

MY MILITARY EXPERIENCE



by
Hulin Robert

One night my Dad said to me “Come on we’re going to a meeting.” I didn’t ask any questions but jumped into the car beside him and we drove to the elementary school building in Union, a little town about six miles away. The meeting was a Boy Scout meeting. I learned some first aid and how to tie a few knots.

One of the assistant Scoutmasters had been in the army and he taught us some close order drilling, how to march in step, stand at attention, stand at ease, about face and so began my military experience.

I really liked the scouting program and after two years I was a Star Scout well on my way to Life Scout. One summer I went to Scout Camp for a week and earned the canoeing merit badge in a pirogue on Bayou Liberty.

After two years of scouting the Scoutmaster got promoted and moved away. No one would take his place and that was the end of my scouting experience. That was one of the big disappointments of my life and I think that is the reason I spent so much time working in scouting as an adult.

When I started LSU it was mandatory that every able-bodied male student be in the R.O.T.C. (Reserve Officers Training Corps). We studied Military Science and did a lot of drilling. Every Friday there was a parade on the parade ground near the Campanile (A large clock tower on the campus). Occasionally we had dogfights in the cornfields adjacent to the campus. We crawled on the ground and really played soldier. I was in the infantry.

My junior year I chose to continue in advanced R.O.T.C. and I was First Sergeant of Company I. Our uniforms were now khaki instead of gray. They were wool and looked rather nice. Usually I wore mine when I hitchhiked home on weekends. It made it easier to catch a ride.

There were several freshmen football players in my company. I weighed all of 120 pounds then and these 250-pound guys tried to give me a hard time. One day I went into the weight room and two of them were there. They laughed when I walked in and said “Ha! What’s light enough in here for you to pick up?” I didn’t say anything went ahead and warmed up, then I picked up the 75-pound dumbbell and jerked it over my head with my right arm, put it down and then did it with my left arm. Their mouths dropped open. They both tried but neither of them could get it above his head. After that I had a lot more respect from them.

Each company had a female sponsor who wore a uniform and marched with the company in the parades. They were usually picked by the Company Commander, the Captain, and it was usually his girlfriend. My Captain didn’t have a girlfriend so he asked me to pick the sponsor and I got to have my girlfriend as sponsor.

December 7, 1941 came along and with it Pearl Harbor. I had hitchhiked back to Baton Rouge after being home for the weekend. Before catching a bus to the campus I had decided to go to a movie. The movie was interrupted with the news of Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor.

This was in my sophomore year so I was not yet in advanced military. That night we were ordered to fall out by our cadet officers. Once the company was formed outside the barracks we were told that Colonel Hill, Commandant of Cadets, an army Colonel, wanted to speak to us. We were marched, in a very orderly formation, over to his house. After a while it was evident that he was not home. General Hodges was President of LSU. The cadet officers marched us over to his house. General Hodges

came out and spoke to us. He told us that this was indeed a terrible thing and that the country was in for rough times ahead. He said that at the present time our job was to stay in school and study hard. Then we were marched back to our barracks and dismissed. The next week Life Magazine came out with a story that the students at LSU had rioted. Don't believe everything you read.

It was school as usual until 1943 came along. Classes were scheduled for New Years day. Several of us decided that if we had to go to class on New Years day we would certainly celebrate the night before. We took a bus downtown and went to a liquor store. I bought a bottle of Haig & Haig Pinch Bottle Scotch. Of course I had never tasted Scotch before but I had heard about it. It tasted terrible. The next day I hid the nearly full bottle in the back of my locker. During the following months every once in a while I would take a little swig. By the time the bottle was empty I liked Scotch and that was my drink of choice for many years.

There were some ASTP troops on campus by this time. These were soldiers who were going to college. They would be marched past our barracks on their way to the cafeteria and some of our guys got a kick out of yelling out commands. Someone would shout "To the rear MARCH" and the whole formation would start going in the opposite direction. This was a big joke for us.

Sometime during the spring of '43 we were transported to Camp Beauregard near Alexandria and issued regular army clothing. This was our first taste of the real army. The sergeants were tough and did not at all treat us as gentlemen. We went back to LSU to finish out the semester.

After exams we were put on a train heading to Camp Roberts, California. We had about a five-hour layover in Kansas City, Missouri. Off to town we went.

Several of us met some girls in a bar and had a few drinks with them. They gave us a ride back to the train in their car. I was sitting in the back smooching with one of them and she told me she was engaged. I said, "Why do you want to get married? Why don't you have some fun first?" She replied, "That's what I'm doing now."

The next layover was in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Not much excitement there but sort of cold even though it was June. We were there a few hours so we walked to a bar and had a drink.

After about five days on the train with coal burning engines we were very sooty. Finally we arrived at Camp Roberts, had a shower and put on some clean clothes after being assigned barracks.

That night we learned that we had been given some bad food on the train. All night long we were passing each other to and from the latrine. It got all except one guy and he didn't eat the food on the train.

The next day it was announced to us that basic training had been increased from thirteen weeks to seventeen weeks and we would be the first troops to get the extended training. Joy! Joy!

Our unit was an anti-tank unit and we would be trained on the 37mm anti-tank gun. We would work up to the 37mm and eventually the 57mm, which was a new development.

Camp Roberts had a parade ground that was about one mile by one half mile of asphalt. We did a lot of marching on this and also sitting for classes. Temperatures got up to 110 but the humidity was so low that the sweat evaporated as soon as it came out and that way we could stand the heat.

Training started by learning the ins and outs of our basic weapon, the M1 Garand that was a semi-automatic rifle. After adequate training we went to the firing range and I scored expert. Then we fired the carbine and I boled. (Failed) Later I had a chance to fire it again and scored expert and I realized that I must have had a faulty weapon the first time.

Next we were trained on and fired the 37mm anti-tank gun against moving targets. This required good hand eye coordination because you had to look through the sight, track the target with the right hand and control the elevation with the left hand. I scored expert.

About the third week we started leaving the main camp and hiking out a few miles carrying light field packs. On our first overnight we were given a canteen of water (one quart) and told that it had to last us all day and we had better have enough left to shave that night. I only had a little fuzz then and I dry shaved.

When we started to get weekend passes the first trip I took was to Los Angeles. We stayed at the Wiltshire Hotel, walked around Hollywood, looked at the footprints in the concrete in front of the Grumman Chinese Theater.

That Saturday night we went to the Palladium. This was a large dance hall with a bandstand on each side. Jimmy Dorsey and his band played on one side and when he took a break Tommy Dorsey and his band played on the other side. It seemed like there were hundreds of girls waiting for someone to dance with them.

Margaret Landry was a Baton Rouge girl from LSU who had made it into the movies in a small way. She and her date met us at the Palladium. We had a big time.

We were astounded to learn that you had to be 21 to buy a drink in California. When the waiter asked to see our ID, Don Smith who was 23 pulled out an expired pilots license and a drivers license. I picked up the pilots license handed it to the waiter and said here's mine. Don gave him the driver's license and he didn't notice that the name was the same so we got by. Don let me keep the old pilots license and I used it the whole time I was in the army to get drinks.

Sunday we went out to the beach on the Pacific. It was a hazy day and there didn't seem to be any sun. I didn't worry about protection and that night on the way back to Camp Roberts I started feeling my legs and back. We stopped for gas and I went into the restroom and pulled down my pants. My legs were beet red. Monday we had 37 mm gun drill with packs on our backs. Sunburn was considered not in line of duty so any time missed with it had to be made up. I suffered through the next few days and didn't go on sick call. But, I learned my lesson.

Don Smith had a former girlfriend who lived in Bakersfield. One weekend she drove to Camp Roberts with a woman, who she lived with and whose husband was in the army overseas. The four of us drove out to a little creek on the reservation and we had a picnic. They invited us to visit them in Bakersfield, in the San Joaquin Valley when we had a weekend pass.

A few weeks later we got weekend passes and Don and I headed for Bakersfield. That Saturday afternoon we went out to a creek with a weir that made a great swimming hole. We swam and sunbathed and lolled around all afternoon. We went back to the house, showered, dressed and went to a Chinese Restaurant for dinner.

Later back at the house we were sitting in the living room talking when suddenly Don and Lorena disappeared leaving Thora and me alone in the living room. We talked for a while and then her hand was running up and down my back. Next we were kissing and then Don came in and said we had better get to bed. Don and I slept in one bedroom and the two women slept in the other.

Later we planned a weekend together in San Luis Obispo, a seaside resort town between Camp Roberts and Los Angeles, but Don and I couldn't get passes so that fell through.

Thora and I corresponded and she mentioned in one of her letters what a nice boy I was and I must have fine parents. A couple years later I got a letter from her asking me to please not write anymore because her husband was coming home.

Camp Roberts was hot and dry. The only rain I saw the whole time I was there was a drizzle the day before I left for Camp Hale, Colorado.

A group of us from LSU and the University of Oregon made the trip by train to Camp Hale.

We were put off the train at Pando, the nearest whistle stop to Camp Hale. There was snow on the ground and my first thought was that it wasn't so cold. We didn't have winter clothes yet. We had to wait about a half hour for the trucks and by that time I had decided that it was indeed cold.

Camp Hale was situated on the floor of a 9,500-foot high valley just about three miles below Tennessee Pass on the Continental Divide. The barracks were heated with coal burning furnaces. The humidity was so low that at night the sergeants would throw buckets of water on the floors to keep us from getting sore throats. By morning the floors were dry. One night the soldier on duty stoking the furnace went to sleep, let the fire go out and the next morning there was ice on the floor. We didn't have the luxury of sheets at Camp Hale. There were mattress covers and we lay on that and covered with comforters.

We were issued winter clothing. The gloves had a hole so that the trigger finger could be bare without taking off the gloves. I was put in a mortar squad. We were issued ski boots and skis, but since I was in a mortar squad and the mortars were heavy I was also issued snowshoes.

I used the skis a couple of times on weekends that I didn't have a pass to go to Denver. Back then I thought going to Denver, drinking and meeting girls was more fun than skiing.

On one weekend to Denver I rode in with the company clerk who had a car. We were about seven of us in the car. Charles Lobdell and I stayed at the Brown Palace Hotel. It was a pretty wild weekend and we didn't get much sleep. We left Denver Sunday night with just enough time to get back to Camp Hale at 6:00 AM when our passes were up.

There was no tunnel then and the route took us over Loveland Pass. I was sitting in the front in the middle sleeping when I awoke with a thud. The driver had gone to sleep on one of the switchbacks and the car had turned into the mountain. Had it turned the other way there was about a thousand foot drop to the tree line. Everyone woke up, we got out, pushed the car out of the snow, climbed back in and immediately fell asleep again. About half an hour later the same thing happened all over again. I guess we were lucky to get back to camp at all.

One of my buddies from Oregon had relatives in Arvada, a suburb of Denver, and we stayed at their house sometimes. They were George and Bernice Behan. They were very nice people. George was postmaster in Arvada. Bernice was a chubby little housewife and an excellent cook. They had three young daughters who seemed fascinated with the soldiers. I corresponded with them for several years after I got out of the army. I visited them in 1970 when I went to the National Boy Scout Convention in Denver.

The training at Camp Hale was pretty tough. I remember one morning the First Sergeant trying to show us something about a rifle and his hands were shaking so much from the cold that he could hardly do it. When we left camp mornings for training we always walked up and in the afternoon they always found a different route back that was up too.

They issued us down sleeping bags. They were nice and fluffy. The first night that we went out on a bivouac I took off all my clothes and crawled into the bag naked. No pad under the bag and as the cold started coming at me from the cold ground I started pulling clothes back on and by morning I was fully dressed.

Later I learned to break off spruce boughs and lay them on the ground under the bag and that gave some protection from the ground. Nevertheless that was the last time I took off all of my clothes at night.

Faced with all that cold and snow the first thing my buddy, Charles Lobdell and I thought of was applying for the Air Corps. The Air Corps was part of the army because at that time there was no separate Air Force. The First Sergeant tried to talk us out of it by telling us what a good outfit the Tenth was and that we would get used to it. We went right ahead and applied.

It took three letters of recommendation, which I got my Dad to get for me. One was from the Sheriff, one from a state Senator and the other from a prominent attorney. That did the trick and I was accepted. Charles and I were sent to Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis, Missouri. We passed all the tests and were put on a shipping list to go to a college for more schooling.

We were issued cadet uniforms. They were more like an officers uniform and it was fun to go to town wearing them. There was a big dance hall with a name band and there were plenty of girls to dance with. I kept using Don Smith's old pilots license to buy drinks.

While I was in St. Louis my Dad came to visit me one weekend. I took him to a place that had a good floorshow and he enjoyed it. It was really good to see him as I had been gone from home for almost a year then.

I learned the ugly part of snow in St. Louis. After a few days all the soot from all the coal burning furnaces began to settle on the snow and it looked dirty and ugly. Not at all white and pure like in the mountains.

After about a week the shipping list was canceled and we were told that there were too many pilots so we would be sent to gunnery school. After a while that shipping list got canceled too. We were then told there were too many men in the Air Corps and we would be sent back to Camp Hale. Sad day.

The last night in St. Louis all the bars and nightclubs were closed because it was Sunday. A couple of us took a bus across the Mississippi River to East St. Louis, Illinois. Everything was wide open there. We got back to St. Louis about 1 AM and I noticed this guy opening the doors to a bar. I asked him what was going on and he said: "It's Monday now and we're opening up." We went in and had a few more drinks and then caught a bus back to Jefferson Barracks.

It was a sad train ride back to Camp Hale where we had to go back and face the same First Sergeant. He looked up grinning and said: "Youse back huh." It was K P (kitchen police) for us for about a week.

When I was a little boy I can remember my Mother and my Aunts laughing about a man because he wore long drawers. This made me believe there was something wrong with wearing long drawers so the whole time I was at Camp Hale I froze my ass off but I didn't wear long drawers. Since then I've learned better.

One day we started out on maneuvers. We were scheduled to be out several weeks and the whole division was involved. We would be on the move all day and at night had to bed down in about six feet of snow. If we were lucky there were some trees to break boughs and make a bed under the sleeping bag. The water in our canteens would freeze during the day and we would take it into the sleeping bag with us at night so it would thaw out and we could drink. Our boots were also taken into the bag; otherwise they would have been frozen stiff and would have been impossible to put on in the morning.

About the end of the first week I got the flu and was sent to the hospital. I stayed there a couple of weeks and when I got out the maneuvers were over. I thanked God for that. It had got so rough out there that several men had taken their rifles into the sleeping bag and "accidentally" shot off their toes so they could be taken out of the cold.

There was snow on the ground at Camp Hale until the end of May. Sometime during May I had a two-week furlough and went home for the first time in a year. I rode the Colorado Eagle to Kansas City and then the Sunset Limited to New Orleans. I can remember how good the tall trees and the green grass looked when the train finally pulled into Louisiana.

While home I ate a lot of good food, visited a lot of relatives, went to New Orleans to do the French Quarter a few times and I think I dated a different girl every night.

When I got back to Camp Hale the days and nights were warmer and the snow was beginning to melt. By the middle of June the snow was gone from most places except for under the trees. It was warm enough in the sun to remove clothes for a tan but in the shade a coat was necessary.

I transferred out of the mortar squad to the communications squad. One day out in the field my walkie-talkie happened to be on the same channel as an airplane going to land in Denver. I heard the pilot say "6000 feet, gliding, gliding." I pressed my button and said: "10,000 feet, walking, walking."

One week we had rock-climbing school on about a 50-foot rock cliff just above Camp Hale. I didn't care too much for rock climbing but I really liked the rappelling. That was fun.

About the middle of July, just when the weather was surprisingly pleasant in Colorado we were sent to Camp Swift, Texas, about 30 miles outside of Austin. When we were in Colorado and those of us from the south were having problems with the cold the guys from the north would tease us and say: "Suffer rebel, suffer!" Now it was our turn, because believe me they were really having trouble with the heat. We would say: "Suffer Yankee, suffer!"

The heat was so rough on those poor Yankees that we didn't do any training during the day. We would start at 5 AM and stop at 9. We would lie around the barracks until about 5PM and then go out and train until about 11. It wasn't until about the middle of September that we got on a regular daytime schedule.

We did a lot of forced marches at Camp Swift. Five miles in one hour and nine miles in two hours were considered forced marches. The toughest were the 25-mile hikes in 8 hours. We did these at night carrying full field packs. There were trucks to pick up the guys who couldn't make it. I always managed to make it though it was tough.

One night about halfway through the 25 miler I missed my buddy, Charles Lobdell. The next day I asked him what had happened. He said: "Man, didn't you see that water melon patch? Edwards and I crawled under the fence, ate our fill and then got a ride in a truck the rest of the way."

Austin was about 30 miles away and on weekend passes I would stay at the Theta Xi house at the University of Texas. The guys there were really nice and always fixed us up with dates. They would even lend us civilian clothes so we could get out of that uniform for a while. This was strictly against the rules and I would have been court marshaled had I been caught. I looked young enough that I could get away with it. One night we even went into an MP headquarters building to ask a question. Of course I never would have done that if I hadn't had a few drinks. One soldier was complaining about how rough the army was. I said: "Yes I know, I have an older brother in the service and he tells me its really tough."

One weekend one of my buddies and I were going to Austin without passes. They didn't usually check for them. We had caught a ride with a couple of Officers and when we got to the gate damn if they didn't ask to see passes. We fumbled around and said we must have left them in the barracks. The Officer driving said he would take us back to get them. After he turned around he said: "You boys don't have passes do you?" We admitted: "No Sir." He said: "Well we'll just go out another gate." It was a good weekend in Austin.

The camp had several swimming pools so I got to swim a good bit that summer. Austin had a place called Barton Springs where we would go to picnic and swim on weekends.

One day Charles Lobdell and I went to Lake Austin and rented a canoe. When we got to the middle of the lake I jumped out to go swimming and left him in the canoe. The wind took the canoe a good distance from me and he couldn't handle it in the wind. He finally learned that by paddling in the bow he could handle the canoe in the wind. I was glad because it would have been a long swim back to shore.

One day we were out in the field training about 5 miles from the barracks. We were on our way in when it started raining. They kept marching us in formation and we got soaking wet. We even had to wade through a canal that was about waist deep. After about half an hour the rain stopped and the order came down: "COMPANY, HALT!!" Then: "RAINCOATS ON." That's the army for you. We marched the rest of the way back with raincoats on. We were already wet so they didn't keep us dry but I guess they kept us warm.

Towards the end of November the rumors started. We were going to move. Soon after the first of December it became official. They began to censor our mail. We were going overseas. We could not write about departure dates, routes taken or anything else.

When the day came we boarded a train and headed east. The train stopped for a while in Orange. One guy who was from there saw his wife hanging clothes on the line at his house about two blocks away. We all helped him yell to try to attract her attention but she never did hear us.

The train pulled into coastal Louisiana before dark and I got teased about the wetlands. "Is this all Louisiana is?" they asked.

When we got to the Mississippi River instead of going over the bridge, the train rolled onto a barge to cross the river. I realized then that we would probably be passing through Burnside. I stayed up and at two AM we rolled through Burnside. I could see our house in the moonlight and when we passed my Uncle Roland's house there was a light in his office. When I wrote home I asked "What in the world was the light doing on in Roland's office at two o'clock in the morning?" Pretending I was referring to something they had written to me. They realized that I had passed there and replied that he was working on a report the night I passed through.

Our destination was Hampton Roads, Virginia where we boarded the S. S. Argentina, a converted luxury liner, at four o'clock one morning.

On the ship we slept in hammock like bunks that were stacked about five high. Not very comfortable. We were fed only two meals a day and they weren't very good. One day 2nd Lt. Howell said something about the great food on the ship. We told him about our food and after that he always managed to bring some fresh fruit to us.

There was a USO group on the ship and we got to see the girls walking around the deck during the day. We were not allowed to fraternize with them but the officers could. After a few days it was decided by whoever was in charge that there was a little too much

fraternizing on the decks at night so a guard was posted to keep everyone off the deck at night.

My company had guard duty. One night while I was guarding one of the doors one of the show girls and an officer came up to me and asked if I would like a ham sandwich. I said "sure." Next question: "Can we go outside?". I said "No!" Then: "Can we go in there?", a room to the right of the outside door. Our orders were to keep people off the decks and nothing was said about other places so I said OK.

The next night the USO group put on a show for us and that helped break the boredom of the trip.

One night I relieved one of the company's new replacements on guard duty. He said: "Hot damn ya'll late eh?" I said: "Boy what part of Louisiana are you from?" He replied: "Who me? I'm from right around Lake Charles Me."

When the ship pulled into the Mediterranean Sea we could see the Rock of Gibraltar on one side and the African coast on the other.

Our destination was Naples. It was just about sunset when I realized we were pretty close. I got a place way up in the bow of the ship where the railing made a V. The ship had to make a lot of turns to stay in the channel and the wind was blowing in my face but I had a fantastic view. We passed by the Isle of Capri and it was beautiful. I stayed there until almost dark and then I had to go below.

The next morning when I went on deck the ship was just easing up to a dock. There were Italian people on the dock and some of the soldiers were throwing them things like a piece of soap, a cracker, a cookie and they would scramble for the item. What they fought over more than anything else was a cigarette butt. I had not started smoking yet and I decided then it would be a good idea not to start.

It was the day before Christmas 1944.

We were loaded into trucks and taken to a bombed out school on the outskirts of Naples. The building my squad stayed in had a whole wall missing on one side. Sleeping on the marble floor got pretty cold and Richard Keller and I slept pretty close to each other to keep warm. We stayed there three days and were not permitted to leave the grounds.

One day my company was assigned guard duty. Charles Lobdell and I decided to go to town. Our buddies on guard duty let us walk out the gate. We caught a train into Naples. It was late in the evening after we had been dismissed for the day. We walked down what looked like a deserted main street. Nightfall had arrived. Every side street was marked "Off Limits". There was no action on the main street and everything was blacked out. Finally we saw a light down one of the off limits streets and we headed for it. There were a couple of British soldiers standing outside grumbling because they

wouldn't let them in. They let us in. We were in a small crowded room with two large pans of chicken pieces sizzling on the stove. Most of the talk was Italian and we couldn't understand it. We weren't hungry so we left.

We caught the train back to the school and when we got there much to our dismay we didn't recognize the guards at the gate. The guard had changed and a different company had guard duty. We walked around the fence until we found a hole and crawled under the fence breathing a sigh of relief. That was as much as I got to see of Naples.

The next day we were loaded onto an Italian ship and headed for Leghorn. This was a three-day trip and the ship was pretty bad. The latrine was a row of toilets sitting on top of a four-inch pipe out on deck. The bunks were not very comfortable and the food was terrible. Finally we landed in Leghorn.

We were transported by truck to an open field where we set up pup tents and had training exercises all day long.

Our campsite was about five miles from Pisa. One night after training ended several of us took off walking to Pisa. The town was blacked out and deserted. We found the leaning tower and got a good view of it by moonlight. We stood right under it and dared it to fall on us.

Pre-combat training was over when we left the fields near Pisa and occupied the little town of Maresca. We were billeted in a hotel. This was a front line position but we had no direct contact with the Germans because there was a mountain between us. Patrols were sent out daily and only one made contact with the enemy.

There were outposts with soldiers standing guard on the outskirts of town. The outposts were pulled in closer at night. We had to keep someone in the communications squad on duty all night to keep in touch with the outposts by telephone. One night I heard some shots from one of the outposts. I called to see what was up. We heard something so we fired they said. The next morning there was a dead cat in the road. A new second lieutenant came into the company as a replacement and he would go out at night and try to sneak up on the guards at the outposts. He was lucky he didn't get the same treatment as the cat. He was an undertaker in civilian life and after a few days he was transferred to graves registration.

The time we spent in Maresca was pleasant. There were maids to clean our rooms and we met some of the local people. One of the local girls invited me to Sunday dinner with her family. The food was great and so was the wine. Afterwards she suggested that we take a walk. We walked a mountain trail on the south side of town since the Germans were north and over the mountain. I was very disappointed that Papa decided to go along on the walk.

One night we had a dance in the lobby of our hotel. There were a few British soldiers who attended as guests. One of our platoon Sergeants had a little too much to drink and for some reason got mad about the British soldiers being there. "Lets go throw those bastards out." He said to me. I said: "Sure, but I have a bottle of cognac in my room; lets go have a drink first." We went up to my room and he sat on the bed. I poured him a drink and when I turned around to hand it to him he had passed out. A fight with our allies averted.

One of our guys got friendly with one of the maids who could speak a little French. He told me he was invited to her house one night and he wanted me to teach him some French. "How do I ask her to go to bed?" He asked. I taught him to say: "Volez vous couché avec moi?" The next morning he told me it worked; he slept with her.

After Maresca we begin to learn what war was about. After dark one night we moved into a house at the base of a high cliff. I found out later that we were at the foot of Riva Ridge. K Company was in reserve that night and the whole company was squeezed into a house. I explored the house. Upstairs I found a bed with a feather mattress. When you lay on it your whole body would sink in about two feet. Of course I didn't get to sleep there. Down in the basement there were some Brazilian soldiers. I had a cup of coffee with them. It was the strongest coffee I had ever had in my life.

The house was pretty crowded with the whole company in it and I finally found a few square feet of space in the kitchen where I plunked down and slept. The next morning I awoke to the sound of gunfire. While we slept the rest of the battalion had climbed to the top of the ridge at night and surprised the Germans at dawn and the battle raged.

When I came out of the house in the morning, the engineers were setting up a tram to bring the wounded down from the top. K Company assembled and we began to climb to the top of the ridge. I passed several wounded soldiers on the way up. We were moving along the top of Riva Ridge when Captain Dole sent me back with a message for his second in command. After I delivered it I was rushing to catch up with company headquarters when on instinct I suddenly stopped. I looked down and there was a wire strung across the trail. It was a booby trap, which I carefully stepped over and went on.

We kept moving the next couple of days meeting only spotty resistance. We got the news that the 87th regiment had taken Mt. Belvedere. We settled in for the night at the base of Mt. Della Torraccia. Carroll, one of the guys in our squad cracked up. He kept talking to someone who had been killed two days before and he was sent to the rear.

We were told to dig in on a hillside. This was February and there was snow on the ground. Another guy and I dug a shallow trench and spent the night in it. We didn't sleep very much as all we had for warmth were raincoats and we shivered all night.

We were rousted out before dawn the next morning and the whole company assembled behind a large hill. Just at daylight all hell broke loose. There was artillery fire and the platoons spread out and went over the hill. Company headquarters followed and we

took refuge behind a little knoll. Rifle and machine gun fire joined in with the booming artillery fire. We got word from the second platoon that Lt. Howell had been killed.

I crawled to the top of the knoll and got my carbine into position when I heard Captain Dole shout behind me: "Robert, what the hell are you doing?" I'm going to fire some shots." "Get your ass back here and operate that radio, that's your job." I complied.

Later Dole sent me back with a message and when I got back to the knoll the headquarters group had moved on. I started after them across an open field and when the shells seemed pretty close I took cover in a hole. I looked around and there was an arm and a few feet away a leg, then my eyes fell on a body with no head. Some poor guy had taken a direct hit from an artillery shell and the hole I was taking cover in was the shell crater. I quit that place just as soon as the barrage let up a little.

I caught up to Captain Dole and the others at the very top of Mt. Della Torraccia and they were digging in. I picked my spot and started digging away at my foxhole. We were to be there for the next seven days.

Artillery fire would come our way at intervals and we would jump into our foxholes and get out when the barrage ended. During a lull in the artillery fire we were walking around the mountain side and we came upon a dead German he looked to be about 18 or 19. The top of his head had been cut off by machine gun fire. His skull was on the ground beside his face like a cup and his brain has spilled over into it. His blue eyes were wide open staring into space. That picture will remain etched in my mind until I die. We looked into his wallet and discovered that he was royalty.

There was intermittent artillery fire all afternoon. That night the Germans counterattacked. They were coming in strong on the first platoon. Captain Dole told Lt. Motley, the forward observer from artillery, to go out there and fire some rounds on them. "My radio is broken" he said. "Take mine" Dole said. "How is it going to get out there?" I asked. "Dammit, you can carry it, can't you?" Dole said.

It was a pitch black night. I had not been to the first platoon position and Lt. Motley had been there during daylight. I followed him very closely. He ran, I ran, he slowed down to listen I slowed down, sticking to him like glue. Artillery bursts were shaking the ground and rifle and machine gun fire was chattering all around. We stayed low. He hesitated several times and I felt that he didn't know where we were and I sure in hell didn't know where we were. All at once we realized that we were between our troops at the top and the Germans at the bottom.

We crawled toward our boys and when we got close enough, got their attention and identified ourselves and then went running and jumped into a foxhole with a rifle soldier. Lt. Motley went to work. He would give me a command and I would radio it to our regimental headquarters and they would relay it to his artillery unit and the artillery rounds would start exploding. He kept adjusting the fire and I would send the command. Some of the rounds hit really close to our foxhole and fortunately it was

good and deep. This went on from when we got there at about 10PM until daylight when the Germans finally retreated.

Sometime during the night I discovered that in my hurry to get into the foxhole I had carelessly let the muzzle of my carbine stick into the dirt. Luckily I had not tried to fire it. I managed to clear it with a small stick.

After the retreat all firing stopped and it was a really quiet morning. We got out of the foxholes and walked about a hundred feet to the bottom of the hill where there were about a dozen dead Germans. The first platoon had no casualties thanks to the deep foxholes.

Motley was a really nice guy. He was a Harvard man from Boston with the accent to prove it. He stayed with us about three more days and we got to be good friends.

We stayed on top of Mt. Della Torraccia for seven days and nights. We ran telephone wire out to each platoon so Company Headquarters could have telephone and radio communications with each platoon.

Each time there was a German artillery barrage, which was frequent, the wires were broken and we had to run new wires. It was easier and quicker to just take a new reel of wire and run a new line instead of trying to find the break and repair it. Members of the communications squad took turns running out the new wire.

One night there was an extremely fierce barrage when the phone line to the third platoon was cut. Captain Dole said "Run a new line out there." It was the squad leader's turn and he said "I'm not going." Dole said "Somebody has to go." My turn was next so I picked up a reel of wire and started running. About halfway there the barrage got worse and I jumped into a fox hole. I soon discovered that I was sharing the hole with a dead German. Better a dead one than a live one I thought.

The next day the squad leader was transferred to another company and I became squad leader.

The guy who replaced Lt. Motley was a West Point grad – stern faced and cold as ice. The first thing he did was get out a chain saw and started toward the lone tree that provided us with a little shade. "Dammit, what are you doing?" Dole asked. "I'm going to take down that tree, an artillery shell might hit it." "Leave it there, it hasn't been hit yet." Said Dole. We were lucky it never did get hit.

We stayed in our position on Mt. Della Torraccia for seven nights. During that time we had daily and nightly artillery barrages. There were quiet times, however that we could get out of our holes, walk around in the sun and enjoy the short respite from the damned artillery fire.

There was usually a wood fire going to warm our hands by and at times we would strip down and take a sponge bath out of our steel helmets. Our subsistence consisted of K rations and C rations. K rations came in a cardboard box and consisted mostly of crackers, cheese, potted meat and that kind of stuff. C rations were cans of stuff like beanie weenies and corned beef hash. These could be eaten cold but were much better warm.

The only way we had to warm them was to put them in the wood fires. We soon discovered that a small hole punched in the top before placing them in the fire would prevent overheating and a small explosion.

On the eighth day word came down that we were moving out. It was our good fortune that another unit would move through our positions and lead the attack while we followed in reserve.

General Duff, assistant division commander, had the engineers dig a hole large enough for his entire staff on the north side of our mountain just below the crest so that he could have a good view of the attack as it progressed down the mountain. I was given the job of wiring the hole for telephone communications.

I was lying on my stomach with my head hanging inside the hole connecting the wires when a fierce artillery barrage started. After a few bursts the general looked at me and said: "Well, get down in here." I hurriedly did and when the attack started I could see the progress along with the general and his staff. After about half an hour the artillery had stopped and the attack was progressing smoothly when the general noticed that I was still there and said: "Oh! You can go now."

I joined the rest of company headquarters and we prepared to move out. I had the radio on my back as usual. We moved on down a little trail following the advanced units. About $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way down the mountain we came upon a farm house. There was a wounded Italian civilian lying outside on the grass with a smashed head. I felt sorry for the poor fellow and I've often wondered if he made it.

The farm house was two story and half of the first floor served as a barn with straw on the floor and cows and goats inside. The other half was living space and the sleeping quarters were upstairs.

This was a beautiful sunshiny day. The whole regiment was deployed along this narrow trail and we could not hear anything that was going on ahead. We came to a stop and Captain Dole told me to turn off the radio to save the battery. We must have lolled in the grass, basking in the sunshine, having casual conversation for a couple of hours.

When we were ready to move on I turned the radio on and got an earful of what had been going on. The advance unit had run into a well dug-in strongly fortified German unit that really gave them a hard time. There were a lot of casualties. The thing that

saved us was the fact that we had two tanks with the lead unit. The Germans had never anticipated that we could bring tanks down that narrow mountain trail.

The high mountains were behind us now but the lesser peaks were plenty rugged. That night we got to sleep in a barn. There were chickens and we had fresh eggs. We stayed in this location a couple of days occupying the barn while the local Italians remained in their house. This was a very primitive domicile – no plumbing. Outside there were two piles of straw. A local would come out, take a forkful of straw off one pile, defecate in it and then shovel it onto the other pile which was used for fertilizer in the fields.

We stayed there about three days and we ate a lot of fresh eggs. There were chickens and if the locals got the eggs first we had to give a can of C rations for an egg; if we got them first they were free.

When we left there we were in the foothills of the Apennine Mountains and the Poe Valley was ahead. We were anxious to get into the valley and the big city of Bologna. There was little resistance and we were taking a lot of prisoners however every once in a while there was a little skirmish and there were some casualties.

Along about this time I went to a hospital. No; I wasn't wounded; I didn't get a Purple Heart. I went in for a hemorrhoidectomy. I woke up with a pain in the ass, so I went on sick call. The Doctor took one look and said: "Bad enough to come out." So off I went to a field hospital near the picturesque little town of Montecatini. I was assigned to a bed in a ward which was a large tent.

The next morning a nurse walked me to surgery which was also in a tent. She left me with a couple of Doctors and I heard one say: "I think a local anesthetic should be OK." The other one said: "Yeah, I think so."

They gave me a shot and proceeded with the surgery. I think it took all of ten minutes and then one said: "OK, you can go back now." So I walked back to my tent alone and just when I got through the door the anesthetic began to wear off and the pain hit. I guess I must have been staggering a little because a nurse ran up, grabbed hold of me and helped me to my bed. She proceeded to give the Doctors a good cussing out for letting me walk back alone.

My bed was near the nursing station which was in the middle of the tent. There were two beds in the station itself for two guys who had concussions. They were in the beds naked and the beds had rails to keep them from getting out. One day somehow one of them got out of the bed. I went over and touched him gently on the arm asking him to get back in the bed when along came a big nurse. She whacked him on the ass and practically threw him back into the bed.

After a few days I could walk around without any discomfort so I would walk to the mess

(dining) tent for meals. Time went on and I was feeling pretty good so I would walk around the hospital area. One day I discovered a hole in the fence so I went through it and strolled into town. This became a regular routine. I would go to breakfast, walk to town, browse around the shops, talk to natives practicing my Italian.

One day I came back after a trip to town and the guy in the bed next to me said: "You're going back tomorrow." I said: "That can't be; I haven't seen a doctor." He said: "Look on that tag hanging on the bed." Sure enough I was heading back to the front the next day. I left the hospital with never a doctor checking me after the surgery.

I got a jeep ride to within about a mile of K company and I had to hustle to catch up because they were moving. When I caught up I discovered that Stuart Elkind was acting squad leader and carrying my radio. This didn't sit too good with me but all I could do was join the rest of the squad at the rear of the company and bide my time.

About the second day after I got back I was walking along with the squad in the rear of the company when all at once there was Elkind sitting on the side. He said: "Robert, the Captain wants you to take the radio and catch up to him; I sprained my ankle." I grabbed the radio and took off.

The radio I carried was called a walkie talkie. It was about 15 inches wide, 6 inches thick and 18 inches high. I carried this strapped on to a pack board along with an extra battery which was almost half the size of the radio. This radio was used to communicate with other companies in the battalion, battalion headquarters and regimental headquarters.

The Captain carried a little radio called a handy talkie. It was about 4 inches square and 14 inches high. It was used to communicate with the platoons as each platoon leader had one.

When we stopped for the night we ran telephone lines to each platoon so that in addition to radio there was also telephone communication between the platoons.

The lines had not advanced very much while I was gone because the 10th's advance was put on hold for a while because we were so far ahead of the other forces that they had to have time to catch up. We were still in the foothills. The Germans were on the run and we were moving pretty fast but the fighting got pretty furious at times.

One day we were steadily advancing and fighting holding actions as we went. When at one point when the firefighting was hot and heavy the second platoon leader, a short, stocky and kind of fat 2nd Lt. who had just joined the company as a replacement came stumbling up the hill. When Dole looked around and saw him he began chewing his ass up one side and down the other. He said: "Lt. what the hell are you doing back here? You're supposed to be leading those men. You get your ass up there and lead like you're supposed to." The poor guy just stood there saluting and repeating: "Yes sir, yes sir, yes sir." Then he took off trying to catch up.

I know it was less than ten minutes later that a call came in from the second platoon saying that the Lt. had been killed. The look on Dole's face displayed a degree of sorrow and concern that I didn't think the man capable of having.

Captain Frederick Dole was a man who I guess was pushing 50. He was opinionated and if something was black and he said it was white, in his mind it was white. However, he was a good military tactician and when I was with him I felt safe.

About the middle of April we were so close that we could almost smell the Po Valley. There was one high ridge between us and the flat land of the valley and it was strongly fortified. Early one morning the order came to move on it.

All hell broke loose in a few minutes. There was mortar, machine gun and artillery fire from both sides. This was a tough battle that went on for quite a while. There were many casualties but we finally prevailed and the Germans retreated.

We claimed the ridge and dug in for the night. Excitement abounded because we thought we were headed to the city of Bologna where there would be wine, women and parties. Much to our disappointment we by passed Bologna by about 25 miles. Going through the Poe Valley was a blast. The Germans were running fast and there was practically no resistance. They were planning to make a stand at the Poe River.

We left the foothills and started the flat land of the Poe River valley. Each little village we approached the Italians would come out to meet us with food and wine calling us their liberators.

We came to a hedgerow and ditch at one point and about ten German soldiers jumped up out of the ditch with their hands up. It was unusual for company headquarters to take prisoners as the whole company had passed over them before we got there. We took their weapons and everyone was going after the handguns. Someone put one in my hand and said "You just as well have one too." It was in a holster and I strapped it around my waist and went on. Later when I looked it was the prized German Luger pistol.

We covered 15 miles the first day in the Po Valley; the second day we covered 16 miles. The Germans were in full flight to the Po River. The third day they found trucks for us to ride in.

Two trucks filled with soldiers were in the lead and I was in a jeep with Captain Dole and the driver. We came to a bridge with a hole in it about 4 feet across. Dole called back for the engineers to repair it. He sent a squad across the bridge and we were right behind them when we met machine gun fire. The Captain and I squatted down behind the bridge rail and he sent the squad on to take care of the German machine gun nest. I heard a voice behind me say: "What's up Captain?" I looked around and it was General

Hays, the Division Commander, standing there. Dole told him it was a machine gun nest and he had sent a squad to knock it out. The General said: "Good, carry on." and he whirled around and walked off.

The rifle squad soon took care of the machine gun nest and we continued on foot while the engineers repaired the bridge.

This was a rural countryside and we walked through tilled fields coming upon small villages of six to twelve houses. The local citizenry greeted us with wine, food and cheers. I had about a dozen eggs inside my shirt, trusting that none would break. Someone gave me a link of salami and it was and is the best salami I have ever tasted.

I saw a man with a bucket giving out milk. I went running to him but by the time I got there the bucket was empty. He saw my disappointment and said: "Wait, I milk cow." So I waited while he milked the cow, then I poured the wine out of my canteen and filled it with milk. Now fresh milk was the one thing I missed more than anything else. I put the canteen (one quart) to my lips and didn't take it down until it was empty.

We continued on foot for several hours before the vehicles caught up to us and we were once again motorized and advanced on toward the Po River.

Late that evening we took over a three story building which appeared to have been a school house and was large enough to house the whole company. The plumbing was out of order, so the engineers dug a slit trench right outside the fence and near a dirt road.

The next morning I was squatting over the slit trench taking care of business when I looked up and there were three women passing on the road. They said: "Bon journo!" (Good morning!) I said: "Bon journo!" and they walked on.

Our crossing of the Po was uneventful. Other units had gone before and cleared the way. We walked over on a pontoon bridge laid down by the engineers.

The Germans were in full flight and we took lots of prisoners. I carried the walkie talkie radio and an extra battery on a pack-board and this was about all I could carry as I weighed only about 120 pounds. When night came I would take a couple of blankets off German prisoners and throw them away the next morning. They also carried clean socks so I would get a pair of clean socks too and that made my feet much happier.

We went on through the Po Valley farmland, sometimes walking and sometimes riding. The Italian people were happy to see us, cheering and proffering us food and wine. Resistance was light and we continued to take many prisoners. One day I took a pair of binoculars from a German officer and it was fun having them.

Our turn came for a rest and we were trucked back to a field shower to get cleaned up and get clean clothes. The shower was a canvas hallway about 75 feet long with water

spraying out both sides. We took off the clothes we were wearing, threw them into a barrel, were handed some soap and walked through the showering hallway washing as we walked. Towels were handed out at the end and clean clothes were obtained.

One night we were awakened at 1 AM and started moving on the City of Verona. One by one the Germans blew up the bridges surrounding the city and we could hear and see the explosions as the darkness was momentarily lit up.

After blowing the bridges the Germans began retreating and we, the soldiers of K Company 86th Regiment were the first American troops to enter the City of Verona hardly firing a shot.

Once Verona was secured K Company headquarters picked out a palace for our billet. We promptly obtained a supply of wine and started lining up girls wildly anticipating the great party celebration we surely would have.

The best laid plans-----About a half hour before dusk we were told that we had to move out. We assembled and were moved to an open field about two miles out of town. We had no tents, only sleeping bags. Rain started coming down and we were wet and thoroughly pissed off.

The Germans were retreating up the east shore of Lake Garda, Italy's largest lake. Lago de Garda was a pear shaped lake with the larger body extending down into the Po Valley and the stem extending into the Alps to the north. The 85th Regiment was hot on their tail and we were going along behind them.

We spent the first night in a beautiful villa right on the shore of the beautiful lake with crystal clear blue water. The villa was well appointed with fine furnishings. The leather chairs and couches were extremely comfortable after the nights we had spent sleeping on the ground.

I discovered a complete set of Kipling's works, Moroccan leather bound in the library. Carefully, I wrapped the books in the foil the radio batteries came in and nailed them in a wooden box with my name on it. This was to be my spoils of war and I gave the box to the Supply Sergeant who had use of a captured German van to carry such things.

Early the next morning I stood on a rock right at the waters edge. The clear water looked tempting and I started undressing for a swim, I stooped down and put my hand in the water and quickly decided it was a bit too chilly for a swim.

Later that day we started moving north on the road along the lake shore. Before long we came to a spot where a bridge had been blown up and we could go no further. After about a two hour wait some ducks (Amphibious vehicles that could go over land or water.) were brought up and the entire battalion was ferried around several blown bridges and a couple of tunnels.

The entire time we were on the water German 88s were sniping at us from across the

lake. Fortunately there were no direct hits on any of the ducks and we made it without a casualty. I learned later that another unit had not been so fortunate. An 88 shell scored a direct hit on one of the ducks sinking it. There was only one survivor.

The battalion assembled on the road and there were three of the seven tunnels between us and the resort town of Torbole. We took cover inside one of the tunnels and spent a mostly sleepless night.

When morning came it had been decided by the high command that L Company would advance along the road through the tunnels and I and K Companies would go over the mountain with I Company in the lead and K Company in reserve. It was a pretty tough climb but by noon we were on top the mountain looking down upon Torbole.

I Company advanced along a trail on the north side and immediately ran into resistance. All afternoon we lolled around lying in the grass while I company battled it out taking many casualties.

Meanwhile L Company was trapped in the last tunnel. The Germans had zeroed in on the mouth of the tunnel and any effort to exit was shot down. One shell exploded inside the tunnel causing about 50 casualties -- 7 dead.

Late in the evening the Regimental Commander radioed Captain Dole that I Company had failed and he was assigning K Company the objective of taking the Town of Torbole. The first thing Dole did was chew him out up and down for waiting so long with the reassignment, then he told him what he would do -- take the Company down the west side of the mountain. The I Company Commander got on the radio and I can remember him saying to Captain Dole: "I have only about 1/3 of what is left of my company under my command and you can use it however you want." Dole said: "Just follow in behind us."

The west side of the mountain was so steep that we practically slid down on the seat of our pants, grabbing onto little trees along the way to slow ourselves down. Two platoons were ahead of us and they cleared out the first few houses and we took the first house for Company Headquarters.

It was a relief to get the radio off of my back and I set it up on a table inside. The sounds of gunfire were subsiding as the rifle soldiers moved further into the town clearing out the houses as they went. I stepped outside to see what was going on. There was a solid stone fence about fifteen feet from the house. A rifle squad was in position just outside the fence. I stood just behind the fence peering into the almost dark night.

L Company had been pinned down in a tunnel all day and we had radioed them that we had the town. When we made out a squad of men walking along the beach by the lake we thought it was L Company. One of the soldiers called out: "Hey, L Company!" The answer came back in German. One of our men yelled out in German; "Hands up!"

Come here!” The answer was gunfire.

Our rifle squad answered in turn. I knelt down behind the stone fence, then carefully raised up, pointed my carbine in the direction of the enemy fire and got off a few quick shots. Bullets were bouncing off the stone fence and off the side of the building and then the German 88's across the lake got into the action. 88 shells were slamming into the building and shrapnel was falling all around me. I looked down and magnesium from a tracer round was burning about six inches from my leg. I decided then that I had better get inside the building and operate the radio. That was my job.

The rifle soldiers did their jobs and cleared all the houses and the Germans retreated temporarily. A counter attack started with three tanks leading the way. We were short on ammunition and the chicken colonel commanding the regiment radioed that he was sorry but there was no way they could get more to us; we would just have to make out with what we had.

One of our men in the second platoon got into the middle of the street with the last bazooka round in the company and crippled the lead tank. The street was narrow and buildings went right to the curb so the tanks were stopped. Soon the Germans retreated for good.

World War II was over in Italy.

After a quiet night we moved out in the morning to a farm house a couple miles north of Riva, a resort town west of Torbole. That night the family living in the house made flat noodles and cooked them for us. Really delicious.

Captain Dole surprised me one day telling me I had been put in for the Bronze Star.

We were allowed to go into town but we were not allowed to carry weapons anymore. I didn't feel safe without a weapon so I traded my German Luger to Captain Dole for an Italian Beretta which was small enough to fit into my pocket.

Tony was a friend in the company whose grandparents had immigrated from Sicily and he was fluent in Italian. One day Tony and I walked into Riva. There were two girls walking down the street and Tony approached them to see if they would join us. They said they couldn't because the two policemen behind them were taking them to jail because they had been friendly to the Germans. Tony tried to talk the policemen into letting them go with us but to no avail.

We walked along with them to the jail and Tony tried to talk the head jailer into letting them go under our supervision. He wouldn't do that but he did let us join them in their cell for a couple hours. That is the only time in my life that I've ever been in jail. I'm certain the experience was more pleasurable than most jail stays.

The next day the whole battalion was assembled in the Riva town square and General

Hays spoke to us. He told us that the war was over and we should wash our clothes, shave and present a good appearance.

We were looking forward to more fun in Riva and maybe swimming in beautiful Lake Garda. No such luck. The next day the Battalion was loaded on trucks and became part of a task force to go up the pass to the Austrian border to prevent German soldiers from sneaking into Austria, getting out of uniform and avoid being taken as prisoners of war. I rode in the jeep behind Captain Dole with the radio by my side.

We steadily gained altitude as we proceeded up the valley. Tall peaks rose on each side of the road and there was snow on the mountain tops. There were several towns we had to pass through. The Italian people greeted us with cheers, called us their liberators, gave us food and decorated the vehicles with flowers so that they looked like carnival floats.

Then there were the German soldiers lining each side of the street. They stood at attention, solemn faced and they still had their weapons. It was very hairy because we didn't know if they might get fanatical and start the war all over again. Many of them were SS troops.

Night came upon us and all vehicle lights were turned on full force. After about an hour of trudging into the darkness the caravan came to a halt. We had no idea what was going on. Then word came down by radio that a German contingent in Austria, which was only a half mile to our west, was about to fire on us when they decided to investigate because it seemed strange that we were traveling with full lights.

The commander of our task force met with the German leader and when he learned that the German Army in Italy had surrendered he decided his forces would surrender too.

Our caravan moved on through the night and we finally reached our destination, the little town of Resia, several hours after daylight. The elevation was pretty high now and the ground was covered with snow. We were on the corner of Italy, Austria and Switzerland.

We settled into billets, explored the town, made friends with some locals and set up a party for that night. Then word came down that there was a curfew and no one was to go out that night. I had to call all the platoon leaders with this information. Later a buddy and I sneaked out and enjoyed the party we had set up.

The next morning the First Sergeant said to me: "Robert, did you go out last night?" "Yes" I answered." The Captain knows it" he said. Later I got a call from Captain Dole. He chewed my ass up and down. He said: "You called and told everyone they couldn't go out and then you went out. I just put you in for Sergeant's stripes but those stripes have wings already. You'd better be careful." That evening I got sick and vomited during retreat. Dole said to me: "Too much rotgut wine last night huh?"

The next morning Dole, who was staying in a house with a woman about a half mile away called and said he would not be in because he was sick to his stomach. I asked: "Too much rotgut wine huh?"

We then moved to a campsite on an old abandoned airfield. No trees, hot sun so the afternoon of the second day some of us took off for an irrigation ditch about a half mile from our campsite. We stripped and washed off in the cool waters of the ditch. A couple hundred yards down from where we bathed some women were washing clothes. They were in the water almost hip deep. They would wet the clothes apply soap and then beat the clothes on rocks to get them clean.

When we got back to the camp site we were handed a bottle of champagne taken from a captured warehouse. Each bottle was stamped in three languages: "Reserved for the German Army." I had no taste for drinking hot champagne as some guys were doing so I looked around and noticed a stack of frozen chickens thawing out outside the mess tent. I stuck my bottle into the middle of the chickens and when it was good and cool I opened it and guzzled.

We were about twenty miles from Brescia, a fairly large city and on our nightly excursions we found a nice supply of wine and women.

This didn't last long because one morning the company was loaded into trucks and I was sitting in the jeep behind Captain Dole and we were on the move again.

Yugoslavia had taken the northeast section of Italy and Tito was making noises that he would keep this territory and make it a part of Yugoslavia. The 3rd battalion, 86th regiment with a couple tanks attached made up a task force sent to occupy the little town of Cava de Predil. Yugoslavian soldiers were also occupying it.

We were assigned a hillside on which to pitch out tents. My tent mate and I dug down into the hillside in order to have a level spot on which to pitch our shelter halves.

Shelter halves. Each soldier carried half a tent therefore it was necessary to have a partner in order to have a whole tent. The two halves were connected by buttons so they could be set up as a complete tent. Remember this was before the age of velcro.

Tall mountains rose all around the little town and there was snow on the peaks.

Yugoslavian Partisans stood guard on one side of the street and we stood guard on the opposite side. Our tanks paraded up and down the street and US planes flew over all day long. After a week of this the Partisans packed up and moved out.

Word was put out that there would be a track meet in Udine in order to select a regimental team to participate on a higher level. I went for it and started running up and down the gravel road in my ski boots which had served as my footwear the whole time I

was in Italy.

I learned that Charlie Kleb, an LSU friend from Kaplan, was stationed in Udine. I got in touch with him. The night before the meet Charlie and I stayed up drinking wine and talking until 3:00 AM. Needless to say I didn't run too well the next day. Although 440 was my best distance I chose to run the 220 because I had not had much time to train. I came in 4th. 3rd would have got me on the Regimental team. Back to Predil I went.

We were moved out of town to a field adjoining Lago de Predil, a beautiful lake fed from melt from the snow capped peaks surrounding it. One day I decided to take a swim. I jumped in, took about three quick strokes and got right out. The water was freezing cold.

One day some of us went on a one day trip to Venice. We were hauled there in trucks and left on our own. We browsed shops, took a gondola ride, ate in a restaurant, visited St. Mark's square with all its pigeons.

The gondolier took us on the Grand Canal which was wide and beautiful. He sang for us while paddling. We went through some side canals which were narrow and dirty. We saw people throwing slop into the canals through windows. I guess it would eventually wash out to sea.

One of the items I had in the restaurant was a serving of tiny shrimp and they were delicious.

Around noon we noticed that all the shops were closed. Siesta time. It wasn't until about 1:30 that they reopened. We visited some art galleries and a museum.

The trucks picked us up at 5:00 for the long ride back to our campsite. We arrived about 11:00 pretty much tired out.

Sunday morning I went to church with a local girl I had met. Afterwards we went for a walk up the mountain and explored a mine shaft. Mining was Predil's main industry. I asked her what the Priest had talked about and she said he fussed about the women not wearing hats to church.

All sorts of activities were being offered to keep us busy and counteract boredom. Some guys went to Grossglockner, Austria's highest mountain, for rock climbing school. One of them gave me a couple of edelweiss, flowers that grow above the timberline in the Alps, and I still have them.

I decided to go out for the swim team. We took a two hour truck ride to a lake in Austria that had a much warmer water temperature than the one by our campsite. The route took us through an Austrian countryside made up mostly of farmland. We passed one field where the workers were loading hay onto wagons. Big buxom women wearing sleeveless undershirts were wielding pitchforks right along with the men.

The lake was about a half mile across and the coach announced that our workout would be to swim across and back. I made it across alright but I was really glad for the rest we took before starting back.

That night I learned that I could go to Rome for a week. The swimming was over for me.

It was a long truck ride to Rome. Out of the Alps across the Po valley and into the Apennines. There were no rest stops. We had to pee out the back of the truck, going through a town or not.

Finally we reached our destination at about eleven at night. We were ushered to some barracks that were to be our home for a week.

Rome, the eternal city. So much to see. So much to do. Where to start?

The first day I opted for a commercial tour. This was really a worldwind tour. We rode in a large van and rushed from one place to another. The Baths of Caracalla, the Catacombs of Rome, the Spanish steps, the Roman Forum, the Coliseum, St. Paul's Cathedral, the Tivoli Fountain.

The place we stayed had been a military school for Italian youths. There was a large outdoor pavilion with a smooth concrete floor. An all girl orchestra from the States played at night and there were plenty of Italian girls to dance with. There was also a lot of action in the bushes.

One of the girls I danced with offered to take me on a tour the next day. The next morning I met her at the appointed place and we took a taxi into Rome. The highlight of this tour was a visit to the Borghese Museum. The featured piece there was a statue of Pauline Bonaparte Borghese, Napoleon's sister. She was reclining on a sofa nude from the waist up. I was familiar with this because there was a half size replica of it in the balcony of the Sanger Theatre in New Orleans.

We went to a few more places and then took a horse drawn buggy taxi back to the school. We parted at the place we had met earlier and I never saw her again.

The next days activities included a visit to the Vatican. St. Peters Cathedral was massive and there were several masses going on at the same time. The Pope came out on a balcony and blessed everyone.

One day I was in downtown Rome standing on the street; two women walked by, a tall blonde and a shorter brunette. They passed by and went on about twenty feet when the blonde came back and approached me. She said: "You like to fook?" I replied: "Yes I do? do you?" She said: "Yes yes." Then she said: "Feefty dollar OK?" I said: "Look, if you like to fuck and I like to fuck, what is the fifty dollars for?" She broke into laughter and

said to the brunette: "He vant to fook for luv." I kept my fifty dollars but she got a good laugh out of it.

One night I went to an opera and saw Madam Butterfly. The female lead was sung by Rina Gigli, daughter of the great tenor Beniamino Gigli.

One night at a dance I really hit it off with this girl.. We danced a lot and then she invited me to go home with her. We took a taxi to an apartment complex. She stopped at the entrance and handed me a note. She told me to wait five minutes then go knock on door number 220. I was told to give the note to whoever answered the door. An older woman answered the door and when she read the note she threw her arms around me and gave me a big welcome. Then suddenly she disappeared and the girl came into the room. She took me by the hand and lead me into a bedroom where I passed the whole night without getting a minutes sleep.

The week in Rome went by quickly and it was back to the pup tents. From there we were moved to Florence where we were left wondering what our fate would be.

We soon learned that we were destined to return to the States for more training and then on to the Pacific Theatre to fight the Japs.

The ship we came home on was half the size of the Argentina. There was a lot more seasickness. I went into the head one day and there was a poor guy siting on a toilet with his head hanging in another one as he was running from both ends. Luckily somehow I escaped getting sick.

Halfway across the Atlantic we got word of the atomic bomb being dropped on Japan. Very welcome news because we knew then that we would not be going to the Pacific..

Upon reaching the States we were taken to Fort Carson, Colorado near Colorado Springs. We were given immediate leave to go home. I was at home for VJ day and celebrated.

The army was discharging soldiers based on a point system and I didn't have enough points to be discharged in 1945. I was sent to Fort Omaha, Nebraska where I worked in Seventh Service Command Headquarters biding my time until 1946.

On the 7th of January 1946 I was honorably discharged from the army at Camp Shelby, Mississippi.

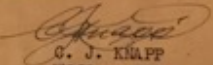
HEADQUARTERS
10TH MOUNTAIN DIVISION
APO #345
U. S. Army

21 June 1945

C I T A T I O N

HULIN J. ROBERT, 18027395, Sergeant (then Private First Class), Infantry, 86th Mountain Infantry, United States Army. For meritorious service in combat during the period 20 February 1945 to 2 May 1945, in the Apennine Mountains and Po Valley, Italy. As company radio operator and wireman during the division's commitment to battle, Sergeant ROBERT was instrumental in the success of his unit's mission by his willingness to brave artillery and small arms fire to lay and maintain vitally important communication lines. Often going without rest and lacking much needed equipment, he worked fearlessly and conscientiously to see that communications were always maintained between his unit and other units of the division. His achievements reflect great credit upon himself, and are worthy of commendation in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Army. Entered the military service from Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

BY COMMAND OF MAJOR GENERAL HAYS:


C. J. KNAPP
WOJG USA
Asst. Adj. General

