



**Adventures Of
An Army
Blowhard**

BY JOSEPH N. FISHER



Chapter I

Greetings From Uncle Sam

When I saw his picture in July 1943, I finally realized the guy in the tall hat was pointing at me. Uncle Sam then sent me a nice letter with a salutation that said "Greetings" and the United States Army drafted me. I assumed there was a mistake. Why would the Army want a skinny, adolescent like me, weighing less than 125 pounds to become one of America's fighting men? It just did not add up.



But there was no mistake. On July 23, 1943, one month after graduation from high school, I was a Private in the U.S. Army. Six months later, on January 16, 1944, I boarded a troop ship, bound for the British Isles and an unknown future. Talk about culture shock! Within five months I weathered the drudgery of basic training, was declared fit for combat duty, and was on board an ocean liner headed for the European Theater of Operations.

I arrived at the Army Reception Center at Camp Grant, Illinois on July 24 where we watched endless orientation films, were given shots, and practiced saluting. One day a second lieutenant congratulated me on the excellence of my salute, which was the highlight of my stay at Camp Grant.

We left Grant on August 3, 1943. The train trip was leisurely and comfortable and I thought, "Army life is pretty good." I shared a roomette with Hank Gawlik and one other guy during the long train trip to Texas.

It was the middle of summer when we arrived and the Texas heat was like facing a blast furnace although that stifling introduction seemed appropriate for the hell that was called Basic Training.

Camp Wolters was my home for the next five months and the metamorphosis from civilian to soldier was complete after seventeen weeks of basic training.

Roll call was the beginning of a series of lessons on blind obedience. Sometimes the whistle would blow at 3:00 in the morning, a signal that meant, "get out the door and line up on the parade ground." If the officers decided we did not come out fast enough, we were ordered to repeat the drill until they were satisfied, or maybe they were also tired of the exercise and wanted to get back in the sack.

From dawn to dusk, we were under the merciless Texas sun, practicing close order drill, listening to lectures on military courtesy, and learning how to disassemble an M1 rifle and put it back together. We were also randomly selected for KP duty, an abbreviation for Kitchen Police. When we were assigned to the kitchen, we hung a towel over the foot of our cot and were rudely awakened at four in the morning to begin our tasks in the mess hall. The recruits sat at large picnic-like tables and those on KP were waiters, responsible for refilling milk pitchers, supplying bread

or whatever was demanded. The soldiers stood until the officer on duty shouted "seats" and everyone did as they were ordered but did not eat. On the command of "eat" the noise became unbearable as the new soldiers reached, grabbed, and hollered for food and drink. When the noise became unbearable, the officer on duty would holler "At Ease," and the room was silent, almost as quiet as a GI's response to requests for volunteers. After a lecture on the blessings of silence, the recruits continued eating. It was quiet for a few moments but soon the sound decibels were higher even than before.

When the meal was over, KPs cleaned up the tables, mopped the floor, and then returned to the joys of basic training tasks.

The Army and high school were similar in some respects, but vastly different in others. We learned algebra, geometry, foreign languages, English literature, and science in high school. The Army taught the art of survival.

High school was paradise, a sanctuary where I studied literature, played trumpet in the band, and acted in school plays under the tutelage of the Oak Park and River Forest High School faculty.

The Army taught me how to shoot rifles, machine guns, and mortars, how to kill the enemy in hand-to-hand combat, how to throw a hand grenade, and how to dig a foxhole for protection from artillery and air attacks. We were also told how to perform the delicate task of removing a

bayonet from a dead enemy soldier. "Shoot him." they said, "and the blade can easily be retrieved."

We endured obstacle courses, twenty-mile hikes, and crawled under barbed wire while machine gunners fired live ammunition over our heads. We also learned a new language, the Army version of English.

For example when we counted cadence, "one" was always "hut" as in "hut, two, three, four" and when we were ordered to march, the command word was "harch." The word for bathroom was latrine the word for food was mess, and an acronym, "SNAFU", was defined as, "A chaotic or confused situation," translated by GIs everywhere as "Situation normal, all f----- up." I also learned that "Private," is an oxymoron because an Army Private's world is anything but private.

Lieutenants and sergeants were the faculty at Camp Wolters, Texas. They prodded, nagged, and ordered us to "listen up" because their instructions "might one day save our lives," they said.

Some instructors savored their role as tyrants and salted their instruction with liberal torrents of profanity as they taught death, destruction, and survival. Lieutenant Mode, one of our teachers, was the Devil Incarnate as far as his subordinates were concerned. Prior to becoming an army officer, he taught elementary school and he treated his "soldiers-to-be" like kids in grammar school. If a trainee dozed during a lecture, conducted under the relentless Texas sun, Lieutenant Mode would creep silently up to the sleeping recruit, and holler "Ten-Hut," (Army

pronunciation for "Attention"). Then he ordered the hapless victim to stand at attention for the balance of his harangue. If a recruit committed the unpardonable sin of chewing gum, he also stood at attention until the end of the lecture, with the gum stuck on the end of his nose.

Lieutenant Mode was a crude version of Professor Higgins, a character in Shaw's *Pygmalion*, who altered the persona of Eliza Doolittle. "Professor" Mode bellowed profanity, harassed, ridiculed, and diminished our self-esteem as he assiduously brainwashed his recruits. He programmed us to respond as soldiers, and to obey orders without thinking, a classic example of Pavlov's theory of conditioned response.

Much as we detested this imperious officer and his techniques, we cannot help but admire the results as we reflect on that distant past when a motley civilian group was transformed into battle-ready soldiers in only seventeen weeks.

The Army said that I was a man, but the real me was a naïve and innocent teen-ager, shocked by army language that was different from what I was used to. I had heard the "uck" words before but not in such scurrilous vituperation as practiced by most of my comrades-in-arms. One "uck" word in particular was a noun, an adjective, adverb, and adjective and no sentence was complete without repetitive variations on this particular word. Of course, the climate for vulgar language has changed in the current generation where the "uck" words are in vogue without regard to gender, heavily influenced by movies, TV, and novels.

My address at Camp Wolters was Company C, Second Platoon 55th Battalion, a residence I shared with twenty-nine other recruits who ranged in age from adolescents to weather-beaten "old men" like Amos

Emerson who was 38 years old. My "roommates" included an illiterate Southern Illinois coal miner and several college graduates. Some were married with families and a few served jail sentences in their pre-army lives. One, Hank Gawlik became a life-long friend as the Army and fate brought us together for more than a year, from Camp Grant, Illinois to England, France, Belgium, and Germany.

Fred Fisher was one of my bunkmates. He wore glasses and one day, a stentorian voice came over the squawk box. "Fisher, report to the orderly room on the double." I hollered back, "Which Fisher?" and the reply was "Joseph." So I reported as ordered.

"Private Fisher, sir."

"Report to the dispensary and get your new glasses."

"But, sir, I don't wear glasses."

"Your name is Fisher, right?" I acknowledged that it was.

"Then move out, on the double."

So, I trotted off for the dispensary until I was out of the Sergeant's sight and I began a slow walk, wondering if the Army would force me to wear glasses even though I did not need them.

The doctor said, "read the lowest line that is legible." I did, and then he said, "now the other eye." I recited the letters correctly.

"Why are you here?" he asked, obviously annoyed.

"Sir, I tried to tell the Sergeant there has been a mistake. There is another Private Fisher in our barracks and he does wear glasses. I think he's the one you want."

I reported back to the Sergeant and told him the doctor wants Fred Fisher. He replied, "Why didn't you tell me in the first place?" and he turned to the squawk box and ordered Fred to report to the Orderly Room. "On the double," of course.

During the endless regimen at Camp Wolters, I occasionally played trumpet with a small band on Saturday nights, hoping that I might avoid an ominous future of overseas combat by being permanently assigned to a band. That was an idle dream of course, because it seemed there was no place in the Army for musicians and I was to be an infantry replacement destined for combat in either Europe or Asia. At the time we could think of nothing worse than our Camp Wolters ordeal so we didn't care where they sent us.

When basic training ended, we were allowed a week off to visit home before going to the East Coast. The army called this hiatus a "delay en-route," a mini vacation that began on December 12 and ended on December 21, just four days before Christmas.

After spending a week at Fort Meade, Maryland, we went to Camp Shanks, New York and later boarded the *Ile de France* at one o'clock in the morning on January 16, 1944. As I followed a long line of GIs up the gangplank of this huge ocean liner, an army band played an inspirational

anthem called "The Pennsylvania Polka." I turned and listened for a moment, thinking how lucky they were to be in a stateside army band.

Tugboats eased the *Ile de France* away from the pier just before dawn, towing and pushing us into the harbor, and on to the open seas where Navy blimps and fighter aircraft escorted us for a few days, scanning the sea below for enemy submarines. When our escorts left, we were alone, 8,000 souls mired in the monotony and claustrophobic conditions of an overcrowded troop ship. I was reminded of these cramped conditions many years later when I watched "pushers" in Tokyo, Japan. Their job was to shove and push commuters into packed subway cars to insure that every bit of space was utilized.

We slept on canvas bunks in the *Ile de France*, stacked five high with barely enough room to turn over. Showers were available aboard ship but bathing in salt water where soap would not lather was a ritual most of my traveling companions declined. Small wonder, the formerly posh *Ile de France* smelled like a high school locker room by the time our voyage ended.

Since our "cruise ship" was navigating the Atlantic Ocean, we were certain that Great Britain was our destination but there were those who said we were not really going to England and a rumor spread faster than today's electronic mail, suggesting that the voyage was an elaborate hoax. According to the grape vine, the Army wanted us to believe we were headed for England when in fact we were destined to land somewhere in

the Pacific Theater of Operations. We doubted the accuracy of this news but we were not sure, so we considered the possibility. The Army grapevine, a haven for rumormongers helped pass the time and was almost as effective a stimulus to the imagination as curvaceous pinup pictures that graced the walls of Army barracks throughout the world.

Eight days later the Asian rumor was disproved when on January 25, 1944 we anchored off the coast of Greenock, Scotland.

Chapter II

Memories of Woolacombe

The phrase, "Hurry up and wait" captured the reality of Army life and succinctly summed up my first year in the service. For example, we had to leave home four days before Christmas in order to wait a month before boarding the *Ile de France* and after spending nine days aboard ship, we waited another two days off the coast of Scotland before we could go ashore.

We thought we were through with basic training when we left Camp Wolters, but after arriving in Scotland and subsequently Wales, we repeated the daily routines we had grown accustomed to in Texas. We practiced close order drill every day, took long hikes, did our calisthenics, listened to lectures, and waited, marking time until we were permanently assigned. Since the invasion of Europe would not begin for another five months, combat replacements were not needed.

One morning at daily roll call, two names were called. "Gawlik and Fisher, Pack your gear and be prepared to leave immediately," barked the sergeant.

Our orders were sealed which had a James Bond ring to it, sort of like embarking on a secret



mission. We packed, then "hurried up and waited" for a truck that took us to the train station.

Four more U.S. soldiers from various outfits, including artillery and infantry units boarded the railway carriage at stops along the way. One of the newcomers was Bill White who was soon to become a roommate and a long-time friend.

When the train stopped at towns and villages along the way, we got off and searched for food. One of the refreshment stands sold pies that looked especially inviting with crusts that reminded me of those my Mother baked. "What kind are they?" I asked the shopkeeper and was told they were kidney pies. I was not prepared for their unfamiliar taste and my first bite was my last sampling of kidney pie. It reminded me of home when the meat looked like steak but turned out to be liver. I never ordered this unsavory pastry again, although kidney pie is considered a delicacy among the English.

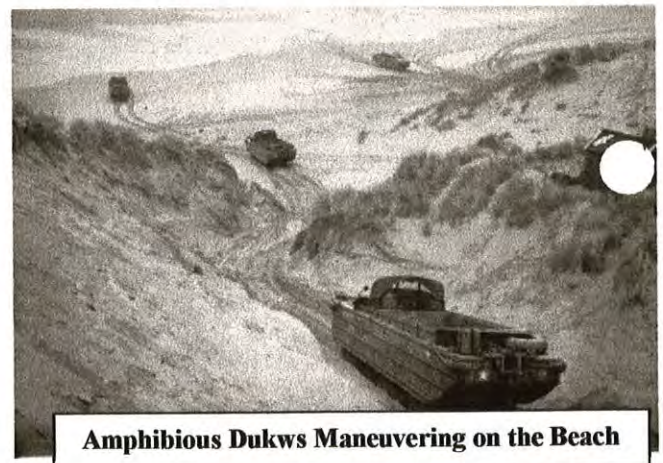
When we arrived at our destination, an Army truck was waiting, parked by a sign that identified the station as "Mortehoe." We asked the driver if he knew why we were here and he said he didn't have a clue. He was only told to take us to Woolacombe.

After a short drive, we arrived in Woolacombe and were greeted by a staff sergeant, who opened our sealed envelope, read the contents, and looked perplexed. He said, "I have no idea what this means but I'll check it out in the morning. In the meantime you will be assigned a temporary billet." Our quarters were luxurious compared to our recent standard of living in Wales where home was a canvas tent, heated by a pot-bellied



coal stove. Living in a real building, complete with roof, windows and walls was an unbelievable treat, if only for one night.

There was no reveille in the morning so we slept late. When I awoke, the sun was shining and the rolling green hills of Woolacombe were a landscape painting of incredible beauty. Then I noticed that something was wrong with that pastoral scene because American soldiers were crawling up the hills, carrying M1 rifles, with full combat packs on their



backs. They had “landed” on the beach and were practicing for the invasion of Europe, which was to occur four months later in June 1944.

My brief communion with nature’s beauty ended abruptly when I realized that we were here to train for the Invasion of Europe. I would gladly have eaten an entire kidney pie if only someone would say, “It’s just a dream kid. Wake up.” The “awakening” did come later that day:

"You are henceforth assigned to the Assault Training Center Band," were the words that profoundly changed my life in the Army for the next



two years

Three weeks passed before our band instruments arrived and while we waited for our musical

"weapons," we were assigned various tasks. I was a waiter in the non-commissioned officers lounge called the "48 Club." I served beer and hard cider, which I did enthusiastically when I realized I was earning extra money. The "non-coms" left generous tips and after a night's work, my pockets were filled with shillings, florins, and half crowns. I was not sure of their value in relation to American money but I did know it was better than landing on the beach and crawling on my belly up

the hills of Woolacombe.

Our band instruments and Warrant Officer Charles Banner finally arrived. Mr.

Banner appeared to be about

fifty years old but he may have been older.



Mr. Banner



Banner had a wife and family of six kids back in Red Bank, New Jersey, although he never mentioned them that I recall. It was also rumored that he had served in World War I, which was possible, because there were

only twenty-two years between the end of that war and America's involvement in World War II.

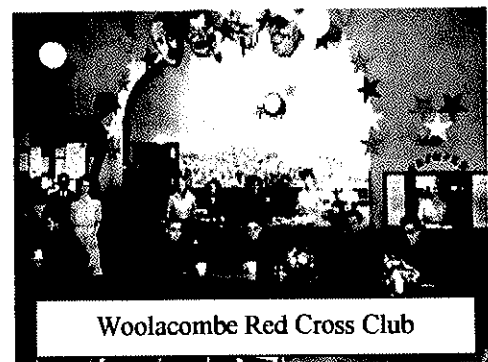
Charles Banner was like an absent-minded professor who frequently continued to wave his baton long after the music ended, as though his mind was elsewhere.

Our quarters were in the home of Mrs. Davis and her daughter Enid, which



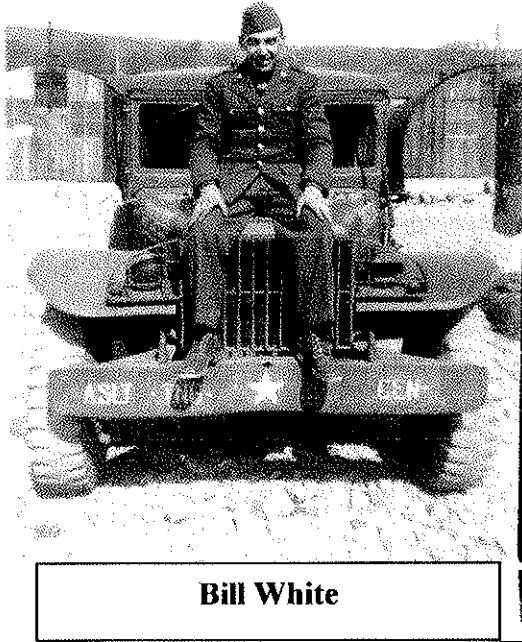
must have been an ordeal for them, a captive audience forced to endure the strident noise of 27 musicians practicing on drums and brass instruments.

We marched in parades, performed in concerts, and participated in the military ceremony of Retreat when the American flag was lowered at sundown, accompanied by the band's rendition of the Star Spangled Banner. Some of us also played in the Dance Orchestra and we traveled to various bases in the vicinity of Woolacombe where GIs and the local ladies did their thing on the dance floors of Devon.



Woolacombe was Shangri-La, an island of quiet beauty, even though 200 miles away, German rocket and air attacks were a nightly reality in London. We lived a fantasy beyond any imagined view we might have had about army life. Camp Wolters prepared us for death and destruction but could not predict that one day we would saunter down to the center of Woolacombe and buy hot rolls from the local bakery, or sit on the beach and gaze at the Bristol Channel, or contemplate the world from a hillside in Woolacombe.

Memories of events are inseparable from friends with whom adversity and joy are equally shared.



One of my Army buddies was Bill White, a unique character from Yonkers, New York who I first met on the train ride from Wales to Woolacombe. Bill was a talker who told wonderful stories and anecdotes about his life and people he knew. He was 32 years old, one of the "old men" in the outfit, who had more civilian

friends in Woolacombe than did the natives because of his outgoing nature and love of people. He was also a bit of a con artist. Bill played cymbals in the marching band and probably stated in his Army Personnel records that he was a drummer in civilian life, although cynics wondered if had ever held a drumstick except at Thanksgiving.

We kept in touch after the war and visited one another in New York and Chicago.

Bill is now deceased.

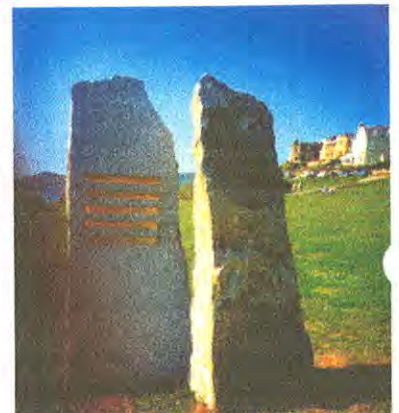
Marilyn Myers grew up in Woolacombe and recently wrote the story of "Woolacombe at War," including a description of the first and only time the village was bombed.

"On 15th August 1940 Woolacombe had its first and only bombing when on Thursday evening in the fields behind Putsborough, a German Bomber off loaded seven bombs, fortunately only resulting in the death of a cow or unfortunately if you were that cow!"

Mrs. Myers also writes about Germans coming to Woolacombe for fresh water. She wrote: ***"Peter Willis, who served on a German U-boat and now resides in Woolacombe, recalls regularly coming in at night to Woolacombe Bay to get fresh water. Frighteningly, nothing was known at the time."***

There was also tragedy during the war years at Woolacombe as Marilyn describes in this excerpt:

"One Saturday morning towards the end of November 1943, or beginning of December, the Assault Training Center, against local advice from the coast guards were attempting practice landings in amphibious DUKWs in appalling conditions, known to



the locals as the black east wind which brings high seas and lethal under currents. Three of the DUKWs started to drift towards the rocks and when they turned parallel to the beach in an attempt to rectify the situation, they were almost instantly rolled over and capsized, killing most of the troops on board. The local memory estimates that 50 to 60 men drowned. When the bodies were laid out in the Forty-Eight Club they covered most of the floor.

But the true figure may never be known."

Marilyn closes her Woolacombe memories with these words:

"As I summarize this story and reflect on Woolacombe at war I see a time when the excitement of the unknown, of living for today, not knowing if there would be any tomorrows, was normality for the young men and women living and training in the village. But I also see in my mind a young Brian Watts running up the path too late to wave goodbye to his brother on the departing bus, desperately waving to get his brother's attention whom he was never to see again. And I can hear Margaret Pearts words:

" I got up in the morning and every thing was fine, but on hearing of the death of my brother, from that moment on nothing was ever the same again."

I feel these words epitomize war, whatever the time, the place or nationality and so I say thank you to all those men and women that enabled me to be here today to recount this story of Woolacombe at War."

Now, fifty-four years later, a grandchild asks, "What did you do in the war, Grandpa?" And for just a moment, I hesitate to say, "I was a trumpeter in an Army band."

But that moment passes as I recall memories of a blessing bestowed by God with a little help from a Lady named "Luck," in a sanctuary called Woolacombe.

Chapter III

A Day At The Beach

Sometimes we forget what happened yesterday while other memories stay with us forever. I have recollections of my past, preserved in those mysterious chambers of my memory that are as vivid today as they were more than fifty years ago; like the events of September 22, 1944, the day we landed in Normandy, France at a place called Omaha Beach.

Few people know or care what happened on September 22 1944. Some may remember because they celebrate a birthday or anniversary on that date or they were aboard ship with me when we landed in France on a foggy September morning.

There is no historic significance attached to the date because our arrival was a routine day at the beach compared to the events of June 6, 1944 when American forces landed on Omaha Beach. That historic invasion marked the beginning of the end of World War II in Europe.

Four months had elapsed since the invasion of Normandy and our September arrival, but the battle scars were still evident as we waited our turn to leave the ship. The harbor was littered with the wreckage of landing craft, their sterns pointing in haphazard angles just above the surface, helplessly drifting amongst debris abandoned during the devastating battle on D-Day.

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We descended on rope ladders attached to the side of our ship and boarded landing craft, just as the D-Day soldiers did, but there was a significant difference on this day in September. There were no enemy guns shooting at us from cliffs above the beach.

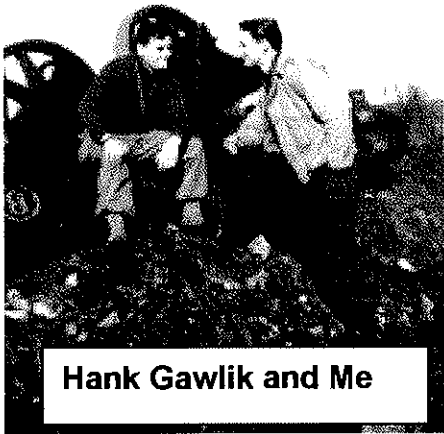
"How could anyone have survived?" I wondered as images of ordinary kids like me flashed through my mind, scrambling down similar rope ladders on D-Day while heavy artillery and machine gun fire delivered destruction and death, tragically ending so many young lives. Some of the landing craft sank on that fateful day, and all aboard drowned, even before our soldiers could reach the beach. As we approached the shore we saw a path rising to a plateau, where the Germans were entrenched on that historic day of invasion, protected by a tremendous height advantage over the advancing American invaders.

After a long hike up the steep incline, a never-to-be-forgotten panorama lay before us. Row after row of white crosses marked the graves of kids like me, many of whom probably trained at Camp Wolters. Reflecting a quiet dignity, the crosses were solemn symbols that attested to the severity of the fighting on that sixth day of June 1944. Selfishly, we thanked God for our good fortune, and somewhat uneasily wondered why we were spared.

I was reminded of this thought many months later when the band performed at a concert in an army hospital in Aachen Germany. When we finished playing, a patient came up to me and said, "Don't I know you?" I

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did not recognize him until he reminded me that we trained together at Camp Wolters. He was one of the soldiers who assaulted the Germans at Omaha Beach on D-Day and he described how he was blown out of his landing craft, lost his rifle and other gear, and was subsequently captured by the Germans, then escaped, and was later wounded in yet another battle. As he spoke, I felt guilty, as though I should apologize and I unconsciously clutched the trumpet that was my lifeline to survival.



After all the troops had landed on our mini D-Day in September, we set up camp on the plateau near the American cemetery. I shared a pup tent with my friend, Hank Gawlik and for the next five days we waited for orders to move on.

One night Bjorn Andreason, one of the band members took his violin from its case and played Ave Maria. It was the most beautiful rendition I had ever heard and was particularly memorable in the tableau of little pup tents, bon fires, and quiet American soldiers, silently touched by the beauty of Bjoren's violin.

Chapter IV

Make Mine a Rusty Hot Chocolate

I experienced some miserable moments in the Army, but nothing that compared to a train trip across France and Belgium.

We boarded a boxcar On September 28, that bore these words on the sides of the cars: **40 hommes, 8 chevaux**, translated by our army-issued English-French dictionary, to mean the freight car had a capacity of 40 men and 8 horses. Our group had no horses but more than 40 men were wedged into each boxcar plus all our gear. It was impossible to lay down because space was so limited and we traveled like that for four days, crouched in a sitting position as the smell of unwashed humans intensified. Irritability increased with each passing day of confinement and we longed for our former luxurious shelters in small, but cozy pup tents in Normandy.

East and westbound trains traveled on the same rails because so many of the railroad tracks were destroyed by air and artillery attacks. There were interminable delays as we waited on sidings for trains to pass, coming from the opposite direction. The highlight of those delays was getting out of the boxcar, stretching our legs, and filling our canteen cups with hot water, tapped from the steam engine's boiler. The water was rusty and not too clean, but it did not taste as bad as it looked after we dissolved our ration of hot chocolate into the reddish-brown liquid.

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This was an unpleasant moment until we thought about the guys who had to fight for every piece of ground they gained amid the hedgerows of St Lo and Caen.

Like so many events in life that seem momentarily unbearable, our discomfort in a boxcar was only a temporary inconvenience, especially compared to other freight car passengers whose destination was the infamous gas chambers of Dachau and Buchenwald.

Chapter V

Bugles, Bombs, Boody, and The Bulge

The train ride ended on September 28 and then began a series of continuous relocations through France and Belgium. During the next 39 days we moved three different times, spending an average of thirteen and as little as three days at some locations, as we headed toward Germany. We lived in Carentan, Fontainbleau, Chateau Fleury, St Trond, and Tongres, and their names seemed to fly by like station signs seen from a passing train.

During our migration through France and Belgium, Mr. Banner disappeared for almost a month. Apparently he was summoned to a higher headquarters for some reason that was never disclosed.

Sergeant Boody was temporarily in charge. Boody was the drum major when we were on parade, as well as Banner's confidante, record keeper, and spy who caused a major change in my Army life shortly after Banner returned to our group.

More detail on that episode later.

Sergeant Boody was not a likeable person. His most distinguishing characteristic was a nondescript moustache, and beady little eyes that watched for even the slightest infraction of rules by the band members, which he then reported to his leader when Banner returned from his sabbatical.

We were in Chateau Fleury, France from October 4 to October 28. A highlight of this period was traveling with a USO show, a musical called "Panama Hattie." I was one of several band members selected to round out the pit orchestra of four musicians who were part of the troupe from New York City. We did this for almost three weeks and it was a great experience, one of the few times I was able to play my trumpet since arriving in Europe, because we were regularly assigned to guard duty and other non-musical pursuits.

Included in "other pursuits" was a special kind of guard duty. Hank Gawlik and I rode shotgun, so to speak, on a freight train. We lived in the caboose for three days and carried loaded carbines in case Jesse James or some other

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latter-day, European outlaw attacked, but no incidents occurred so we fired at tin cans lying along the tracks.

We finally enjoyed a sense of permanence when we arrived in Tongres, Belgium and stayed there for almost two months, from November 11 until January 13, billeted in a former German barracks. We performed at various concerts at this time and on one occasion we played in a tent, close to the front lines where GIs gathered to listen before they were sent forward. They sat on



their steel helmets, their faces expressionless, seemingly unaware of the music. This was a lucky break for them because we played poorly as artillery bursts and machine gun fire in the distance accompanied the sound of our horns.

I was the bugler when I drew guard duty, blowing reveille, chow call, and taps on my trumpet. One dark night, as I finished playing taps, the signal for lights out, a buzz bomb flew overhead leaving in its wake a trail of fire. Buzz bombs were unmanned German rockets with an eerie and unmistakable sound as they proceeded on their deadly missions. Whenever the engines stopped, it was time to hit the deck and pray for survival. Fortunately this flying bomb continued on, probably headed for London or Liege, Belgium, major cities that suffered through many buzz bomb attacks during the advent of the German V1 and V2 rocket warfare.

On December 16, 1944 we heard disturbing news. The German army launched a counter offensive, dubbed by historians as the "Battle of the Bulge." By December 22, the German troops had cut off all access roads to Bastogne where General McAuliffe and the 101st Airborne troops were headquartered.

The setback was as disappointing and dismal as the weather which was dark, foggy and overcast, accompanied by numerous snowstorms.

One German Army tactic was designed to create confusion among the Americans. English-speaking German soldiers, dressed in American uniforms,

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infiltrated American Army units and one of them scared hell out of me one cold night while I was on guard duty. I saw movement just outside the fence that surrounded our compound so I raised my rifle and shouted, "Halt! Who goes there."

A voice responded with unintelligible words that sounded like English with an accent, so once more I hollered, "Sergeant of the Guard, Post Number Three." Translation? "I'm scared to death. Please help me." I hoped the guy wouldn't do anything goofy because the safety release on my rifle was off and a live bullet was in the chamber. I did not want to shoot although the shot probably would have missed the target because my arms were shaking so much.

The Sergeant arrived and a conversation ensued between him and the intruder but I never did find out whether the man lurking in the shadows was a German soldier, or an inebriated American GI.

The American Army was in retreat and we were ordered to evacuate on December 22. Christmas packages arrived from home a few days before and in the midst of scurrying and packing, we gorged ourselves on cookies and candy, displaying uncharacteristic generosity as we offered to share our goodies with others in the band. Since everybody had their own treats to either eat or leave behind, there were no takers.

I'll never forget the day in late December when the weather finally cleared and thousands of Allied planes were in the sky. There were huge Flying Fortress bombers, protected by small fighter planes ready to battle the German Luftwaffe. It was the most spectacular and beautiful air show I ever witnessed.

The counter offensive known as the Battle of the Bulge finally ended on January 28, 1945. The battle that began on December 16 resulted in 8,477 Americans killed, more than 46,000 wounded and almost 1,000 were prisoners of war or missing in action. It was estimated that the Germans suffered even greater losses with almost 11,000 killed, 34,000 wounded, and 33,000 prisoners or missing. It was also Germany's last major effort in a war in which the Germans surrendered unconditionally on May 8, 1945, four months after the Belgian offensive began.

A Brush with Boody

My career with the Assault Training Center musicians, now the 421st ASF Band, came to an abrupt halt on February 17, 1945 in Namur, Belgium. I was dismissed because of a confrontation with Sergeant Boody during Mr. Banner's mysterious absence.

The details are vague as they usually are when trying to recall reasons for minor quarrels. But for some obscure reason, I challenged Boody to remove his stripes and fight like a man. (I wonder now if I was reenacting a scene from an old movie). Boody did not remove his Sergeant's stripes so we exchanged words, most of which were mine. It was a foolish show of defiance because the man with the higher rank is always right. I was wrong and should have known better.

Apparently Mr. Banner was ordered to reduce the number of men in the band because several others were also let go, including Hank Gawlik and Bill White, neither of whom had challenged Boody to fight it out. Maybe they were also booted because they were my friends.

Banner called a meeting the day after his return to Namur. He said some of us had let him down and had not lived up to his expectations during his absence and were therefore to be reassigned.

Mine was the first name on his list and I realized that I might have to pay a high price for a stupid mistake.

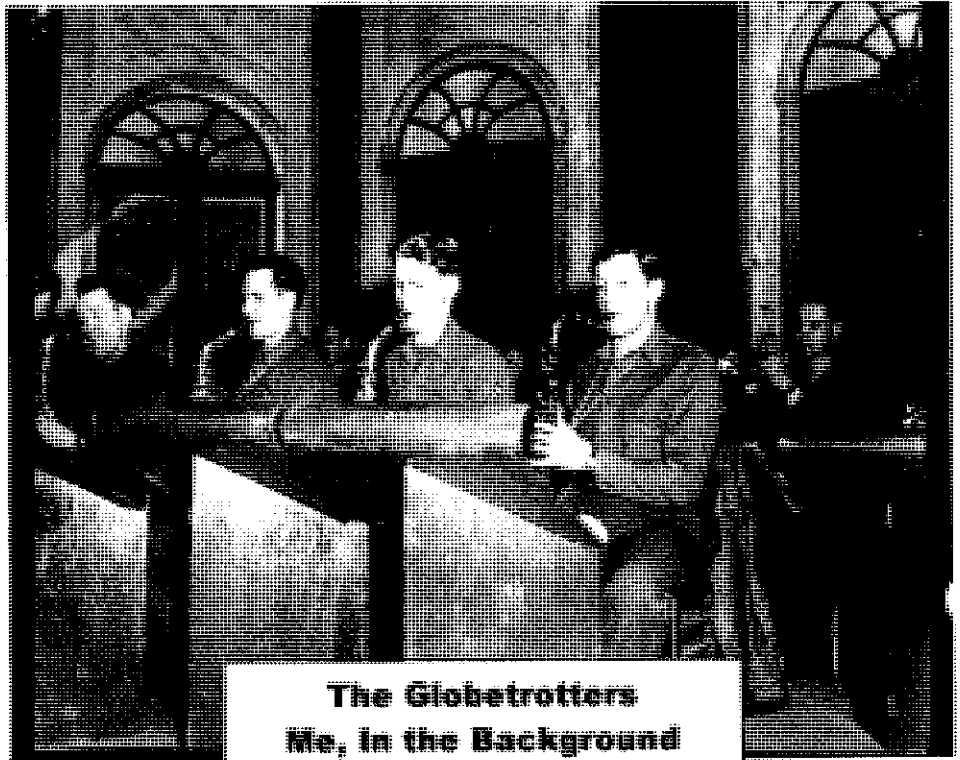
Then a second miracle occurred and I wondered again why my Guardian Angel was always there for me, even when I was in the wrong, as I was in the Boody Brush.

Chapter VI

Memories of Liege and the 423 ASF Band

Miraculously, another band submitted a requisition for a trumpet player and I was there, once again in the right place at the right time. I transferred to Liege on February 19, 1945 and joined a new group of musicians.

The band was quartered in a former Army hospital that had earlier suffered a direct hit from a buzz bomb. We lived in a section of the hospital that was still intact.



**The Globetrotters
Me, in the Background**

Warrant Officer Wilbur Smith in charge. He was young and an accomplished musician who played the tenor saxophone. Despite his casual disregard for rank, the band members respected him for the man he was.



The guys in the 423rd group were better musicians than my former companions and we were busy, playing either in concerts, for dances, or marching in parades.



Adventures of an Army Blowhard

We played once a week, sometimes more often, in the Palladium, a downtown Liege nightclub that catered to servicemen and their dates. I have many pleasant memories of Liege and my new band associates as well as several Belgian civilians who were my friends. I met two of them at the Palladium Nightclub. They were Ginette Luchtman and her Grandmother who was her constant companion and chaperone. Wherever Ginette went, Grandma was close behind. Grandma and I got along fine although she spoke only French and Flemish, neither of which I understood.

When I wrote letters about Ginette to my family, they thought romance was in the offing and that I would bring home a war bride, but I don't think that question was considered by either Ginette or me. Besides, where would Grandma sleep?

We stayed in Liege until March 28 and later when we were in Idstein, Germany, I hitchhiked on Army trucks and spent a three-day leave with Grandma and Ginette at their Liege home.



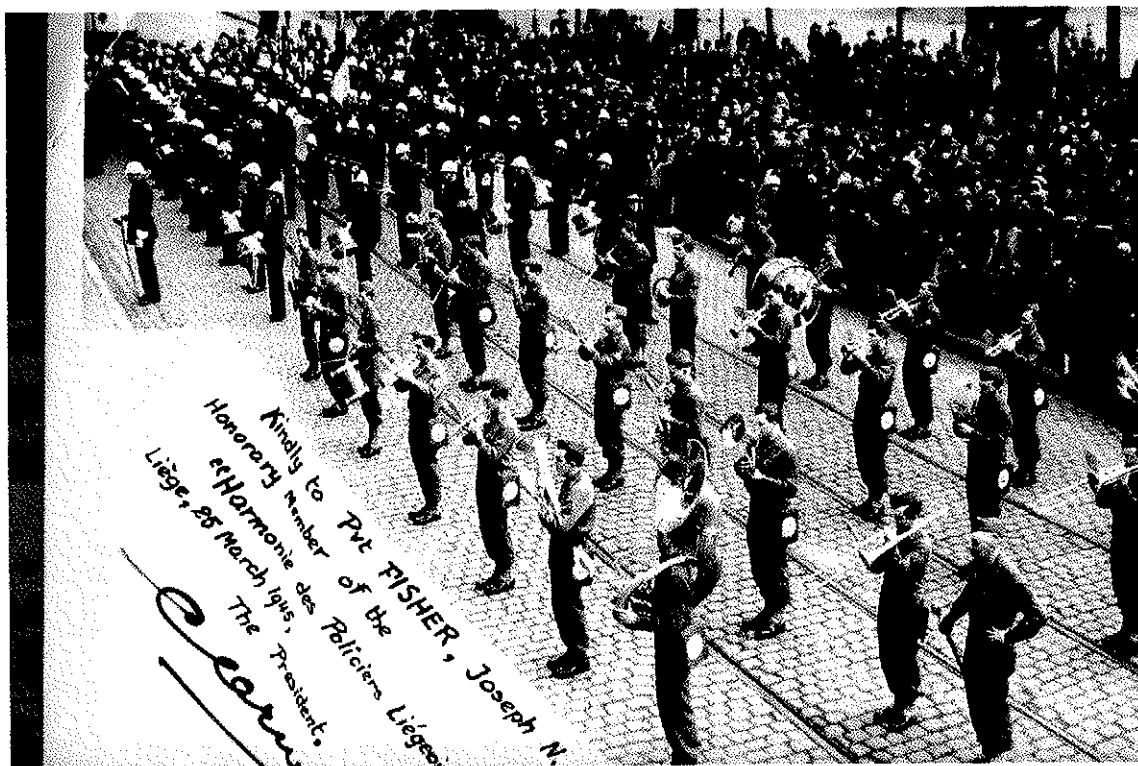
I stopped at a small café in Liege before I hit the road for Germany, after my brief furlough and ordered a cup of coffee. It was served in a miniature drip coffee maker. When hot water was poured into the top half, coffee flowed into the glass container. I was fascinated because I had never before seen such a device. I told the old gentleman how much I enjoyed the coffee and I asked, "Is it possible to buy one of these cups?" He replied that, "No, it is not possible," and went into the kitchen.

Adventures of an Army Blowhard

When he returned, he held a small box and presented it to me. I removed the lid and inside were two individual drip coffee cups exactly like the one I first saw. I was pleased and I asked how much I owed him and he said, "Nothing for the coffee, and the cups are a gift."

I was stunned by his generosity. Then he went on and said, "My country and I are grateful to America and its soldiers for all you have done for us and this small gift is merely a token of that gratitude."

I have never forgotten this man and his gift that I have treasured ever since that magical morning in a small café in Liege, Belgium.



One of many memorable occasions in Liege occurred during a parade of celebration on March 26, 1945, featuring the 423rd Band and the Liege Police Band. The American Musicians were named honorary members of the Police Band and a photograph was presented to each of us with an inscription from the mayor, attesting to the honor.

Liege, Belgium and Woolacombe, England gave me friendship, a feeling of community, and a sense of belonging when I was far away from home.

Chapter VII

The Long Voyage Home

The final days of my European odyssey began in Germany; a few months in Aachen, twelve days in Bad Godesburg, twenty-seven days in Idstein, three months in Rheims, France, and two months in Frankfurt. I felt like a nomad as cities and countries blurred in a geographic collage of foreign names.

We were in Bad Godesburg, Germany when the European war ended on May 8, 1945 and we talked about the Allied victory with an older German gentleman who lived in the neighborhood where we were staying. He said, in perfect English, "Even though this war is over, America should be prepared for the next big one with Russia." Fortunately the "next big one" did not happen, even though the "Cold War" between America and Russia lingered long after the end of World War II.

We dismissed the old man's remarks and speculated about our future. Now that the European war was over, would we be sent to the Pacific where that war was still raging, or would we be discharged and return to civilian life?

The band went to Frankfurt in October 1945 for the second time, having been there for a few days in June. Changes were evident and different from our first visit to that city when the "non-fraternization" order was in effect. At that time, barbed wire lined the streets to prevent German civilians and American soldiers from mingling. By October, the order was rescinded and American soldiers intermingled, mostly with German frauleins especially in the dance halls where the band did its thing.

We played twice a week in the Palm Garden Club and also performed on AFN (American Forces Network), an Army radio station that broadcast throughout Europe.

New faces gradually replaced old friends in the band as the lucky ones left for home and separation from the Army. A point system was in effect and the points were determined by length of service, overseas duty, and in some cases

Adventures of an Army Blowhard

personal hardship. I had 60 points and waited anxiously to be called for the long voyage home.

The "Blowhard" finally realized he had blown too hard over the past two years. It hurt too much when I played the trumpet due to a hernia that had developed over time. I did not want to be operated on by an unknown Army medic so I retired from trumpet playing and gradually became a "semi-professional, do-nothing goldbrick." Nobody seemed to care because we were all waiting to be returned to civilian life. At last, my name was called and I left Frankfurt on December 11, 1945, bound for Antwerp, Belgium.

It was New Years Eve when we boarded the Jonathon Edwards, a Liberty ship whose seaworthiness was soon to be tested in the wintry waters of the North Atlantic Ocean. There were 600 men aboard the Jonathon Edwards, compared to 8,000 troops on the Ile de France when I left for Great Britain, a voyage that took only eight days. Our return home would last almost a month, aboard a much smaller ship.

Tugboats eased the ship from its berth at 5:00 AM on New Year's Day, 1946 and by the time we reached the English Channel at 11:00 AM, the ship began to roll, dip, and sway, a preview of the worst that was yet to come.

Shortly after leaving the harbor, we were issued American money and the crisp new bills felt good. The German marks, French and Belgian francs issued to us in the various countries were like play money compared to the quality feel of American currency.



The clickety-clack sound of dice was heard as crap games proliferated on the lower decks, even before we entered the English Channel.

The newfound American money changed hands many times before the heavy seas finally stopped the games.

We were in a good mood for those first few days at sea. The chow was superb and we enjoyed a turkey



Adventures of an Army Blowhard

dinner on New Year's Day, almost as good as home-cooked. Ice cream was served every evening and gallons of fresh milk were freely available. This was a treat because only powdered milk was available in Europe.

After three days on the Atlantic we traveled 270 miles, an average of only 90 miles per day and pessimists predicted that it would take us 33 days to reach New York.

"No way," said the optimists. "We'll be in New York in twelve days."

When we were allowed on deck during the first week of the voyage, we sat at the stern, our life vests securely strapped to our bodies, and watched the Atlantic Ocean display its incredible, awesome, and frightening grandeur. The water was a continuous chain of Niagara-like falls and when we reached the crest of a wave, the ship's propellers churned the air, desperately grabbing for the sea until the ship roared like a roller coaster to the bottom of the wave. The dramatic rise and descent of our little ship from one mountainous wave to another was repeated again and again and we were afraid.

The ferocity of the wind and waves increased and the Captain ordered us to stay below where conditions were chaotic. Dinner trays slid back and forth in a noisy cacophony of metal against metal, and garbage cans were tossed about like tiny thimbles. It was impossible to sleep, and even difficult to stay in bed as we clung to the sides of our cots. The freight train ordeal in France now seemed like a luxury excursion compared to present conditions in a frightening world of angry water.

There was little else to do in the rock and roll environment of a small boat being tossed in the turbulent Atlantic, so rumors were exchanged throughout the ship. By the eighth day, we heard, "The ship is leaking oil."

There was actually an oil leak, which restored our faith in rumors, and we stopped for repairs in San Miguel, one of the Portuguese islands in the Azores. The water was calm and the tropical sun felt good but the warm weather was a temporary respite because the seas were even rougher after we left the Azores.

"When do you think we'll make it?" was the daily question and the response never varied: "About a week from tomorrow."

Adventures of an Army Blowhard

By January 13th, the fourteenth day of our saga, we were 975 miles from Nantucket, an Island just off Massachusetts. A few days later, we heard a New York radio station and eagerly listened to the "Adventures of the "Lone Ranger." We even enjoyed the commercials.

After 23 days aboard ship we were almost home. Excitement was mounting and every "soon-to-be-civilian" was shining shoes, shaving, and preparing for debarkation. The sea was calm and the mood was exciting as we contemplated homecoming.

Now, it is January 25th and we can see the New York skyline. Every man is standing on the upper deck, excitedly pointing to various landmarks, sharing as one this memorable moment. We also felt disappointment because the Statue of Liberty was nowhere to be seen. Not even her torch was illuminated.

Suddenly, as if touched by a magic wand, floodlights bathed the statue in a dramatic glow and the torch was a beacon of brilliance. If there was a dry eye among us, I did not notice, because my eyes were filled with tears. Some were sobbing, overcome by the magnificent spectacle before our eyes. Even today, fifty-three years later, a shiver runs up my spine, as I recall that momentous event.

After landing, we went to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. where the Army treated us to a delicious steak dinner. Even if the meat were shoe leather, we would have raved about the food because our joyous euphoria could not be tempered by something as prosaic as mediocre Army chow.

We stayed one night at Camp Kilmer. After the Army sorted us out geographically, we boarded a train on January 27, bound for Camp Grant, Illinois but we stopped in Chicago for a period of several hours, a delay that seemed interminable because the final chapter was so close.

We were ordered to stay aboard the train, but many of my traveling companions went into the Illinois Central station to buy liquor which they drank from a bottle like soda pop. By the time the train left the station, the intoxication



Adventures of an Army Blowhard

of homecoming excitement evaporated, replaced by a different kind of intoxication. The passengers were no longer neatly dressed and clean-shaven soldiers, but instead a band of disorderly drunks. Some sat in a drunken stupor, their shirts in disarray, stained by their own vomit. Others were fighting and the floor was littered with debris. A window in our car was shattered, and pieces of glass were strewn on the floor.

We arrived at Camp Grant about two-thirty in the morning and I was relieved that Lieutenant Mode from Camp Wolters was not there to greet us as he did in Texas. He knew how to handle gum chewers, but I idly wondered how he would deal with a trainload of drunken soldiers.

I was discharged from the Army on January 30, 1946, and I left Camp Grant with my Honorable Discharge, my uniform, and mostly good memories. Despite the fact that I was now a veteran, I realized that I still had a lot to learn so I was determined to further my education, once I settled back into civilian life.

If anyone had asked for advice from the "Blowhard," now a twenty-one year old veteran of foreign wars, I would have said: "Go to school." If not college, then study something that might help you in a career, as well as save your life...like trumpet lessons, perhaps?

A Chronology of Army Life

DATE	LOCATION
July 24-August 3, 1943	Camp Grant, Illinois
August 7-December 12, 1943	Camp Wolters, Texas
December 21-December 30, 1943	Fort Meade, Maryland
December 30-January 16, 1944	Camp Shanks, New York
January 17-January 25, 1943	Aboard Ile de France, Crossing the Atlantic Ocean
January 27-February 5, 1944	Camp Lufton, Scotland
February 5--March 13, 1944	Kenfig Borough, Wales
March 13-September 14, 1944	Mortehoe/Woolacombe, England
September 14-September 18, 1944	Braunton, England
September 18-September 21, 1944	Warminster, England
September 21, 1944	Departed Southampton for France
September 22, 1944	Arrived Omaha Beach, Normandy, France
September 22-September 27, 1944	Bivouac Area, Normandy
September 27-September 28, 1944	Bivouac Carentan, France
September 28- October 1, 1944	En route in A Box Car
October 1-October 4, 1944	Fontainbleau-Avon, France
October 4-October 28, 1944	Chateau Fleury, France
October 29-November 8, 1944	St. Trond, Belgium
November 8-January 13, 1945	Tongres, Belgium
December 16, 1944	Beginning of the Battle of the Bulge

DATE	LOCATION
January 13-January 16, 1945	Givet, Belgium

January 16-February 5, 1945	Arlon, Belgium
February 5-February 8, 1945	En Route freight train
February 8-February 17, 1945	Raeren Belgium/Germany
February 17-February 19, 1945	Namur, Belgium
February 19-March 28, 1945	Liege, Belgium (423 rd ASF Band
March 28-May 7, 1945	Aachen, Germany
May 8, 1945	European War Ends
May 7-May 19	Bad Godesburg, Germany
May 19-June 5, 1945	Idstein, Germany
June 5-June 7, 1945	Frankfurt a Main
June 7-September 14, 1945	Camp Cleveland, France
September 14-October 9, 1945	Rheims, France
October 11-December 11, 1945	Frankfurt, Germany
December 11-December 19, 1945	Marburg, Germany
December 19-December 21, 1945	En route on 40 & 8
December 21-December 31, 1945	Camp Top Hat Antwerp, Belgium
December 31-January 25, 1945	Homeward-bound aboard the Jonathan Edwards
January 25-January 26, 1946	Camp Kilmer, New Jersey
January 27-January 30, 1946	Camp Grant, Illinois
January 31, 1946	Discharged from the Army

MEMBERS OF THE ASSAULT TRAINING CENTER BAND

LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	INSTRUMENT
Andreason	Bjoren	Flute/Violin
Banner	Charles	Warrant Officer
Bernard	Ed	Drums
Boody	First Name ?	Baritone Saxophone
Brady	Earl	Alto Horn
Brennar	Harry	Trumpet
Cook	Fred	Trombone
DeLorenzo	Joe	Trombone
Fisher	Joe	Trumpet
Gawlik	Hank	Drums
Gillespie	Jim	Drum Major and Bass
Giocavelli	Iggy	Alto Saxophone
Hanselman	Ed	Trumpet
Jenkins	Rodney	Sousaphone
Klein	Lenny	Tenor Saxophone
Kohlmeyer	Bill	Guitar
Laganke	Wilber	Trumpet
Martz	Bill	Mail Orderly
Mudd	Bob	Trumpet
Pagano	Jim	Alto Horn
Pakata	Al	Clarinet
Piccirilli	Roy	Sax/violin
Romagna	Ugo	Clarinet
Rominger	Ed	Baritone Horn
Rydstrand	Clayton	Alto Saxophone
Seibert	Frank	Trombone
Somerville	Paul	Clarinet
Summers	Darrell	Trombone
Triglia	Tony	Alto Horn
Turcek	Charlie	Trumpet
Van Milligan	Henry	Sousaphone
Weir	Bill	Piano
White	Red	Clarinet
White	Bill	Cymbals
Wolfson	Marty	Drums



Honorable Discharge

This is to certify that

JOSEPH N FISHER

36675650 TEC 4 346TH ENGR

Army of the United States

is hereby Honorably Discharged from the military service of the United States of America.

This certificate is awarded as a testimonial of Honest and Faithful Service to this country.

Given at SEPARATION CENTER
CAMP GRANT, ILLINOIS

Date 30 JANUARY 1946

L. A. Friberg

L A FRIBERG
LT COL INF

ENLISTED RECORD AND REPORT OF SEPARATION

BOOK 253 PAGE 52

HONORABLE DISCHARGE

1. LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE INITIAL FISHER JOSEPH N			2. ARMY SERIAL NO. 36 675 650	3. GRADE TEC 4	4. ARM OR SERVICE ENGR	5. COMPONENT AUS
6. ORGANIZATION 346TH ENGR			7. DATE OF SEPARATION 30 JAN 46	8. PLACE OF SEPARATION SEPARATION CENTER CAMP GRANT, ILLINOIS		
9. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES 428 S MAPLE AVE OAK PARK ILLINOIS			10. DATE OF BIRTH 27 DEC 24	11. PLACE OF BIRTH ASHLAND OHIO		
12. ADDRESS FROM WHICH EMPLOYMENT WILL BE SOUGHT SEE 9			13. COLOR EYES BROWN	14. COLOR HAIR BROWN	15. HEIGHT 5 10	16. WEIGHT 137 LBS.
17. NO. DEPEND.	18. RACE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WHITE <input type="checkbox"/> NEGRO <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (specify)		19. MARITAL STATUS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SINGLE <input type="checkbox"/> MARRIED <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (specify)		20. U.S. CITIZEN <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	
21. CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND NO. STUDENT HIGH SCHOOL X-02						

MILITARY HISTORY

22. DATE OF INDUCTION 3 JUL 43		23. DATE OF ENLISTMENT		24. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE 24 JUL 43		25. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE CAMP GRANT, ILLINOIS	
26. REGISTERED SERVICE DATA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO		27. LOCAL S.S. BOARD NO. 2		28. COUNTY AND STATE COOK CO ILLINOIS		29. HOME ADDRESS AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE 428 S MAPLE ST OAK PARK ILLINOIS	
30. MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY AND NO. BANDSMAN CORNET AND TRUMPET 433				31. MILITARY QUALIFICATION AND DATE (i.e., infantry, aviation and marksmanship badges, etc.) MM W/M-1 RIFLE			
32. BATTLES AND CAMPAIGNS ARDENNES RHINELAND CENTRAL EUROPE							
33. DECORATIONS AND CITATIONS 4 OVERSEAS SERVICE BARS EUROPEAN-AFRICAN-MIDDLE EASTERN THEATER RIBBON W/3 BRONZE BATTLE STARS GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL WORLD WAR II VICTORY MEDAL							
34. WOUNDS RECEIVED IN ACTION NONE							
35. LATEST IMMUNIZATION DATES SMALLPOX IMM SEP 45 TYPHOID STIM AUG 45 TETANUS STIM AUG 44 OTHER (specify)				36. SERVICE OUTSIDE CONTINENTAL U.S. AND RETURN DATE OF DEPARTURE 17 JAN 44 DESTINATION ETO		DATE OF ARRIVAL 25 JAN 44	
37. TOTAL LENGTH OF SERVICE CONTINENTAL SERVICE: YEARS 0 MONTHS 4 DAYS 28 FOREIGN SERVICE: YEARS 2 MONTHS 0 DAYS 9				38. HIGHEST GRADE HELD TEC 4		DATE OF RETURN 25 JAN 46	
39. PRIOR SERVICE NONE							
40. REASON AND DATE OF SEPARATION FOR CONSCIENCE 7.2.45 ISSUED BY THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION TO BE USED FOR THE FUTURE REQUEST OF ANY QUANTITY OF INSURANCE BENEFIT UNDER TITLE III OF THE SERVICEMEN'S READ-UP ACT OF 1952 (DEMOBILIZATION) IN THE REGION 5-365 DTD 15 DEC 1944							
41. SERVICE SCHOOL ATTENDED (If 1945, no school listed, that year will be omitted) NONE						42. EDUCATION (Years) Grammar 8 High School 4 College 0	


PAY DATA VOU 21827

43. LONGEVITY FOR PAY PURPOSES YEARS 2 MONTHS 6 DAYS 28			44. MUSTERING OUT PAY TOTAL \$ 300 THIS PAYMENT \$ 100		45. SOLDIER DEPOSITS NONE	46. TRAVEL PAY \$ 4.40	47. TOTAL AMOUNT, NAME OF DISBURSING OFFICER \$246.00 G F DOLBEAR CAPT FD
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INSURANCE NOTICE

IMPORTANT IF PREMIUM IS NOT PAID WHEN DUE OR WITHIN THIRTY-ONE DAYS THEREAFTER, INSURANCE WILL LAPSE. MAKE CHECKS OR MONEY ORDERS PAYABLE TO THE TREASURER OF THE U. S. AND FORWARD TO COLLECTIONS SUBDIVISION, VETERANS ADMINISTRATION, WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

48. KIND OF INSURANCE Nat. Serv. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> U.S. Govt. <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/>		49. HOW PAID Allotment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Direct to V. A. <input type="checkbox"/>		50. Effective Date of Allotment Discontinuance 31 JAN 46	51. Date of Next Premium Due (One month after 50) 28 FEB 46	52. PREMIUM DUE EACH MONTH \$ 6.50	53. INTENTION OF VETERAN TO Continue <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Only <input type="checkbox"/> Discontinue <input type="checkbox"/>	
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	55. REMARKS (This space for completion of above items or entry of other items specified in W. D. Directives) LAPEL BUTTON ISSUED ASR SCORE (2 SEP 45) 61 ERC TIME FROM 3 JUL 43 TO 23 JUL 43	
	56. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING SEPARATED Joseph N. Fisher	
57. PERSONNEL OFFICER (Type name, grade and organization - signature) MARY C MAHONEY 1ST LT WAC		

0 25 26