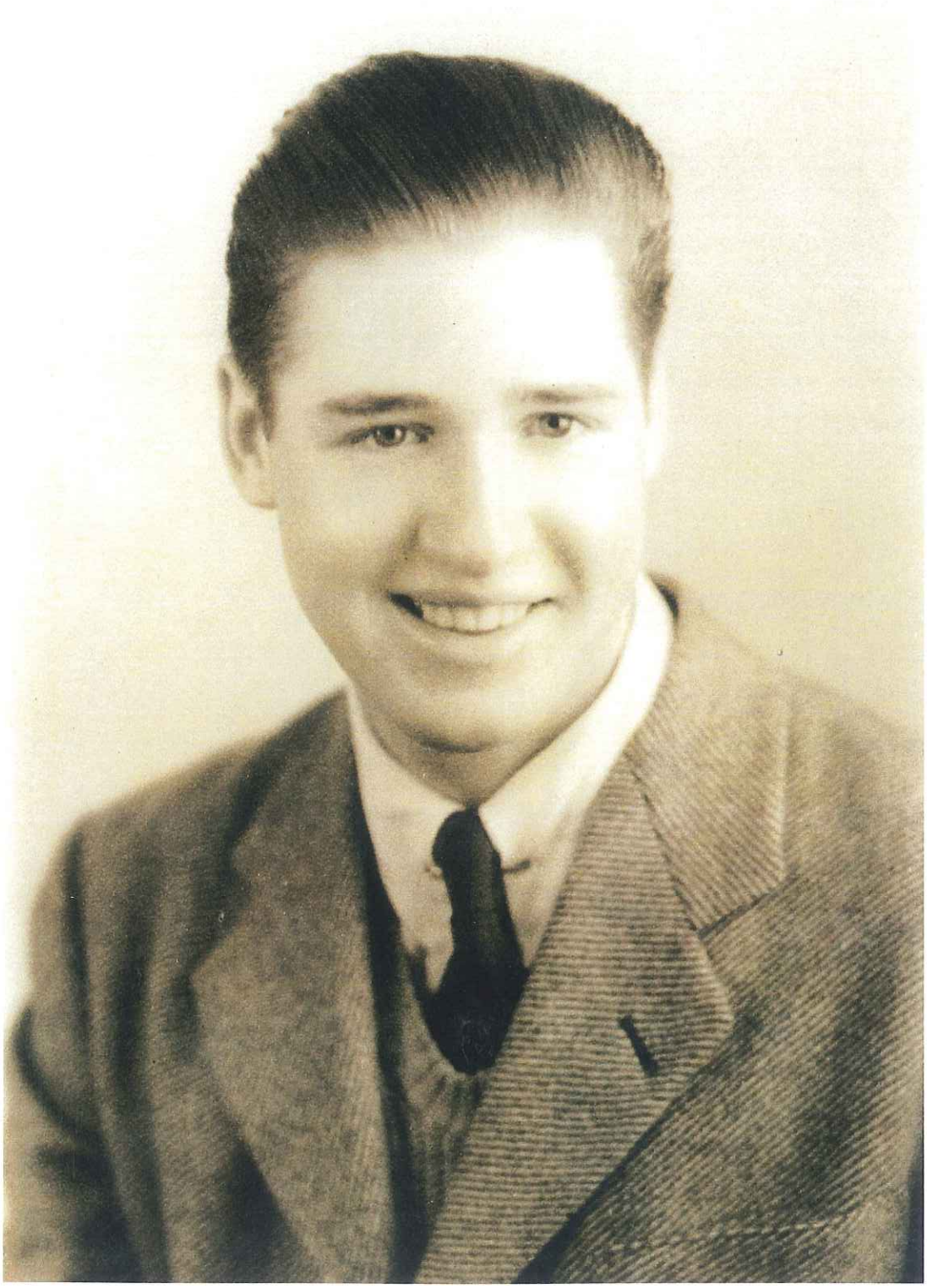
I WENT TO WAR

WAR EXPERIENCES OF ADAM EMRON YANCEY

WORLD WAR II

567th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion, Mobile

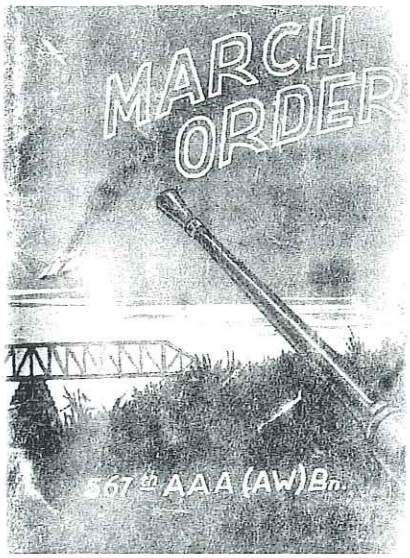


The Greatest Generation

"At a time in their lives when their days and nights should have been filled with innocent adventure, love, and the lessons of the workaday world, they were fighting in the most primitive conditions possible across the bloodied landscape of France, Belgium, Italy, Austria, and the coral islands of the Pacific. They answered the call to save the world from the two most powerful and ruthless military machines ever assembled . . .They faced great odds and a late start, but they did not protest. They succeeded on every front. They won the war; they saved the world. They came home to joyous and short-lived celebrations and immediately began the task of rebuilding their lives and the world they wanted."

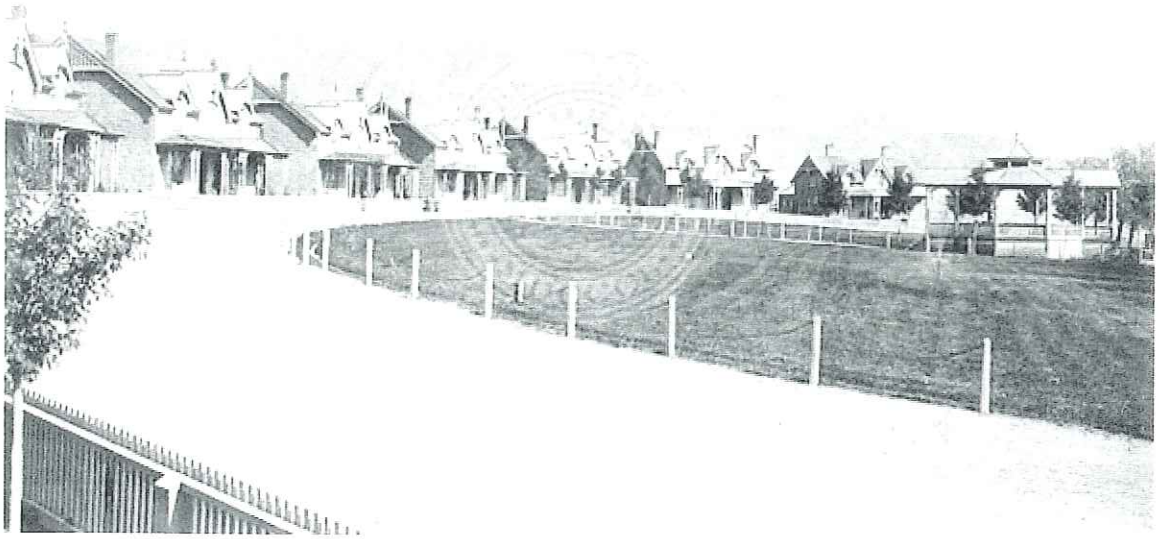
"They came of age during the Great Depression and the Second World War and went on to build modern America -- men and women whose everyday lives of duty, honor, achievement, and courage gave us the world we have today."

Tom Brokaw



Adam's official date of induction was 19 May 1943, with his date of entry into active service 26 May 1943.

By late February 1943, I had my draft notice and was to go in the service in May. I helped Dad on the farm a little and left the latter part of May to go to Fort Douglas at Salt Lake City, Utah. I took some of my basic training there and then I volunteered for paratrooper training. Out of about 37 people that volunteered at Fort Douglas, I think there were only five that passed their tests and physicals and were allowed to go.



Fort Douglas

We started on the train for Camp Toccoa, Georgia. We were joined by other little groups enroute until there were fifteen or twenty of us that arrived at CampToccoa. Again, we had

to take tests and physicals, and of this group, there were only two of us accepted. Toccoa was about 90 miles from Atlanta.

We were attached to the 517th Airborne Division. We took basic paratroop training for a while with them. They were a nasty, rotten outfit that had no regard for the enlisted men at all. We had a lot of casualties on the firing courses because they shot live machine guns three feet from the ground over us. Someone would crawl along into a big snake and jump and get shot.

Camp Toccoa

It was also hotter than blazes in Georgia and people were dropping over all the time from the heat. They treated you just about like criminals and slaves. For the first eight weeks, you couldn't go anywhere alone. Even on your off duty time, you couldn't go to the latrine or showers, meals, or anywhere else unless you went in a group with a non-com (non-commissioned officer) over you. You were given so many minutes to go to the bathroom, so many to eat, and etc.

They kept telling us it was strictly a voluntary outfit and anyone that didn't like it could leave. Finally five of us decided if we were going to die in the war, we weren't going to spend our last days in that outfit. There was a Baumgartner from California, a Napier from Ohio, myself and two others that I don't recall their names now. We were all from different platoons and didn't really know each other very well. Napier and I were the best acquainted. The five of us got together and decided we would all go in the same day and ask for a transfer. We decided if they asked why, we would each say it was just too tough an outfit for us.

Each one of us went and asked to see the captain and each said the same thing. I was last, and by my turn, the captain was so mad he couldn't hardly even talk. (The captain

didn't want anyone transferring out of his "glorious" unit.) He told us fine, he would show us how tough it could be. He called the whole company out in ranks and made us stand at attention before them. He then asked us why we were transferring, and we all said because it was too tough. He then ordered the sergeant to rip our airborne patches from our shirts, which he literally did, tearing one shirt sleeve in the process.

The captain then told us we were no longer paratroopers. We had taken part of their basic training and jumped on guy lines from towers but no free fall or airplanes yet. He then lined us up at attention in front of the company and told the men that we would now be treated as prisoners. We were to be transferred to a barracks by ourselves, and if anyone in the company was caught talking to us, they would be treated as we were. He called out a corporal from the ranks and told him that his responsibility from then on was to take charge of us.

We weren't to eat or communicate with any of the men. We were to go on steady K.P., or kitchen police duty, and we would work for both shifts of cooks. The first cook shift went on at 4 a.m. and worked until after the noon meal was over. The next shift then came on and worked until midnight, which meant that we were to work from 4 a.m. 'til midnight. We did this for a period of 21 days. However, we got smart after a few days, and two of us at a time would sneak out when nobody was looking and run hide in the pine trees which were nearby. When the cooks would notice we were gone, the other guys would lie and say we had just gone to the latrine, or we had gotten a bad nose bleed, or one of us went over to the barracks to get some aspirin. After a couple hours, those two would come back and two more would sneak off. We managed to get some rest and survive this way.

They decided to take the company out in the field for a week for firing practice. It was about a 4 ½ mile march. The company had their gear hauled out in trucks and walked at route step, not a strict formation. We, with our corporal, had to walk about 50 feet behind them. We had full field packs on our backs and had to walk in formation and at attention.

When we arrived at the site, we were put in a tent by ourselves. We were told we could each have only one canteen of water every 24 hours. A guard was placed over the water supply with orders to not let us have any. This was in the middle of the summer in Georgia. The men were all warned that the stream running through the area was contaminated with typhoid and unfit to drink, and there were warning signs posted along it. Every time our guard turned his back for a minute, one of us would run down to the stream, get a drink and fill a canteen. Again, we managed to survive.

We were again placed with the cooks, only this time, we had to build fires to heat water for the men to wash their mess kits in. There were two lines – 3-50 gallon garbage cans in each line – for a total of six cans on the lines. The captain wouldn't let us dump the dirty water out. We had to haul the cans full of dirty water about a half mile to the stream, empty them and then clean them and fill them with fresh water. We then had to haul them back to the fires. Since there were only five of us, and there were six cans, and it took two men to a can, we had to make several trips for each meal. It kept us going all day long just hauling cans. The corporal, with a gun, marched with us each time and sat and fished while we were cleaning cans.

About the end of the second day, a Red Cross panel truck with a lieutenant in it saw us and asked what was going on. We told him, and he just couldn't believe it. He was attached to another outfit and wasn't with ours. The little road we used turned behind some trees just as we left camp, and so we couldn't be seen from camp. The lieutenant told us he would have his truck there each day and haul the cans for us. The corporal over us was a pretty good Joe and he felt sorry for us. Also, the lieutenant told him if he didn't keep his mouth shut, he would see that he paid for it. So the last four days, we only had to haul the cans from the camp to the pine trees.

While we were back in the main camp, two other troopers sneaked over one night about midnight and wanted to talk to us. They said they also wanted to quit but after seeing how we were being treated, they were afraid. We told them that we would survive, and one day be out of there, and they would still be in and wish they were out. We advised them to quit and take whatever they needed to. Apparently, the next morning, they did. It had rained real hard and the drill field was covered with big mud puddles A sergeant came out with these two men, marched them over to the largest puddle and ordered them to lie down. Then he ordered them to roll over ten times. Next, he made them stand up and double time over to the next big puddle. They repeated this process for about 2 ½ hours, and then he marched them over and put them with us. They looked like a couple of drowned rats, but they said they were glad they had gone ahead with it.

After about a month of this kind of junk, we decided we had had enough. The division commander, as I remember, was a full colonel. We seldom saw him, but he had an office on a little hill right up at the end of our company street. We decided that we had to somehow see him. We decided to wait until our company was all in eating dinner, and then we would just dash out and run up to his office. This is what we did. We just all ran out of the mess hall and started running down the street. (It was about the length of two or three Blackfoot city blocks.) Our captain came dashing out, hollering for us to stop. We dashed up the little hill and ran right in the colonel's building. There was a master sergeant there, and he asked us what we wanted. We said we wanted to see the colonel. He told us we couldn't without permission from our commanding officer. We told him we weren't leaving until we saw the colonel. About then, the colonel hollered from the next room and asked what was going on. The sergeant told him and he said to send us in. We told him what had happened to us and we wanted a transfer. He asked me, "Are you telling me the truth?" When I answered, "Yes, Sir," he said, "Well, you know, soldier, I believe you." He asked how long this had been going on, and we told him a month. He then said we should have been transferred to an out platoon within two days.

He then told us to sit right there and asked the sergeant to go and get our captain, no ifs, ands or buts about it, no matter what he was doing or where he was. Everyone else was to stand right where they were standing and not to move a muscle. When the captain arrived, the colonel asked,

"Sir, are you the captain of Battery such and such? (The colonel was over four or five batteries or more.) The captain said yes. And he asked the captain where he was the last few minutes. The captain replied he had been eating lunch. The colonel asked if he knew these men here.

The captain said, "Well, not really, Sir."

The colonel asked, "Why don't you know them?"

The captain then said that he hadn't been having much contact with them. When the colonel asked why, the captain said, "Well, because they asked to be released from our company here and sent to another outfit, and we didn't think we should let them go."

The colonel asked, "Where were these men while you were eating your lunch?"

He answered, "Well, they were supposed to be on duty in the K.P."

And the colonel asked, "Why were the men running up the middle of the street?"

"Well," the captain answered, "We were chasing them."

"Why were you chasing them?"

"Because they weren't to have anybody talk to them."

And the colonel said, "Well, Captain, you come here a minute . . . right over here, the side of me."

The captain came over by the colonel and the colonel said, "Now, captain, you see these men here?"

He said, "Yes, Sir."

The colonel said, "What are those men?"

And the captain answered, "Those are the men that are on K.P. duty."

And the colonel said, "What's their time – what do you work them?"

And the guy told him from 10 at night until 7 in the morning and from 7 in the morning until 10 at night.

And the colonel said, "Captain, how would you like the same conditions? Aren't these men soldiers?"

"Yes, they are, sir."

"Why are you treating them that way, then?"

"Well, because we didn't like 'em leaving the battery."

And he said, "Well, they are human beings. Do you know that there's an order out on the books that no punishment or anything will be done to men that want to voluntarily leave our outfits?"

"Well, ah, ah, yes, sir."

He said, " All right, Captain you stand right out here in the street – go right down there to the bottom of the hill and stand there and I'll be right down with you."

So they both, along with the first sergeant went down, and the captain stood at attention.

The colonel came up to the captain and said, "Captain, you are a disgrace to the army and the United States of America . . . and, as of this minute, you are relieved of your command. And who is your lieutenant?" (Well, he was lieutenant so and so.) And the colonel said, "He will join you and he will be marked down to a buck private. These men will go back and you will send somebody with them to take care of their belongings. You will take them up to this empty barracks and they are free to visit with whoever they want. And you people, captain, and you first lieutenant, you'll stand right here until I get that order official that you're busted.

The colonel then asked him if we had asked for a transfer and when the captain told him yes, he told his sergeant to go and call the captain's company out in front of the mess hall. Then the colonel, all of us, and the captain marched down the hill to where the company was at attention. The colonel then told the company that he had better not ever hear of any more of those incidents.

"You have these men with all their belongings registered in an out platoon, requesting priority shipment within two hours, or I will break you of rank and have you under arrest." He then appointed a lieutenant to take over the company. Believe me, we were moved in a hurry and that evening, the colonel sent someone over to see if we were all okay. I don't know what finally became of the captain. We stayed in the out platoon for a week or so until a shipment of men went out, about mid July, and then we were shipped to the 567th Anti-Aircraft Mobile Unit – Camp Haan, California. It was just a few miles from Riverside and Colton, California. This battalion was just being formed with Lieutenant Colonel Wilbur H. Lamberton assuming command. The battalion itself was divided into five batteries: a Headquarters Battery whose duties were supply, operation and communications; and four weapons batteries Able, Baker, Charlie and Dog (A, B, C and D). I was part of B Battery. The first few weeks of training included wearing of the uniform, military courtesy, infantry drill, manual of arms and rifle marksmanship.

Aerial view of Camp Haan. Six-man huts in center, left of huts are latrines, and to right are mess halls and supply / day room buildings (SWP)

We were asked what position we thought we would like and I chose gunner. This was operating a quad mount 50 caliber machine gun unit. It was four guns mounted in a large trailer on wheels with a seat between the guns and could fire around 2000 bullets a minute when all four guns were going at once. It actually came closer to about 1400 a minute. This was the position I was assigned. Each of the four companies had four gun batteries. Each gun battery was about 15 men, one 40 millimeter cannon, one quad mount 50 caliber machine gun, a trailer with a seat area and two machine guns on each side of the seat. All of the guns could be fired by a single trigger. Each battery also had a power plant for electricity, a range finder machine for aiming the 40 mm cannon, boxes of ammunition, and two trucks for handling the equipment and hauling the men.

40 mm Bofors gun

M51 Trailer-mounted Quad 50 Machine Gun

U.S. Artillery crew with 40 mm Bofors gun

A month of basic training here was followed by a series of Desert Training Periods conducted at Camp Irwin, California, located in a barren valley in the Mojave Desert, 125 miles west of Camp Haan. This installation consisted mainly of pyramidal tents pitched in a large hot dusty quadrangle on the desert floor surrounded by jagged treeless mountains. In all directions from this camp were laid out ranges for small arms and antiaircraft weapons fire. The unit moved by tactical convoy to Camp Irwin on August 16, 1943.

Rows of pyramid tents - Camp Irwin on the Mojave Desert

We stayed in this area for several months and part time was on maneuvers in the Mojave Desert about 60 miles from Death Valley at a place called Camp Irwin. It was about 110 °F when we got there. Rifles were so hot in the daytime, you could hardly touch the metal.

It got so cold at night that you needed a sleeping bag with a blanket in it. We were in little two-man pup tents. Just long enough to lie down in and about 3 or 3 ½ feet high. Time you got two bedrolls, your duffle bags, rifles, gas masks, canteens, etc., in them, there wasn't much room left.

The Mojave Desert

The temperature in the desert could be over 120 degrees Farenheit. The ground was covered with nothing but sand, gravel and patches of dried-up sagebrush. There wasn't even any cactus. Camp Irwin proper was row after row of sand-colored, six-man pyramidal tents with wooden floors. Each tent had six cots with no mattresses and one potbelly stove. To get to Camp Irwin, you had to travel from Camp Haan to San Bernadino, then go up through the Cajun Pass in the mountains. Then you went east to Barstow where you turned off on a dirt road to Camp Irwin in the Mojave Desert.

37b. The desolate looking Mojave Desert. (VR)

The initial period of desert training extended from August 16 to September 4, 1943. The second period at Camp Irwin, September 20 to November 6, was a rigorous experience under field conditions. The Battalion bivouacked (set up temporary locations) at East Range in puptents, a camp which came to be known as Tent City. Training consisted of firing at towed targets and practice on the antitank range. Two simulated tactical field exercises were held and all participated in a 25 mile hike.

We would practice shooting at little remote controlled airplanes with our 50's and 40 millimeter cannons. The air force also sent planes over, towing a long sleeve on a cable, that we would shoot at with the 40's. One of our guns shot too close to the plane and cut the cable just a ways back of the plane's tail. Talk about a mad pilot.

Dive bombers would also practice diving at us and drop dummy bombs – regular bombs filled with sand instead of explosives. They weren't supposed to drop them right on us. These bombs weighed 200 – 300 pounds. One plane dived at our gun position once and his aim was a little too good as one of the bombs came sliding right through our gun position. Tore clear through the pit and on out the back. There were men all over the area but, fortunately, it missed us all.

The corporal in charge of our gun section went AWOL (Absent Without Leave) when we were back at Camp Haan, so they broke him and gave the job to me. I remember one time we were having a gun inspection. Officers would come around to inspect you. We would

have to clean our guns, load and fire them. There were eight gun sections in our battery. When they jumped to fire the last gun, a big blast of white came out of the gun, and it was just like a little snowstorm. Someone had cleaned the barrel with a big wad of cotton packing and had forgotten to remove it. As we were using high explosive shells, they were lucky the gun didn't blow up.

It was a tough time on the desert and we were hard as rocks. Could lie down on a rock or anywhere and go to sleep.

I remember at maneuvers one time in the desert, they had us pitch our tents in two parallel straight lines, leaving a sort of road in the center. That night, a violent storm came up, and the water just swirled through the area. Washed out our tent pegs and there were only two tents left standing. There we were in our shorts about 1 or 2 in the morning – pitch black – everything wet, running around trying to rescue everything. I'm sure if anyone could have seen us, they would have died laughing.

We had one man, name of Mullins, (we called him "Moon") that undressed one night and crawled down in his sleeping bag. He let out a scream and tore the tent down getting out. A big scorpion had crawled in and bit him on the toe. He thought sure he was going to die. All it did was make him a little sick.

Soldiers had to learn how to use gas masks because so many were killed in World War I with poison gasses. It was one of the most disliked chapters of the training. Soldiers were sent into a building and all doors and windows were closed. Then, tear gas bombs were set off while the masks were still in their carrying pouches. After the discharge, soldiers had to hold their breath, open the gas mask container, put the mask on, and clear the mask to avoid being affected by the gas.

Remember one time at Camp Haan, a fight broke out one evening. We were living in a combination tent and wood building. The sides, maybe 4 or 5 feet high, were wood, and then a big tent top. They had big portions of the sides that raised up and were held up with two boards so that the air could pass through. Some guy and a sergeant were about half-tanked up and got in a fight. The guy bit off the whole ear lobe of the sergeant, and the sergeant grabbed one of these wooden slats – about a 1 X 6 – five feet long and just knocked the guy silly.

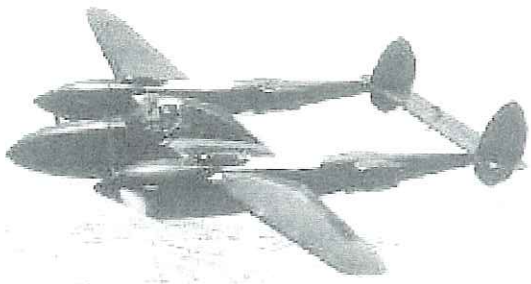
We also had a guy named Sperry, from Texas, that drank a lot and got real mean when drinking. He was always starting a fight. He came up to me one time and got real abusive because I didn't drink and started to try and get me to fight. I told him he might start in on me, but he could be damn sure I would take one of those slats and beat him half to death, and he would wake up in the hospital. I told him if he ever so much as looked cross-eyed at me, drunk or sober, wherever we were, I would beat him with a

board. He stood and looked at me a minute, turned and walked away. From then on, even drunk, he was very friendly to me.

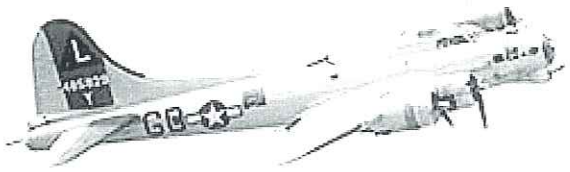
Everybody got tired of his meaness though. One night two great big fellows took him down to the shower rooms and beat the stuffing right out of him. He looked like he had been run through a meat grinder. He was going home on furlough the next day. When he came in to get his pass, he was covered with bandaids, one eye swollen shut, one ear all swollen and bruised, mouth all puffed up and bruised. The officer said, "Well, Sperry, looks like you finally got what you've been asking for. Have a good trip."

Another part of training was how to attach bayonets to the rifle and use them as weapons. Classes were given in jabbing with the bayonets, hitting with the butt of the rifle and other ways to injure the enemy. Most soldiers thought that the chances of an antiaircraft crewman having to fight the enemy hand-to-hand seemed quite remote. For most, and for the balance of the war, the bayonets, like the gas masks, became just another piece of equipment added to the load carried everywhere they went. Most believed that if you got close enough to the enemy to use a bayonet, just shoot him instead.

When we were at Camp Haan, California, base, the airbase was right across the highway from us. We used to set our guns up and track the planes as they were arriving and leaving. There were the twin-tailed Lightnings (fighters) and also B24 Liberator Bombers and B17 Fortress Bombers.



Twin Tailed Lightning Fighter



B17 Fortress Bomber

One day, one of those bombers dove down but didn't pull out quick enough and dove straight into the ground. You couldn't believe the hole it made. The nose of the engine was buried 14 feet in the ground. We also saw a Fortress come in and he kept circling, finally we saw that he couldn't get his wheels down. He flew 'til his gas was used up, and then brought that plane in on one wheel. The other was still locked up. He went nearly the whole length of the runway on one wheel and then just dipped his wingtip down and skidded on it. Only damage was to the wingtip. Was just a beautiful landing.

Another time, there was a whole flight of B17's, I believe, that was taking off one right after the other. There were seven of them that crashed just as they were taking off. Some had just gotten up in the air good and some were still making their climb. One or two of them started burning. Some of our people ran over and helped get the crews out. It seemed to be sabatoge.

B24 Liberator Bomber

We finally left California and went to Camp Polk, Louisiana, for more training maneuvers.

The 567th was first attached to the Third and then the Fourth Army for the Sixth Louisiana Maneuvers. The maneuver period began in February and ended in April. Troops contended against each other in the true maneuvers. Every effort was made to simulate actual combat conditions. Blackout and camouflage discipline was rigorously enforced.

The maneuver area covered much of west central Louisiana and that portion of Texas adjacent to it across the Sabine River. The terrain presented every kind of tactical problem. The greater part of it was rolling hills covered with second-growth timber, interspersed with flat swampy lands. There were few towns, Leesville and DeRidder being the main ones.

If a low point were to be selected in the Battalion's history, it would be the period of January 25 to 30, 1944. Debarking from the train at Camp Polk, Louisiana at 0330 January 25, the troops were met by a determined drizzle that continued for seven days thereafter. The bivouac area was located a few miles west of Camp Polk in a sparse pine grove. The vehicles churned up the thin soil and produced mud that became a constant companion to all who lived in that area.

We arrived in Louisiana in the middle of the night in a snowstorm. We unloaded all our guns and equipment off the train and were told to pull out in a big field and line all our guns up for inspection. Within a couple hours, all the trucks but two in the whole battalion – about 100 – were bogged down clear to the floor boards. It had been raining and snowing for 20 days and the place was a regular swamp. It took us three or four days to finally get unstuck

and get our guns lined up. What a miserable week. Again, they lined us up in a long line. The guy next to you was your partner, and where you were standing was where you pitched your pup tent. We happened to be standing in a puddle about 6 inches deep. We pegged our tent down and then had to find branches to pile in for about a foot deep to keep our things out of the water. It made it awfully small inside that tent. Nearly everyone was soaked constantly for most of that week. It did finally dry out and we were able to go on maneuvers.

Our training consisted of each gun section, about 15 men, one 50 cal quad mount machine gun, one remote control direction range finder, ammunition supply, one power plant generator and two trucks, operating as an independent unit. There were four of these units in a platoon. Two platoons plus a headquarters section and medics section and cook section were in a battery. Four batteries were in a company.

Each time we moved, we had to dig holes about three feet deep for all our equipment. The 40th (40 mm gun) hole was about 12 feet by 12 feet by three feet. The 50th (50 mm gun) hole almost the same; range finder hole, about 7 feet across and round and 4 feet deep; power plant hole, about 4 feet across, 3 feet deep and 9 feet long. Another hole about that size was for ammo and such and then individual foxholes. We sometimes were ordered to move to a new location two or three times a day, and once we moved five times in 24 hours. We were in one area that was real boggy. We were supposed to get all dug in and camouflaged for a battalion inspection. There was no way we could dig in in that bog, but there were quite a few trees around, so we cut most of them down and pulled them over to the gun with our truck's cable winches. We then built a parapet about and threw mud over them. When we were inspected, we received a special commendation because of what we had done. When we were overseas a year or so later, the captain called us in and showed us a bill that the Louisiana property owner had sent the government for cutting down all his trees. The captain just laughed.

While in California, another fellow who had some meteorology in his background and I applied for a transfer to March Field Airbase which was just across from Camp Haan. We applied for pilot training. I had received a 136 grade on my aptitude tests and 110 was all you needed to apply to OTC, Officer's Training School. They accepted our applications because of my high score and his meteorology, but we had shipped out to Louisiana before our orders came down.

After we had been in Louisiana for some time, we were called in to Headquarters and told that our transfer pilot training had arrived and we were scheduled to ship out in two days back to California. The next day an order came down saying that no more pilot training transfers were being accepted if you hadn't already gotten to your unit. So we missed out by one day. The officers advised me to apply for Officers Training School but I refused.

There was another outfit called OSTP, Officers Specialized Training Program, where they sent you to a college for a year or so for special training that you could apply for if you had over 120 test score. I applied for this but again was notified that they had stopped taking any more applicants.

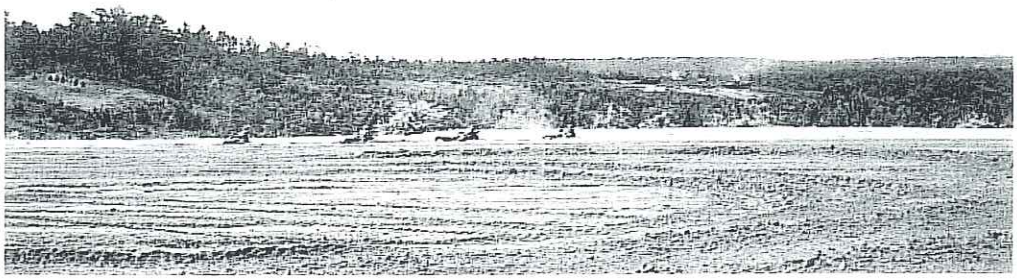
While in Louisiana, another fellow and I were chosen to go back to Los Angeles and return a prisoner. It was a fellow who had gone AWOL from Camp Haan, and they had just caught him. We were both issued carbines and had orders to bring him back. While we were on the train coming back, the prisoner said he wasn't going back and if he jumped off the train, he didn't think we would stop him. I told him that I had heard if you lost your prisoner, you took his place in the guardhouse. I assured him I wasn't going to do any time for him and that I had seven shots in my magazine. I guaranteed him that at least four of the seven slugs would be in him before he hit the ground. He looked at me kind of funny, but we didn't have any trouble with him at all until we delivered him at camp.

One time, while out in the field, we had our guns and equipment all set up in these holes we had dug. It was just starting to rain good when it got dark. The next morning, the holes were all clear full of water. We had to draw straws to see who would wade in and raise the outriggers and such on the guns so we could hook a cable on them and pull them out. It was still just pouring down. Edward (Ned) Cass, one of my best friends from Pittsburgh, lost the draw. He stripped down and skinny-dipped in the holes for us. We were all soaked time we got everything loaded.

We also spent a night or two standing under big pine trees most of the night because our tents and beds were full of water.

I left Louisiana and came home on a furlough. Thelma was ready to get married so we did. I had to borrow the money to get married on. Wired my outfit in Louisiana and asked for a week's extended time to get married. They wired back permission denied. I took the week and stayed home anyway. Received notice that my outfit was moving to Georgia and I should report back to Camp Stewart, Georgia. I was not technically AWOL. On the trains going back, the Military Police checked my orders and noted I was AWOL but didn't do anything as long as I was heading toward Louisiana.

As soon as I started past Louisiana, however, they picked me up. I showed them the telegram telling me to come to Georgia and explained why I was overdue. They said they didn't usually allow a man to go on that was AWOL but they would let me go.



Camp Stewart Georgia

The only ones of our unit that had arrived at Camp Stewart when I got there were our Captain and a few advance detail men. I reported to our captain, told him I was a week AWOL. He just assigned me to a barracks, told me to wait for the arrival of my company and forget it. Nothing was ever said about me being AWOL. Company came about three days later.

Again, we went into training. Georgia was hot and humid and most of us were covered with heat rash. We used to take our sheets down to the shower at night and soak them in cold water and then take them back and sleep under them. I was sending most of my money home on allotment to Thelma. I only kept about $5.00 a month out. I washed and ironed other soldiers' clothes on weekends to earn more money. Managed to save enough to buy a nice silverware set and send home to Thelma this way.

Had only been with Thelma a few days after marriage and it would be another year and a half or so before we would see each other again.

Our outfit was about 90% made up of men from Virginia. Few from Maryland and a few from other places, such as myself. It took a while to get to even understand their talk.

Camp Kilmer NJ

Camp Stewart included final preparations for overseas movement. Guns were turned in by the end of August. The month of September was a period of waiting with training time spent on infantry problems. Rail movement from Camp Stewart to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, began on September 30.

We finally shipped out of Camp Stewart to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, for shipment overseas. Seems like we were at Kilmer a week or two. I went to New York on pass one day. Country boy in the big city, didn't enjoy it very much and didn't go anymore.

ONE OF THE MANY POST EXCHANGES, CAMP KILMER, N. J.

I was in the army about 33 or 34 months. About twenty or so were spent overseas. We went through England, France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg and part of Germany. Also was to Switzerland a couple times on leave. Since my unit was a mobile unit, we were attached to the 1st, 3rd and 9th armies. Patton and Hodges were two of the generals over me.

We boarded the boat from Camp Kilmer and headed for England. A couple of men from our section and I were sent ahead on a boat with all of our trucks, guns and equipment. We had to roam around the ship and see that stuff was tied down. This was about October 10 or so. Battery B was assigned a kitchen unit so we had to clean up all the dishes and everything . . . and most of it was puke. Everybody would start with their tray and get about half way up the stairs and all of a sudden . . . "watch it . . . puke's comin'" They'd just dump their tray over and run downstairs to get out. Quite a bit of that happened.

Conditions were crowded on the other ships, the food was vile and the trip was a long one. It took about 10 or 12 days to get across. The passage was relatively calm and the air surprisingly warm.

Arrived in Liverpool late at night. Was cold, drizzly and foggy. We went inland a ways to a little town of Leeds, near Stoke-on-Trent and, I believe, it was about 40 or 50 miles from Liverpool. We were stationed in small Quonset type huts. We had metal stoves that burned coke to keep us warm. This was probably about the best facilities we had lived in since leaving Salt Lake. Seems like we stayed a couple months in England and then shipped over to France.

(Camp Blackshawmoor had been a British installation. It consisted of a series of low, one-story barracks heated by inadequate coke stoves. The sanitary facilities were quaint. A Battalion mess was established so the cooks could figure out the British culinary equipment. Extra blankets were issued for the change from the heat of Georgia to the chill of the moors.)

The location of the camp was beautiful. To the north and east were the high moors and to the south across the Leek-Buxton highway, a long valley fell away, crisscrossed with hedgerows and stone walls and dotted by ancient and picturesque farm houses.

The Battalion's mission at Camp Blackshaw Moor was to equip itself for an operational assignment. A detachment unpacked guns and mounts at Chester, convoys covered England filling out shortages in equipment and drawing ammunition. The troops were subjected to physical training, long hikes through the steep moors and military rehearsals.

On December 12, 1944, the Battalion left Blackshawmoor in convoy for Southampton. This was a long cold trip passing south through the outskirts of Manchester, Evesham, Cirencester, Marlborough, arriving in the bivouac area late at night. A few days were spent in the city park, subsisting on C rations. The vehicles and some personnel left Southampton on 16 December, 1944, crossed the English Channel, anchored off Le Havre, France. I was part of this group.

Le Havre France - Most of the city was destroyed in the war.

The vehicles landed at Rouen and rolled north to Camp Bertrimont in the Red Horse Assembly Area. The other personnel landed on the beach at Le Havre. It was a clear moonlit night as they marched through ruined Le Havre. Vehicles arrived on the 20th of December and the Battalion was again assembled at Block H, Camp Bertrimont.

It was a nice day as we sailed up the Seine River in France. We could see ruins of planes, tanks and buildings, occasionally, so knew we were getting closer to the war. We disembarked at Rouen, France. Unloaded all our equipment and drove them to the rendezvous point. It was a day or two before the rest of the battalion arrived. While we had gone by boat and driven, they had to walk quite a ways after getting off their boats.

Camp Bertrimont was in fact two sides of a road in the midst of a flat agricultural district. The troops pitched pup tents and bedded down on hay. On December 23, the temperature dropped well below freezing, the ground became solid with frost, and coke and coal was hauled in to the shivering men. The men were issued overshoes and sleeping bags in the midst of a strafing attack.

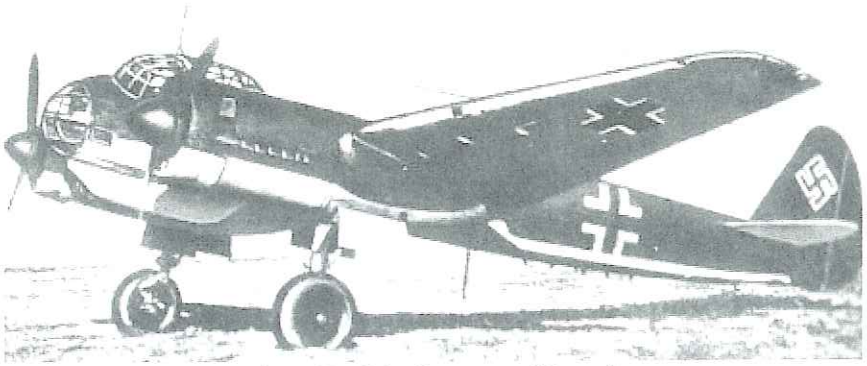
I remember Mitchell and I thought we would live in comfort, so we swiped a couple of fold-up army cots from the boat. They just reached across the back of our truck from sideboard to sideboard, similar to a hammock. We crawled in them the first night and nearly froze to death. It was really cold, and there we were, hanging up in the air with cold air all around us. We soon threw away the cots and went back to sleeping on the ground. Traveling in winter, a lot of the men got their feet frozen. Sometimes when we would go to sleep on the ground, we would wake up in the morning and find five or six inches of snow on top of us.

At this time, the Battalion was assigned to the Ninth Army and Twelfth Army Group. Orders were received to proceed by forced march to Vise, Belgium. Most of the group left

Hamm and rolled into St Quentin at noon. This town was to be a gas stop, but strafing planes had destroyed the local gas dump and refueling did not take place until after dark.

As our outfit was mobile, we moved around quite a bit. We guarded railroad depts., Patton's gas supplies for his tanks, air fields, etc. We were attached to the First, Third, and Ninth Armies at various times, Seventh Army, mostly though.

At 2310, approximately five miles west of Hirson, France, the column was strafed by an enemy aircraft identified as a JU-88. This plane made three runs the length of the column, strafing with heavy machine gun fire and 20 mm HE and AP shells. All batteries fired caliber 50 M51 and M-32 mounts, and the men hit the ditches and fired small arms at the raider. During the course of the action, the Battalion expended 25,878 rounds of ammunition, suffered seven casualties and, it is believed shot down the enemy aircraft.



Junker Ju 88 German Bomber

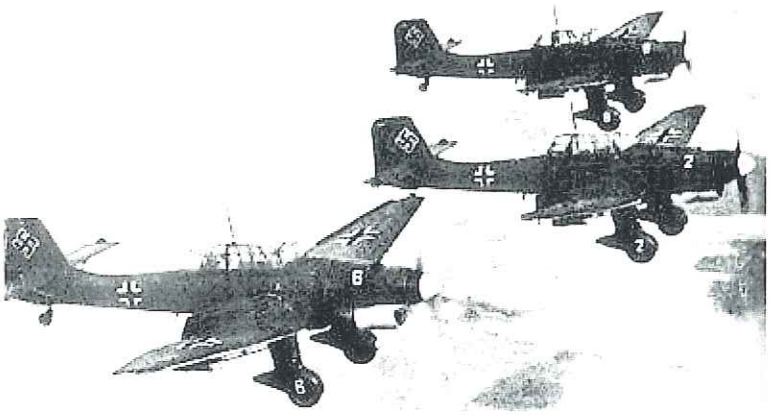
The most serious casualties occurred in Headquarters Battery where the operations truck was squarely hit by a 20 mm shell and a spray of heavy machine gun slugs. In the second platoon of B Battery, the strafing plane laid three 20 mm shells on the crown of the road, slightly wounding two men with flying fragments and causing a jeep accident which injured another. This was my battery.

After the strafing attack at Hirson, the column left the Northern France sector, moving east and then north through Rocroi, Phillipeville and turning east at Charleville. The weather was bitter cold, and a breakfast stop was made just across the Belgian border at Fosses, Belgium. Then the column passed through Namur, Tirlemont and St. Trond.

At 1700, low on gas and having been on the road for thirty-two hours of steady driving, the Battalion ran into difficulties in the form of a British tank column which cut the line of march in several places and caused a general dispersal of the unit. Orders had been changed while the march was in progress, but only the leading elements of the convoy were intact to continue on to the new destination of Brand, Germany. Dog, Charley and Able batteries straggled into Vise, Germany, through Tongres and the bridge at Vise. The leading elements of Baker Battery (my battery) were cut off and the column turned blind southeast toward Liege instead of continuing through Tonges to Vise. While passing through Liege, the column was subjected to aerial attack aimed at the Meuse bridge.

We were called one winter to take our battalion up north in Germany to Aachen. This was the time of the Battle of the Bulge, and we were told the Germans might try a tank run through the Aachen area to break out beyond our lines. We were to set up our guns as anti-

tank guns and had orders not to retreat if there was a breakthrough. As far as we knew, we were about the only battalion in that area. It was mighty scary for a day or two, but, fortunately, the Germans never came. They could easily have overrun us if they had, but were instead concentrating on wiping out the troops at Bastogne, Belgium. We finally got orders to move to a different area and were on truck convoy to do this. Our convoy consisted of about 125 vehicles pulling their guns and such. We had traveled quite a ways and were passing a crossroads when a large British convoy came. There must have been two or three times as many trucks and equipment as we had or more. All of our battalion had passed the crossroads, I believe, except the two gun sections in our platoon and four more gun sections in the next battery. A battery consisted of two platoons – four gun sections in each platoon. We were in the 567th Anti-Aircraft Battalion Mobile. The British convoy was moving bumper to bumper, almost, and they wouldn't let us through. Took an hour or better for them to go past. By this time, the rest of our battalion was gone. The officers left with us didn't know which roads they were taking or anything. They led us off on a road and, after quite a while, we started to see a lot of front line troops. When we asked some of them where we were, they said we were right up in the Battle of the Bulge area and the Germans were dropping parachutists in and everything.



GERMAN STUKA DIVE BOMBERS

We soon came to the town of Leige, Belgium. German planes were strafing and some of our ninety mm anti-aircraft guns were set up right in the town. Our section trucks parked fairly close along a building by this 90 outfit. We went over and talked to them. (Leige was just south of Aachen, Germany, and only a few miles from the German border. It was north of the city of Bastogne, at a guess, 30 or 40 miles. The Germans had their big drive on to try and overrun this area with their big thrust at Bastogne – which became known as the Battle of the Bulge.) The men in the 90 outfit said Leige was being bombed and strafed nearly every night. We had had a truck or two shot up as we came into the town. They told us there was a Stuka dive bomber who came right down the main street every night strafing. There was a church with a steeple right in the main street and the road kind of went around this church. They said the plane flew real low strafing, then pulled up to clear the church and then dived back down to continue strafing. They had set their gun up right in the middle of the street that day and aimed it right at the top of the steeple. These fellows said they were laying for "Bedcheck Charlie," as they called him, and were going to get him that night. Sure enough, that evening, as he zoomed up to clear the steeple, they cut loose with their 90, and they must have gotten him dead center because that Stuka just turned into a big ball of fire.

We weren't supposed to be in this area, and the Germans were sealing it off. Our officers gave word for us to try and get out, and on New Year's Eve, as soon as it got dark, we started out. It was dead of winter, lots of snow and ice. We had to come down out of the