IN THE ARMY

1943-1946

The other day I wrote for you an account of a part of my life which I entitled *From Internment to Going Off to War.* Now I am writing about the period of my life in the Army of the U.S. [Let me here explain the difference between the U.S. Army and the Army of the U.S. During my service years, U.S. Army meant the Regular Army and the Army of the U.S. meant the civilian army. Therefore, when you look at my discharge certificate you will find that it is the Army of the United States in which I served.] Some of the information I give in this paper you will find in the Honorable Discharge Certificate, a copy of which is added. [The stamp, "Book 149 pages 74 and 75", refers to the location of a copy of the certificate recorded in Miscellaneous Documents of the State of Oregon, County of Multnomah. This was done officially by the County Clerk on 6 May 1946.]

I was inducted into the service on 10 August 1943 at Fort Douglas, Utah, put into uniform and then was placed on inactive service from 10 August 1943 through 1 September 1943. The Army gave me the three weeks to visit my family in Minidoka before I was to report for active duty at Camp Shelby, Mississippi on 2 September 1943. The train travel was not easy, and it was slow in those days so that I used some of the days just to get from Hunt, Idaho (closest town to Minidoka) to Camp Shelby. Why was I sent to Camp Shelby? The answer is simple. That was where all the nisei volunteers were sent to be assigned to units within the all-nisei 442nd Combat Team. I arrived at Camp Shelby and reported.

Camp Shelby in early September was hot and very humid. Perspiration would not evaporate. The sheets on my bed were clammy all the time I was there, and worse, the mosquitoes were fierce. Those who reported were interviewed and given assignments in various units. When my turn came to be interviewed, the interviewer saw that I had a record of having passed the examination for the Army Specialized Training Program. That had some kind of priority, and I was given orders to report to Fort Benning, Georgia for infantry basic training with other ASTP soldiers. There, I was with other college men. It was a young and intelligent bunch of men, but in physical abilities, some of the men were deficient. Infantry basic training was designed to make men physically fit. Some of the men took weeks to learn to march in cadence. Close order drills were fiascoes in the early weeks. Many fell out when we went on force marches. We fired M-1 rifles; we ran obstacle courses; we crawled on our bellies while the 30 caliber machine-gun was being fired over us; we were taken to the woods at night and were to reach the assembly point. We college men were probably seen as being soft to the training cadre. The training cadre on the other hand weren't all that smart. For example: When we did force marches, they had us line up by height with tall men in the lead. I, being the shortest, was always last. The man in the front would set the pace, but very soon the accordion action sets in. What I mean by this is that men in the middle started to hasten and slacken the pace, like an accordion. By the time this action got to the anchor the action was very pronounced so that I was running at dead heat at times and running up the heels of the man in front at other times.

Some of the men were quick learners and took soldiering in stride. I

was a quick learner. I could strip the M-1 rifle down and put it together quicker than others in the company. Since I was agile, having been a gymnast in high school and a member of a judo club in Portland, I found myself leading the company in calisthenics. No training cadre would lead the calisthenics after I was given the responsibility. Our three months of basic training passed quickly.

While we were at Fort Benning, there was an unfortunate epidemic that knocked the whole training battalion out of commission with the Thanksgiving Day meal. Almost every soldier had diarrhoea and some were vomiting. At the time I did not know how that happened. The officers of the Fort did not know either, for they were to repeat the outbreak again. [It was after I got to the Johns Hopkins University more than two decades later that I learned just how the epidemic happened. My colleague, Dr. C.W. Kruse', had been on the Armed Services Epidemiology Board and he had been supplied the facts. As explained, there was no mystery about it. In the war days feeding the soldiers in forts and camps was a major logistical undertaking. The poultry packers were short of workers and they had cut corners. They saw that it took too much time and effort to eviscerate turkeys after plucking the feathers, and so they packed the uneviscerated turkeys in huge containers with ice. They called this "New York Pack" and they shipped the turkeys off to the military installations. The inevitable happened. The ice melted so that by the time the turkeys reached their destinations, they were swimming in water. Whatever contaminant was present got disseminated to all the turkeys. To compound the problem the Army cooks were instructed to make bread stuffing in the birds. When the birds were placed into the oven to roast, the stuffing became an insulator and the temperature in the turkey became the perfect incubation temperature for the bugs. The organisms multiplied. The organism was one of the *Salmonella* species, common in chickens and turkeys.] The enemy could not have concocted a better method to make us soldiers incapacitated. Most of us recovered, but without good medicine in those days, some continued to have a low-grade disease.

For Christmas that year some of us were given weekend passes and we went in to Atlanta. One of the men had family friends who had invited us to a club where there were slot machines and plenty of free food. We ignored "the slots" and ate. It was a welcome change from the Army food.

When our basic training was over after Christmas, we were assigned to colleges. Trains went to different places around the country. I was on the train taking us from Georgia to San Francisco. The train dropped the student-soldiers along the way. The troop train was slow moving and the travel through the plains was truly boring. I volunteered to work in the kitchen car, knowing that if I did so, I would eat well. We didn't need to wash dishes for every soldier had his own mess kit. Those who drew KP (kitchen police) washed the pots and pans. As assistant to the cooks, I avoided that also. What was great about the kitchen car was that it was warm, and we could open the side windows and see the countryside through which we were passing. This was in January of the year and the Rockies were magnificent. When we went over the Continental Divide, we seemed to be coasting down to San Francisco. By that time the number of soldiers had dwindled to a handful, and there were only a few railway cars. I was one of the last off the train for my assignment was to the University of San Francisco. I knew this was an exclusion area for me, but I decided not to point this out. When we arrived at the University, the weather was bracing

in the morning. We were in the fog the first roll call, but for the time I was there, in the late mornings and in the afternoons there were many days of sunny weather. It was a beautiful time to be in San Francisco and since it was before the semester started we had time to go into the city. Two weeks after my arriving in San Francisco I was called into the first sergeant's office and was told that I was being transferred to Las Cruces, New Mexico on assignment to the New Mexico State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts. (Today it is the New Mexico State University.) "Hah," I said to myself, "The Army made another mistake, but I enjoyed the two week sojourn in San Francisco."

Las Cruces then was a very small town, and the State College was also very small. There was only one paved street, its Main Street. But it had a restaurant that served the best steaks for miles around. The ASTP Commandant at the State College was an older, West Point graduate, and he wanted above all Discipline. We marched to and from classes. Our shoes had to be shined. We called it "spit and polish". The brass buttons on our uniforms were required to be polished, and he conducted "white-glove" inspections of our quarters. We thought he was an old *fuddy-duddy* and wondered whether he knew that a war was going on. The student-soldiers assigned there had been placed in a three month course in Basic Engineering, but half way through, the program was discontinued and all of us were transferred to line units. [The State College gave me a certificate that I was there for six weeks. There should be some record of my time there in the institution's archives.] The fortunes of war had not gone well in Europe, and we were needed to replace units in the front. Those of us who were in Las Cruces were first sent to a tank outfit and from there some of us were sent on to field artillery units. I was glad for I did not like the confined space in the Sherman tank. Had I stayed there I would have been a bow gunner/assistant driver.

My assignment was to Camp Barkley near Brownwood, Texas where I was placed in Battery B of the 667 Field Artillery Battalion. The battery was made up of a curious mix of men. We who went there from the ASTP were "the college men". There was a core of older non-commissioned officers who had previous artillery training elsewhere. There were those who had trained at the Artillery School at Fort Sill. Many of the latter were illiterate; they signed their names with "X" when they were paid. One unforgettable man among them was in civilian life a runner of moonshine whiskey. His base of operation was Bluefield, Virginia, which he said was the "Moonshine Capital of the World". He had tons of stories to tell about his life. I have often wondered whatever became of him after he got out of the Army. The battery had three 155 mm howitzers. The men assigned to each gun were in a section. The fourth section was the support section. As we trained to be ready for combat, we were given jobs to do. The executive officer saw that I had leadership potential and made me the acting sergeant of the fourth section. I was given an arm band on which was the three stripes of a sergeant. We went through rigorous training in dusty Texas. It was so dusty that we often said, "See Texas blow by." One of my responsibility was to man the 50 caliber machine gun probably because I could strip it down and put it back together with relative ease. I learned to lay wire (telephone), to climb poles having put on spikes and when the supply sergeant became very busy, I was asked to assist him with records and inventories, probably because I could type, because I was very good with figures, and because I was able to master the Army Regulation's Table of Organization and Equipment (T/O&E) fairly easily. I made myself useful doing my work and that of others.

There was one very nasty, heavyset man in the battery. Somehow he took a dislike to me and would go out of his way to poke me and push me around. He resented my mental acumen and the fact a "runt", as he called me, led close order drills and calisthenics for the whole battery. One day at the end of our training period, we were playing a pick-up soft ball game on our free time, for our heavy equipment had been prepared to be sent overseas. This man started again to push me around. I tried to walk away from him, but he was persistent. My judo came in handy then. I simply kicked his feet from under him in one of the classical judo moves. He sailed up in the air and landed with a thump on the ground. The men of the batter saw this and let off a thundering laugh. The runt had humiliated his big-bellied, beer guzzling tormentor. He went away and left me alone from then on. Before we left Camp Barkley, he was transferred out of our unit. I concluded that the officers did not want to deal with a misfit in combat.

We were now ready to go overseas. Our equipment had been made ready for shipment and had been sent off. It was then that the promotions were announced. There were only two nisei soldiers in our battery. There were no other nisei in the battalion. Both of us were promoted to private first class (PFC). The other nisei was the lead cannoneer of one of the howitzers. He should have been made a corporal. I had been an acting sergeant. What had happened? The executive officer, whom everyone respected and who made me the acting sergeant, had been transferred to another unit quietly, and the motor officer, for whom the men had little respect, was made the new executive officer. We suspected military politics even in time of war. I never really found out what the basis of the decisions were. What I do know is that the person who made sergeant and was placed in charge of the fourth section proved to be ineffective when we got into battle.

We got on the train and went up the coast to Boston. Somewhere along the way when the troop train stopped for several hours, and someone in the battery got off the train and brought back a box containing Kentucky Fried Chicken. That was my first taste of KFC and I thoroughly enjoyed it. We were not long in Boston. We set sail on a former luxury liner Europa, for England on 10 November 1944. We landed in Liverpool on 18 November 1944 after having zig-zagged across the Atlantic. We were not in a convoy so that we could have been a target for the U-boats. From Liverpool we trained down to Burton-upon-Trent where we were quartered at some posh estate. We were not in the living quarters but in the stables. [What is it about me that I drew stables as places to stay?] There we unpacked our fighting gear, degreased the howitzers and in every way got ourselves ready for combat. We were in Burton-upon-Trent when the American Thanksgiving Day came around. We had our traditional Thanksgiving Day turkey and experienced another epidemic of diarrhoea. The Army had not learned from the experience of the year before at Fort Benning and elsewhere. The estate had bucket latrines and we filled many buckets. I thought the German bombers could have smelled the effluvia.

I remember how friendly the English were. However, there were some humorous moments, not to be forgotten. We were told to sample the famous English *Fish and Chips.* We were young and none of us had travel experiences. We did not know what that special snack was, and so when a group of us had passes to go into town, we found a shop that specialized in Fish and Chips. It was little difficult to find the place in the blackout, but find the shop we did. Each of us ordered

one serving. The shop-keeper had newspapers cut up to make paper cones. In it he placed some "chips" and on top he placed a piece of "fish". The fish was probably haddock. I looked at the cone filled fish and chips, picked up a "chip" and remarked, "Why, it's French Fries!" Thereupon, the shop-keeper rose up and said, "Sir, it's British!"

It was on Christmas Day under the cover of darkness that we moved out of Burton-upon-Trent in full battle gear. I was one of the men who stood along the route to direct our convoy. It was foggy, cold and dreary. Everything went well, although not like clock-work. I was picked up more than an hour late. Our immediate destination was Southampton. There we boarded Landing Ship Tanks (LST) for Le Havre. The crossing was not too rough, but the LST is not one of the more comfortable ships on which to cross the English Channel. On landing in France we made off to the assembly area near Rouen. That winter was miserable. We had rain and snow. It was extremely cold. We never knew what the brass was doing. We had been waiting and waiting for orders to move to the front. I didn't think we were kept waiting for good weather. Each day of waiting was like eternity for us.

The word finally came for us to move up to the front. We hitched up. In our battery the half-tracks pulled the howitzers, and we had jeeps, a command car, three-quarter ton trucks and a 4x4 truck. My 50 caliber machine gun was mounted on a three-quarter ton truck that was used by the wire section. We drove from France into Belgium going through Brussels. In the city the streets were sheets of ice and even our half-track had problems negotiating turns in the road. We headed in the direction of Aachen in Germany. We were in "the Bulge". Officially it was called the Ardennes Campaign. We were soon in position and started to fire our howitzers. The Germans used church steeples as observation posts, and so often our forward observer would call fire on churches with tall steeples. This was unfortunate. In our first position the snow was so deep that it came up to my hip. We were retaking the land that had been lost when the Germans pushed back our advances in what has come to be called "The Battle of the Bulge". We were medium artillery, but we were often forward enough that our infantry was sometimes not ahead of us. On our moves up we found American dead in the snow. The grave registration unit had not yet arrived where we were. We were sometimes strafed by the German air force when we were on the road. We had nightly visits by their airplanes we called, "Bed-check Charlie". At night their pilots would fly over our positions to see some signs of our whereabouts, like flames from our kitchens. If they saw some flames, they would drop their bombs. That made us very nervous.

Most of the time, however, we ate C-rations that came in boxes the size of the old cracker-jack box, because we were on the move, or because we were laying wires and could not get back to our mess. Day after day of canned ham and eggs and biscuits got tiring. We had small can openers that were very clever and served us well. Some men who lost their spoons and forks were, however, in trouble. It posed no problem for me. When my mess kit was in the truck, all I needed to do was to cut two pieces of twigs of proper lengths and used them as I would chop sticks. My cultural background had advantages.

It took us some time to get used to the sounds of battle. In training we had shot our howitzers. That big bang we were accustomed to, but the sound of artillery rounds coming toward us had a different and

definitely an eery sound. We often faced the German 88. Their rounds had flat trajectory and its whistling gave little warning before hitting. We came to dread that sound. We were shooting, and they were shooting back. Once we had German tanks break through our infantry and came close enough to fire at us. There is no glamour being a soldier in the trenches. Some of our men under the strain of being bombed and shelled became shell-shocked.

The Army did some stupid things, one of which has caused me pains. When the design of combat boots was being considered someone thought that it would be better not to have the chrome leather side (the smooth side) out. Instead it was thought that the buff side out was better. What this did was to make it easy for water to be absorbed. This was a problem, and so the Quartermasters issued "duck grease" to water-proof the boots. It took a lot of grease to make the boots water-proof and that in effect prevented the boots from breathing. For some of us there were days on end when we could not take our boots off to change our socks because of the battle or being on perimeter guard duty. Our feet would sweat and our feet began to freeze. This happened often enough that the capillaries in my feet became damaged. I have had problems from that from then to now.

We were part of the First Army under General Hodges and over him was General Bradley. They were good generals whom the troops respected. For a while the resistance by the Germans were heavy, but soon we were moving up on them. Our target was to reach the city of Cologne in support of the infantry. Suddenly we were ordered to change course and swing southward to the Rhineland. We were close to Remagen when we engaged the enemy. There have been movies made of the Remagen Bridgehead, and I can say that the real fighting was not like what Hollywood depicted. The Army engineers quickly erected a water-level pontoon bridge across the Rhine, and we were the first medium artillery to cross over to the east bank of the river, all the while the German planes were trying to bomb it. They would fly along the river when the sun was over the river so that we could not see them easily. They dropped their bombs which caused a lot of splashing but they did not hit the bridge. When we got into position on the east bank of Rhine we lobbed our rounds over the hill. The enemy was very close so that we were using the lowest charge to fire the rounds.

One of the most disturbing thing that happened at the Remagen Bridgehead in the Battalion was our men finding wine in the cellars of the houses. We had fought in the cold and in the rain. We had subsisted on C-rations. It was beginning to be spring and the men who had not had any alcohol for a long time, especially the men who liked "likker" back home, found wine. They got drunk even though the enemy was close. So our commanding officer busted the men who got drunk. The supply sergeant was among them. He was reduced in grade from staff sergeant to private. With that the CO placed me in charge of the supply. I had assisted in the supply back in Texas and that was a natural stop-gap for the officers. One month later the supply sergeant got his stripes back and I went back to what I was doing. That was an interesting interlude for me, and it was without any promotion. The supply sergeant lost one month of pay at the higher grade. I was given no compensation for the additional responsibility placed on me.

In the Rhineland campaign we used pincer movements to entrap the enemy and capture them. One day I was helping the wire crew to lay lines near the woods, and two German soldier appeared suddenly to surrender

to me. Needless to say, I was taken by surprise. Germany was losing the war. More and more German soldiers caught in the pincer movements were surrendering. Suddenly during this mopping up operation, we received another order to change our course to make a run toward Munich. That distance from where we were to Munich was great and we started out in that direction. We were now under the Third Army under General Patton, for whom the troops had little respect. The men called him "Blood and Guts" adding that it was "our blood and his guts". Spring weather had come and the going was not so difficult. Only on two days we were strafed from the air by German planes. We could not mount much defense. We simply stopped and jumped into the roadside ditch. We were getting close to Munich when we were told to stop. Germany had finally capitulated. It was VE Day (Victory in Europe Day). When that happened we just stopped and simply rested. The war was finally over!

The 667 FA Battalion after the VE Day was assigned to duties in the Army of Occupation. We were stationed near Prien am Chiemsee. Chiemsee is a lake, an island on which Ludwig II had built a castle which was remarkably saved from the devastation of the war. It had always been a tourist stop in the past and since. Many of us were able to see it. We were now entitled to some R&R and so we took turns having tours and leaves. I remember visiting Salzburg and signing the guest book at the Mozart's Geburtshaus (birth-house) and touring places around Innsbruck. We got on the cable car and reached the top of a hill and saw edelweiss growing among the snow. What a change it was from slogging in the snow and shooting and being shot at!

While these diversions were pleasant, there were jobs that needed to be done. The howitzers and my machine gun and other gears were packed up and sent back to the U.S. and for a while we were assigned to MP duties on the autobahn. I had a smattering of German and so the first sergeant said to me, "You're the interpreter!" I wasn't that good, but most of the men learned no German words. I was like the one-eyed person among the blind. But this was not how I wanted to spend my days. I hoped for something better to come along. It so happened that many units in the Third Army were looking for soldiers who could serve as company clerks. I could type and I could keep records. I had assisted as the supply clerk in Battery B. When I said I would like to be considered for the company clerk assignment in any company, I was quickly transferred to another company. I don't remember that company since I was there only a few days at most. The battalion headquarters over that company, which had the responsibility of processing troops to be sent home, needed a supply clerk immediately who could become the battalion supply sergeant when the staff sergeant in position had rotated home. In a series of transfers I was assigned to the 218 Quartermaster Battalion Headquarters at Furth, the sister city (actually suburb) of Nuremburg, as supply clerk with the grade of corporal. I essentially took over the supply sergeant's work since my predecessor was to leave for the U.S. shortly. When he did so, I was promoted to the grade of staff sergeant. I took on other responsibilities. I was the PX sergeant for the whole battalion, not only for the battalion headquarters. I managed for the supply officer, the officer's liquor ration. He especially liked a non-drinker to take on that responsibility. I also made monthly reports to the Third Army on the Captured Enemy Materials stores which was an additional responsibility of the Battalion. I was always very organized and did not shirk responsibilities asked of me. My reports were always on time (which the Army insisted on) and neatly typed. The supply officer was

Chief Warrant Officer Frederick Salaman. He was in the Regular Army and was a very capable military man who knew the Army Regulations and how to get around the rules when it was advantageous to do so. He provided me many hints. When he went on a long leave, the battalion assigned a Junior Warrant Officer to fill the position. Unfortunately, this officer was an alcoholic and could not do the job. I did my job and his, often taking papers to his quarters for him to sign. I must have impressed the commanding officer with my performance over the several months I was in the position. He had me transferred out of the battalion headquarters "on paper" to one of the companies where a technical sergeant's grade was open, promoted me, and then transferred me back to the headquarters without me having to move from my quarters.

One day I was on a street in Nuremburg on some business and ran into the sergeant with whom I served in the Battery B of the field artillery battalion. I said, "Sergeant Parker, do you remember me? I'm sergeant Kawata." I had then outranked him by two grades. On another occasion I met the executive officer of Battery B and reintroduced myself to him. I don't think he was surprised that I was then a T/Sgt after I got out of his unit. He could no longer hold me back.

There were other interesting side lights of my time in Furth. One had to do with sick call. We had a Battalion Surgeon. That was his title, but he was really a GP. Once a week when I went to the building where my office was, there was a long line of men from every company under our command waiting to see the Battalion Surgeon. The number of men who came were huge. They all had venereal disease, and they were there to get penicillin shots. Penicillin was a new drug then and was quite effective. What was even more interesting to me was the presence of some German medical personnel a little distance away from our building who were paying the soldiers to give them their urine. In the post-war period, medicines were difficult to get and that was one way to recover the excreted penicillin.

I went into Nuremburg often and drove by the place where the Nuremburg war crimes trials were being held. We heard very little about what was going on in the building, but having been in combat, we wondered how rational was the judgment of the victor over the vanquished. There is no such thing as gentlemanly wars.

During the 7 months I was in the Quartermaster Battalion, I was able to go on a two week Army-arranged R&R in Switzerland. Another T/Sgt in the headquarters and I drove from Furth to the R&R entry point at Mulhouse near the border between France and Switzerland. Our route took us through Strasbourg. The countryside and the mountains in the region were delightful. It was still cold at night, especially in the mountains. I recall several things from that trip. We went through Basel and headed to Andermatt where we went skiing. I was told that the snow was just right, but I never got the knack of standing on my feet with skis on. We got off the mountains and went to Lucerne. It was a quiet city built around lakes. It had a covered bridge across the lake and there were boats that took people to little hamlets around the lake. We stayed at a hotel called Wildenman. It was a very comfortable hotel and I will never forget the luxury of the hot bath. The old fashioned Swiss hotel just did not have showers then. I had missed the hot bath since I left Portland, Oregon in 1942. Forty plus years later, your grandmother and I stayed at this same hotel (which had been modernized some), met its owner and reminisced about the year I stayed there years before.

I was now getting anxious to return to the U.S. and to resume my education and go on to become a useful person in society. My commanding officer wanted me to stay longer and said that he would promote me to the grade of master sergeant if I agreed to stay another six months. This was very tempting, but I had had enough of the Army life. And so I departed Germany on 15 April 1946 by a troop ship and reached the U.S. shore on 25 April 1946. It was a thrilling experience to sail into the harbor going by the Statue of Liberty.

I was briefly in a camp at Elizabeth, NJ and then placed on a troop train headed for Tacoma, WA and then on to the Fort Lewis Separation Center. Since I was the ranking non-commissioned officer, I was responsible for about 12 men. On 3 May 1946 I was separated from the Army. In the Army jargon it was "demobilization at the convenience of the government". My length of service consisted of 1 year, 2 months, 17 days in Continental Service and 1 year, 5 months, 16 days in Foreign Service. I was in three campaigns in Europe and received five medals.