BASIC TRAINING - 1942

This is an account of the military service of Donald R. Parks, from November 28, 1942 to October 27, 1945. Because few life experiences are simple, or can be said to start on one date specific, I will go back awhile, to set the background for this narrative.

I am writing this memoir and attendant comments during my 84th year. Most of what I write about occurred more than a half century before. I will attempt to describe facts, situations, and people accurately. Because of the time lapse between then and now, and because of failures or distortions of memory, I may err at times. Any differences between my statements and historic fact or the memory of the reader will never be deliberate, but should be ascribed to inaccuracies in recall after a very long time.

I will begin in Sheldon, Iowa, on Pearl Harbor Day, December 7, 1941, an unforgettable date. When I think about that "day of infamy," the Japanese attack on our fleet at Pearl Harbor, I am reminded of a day several years before, also a Sunday, when my Dad and I were watching a freight train going west on the Milwaukee Railroad, with gondola car after car loaded with scrap steel. Dad pointed to the train and said to me, "Take a good look at that steel. In a few years the Japanese will be shooting it back at you." How true his prophecy was!

Pearl Harbor Day was the only day in the life of my mother, Georgia Parks, when she had all of her living children together, in one place. It is ironic that such a tragic day for the nation would also be a day of real joy in our household. Those children, in order of

age, were David Eugene Crocker, Alvin Laurence Crocker, Donald Russell Parks, Winifred Ruth Parks, Margery Ann Parks, Jean Marie Parks, and Wilma Jane Parks. As I write this, in August, 2006, David and Laurence are deceased. Georgia's oldest child, Evelyn, died during the influenza epidemic in 1918.

David was one of the first young men to be drafted into service during the build up for possible war. He completed basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia. When he did so, the U. S. Army was organizing its first parachute battalion, and David volunteered, making him one of the very first paratroopers in the army. After he earned his paratrooper wings, he applied for Officer's Candidate School and was accepted. He became a brave new Second Lieutenant on Dec. 1, and was given a furlough, to visit family. While he had never lived with the Parks family, since he went with his father Alvin Crocker when the Crockers were divorced, he decided to visit his mother before entering into active duty as an officer. He arrived in Sheldon, I believe, on December 5 or 6, to the great delight of the whole family. He looked grand in his uniform, and the brand new gold lieutenant's bars gleamed on his shoulders. The girls were thrilled to have him walk with them through the downtown streets.

Georgia called David's brother Laurence, who was living in Council Bluffs at the time, and he made a rapid trip to Sheldon, to see his brother and the rest of the family. Laurence was familiar with the Parks family, because he had spent his childhood and youth in Sheldon, in our home, and was really a big brother to all of us. The whole family was together, and the day was an enchanted time. When the news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was announced over the radio, we were all astounded, as I am sure

David Crocker
Photo taken after qualifying for Paratroops
Before going to OCS and becoming an officer

Mit Luftpost
Nach Nord Amerika
chg. 40 Pegs.

Taxe perçue .... RM ... RPF

Kriegsgefangenenpost

25.11.43 – 12

„Mit Luftpost
Par avion"

An Mrs. Georgia Parks

Empfangsort: Sheldon

Straße:

Kreis: Iowa

Land: U. S. of America

Landesteil (Provinz usw.)

U.S. CENSOR
EXAMINED
By 431

Geprüft
Oflag
64

Gebührenfrei

Absender:

Vor- und Zuname: 2nd Lt. David E. [illegible]

Gefangenennummer: 3003

Lager-Bezeichnung: Kriegsgef.-Offizierlager [redacted] 64

Deutschland (Allemagne)

Dear mother and family, How are your folks as far as health is concerned? I'm feeling fine myself. Today is a cold, cloudy day with snow on the ground. It's apt to get very much colder, later on, but we can stand it for the weather here is very much like it gets at home. We're getting the hockey rink ready, so we will have some winter sport. Some of the boys that got captured the same time I did, have recieved mail from home so I'm waiting for the mail every day. I'll be relieved when I hear from you, for then I'll know that you are receiving my letters. I'd certainly like to get a picture of you and the girls, for my pictures were left behind.

Well we can just pray that this war will soon end for then we can get together again. Say Hello to the girls, Lawerance and family, and Donald. May God take care of you all.

Your Loving Son & Brother
David E Brocker

nearly all Americans were. However, our family reunion continued, and we were creating a memory never to be repeated.

Laurence returned to his home in the evening, to go to work on Monday. On Monday, also, David received an urgent telegram ordering him to report for duty immediately, as war between the United States and Japan had been declared. We were sad to say goodbye to him when he boarded the train en route to Fort Benning and an unpredictable future.

As events transpired, his involvement in active warfare was very brief. During the invasion of Sicily, his platoon was dropped into a German troop garrison, and all his men except one were killed. He was captured, and spent the duration of the war in a prisoner of war camp in Poland. He was released from imprisonment by Russian troops as they fought their way into Germany, and was repatriated from Moscow. He remained in the Army Reserve after his discharge from active duty, and attained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. I didn't have a chance to know David very well but I know, from our brief times together, that he was a most kind, decent, and excellent person. He lived in Nederland Texas, worked for Gulf Oil Company, married, and died there.

During those momentous times, my Dad, Percy Walter Parks, (Pat, or Sparky, to his friends) was missed. He had died in November, 1939, as a result of an accident at work.

November mornings in Iowa can be beautiful, even though they are often quite cold. Deep winter has not usually set in. On the morning Dad was fatally injured, I was at Junior College early. The day was bright and sunny, and quite chilly but not really frigid.

The Iowa Public Service line crew, Dad included, reported for work, as usual, a little before 8:00 o'clock. They loaded the equipment and supplies they would need for the day, and climbed into the utility truck, with Andy VanderBerg driving and Merle Tinkham, the foreman, in the cab. Dad and George Kobbe were in the back, riding in the sheltered area just behind the cab. They headed east, going, I suppose, toward Archer. The blazing sun was just above the horizon as they approached the Illinois Central railroad crossing. I am sure Andy was nearly blinded. There were tall weeds, over 6 feet high, growing along the railroad right of way, right up to the ends of the ties.

Probably the truck slowed at the rather rough and ill-maintained crossing, and therefore remained across the tracks long enough for the morning train to crush into the truck with a horrible crash that was loud enough to alarm my friend Wally Henry, who was feeding his dad's hogs about a quarter mile away. Wally sprinted toward the scene as fast as he could run, and was the first person to arrive. He found my Dad lying unconscious on the cowcatcher on the front of the railroad engine, where he landed after being forced through the welded steel corner of the truck canopy. Merle Tinkham was dead. George Kobbe was moaning, with both legs broken and many other injuries. Andy, the driver, was least injured, but was dazed and incoherent. The noise of the crash had alerted others, and soon rescuers were taking the men to the hospital. Dad was terribly hurt, with numerous broken bones, and extensive internal injuries. I believe that, had he lived, he would have been a dependent cripple for the remainder of his life.

At about 9:00 o'clock, I was called to the office of the dean, and told that my father had been seriously injured in an accident, and was in the hospital, and that I should go there

immediately. The school provided a ride to the hospital, and I was able to say a few words to Dad as he lay on a gurney, obviously terribly injured. He knew me, I am sure. That was the last time I saw him alive.

It was necessary to get word to Mom, who had not been told. The Catholic priest was at the hospital, having come to give last rites to Merle Tinkham. Very kindly, he offered to give me a ride to my home. Mom was washing clothes. When I told her about Dad, she wiped her hands on her apron, asked me to take Wilma next door to Mrs. Murphy, and went with the priest to the hospital. She spent all the days before Dad died beside his bed, bravely tending to his needs and loving him. He died of shock pneumonia five days later. My strong, wise, and loving Dad was gone.

Mom quietly assumed care of all of us, and never wavered in her determination to raise wise and wonderful kids. Those who read this and knew her will recall her great courage, her wisdom, her love, and all the other attributes that made her such a splendid person. Now, after this long introduction, I can begin with my own saga.

After Dad died, Mom sold the house west of the tracks, and bought a small house next to Sherman Motors, the Studebaker dealer, on East 3rd Avenue, just east of 8th Street. She began doing laundry for income. I was going to Junior College, and she insisted that I should finish. I was also working for The White House clothing store, which belonged to Mr. E. B. Starrett and was managed by Melvin Versteeg. I was making only a few dollars a week, but nobody was making very much money in those times. Life wasn't too bad, although we didn't have much. In February the post office conducted a test for substitute clerk-carrier, because Chris Smith, father of one of my best friends, retired. More than thirty people took the test, including me. In typical government fashion, no results were expected for several months.

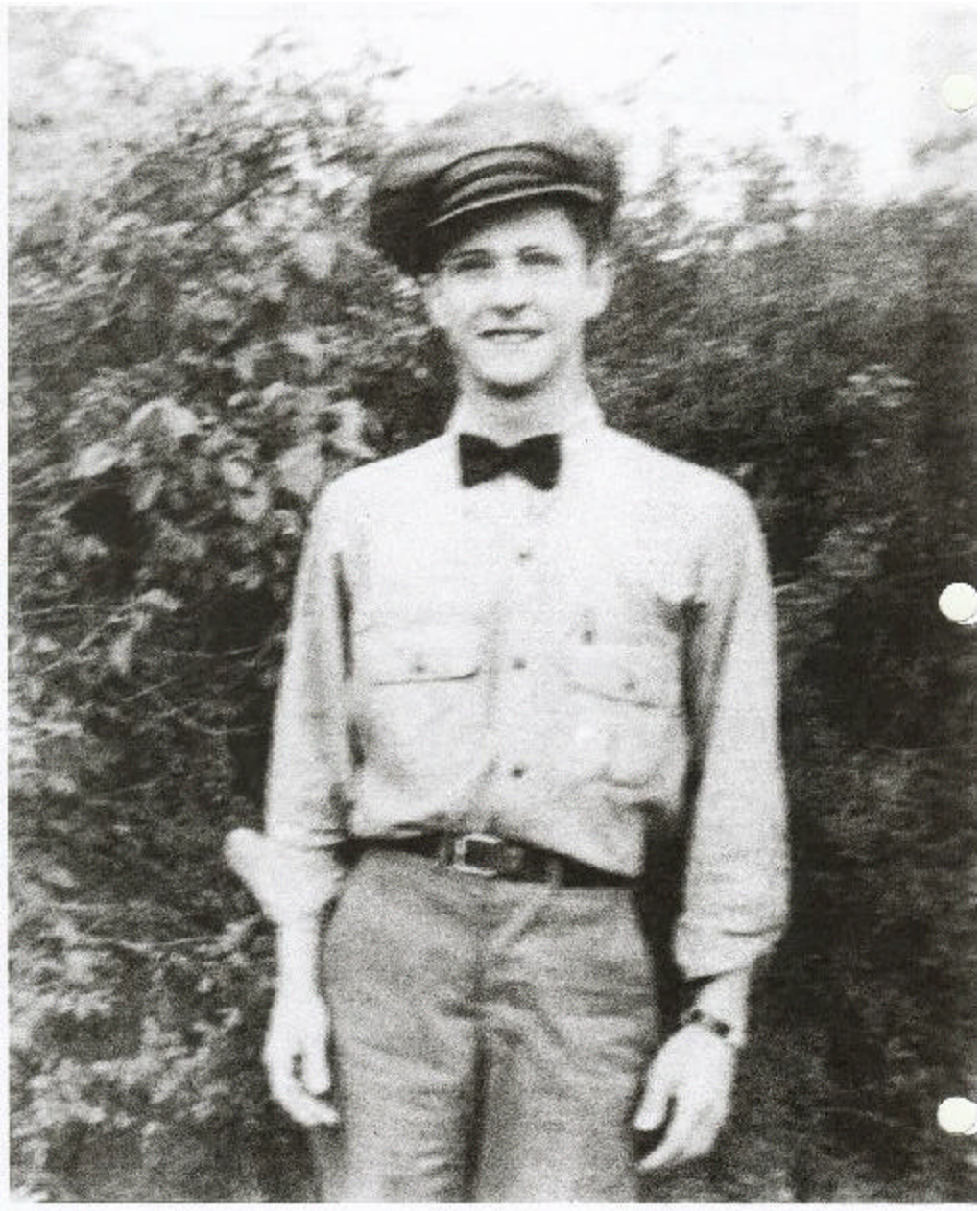
I graduated from Junior College in May, and continued to work at the White House. Because I was now there full time, I was paid more. I enjoyed working with Jake Wobbema, the tailor, who is worthy of a really good biographical sketch. He was one of the really exceptional people who seem to have come into my life at opportune times.

One day a stranger came into the store, looking for Donald Parks. I identified myself, and he asked if he could take some of my time to explain the reason for his visit. He represented a school on the East Coast, a member of the little Ivy League, named Wesleyan University, at Middletown, Conn. He had come to offer to me a full scholarship, in any field of study, which would include not only tuition and books, but also living expenses. The offer was endowed by a wealthy Iowa native, who in his youth had lived beside the Illinois Central Railroad. I was eligible for the scholarship because the Illinois Central ran through Sheldon, from Cherokee to Sioux Falls. My scholastic

record was excellent, which was another of the qualifying criteria. I was, of course, amazed and delighted at the offer. He said he would give me a week to make up my mind, before going to another candidate.

Mom and the girls were very happy about the whole idea, but we knew that it would require a great deal of sacrifice for Mom to continue providing a home for the family with me a half continent away. We thought seriously about it, and were, I believe favorable to the proposition. However, two days later the Postmaster, Bill Hollander, whom I knew by sight only, and who was a very nice old gentleman, called for me to come to his office that afternoon. When I did so, he offered me the job in the post office. He said that my score on the test was far above any of the others, and although he knew nothing about me he thought his best course was to hire the highest qualifier. I thanked him, and asked if I could give him an answer the next day. He said "Certainly" and I went back to the White House for the rest of the day.

That evening was one of deep and prolonged discussion between Mom and me. We knew that the college offer would probably lead to a great future, in a few years. We also knew that we needed income at the present time, and that the girls deserved the best we could provide. In the end, practicality won out. If there was ever a true life application of the old adage "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," this was it. I went to the post office the next morning and accepted Mr. Hollander's offer, and went to the White house and gave notice to Melvin that I would be leaving. I could not know then, of course, but I had set course for the remainder of my working career. I have never succumbed to the game of "What If?" and have not regretted my choice. I might have come out of



Don Parks Mail Carrier

Wesleyan with a degree that would have helped me enormously in life, However, the choice I made was the basis for a constructive and respectable life, and was a good one.

The next year and a half went by pretty rapidly. My Junior College friends who were in the national guard, Company I, 133rd Infantry, had finished training and were in Ireland, awaiting shipping to the shooting war. I carried mail as substitute on all three city delivery routes, and also delivered parcel post when needed. Because Roy Lind was senior to me, he had first choice on assignments, so I sometimes worked only one or two days a week. I was paid $.65 an hour, which was the rate for subs at that time. The war in Europe was going badly, and the Pacific situation was no better. A German general named Erwin Rommel was teaching the art of tank warfare to the British in Africa, and Russian troops were dying by the tens of thousands. Over the heads of young American men was the impending call from the draft board, which would summon them to service in the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, or the Coast Guard.

In the summer of 1942, my number was getting closer to being called for service. I discussed with Mom the possibility of applying for a family deferment, based on the fact that I was the only male wage earner in a household with four dependent girls. I do not know what the official response would have been, because Mom said "No, Don, this country has been good to us, and you should just go and do your duty. I'll take care of myself and the girls." With that decision made, I continued to work until autumn. I then decided that I would enlist, rather than wait for the draft call. I took a week and went to Aberdeen, South Dakota, to visit my very dear cousin Barbara Jerde and her father and mother, Uncle Arnold and Aunt Jean.

I had loved Barbara more than any other girl for several years, and had even contemplated asking to marry her at some time in the future, and I think she would have agreed, except that the families would not have been happy about cousins marrying, and life and war and time intervened. I had a good visit with her that week, and it was the last time I ever saw her. While I was in the Army, she married a fellow college student who was an engineering genius and became manager of a project to build a supersonic bomber, which was completed and built but never put into service because of the end of the war. Two were built. One crashed during the filming of a General Electric commercial, and the other is sitting in front of the Air and Space Museum at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base at Dayton, Ohio. Barbara developed lung cancer and died in California, in the decade of the 70's. She was a splendid person, with great charm, wit, and blazing intelligence. I still love her, in memory. If ever I had a soul-mate, it was she.

During the summer preceding my enlistment, my good friend Kenny Heijn enlisted in the U. S. Marine Corps. Kenny was always fond of the military and during summers for several years had attended CMT (Civilian Military Training) camps for several weeks. When he left he always asked me to be nice to Patricia Church, his girl friend. He wanted me to take her to the band concert, or to a movie, or just to get a coke at the candy kitchen. I always did, because she was good company and I had little else to do in the evenings. Pat was plumper than necessary, and quite naïve, and not very "popular" in school, and appreciated any attention given to her. (I learned in later years about her nightmare childhood, and how it affected her entire life.)

Before I enlisted, word came that Kenny had been killed in a mishap aboard a ship. Pat was naturally devastated, because she loved him very much and had hoped to some day marry him. In carrying out Kenny's requests that I be nice to her, I had grown to love her, even though Barbara remained at the top of my loves. I had, by now, realized that I could never marry Barbara and could only be thankful for what she meant to me in my youth. At any rate, I decided that since Pat was no longer pledged to Kenny I should ask her to marry me, after the war and after all my sisters were through school. I had known that she was fond of me, but was surprised at her ready acceptance of my proposal. In May of 1944, while I was home on furlough prior to shipping out for combat, we were married in her home at 614 8th street, in Sheldon. We spent a week of honeymoon at the Stevens Hotel in Chicago, and then I returned to Camp McCain in Mississippi, and in a few weeks left for the war. We were married for over 60 years, and I guess in retrospect that I kept my promise to Kenny, to be nice to Pat while he was gone. For 60 years.

If, as I now suspect, this narrative seems at times disjointed it is because life itself is that way. Various events occur on their separate schedules, and rarely does any single circumstance reach finality in isolation. Instead, our lives include many matters simultaneously, and that multiplicity is of necessity reflected in an effort such as this writing. I really will enlist, but other matters have required attention on the way to that life-changing action.

I hitchhiked a ride to Sioux City, and went to the army recruiting office, to enlist. I decided on the army, because I knew my eyesight was not good enough to qualify for the air corps, and I didn't want to go into the navy. I completed the required papers, and was told to report for induction three days later. My mission accomplished, I went to a movie in the early afternoon. I was sitting alone in the center of a sea of empty seats when a young lady came in, moved to a seat beside me, and sat down quietly. We watched the show in silence, and soon our hands were touching, and we could feel each other's warmth. Nothing else occurred, and after the movie ended, we left the theater together and I walked with her to her bus stop. She said she was a nursing student at Saint Joseph's Hospital, and came from a small town not far from the city. I told her that I had just enlisted in the army, and would report in three days. We said goodbye, and she got on her bus and disappeared. For some reason, this casual and completely random incident has remained in my memory through all the ensuing years, although many much more important events have vanished from my mind forever. I don't know her name, or remember her appearance except that she was neat and rather nice looking, but she briefly entered my life and left it, never to be forgotten. I guess that sometimes strangers need

strangers, to keep life on an even keel.

One final action was required before I left home. I had heard lurid stories about sadistic sergeants and barbers, who took great delight in shearing the last remains of civilian hair from the heads of their newly helpless victims. I determined that such would not happen to me. I went to Curly Nelson, the barber who had been cutting my hair for several years, and told him to clip it all off, down to a nothing but a fuzz. He was reluctant, but did so after I told him my purpose. All through the process of becoming a private in the army, I was glad that I had taken charge of my own head and not let a stranger change my appearance arbitrarily. Although the military tries to diminish individuality during early training, I had prevented at least one psychological assault on my life.

I reported to the recruiter on schedule, and left Sioux City on the train, to Des Moines and Camp Dodge, along with a half dozen other new enlistees. I must confess that I remember very few details about the next few days. We were given uniforms which didn't fit, and shoes that weighed a ton, and stood naked in endless lines while men in white lab coats listened to hearts and looked down throats and poked and bent various parts of our anatomies, and we were given shots, and potions to drink, and otherwise processed like carcasses in packing plants. This was all done in a hurry, and without any abuse or rancor. There were just so many of us and so few of them and so many blanks to fill in and squares to check, before we were complete. Up to now we were still technically civilians, but that situation came to an end when a whole roomful of us stood and raised our hands and swore to uphold the constitution and to defend our country..

I was assigned to KP duty on my first day as a soldier. I spent the entire day, from 4:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M., scrubbing pots and pans and sweeping and mopping and shining and cleaning floors and benches and tables and any other surfaces not covered with food or otherwise in use. As a grand finale, when everything else was shining and we were aching to get to our bunks, the mess sergeant decided that we should dismantle the biggest stove and clean all the parts, and reassemble it, before we were allowed to depart. As I look back, that day was probably a blessing in disguise. Seldom, in the time of my service, did any day equal the first in utter misery and fatigue. From the absolute bottom, there was no way to go but up.

After two more days, we found our names on the bulletin boards, on schedules of departure to installations all over the nation. I was to go by Pullman to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, for basic training. Several others were on the same shipment, and we boarded the train in the afternoon, and I slept very well. I was grateful for the kindly individual who gave us Pullman berths instead of coach seats. This was now, after the nightmare of that Camp Dodge kitchen, becoming an adventure of sorts. I had never been south of Iowa City before, and was glad to be going, ostensibly, away from the bitter Iowa winter that we knew was fast approaching. I awoke just as the sun was coming up, and we were somewhere in Arkansas, and I thought to myself that I was now "down south" and I looked out the window, and the first sight I had of Dixie was a little boy standing on the edge of a cabin porch, peeing out into the yard as day was dawning around him.

We left the train in Alexandria, LA, and were trucked into the countryside to the camp. I knew something of Claiborne's location, because it was the place where my national

guard friends had gone through early training when the guard was federalized at the beginning of the war. It was simply a vast assemblage of temporary buildings spread across a red clay vista that became nearly a swamp when it rained. We learned that we were the first shipment of new troops to begin the organization of a new infantry division, the 103rd. On hand to greet us were the cadre troops, consisting of men and officers siphoned from existing units to form the framework of a new unit. We were assigned to various companies, based partly on our civilian experience.

I was very fortunate in that process. Because I was an experienced postal employee, and because mail was second only to food as a priority for maintaining morale in the service, I was assigned to Service Company, 410th Infantry Regiment, to work in the regimental post office every other day and to take basic training on the alternate days. Service companies do what their name implies. They provide transportation, and issue food, and deliver mail, and do whatever else is necessary to keep a regiment in good and effective trim. My own contribution was to sort mail, and the fact that it relieved me of half of my basic training ordeal was indeed welcome. My boss in the post office was a genial staff sergeant named Hildebrand. He also was a postal person, so we got along very well.

The entire staff of the company were quite reasonable people. The first sergeant, Barber, was easy to approach, and dealt with the men fairly. The Captain's name escapes me, but he turned out to be quite good. My platoon leader was Lieutenant Gleaton, who was a physically imposing athletic sort and seemed always in a good mood. The executive officer was Lieutenant Encalade, a native of New Orleans who first taught me that Cajuns sometimes speak with a Brooklyn accent. My platoon sergeant was named Felsenfeld,

and he soon was promoted to an accounting job as a warrant officer in regimental headquarters. All told, the situation was even better than my best anticipations could have imagined.

In a short while more men were assigned to the company and to the entire division, and basic training began. We had to learn a great many details about such matters as military courtesy (which amounted to saluting every officer encountered wherever they were) and proper arrangement of our cots, and the mandatory display pattern for inspections of the hutments in which we lived. We began the never ending repetitions of close order drill, which involved endless marching back and forth, reversing and turning and keeping in cadence and holding the rifle properly. We learned the manual of arms, which involved the procedure of handling the rifle in formation, and shouldering it and trailing it and presenting it and offering it to the inspecting officer properly and retrieving it from him without dropping it. We learned military posture, and the various orders for standing in formation. None of us in the ranks had previous exposure to military life, and it sometimes seemed that we would never really become a coordinated 200 men, acting in unison upon command, and looking and feeling like soldiers.

On one of the first mornings of instructions, a very young and obviously green second lieutenant had a small group of us in a classroom, where he was lecturing us on basic military behavior. Things seemed to be going quite well, when the door flew open and the lieutenant's face froze with horror, and a procession of obviously important older officers paraded into the room, shoulders bright with colonels eagles and brigadier's stars, and in the center was a small man with a slight smile and three stars on his shoulders. To even us raw recruits it was apparent that he was a very important person. When they came in, the lieutenant managed to yell "Attention" in a somewhat soprano voice, and we all complied in the best fashion we could, although even our best was certainly not very

convincingly military.

The old officer with the three stars moved along our ragged ranks, and talked quietly to each of us, asking about our origins and our experience so far, and hoping we would learn to like the army, and giving each a word or two of encouragement as he passed. He was not in a hurry, and of course no other officer in the group had any comment to offer, and finally they all left the room, and the lieutenant put us at ease, and told us that we had just been visited by Lieutenant General Walter Kruger, one of the most important officers in the United States Army, who was commandant over the entire southern half of the United States. We learned later that General Kruger enlisted in the army as a private during the Spanish American War at the turn of the century, and advanced by sheer talent and knowledge to his present rank. I never saw him again, but did on occasion learn of his movements. He served with MacArthur in Australia, and participated in the execution of the war in the Pacific Theater. He was a great soldier, and I remember him as a kind and gentlemanly old man who wanted to know about me, on that morning in Louisiana.

As the weeks passed we did become a unit. We lived in close quarters, and soon found that a bad Friday morning inspection by one man might result in Saturday confinement and labor for the all 24 men resident in that hutment. We learned also clandestine methods of informal enforcement to discourage bad performance by anyone. Life wasn't really as bad as we had heard basic training described. Of course, many of us in service company had it far easier than men in the line companies. Most of us were specialists in some skill or trade that the army required if it was to function properly. We had butchers and meat cutters, and carpenters, and mechanics, and truck drivers, and painters, and a

number of other specialists who were happy to apply their civilian skills to the uses the army had for them.

Lieutenant Gleaton, my platoon leader, decided that it would be a good idea to lead cross-county runs on Saturday mornings. He was an athletic sort, and arranged with the company commander that any men who wanted to run with him would be excused from Saturday morning duties, which were usually drudge chores and not much fun. A number of us, strong and happy to avoid work, volunteered. He would lead us for at least two hours, running around the camp and going through various obstacle courses, running easily and feeling like really privileged characters when we passed by work crews toiling away on some senseless make-work chore dreamed up by a disgruntled junior officer who drew Saturday duty instead of two days in town.

We were fed in the mess hall, and the food was quite respectable. There was usually enough for everyone, as soon as we figured out how to arrange that. I don't know why, but in our company we were not served at a cafeteria-like chow line. Our food was placed on the tables by that day's KP's and we ate family style, everyone taking a portion as needed. At the beginning, we found that there were a few men who were real chow hounds, who would grab the serving dishes and take huge portions, sometimes not leaving enough for others to have even a little bit. This situation is not confined to the military. I have eaten with families with similar behavior. Most of us soon learned that the chow hounds were first in line, outside the mess hall before meals. It didn't take us long to realize that, if we let them go in first, all together, they would fight each other for food and the rest of us could eat in decent fashion, and we would all have plenty. For

some reason these hoggish individuals never did discover that we had beat them at their own game, by turning them against themselves. Lesson learned.

We began training in January. I had long heard about the "sunny south" and expected that I had left winter far behind. Not so! The afternoons might become quite comfortable, but nights and mornings were frigid, and everyone was cold. Our hutments were wood structures, set about two feet above ground. They were unfinished inside, with bare plank walls nailed to two-by-four framing and covered on the outside with heavy black tarpaper. The sides were hinged flaps along the entire sides of the building, which could be propped open for ventilation in hot weather but which could not be closed really tight in the cold. Heat was two small gas space heaters in the center, spaced about ten feet apart. Cots were along the sides, with heads to the wall and feet to the center. Each man had a foot locker to contain his underclothing and socks and personal items, all of which had to be arranged in particular fashion to satisfy the inspecting officer on Friday morning. At either end of the hutment was a door, and at the end opening to the company street was a rifle rack, where all weapons were placed. Shirts, pants, jackets, and coats were hung in prescribed order on hooks above the cots. Shined shoes were under the foot of the cot, and that meant all shoes, because shoes not shined meant trouble.

It did not take long to learn the necessary things, and generally life in such a close and programmed situation, and schedule, was not terribly difficult. However, at the end of the first month of training, a new problem arose. First one, and then a few, and then many of us began running fevers, and had sore throats, and coughs, and eyes watery, and

headaches, and were really sick. Because we were in close proximity to each other, the sickness quickly spread to the entire camp. First the base hospital was filled with patients, and then the regimental aid stations, and then there were no more sick beds and no place to put the flood of really ailing men. The disease was no respecter of persons, and officers and privates were equally miserable. After more than a week of this rapidly growing problem, some genius came to the rescue.

All personnel were returned to their units, no matter what their present condition might be. The ventilation flaps on all hutments were nailed open, allowing the cold winds to blow freely through. All men were issued an extra blanket. The gas heat was turned off. All training classes were held outdoors. Before eating each meal, every man had to drink a half-canteen cup of salty soup outside the mess hall. Aspirins were freely issued, to combat headaches and body pains. Because of the soup, we all drank lots of water. Because we were outdoors most of the time, we didn't infect and re-infect each other. Because the air in the hutments was constantly changing, it was not infectious. The treatment was obviously draconian, and nobody was happy about it because we all thought we would freeze to death in short order, but in a week the problem was gone and everyone was in good health and the flaps were again closed and the gas turned on and life went on as before.

I didn't mind the military training bit, because I had the post office to work in three days a week. Mail was brought from division headquarters daily, by truck, and usually arrived about 10:30 or 11:00. Before it arrived, we took care of any necessary forwarding or returning or other chores. When the truck arrived, we had to sort the mail to the various

companies in a hurry, because the mail orderlies from the units were due to arrive by 2:30, and they had to take their mail to their units and sort it so they could distribute it at evening mail-call, which was always the highlight of every day. Because we were all experienced postal employees in our civilian lives, we quickly developed effective routines, and sensible division of responsibilities, and had a smoothly operating unit in just a few days. Sergeant Hildebrand was nice to work for, and he always did his full share of work.

One day we were busy distributing mail and a nice looking young lady in civilian dress came to our door and made an odd request. She had two good looking young lads with her, and asked if she could leave them with us for a couple of hours while she went to some sort of affair at the officer's club, which was next door to our building. She assured us that they would behave, and that she would be away only a couple of hours. We all exchanged looks, and Hildebrand said it would be alright with him if the rest of us didn't object. Because she was quite pretty, and obviously well spoken, we all agreed. She left and Hildebrand gave them magazines to read and told them where to sit and they sat and read and answered politely when spoken to and were real little gentlemen while their mother was gone. When she returned she brought cupcakes for everyone, from the ladies function at the officer's club. She was grateful, and we were happy. She identified herself before leaving. She was Mrs. Anthony Drexel III, and her husband was a second lieutenant in a rifle company. He was also, we learned, a member of one of the wealthiest families in the United States, who owned a large share of Philadelphia, and we learned later that he was a genuinely nice young man. Also, we learned that Mrs. Drexel, who

visited us quite regularly after that first day, was the daughter of the Attorney General of the United States, Francis Biddle. This young couple proved to us that wealth does not necessarily spoil people. They were splendid individuals, gracious and outgoing and considerate. He drove a large convertible, bright red, and always stopped at the bus station before going into town in the evenings, loading his car with soldiers on their way to town, and bringing a load back from the bus station in Alexandria on his way to work in the morning. The fact that he was serving as a second lieutenant of infantry, when his money and influence could have won a much more impressive and less dangerous post, spoke volumes about his character. Also, they were parents to a couple of really nice little boys

All through January, February, and March, 1943 our basic training continued. The days settled into routine, with only occasionally inserted special endeavors designed to prove endurance, ingenuity, and other character or physical traits demanded of soldiers. Days began with roll call formation in the dark of winter mornings. Then came a frantic few minutes spent putting the hutment into acceptable neatness and cleanliness, should an officer "happen" to visit. Breakfast was a hearty meal, and there was usually a little time after to tend to personal needs, such as shaving and toilet or whatever else demanded immediate attention. The first formation after breakfast was calisthenics, and these became progressively more demanding as training advanced and we shed civilian sloth and developed muscles and agility we never knew we had.

The training day might include a great variety of activity. Some days were completely devoted to one subject, such as firing on the range, or a training hike. Other days included a number of classes, in matters such as gas warfare, or first aid, or weapon cleaning, or military courtesy, or venereal diseases and how to avoid them, or a whole catalog of other subjects deemed necessary to convert civilians into soldiers, as well as possible and in a really short time. As I have already noted, I was present at only half of the training days, because the post office was absolutely necessary for morale of the troops, (and actually for my own comfort as well.)

I soon found out that my recent employment as a mail carrier had been excellent preparation for an infantry soldier. Although I weighed only 128 pounds while in the army, I could out-hike nearly everyone else, and often finished hikes carrying not only my own pack but also the gear of another man who could not finish without help. When I say

this, it also sets forth the attitude which training was aimed to develop. We were a unit, and the welfare of each was essential to the success of all. Men from widely varied backgrounds became buddies, and cared for each other. I had two real friends, both of whom came from rural lives and were just as naïve as I. One was a boy from Tennessee named D. F. Boshell. Yes, his name was D. F. His parents didn't, I guess, see the need for a name when initials would do just as well. He was tall, and lanky, and slow of speech, and was pretty good at playing dumb when that act would get him out of work or trouble. The other was Ben Batchelor, who came from someplace in Indiana, and began basic quite pudgy but shed about twenty pounds in those three months. When I left the unit after basic was finished, I lost contact with both of them, but during those three months we were real friends. I hope they survived the battles the 103rd Division participated in, and came home to loving families just as I did.

Sometime in February I was jumping off a wall on an obstacle course when my right ankle collapsed, and I couldn't stand on it. It was severely sprained, and for a couple of weeks I was not able to take part in any of the active training. I had crutches, and went to classes, and worked as usual in the post office, but enjoyed the brief respite from physical effort. The officers were quite considerate, and I suffered no consequences because of my admittedly awkward accident. In time, the ankle was healed and I resumed normal activities. However, two months later, while I was in transit at LSU awaiting assignment to an ASTP unit, I dived off the edge of the swimming pool and the ankle reminded me, with renewed sharp pain, that sprains take a long time to completely heal. Luckily for me, in time healing was complete, and no trace of the injury remained.

Training a disparate collection of young men, recent civilians, from all walks of life and all regions of the country, to make them a cohesive unit capable of waging war was a complicated and difficult task. As is always the case, there were some who grasped their mission readily and were effective almost from the beginning. A few, for one reason or another, were slower and required more repetitions and demonstrations in the process. Also as always there were a few who refused to cooperate, or to take the process seriously. These few were problems for the staff, and on occasion for their fellow trainees, when their malfeasance resulted in punishment for a whole squad or for the fellow residents of their quarters.

This group punishment usually was followed by retribution from those who were unfairly punished for the conduct of one or two who misbehaved. Meanwhile, however, the group punishment was inflicted. Usually the penalty was loss of weekend freedom, and performance of one or another distasteful duties. Among those who were not happy about this sort of weekend were the unlucky second lieutenants who were ordered to take charge of the punishment assignment. While they were not technically being punished, they were certainly required to remain with the errant group and were thus also deprived of weekend freedom.

One Saturday morning in mid January I was unlucky to be included in a detained group. Our hutment had failed the regular inspection on Friday, because two men had not complied with the protocol for inspection of quarters. We were ordered to assemble in the company street, with our rifles, to be marched to the nearby parade ground for training in firing positions. Because it had rained during the night, the ubiquitous red clay was

now surfaced with mud. The lieutenant in charge was extremely unhappy and made no effort to conceal his feelings. We repeated again and again the standing position, and then began the kneeling position. Of course, our knees were soon caked with red mud, and we were already anticipating the job of cleaning up. Finally, the lieutenant ordered us to assume the prone position, lying on our bellies, with the rifle aimed at a non-existent enemy while we squeezed off practice shots. The lieutenant was walking among us, prodding us with his toe, to move us into proper position. We were muddy from neck to toe. His boots were muddy. The scene was really pathetic.

Along the sidewalk at the edge of the area came Major Selk, who was in charge of the regimental motor pool. He was a well liked officer, who managed his mechanics and drivers with consideration and respect. He was dressed in a go-to-town uniform, all pressed and with gleaming gold leaves on his collar and cap, and boots shining better than new. He stopped when he reached our vicinity, and quietly observed what was going on. Finally, he walked to a soldier whose position had just been "corrected" with the toe of the lieutenant's boot, and ordered the lad to give him his rifle. Then the major flopped down in the mud, assumed the correct prone firing position, and called the entire group to come and observe. The lieutenant stood speechless. The major called the entire group to where he was lying, and explained the proper positioning of the elbows, the shoulders, and the rest of the body when firing from the prone position. When he had finished his impromptu lecture, he stood up, with his entire front caked with red mud, and handed the rifle back to the soldier. He looked squarely at the lieutenant, snapped out a curt "Carry on, Lieutenant!" and walked back toward his quarters. A subdued young officer ordered

us to fall in, and marched us back to the company area. He told us to fall out, clean up as best we could, and do whatever we wanted to do for the rest of the day. I don't know how he explained our curtailed punishment to the company commander, but I will always believe that Major Selk made a vast improvement in the competence of a young lieutenant on that Saturday morning.

Toward the end of February our company commander had an inspired idea. As I have pointed out, Service Company had, among other assets, several trucks which were used for any required transportation of materials or people. Our captain was by now thoroughly disgusted with the mud that blighted our every move. He decided to take corrective action, all on his own. He unexpectedly kept the entire company on duty on a Saturday morning. He obtained a sod cutter somehow. He loaded the men into the trucks, and drove us out into a nearby swampy area, where beautiful green grass covered the soil. In a short time, we cut and loaded sod enough to cover our entire company area. We hauled it back to camp, and laid it out neatly, and by afternoon we had the only green lawn in the entire camp. Although it had taken a Saturday away from us, we were proud of our accomplishment, and delighted with the idea that we would no longer have to spend our days fighting red mud and red dust.

Sunday we spent, when not at the movie or at the PX, admiring our fine green premises. Monday morning began in great shape. We were going to train in much more comfortable circumstances than before. This euphoria lasted until noon chow time, when word was posted on the bulletin board based on an order from the Division Commander, a major general whose name I can't recall. He had driven past our company area on

Sunday afternoon, and had observed our fine green lawn, and had issued an order on Monday morning that Service Company, 410th Infantry, would on the following Saturday remove all sod from the company area and would restore the land to its previous condition. No explanation was needed or given. When a major general issues an order, people obey. We spent the following Saturday again toiling with sod, reversing our labors of the preceding weekend. Admittedly, there was not enough available sod to cover the entire camp. Admittedly, care for all those lawns would have required a great many lawn mowers, and men to push them, and would add another entire criterion to the inspection requirements. I am sure the general had these and other reasons for his ruling, which we could not recognize at the time. But actually, I think he was at least a little bit jealous, because he had been out-grassed by a mere company commander.

It was at about this time that I learned by observation the true extent of the power wielded by those remote officers with stars on their shoulders, making them generals. The food in mess halls throughout the camp had been pretty good, generally. Our cooks were at least ordinarily competent and could convert the supplies furnished into meals that were plentiful and generally tasty. Suddenly, however, meals became quite unpalatable. We had been eating the usual meats which are consumed everywhere - beef, pork, and on Fridays fish. Now, some sort of bad tasting, strong meat appeared on our tables. We hoped this was just an aberration, soon to be corrected, but that was not the case. Those of us who were always famished managed to eat a little, but many just dumped their meals in the garbage and went to the PX to eat hamburgers. We berated the cooks, who said they could not make feasts out of trash. They said they were being furnished stringy

goat meat, which I am sure some Texan had sold to an army contractor. It was really bad stuff. Throughout the division, protest was rising in volume and numbers, and the men were almost ready to rebel, when once more an order from the major general in command appeared on our bulletin boards. It noted that there were many complaints about the meat, and also noted that cooks and other food providers had complained about goat meat. Therefore, the order went on, from that day on all mess personnel would refrain from using the term "goat meat" and would instead begin referring to "spring lamb" in any discussion about the meat being furnished, and any cooks who did not obey this order would be re-assigned as privates to rifle squads and replaced with more suitable personnel.

Upon reading that order, I realized how powerful a general really was. Any mere man who could change malodorous goats to tasty young lambs by issuing a written order must have powers bordering on the divine, never to be questioned or denied. Jesus himself, while he changed water to wine at the wedding feast, never performed a feat quite as astonishing as that carried out by that major general at Camp Claiborne, in February, 1943. Soon the supply of "spring lamb" was exhausted and our meals resumed their former quality, but I have never forgotten the awesome power of that general.

So far I have written about infantry basic training without describing or explaining what actually was included in that program. It is obvious that the intent was to convert young and peaceful citizens into warriors, able and willing to inflict grievous harm or death on an anonymous enemy serving an evil regime. I will try to explain some of what was included in that process.

First, a better explanation of the organization of an infantry division in WW II is in order. The concept was called a triangular structure, based on three units at every level, with corollary units attached. For example, at the base were platoons, consisting of three rifle squads with an additional weapons squad (corollary) added. A platoon was usually about 45 men, including the second lieutenant platoon leader and the technical sergeant platoon sergeant. A company usually consisted of three rifle platoons, with a heavy weapons platoon and a headquarters contingent added. A company was commanded by a captain, with a first lieutenant executive officer, a first sergeant, and auxiliaries such as armorers, supply sergeant, kitchen staff, company clerk, and communications (radio) operators. A company usually was about 200 men. Next larger was the battalion, which again had three rifle companies and a cannon company, with additional headquarters personnel and responsibilities. Usually a battalion was commanded by a lieutenant colonel, with a major as second in command. A battalion usually numbered about 900 men.

Next in order was the regiment, with three battalions, a light field artillery force, a reconnaissance troop, a regimental aid station staff, a marching band, a post office, and a number of other auxiliary units necessary to keep those 12 man rifle squads, on which the whole system was based, in fighting trim, with adequate supplies, technical support, and

the leadership required to attain success in battle. The regiment was usually commanded by a full colonel, with a lieutenant colonel as second in command. Regiments were about 4000+ in strength. Finally, the division was about 15,000 in strength, with, again, three regiments and heavier artillery and a hospital and a large number of other support troops. A division was commanded by a major general, with two stars on his shoulders, and his second in command was a brigadier general, with one star.

It has been said that in WW II, at least, maintaining each lonely rifleman in battle required a total of nine support people at various levels, up to corps and army and theater commands. When one considers that a great majority of injuries and deaths were suffered by only 10% of the entire army, the extreme danger and difficulty in the life of the rifleman becomes apparent. Other branches of the military have different proportions. The marines, for example, are almost entirely fighting forces, with nearly all support furnished by their parent service, the navy.

Training begins, for the infantry soldier, with instruction in military courtesy, military posture, calisthenics, weapon handling, and drill. At first only the rudiments are taught, but demands for conformity become ever more rigorous and detailed. The aim, or course, is to build obedience. From the beginning, almost all activity centered in the squad. The individual was led from individual thinking into unit action, and reward or punishment generally was earned by or inflicted on the squad, even though one or more individuals may have precipitated the recognition. At first, and actually throughout training, the absolute necessity for this protocol was not often admitted by the individual soldier. All doubt about its value was, however, erased once actual combat with a real enemy was

begun. At that point the brotherhood of the unit becomes the most important factor in life. Or in death.

Many different segments of the training process take place simultaneously. Early instruction in the weapons of warfare begins with proper handling of the rifle, or carbine, which is the individual soldier's weapon. We were taught to disassemble and reassemble our rifles, and to name each part. We had to keep the rifle immaculate at all times, which was a real problem in the dust and/or mud of the camp. After a month of carrying and cleaning and practice firing, we went to the range, where we fired actual bullets at targets and were qualified as either marksmen or experts, or were required to repeat range firing until we did qualify. Some individuals required as many as six range cycles before they qualified.

At the same time we were learning bayonet attack methods. The bayonet was a short sword attached to the muzzle of the rifle, and using it with effect was a skill at which I never did excel. I can still recite the various moves, including long thrust, short thrust, butt stroke, smash, slash, and stab. These moves were in sequence, and were rapidly executed. We attacked dummies made of burlap-wrapped brush or straw, and those dummies really took a beating. Later in the training cycle, we were instructed in the proper method of sneaking up on an enemy sentry, and stabbing him from behind in the soft front of his throat, to prevent his outcry that might alarm his fellows. For this purpose we were issued a trench knife, which amounted to a heavy dagger.

Then, we were given dummy hand grenades, and spent hours throwing these at target

windows, or foxholes, or over barricades. We learned to pull the fuse, and to get rid of the grenade before it exploded. In the later stages of training, we threw real grenades under carefully controlled conditions, to familiarize us with the effect of these small and lethal fragmentary bombs.

While we in the rifle squads were learning to use our weapons, the men in the weapons squad were also learning to shoot the light machine gun and the 60mm mortar which gave the platoon its heavier fire power. In the infantry squad the only heavier weapon was the Browning Automatic Rifle, or BAR, which fired a magazine of 21 rounds either individually or on automatic fire. For heavier support we needed the weapons squad. In the company, the weapons platoon had several machine guns, and 80mm mortars which really amount to light artillery for support of the rifle soldier.

During the latter part of basic training, there were a couple of sessions involving crawling on our bellies for what seemed like forever, carrying our rifles on our arms and keeping our heads down, while machine guns fired real bullets above us and buried explosive charges were detonated around us to simulate enemy artillery fire. These were not pleasant experiences, but they did teach us emphatically that war is dangerous, and that it is probably a good idea to listen to instructions and to obey orders, but also to care for ones self. These lessons in the care and use of weapons and respect for their capabilities, were continued throughout basic training, with much repetition, to ensure that everyone could function effectively when necessary.

Another item of equipment on which much time was spent is the compass. Because

infantry in modern warfare is usually operating in unfamiliar territory, knowledge of maps and the use of the compass is essential. While not every soldier was able to really be proficient in this effort, at least half of the men in a squad were able to grasp the rudiments and to make use of them. There were several night exercises involving use of the compass to complete a trek of several miles through woods and hills with five or more changes of direction and finding a designated location within a specified time limit. These were miserable sessions, usually involving much stumbling and falling, and running into trees or rocks in the dark, and disagreeing about distances or directions, and a great deal of swearing at each other.

Late in the training cycle, we were exposed to artillery fire. We were marched to the artillery range, where we were placed in trenches. The newly trained division artillery batteries fired over our heads into the hillside in front of us, and we heard the unmistakable sound of shells passing overhead, and the explosions as they struck the targets. This division artillery was equipped with 105 mm howitzers, which are basic for close support of infantry combat. There are larger artillery weapons, but for the infantry division the 105 is basic. Following the firing, we were marched to the target area, where we could examine shrapnel from the exploding shells. We could readily see that these jagged pieces of steel were lethal, and that keeping one's profile low could save ones life.

Probably something should be said about the importance of artillery support to the accomplishment of infantry missions. While riflemen are learning to defeat the enemy in confrontations, artillery battery personnel are learning to use their guns to destroy the enemy at long range and to provide cover for the infantry. Artillerymen must function on time and accurately no matter what conditions are affecting the movement, placement, and operation of their massive weapons. They must also learn the rudiments of trajectory calculation, map interpretation and application, and communication. Certain artillerymen accompany the infantry, at the front, to provide constant radio communication with their battery mates at the rear. These men are trained to identify and to precisely locate targets, to interpret enemy action, and to provide on-the-scene correction of fire. While it is true that the infantry is the force that meets the enemy face to face, it is also true that the support and protection provided by expert artillery units is essential for success in battle.

While in the army, I trained in two different divisions, the 103rd and the 94th, and learned to appreciate those "rear echelon" fighters who provided cover for our movements and attacks, and also helped to stabilize the front when we were not fighting but were merely occupying territory during lulls in the action. While not usually thought of as artillery, the mortars used by infantry units are actually the smallest of the weapons capable of throwing explosive missiles at the enemy. Infantry divisions in WWII had units of 37mm, 75mm, and 105mm guns. Often battle conditions brought temporary assignment of self-propelled tank destroyer guns, or of bigger guns such as the 155mm "long toms" that could fire at targets 15 miles away with devastating effect. Thus the infantryman in his foxhole, staring at fields or woods that may erupt with attacking enemy, is greatly

encouraged by the knowledge that he is not alone. A mile or so behind him is another soldier whose mission is to support him.

Ironically, the artilleryman is himself vulnerable to enemy artillery fire. Through various location techniques it is possible to identify the source of artillery fire, and to direct counter fire at that source. Thus, there was often a sort of long-range battle going on between opposing artillery forces, with shells passing over the locations of the infantry and impacting far to the rear or far to the front. If enemy guns can be neutralized by destroying them or forcing them to move, that victory may have real effect on the infantry battle underway. While writing about my combat experience I will describe one incident to which I was a witness that proved dramatically the value of artillery support.

I have said little about one of the most basic forms of basic training: marching and hiking and parading. Camp Claiborne was a sprawling installation, and there were outdoor class and demonstration areas in many and widespread locations. Movement of troops to these class areas was on foot. Only rarely, and at great distances and when time was an imperative factor, were we transported by truck. We learned the meaning of the terms "fall in" and "fall out" almost immediately, and soon responded quickly to these commands. "Forward, march" was also an early lesson. Soon marching groups were singing as they moved from one place to another. Song broke the tedium and also made easier the task of keeping cadence as we moved along. "Someone's in the Kitchen With Dinah" was a favorite, and also "I've Got Sixpence." the words to the latter are:

I've got sixpence,
Jolly, jolly sixpence,
I've got sixpence
To last me all my life.
I've got sixpence to lend,
And sixpence to spend,
And sixpence to send home to my wife,
Poor wife.
Rolling home, rolling home,
Rolling home, rolling home,
By the light of the silvery
Moo-oo-oo-oon,
Happy is the day
When the army gets its pay,
And we go rolling, rolling home!

Also, close order drill was never-ending, and the required movements which seemed so difficult at first became automatic. Formations large and small could be moved about with ease by an experienced drill sergeant. Basic orders were :Attention! At ease! Right dress! Forward, march! To the rear, march! Right flank, march! Left flank, march! Oblique, march! After these movements had become automatic, others which were more complicated were added. The same sort of orders were used for weapons handling: Present, arms! Retrieve, arms! Right shoulder, arms! Trail, arms! Etc.

Hikes began in the early days of training, and became more extended and rigorous through the cycle. Green recruits were doing well to hike two or three miles with full packs, in full daylight. These hikes became longer and longer, and night hiking was introduced, and hiking over rough terrain, and at the culmination was a twenty five mile hike, partly daylit and partly at night, in eight hours or less. It was the aim of every company commander to make that hike in the shortest time possible, and most of the men agreed with that aim.

The last form of on-foot training was the parade. Customarily, companies paraded weekly. Each month the regiments paraded, with bands and vehicles in formation and the four thousand man complement marching past the reviewing stand where the colonel and any guests stood. At the end of basic training, the 103rd Infantry Division, three months old, paraded before the commanding general and his staff, with the Secretary of War as his guest. To be a part of an event involving over fifteen thousand men marching and maneuvering, with the band playing and all vehicles and heavy weapons in formation, was for me a real thrill. A majority of soldiers gripe endlessly about parades, with the demand for shined shoes and neat uniforms and haircuts and sometimes hours of standing in assembly areas. I too was unhappy about the demands, but truthfully I never got over my pleasure in the performance. The larger the better, and they were splendid.

The day was regulated by bugle calls. Reveille woke us up, and taps turned out our lights. In between were calls for assembly, mess, mail, sick call, retreat, and the loveliest of all, the evening call that preceded taps: tattoo. The notes from the bugle marked the day, and were much more pleasant than shouted orders might have been. Musical signals have been part of military culture since the earliest times, and remain so to this day. I first learned to recognize the various calls when my brother Laurence became bugler for the boy scout troop in Sheldon, when he was working to earn his life scout rank. He was soon fairly adept at producing respectable music from the beat-up bugle belonging to the troop. He was about fifteen years old, and quite large for his age.

One evening he was practicing in the yard outside our house when Fred Kelly, the

commander of the local national guard company (Co I, 133rd Inf., 34th Div.) drove by the house. He heard the bugle, stopped his car, and asked Laurence if he would like to join the national guard. He needed a bugler. He told Larry that he would be paid $3 for each weekly drill, and would go to summer camp for two weeks every year and be paid for it. Larry was elated, and went to the next Monday night drill at the armory, enlisted, and was issued uniforms and equipment, including two shiny new bugles. He remained in the guard for three years, and was probably the only person who ever bugled for the boy scouts and the army at the same age. Of course he was much too young when he joined the guard, but buglers were scarce, and rules can be broken. Company I fought nobly through North Africa and Italy in WWII, and many of my friends were killed, wounded, or captured during those campaigns.

Two other topics of training remain. The use of poison gas in WWI makes necessary a procedure to minimize such attacks should they occur. With that in mind, each soldier was equipped with a gas mask, and instructions it use. Practice in putting it on and taking it off, in clearing it of poisonous vapors before breathing, and in protecting the eyes and if possible the skin against the chemical assault, was conducted regularly. All trainees were exposed to low concentrations of the known agents, such as mustard gas and phosgene. In addition, a class was held in a gas chamber, where trainees entered without wearing their masks into a concentration of tear gas, and were forced to don their masks to protect their eyes and breathing. This exercise was a convincing lesson in the importance of gas protection.

The last topic which I remember being taught was battlefield first aid. Each soldier

carried a packet into battle, and they were often used when men were injured. We practiced using disinfecting agents, and bandages. While these first aid kits were small, and rudimentary, they did at times prove their worth. Of course, attached to each platoon was a medic, who accompanied the infantry into battle, and was well equipped and trained to care for even grievously wounded men. These medics, who went into the front of combat without any weapon and whose only protection was a red cross stenciled on the front of their helmets, were real heroes. They endured all the discomforts and indignities of infantry warfare, and patched the damaged and comforted the dying, and a significant number were killed or wounded in carrying out their duties under fire.

The three months of basic training seemed to take forever, but in retrospect it ended quite quickly. The civilian had now become a soldier, and the units were prepared for advance training in tactics and in field exercises, and would finally go on maneuvers in strange territory to further develop their abilities and to qualify them for shipment into a war zone and into combat. At this point, a few of us trainees were summoned to the orderly room (company headquarters) for some unknown reason. We were pleased at that reason. The men who had the highest AGC (Army General Classification) or IQ scores, at least 110, were informed that they could apply for officers candidate school, and might be accepted. This news meant that I might not have to fight as an enlisted man, but might become an officer. Two OCS's were then accepting candidates. One was the infantry, and the other was the coast artillery. The artillery school required a degree in mathematics, which I did not have. However, I did obtain the papers to apply for the infantry school at Fort Benning, GA. David had graduated from that school. While it was common knowledge

that casualty rates among infantry platoon leaders were statistically highest of all categories of personnel, I thought it might be worth a try. There was no assurance that I would keep my post office assignment after basic, so perhaps OCS was a good option.

Two days later, I was again called, alone, into the orderly room. The executive officer, Lieutenant Encalade, put me at ease, and then told me that the army was beginning a program of college education for men with scores at least 120, but preferably higher, and that because my score was 143, and highest in the company, I was eligible and would be sent to a college or university for education in one of many majors. There was no way of knowing which school would be my destination, but if I was interested I should say so right away because the army was anxious to get the plan into operation. I asked him what he would do. I told him about the OCS application papers, and that I knew what that entailed but this new idea was perhaps a pig in a poke.

The lieutenant was a small, rather swarthy man, from Cajun country in Louisiana, and spoke with a pronounced Brooklyn accent (as many Cajuns do.) He sat for a minute, thinking, and then told me that he thought I should go to school. He pointed out the casualty rate among company officers, and also said that few people came under attack on college campuses. Ever since, I have been grateful for his advice, which led to 9 months at the University of Mississippi. That was the end of basic training.