigid winter air. I was another challenge to say the least!

During our numerous changes of location at this time we had the opportunity of seeing the smaller Arab villages along the way. It was interesting, but a far cry from small-town America! Each village had a town square where the bazaar or marketplace was located. Occasionally we would stop out of curiosity to see what it was all about. We found out soon enough as we were surrounded by the local hucksters trying to barter off their junk! The place was loaded with Arab men, women and children of course, plus goats, sheep and camels. Everything smelled atrocious, and it was inconceivable to us that anyone could buy the raw pieces of meat and butchered chickens hanging on hooks and covered with flies. There were entrails and blood on the ground plus animal droppings too! The camels wandered around and, of all things, had cactus barbs protruding through their lips! I guess they got hungry enough to eat cactus in the raw. Also, if you got too close to the camel it would spit on you, and *that* had a powerful aroma! So be it, we just moved on and were thankful for our own bivouac area and could appreciate our cans of "C" rations all the more!

About this time word was passed down that the British tankers had initiated the custom of selecting a brief but meaningful name to be applied to the side of their tank turrets; a sweetheart, a song, a wry GI term and so forth. This technique was later applied to airplanes as well. Permission was granted and the troops had a ball picking out their own names. Some were quite hilarious. I wanted my tank to bear the name "GIN", and so it was. The troops thought it was my favorite drink, but I knew better; it was short for my

sweetheart's name: Virginia! I think the whole idea was to think of it as a good luck omen. I guess it was!

I recall taking a Jeep and my platoon Sergeant one day on a reconnaissance mission to the northern tip of the Ousseltia valley for the purpose of determining the defensive strength of a French emplacement there. It was pretty sad; a 50-man Infantry unit with no artillery support. The Germans were on the other side of the low range of mountains and controlled the pass to Kairoun. The soldiers pointed out unexploded artillery shells they had roped off as a safety measure. I reported back to Captain Machus that any defense to the north of us could be written off. The Germans were merely on guard duty on the other side of the hill to report any activity from our side, and the French contingent was essentially doing the same on our side. The time was now late January 1943 and if one were to think it was warm in this arid and desert country, another thought is in order! As payday was on the first of the month, I was detailed to take a Jeep and driver down to Sbeitla to Division Finance and pick up the Company payroll. Well, this was a distance of about 50 miles over rugged terrain and mountain passes, and it was cold and snowing! We made it to Sbeitla and got the payroll alright. Coming back was a different story. The snowfall had gotten heavier and we had to grope for the narrow roadway (trail) that became non-existent. We reached the top of the mountain pass and I began to think perhaps we'd best turn around and follow our tracks back to Sbeitla. You see, in combat, vehicles no longer had windshields because of the danger of shattering due to explosive air bursts, and Jeeps had no roof covers either because there was nothing to support them. So, here we were without shelter in the middle of a blizzard. Just then, up ahead of us, we spotted a lone vehicle. We pulled up and stopped, and would you believe what it was? An Army ambulance, in the same dilemma as we were! We asked for shelter, they obliged by pulling down a couple of bunks in the back, and in we went, sheltered for the night…lucky us!

By morning the snow had ceased, we could vaguely determine where the road went. We bid farewell and headed off for "E" Company. Incidentally, we were paid in Allied Expeditionary Forces French francs as the legal tender for the area! What could you buy with this paper money in the barrens of a desert?

It's amazing how lessons learned at an early age can re-surface at odd times. As a Boy Scout we learned all sorts of things like locating the North Star, reading a compass, and survival under adverse conditions. This would hold me in good stead on patrols. Speaking of patrols, these were absolutely mandatory around the perimeter of our bivouac areas at all times, but most especially at night. Guard posts were established around the encirclement and our sentries would patrol the intervals in between. When approaching another guard they would be ordered to halt and give the password, which we changed every night. The password, or words, had to incorporate a word with a "th" sound in it, such as through, thought, thanks, together, etc. because the German language does not have that sound in it, and it would be a simple way to screen out an infiltrator.

Another strange experience was having Arab sheepherders and camel drivers come right through our bivouac areas. We thought nothing of it but learned much later, to our

chagrin, that they were counting the number of tanks we had, then continuing on into the German lines and reporting this information, for a nominal fee I'm sure. Apparently it only worked in one direction. This land had been under French dominion since the 1800s and the Arabs were not too happy about it. Yes, they were sympathetic to the German cause although we were not informed of this!

Another fascinating observation was the number of spectacular ruins evident throughout Tunisia from the age of the Carthaginians. Arches, aqueducts, temples and amphitheaters were in utter ruin from degradations from the Romans and other invaders, but the present-day inhabitants of the land seemed to be perfectly content to live the nomadic life they had chosen. The merchant-oriented trade centers along the seacoast did show some inclination to be a bit more civilized, but not much. The world situation does not change very positively, does it? It seems there is always someone who wants to dominate another, a town, or a country.

Combat and Capture

Our maneuvering and repositioning during the past several weeks finally ended at the northern edge of the Ousseltia Valley in the vicinity of Fondouk and Pichon Passes. British Intelligence had indicated the German forces were concentrating east of these passes preparing for a breakthrough. As it turned out, this data was completely in error; more defective intelligence.

Disturbing reports were being received by us over Captain "Mac's" radio communications with Battalion Headquarters. The date was 14 February 1943, and from what we could determine, the Germans were advancing against Allied positions in the mountains and passes of the Eastern Dorsal range of the Atlas mountains about 60 miles south of us. By 5 o'clock that afternoon the situation had worsened and we received orders to move out to a position near Kern's Crossroads, named after Colonel Kern of the 1st Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry Regiment.

Excitement reigned as we platoon leaders dashed up to Captain Mac's command post to get our marching orders. We were to be certain all vehicles were in combat readiness and to fall in to a column formation and follow his lead tank. We were told that the Germans had broken through our lines at Faid Pass and had surrounded several of our battalions there.

It just happened to be at "chow" time and the Mess Sergeant was ready to serve it up. We did not have time to partake of a prepared meal, so the Sergeant stood beside his mess truck and tossed cans of "C" rations up to us crews as we drove by, a true example of "Meals on Wheels" at an early date.

We headed due south following Captain Mac's tank over very rugged desert terrain and under blackout conditions. The going was also slow and dusty. It might be interesting to describe this portion of the country more fully. It was not the gently rolling and sandy terrain of the vast Sahara Desert; this was sandy and rocky mountain terrain, in many respects like the barren desert and mountain regions of Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico and Utah back home in the States.

We travelled all night and stopped briefly at about 4 am the next morning near an American Infantry emplacement. Captain Mac contacted the unit commander hoping to get some breakfast rations for his Company of tired and hungry tankers. No luck! The Infantry CO said he had none either and would appreciate our moving on so as not to attract the attention of German patrols that were not too far away. We obliged and moved out. We continued southward until we finally reached Kern's Crossroads out in the middle of the desert. There was a group of high ranking officers gathered there and Captain Mac was able to report in to our 2nd Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. James D. Alger, where a staff meeting was convened. We were directed to continue south one or two miles and prepare our vehicles for engaging the enemy; gas up, check ammunition and so forth.

We asked if there was any food forthcoming; there was not! Fortunately, it just so happened that some of those large American #10-sized cans of fruit that I had "confiscated" from the British back at Phillipville were stashed in the supply lockers inside my tank. Foresight? Luck? In any event, a true blessing. I passed them out to our tank crews and it was a symbolic "Last Supper" for us! The troops were most grateful. I've loved canned apricots ever since that memorable day!

Captain Machus returned from the battalion staff meeting and we platoon leaders gathered around his Jeep to learn the latest. We were completely oblivious to the current battle situation and were anxious to learn more about it. We asked lots of questions about enemy strength, equipment, locations and so forth, but to no avail. We did learn that our 3rd Battalion had been massacred and trapped on Djebel Lessouda, and some infantry and artillery units were also trapped on Djebels Hadid and Ksaira bounding the hamlet of Sidi Bou Zid. (A djebel in Arabic is a small mountain). This disaster became known afterwards as "Bloody Valentine's Day".

Just a couple of weeks prior to this event, word was received that Germany had suffered a disastrous defeat at the hands of the Russians in the Siege of Stalingrad on 31 January 1943. Approximately 160,000 Germans had died and 90,000 were marched into Siberia for ultimate death. Rommel's Afrika Korps was engaged in fighting a desperate withdrawal action as it was being pushed back from Libya by the British Eight Army under Field Marshall Montgomery. The American & British invasion of North Africa had been launched on 8 November 1942, so things were looking pretty bleak for the Germans on all fronts at this time. Word was passed down to us that the Germans were *not* taking prisoners, so fight to the death! That's war, right?

The bottom line to all of this was that we did not have a very good feeling about what was most likely to be in store for us. Lt. Holder and I discussed briefly some of the combat tactics we had been taught back at OCS and we could not see where any one of these lessons was being applied in this case. We did not know the enemy's strengths or his locations due to the lack of any reconnaissance. On our side our 50 tanks only had meager infantry and artillery support on our flanks, and these were open halftracks, and there was absolutely *NO* air support! Not at all encouraging. In addition to this our men in our entire battalion had not had any sleep the night before, and no food to speak of. Thank goodness we were young! I would like to comment here that the officers and men in our battalion were a true cross-section of America; loyal, dedicated and well-trained soldiers.

So much for that. The next step was to "move out" which we did at about 1:30 pm, 15 February 1943. It was a most impressive display of a tank battalion in combat formation, very textbook in appearance, and 50 tanks strong!

Off we went as ordered with Lt. Col. Alger leading with "D" Company on his left flank spearheading the assault on Sidi Bou Zid; "F" Company was on his right flank to monitor potential hostile enemy fire from some low hills to the south; and "E" Company followed in the wake of "D" Company to exploit the breakthrough in Sidi Bou Zid, and also to provide rear guard support as required. In all fairness to our Air Force comrades we did see one P-

38 Reconnaissance airplane flying low, wagging its wings as a sign of a friendly aircraft, and streaking to the rear!

This noble enterprise became seriously disrupted shortly after the jump-off order was given, however. A flight of Stuka JU 87s streaked in low over the rear of our formation and released their bombs. Explosions, sand plumes, and dust permeated the area. Fortunately, not one of our tanks was hit. The end result of this first encounter with the enemy was that our Artillery, Infantry and Reconnaissance support troops in the open half-tracks decided this was no place for them to be, so they turned back and headed for the rear.

In retrospect one could envision this episode as the first move in a big chess game. Here were the brave knights all decked out in their shining armor charging forward against the enemy! Then disaster; within four hours they were relegated to the status of pawns in the conflict. No horses (tanks) left!

The next obstacle to be overcome was to traverse a giant ouadi (wadi), or deep, dry streambed, in the desert floor which was about 15 feet deep and 100 feet wide. We had to find suitable places to break down the steep sandy sides to get our tanks into and out of these defiles. Quite a trick and rather time consuming.

The Germans were aware of these obstacles and had zeroed in on them with their long range HE (high explosive) artillery shells. It made for an interesting obstacle course. During this phase of our advance one of my tanks became mired down in a muddy low spot in the bottom of the ouadi. I radioed my first tank leader, Sergeant Tony Tocci, to drop back and attach a tow cable to the bogged down tank and pull it out. This he did successfully, even under the imminent risk of HE shells being lobbed in.

By this time the beautiful, parade-like formation positioning of our battalion was completely disrupted and we became engaged individually with identifying sources of enemy fire and attempting to neutralize them.

In contact with the tank commanders of my platoon I directed them to spread out farther to the left and right flanks and be alert for any enemy enveloping movement. The platoons up ahead of us were really starting to catch enemy fire now as a tank could be seen blowing up here and there.

I received a call from my right flank tank commander, Sgt. Gott, who reported he'd located one of the problem areas. Apparently the Germans had emplaced AT (anti- tank) guns in and around the cactus enclosures of Arab huts. I guess the German reconnaissance units had figured out our plan of advance from the previous day's battle. Well, now we had target locations we could take under fire and we did destroy some of the emplacements. They had been quite successful in knocking out some of our advance units from the rear. Now it was our turn! I contacted Captain Machus and my other tank commanders and reported the latest information to them.

Whenever we were hit by an enemy shell, the impact on the turret made one feel like you were inside of a gigantic bell; the reverberations were mind-boggling.

My thoughts took me back to those days at Ft. Knox when our OCS artillery officer instructor used to pound it in to us the importance of estimating the range, or distance, of various objects. He told us to make estimates in terms of football field lengths. We all knew a football field was 100 yards long, so just think in terms of multiples of that figure. He would march us out to the reservation and have us make estimates of the distances to various objects he'd already calculated; old barns, rock formations, and so forth. These lessons were very worthwhile. All we needed was bigger guns to reach some of the enemy emplacements we were encountering!

Our instructor also told us to exercise our eyeball muscles by alternately looking at distant objects, then close-in ones.

During this period I had my head sticking out of the top port of the turret using my binoculars in attempting to locate enemy emplacements and/or tanks. The tank commander also had a control lever which enabled him to rotate the 75 mm gun turret in the general direction of a potential target, then fire a volley of 30 caliber machine gun tracers for the benefit of the gunner whose field of sight was very limited. The gunner could then take over control and adjust the gun accordingly. We soon found out that the enemy guns firing on us could not be reached by our guns within the range of the telescopic sights. I then directed the gunner to elevate the gun by counting the number of hand wheel rotations between firings. By my watching the tracer flare at the base of the shell until the detonation of the HE projectile occurred, I could tell him to either increase the number of turns controlling the gun elevation or decrease them. When artillery guns are adjusted in this manner it is designated as "indirect fire". Sort of like General Washington's artillery officers in the Revolutionary War must have done! This worked fine on stationary targets but was useless against a moving enemy tank. We just fired away at them anyhow hoping the HE shells would either damage the enemy tank tracks or his periscope gun sights. Our AP (armor piercing) shells were essentially useless because the German armor plate was so thick, plus our shells did not have the penetrating effectiveness of the German guns. Not too good a situation! Much to my chagrin, I now saw my own platoon tanks gradually being neutralized. It was most devastating to see our tanks being blown up and the crews, who we now had known very personally, being lost with them.

Another unique observation was that the German tanks were painted a light sand color and were difficult to spot at a distance. Our American tanks were painted a dark olive drab color that contrasted nicely with the light tan color of the desert sand. Furthermore, on the side of our own tanks were painted very large white 5-pointed stars, ostensibly to help inform Allied air and artillery support troops that we were their friends. It also, unfortunately, gave the Germans a rather clear target for them to zero in on!

The closer we came to Sidi Bou Zid the more "kills" the enemy was able to make. Our rear guard tanks had been ordered to close up which made us the advance force now. We never did make it into town and those ahead of us those who did never made it out! As we were taking more HE shells above our tanks now, it was prudent to close the turret hatch where my head had been protruding. There were vision slots around the inside of my turret hatch ring. It was possible to see through them, but with difficulty. We were much

closer to the main German defense guns now so were able to use our HE shells more effectively.

At this point I could see some of our tanks up ahead backing away from the town, what was left of them that is. The Germans had figured out our range to perfection by this time and were picking us off like ducks in a shooting gallery. The end result of this debacle is that within minutes I could see but a few American tanks still active on the field of combat. Scanning the area around us I could see a double-enveloping maneuver picking up momentum on either flank, which appeared to be a company of German medium tanks on each side. Contact with Captain "Mac" had been lost some time back. The rest of my platoon tanks had been wiped out during the afternoon, the flanking enemy tanks were too distant to engage, so I started maneuvering back to a slight defile behind us that might afford some protection so we'd have a chance at a few more German tanks as they got closer. At this time I spotted one lonely battalion tank maneuvering toward me. I was able to make radio contact with it and determined it was Lt. Holder's. I told him my game plan and to come over to the defile just in back of me. Ammunition was getting low and this is the first time it was driven home to me that we were really in big trouble. I'd been so busy with the business at hand that no time was available for evaluating the big picture situation, or even thinking about our personal welfare.

At this time loud explosions occurred and Lt. Holder's and my tanks got wiped off the combat arena. My tank took a whopper in the turret ring that prevented any further rotation of the gun. At about the same time we took another round right through the front slope plate. The armor piercing shell came on through the front drive differential and transmission and lodged under the turret floor. In the process it broke through the transmission casing and spewed hot oil and unbreathable fumes throughout the tank. We were fortunate the ammunition stored under the turret floor was almost gone; otherwise it could have blown up too! Our day of combat was through. I gave the crew the order to dismount and hit the dirt, or sand, as it were. I yelled for them to lie down, play dead, and do not run. We all got out and I led them, crawling, to a very shallow ditch. Lying out there completely exposed on the desert floor drove the message home that we were not in a very tenable position. Everything grew eerily quiet and we could now see all of the tanks around us either burning or disabled, as was ours. There were no more sounds of shell fire. All was quiet on the Eastern Front!

We could see in the distance the enemy tanks and support infantry slowly maneuvering over the area, apparently looking for survivors. Machine gun fire was audible and as the tanks got closer they zeroed in on our tank. My very young assistant driver started crying hysterically, panicked, and tried to get up and run away. I was able to grab him by the ankle and pull him back. The rest of the crew then grabbed him and held him down. The machine gun fire just over our heads sounded like loud popcorn as the bullets tore through the air.

I was hoping for darkness so we might be able to slip away, but this was not to be. The time was about 5:30 pm and darkness was starting to fall. Well, one can dream can't

one? Within minutes of Lt. Holder's and my tanks being destroyed, the German tanks and infantry came moving over the battlefield like hungry wolves.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see a MK IV Panzer tank slowly approaching us. I told the crew to lie very still and play dead. My memory harked back to the word previously received that the Germans did not take prisoners. For some silly reason I began to wonder how they were going to dispose of us. Were they just going to machine gun us down, drive the tank tracks over us, or make us run so they could have fun picking us off? Not too happy a choice! I recall at the time saying quietly: "Oh God, is this all there is?!" My thoughts harked back to memories of my dear wife and me spending our last night together and of our plans for the future and the raising of a family. Please dear Lord, make it be so! These musings were ended very quickly.

The German tank slowly pulled up to within about 15 feet of us and stopped. We were covered by the tank machine gun and by a Lieutenant in the gun turret pointing two hand guns at us; one a German standard Luger and the other a 45-caliber Colt, no doubt taken from another American casualty. In a very clear voice the Lieutenant barked out the command: "Oppschtanden!" Well, we weren't too familiar with his Anglicized German, but we did get the message! We stood up; was there a choice?! The next command barked out was: "Hahnds Opp!" Amazing how well we could understand him now! Yes, we put our hands up. The next step was for his crew to dismount, run over to us with sub-machine guns pointing at us, and remove our side arms. We were then directed to climb up onto the back of their tank. The Lieutenant glared at us and said: "Fur zee der Voor ist oober!" We got the message. With the guards' pistols pointing at us, we were driven the short distance into Sidi Bou Zid. This was not exactly like a victory parade, for us that is! Here we had a firsthand view of part of the cause of some of the problems we encountered during our advance. Nicely camouflaged within the cactus patches and small clay block Arab huts near a Muslim mosque were several gigantic German MK VI Tiger tanks. The 88 mm guns looked like telephone poles compared to our 75 mm guns.

The MK IV tank carrying my crew and me continued moving ahead until we reached the courtyard of a mosque where we were motioned to dismount. We were then taken in to the courtyard which apparently was the collecting point for the dead, the wounded, and the prisoners. It was a most distressing sight to see; what just a few hours before had been our hale and hearty comrades, all were now laid out either dead or severely wounded. Over to my left, leaning back against a wall, I spotted Corporal Garibay, the gunner of my second section's lead tank. He was gasping for breath and shivering violently in the cold night air. I went over to him and he told me Sgt. Gott had been killed when their tank was hit, and that he was barely able to climb out of the turret hatch of the burning tank before the ammunition exploded. I gave him my combat jacket and helped him put it on. He was a terrible purplish color and was retching violently from having inhaled so much of the poisonous fumes. I did not think he would make it. I learned later from other comrades that he did die that night. The German medical aid facilities and personnel were over-taxed as could be expected. They naturally were tending the needs of their own wounded first and ours had to wait. Sad, but that's war.

The POW Experiences

As an officer I was separated from my men immediately after capture and taken over to a German officer where I was subjected to a brief "stand-up" interrogation. We had been taught in OCS that if we were ever to fall into the hands of the enemy, we did not have to respond to any questioning other than to give our name, rank and serial number. This was in accordance with the rules set down by the Geneva Convention of 1929.

The German officer asked a number of questions which I declined to answer. He knew more about our regiment and its condition than I did. I gathered that what he was really interested in was the possibility of another larger American offensive that might be moving in right on the heels of our massacre. I of course knew of none and would not have told him if I did know. He went on to say that from the appearance of our suicide attack they assumed we were the point of a larger attack force to come. What could I say? This was an interesting observation, and in the next couple of weeks he would learn we did *not* have any more troops and tanks in the area at this point to get chewed up! He dismissed me and I was marched over to a waiting truck and ordered to mount up into it, which I did.

This was the beginning of the let-down period as I rejoined what was left of some of the surviving officers of our battalion.

We eagerly asked each other about any knowledge of, or the condition of, or the whereabouts of our fellow officers who were missing from the group. As could be imagined, very little information could be obtained because we had been widely separated during our four hour combat experiences. Lt. Marlow was with our group but I was quite concerned about my good friend Lt. Holder's status because he was not with this group of about ten of us. I was also very concerned about the status of our favorite Captain "Mac" who was not present!

The fifth officer of "E" Company, Lt. Champlain, was back with the supply and support section of our unit, so was not in the combat arena and was therefore not captured.

It was nightfall by this time and we could only wonder what was in store for us. The truck moved out of the battlefield area in an easterly direction for about 15 miles or so. The truck then pulled over into a cactus patch area and we were unloaded. Nighttime in the Tunisian desert in February is rather cold. Our combat uniforms at this time were what were known as combat fatigues or cotton fabric coveralls; not too warm! As stated previously, I had given my combat jacket away, so I was a bit chilly.

We huddled around in our small group discussing the battle and wondering what the next move would be. Periodically another officer or two would be brought in to our cactus patch. Each one would eagerly be questioned by us to learn more of the status of the remainder of the battalion. I was very relieved to find that one of the newcomers was my very good friend Lt. Holder, and he was not injured. In fact, he was delivered to us in first

class mode, by motorcycle side car! How about that? We subsequently learned that Captain Machus had been severely wounded and was transported to a German field emergency aid station. We were not to see him again for almost two years. Upon his return home after the war he was able to have an excellent book prepared detailing his escapes and experiences throughout Italy, Germany, Poland and Russia. It will be referenced at the end of this book by its title: "Turmoil to Triumph".

As could be expected, our group of captured American soldiers from the 2nd Tank Battalion was a pretty depressed collection. No one wants to be on the losing end of anything; a football game, a poker game, an argument, or a battle with an ultimate conclusion, as in our case, of death, wounding or capture! A one word description of our feeling at this point would be "numbness".

Before proceeding with the remainder of this story, and while we are still in the arena of the post-battlefield confusion, I feel it would be appropriate to finalize this phase of our history by summarizing how we got into the debacle just described and how it all ended three months later. This could be termed an epilogue of the Tunisian Campaign and the post-mortem of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division. These facts are all based upon having studied numerous books on the subject after the war. They certainly explained to my satisfaction how it all came to be, and how unaware we were of these facts before we went into combat!

Numerous British authors and newsmen had written the terrible defeat off as the result of "green" and inexperienced American troops. This was definitely *not* the case as can be confirmed by reviewing the information that follows.

The British press corps had been trying to elevate the popularity status of General Bernard Montgomery (Monty) who had been assigned command of the British 8th Army in August of 1942 to combat Rommel's Afrika Korps. He had been notoriously slow and cautious in his command decisions because he wanted a real excess of troops and supplies before attacking the enemy. Not a bad idea, but aggressive tactics at times are warranted, especially if you have the opportunity to trap a large portion of the enemy. Well, Montgomery, with the aid of American tanks and supplies, was gradually pushing Rommel back through Libya and Tripoli into Tunisia at this time in February 1943. We American troops, under the British command of General Alexander's 1st Army, were the ones charged with the mission of preventing the Afrika Korps from driving westward into Algeria.

Briefly, we unknowingly were pitted against General von Armin's 10th Panzer Battalion augmented by the formidable 501st Panzer Battalion with its Mark VI Tiger tanks, and Field Marshall Rommel's 21st Panzer Division of the Afrika Korps. To tally the challenges we faced that day, we were: Out-gunned, outnumbered, out-positioned, under-equipped and under-supported in terms of air, artillery or reconnaissance. Other than that, we did stick to our guns and fought to the last man!

One of the most complete and readable books covering the North African/Tunisian Campaign was written by American Brigadier General Paul Robinett entitled "Armor Command". He was the commander of CCB (Combat Command "B") and was exposed to all

of the same situations to which we were. He, of course, could relate to the higher echelons of command to which we were not privy. In addition to combat experiences, he was also able to comment on the upper echelon's difficulties of coordination and communication between American Generals Eisenhower, Fredendall, Clark and Patton versus the British General Alexander and Field Marshall Montgomery versus the French General Juin! There were numerous occasions where petty jealousies encroached upon better judgment. Never the twain shall meet!

The battle for Tunisia continued to struggle onward with severe losses of men and materiel on both sides. Finally, during the period of 10-13 May 1943, approximately three months after our debacle, the German and Italian troops surrendered in Tunis, with the loss of 250,000 troops captured bringing the conflict to its final conclusion.

Now we can return to the 15 February 1943 period and continue with the next phase of the story: POW!

Yes, the combat portion of the war was over for us, but there were other rather graphic experiences awaiting us in the months to come. The cactus patch here in Tunisia was just our first place of incarceration. Accommodations were rather stark; a sandy patch of desert floor surrounded by cactus about six feet high and German guards with their guns at the ready. There was no food, water or blankets. Yes, we were getting pretty tired, hungry and thirsty considering we had not had adequate rations or rest for over 36 hours!

Commemoration

I would like to take a pause to pay tribute to those fine young men of my armored tank platoon who were exposed to and shared the combat experiences with me on 15 February 1943 in the Tunisian desert. They were well trained, most military in their behavior both on and off the battlefield, and a fine example of their patriotic American heritage for which we can all be proud.

This listing was compiled after we were interned as a group in Capua, Italy, prior to being separated into separate POW camps in Germany. Unfortunately, at this point, much valid information on the status of some of our comrades was not available. They are listed in order by rank.

S/Sgt. Hampden, J.W.	MIA	T-5 Reineke, J.	POW
Sgt. Gott, D.	K	T-4 Lowery, N.	POW
Sgt. Suining, N.	POW	T-4 Pearson, W	MIA
Sgt. Tocci, A.	POW	T-4 Roland	POW
Cpl. Garibay, V.	K	T-4 Spiegel, A.	MIA
Cpl. Graham, E.	POW	Pfc. Powell, W.	POW
Cpl. Havelik	POW	Pfc. Tomlinson	MIA
Cpl. Jorae, V.	POW	Pfc. Zanders	POW
Cpl. Kinbley, J.	MIA	Pvt. Anderson	POW
Cpl. O'Conner, W.	POW	Pvt. Clark, G.	POW
T-5 Hunsaker, W.	POW	Pvt. Cronin, C.	MIA
T-5 Krulik, F.	POW	Pvt. Davis	POW