Harvey's Story

This is, to the best of my memory, a history of my military experience in World War II. I turned 19 in February, 1943 and was inducted into the service in March, 1943 at Owego, New York. There we had physicals, interviews, and tests to determine what we were most qualified for. I got what I wanted and went into the Army Air Forces.

From there, the next stop was Fort Niagara, New York. In Fort Niagara we only had the lightweight clothes we arrived in. They were warm enough back in Spencer where I then lived. The weather in Fort Niagara was bitter. We didn't get a clothing issue for a couple of days. In the meantime we froze. We also had our first experience with Army multiple shots.

In Fort Niagara we began to learn some lessons on Army life. One day a permanent-party Corporal came in and told us to fall out. We lined up and he proceeded to give us close-order drill. A Lieutenant came along and saw what was going on. He dismissed us and proceeded to lay down the law to the Corporal while he stood at a very stiff attention for about five minutes. The Corporal wasn't supposed to be drilling us. He stayed away from us from then on.

Another incident came when we got our clothing issue. The last four digits of our army serial number had to be stamped onto the inside of all of our clothing. One of the permanent-party came into our barracks with a stamping kit. He told us we had to have the stamping done that day and he would do it for a dollar. We all gave him a dollar and had our clothes stamped. We found out later we could have had it done in supply at no charge. Live and learn.

I was assigned to go to Miami Beach, Florida for ten weeks of basic training. After a stay of three or four days in Fort Niagara, those of us going to Miami Beach boarded a troop train and headed south. I spent the first night in a boxcar peeling potatoes. It wasn't too bad. The boxcar door was open and we could watch the world go by. Not only that, but we had a big bag of apples to munch on. We had a new West Point Lieutenant in charge

of the train. He was a good officer. When the train stopped to take on coal and water or to change crews or whatever, he would check on how long we would be there. He would then let us go get a burger, or a beer, or whatever was available, and what time to be back on the train. One of our group was always late coming back. One time they held the train up for about five minutes. The next time he was late, they waited and finally the Lieutenant told the train crew to go ahead and leave him. He would be reported as A.W.O.L. or deserting. Just as the train was starting, he came running across the railroad yard. There were a few of our group waiting for him on the platform between the cars. As he jumped on the step, they slammed the gate and stood guard on it. He rode for several minutes standing on the step and hanging onto the two handrails. He was never late again. After a few days we arrived in Miami Beach.

Miami Beach was a high-class resort city with many nice hotels, and lush green golf courses. There was a long stretch, maybe a few miles, of white sandy beach. The Army had taken over the hotels to house the fifty thousand troops that were there for basic training, and the golf courses for drill fields. The grass on the golf courses was soon gone! The hotel elevators were taken out of service so we had to climb the stairs. Good exercise. The hotel I was in was right across the street from the beach, where we spent as much time as we could. I was on the sixth floor and had many trips a day up and down the stairs. One of the guys on the sixth floor was a Canadian. He had tried to get in the service in Canada. They turned him down because he had two club feet. His feet were so bad he was walking almost on the side of his feet. He wanted to get in so bad that he came down to the States and they took him. He went everywhere the rest of us did, up and down the steps, on the drill field, and never complained. He always had a big grin on his face. Of the whole class he was the only one whose name I remembered, Charles Gonzales.

We could not go on the beach after seven p.m. because of the danger of spies coming in from subs. The beach was heavily guarded at night. Before I got there a ship had been torpedoed and from the shore, they could watch it burn. I got guard duty one night on the back entrance of the hotel. It was pitch dark. Some of the permanent-party had transferred to Texas. They took a lot of the equipment with them including the

flashlights. It was a joke trying to check passes with no light. If they were in uniform and had something that resembled a pass, I would pass them through.

It seemed to me that the Army had two favorite foods: cold cuts and stuffed peppers. We would eat cold cuts for a few days. They would get old and they would grind them up and stuff peppers. We then ate them for a few days. They had what they called consolidated mess halls in different parts of the city. That meant that at lunchtime you ate in the closest mess hall. The number fed in each of these mess halls varied greatly from day to day.

We spent our time on the drill field, learning which foot was left, which was right. There were always lectures or classes on this or that. There were rifle ranges around the city. We spent quite a bit of time shooting.

The highlight of the week was the Saturday parade. Each training class would form up in their area and march maybe fifteen or twenty blocks to the form-up area and pull into side streets. This filled the side streets for several blocks. The parade started moving from the rear. As it passed a side street, the units on that street would join on. This went on for block after block until the whole parade was formed. Then several more blocks to go by the reviewing stand. If anybody fell out, he was subject to K.P. If anybody fell out to help him - the same punishment.

One day they told us we had to take tests for A.S.T.P. (Army Special Training Program). The award for passing was four years of college. We started with three hundred trainees. The test ran for three days, eight hours a day, with a percentage at the bottom being eliminated each day. I finished with the top thirty. Then an interview with an officer. He asked what course I would like to take. I told him if I didn't have to do it, I would rather get into flying. Turning it down took about two minutes. I never understood why I couldn't have just turned it down before all the tests. I finally survived the ten weeks of basic training.

My next stop was Buckley Field, Denver, Colorado for six weeks of armament school.

On our way to Buckley Field, we made a stop, I think in Memphis, TN, to change train crews and, I guess, to take on coal and water. As soon as the train stopped, a large group of women, members of a Mothers of Service Men group, ran out from the station. They were carrying baskets full of milk and cookies. The women would go up and down the train, passing goodies through the windows. When the basket was empty, they would run back in and return with another load. A lot of the guys would lean out and give them a big hug and a kiss on the cheek. This went on until they ran out of supplies or the train pulled out.

I was in the rear car of the train. Suddenly we heard a loud noise coming from underneath. They stopped and checked. We had a broken wheel on our car. We sat there for at least a half-hour. Then we had to take our baggage up into the forward cars. We jammed the baggage in wherever we could and crowded in wherever we could, three to a seat. They dropped the car on a sidetrack and we took off.

The Non-Com in Buckley decided to form a singing group as an activity. I signed up. I couldn't sing but in a group of thirty or forty, who would know. We went into Denver and sang for two or three public events. It was a good way to get out of camp. The people of Denver were very good to servicemen. There was a U.S.O. that had been a hotel. In the lobby was a huge blackboard. People would come in during the week and put their name on the board. Requests like two Italians for spaghetti dinner, three G.I.'s for Sunday dinner, two for a picnic in the mountains, etc. Sunday morning they would come in to pick up those who had signed up for their invitation or just to see if there was anybody who didn't have anything to do for the day. The line would, at times, go around the block.

Then on to Lowry Field in Denver, Colorado for six more weeks. One field was fighter armament and the other was bomber armament. We worked with cannons, machine guns, turrets and bombs. There was also a camp up in the mountains. We lived in pup tents for two weeks. We had training doing everything by hand, without power. This was for working at an advanced fighter field in the Pacific. I graduated with the rank of P.F.C.

Next was a four or five day trip on a troop train to Harlingen, Texas for gunnery school. The old passenger cars we rode in leaked smoke from the coal-burning engine that pulled the train. Every day our suntan uniforms got darker. The train had a layover at Houston, Texas. We were met at the station by representatives of the Mayors office, transported to city swimming pools and treated to a swim.

The first week in Harlingen we spent in ground school. We studied ballistics, practiced taking machine guns apart and reassembling them. The final test was to disassemble and reassemble them blindfolded with canvas gloves. We studied aircraft identification. We spent most of our time shooting. We practiced on rifles, pistols and shooting skeet. We shot skeet standing in the back of a small truck with a safety rail. We went around a figure eight track, shooting at clay pigeons thrown at us from small sheds spaced around the track. We shot skeet from a top turret mounted on a tower with a shotgun mounted in the gun cradle. Pigeons were thrown out and we tracked them with the turret. This was followed by two weeks of air-to-air firing. We stood in the back seat of an AT-6 (advanced trainer) and fired at fabric sleeves being towed by another AT-6. This was all so much fun we should have paid to go to gunnery school.

The Army treated all of us to a trip to Mexico. A section of the class would go each Sunday. We took a taxi tour of the city. The driver showed us the girl's high school and the boy's high school. He said it had been one school but too many girls were getting pregnant so they separated them. There was a bullfight arena but they only had fights every other Sunday. We were there on the wrong Sunday. We had a chicken dinner for a quarter. It provided a break in the training routine.

We had a little excitement one night. We had been somewhere and were returning by truck-convoy. Suddenly a large herd of steers was crossing the road. The first truck stopped sudden, the second truck pulled up to his left and the third to his right. They ended up in a perfect three-line formation. It was like they had practiced it.

We graduated with the rank of Sgt.. We were then sent to Salt Lake City by a delay in route of thirteen days. This meant we had thirteen days to get to Utah, arranging our own

transportation by rail and take our baggage with us: clothes, flying suits, parachutes, everything. We could have probably got it all from the huge warehouses in Salt Lake City. I got a few days at home and it didn't count as furlough.

Salt Lake City was a huge warehouse depot and a place to form crews. Graduates from pilot school, navigation school, bombardier school, gunnery, radio and mechanic schools were coming in there from all over the country and being formed into crews. I was assigned to B-24 liberator bombers. After our crew was assembled, we headed for March Field, California.

One thing I would like to point out is the crew relationships that were established in March Field. In the infantry, a unit of maybe a hundred men might have a Lieutenant in charge; with Sergeants in charge of small units taking orders from the Lieutenant. A heavy bomber crew was made up of four commissioned officers: pilot, co-pilot, navigator and bombardier. The rest of the crew, gunners, radio operator, armored and flight engineer were all non-commissioned officers, corporals and sergeants. We were together most of the time. When we flew we wore summer flying suits. The only difference was that the officers wore a different hat. When we came off the flight line, they would come to our barracks, borrow one of our hats, and go to our mess hall. When we went on weekend pass, we went as a crew. We were in our favorite hangout in Hollywood with another crew. At midnight on Christmas Eve, the pilot of the other crew bought everybody a double drink.

One part of training everybody had to learn to cope with was accidents. When you combine green pilots with an accelerated training program, something had to give. We had three accidents one day with twenty-one killed. One of the crashes was a plane coming in without one engine on the left side. He was coming downwind, and with an emergency, he could have landed downwind, rolled down the runway and into the desert if necessary. Being green, he thought he had to bypass the runway and turn and land upwind. He flew along the right side of the runway. When he had to turn left to come around into the wind, the plane dropped off on the dead engine and landed on a B-18 parked by the runway, blew up and everybody was killed. Another crash was a plane

coming in to land. Right at the end of the runway both engines on one side quit. The plane dropped off on the dead engines and crashed, killing part of the crew. The third crash was a pilot practicing blind. His side of the windshield and the left window were covered so he couldn't see out. He had an instructor pilot in the right seat to check his progress. On takeoff he told the pilot he was climbing too steep and didn't look again to check. The pilot overcorrected and went into a shallow dive. They crashed into the ground, tore out a section of railroad, then hit a car on the highway, killing one passenger and part of the crew. Another day a B-24 took off and few straight into the side of the mountain, ten or fifteen miles away. We never heard what caused it.

We spent two months there working together as a crew and more gunnery practice from bomber turrets. The pilots and navigator had cross-country practice. The bombardiers practiced dropping bombs on ground targets. Sometime in late March we went up to San Francisco and picked up a new B-24. From there we flew by stages to Italy. Our first stop was at an airfield outside Phoenix, Arizona for a couple of meals, refuel and take off in the morning. Next stop was Memphis, Tennessee or possibly one stop in between. For some reason we spent eight days at the field at Memphis. The commanding officer of the field had a big heart and gave us Class A passes. That meant we were free to come and go just so we were there when we might get orders to take off. One night, almost midnight, somebody suggested getting a steak. The ones in bed got up, dressed, and we headed for Memphis. The gate guard looked at the passes and we went out with no questions.

From there we went to Homestead Field in the lower part of Florida. When we left there we had sealed orders, not to be opened until we were at a certain point. We had been given a compass heading. We also had two carrier pigeons, one tuned to Homestead Field and the other to a field near San Juan, Puerto Rico. This was the place listed in the sealed orders. Where the orders were opened was past the point of no return, meaning if we had engine failure, we had to continue to San Juan rather then to try to return to Florida. One night in Puerto Rico and our next stop was in the top of South America, one of what was then one of the Guinas. One night and we were off to Belem, Brazil. We flew over the vast expanse of jungle at six hundred feet, sightseeing. There were shacks

built on stilts so far from anywhere, we could not see any towns or cities from the air. There were natives in their dugout canoes and herds of wild cattle. Next day we headed across the ocean to Senegal, Africa. Next stop was in Tunis.

There we were given our final destination to a field in Southern Italy. After a day or two we were sent to the Four Fifteenth Air Base in the heel of the boot near Manduria, which was our real final destination. There we turned in the new plane we had flown over and waited for orders. A few more days and our crew was split up, to be individual replacements for the old crews. One of our waist gunners and I were assigned to a crew that had almost finished their missions.

Our base in Italy was in a very poor part of the country. The houses in Manduria were built with each house in a block having a common wall with its neighbor. The people would go in the morning to their fields out of the city and work their individual plots. When the Germans left, they stripped the city of anything useful. Little kids would follow any G.I. who was smoking a cigarette. When he threw the butt down, the kid would grab it, knock the light off and put it in his pocket to take home to his parents. We went into what passed for a bar for a drink. The bar was one room in the front of a house with a dirt floor. The only furniture was a long table with bottles of wine, a stack of glasses and a pan of water. You could sample the wines to see which you wanted, then get that one for three cents for about a six ounce glass. When you finished, they would give your glass a quick dip into the pan of water and set it back in the pile.

When I started flying missions, we flew at twenty thousand feet. It was around twenty to twenty-five degrees below zero. The B-24 was far from airtight. We had to walk around bottles located around the plane. They were small oxygen bottles you could carry. If you had to leave your position, you would unhook your mask from the main line and snap on a carry around bottle. Otherwise you could pass out from lack of oxygen. In the extreme cold and sitting on a cold steel seat for a long period, a rest room was a necessity. Our "relief tube" was a plastic tube leading to the outside of the plane with a funnel on the end and an empty ammunition box. The box was usually thrown out on the way home. My first mission was a shipyard and the second was a big marshalling yard, what we call

a railroad yard. They were both in northern Italy and were uneventful.

Our third mission was on April 29 to Toulon, France, bombing sub pens. These were tunnels deep underwater going back under the shore. They were covered with about ten feet of reinforced concrete and about twenty feet of earth. We destroyed one ship in the harbor and badly damaged another. We were getting heavy flak during the bomb run and after we released our bombs, we got our final hit in the bomb bay, breaking gas lines. Gas was pouring out heavy. It was on fire when we bailed out and if the bomb bay door had been closed so it couldn't ventilate, it probably would have exploded. It did explode after we all got out safely.

I landed in a small, plowed field in a suburb of Toulon named Cuess. We were all captured immediately. At the time of my capture I was a Sgt. in the U.S.A.A.F., Serial No. 32848375, 450th Bomb Group, 722nd Squadron 15th Air Force. There was a German patrol of five or six waiting for me. We spent the night at a German fighter field. We traveled to Frankfort, Germany in compartment cars – two guards and two prisoners to a compartment. We were held and interrogated at Dulag Lufh. We had been briefed on what to expect and I gave the interrogator my name, rank and serial number and refused to tell him anything more.

When we had been briefed, we had been told we could look forward to good food, wine, an act of being friendly and pretty girls waiting on us. That's the way it went. The first afternoon there were four of us at the headquarters of a German fight field, in command of a German Major. In the middle of the afternoon, a small table was set up in what I would call a living room. The same building was also the living quarters for the Major. We were seated at the table with a big bowl of delicious potato stew and a glass of wine. We knew what was going on. He wanted us to get drunk and start talking. So we sipped the wine and the Major guzzled. A girl the Major said was French, but I felt was a member of the German army, kept filling our glasses. Later in the day, the rest of the crew, with the exception of one of our gunners, and the other crew that was shot down were brought in.

That evening we were all seated at a long table along with the German Major. More wine

and a fine meal was served to us by two girls who kept being friendly to us. In the middle of the meal, the German Major stood up and said, "You know the other fellow with you? We had to shoot him." He was the one who hadn't showed up yet and he was Jewish. Our pilot, who was also a Major, jumped up and said, "You bastards have finally got that bad!" All of us were real mad and the German Major got scared. He said that our gunner was all right. He had sprained an ankle when he landed and they had taken him to their hospital. They then gave him a small tour of the field and it was too late to bring him over so they kept him there. He showed up the next day. When we went to bed that night the German Major was supported between two German soldiers. His legs were quite unsteady.

After two days, I was out of there and was on my way to the prison camp Stalag XVII B at Krems, Austria, about thirty miles from Vienna. We traveled in forty-and-eight boxcars. These boxcars were first made by the French in World War I. They were made to carry forty men or eight horses. That was where they got their name. We had thirty-five of us in one end and eight guards in the other. We were so jammed in that if we laid down to sleep there wasn't room to roll over. With the exception of one stop up in the hills to go out in the field and relieve ourselves, we were in the boxcar for eight days with no food or water. When we got to Krems we had to walk about three miles to the prison camp. I arrived at the camp on, or about May 11, 1944 and was there until sometime in April, 1945.

When we got to the camp, the older prisoners had something ready for us to eat and had made eating utensils for us. Our soup bowls were one pound powdered milk cans with a metal handle held by a strip of metal. The drinking cup was a number two can with the same kind of handle. We got a tablespoon and that was it.

The barracks in the camp were wood frame construction with no ceilings. The camp held about four thousand prisoners, divided into four compounds. Each compound had four double barracks. Each end held 150 men and was separated by a washroom, which was unheated and supplied only with cold water. The barracks let a lot of cold in and were

unheated except for a half a scuttle of coal, when available, used at noon in a cook stove to heat food. The combination of cold and moisture from breathing caused moisture to collect on and drip from the ceiling until somebody hung a tin can under the drip. This large collection of cans earned the barracks the nickname of tin can alley. This combination of cold and moisture caused chills, which led to uncontrollable shivering, which could last for several days. For cleaning, the Germans supplied only brooms made of branches. We had wooden framed bunks that were two bunks long, two bunks wide, and two bunks high. The mattresses were burlap stuffed with excelsior.

The Germans would furnish a big tub of hot water for breakfast, which we used to make coffee from instant coffee in the Red Cross parcels. We had a tub of boiled rutabagas, quite wormy, or rutabaga soup, also usually wormy for lunch, and sometimes a tub of boiled turnips for supper or sometimes another tub of water. Sometimes we got a thin barley soup, a cereal similar to cream of wheat, occasionally boiled potatoes, and a very irregular issue of rye bread. The rest of our food was from the Red Cross parcels. We were supposed to get one a week. More often it was one divided by two or occasionally three prisoners and sometimes more than a week apart. By the standards established by the Geneva Convention and the International Red Cross, we were below starvation a big part of the time and constantly hungry. One condition that a lot of us had was a breaking of the pores and a slight bleeding when shaving. This we were told was a result of malnutrition. Everybody lost a considerable amount of weight.

Our toilets were outside latrines constructed of brick. They were nonflushable and made in the manner of old-fashioned outhouses, only much larger. The solid and liquid waste collected in a concrete storage chamber underneath and was pumped out when it became filled. In hot weather the odor became quite unpleasant. We also had a small outhouse type latrine built into the end of each barracks, which we avoided using in hot weather for the same reason of sanitation. We were, however, sometimes forced to use these during air raids at night. The Germans feared weapons drops to arm a mass breakout.

Many of the things that happened in prison camp were funny, some serious. Some funny things could have turned tragic. One of the guards was probably 6"3" or so and weighed

close to three hundred pounds. We were told by another guard that he had been a sparring partner for Max Schmeling. We were at roll call. He was walking across the front of my barracks group. Somebody hit him in the back of the head with a snowball. He turned around screaming in German and had his pistol halfway out of his holster. Nobody moved. He saw the other guards laughing at him and settled down. We decided he must have figured it was part of his initiation.

Our roll call snowball battles would have looked good in a movie. We were divided into compounds of about a thousand in each compound. When we went out to morning roll call, we would all make a few snowballs. When we were dismissed, we would wait for the next compound to be dismissed. Then both sides would rush the fences firing snowballs. Two or three thousand snowballs in the air at once. Any guards that were still in the area were fair game.

One time the guards came in and took out one of the prisoners. He had been charged with some form of sabotage and would have served six months of hard labor and six months of solitary. He probably wouldn't have survived. After making threats all day that the whole camp would suffer if he wasn't turned in, the next morning we all had to take everything we had and move out into the parade ground. This went on for three days. The first day the Luftwaffe guards searched, the second day the infantry, the last day the Gestapo. Guards were making bets and giving odds that he wouldn't be found. He was never found. The incident was used in an altered form in the movie Stalag XVII.

One day two POW's came into our barracks. One of them said, "There's a couple damn fools out there trying to paint their way out of camp." They had gotten hold of a bucket of paint and started to paint a stripe down the middle of the street to one of the gates. When they got to the gate, the guard apparently wasn't too bright. He opened the gate and let them keep painting. They quit painting too soon and took off. They were spotted and caught. This incident, in altered form, was also used in the movie.

The morale in the camp was very high. There were probably a few exceptions but we never doubted we would win the war. You never heard "If I get home." It was always

"When I get home." One of the biggest problems was letters from home. One woman would write and tell her son she didn't mind him going to all the parties they had in town for us, but she didn't want him bringing one of the German girls home with him. One P.O.W. who lived in the mountains down in one of the southeast states, got a letter that his father was marrying his girlfriend. One woman would write letters accusing her son of being a coward and being there living a good life. She said he should have been out fighting like the rest of the boys. He finally cracked up and made a rush for the wire. Several others tried to catch him. They yelled at the guards not to shoot, they would catch him. As soon as his hand touched the fence, the guard shot and killed him.

We lived like this for a year after I got there, then one day we started hearing rumors we would abandon the camp. We started getting ready, walking a lot more every day and making ourselves a pack out of a shirt. Then one day we were told it would be the next day. Everything we had was divided, the Red Cross parcels, and what bread was left in the storeroom.

The main reason for our moving out of the camp was the advancement of the Russian Army. It was obvious that their advance would take in Stalag XVII. There was no Red Cross agreement between Germany and Russia. Atrocities to troops captured by either side were very common. The German leaders of the camp and the guards felt quite certain that, if they were captured by the Russians, they would be shot. The solution to their predicament was to get to the American front where they could surrender to American forces.

The day we left, we were called out early and told we were leaving. We put on our handmade pack, said good-bye to the ones left behind because they were unable to travel. Before we left, the guards agreed to give us a break every hour. They were in a panic to get away from the Russians so they started waiting two hours or more. Somebody in the front of the group got an idea how to fight this. The next day when they called a break, nobody listened. We walked another hour or more, then everybody headed for the side of the road and flopped in the field. The German Colonel in charge of our group (we were divided into eight groups of about five hundred apiece with a space between each group)

caught up ten or fifteen minutes later. His head was down on his chest, his face was flushed beet red, and he was panting hard to try and breathe. We thought he might die. We got a rumor that one guard in one of the groups did die. We had no more trouble about breaks.

The first day we didn't stop until about 10:30 that night. We were in the middle of an Austrian village and the guards didn't know where we would spend the night. We laid down on the cobblestone street without taking our packs off while they decided what to do. We were in the foothills most of the time, staying off from the main roads.

We had no trouble with the Austrian people except that we were quite concerned about cities that had been bombed. We had to go through the city of Ling, which was being bombed regularly and we didn't know what to expect. They had been bombed always around noon. We left early and didn't stop until we had traveled the few miles to the city, all the way through, and three miles out the other side. To my knowledge there were no incidents.

One day we were going past a small white house with a picket fence. There were two women in the yard behind the fence. One had a big loaf of bread under her arm and a big butcher knife in her hand, chopping off slices of bread. The other was catching the slices and handing them out to anybody who could reach them.

One day we were going by a farmhouse that was back a ways up a steep lawn. There was a pretty, young Austrian girl, probably sixteen or seventeen, sitting in the lawn down by the road, watching us. One of our group yelled out a not-too-nice compliment. She smiled and answered in English better than his. He looked like he wanted a place to hide.

Another time, one of the guys right next to me got bored, so he started chatting with the guard walking along side of us. He kept a big smile on his face and started in with "You know, you are about the ugliest thing I ever saw." The guard thought he was being friendly and got a big grin on his face and answered "Ja Ja". Next he told him "I bet your mother was a hippopotamus and your father was a baboon." Another grin and a "Ja Ja."

He finally got tired off chatting and stopped talking with the guard. The guard didn't understand English so none of us got shot.

We kept walking, day after day, until we arrived at a village. We were out or almost out of food. The way I heard what happened was, a Red Cross representative was at that town waiting to make his (regular) inspection. He saw our condition and notified our State Department. They came right back with a message through the representative. They were not to move us any further until they got food to us. We stayed three days. I slept in an orchard. On the fourth day, four big, canvas covered American trucks with big red crosses painted on the sides, with Swiss drivers, roared into the town, jammed with Red Cross parcels. The message from our State Department had been, if we went any farther without food, all the guards from the top officers down to the lowest guards, would suffer the consequences.

From there we walked to the city of Branau, Austria and there we camped up in the woods. We built lean-to's from the branches of trees - what few were left from being used by groups that arrived before us. Three of us slept in one lean-to. Every night it snowed. Our body heat was enough to melt the snow. The next day would be largely taken up getting dried out and warmed up.

One day, after about three or four days of this, we looked across the river and saw American tanks coming down the road. Our chaplain, who had traveled with us, and the German Colonel in charge of the guards went across the river and stood in the road in front of the approaching tanks. They held up an American flag and stopped the tanks.

There were nine tanks and the captain leading them got out, looked at the chaplain and said, "What the hell are you doing here?" The chaplain replied, "I was just going to ask you the same thing." They came back to the woods where the tank captain accepted the surrender of the area and about twenty thousand allied prisoners. The captain told us "You are no longer prisoners, you are now members of the United States Armed Forces."

He said that there were two other groups in the area like his, and he would contact them

by radio and tell them where we were so they wouldn't shell us. He took off heading for Vienna, trying to beat the Russians there. The middle of the next day his infantry support arrived and took our guards out. This was May 3, 1945. We stayed there for a couple days and moved into the city of Branau. I stayed for the remainder of our time in an aluminum factory. We were sitting in a field watching a U.S.O. show. The show was interrupted to inform us the war had ended.

A few days later we were flown by C-47's to a field in France. We then took a truck convoy to Camp Lucky Strike. This was one of three camps, all named after cigarettes, set up to process liberated prisoners. We stayed there for two weeks on a very special diet. We were not allowed seconds, but the French Red Cross had a tent set up serving eggnog, very rich in nutrients. We could have them any time of the day, as many as we wanted to stand in line and wait for. The first thing we got was a hot shower. We were deloused, issued new uniforms, and our old uniforms were destroyed. The camp was at the harbor city of Le Havre.

We then boarded a troop ship, the Le Jeune. It was a former German luxury liner scuttled in a harbor in Argentine, raised by the U.S. Navy, returned to the States and converted to a troop ship. We were told that cigarettes and candy were rationed. We thought that meant maybe a pack of cigarettes and a candy bar a day. It turned out to be two cartons a week and five candy bars a day. We were well fed, had movies in the mess hall, and they published a new pamphlet for us called R.A.M.P.'s Away. R.A.M.P. meant Recovered American Military Personnel. It was an enjoyable trip.

We passed the Statue of Liberty coming in to New York Harbor. What a sight that was! We were met on the dock by a group of women who were passing out milk and cookies. We had been told that there would be rooms available at the Grand Central Station Hotel. They had none and didn't know where there were any. They did give us directions to a hotel the U.S.O. had taken over just for servicemen. We stayed there that night, not knowing where we were. The next morning we looked out and there were fruit and vegetable carts all over. It was in the Brooklyn shopping district. We caught a train to Fort Dix, New Jersey. There we were processed as fast as they could. Records and

where we would report after our furlough.

I didn't do anything real exciting on my furlough home. We spent a lot of time just talking, catching up on everything. Mom would cook big meals and I would fill my plate but halfway through I would be stuffed. Warren came home on furlough from the hospital. We were up most of the night talking. We went to a few ball games and did some fishing. My brother-in-law, Charles Lampila, took me to get some driving practice and then to take my test. I spent one day going to Spencer and got to talk with some of the old gang. Our favorite hangout was the V.F.W. We sat at the bar and refought the war. The V.F.W. put on a dinner for the ex-POW's and our families. Mom and Dad went.

One of the highlights of my furlough at home was my cute little, five-year-old, niece, Diane Lampila, with long blond ringlets. She was up to our house every day. In the morning she would get me by the hand and say, "Let's go on a date." We always ended up at the Ex-Cel dairy down the street for ice cream.

From there I went to Atlantic City, New Jersey. We lived in hotels, ate like kings, and had nothing to do but go to movies or theatre stage shows, sit in a tavern and sip beer, and lie around on the beach or swim. After about a month of this, I got orders to report to the Army Air Base at Syracuse, New York. I worked in the orderly room along with a few others, typing out daily orders and taking care of the passbook, and waited to be discharged. After a few weeks, the first sergeant got me a ten-day furlough and said he would hold it in his desk. If I got back to Syracuse, he would have to turn it in as a furlough. If I got orders to report for discharge, he would throw it away. After a few days, I got a letter telling me to report to Rome Air Base, Rome, New York for discharge. My brother, Bob, was already home and he drove up to Rome to pick me up.

I went through all the lines, turned in most of my clothes (we were allowed to keep two outfits), collected my pay, picked up my discharge, went out the gate and out of the service.