

REMINISCENCES

In the Service

Incredible as it might seem, I registered for the draft when I was in the Assembly Center in the Pacific Northwest Livestock Exposition grounds under guard by a detachment of U.S. soldiers. I got into the U.S. Army by volunteering. When I was called up, I was ordered to report for induction at Portland, Oregon. That was my draft's board's error. When it was all straightened out, I was sent off to and inducted at Fort Douglas, Utah on 10 August 1943. I reported for active service on 2 September 1943 at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. (See "Internment".) However, I did not stay there, but was instead transferred to Fort Benning, Georgia for basic training of soldiers in the ASTP.

Basic training was largely physical conditioning, orientation, and close order drills. We were being sent to colleges afterwards. There were, however, two incidents at Fort Benning that I remember vividly even after many years. The day after the Thanksgiving dinner in 1943 is one that stands out in my memory. The whole battalion came down with diarrhoea. Years later I learned from the reports of the Armed Forces Epidemiology Board the cause of the outbreaks in the Army. It was an out and out failure in food hygiene. The turkeys that were sold to the Army messes during World War II were prepared in what was called "New York packs". This was simple whole turkeys that were plucked, but otherwise intact and refrigerated, i.e. they were not cut open and cleaned. The refrigeration was almost always inadequate, so that by the time the turkeys arrived at the forts and camps, they were swimming in poultry juices. Bacterial contamination of the batches was assured. The cooks further compounded the contamination by stuffing the turkey with bread which was a good insulation. The temperature within turkeys being roasted reached ideal incubation temperature for Salmonella. The sad part of this is that it occurred at many camps. The other incident that has remained in my memory was the one day leave I had and went to Atlanta. The person who arranged the trip into Atlanta had a family friend there, and he took us to a fancy club in the city where I was surprised to see rows of slot machines, all being fed by the gambling members. There was gaiety and frivolity that to me was very strange in wartime. I surprise myself in the things that I remember most.

When the basic training was finally over, we were placed on a troop train traveling westward. It dropped groups of ASTP soldiers along the way at various colleges. My assignment was to the University of San Francisco. I knew it was probably a mistake, but I did not question the orders. The inevitable happened. I was in San Francisco only two weeks, but they were two great weeks. I had an opportunity to see some parts of the city. Since I was in uniform, no one questioned my being there. The Army did note the mistake in due time, cut new orders for me and sent me to join the ASTP contingent at the New Mexico State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts in Las Cruces. Our commandant there was a West Pointer and we were made to emulate the cadets. He even conducted white glove inspections in our dormitory and we marched to and from classes. Our comments about the commandant was cutting and not very nice. Our stay there was, however, only six weeks. Fortunes in the war zones required more troops, and we were soon transferred out to combat units. Our first stop was with an armored division in Texas to which some of

the men were assigned. I went with the remainder to the 667th Field Artillery Battalion in a camp near Brownwood, Texas. I was assigned to Battery B. The battalion was made up of hodge-podge of men from various parts of the U.S. There were men who had trained in field artillery at Fort Sill, Oklahoma and were assigned to our battalion; there were non-commissioned officers who had been transferred in from other line units; our officers were ROTC-trained or were 90 day wonders; and there were the ASTP soldiers. In our unit was a sub-group of men who came by way of Fort Sill. They were loud, had little education and had been moonshiners in the eastern part of Virginia in civilian life. It was an American sub-culture that many of us knew nothing about. With the exception of the officers and the core non-commission officers, we were all privates being shaped up for combat. Our Battery Commander was Capt. Amundson. The Executive Officer was 1st Lt. Truesdale. The Motor Officer was 2nd Lt. Beall.

The Fort Sill men were assigned to be canoneers on the 155 mm howitzers. My buddy, Luis de la Torre, and I were assigned to the Fourth Section which was the support section to the three gun sections. Luis became the radio operator, and I was the machine gunner behind the 50 caliber piece. During the training period we were given various tasks. When the work in the Battery Supply section became very busy, such as outfitting the men for going overseas, I was called to assist as the supply clerk. I was able to do the paper work without difficulty and I could type. In training I could tear down the M1 rifle, or the carbine, or the machine gun quicker and better than all others. I had qualified as a sharpshooter on the M1 rifle and as an expert on the carbine. For a while I was designated the acting sergeant in charge of the Fourth Section. Our Executive Officer, Lt. Truesdale, felt then that I had the intelligence to lead the section.

Being young and small in stature, I was the target of one, not too bright, heavy set, bully who had a beer belly. He took delight in shoving me around and in general being nasty. One time when our battery was having an organized recreation playing soft ball, the bully started to push me around. Others noticed, but they didn't do anything to stop him. My exasperation reached its limit, and I used a judo kick sweeping his feet from under him. I could not have done it any better. The bully sailed up and fell right on his butt, and there was an explosion of laughs from the rest of the men. Goliath had met his defeat. I earned the respect of my comrades. The bully was a total misfit; he was soon transferred out before we went overseas.

We trained hard and when we were ready, we greased up our equipment to go overseas. However, before we finally left camp, there were shuffles in the command and non-commissioned ratings were given out. Lt. Truesdale, whom the men liked, was transferred out, and Lt. Beall was made the Executive Officer. The latter was a college graduate who prided himself as having played pro football some years before. When the ratings were announced, I had been promoted to Private First Class. Another person by the name of Parker was promoted to sergeant in charge of the Fourth Section. He was older, but slow in thinking.

From Texas we went by train to a camp near Boston and we shipped out on 10 November 1944 and sailed the Atlantic on the passenger liner, Europa, which had been converted into a troop transport, to Liverpool. After landing on 18 November 1944, we went by train to Burton-on-Trent. The next few weeks were a

busy time. We took our equipment out, degreased them and made ourselves battle ready. England in wartime was an eerie place, at least, to me. We had black-outs, and accommodations were bleak. We had in Burton-on-Trent a repeat of the Thanksgiving dinner I experienced the year before in Fort Benning with the same disastrous result. The Army had not learned from the past. My gastronomic education was, however, not neglected. I learned what fish and chips were, when we went into the town. I remember ordering one for the first time and exclaiming, "Why it's fish and French fries!" To this the English shopkeeper said, "I beg your pardon. It's English!"

On Christmas day 1944 we slipped out of Burton-on-Trent and went to Southampton where we boarded LSTs and sailed to La Havre. I was one of the route guides on the road somewhere between Burton-on-Trent and Southampton. The going was most difficult because of the heavy fog that day. However, we reached La Havre without any problem and made our way to the designated assembly area. Few days later, in the cold we made our way through France over icy roads into Belgium to be part of the U.S. First Army in our push against the Germans in the Bulge.

There were many problems that the Army created for itself. One of them was the specifications of the combat boots that were issued to us. They were made incredibly poor. The leather was turned inside out from the normal construction. The smooth side was inside and the rough side out. It, therefore, absorbed water readily, and so we were given goose fat to rub on to make it water-proof. What this did was to prevent the boots from breathing. Since feet sweat, under the conditions of weather and duty, freezing the feet was a definite possibility. The Ardennes that winter was blanketed with deep snow, and we were up much of the time in position or on guard duty. We often did not have time to get into a barn and take our boots off and dry off. I froze my feet.

We saw or heard Bed Check Charlie regularly; we were attacked at our flank by German tanks; we were targets of the German 88s; we were strafed during one of the forward moves. I was often on advance parties to set up forward observer position. In that work I saw our dead before the Grave Registration unit could get around to them.

In our push we were heading for Cologne, but suddenly we were ordered to the Rhine at Remagan, and there we provided the medium artillery cover for the infantry. We crossed the river and set up and shot over the hill with the lowest charge we ever used. We could see the projectile being shot out of the howitzer. We were very close to the enemy. Rhineland was the vineyard of Germany. Our troops soon found wine in cellars. Since they had not had any alcoholic beverages for some time, a fairly good number of them broke open bottles of wine and got drunk, in spite of being so near to the front. Their rationale was that the Germans were now on the run. Several non-commissioned officers were busted by the Battery Commander; one of them was the Supply Sergeant. Therefore, I was made the acting supply sergeant without even another stripe. It was clear that I was not going to be promoted beyond the one stripe in that unit.

Our forces kept pushing, isolating pockets of the enemy by pincer movements and getting them to surrender. At one place I was surprised by two German soldiers who came out of the woods to surrender to me. Indeed, we had the

Germans on the run. We were on the push toward Munich when the war in Germany ended. We had seen action in three campaigns: Ardennes, Rhineland and Central Europe.

When the fighting war ended, we were in Bavaria and there was little to do as a field artillery unit, and we were given assignment as military police. There was little else to do for us in the Army of Occupation as we waited our turn to return to the U.S. We were quartered in Prien which was close to Chiemsee where King Ludwig had built a castle on an island in the lake, and we were close to Salzburg. I took advantage of organized excursions to see some of those places. Austria was a paradise compared to the towns and cities of Germany that had been bombarded. There was also the opportunity to visit the Eagle's Nest at Berchtesgaden.

I saw little scope for me in the 667th, and so when other units were looking for men who could type and serve as company clerks, I accepted the transfer. Almost immediately after being transferred to a company, the battalion headquarters over the company had me moved to it. They had noted that I could do more than just type. It was the Quartermaster Battalion which had extensive responsibilities in administering the Captured Enemy Materials Depot and in preparing other units to be shipped back to the U.S. It was not a regular battalion; it had many more companies than the table of organization at any time, and the companies assigned to it constantly changed as some were added and some were shipped out. I was placed in the Supply Section and was immediately promoted to corporal. I assumed all the reporting work to the Third Army. When the Battalion Supply Sergeant, who had a large number of points to be shipped back to the U.S., left, I was immediately promoted to fill his position with the rank of Staff Sergeant which the position called for. It was a jump in two ranks. My work was efficient, and I could carry out the responsibility of the section without too much supervision. When the Chief Warrant Officer Salesman went on R&R, I did his work also. I prepared papers to be signed by another officer appointed to fill the post in title only. Due largely to the work that I did with efficiency and despatch, the Battalion Commander, on paper, transferred me out to a company, promoted me to a Technical Sergeant, and transferred me back to the battalion headquarters. I did not physically move out of our headquarters even for a minute. We were then quartered in Furth, the sister city of Nuremberg.

Some months after my promotion to Technical Sergeant, I had an occasion to run into Sgt. Parker. He was still with the 667th Field Artillery Battalion. I outranked him by two grades. I also saw Lt. Beall and gave him a snappy salute re-introducing myself as Technical Sergeant Kawata. If he was surprised, he did not show it.

During the Army of Occupation, I had an opportunity to have an R&R in Switzerland with another non-commissioned officer. We went to Mulhouse where the gathering point for R&R was located. We visited Bern, Andermatt, Lucerne and Zurich. In Andermatt we skied, or attempted to. In Lucerne we stayed at the Hotel Wildenman while seeing the sights. More than 40 years later on our vacation from my USAID assignment in Egypt, I found that the hotel still existed, and Marion and I stayed at that hotel in 1989. I recounted the past with the owner of the hotel. He was the same owner in 1946.

When my turn to return to the U.S. came around, I turned down the request of the Battalion Commander to stay on even though he held out an inducement of a promotion to Master Sergeant, and happily left the European Theater. There was a lot of catching up on life to do in the U.S.

I returned to the U.S. on a victory ship leaving Bremerhaven on 15 April 1946. The ship reached the port in New Jersey on 25 April 1946 sailing in past the Statue of Liberty. We were home at last. There at a camp we were processed and sent on to separation centers. Since I was a senior non-commissioned officer, I was made the one in charge of a contingent going to Fort Lewis, Washington where we were to be discharged. I lost a few men when our troop train stopped in Chicago. They had gotten off the train to make telephone calls or to buy some items at a stand. The train, however, was moved several times in the station for we did not have high priority. The men were unable to find the troop train where they had gotten off, and they were left behind. Somewhere in the plains states they did catch up by taking a regular train. We arrived at Fort Lewis with all the members of the contingent present and accounted for. I was honorably discharged on 3 May 1946. I had put in 1 year, 2 months, 17 days of continental service and 1 year, 5 months, 16 days of foreign service in all.

The U.S. Army listed having awarded me the following medals:

- American Theater Service Medal
- Good Conduct Medal
- European African Middle Eastern Service Medal
- Victory Medal
- Army of Occupation Medal (Germany)