

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

We had a memorable time during our month in Solingen, in the Ruhr Valley, but nothing that good could last forever. In early June we were relieved of our assignments by a British unit, the nature of which I do not recall. I met the officer who assumed my position at the Bruchhaus distillery, and gave him a brief orientation about the place. I also gave him a letter of recommendation for Gerd Justen, the German lad who had served us so well as houseboy and interpreter, and who naturally had trepidation about my squad leaving and strangers taking our place. As I found out in subsequent years, the letter served its purpose very well. Gerd worked with the British during the years of occupation, and was entrusted with quite significant assignments, some of which involved critical supply convoys from Belgian ports to the British occupation zone.

Finally all our personal clothing and equipment and possessions had appeared out of the mysterious never-never land where such materials were stored while we were deeply involved in the daily task of winning the war while staying alive if at all possible. We were told that our next destination was to be Czechoslovakia, where we would be positioned against the Russian troops who already occupied the eastern end of that country.

I don't know which one of my men suggested it, but ten of us decided that we could probably get more clothes and other items, but we surely would never again have free access to large quantities of very good liquor. As a result of these thoughts, we left behind most of our non-essential gear and substituted bottles of Edelkorn, and Cacao-mit-Nus, and brandy, and rum, all products of Madame Bruchhaus' enterprise. We left

Solingen reluctantly, but confident that we were well prepared for any discomforts that might loom in the near future.

The move to Czechoslovakia was by rail, and seemed typically endless. Europe may in normal times have excellent and speedy rail service, but during the war trains traveled, when they moved at all, at a snail's pace. A trip that should have been completed in twenty four hours took three days. We were traveling in a freight car, just like the ones that months before had borne us from Brittany to the Saar-Moselle Triangle, and the Siegfried Line, and the 11th Panzer Division, and snow and misery and far too many wounded and dead companions. At least this journey was in June, and it was warm, and we were not heading for battle. There were rumors that relationships between the Russians and the American army were quite tense, but at least nobody was shooting.

In the afternoon of the second day enroute, our train stopped for a long period in a rail yard, beside another freight which was also stopped. Oddly, there were MP's riding on the tops of cars at either end of that train. It did not require genius to know that there was something in that train which was valuable enough to be stolen. We, of course, decided that if anyone was going to steal whatever was in the car next to ours it would be us. I no longer recall exactly how one of my men got across to the other car, nor how he managed to open it without detection. In such matters the less one knows the better. He did get across, and he did open it, and climbed inside, and found that it was full of crates of canned peaches.

Now, we had been on short rations almost continuously since the war ended, because

every resource was now targeted to the Pacific theater, where the Japanese were still fighting fiercely for every scrap of land, and making the allies pay dearly for each advance. That carload of peaches looked to us like a carload of gold. No wonder there were MP's supposedly watching it. What else the train might contain we could not know, but those peaches were there, right beside our car, and it took only a little planning to decide our method of operation, and to begin transferring crates to our car. To this day, I don't know what the MP's were doing, or why they didn't see what we were doing, but in a few minutes we had taken about half the peaches, and closed the other car door, and had opened one of the cans with a bayonet, and were digging into the contents as fast as possible. Those peaches were delicious. No, they were more than delicious, they were unbelievably splendid. They were the best thing we had tasted in over a year. As I think about it now, I don't think anything was ever quite as good as those peaches, halves canned in syrup.

The remainder of our trip was quite pleasant, and during the journey we tried many mixtures, combining peaches with the various kinds of liquor we had with us, thus fending off both hunger and sobriety. I cannot say that we arrived at our new post in the best of all possible condition, but we didn't have a war to fight and were confident that we could deal with any circumstances awaiting us. If, that is, we could manage to stay on our feet.

We off-loaded into trucks, and rode a few miles along rural lanes through an undamaged countryside, finally arriving at a small village named Vimperk. Our quarters were in a large school building, where my squad was assigned to the assembly hall, which was big

enough to contain all twelve of us. We laid out our bed rolls, and broke out K rations, and generally settled in for the rest of the afternoon and the night. We had no guard assignments, and so just continued the trans-Europe spree in which we had been engaged since leaving Solingen. I can remember vaguely that as evening approached I finished another K ration and walked (staggered?) to the center of the room to throw the ration box and can into a large cardboard carton in use as a refuse bin. My intentions were good, I am sure, but I managed somehow to throw myself into the box and to leave the garbage outside on the floor. A couple of my men rescued me, and we all decided that it was time to sleep and sleep we did. That was the end of the most continuous, most protracted, and most resourceful binge in my life.

I am not particularly proud of that memory, nor ashamed either, but I can say for sure that the weeks at Madame Bruchhaus' establishment, and the first days in our new location served me well, because I ended once and for all any dependence on alcohol. Since those times I have drunk in moderation, without any need to be really intoxicated. I guess it's a "been there, done that" attitude which has really served me well during ensuing years.

During the night I had a distinct sensation of being invaded by guests of the pest variety. After months in Europe, we expected a certain number of fleas and lice in most rural homes, but this seemed to be something on a grander scale. When I awoke in the morning, I had welts in various places, and itched. As the others crawled from their bedrolls there was a growing chorus of comments and protests, directed at I do not know whom, because the bugs certainly were not listening. Everyone was bitten, and everyone

itched. By mid-morning company headquarters was definitely aware, and by noon we were supplied with cartons of DDT, which was newly in use for insect control, and which we used in quantities.

We were confident that the problem had been solved, but had not reckoned on the huge numbers of pests in that old building. I don't know what its recent history had been, but by the next miserable morning it was decided that we could not conquer this enemy. We were ordered to abandon the building, and to move out in the open pastures around the village. We were told that we should pitch our pup tents for a few days, until larger tents with room for twelve men, and cots with mattresses, and bed linens of a sort could be obtained and issued. The order was perfectly reasonable, but my squad was not able to comply because in the process of packing our liquor in Solingen most of us had abandoned our shelter halves. We did have bed rolls, and until the tents arrived we were the object of a certain level of derision, because we were sleeping without shelter under the stars. By great good fortune it did not rain and only our pride suffered

By the time a week had rolled by, we were comfortable in our canvas homes that were still there in that pasture when I left for home in October. The location was pleasant, with hills on three sides, and the ruins of a medieval castle looming over the village. During my time there, we were visited by thunderstorms with some regularity. Thos storms would generate around the hill to the north, and come down the valley almost like trains running on a track. We sometimes had to spend an hour or so spread around the perimeter of the tent on the inside, holding down the edges to prevent the only shelter we had from blowing away. Several other tents did on occasion collapse, but my squad

refused to let that happen to us. They were a really capable and reliable group, and I still think they were the best infantry squad in the entire army. During the time I led them I never had to repeat an order, or crawl down anyone's throat because of bad performance. The infantry squad is the smallest unit in an army, but it is the bed rock upon which victory or defeat rests.

One of the immediate challenges was to devise means of occupying men's time. The army organized various instruction classes, in such subjects as spoken German, European geography, etc. Also, a widespread program of body building was started. Various divisions and large units in the ETO organized football, baseball, and even tennis teams. USO programs came around occasionally. Some men went hunting for deer around the hill to the north, until we were ordered to stop because that was a government game preserve. I usually had my men fall in after breakfast, and we would spend an hour or so doing close order drill on the makeshift parade ground we devised. Men who had always despised drill or parades seemed to actually enjoy polishing their parade skills now.

One diversion I really enjoyed was climbing the hill and exploring the ruined castle. Villagers informed us that the castle had burned in 1776, and that in ensuing years local people had carried stones away from the ruins, for use in their own buildings. There was, however a substantial part of the original wall standing, and set into it was a small room, still intact. We could also go down into the dungeon, under the central courtyard. It was very interesting to explore, and I spent hours there, when not on duty elsewhere.

Believe it or not, when our first pay day came, during our nearly idyllic season in our

little valley, we were amazed to find that somehow the army had traced the theft of the peaches, by means still unclear, and they billed each member of Company I for a portion of the value of those peaches. It was an astounding feat of investigation. The same army that could not provide combat boots to men who were in desperate need of them was able to track down the miscreants who stole their peaches, and collect for them more than a month later, and hundreds of miles away from the scene of the crime. Oh, well. The peaches sure were good.

Infantry warfare was a fluid situation, with personnel and places shifting constantly as armies maneuvered to gain advantage. During the time I was in battle, both as a PFC platoon scout and as a squad leader, the men immediately around me changed with (dare I say it?) the fortunes of war. Casualties were numerous, both from wounds and death inflicted by the human enemy and from the atrocious weather which, while not usually fatal was certainly incapacitating. When a unit became seriously undermanned, replacements were provided to permit continued action.

Sometimes, during brief withdrawals from the front, new men were brought in from training bases in the states. At other times, when in battle, unit officers were forced to move their men from one smaller unit to another, to keep some sort of numerical balance and to allow each squad or platoon to continue functioning as necessary. I was a squad leader for only a few months, but in that period I had a total of 24 different men in my 12 man squad. Some were with me very briefly, and some stayed with me the entire time.

In Czechoslovakia the membership of my squad was stable, because none had enough points to get home early so we all had to wait our turn. Now, after all this explanation, I think it is time to name the 12 men to whom I said goodbye so hurriedly in October 1945. I know some of their first names, and some I don't know. I, Don Parks, was a staff sergeant and squad leader. My assistant was John Maynard, buck sergeant. My BAR man was Calvin Schermann, PFC. His assistant was PVT Robinson. Riflemen were PVT's Pelletier, Donnaruma, Smith, Ulrich, Simpson, Morris, Couch, and Williams.

Two of these, Couch and Williams, were old hands with Company I who had fought in

other squads but who were assigned to me during the re-shuffling that took place after combat ceased. All of these men had fought well and all were good soldiers, and now, after all these years, I still marvel at the miracle of converting ordinary citizens into warriors so successfully and in such a short time. Even more miraculous was the way in which the great majority put down their weapons and resumed their peacetime lives.

I have written in earlier portions of this memoir about some of these men, because of incidents involving them in the months and years that preceded our stay in Czechoslovakia. Some about whom I have written earlier were not with me at the end, because they were wounded, killed, or otherwise incapacitated during combat, or were moved to other assignments in the company or battalion.

226

Among my greatest pleasures during this period was re-discovering the pastime of reading. I first began reading in earnest in the Carnegie Public Library at a very early age, and books had always been my friends and my instructors. During the months that had elapsed since our arrival in Europe, the exigencies of infantry combat and just plain keeping alive left no time for literature. Books were heavy, and they didn't survive very well in fox holes. Now, however, there was ample idle time, and there was a fairly respectable supply of books from which to choose. I read at every opportunity.

One sunny afternoon, shortly after our arrival in Vimperk, I was sitting outside our tent, reading, when I saw a man or boy in civilian clothes coming across the pasture, carrying one of those cardboard suitcases so common in that area in those times and another large object which I could not identify. He walked up to where I was sitting, and took a close look at my face which I had not shaved that day. He walked down to the stream running nearby, and came back with a canteen cup full of water. Where he got the cup I never found out. He told me, in a mixture of German, French, Czech, and gestures, to sit on my helmet. He opened his suitcase, and took out a straight edge razor, a brush, and a cake of soap. He quickly worked up a generous glob of lather, and put it on my face, and proceeded to shave me. After he had finished, he reached into his case and produced a bottle of lotion, which he liberally applied to my newly smooth face. Looking back, I don't know why I allowed him to do what he did, but it turned out to be a very wise decision.

From that afternoon on, Carl Rendle was the company barber. He was an expert. His haircuts were professional, and his shaves were better than anything we could have done ourselves. His prices were one cigarette for a shave, and two for a haircut. He was not interested in money because it had little value, but cigarettes were solid currency.

Because I was his first contact with the company, he reserved the period before daily retreat formation for my shave, and never would allow me to pay him. We fed him out of our rations, and gave him a bunk to sleep on, and he became a de facto member of my squad. Because of his ungainly thin build, and his long arms and legs, he acquired the nickname "Creepy" and was happy about that because it meant that he was now one of us.

Gradually, Creepy told me of his history. He was not only a barber, but was a fine musician, who played his accordion for the amusement of the company. He even began playing for retreat , before our evening meal. He had been a prisoner in a German concentration camp, and would probably have been exterminated, except for his many skills. He barbered, and played music, and bootlegged, and pimped, and did whatever was necessary to keep himself out of the ovens. I believe he was the ultimate survivor, and suppose he eventually became a government official in the new Czech republic.

While he was with us he was completely reliable, and his advice was invaluable for many reasons.

Shortly after he arrived in our midst, I was given a new and strange assignment. I was put in charge of a "resettlement" operation at the city of Susice, or in German, Schutenhoven. A ¾ ton weapons carrier was assigned to me for transportation. In actual fact, I ran a

stockyard for human beings. The native ethnic Czechs hated their neighbors, the Sudeten Germans who had invited Hitler to occupy Czechoslovakia at the beginning of the war. Czech raiders went to German farms, and arrested the occupants, and brought them to the three story school building, where I furnished rations and housing for a few days, and then they were deported to Germany, to whatever fate awaited them there. This operation was carried out with full cooperation and assistance from the American army, of which I was a small part. Creepy was extremely helpful as an interpreter, because he was fluent in many languages.

For the most part, the process ran smoothly, with almost no trouble from the victims who were being sent from this region, where their families had dwelt for generations, into Germany where they had no friends or family or opportunity. I was not exactly happy about my assignment, but as the saying is, "somebody had to do it." I remember one occasion when I was able to do a good deed. A little girl, about 10 years old, had been terribly wounded in the brief battles when the German army left the area. She was quite brave, and did not complain except for her pain. I had orders to ship her out on a certain day, along with her family. It was obvious that a trip of several hundred miles in the back of a military truck would kill her, and I said so to the officer in charge. He insisted that she had to go, but I managed to have the family miss the shipment, and then requested that an ambulance be furnished to carry her away. I succeeded, and I hope my concern and care allowed her to live. She didn't deserve to die.

During the shuffling of personnel after VE Day, one of the men assigned to my squad was Willard P. Smith, a native of Snow Camp Mountain, NC, who had been in Company I since the earliest days at Camp Phillips, Kansas. Willard was large, and clumsy, and illiterate. He was quite naïve, and was usually assigned to those jobs requiring least knowledge or initiative. He was likeable, and could follow orders. Now, in our assignment at Susice, he stood guard on his regular schedule. He had always wanted to be armed with a BAR, the only automatic firing weapon in a rifle squad. None of his earlier squad leaders had ever seen fit to put their heaviest firepower in his hands.

One day a Czech patrol brought in six very scroungy characters, described them to me as being criminals they had rounded up, and told me they needed extra confinement because of their potential for escape or riot. I put them in a remote room on the third floor, at the end of a corridor and with only one door. On a table outside, I placed a BAR, pointed at that door, and gave instructions that if any of the occupants tried to escape they should be shot. Of course, I made sure that my new prisoners understood my orders.

In due course, Willard found himself on guard at that position. He was at last alone with a BAR, and delighted. No one else was around. The entire building was still, with only the low hum of dozens of quiet conversations among the detainees breaking the silence. The day was quite warm, and everyone, myself included, was sleepy. Suddenly the BAR above our heads roared into action, and echoed through the halls. I jumped out of my chair, and hit the stairs at full speed, sure that there had been an attempted escape, and wondering whether my guard, or some of the prisoners, was dead or dying. When I got to the third floor, I looked down the corridor and saw Willard, staring at the BAR in his

hands, not quite sure what to do. I ran to him and looked at the door of the prison room. It was punctured with holes. Willard stammered that he was just looking at the gun when it began firing, and that he didn't know how to stop it. I knew different, because no gun fires without someone's finger on the trigger, but my main concern now was with the prisoners, because some of them might have been in the line of fire. I unlocked the door, and saw all six of them piled in a heap, in the corner farthest from the door, and all frozen with fear. None had been hit, but they were all nearly scared to death. Willard, too, was terrified because he knew he was in deep trouble.

I grabbed the now emptied BAR, and told him to get down to the squad room as fast as he could go. I handed the gun to another of my men, who had followed me up the stairs, and told him to put a new magazine in it and to take over the guard post. As usual, Creepy was there and interpreted for me when I told the prisoners that the shooting had been a mistake, but now they knew what could happen if they did try to flee. I led everyone down the stairs, and told them to carry on as before. Then I went out to the truck, and drove slowly to the other end of town, and parked, and began laughing. I guess I sat there for a half hour, alone, until I could once more assume my proper role as a leader of men. Sometimes life is too funny to bear.

After the end of hostilities, U. S. military authorities immediately implemented military government procedures, applied by special contingents of troops trained for such duty augmented by the required number of other branches as needed. There was of necessity a great surplus of men not involved in post-war matters, who were awaiting a return home, re-assignment to the Pacific war, or other future. Tens of thousands of idle young men, newly relieved of participation in an epic war, presented a challenge to those in charge.

One of the solutions arrived at was to provide recreational passes that would enable recent warriors to peacefully visit some of the interesting sites in Europe. The men were eager to relieve boredom with travel, and sight-seeing, and visiting as tourists the areas so recently fought over. Among passes available to men in our unit and location were three-day trips to the French Riviera or Paris, trips to historic sites in Italy, and one day visits to Prague and Pilsen, in Czechoslovakia.

Because I was, as usual, lacking in funds I didn't ask for any of the longer passes, but contented myself with Pilsen and Prague, both of which were historically interesting and presented a great deal of information. Trips to Pilsen were overnight. We were housed in a very nice hotel there, and had expert guides to take us to places of historic, artistic, musical, and other interest. Although Pilsen was not really a beautiful place, there was much to learn and these visits were quite pleasant.

Prague was a different sort of trip. That city was in the Russian occupation zone, and was closely controlled and isolated by Stalin's army. Our tours could cross the occupation boundary at sunrise, and had to exit by sundown. Distance to Prague from the border

crossing was about 40 miles, and the highway was good, so we could spend a great portion of the day in the city. Prague is steeped in the dramatic and often bloody history of central Europe. It was one of the earliest places to develop a sophisticated population, and it is filled with striking architecture, including such sites as Hradcany, the old city on a hill containing Saint Vitus Cathedral, the ruler's palace, and Alchemy Street, where in tiny shops early scholars and philosophers attempted to change lead to gold. Construction of the cathedral began in 1329. It was designed by three different architects, centuries apart, and was finally completed in 1929,, after 600 years of work.

On another hill, across the valley from Hradcany, was a beautiful park, where we stopped to eat our K-rations at noon. While there I saw an artist painting an oil depicting the splendid view of Hradcany across the valley. I had never been in a situation before where I could watch a master at work in this fashion, and it was a memorable experience.

We visited one of the earliest ghettos in Europe, where the Jewish population was forced by the Catholic Hapsburg rulers to live and die, burying their dead for a prescribed time before disinterring them to make room for newly deceased. In this area was an ancient synagogue, built with permission from one of the Hapsburg Holy Roman Emperors, who insisted that it be built in the cruciform pattern used in Christian cathedrals. His intent was to force the Jewish people to worship in a Christian structure, in spite of their beliefs. They turned the tables, however, by including a magnificent skylight star of David in the ceiling and arranging the support pillars for the roof in a six point pattern.. We walked by candlelight through deep catacombs strewn with mummified monks, left in disarray by Swedish invaders during the Thirty Years War in the 17th century. We walked across the

Charles Bridge, where an entire population was forced by enemy troops to jump into the river and drown. We climbed the spiral stairway in a palace tower, with windows from which displaced leaders were forced to jump, or were thrown, to their death, a process memorialized by the term "defenestration," or literally "from the window" and a form of assassination perfected in Prague in ancient times, and continued into modernity, some say.

I made four of these fascinating excursions to Prague, and would have gone more if I had not been returned to the U. S. Other soldiers were not much interested in the history and adventure so imbedded in the city, and they competed for the Riviera trips instead. In retrospect, I am glad things were as they were. My memories of those visits to one of Europe's oldest and most historic cities remain a highlight of my life.

Armand Pelletier was one of the later arrivals in my squad. He had only about a week of actual combat before the war ended for us, and we assumed occupation duty status. He was somewhat older than most of my men. He had spent most of the war period in the merchant marine, as an officer. He was by profession a maritime engineer. The United States was supplying weapons to the Russian army, shipping them by way of an arctic port named Murmansk. These voyages were extremely costly in terms of ships and men lost, but the advantage gained by having a well supplied Russian army fighting the Germans on the eastern front made the effort worthwhile. Because of the great hazard involved in this operation, the crews were paid handsomely. Pelletier had completed three successful runs through the German U-boat pack and was on his fourth when his ship was torpedoed. He was fortunate enough to get a spot on a raft, and to be rescued after a day afloat in the arctic seas.

When he returned home after this disaster, his wife told him that he must stay ashore, and never again take such risks with his life, if he truly loved her. He reluctantly agreed, and found a job, and began life ashore. The only problem was that his selective service status was now changed. He was no longer in an essential industry, and was therefore in line for drafting into the armed service. After a half year at home, he was drafted into the army, sent to basic training, assigned to infantry replacement, and in a few months found himself fighting Germans, on land, for a private soldier's pay which was less than \$50.00 a month. I must say that he took it all very well, considering everything. He was a good soldier, and was a welcome addition to the squad. He did say, though, that at sea he had a bed with sheets, much better food, and made a hell of a lot more money.

During the months he had spent with us, I had noticed nothing different about him. I was, therefore, surprised when I found him in the tent one afternoon, at Vimperk, sewing a button on his arm. Not on his sleeve, you see, but on his arm. While I knew that different people have sometimes strange habits, this was a new one. When I asked him what in blazes he was doing, and why, he replied that he thought maybe his sleeve would stay in place better if it was buttoned to his wrist. I watched him for a few moments, fascinated, and then asked him if it didn't maybe hurt a little when the needle went into and through his skin. He thought about that a moment, and said yes it did hurt a little, but not all that much and what was a little hurt, anyway.

He then told me that he had spent many days at sea learning to do different kinds of stunts, such as eating razor blades and light bulbs, and lighted cigarettes. He reached up to his top bunk, and took a double edge razor blade out of his gear, and broke it into quarters, and put one piece in his mouth and chewed it up. He opened his mouth to let me see the little pieces of steel on his tongue, and then swallowed them. He said that he was also a sword swallower, and that he was a fire eater. He lit a cigarette and puffed a couple of times, and then put it in his mouth and chewed it up. He said he had won many bar bets with his stunts, and I certainly believed him. His final demonstration was to put a needle into his right cheek, out the left, and to pull his cheeks back and forth with the thread. Through all this, his demeanor was matter of fact, as if there was nothing strange about what he was doing. You may be sure that I never thought of him in exactly the same way after that discussion and the demonstrations in that tent.

Several weeks later, battalion headquarters decided to organize a talent show for the men,

2-31

to let different individuals show off the skills they had not been able to use for so many months of warfare. Pelletier was very happy about the prospect of doing his fire eating act in front of a real live audience, and immediately began planning for the show, and preparing the necessary equipment. He took a wire coat hanger and made a wand, with a small loop at the end, in which he thrust a ball of cotton. He dipped this into a cup of gasoline, and set it afire with a small candle. He allowed most of the gas to burn off, and then put the remaining fire into his mouth and chewed it up. In his preliminaries he also added, after chewing the razor blade, a new feature. He broke a light bulb, took a small fragment, and chewed it up in the same fashion as the razor blade, with the same results. After a couple of practice sessions, he was ready.

On the night of the show, his act went smoothly and really impressed the several hundred GI's in the audience. When he dipped the cotton and set it ablaze, he began to explain to the audience what he was going to do. He talked too long, and the blaze died. He dipped it into the gas again, set it afire, and swing it toward his mouth. The excess burning gasoline sprayed over his face. HE SET HIS FACE ON FIRE! He continued with his act, to great applause, and thanked the audience, before leaving the stage. I ran to him, thinking I would have to get medical help immediately. His face was bright red from the flames, and his eyebrows and lashes and the front of his hair was all burned off, but he had a huge grin on his face. I said " Geez, Armand, that must have hurt!" His reply was "Yeah, it hurt a little, but it sure made a hell of a show, didn't it." Armand Pelletier, , successful showman, walked over to our little truck, and watched the rest of the show from there, confident that his act was by far the most impressive and memorable of all.

2-3-2000

On a sunny afternoon a squad of Czechs arrived at the school-prison-human stockyard I was operating with an unusual trio of prisoners. They had a German SS Colonel, in full uniform, and a woman and child, supposedly his wife and daughter. They explained that these prisoners had been apprehended as they tried to escape from the Russian occupiers of Poland, where he had been assigned to the management of one of the extermination camps, part of the Nazi attempt to erase Jewish and Gypsy and other minority people from the earth. The Czechs wanted him held until higher military authorities could take charge of him.

He was a slender, rather handsome individual, who behaved with extreme correctness, but obviously was not happy to find himself under the control of a mere staff sergeant and a squad of private soldiers from the American army. He soon demonstrated that he had complete sway over his wife, who never dared to speak to any of us when he was around. While he was my prisoner, the Czechs made several attempts at interrogating him, which met with absolutely no success. He was as cold and silent as a stone, never smiling or exhibiting any emotion. On one occasion the Czechs placed him and his wife in one room, and took their little daughter into the next office. They began terrifying the girl, to the point where she was crying and even screaming. They pounded on a large overstuffed chair, making it sound as though they were beating the child. Through it all, the colonel and his wife sat immutable, not saying a word. Finally the attempt was ended, and the Czechs left. A few days later a group of MP's from American Military Government forces arrived and took the three of them away. I never found out what happened to them, or what crimes were finally charged against him.

At this time, in this part of rural Czechoslovakia, the hay harvest was in full swing. Everything was done manually, in a fashion that was probably established centuries before. The entire family took part, with all performing their own function. The youngsters raked the hay which, had previously been cut with scythes, into windrows, to facilitate drying. Then the wagons were brought out, and the women forked the hay onto the wagons, to be taken to the barns and stored. The men, of course, handled the most technical (and least strenuous) task. They sat on the wagons and drove the horses. We admired the system, particularly the fashion in which the men seemed to escape the most exhausting labor.

One of the benefits we derived from having Creepy in our midst was that he was in demand as a musician, to play his accordion at dances. Several times a week, as he shaved me before retreat, he would tell me that there was a dance in this village or that, in the vicinity. We would eat supper, and then climb into the truck and go dancing. We were always welcome, and the girls and women were eager to dance with American soldiers. Most of us had never danced a polka, or any of the other steps we encountered. That fact was no problem, because the natives were glad to teach, and in truth I spent most of the time off the floor, being swung around and manipulated by a husky farm lady who had worked all day in the fields but had boundless energy for the dance. The local plum brandy, slivovitz, flowed freely and everyone had a wonderful time including Creepy, who played music until everyone was exhausted. Sometimes there would be a fiddler or a clarinet player so there was more than just his accordion. We had a wonderful time at those dances, and I still remember them with pleasure as some of the

most relaxed and carefree times in my life.

With the war in Europe ended, the U. S. Army was in the process of returning most of us to the United States. Until VJ day, in mid-August, men were rotated, after a brief respite at their homes, to the Pacific Theatre, in preparation for the coming massive assault on the Japanese homeland, which promised to be the bloodiest time in the history of the United States. Although we realized that this was a necessity, none of us was eager to begin again , fighting another war in another place, after successfully completing our job on this continent.

Everyone in the European Theatre was assigned points, based on a number of factors, including time overseas, time in combat, medals and awards, and other items I can't recall. Until VJ Day, many were content to minimize their points, to delay the time when they would be sent to the Pacific. Others, of course, were so eager to get home that any other consideration became minor. Infantry units now began going back into the history of their actions, identifying deeds of bravery or extraordinary service that had been overlooked during the stress of battle. Since each medal was worth five points, much effort went into recalling events that included unusual or extraordinary deeds. I recommended several of my men for bronze stars, and one for a silver star. Someone was reminded of a day when I took a battle into my own hands, and successfully flanked and captured a group of Germans who had driven us from a hill.

At this time, in early October, the return level of points was 70. I had 67, so was resigned to spending more time in Czechoslovakia. I knew, however, that I would be leaving

before any of the men in my squad, so I decided to have a farewell party before my point total sent me home. To have an affair of any size, I needed a quantity of liquor to remind all of us of the days of plenty in Solingen. Except for slivovitz, nothing was available in our area. I conferred with Creepy, as I usually did when I had a problem of this sort, and he said he could go to Prague, in the Russian zone, and get plenty of whiskey, rum, gin, or brandy. The problem would be to get through the Russian lines with money, and to get back through with the liquor, He was sure, however, that he could manage.

I had learned by now that he could probably do whatever he said he could., I had accumulated a grand total of \$96.00, and had no other use for it so I gave it to him, along with a generous supply of cigarettes. That evening he disappeared, after telling me that I would have to shave myself for a few days. Nearly a week elapsed, and I had begun to think that he had absconded with my riches, when he came across the field one morning, carrying a dozen bottles of assorted liquors, and obviously proud of his success. He never told me how he evaded the Russians, but somehow he did. The next evening we had my farewell party, and Creepy was the guest of honor. A good time was had by all. We talked over the time we had spent together, and those who were lost, and the places we had been and the things we had done, both good and bad. The comradeship of that evening has never been duplicated in my lifetime, and of course could not be, because it was spent with men who shared the splendor and horror of battle - brothers like no other. After I left, a week later, I never saw any of them again.

They remain in my mind and heart as comrades and friends with whom I spent the most terrifying, adventurous, thrilling, and memorable time of my life. There were others, some of whom died or were wounded, or otherwise disappeared from my life for one reason or another.

As I wrote earlier, following VJ Day there was a concerted effort by most of us citizen soldiers to add up enough points for return. I had 67, and the return number was 70. So near and yet so far. I had been cited for a Bronze Star, but had heard nothing since the papers were sent in, and had just about given up on it. One afternoon I returned from Susice, and had just parked the truck when the company clerk came running out of the headquarters tent and told me to get my stuff packed right away, because the Bronze Star award had come through, and I was going home. He said the kitchen jeep driver was waiting to take me to regimental headquarters, and I would join another group there. I barely had time to throw my stuff into my duffle bag, and turn in my weapon.

The jeep took me to regimental at Horazdovic, and we arrived just in time. Another five minutes and the truck would have left without me. The regimental chaplain came running out of the office, and handed me my medal and citation, and told me it had been sent to my hometown newspaper, and said goodbye, and I left the 94th Division, climbed into the truck, and headed for home.

Before I got into a truck along with several others, to begin the trip, we were handed K-rations and our duffel bags, and we drove off into the gathering dusk of evening.

I recall very few details of the remainder of the rapid journey from Vimperk to Camp Lucky Strike, at Le Havre, France, on the channel coast. I do remember that as we drove through the German mountains I was aware of the temperature differences between valleys and peaks. The higher we were, in that dark night in the back of the truck, the colder we were. I don't remember much complaining, however, because we were all going home, and could put up with discomfort along the way.

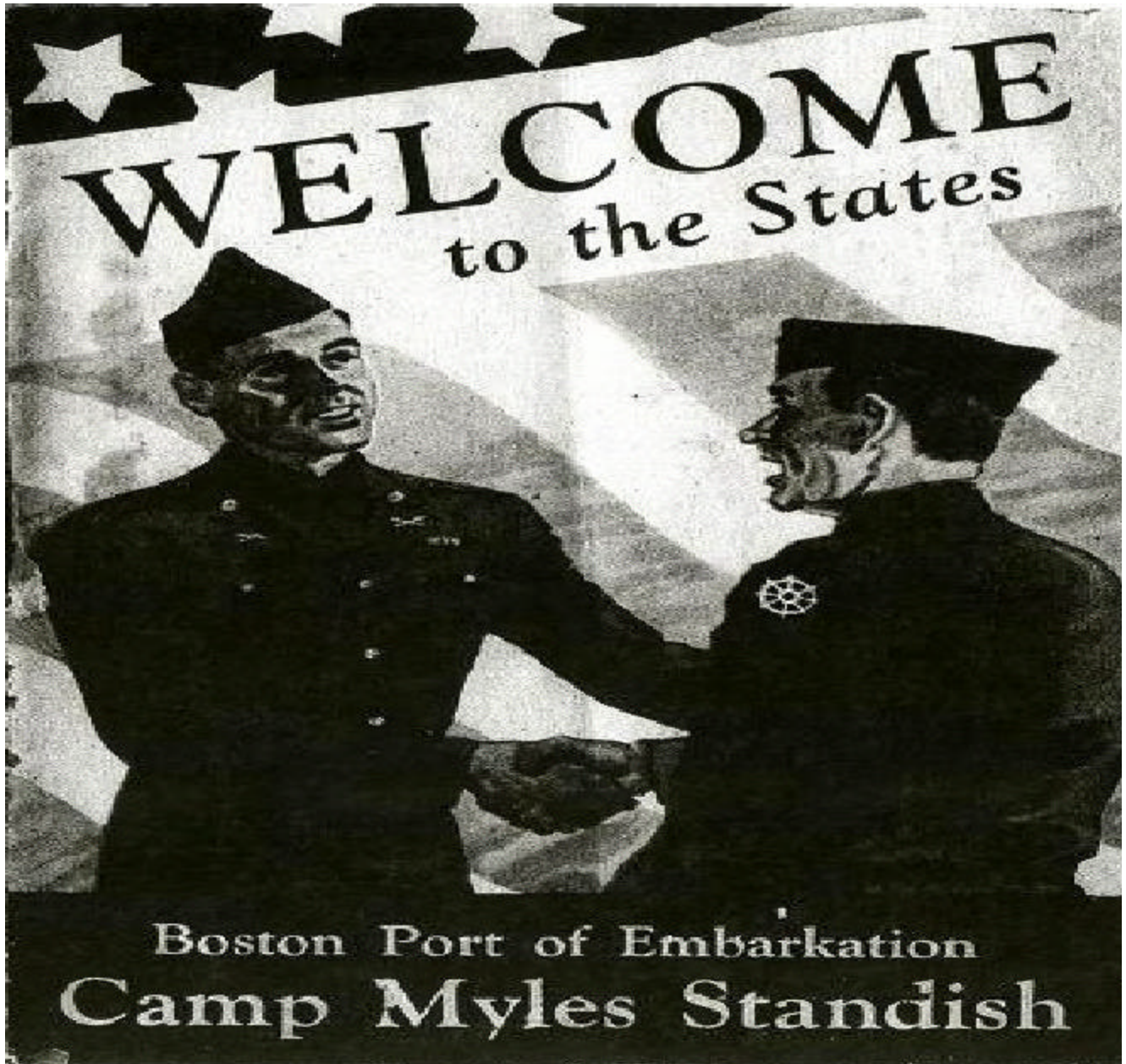
Sometime the next day, we were off-loaded into a reception area where we were assigned to provisional units designed merely to provide meals and other necessities to men who were by now beginning to feel almost like civilians again. Luckily, I was assigned to a homeward bound battalion of about 400 men, under command of a colonel who really wanted very badly to get back to the United States. We were told, by others who had been at the camp for a while, that it usually took about two weeks to get into a ship and on the way home.

Our colonel, however, wasn't about to wait that long. On our third day at Lucky Strike, we were awakened in the middle of the night, and told to get our things together and form up in the street outside our tents. Groggily, we did so, not knowing what was going on. The order came to begin marching, and we went to the dock and marched into a ship that was moored there, and told to bed down on bunks below decks. Unbelievably, by morning we were under way, and never looked back.

During the voyage to Boston, which took 12 days of very rough sailing, we found out how we were able to leave so abruptly and ahead of schedule. Our ship, which was an army transport, owned and operated by the army and staffed with seagoing soldiers, had had a boiler mishap on the way to France. Higher-ups had decided that it would sail back to the U. S. empty, for repairs. Our colonel heard of the plan, and decided to move us into the ship without orders, and to defy the entire army to remove us. He apparently was able to overcome all objections, and we set sail.

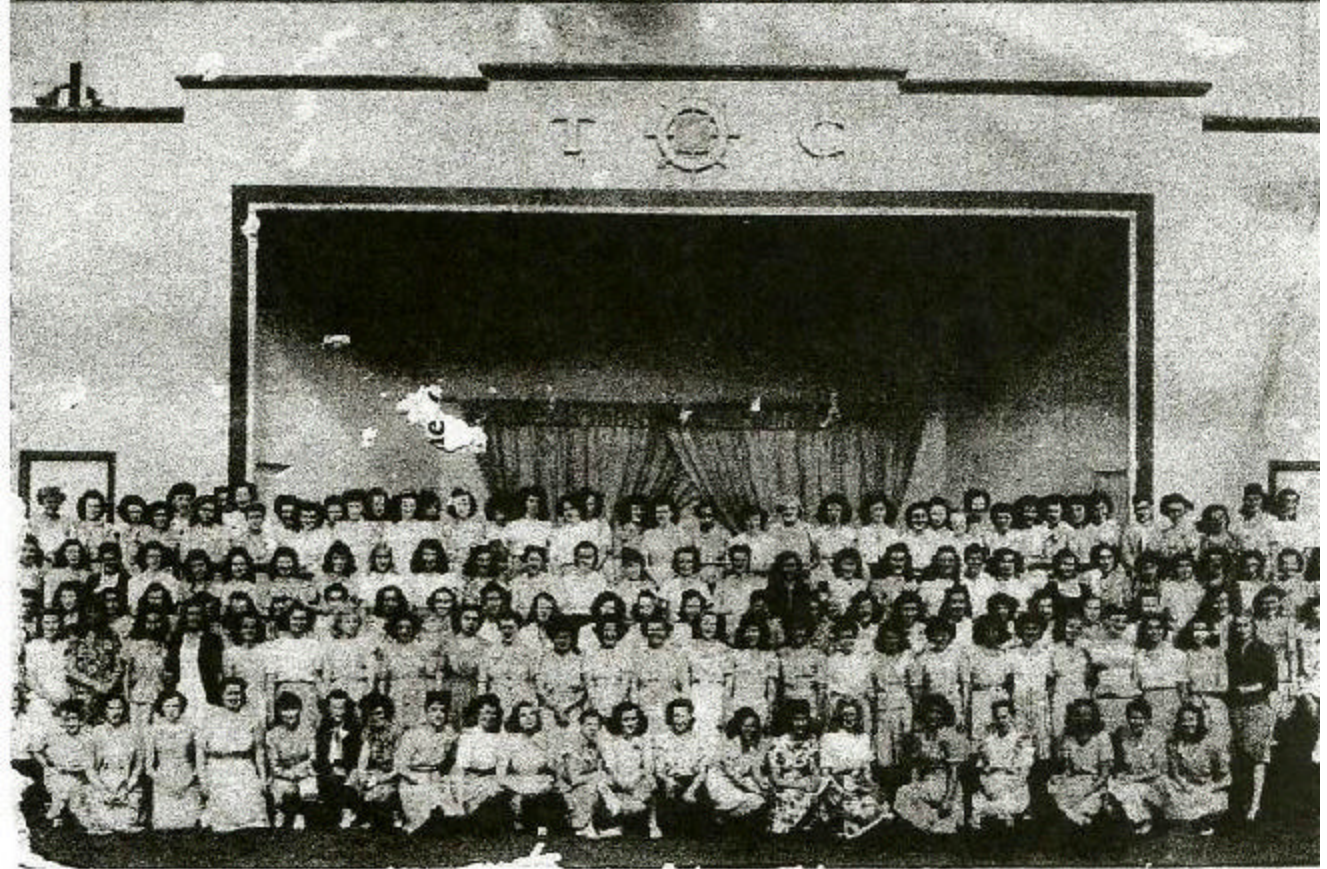
The passage was, as I said, rough. The North Sea is never serene, and in the fall weather becomes more violent. Our ship, with only half a normal load of troops, bounced around pretty much like a cork. As a result, most of the passengers were seasick nearly all the way across. For some reason, I was not affected. I felt fine, and really enjoyed being on deck with the wind gusting and the waves rolling and the clouds hanging low over the water. Also, because most of the men were sick and couldn't eat, I was able to have all the food I could possibly eat. Apparently those transports were provided excellent stores of food, so returning troops could eat well. Our ship's galley was operating with foods for twice as many men as were aboard, and the cooks were glad to fix meals at any time and including all the steaks and side dishes anyone could dream of. I had not had really good food since my three day pass to Paris, and certainly made up for lost time on that 12 day voyage.

When we met the tug, and entered Boston Harbor, we were astounded by the greeting that awaited us. Fireboats were shooting geysers of water into the air, tugs and boats and ships of all kinds sounded their whistles, and bands were playing on some decks and on



Welcome Home Camp Myles Standish

Some of the girls who handle your telephone calls



the dock where we tied up. (As I write this now, nearly 61 years later, I have tears in my eyes, and could not utter word because of the lump in my throat. The memory is splendid.) On the dock were whole groups of greeters, including Red Cross, Salvation Army, USO members, and contingents from churches and civic and artistic societies. There was coffee and milk and orange juice and rolls and cookies and here were hugs and kisses and tears and smiles and laughter, and a marvelous time was had by all.

Eventually, we were loaded into buses and taken to Camp Miles Standish, outside Boston, and two days later I was given a railroad ticket and went to Camp Sheridan at Chicago. Pat met me there, and we had a few days during which my paperwork was completed, and I was given my discharge papers and final pay, and we went to the railroad station and got tickets on the Milwaukee Railroad, and the next morning we were back in Sheldon, and it was over. Two years and eleven months before, I had left on a great and unforgettable adventure, and now I was home.

After a few days, I went to the post office, and after a few more days resumed my job as a substitute letter carrier. The only change during my absence was that I had had several pay raises while gone, and now had more income than I had expected. Otherwise, it was as though those three years had not occurred, and life was normal. The only major difference was that I now had a wife, and Mom and the girls were living in Harris, where Mom operated the telephone office. Life was good, and sweet, and has been pretty much okay ever since. "Bye now.

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