

## INTERVIEW WITH OSCAR TAPIO (DAD)

RCT: Tell me if you enlisted or were drafted.

DAD: I was drafted.

RCT: What year?

DAD: Well, before the war they started drafting people, and I was in that list.

RCT: Were you working?

DAD: I was working at the time. But I had quit my job and ... Pearl Harbor was 1941, so I went in in 1942. April 10th. How it all happened, before Pearl Harbor, they had a draft and I had a low number. So I had to report, so I quit my job.

RCT: Where were you working?

DAD: Gerlach (Barklow) at the time. I took a trip to Florida with Tony (Vidmar) and came back. I was going down alone and Mr. Buret said, "You better go with Tapio and keep him company." We had a nice trip down there. Because of the draft I was going to quit my job.

When we got back, then we made another trip. We were supposed to go in. I was supposed to go in the draft, but I made a trip out east to New Jersey to see Bill Finger. Arne Kronlin went with me. He went up to see his brother in Connecticut. And I was scheduled to go with the draft. And while I was in New York & New Jersey I was 28 years old on June 15<sup>th</sup> while I was there. That was my last trip before going into the army. That was before the war. I had sold my car to Felix Krumpoch. Before I left I told him he could have the car. While out east the papers came out that any person that was scheduled to go into the army, if you were 28 years old before July 1<sup>st</sup>, you were deferred. So I called the Joliet draft board and asked how this affected me and they said you're not going. They said you were deferred. Stay as long as you want to. I had quit my job already.

So I went back from my vacation and I was deferred. So I went back to work again. That was in 1941. Then Pearl Harbor came along. When I came back I arranged with Himmelhawk, who was one of our salesmen in Detroit, to get me a car at a discount which was unheard of in those days. So I made a trip to Detroit and picked up a new Plymouth. I got a \$200.00 discount on it. I came back to work and some people in Joliet squabbled about it because they went down to the draft board and complained that their son was supposed to go with Tapio and they are going and he isn't. They said he was 28 years old. And that was Huey Robert's mom. And Huey Roberts was a lot younger than me. But with me playing baseball with the Barr Senators last couple years, he was our

scorekeeper. And they thought we were all together. He went down to complain but it didn't do any good.

Then came Pearl Harbor and I got my notice. Then I quit my job again. Naturally, this time it was for real. We were scheduled to go to Ohio to bowl in the ABC's, so I went down to the draft board and told them what's a couple more weeks. I can't win the war in a couple weeks and would like to make this trip. So I was deferred for 10 days to go bowl in the ABC's in Akron, Ohio before I took off. If that hadn't gone through, I would have gone into the army in 1941 instead of 1942. I would have been in about 9 months but they changed the law, which saved me until Pearl Harbor.

When I came back, I went down to get on the bus and they called me to the front office and they told me I was in charge of two busloads going into Chicago. It was my responsibility. I asked "why me?" And they said because you were qualified. So I checked the first bus, and all the names were on the bus, and when I got on the front bus where I was, there were three convicts and I was responsible for them. When I got on the bus there were these three convicts sitting there. And I got in they said, "Hello Tapio, don't worry about us. We won't give you any problems. And I asked, "How do you know me?" They said all the guys in prison knew you from playing baseball up there with different teams. And we know who you are. We were only supposed to play one time a year, but teams would load up. I played quite a few times in the prison over a period of years. So we got to Chicago. They didn't give me any trouble.

In as much as I was examined already, I didn't have to take another examination, so they put me to work in the x-ray department helping in the 5<sup>th</sup> army there, in Chicago. We got there about 10 O'clock, and now it's 5 O'clock, and in all that time I've been working in the x-ray department helping them out. The headman from Joliet came to me and said they liked what you're doing there. This is the story of my life in the army. He said they're going to try to get you to stay in Chicago and have my headquarters there instead of Rockford. He said they put my name in to keep me in Chicago and that I would be stationed there for the rest of the war.

RCT: Where was the camp in Chicago?

DAD: Right downtown in Chicago.

RCT: And you were doing x-rays of the new people coming in?

DAD: Yeah. And they liked what I was doing I guess. They tried to get me to stay, which would have been a good duty. But they said the papers had already gone forward, so I ended up in Rockford (Camp Grant). So when I got to Rockford, I had to go on duty in the morning. We didn't know where we were going. I wasn't assigned to Rockford. They said at 5 o'clock in the morning you

had to help work in the bakeshop. They always assigned people different duties you know. For some reason it seemed like I was always one of them. I reported, and the bakeshop wasn't open yet. So a guy gave me a brush and a bucket of water and put me in the cooler to scrub the walls down where the blood was from the cattle that are butchered. They put me in that damn cooler and I scrubbed those walls pretty clean. And the guy said you did a terrific job. From there I went to the bakeshop where it was hotter than hell. The guy came over and said we'd like to keep you here in Rockford. But it was too late there again.

This went on through my whole stay in the army. Everybody wanted to keep me but it was too late, too late. So we didn't know where we were going so I landed in Little Rock at camp Robinson for our basic training of eight weeks.

We had a mixture of different guys. Japanese guys were training there. They tried to put one Japanese man in every 5-man hutment. When 5 of us were in the hutment, the corporal came around and looked around and wanted to know where the Jap guy was. He said which one was Tapio? And I said, here I am and he said, hell, you're not a Jap. And I said no.

But it was here we took our eight weeks of basic training. After six weeks I was scheduled to go to ordinance school in Baltimore after basic training because of my qualifications. That's what they me assigned to. And after about six weeks they wanted to know if I wanted to stay as a (cadyman) there and be a corporal. So I made corporal in little less than eight weeks. In my seventh week there I was promoted to a corporal. Why? Don't ask me because there is a lot of good soldiers around. So I made corporal and kept me there for a few more cycles and within a year I was a technical sergeant. In less than a year. Don't ask me why, but I was. But I got along with all the guys and all that. Then they closed camp Robinson and from there we went to Camp Fannin in Texas. We opened up the base there.

[The Government activated 37 new divisions in 1942. The function of Camp Robinson, along with Fort McCellan, Alabama, was to provide basically trained individuals in excess of the number that could be supplied to branch centers, to meet emergency requirements in all arms and services. They had capacities totalling 26,400 trainees for 8 weeks of rifle training. They would be assigned to whatever branch needed them most urgently.]

RCT: How did you meet mom? I don't know if I ever heard the story.

DAD: I was Camp Robinson, and I had met Doctor Shiff who was head of the hospital which was down on Battery Street down there. Wickman was married and stayed with Dr. Shiff when he was up here in Chicago. We were in the army together. And somehow, why, we went down by the Baptist State Hospital, a bunch of us you know. Pilcher and all of us. And we went into Ship-A-Hoy, a little place close to the hospital that was off limits to the nurses. It was a bar. We

started going down there and I met her. We had to be in at 10 O'clock, so we didn't have that much time. And pretty soon this guy started dating this red head, June's best friend. Pilcher started dating another girl and I met June.

RCT: You met her in a bar?

DAD: It was a little restaurant there, you could have drinks. It was off limits. Yeah, I met her there and she was shy and all that, and she didn't smoke which I liked. She was routy like all the other nurses were. They acted up and all that you know. And pretty soon I'd be back in town. I didn't date her that much. On Sunday we'd have a picnic with some of the other nurses, and pretty soon I was ready to be shipped out and the reason I liked June was that she was sensible. She was honest. I didn't know where she lived or anything. She was in training then. And these guys were dating these girls and we were being shipped out the next day.

And then they would postpone the shipment and pretty soon we were down there sitting on the curb by the hospital. This went on for a week. They wouldn't ship us out. We had a lot of fun because we had to be in at 10 O'clock and they had to be in at 10 O'clock. And everybody would say, well, we're shipping out. And we weren't and we'd go back down there at 4 or 5 O'clock at night and we'd sit on the curb. There were about 5 or 6 of us. It was sort of a fun thing.

After I was shipped out I never corresponded with her, never made any passes at her. I didn't do anything like that. I was the gentleman I was supposed to be I guess. I guess she thought a lot about me. She didn't know how old I was or anything. I probably looked 10 years younger than my age. I lied about my age so much.

When I was down in Texas, I didn't correspond with her. I didn't make any promises to anybody. I didn't go out with her that much.

So Pa got killed (27 June 1943) and I got a furlough to Joliet on an emergency and I had to take a train through Little Rock. So I called her up and said I was passing through Little Rock and the train would stop for 5 or 10 minutes and she came there and met me at the train. I think I bought her a little bracelet or something. We met for about 5 or 10 minutes and the train took off for Tyler, Texas. She said she was sorry and all that.

I had to go higher than my captain to get the furlough. They didn't believe in all that. They weren't supposed to send flowers, but all the soldiers got together, they knew me pretty well, and they sent the most beautiful spray. I have pictures of it. C-82 spelled out in flowers. That was against army regulations. They did it on the sly. So I got to home.

I never corresponded. I never even wrote her once. I didn't say I loved her or didn't say wait for me or anything else. Then I went to New York and then I went overseas.

When I came home there was a letter waiting for me. She wrote me a letter hoping I got home OK. She didn't know. So I called her up. I made several trips down there.

And I said well...I had a problem in that Ma was left alone. I was taking care of her. It was two years before we decided anything. Finally my mother came to me and said, listen, if you are going to get married, you better get married. If you wait until I die, you'll never get married. You don't have to take care of me. I'm worried about you and that girl down there. Either give her up and continue with your bowling or...

The next time I went down there I bought her an engagement ring. We got down around Springfield and it was snowing so damn hard. We were going down for a long weekend and we had to turn around and come back. So finally I gave her an engagement ring. I said to myself, do I want to go through life alone and be like Burrett, Hill, McKenzie? I tried to visualize these single men at gerlach. Or go on and have a family. I thought June was a good heady girl, would make a good mother, and came from a nice family on the farm, a good clean girl. She didn't smoke, didn't drink...and we got married then. That's the story.

Before I was more interested in sports, I was well occupied. I was doing what I wanted to do. No one told me what to do, besides, I was taking care of Ma. If I had it to do all over again I would do it the same way. I have no regrets. I thought more about marrying a good healthy girl and raising a good healthy family.

Before going to camp Fannin, while I was in training, a car killed my dad and I went home for the funeral on an emergency furlough. The last time I saw him was when I was home on furlough. I picked him up at 11:00 on a weekend night. He asked me if I wanted a beer before we went home. Ma was always against it you know. I said one or two wouldn't hurt him, so I said where do you want to stop? So we stopped at Broseman's or someplace, and I ordered a 7-up and he said, "Will you do me a favor?" And I said, "What's that?" He asked, "Would you drink a beer with me?" So I said why not. That was the first time I drank. I never drank that much. I never had a drink until I was 25 years old. Because with Ma, there was no drinking in our house. I didn't want to because I saw too much.

So I did. And it made him very happy. And I never saw him again. The next time I came home he was dead. So it had to be that way I guess. We had a nice talk. He was worried about me being in the army. He said he wished he could go in my place. I've lived my life. Very emotional. My dad wasn't an emotional guy but he was when I went into the army.

RCT: Where were you shipped after Camp Robinson?

DAD: So we were at Camp Fannin in Texas and went through a cycle there. And from there I was shipped to Camp Blanding in Florida, near Jacksonville. And so we went down there and opened up Camp Blanding. And that was quite an experience down there. They were disorganized and nobody wore their stripes. So they finally sent out word we were getting too lazy and we better start a training program so we did. There were very few non-coms out there and nobody wanted to wear their stripes for some reason. So they put us through all the drilling and finally a captain in charge of us asked for volunteers to drill the squad and nobody volunteered. So whom did they select? Me. So he turned over the squad to me and I really drilled them because I already had three or four cycles I had already gone through. And he kept telling me to slow down, slow down but I kept going on. Finally he said I told you to stop. I said "Yes Sir, I know that. You gave me charge of that squad and I was in charge then and could do what I wanted to. He didn't say anything. He then asked what is your name and I told him. We were just getting organized. The camp was wide open. So he said I want your name because I want you to come into my company. He said he'd make me a corporal. I said I'm already a corporal. Then he said I'd make you a sergeant. I said I'm already a sergeant. I was a five striper already. Well, then he said he'd make me a first sergeant to come with the company. I said I was already spoken for. By Colonel Sikes who was in the area there. So he wanted to know how many more of the guys were noncoms and all the hands went up. The next day there was an order out that every GI who had a rating would wear their proper uniform. And then everybody blossomed out. Cooks had stripes. It was really a joke. We had a lot of fun about it. It came out.

So I was assigned to Colonel Sikes Battalion. Colonel Sikes was an old army man from Hearly, Wisconsin. He reminded me of Ned Sparks in the movies with the big cigar. He'd walk around the camp and wanted to know what the itinerary was that the different companies were doing. He knew what was going on all the time. He had to know. It was my job to make sure to bring him up to date every morning where everybody was because I was at headquarters there. So I got pretty well aquatinted with Colonel Sikes and when training started, we had companies coming in I had charge of the headquarters there because I was the highest ranking sergeant. We had different corporals working for us doing typing and everything else. We were down there for a cycle or two there in Florida.

We went to Jacksonville one day and were so loaded with sailors and soldiers you couldn't get a hotel room. We made only one trip to Jacksonville from Blanding, Florida, about 40 miles away. So we were going to stay there, so on our weekend we went for a ride and got down to Palatka, Florida. For some reason went further down to Pomona, Florida and we happened to see a big house on the lake in the back, and we drove in there, and it turned out to be Mr. & Mrs. Charles Feagles.

They were playing a gin rummy game that they had been playing for years and they were retired from out east. And they had a nice home there and they had an apartment over the garage and they had a little cottage down below. So to make a long story short, we wanted a place to go on weekends. We didn't want to go where all the GIs were. So I asked Mr. Feagles if he would consider renting one of these units for us to come down to on weekends. Of course he was looking at soldiers. He said they could try it out. He asked \$15 a month. He said until you show me you're OK, I'm going to charge you \$30 for the first few months and if things go right and I don't kick you out, then I'll drop it to \$15. I said don't worry because I took charge of it. And every weekend we'd go down there. And they started looking forward to us coming down. We were their boys. And we became close and became good friends. Then Hilburn, from California – first cousin to Lou Ayres the movie star, had his wife down there. And we rented the upper part for him so his wife could stay down there because she was pregnant.

So we went down weekends, and we made everybody tow the mark. For example, if you went into the cottage and your shirt or shoes were out of place, you'd have to put a quarter in a jug. We wanted everything neat. And there was no monkey-shining down there. They took a liking to us. We mowed their lawns for them. We fished there – the lake was right there. And we looked forward to go down there every weekend. Finally, my mom and Si made a trip to Florida. And they stayed down there for quite some time in the cottage there. It worked out really good.

RCT: How did you meet these people? You just drove up to their house?

DAD: Yeah, just drove up. A couple of soldier boys. I had my car there. We just introduced ourselves. We said we were looking for a place to come on weekends to get away from it all. We were there over a year I guess.

Next door, Judge Scott from New York had a place next to Feagles. Going down to the lake the grass was pretty high. The Feagles told us the judge was all right but the wife was a real bitch. She was hard to get along with. So before they came down, I took a crew down there and mowed the whole damn lawn out front all the way down to the lake which was a pretty big lawn. We cut the grass and everything else so when the judge came down there, the place was all cleaned up. They asked Feagles who cleaned the mess up? And they said they had some soldier boys here and we told them you were coming down. They asked how much they were going to be charged. And they said they don't take any pay. They just wanted to do it. So we made friends with them real good, even Mrs. Scott.

Now they're looking forward to us coming down on weekends. They couldn't wait for us to come down. The judge would come in a play poker with us and would

take all his winnings and put it in the jar. He wouldn't keep it. He was a good old soul. So that kind of eased the training a little bit. We were pretty popular. We knew the MPs. We invited them down there and they liked it.

I had a car and the tires blew out. One guy helped us out. He ran a tavern down there and he was an ex navy man and he had some old tires he gave me and they were so rotten they blew out. I think you've seen pictures of us holding the tube up. So finally we couldn't get tires for the car so I went before the draft board at Plalotka. I told them the story that I was at camp and had no tires and said they wouldn't sell them to me unless they were essential. I told them about my dad being killed and had my mom and sister down here and we come down weekends and we can verify it for you. They're down there right now only 17 miles. Would you believe it, they approved 4 synthetic tires, which was nice of them to do.

And then another problem was groceries. So we went over to the grocery store there and made friends with the owner. He was the butcher there. We go into the store and look at something and, no, you'd need point for that. We'd put it back. We had balls going around the store. People would look at us. Pretty soon civilians said they had some extra coupons you could take. Now we get to the meat counter and that's rationed you know. So we invited the butcher to come down and see our set-up, and he liked it, so we got all the meat we wanted without coupons. Steaks and everything else. That part was good.

RCT: How long were Si and your mom down there?

DAD: O God I don't know. Probably a couple of months or so. Then I got my orders to be shipped. Then they had to go home. They went back on the train. Before I shipped out, Mr. Feagles offered me the cottage with the furniture in it with the fireplace right on the edge of the lake.

RCT: What lake was it on? Do you remember?

DAD: I don't remember. I know it had alligators in it. We'd catch fish from it. It was all clean fun. Nothing went wrong. We kept it perfect. Mr. Feagles said we're up in years, why don't you buy the cottage? I'll sell it to you for \$1500.00. It was tempting. And I'll give you an option to buy my big home. We'll make an option to buy the whole place out. And I turned it down. I said I didn't know if I was coming back from overseas. I didn't take advantage of it, which I should have.

So while at Camp Blanding we had a Major Shores and his wife who played up to the Generals there. They were from Camp Robinson and General Allen was there then, and they played bridge, and she was one of these high society girls and he was a Major in our battalion. But we had a little corporal who was Jewish and Major Shores was Jewish. And I was over it. We had a night problem and

the camp was fairly new at that time. He told me we were going on a night problem. He said he wanted certain training aides. And I went all over Camp Blanding and couldn't find a certain training aide for this night problem. So he came up and asked where's this training aide? Some problem they were going to have with this training aide. I never heard of it, but I went all over thinking it must be, but nobody had anything. I went to different companies all over, even headquarters. He said well, you're not doing a good job. You're not qualified for being a sergeant. Major Shores said, "I'm putting you in for a bust." He and his wife played up to the Generals with all that high society stuff. So he did. So I was called up to Colonel Sikes office and Major Shores was there. We related the whole story. So I told Colonel Sikes "I would like to ask the Major one question." He said go ahead. "Major Shores, You gave me an assignment to find this training aide and I looked all over. Let me ask you this question: what is this training aide? Explain it to the Col. as to what it is. You're an old army man, you'll know. He didn't have an answer. He was trying to get me out of there so his corporal friend would go up the ladder. So the Colonel Looked at Major Shores and said, number one, you've never been heard of before. You apologize to Sergeant Tapio. Right now! You know what, I could do a lot worse but I'm going to let you off easy. He had a Packard. Give me the keys. You are grounded for six months. You don't even get out of the campgrounds. And that's an order. Otherwise I'll put you in for a bust. And that actually happened.

Colonel Sikes turned out to be from Hurley, Wisconsin. And as you know, we traveled barnstorming around playing baseball. We got talking about Wisconsin and Hurley was a real rough town. We talked about different things and I told him I played ball around there, Tomahawk, and Mr. Tyler was mayor. He had daughters by the name of Columbia and Helen. He said Mr. Tyler is my personal friend. We were good buddies. You are right. I said Columbia Tyler married an army officer, a regular army man. She was a tall girl and Helen was a lot shorter. Both beautiful girls. He said, "who do you think introduced Columbia to this soldier?" We kept up with things in Tomahawk, and I said, "I understand he got killed." He said, that's right. For some reason we talked about all this. So we got pretty well aquatinted.

Now my orders came in, and he called me to his office and said, "Sergeant Tapio, you're going to be shipped overseas." Why don't you go to school to become an officer? I'll make out the papers. With your age you could be a ninety-day wonder. When you get out, with your age, you'd probably bounce around the states for a long time. Think about it. So a couple other guys had the same opportunity. I had a good rating. I was getting a bonus from my mom because of my rating, as she was my dependent. I sent her all my checks and she got \$40 a month on top of that. But I turned it down.

And then I was shipped to Baltimore in the summertime and got on the boat. I always pictured myself going up a big ramp to the boat and here I went down a ramp to a small boat. St. Andrews was the name of the boat. There were about

30 or 40 boats in the convoy. We didn't know where we were going. We were the leadership in front and were protected on the sides. When you're out on the ocean, these ships way in the back would look like they were going down. You wouldn't see them for a long time and they would come up again. Then it would go down again. It was really a sight. We were on this boat for about 15 days. We didn't know where we were going.

While we were on the boat, another strange thing happened. Our officer was Captain Miller. He was an old army man, short guy.

RCT: Were you part of the 103<sup>rd</sup> when you went over?

DAD: No. We were just going over as replacements. We had just come from training centers. We weren't assigned to any regular unit.

Anyway, we get on this boat and Captain Miller got sick. And I was next in command. We didn't have any other officer in charge of our group. About 200 guys. We had a lot of guys on our boat. There were three decks to it, and I remember the first day the air conditioner went out, and God, we really suffered. It was hot. It was a troop transport.

RCT: Was it a military boat or a commercial boat?

DAD: Oh, well they were all converted. Real boats taken. They converted everything. They took every ship possible to take guys over. There were tons of Liberty ships. But this St. Andrews I was on, was a little better boat. It was small though. It was no big boat like the Queen Mary.

So I had to attend a couple meetings with the officers. And I'm the only one not an officer but I had charge of all these guys. These officers pulled some rank and they had our group clean the ship every day. It was our detail to clean the mess on the steps. And all the other guys weren't doing anything because they belonged to these officers. So I said this was for the birds and went to my 200 men and told them the problem. I said will you back me up? They want us to clean this boat everyday, all the crap on the steps while the other guys aren't doing anything. And that even included the next deck up above. So we cleaned it up one day. I thought these guys were pulling rank, so I went to the top banana to explain what was going on. I said would you back me up? All 200. And they all agreed. So I got permission to see the man in charge and explained everything to him and said I've got a complaint. I said I don't think it's fair. You know, I'm in my 30s already. I'm no 18 or 19 year old kid. I said all these guys laying around the ship are getting soft and they're not exercising and it wouldn't hurt for some of these guys to get out do some of the work themselves. It would do them a lot of good. That's how I explained it to him and said I'd appreciate you looking into it. I can't see us being picked on where all these soldiers that

could help and pitch in. Well by God, not only did we get out of it, we didn't have to do it at all.

While I was in charge of these guys, I had permission to run these guys through shower baths almost every day when the other guys only went through about every third day. I arranged it somehow and nobody caught on. Anyway, we didn't have to do any work at all. They took us off completely. So that worked out pretty good.

Now I met the guy who was taking pictures on the boat. And he asked me if I would help him. You've seen my picture of me by the wheel with my life jacket on. You didn't know if you were coming back or not, but when he got back to New York, he developed them and sent them to your home. I rounded up guys and lined them up on the deck. We landed in Naples, Italy. And the day before we got into Naples, the man came over and said he could use my help on these troop transport boats going back and forth. He was going to put in for me so I would go back and forth and not go up to the front lines.

RCT: Did you ship out of Baltimore or New York?

DAD: Maybe it was New York as we went by the Statue of Liberty as we said good-bye to it. I don't remember what camp we shipped out of.

Anyway, we landed in Naples and we got off the boat and this guy said all the papers have gone through already. He couldn't do a damn thing about it. I thought, wouldn't that have been nice. In 10 days I would be saying hello to Si & Cart and my mom back in the states. But it didn't work out. He wanted me. That was another time.

So we landed in Naples and that was a sad sight. Beautiful City, but you would see kids running around with no clothes on. One kid came up, I remember, and pick-pocketed me. He got a round tube of Camforice that was on my belt. You use it for your lips. And he thought it was something to eat. We couldn't get out of line, but I saw him go over and he took a bite of it and spit it out. He was just a little kid, but they were hungry.

We stayed there for a couple of months. And Chip was in Italy, and he was up ahead of me. Chip came in the war two, three years after me. But I was in the states all that time. And he beat me over there. He was up around Leghorn. I knew he was up there, but we were down in Naples. But then we got an order. Our troops got up to the entrance to Innsbruck, Austria. Brenner Pass was the entrance to Innsbruck, Austria. And they were at a standstill. And they didn't want to go through because they were waiting for the Russians to come from the other way to catch up. So they didn't need the extra troops so they sent us back to Naples to get on a boat. And I walked right by the 21<sup>st</sup> General Hospital not

knowing Chip was there. Two blocks away. If I'd had known it, I would have tried to get permission to go to see him.

But we got on the boat and we landed at Marseilles, France. And that's where I was sent out to join the 103<sup>rd</sup> Division. They were rather new and was just getting organized to go up to the front lines. So I joined up with them. There were three separate units and we were the 409.

We joined this bunch of guys and you should have seen the mess there. There were guys from the air corps. As we were moving up front, they kept feeding more people up into the companies to get to full strength. These guys from the air corps had pots and pans and they had to discard all of them. Ahti was one of them. He was a Finn from Joliet. He was captured. And I knew he was alive. They censure all your mail that you send out. I never get a letter through, but somehow I knew he was all right. Where they kept him prison I don't know. He had a soft job at some air base. So we were all fill-ins.

We kept moving and moving and moving. We went all the way from Marseilles, France, all through France and all the way up to the Rhine River, Germany and all the way up the line.

[They had dropped their duffels for extended storage at Docelles. The men were now combat lean and were dressed and equipped for action. Dressed down to their unit tactical clothing and equipment, the men now had in their possession the following: one pair of shu-packs, one pair light wool socks, one pair wool heavy socks, one suit underwear (cotton), one suit winter underwear (winter, long), one suit olive drabs, one wool sweater, combat jacket, steel helmet and liner, one knit cap, one pair wool gloves, and a handkerchief. Equipment included: sleeping bag, haversack, pack and pack carrier, mess kit and utensils, weapon belt, canteen and cup, toilet articles, weapon, and specialized equipment. ]

RCT: Are there any battles during this time?

DAD: There were snipers all around. They were cleaning everybody out. The air corps was helping us out. Big 55 shots coming from 30 miles away ahead of us. They had everything pretty well synchronized. We saw everything. Dead people and horses. We were on the move. We were moving so damn fast. We did stay at one place; I don't know what town it was. All the people were chased out of their houses and the GIs would take over. This was in Germany.

Everything just went so fast. It was getting toward the end of the war you know. Nobody knew when it was going to end. But we ended up in Innsbruck, Austria. Couple of days before we hit there, there was a guy from Joliet, I can't think of his name, an officer, and he got hit by a sniper and got killed. Two days before the end of the war. I had met him and got the word he was shot by a sniper.

But we were on the move, on the move and kept going and going and going. You never knew what was going to happen. You could step on a mine. You could get hit by a sniper.

You could get into a trap, which we did. We went up to clean out a nest up in the mountains. We got to the top, and the Germans were up there waiting for us and started firing at us. Up on a big mountaintop. It was a trap. There was no place to turn around, this Fields driving our car, this great big truck with all the GI's in it, got on the running board and went backwards in reverse all the way down this mountain about 2 or 3 miles and turned us around and saved us.

[The region of the V Mountains can be described as tortuous. Roads were narrow and twisty through the hills. The rains had swollen the rivers and even the normally small streams were at levels difficult to cross. Vehicular traffic was largely confined to road beds.

As the division advanced through the region a manner of unit leap-frogging was found necessary. With German thoroughness, and their use of local forced labor when available, roadway cuts and mountain passes were blocked with deeply set logs and stretches of felled trees, called abitis across the road. Many of the roadblocks were mined and booby-trapped. The attacking American soldier was faced with the requirement to somehow get through those obstacles to the defending enemy and to either force him to withdraw, stand and die, or accept the final option of being captured.]

RCT: Was that your closest call?

DAD: It was always a close call. Anytime. You never knew who was around. Snipers. There were a lot worse battles before we even got there. In Italy there was a real bad battle before we got there. I didn't get into that one. Chip saw quit a bit of it. He was up ahead you know. It was hell all the way through.

RCT: What division was Chip in, do you know?

DAD: I think it was the 63<sup>rd</sup>. Chip was a good fighter. He shouldn't have been up there. He was on a problem all night and he had just come in and some officers were just taking off and they picked Chip out and asked if he would help them out for awhile. Chip said OK figuring he would just go up and come back. Well hell, they traveled all night long and he was carrying some ammunition for them. He wasn't even supposed to be in that detail. He was supposed to have come back and rest. In the morning they were crossing a little river. There were four of them that got killed and Chip was shot by a machine gun. Twice. They hit him one time and he turned around and they hit him in the same leg. Next thing he knew he was in a hospital bed in a tent. He said when he came around there was a big black man next to him. He said to Chip that he must have had a rough

time. They took him to the hospital then. Then from there he went to Kansas and then he went to Colorado. Fitzsimmons General. He was there two years. He had his kidney removed and he was clubfooted for a long time. But he came out of it pretty good considering everything. It really got him in the end after years. He was Italy when he got shot.

We landed in Innsbruck, Austria when the war was over. And these people at Brenner pass that sat there all this time for months and months, we finally caught up to them. Within two or three miles. They didn't have to do anything except walk across there and waited for the Russians to come. So there was the end of the rope.

So then they started reorganizing again. The war was still going on with Japan. So they broke up the whole outfit. I wasn't scheduled to go to Japan because of my age and I had enough points. I had 65 points. I was 33-34 years old then.

Before we broke up, they gave us a furlough to Paris. That was quit a ways. We went to Paris for 4 days. But it was a long trip. We had to go on the GI trucks to the train station where we got on in Stuttgart. The war was over. The driver was being pushed by his lieutenant not to miss the train, and we went around a corner and rolled over and went down into a ditch there in Germany. A tree stopped us. We rolled over twice with all of us GI's in the back. Everybody asked if they were all right. We could have been killed after the war was already over. So we were delayed for some time. They brought another truck. So we took the train from Stuttgart to Paris.

Paris was OK. I took a tour of it, but I couldn't see it. So we found out there was a golf course some miles out that the army ran. Nobody went out there because everybody was in Paris. We went out there and these guys welcomed us and got anything we wanted. They prepared a big meal, had golf clubs there. A big fat lady caddied for me and I didn't smoke and I brought her cigarettes that I had. Cigarettes were a big thing.

When we were in Italy before we shipped to Marseilles, I heard about Al Gazy being sick. I walked about half a mile in the rain and mud and went to his tent where the flaps were blowing, and asked how he was doing. He said he couldn't wait until a package came from his wife. I asked what he was waiting for. He said cigarettes. He couldn't get any. He said you only get one pack a month or something like that. Here I had half a duffel bag full of them that I had accumulated in Italy. A lot of people went down to change cigarettes for rings and cameos or whatever they could get. I didn't go down there and do any of that. So I walked all the way back and took my duffel bag and put it on my shoulder and walked all the way back and emptied it on top of him. I must have had 6-8 cartons of cigarettes. I asked if this would hold him over for awhile. He said where'd you get them, where'd you get them? I said I don't smoke. I could go down and buy stuff and send it home but they have enough problems in Italy.

So he thanked me. I didn't see him after that. He didn't go up to the front lines. They put him in the hospital to work as a medic.

So after the war, the first Christmas back, after I went back to work, and he came up to the switchboard and he asked for me, and came up there and gave me a dozen golf balls in appreciation for those cigarettes which he had never forgotten. He said any time I wanted to play at the Joliet Country Club, I would be his guest. Anytime I wanted some golf clubs, he would get them at cost. I was glad to get rid of them. I was tired of carrying those damn cigarettes around. But they were better than money. You could do anything with them. Everybody smoked. But I didn't.

Same thing when we got to Innsbruck. We were able to go up skiing up in the mountains about 15-20 miles away. Lot of guys didn't ski, so I gave them my beer for their tickets. I went up skiing practically every day. I wasn't supposed to, but they gave me their tickets. The war was over as far as we were concerned.

After Paris, we broke up and was shipped back to Landsberg, Germany, from Innsbruck which was quit a ways. Right close to Stuttgart. Some guys got home quicker because they were enroute to go to Japan. So they wanted me to work in the post office there at Bandberg because we had to do something. But I went out for the baseball team. And I made the baseball team. So I got out of that detail. We traveled around different places after the war playing other camps. That helped me out a lot.

We lived up in the attic on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor in Landsberg. Then news came out that the bomb went off. And then Japan surrendered. German beer was 10 per cent. You drank one big canteen and you were looped already. We all got feeling pretty good and were dancing and hopping around because the war was over. We were so happy. Oh God!

So then they started weeding us out. And I started for home. We departed from Germany. It was a big boat this time. Seven days I guess it was. It was the USS Mariposa. It had swimming pools on it at one time, it was converted. We landed in Boston in October. While we were on the boat, this Major Bearhide was a big guy. Ex football player from Northwestern. And Detroit was playing the Cubs. Of course I always favored Detroit because of Billy Rogale. I knew him and met all the other players. Well on the boat, we made a bet. I bet the Col. \$25.00. First of all, the guys took a collection because they all liked him. And he said I couldn't take it. It was quite a bit of money from 200 guys for a pretty nice pot. He said he couldn't take it, but he would give it to his wife. So I bet on the Detroit Tigers. And he bet on the Chicago Cubs. I gave him my address, and he gave me his address. We were heading for the states. We landed in Boston. We departed separately. Everybody went on their different ways. I had to go to Camp Grant, outside Rockford, to be discharged. Well,

Detroit won. 12 to 4 in the last game of the World Series. I never heard from him, so I wrote him a letter and it came back no such address. So to this day, he still owes me \$25.00 plus all the interest that goes with it. I'm still waiting to meet him someday. And I would ask him whether he ever gave that money to his wife. I never saw him again and never collected my \$25.00.

Of course on the boat, they did a lot of gambling, acy/duacy. The Baker boys were golden glove champions. They were small guys, flyweights. And I got aquatinted with them. And they made a mint. They won \$2-3,000 from the crap game acy/duacy. And I sold them the dice for \$25.00. Because I had met up with a guy from Waukegan who was on troop transport who game me some money to hold. He said hold it until he got back. So 2-3 months later I sent him all his money. So when we landed in Boston, I told them they better not carry all that money around because you might get rolled. They what are supposed to do with it. I said go to the bank in Boston and get travelers checks or get money orders, anything. So they went to the bank and got this one little piece of paper and they couldn't believe it was worth all that money. They never had one like that before. And I said was as good as gold. So we landed in Rockford and were going to Chicago. And it was getting late and he had an uncle who was a bartender at the Sheridan Hotel. So there was a 6-foot guy from Big Moose, and some other guys, and we all went in. When the uncle saw these two guys he picked both of them up and hugged and kissed them. Even though the hotel was filled up, he got all of us a room. So we stayed there overnight. We called home that we would be home the next day. The next morning the Baka kids went down to the flower shop and they both bought some Roses and then took a taxi cab all the way up to the northside of the city, they had money, and gave the flowers to their parents and then gave them the money to pay off the mortgage of the house. I never followed up on them after that. I wish I had.

There's so much in between. We never did anything wrong. We lived according to the right way. We never got into any trouble.

While we were in Little Rock, I had a car and we'd go into town once in awhile. I'd say I wasn't going and ask why I didn't want to go. I said I just didn't want to. So one guy would start putting on my pants, another my shoes and they said you're into town tonight. I'd take 4-5 guys into town. We had a lot of fun. I really met a lot of nice guys in the army.

RCT: Where did you meet Pilcher?

DAD: Camp Robinson. We went to training together. He made corporal a couple of weeks after I did. Why, don't ask me. He was fat and clumsy. He was a likable guy and he was no spring chicken either. We were born the same time, within 15 days of each other. He was a Jewel T manager in the Chicago area. We became real good buddies. He was a lot of fun. When I came home on

furlough, I gave him the keys to my car and they ran out of ration coupons so couldn't use the car until I came back.

Sergeant Barret was an ex-convict who was one of the best sergeants you'd ever want. He was tough. You where a soldier when he got through with you. Then Breedlove. He became an officer in the front lines. He was deserving of it.



## **TIMELINE**

### **1940**

20 January 1940 – Franklin Roosevelt elected for third term as President

### **1941**

7 December - Japan bombs Pearl Harbor, Hawaii

8 December – U.S. Declares War on Japan

11 December – Germany Declares War on the United States

### **1942**

10 April – Inducted Into the U.S. Army, Joliet, Illinois

11 April – Known to be at Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois

June – Promoted to Corporal

7 August – Marines land at Guadalcanal

### **1943**

15 March – Promoted to Technician 4<sup>th</sup> Grade – Camp Robinson, Arkansas

5 June – Promoted to Technical Sergeant (Temp.) Camp Robinson, Arkansas

27 June – August Tapio killed by a truck.

10 August – Known to be at Camp Fannin, Texas

18 November – Known to be at Camp Blanding, Florida

28 November – Tehran Conference

## **BACKGROUND OF ALLIED INVASION IN EUROPE**

It was decided by the heads of state as early as 1942 that an invasion of Europe from the West was necessary but would not be feasible until the spring of 1944 after the elimination of the Germans in North Africa which was successfully executed in 1943. The general plan was two primary thrusts:

1. initiate a major assault against the western wall and striking eastward across France into Nazi Germany. i.e. Operation OVERLORD
2. establish a beachhead in southern France, to advance northward up the Rhone River Valley to join the main forces in their race eastward toward Germany. i.e. Operation DRAGOON

In the spring of 1943, it was determined that the sea lift and shore-landing equipment to be available was insufficient to support both OVERLORD and DRAGOON simultaneously. OVERLORD would have to be served first. Their date was set for 8 June 1944. DRAGOON would be tentatively set for 15 August 1944. May 1<sup>st</sup> was the estimated link-up day. Operation OVERLORD was launched 6 June 1944.

## **1944**

6 June – D-Day Invasion – Operation OVERLORD launched

1 July – Sailed to Naples, Italy on the St. Andrews

15 July – Arrived in Naples, Italy

30 July – Italy pictures taken

15 August – Operation DRAGOON launched consisting of the Seventh U.S. Army and the French Army Group B

25 August – Allies free Paris

11 September – Actual link-up of OVERLORD and DRAGOON (OVERLORD D+97 and DRAGOON D+26. Following the link-up of the Third and Seventh Armies, operations OVERLORD and DRAGOON were discontinued. The northern armies were facing the Ardennes Forest on the north-eastern front which included the British First Army, the U.S. First Army and the U. S. Third Army. The Seventh U.S. Army in the southern sector was positioned to assault the Vosges Mountains with the immediate objective of reaching the Rhine River. The Allied forces thereafter presented a united eastward oriented front. The 10<sup>rd</sup> would eventually become part of the VI Corps of the Seventh Army.

20 October – 103<sup>rd</sup> Arrives at Port of Marseilles, France at 1300 hours. The 103<sup>rd</sup> were the first American troops into this port where the Germans had sacrificed its 242<sup>nd</sup> Division in Toulon and its 244<sup>th</sup> Division in Marseilles fighting the allied forces under the Seventh Army during the latter part of August. The Germans had left on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August.

After 20 October – Sailed to Marseilles, France, Joined the 103<sup>rd</sup> Division, 409<sup>th</sup> Infantry.

The assembly area was about 10 miles from port. The route north was curving and sloped steadily uphill. It was a flat area on a broad plateau ringed by mountains except toward the sea. It was barren except for the scrub growth and trees in the hollows.

1 November – Leaves Marseilles, France. Movement was by rail and truck. The Division was heading north and to the front beyond Dijon to become part of Lt. Gen. Alexander M. Patch's Seventh Army. The Division's destination was the rail junction town of Docelles, near the city of Epinal on the Moselle River. The route would be that which supplies would be brought north and northeast in support of future battles laying ahead for the Division.

9 November – Moved into position to occupy front-line position in the Vosges Mountains at Docelles, Southwest of St. Dié, France, to relieve elements of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division. It was here that the troops learned that this was the end of the non-tactical move, and from there northward and eastward their passage would be contested. From now on, they would be an operating Division of VI Corps with a mission of driving the Germans from French soil and thereafter assist in defeating the Germans armed forces.

The immediate task of the 103<sup>rd</sup> Division was to relieve elements of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division on the front and to continue the attack against the enemy to the northeast. The Division was to dig in on the front between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions, commencing 10 November 1944.

(10-30 November – Vosges Mountain Operations)

11 November – 103<sup>rd</sup> Division Committed to Action. The 409<sup>th</sup> and 410<sup>th</sup> Infantry Combat Teams completed the relief of elements of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, by taking over their right and left front positions, respectively. The positions were in the wooded area extending from Herbaville to the small village of Chevy, a zone about 8,000 yards wide.

11-15 November – Conducted intense reconnaissance

15 November – Division Order No. 1 received

16 November – Attacked (crossed the line of departure at 0900) with the assigned mission of seizing and holding the high ground southwest of St. Dié. The 409<sup>th</sup>'s mission was to attack across the Taintrux River, seize and hold the Division objective in the assigned zone which was the town of Taintrux (which was approximately 1000 yards from the Line of Departure; seize and hold the high ground beyond the town overlooking the city of St. Die; maintain contact

with the 36<sup>th</sup> Division on the 103<sup>rd</sup>'s right and protect the Division's right (southern) boundary. By 1630 hours reached the assigned Phase Line making contact with the 411<sup>th</sup> Infantry.

17 November – The attack was resumed. The 409 seized L'Epine and the first hill mass beyond and continued onward to seize the objective, which was the high ground before St. Die.

18 November – VI Corps Headquarters issues Field Order No. 8: The 103<sup>rd</sup> Division was to seize the high ground northeast of St. Die, capture St. Die, and then advance southeast to the line Anould, Traize, Ban-de-Laveline.

19 November – Regiment relieved and entered bivouac & assembly areas near Les-Roiges-Eaux, France. Then moved to the vicinity of Nompatelize.

20 November – (D-day of the Seventh Army general winter offensive) Moved by truck to near Nompatelize, France, and crossed the Meurthe River in a rainstorm. The assignment was to protect the Division's left flank in an encircling movement north of St. Dié with an immediate objective to capture Ville.

21 November – Moved into position near Hurbache, France.

22 November – Continued the attack at 0730.

23 November – (Thanksgiving) Attacked at 0830 advancing on Provencheres.

24 November – Moved toward Steige and Lubine.

25 November – Reached Urbeis.

26 November – Marched into La Laye, France, near Fouchy. At 1700, the 409<sup>th</sup> Commander, Colonel Lloyd, ordered all combat teams disbanded. 409<sup>th</sup> reverted to Division Reserve. The Cactus division, in review, had now been on the battle line attacking for ten consecutive days. The steady drive of the 409<sup>th</sup> combat team along the St. Die – Provencheres – Fouchy axis secured the Corps supply route for future operations in northern Alsace and into the Siegfried Line.

[By pushing through the Vosges Mountains in late November the soldiers of the 409<sup>th</sup> had done what had been considered impossible by great military strategists down through the ages. War in the Vosges had been studiously avoided even in the most seasonable weather, and the daring Napoleon had firmly rejected the idea of winter campaigning in these mountains. When American plans for the late 1944 Vosges attack were revealed to French experts, the French frankly admitted that such a plan was impossible.]

27 November – Received orders to change the direction of its attack, head southeast and capture the large French City of Sélestat. The 409<sup>th</sup> was ordered to attack from Fouchy in its zone, protect the Division's right flank, secure the roadnet in zone seizing Thanville and Dambach, and, on order, advance and seize its objective, the city of Selestat. Captured town of Dieffenbach.

28 November - Attacked town of Neuve-Eglise and St. Pierre Bois (seized by 1845). Attacked town of Hurtzelbach.

29 November – Final liberation of Dieffenbach. Occupied St. Pierre.

30 November – Occupied Dambach-la-Ville at 1000 clearing the road to Sélestat.

[At the end of November the 409<sup>th</sup> had 36 killed, 156 slightly wounded and 20 seriously wounded, 23 injured in action, 17 missing in action and 4 dead of wounds. The Division had 76 dead, 50 wounded, and 51 missing in action. After 19 days of back-breaking marches and sharp fighting in mountainous terrain, thick woods, and winding trails, the 103<sup>rd</sup> Division had broken through the Vosges Mountains. The Division had taken about 1600 prisoners.]

[Continuing their drive they surged eastward out of the Vosges Mountains and onto the Alsace Plain. With startling suddenness, they switched from positions in the Vosges to small towns in Alsace that were battered by the enemy. From cities and villages that were predominantly French, they moved to cities and villages where speech and dress and customs were predominantly German.]

1-3 December – Battle of Selestat - Orders were to attack in its zone and seize the objective, which was the city of Sélestat. 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion remained at St. Maurice in reserve. Sélestat liberated.

1 December – Secured Scherwiller. Attacked Selestat against light and scattered resistance. 409<sup>th</sup> cleared Dambach-La-Ville and attacked south to make contact with the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry in the vicinity of Chatenois.

2 December – Met sporadic but stiff resistance as they proceeded toward the walled section in the inner-city of Selestat.

3 December – The fight for Selestat was continued using infantry only because tanks could not cross the river. At 1715 “Task Force Selestat” was formed which consisted of the 409<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Company A, 328<sup>th</sup> Medical Battalion, Company B 756<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion and Company B and C 601<sup>st</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion. The force was to function as a tank-infantry team with the mission of completing the seizure of Selestat.

4 December – By 1645 the city was completely taken and occupied. 103<sup>rd</sup> troops were relieved.

5 December – Took Selestat

(5-23 December – Alsace Campaign) [The SEVENTH ARMY consisted of:  
VI Corps: 3<sup>rd</sup>, 45<sup>th</sup> & 103<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Divisions, 14<sup>th</sup> Armored Division  
XV Corps: 44<sup>th</sup> and 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions, 12<sup>th</sup> Armored Division  
FIRST FRENCH ARMY: 36<sup>th</sup> US Infantry, 3<sup>rd</sup> Colonial, 4<sup>th</sup> Moroccan Mountain, 9<sup>th</sup>  
Colonial Infantry, 2<sup>nd</sup> Moroccan Infantry, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> Armored Division]

The 103<sup>rd</sup> Division moved to the north from Selestat through mud and rain to the front up from Strasbourg. The troops closed into an assembly area in the vicinity of Gougenheim, 15 kilometers southwest of Haguenau.

6-7 December – Occupied Reitwiller & Truchtersheim & Gougenheim.

8 December – In reserve. Occupied La Walck & Schalkendorf.

9 December – Occupied Dauendorf.

11 December – [1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was in Division Reserve] Moved to an assembly area near Forstheim. Orders to attack town of Morsbronn-les-Bains and beyond. The Regiment prepared to pass through the 410<sup>th</sup> and replace it in the Division at a point between the 410<sup>th</sup> and 411<sup>th</sup> after the 410<sup>th</sup> cleared Laubach. The 409<sup>th</sup> was then to press the attack northeast in the right sector of the Division zone with the immediate objective the town of Morsbronn des Bains. At 1200 the infantry-tank team moved between the gap and at 1330 entered and occupied Morsbronn. Crossed La Sauer River. Seized the town of Gunstett.

12 December – Attacked at 0730. Crossed Sauer River. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion south of Woerth then seized Dieffenbach. At 1439 captured Preuschkorf. 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion fought for Goersdorf. Occupied Gunstett. Took towns of Merwiller and Pechelbronn and Kutzenhausen. Germans retreated toward the Maginot Line and the Siegfried Line.

13 December – 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion relieved by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion and the 3<sup>rd</sup> reverted to Regimental reserve. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion seized Lobsann and Memelshoffen; 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion seized Sultz and Retschwiller. Took Lobsann. Maginot forts found undefended.

14 December – Assigned to continue the attack and protect the Division right flank on the north. 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion took Bremmelbach by 1200; Companies A and B seized Drachenbronn; 1<sup>st</sup> battalion entered Cleebourg at 1438.

15 December – Took Steinseltz at 0930 and Oberhoffen. Third Division in Cleebourg as reserve. Attacked left of Wissembourg clearing the way for the 14<sup>th</sup> Armored Division. Captured Rott.

16 December – Captured Weiler. Occupied the hills north of town at nightfall and dug in for the night. Took Hill 503 overlooking St. Germanshof, the international border crossing point. Entered German territory for the first time at St. Germanhoff. On this same day, German General Von Rundstedt consolidated the remaining reserves of the now battered German Wehrmacht and mounted a surprise German counteroffensive which was known as the “Battle of the Bulge.”

17 December – Patrols were sent forward to probe the Siegfried defenses. The Regiments did not attack that day because it was told that its units were too far in front of the Seventh Army front. To go further would put principle elements of VI Corps in jeopardy of being cut off. Nevertheless, authorization was given to plan for an attack on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

18 December – Ordered to attack Rechtenbach, Germany. Town empty of civilians. Took Hill 89 overlooking Ober-Otterbach on the west.

19 December – Secured position northeast of hill 543 and took hill 489. Took Hohenberg Hill and Grassberg Hill. These hills, running east and west had been fortified with three reinforced concrete bunkers connected by tunnels.

20 December – Bad weather and reduced visibility making air support impossible. Took heavy artillery fire. The enemy launched a tank-supported counterattack during the morning and one in the afternoon against the 409<sup>th</sup> positions inside the Siegfried Line. Both were repulsed. Forward movement was minimal.

21 December – Ordered to continue its aggressive reconnaissance by fire using all weapons, to conduct patrolling without any involvement in a heavy attack, and to fire on, but not assault pillboxes. Attacked by flame-throwers and Molotov cocktails. The enemy withdrew at about 0330.

22 December – Unexpected appearance of the Thunderbirds. The 103<sup>rd</sup> Division was relocated to fit into the pattern of the new Allied front. They would be a “holding operation” and the division would be positioned to defend, if necessary, against German attempts to enlarge their latest and most desperate offensive in the west. Relieved by the 179th Infantry Division by 1101. By mid-afternoon closed into an area near Wissembourg. Clean clothing was issued. Trucks were waiting to transport the 409<sup>th</sup> men by night motor march to Hellimar, France (a town in the Province of Lorraine located 80 miles to the west of Wissembourg and about 10 miles southeast of St. Avold) along treacherous roads. The 103<sup>rd</sup> was replacing the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division of XV Corps which was being moved north to assist in the relief of Bastogne and the reduction of the bulge in the Battle of the Bulge.

(23 December - 15 March – Wissembourg and Sessenheim)

23 December – Night march utilizing Seventh Army vehicles and Service Company trucks and billeted near Hellimer, France. In assembly area by 0950. By 1600 the relief of the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division was complete.

24 December – Went to Guenviller and Cappel, France, the quieter Sarreguemines sector, part of the erich Saar basin, formally held by the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division. Spent Christmas day here. No enemy contact.

25 December (Christmas) – Turkey was served with cranberry sauce, celery, mashed and sweet potatoes, giblet gravy, mince and pumpkin pie and coffee. The beverage was beer. Mail clerks returned from the APO with sacks of letters and packages. There were small Christmas trees in almost every French home. At 0230 Division Order No. 4 ordered the regiments to deploy onto the new defensive position because 3 German infantry divisions were available to attack in the 103<sup>rd</sup> sector.

23-31 December – Preparations were made to defend the regimental zone. At the end of the month 80% of the necessary tactical work was completed. The 103<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division of the VI Corps was required to fill the gap in the XV Corps front being vacated by the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division which moved north to assist in the relief of Bastogne. 150 trucks were furnished by the Seventh Army to move the 103<sup>rd</sup> Division the 75 miles to the northeast along a route behind the Seventh Army front, on the axis Wissembourg-Climbach-Wissemaare-Union-Puttelange-Metzig-Hellimer. The 409<sup>th</sup> was to be the Division Reserve, with initial in-depth position behind the MLR in the vicinity of Guenviller, Cappel, Rohrbach and Hellimer. The seventh Army now was defending on a line in excess of 103 miles in width. All units on the defensive line were ordered to prepare defensive position against impending German attack. Intelligence had advised that the attack would be on new Year's Eve or New Year's Day.

29 - 31 December – Defense preparations were completed.

[Casualties totaling 589 men in the 409<sup>th</sup>. 46 men were killed in action and 218 were counted as missing in action. Eight were seriously injured. 254 were slightly wounded in action while 56 were slightly injured. Six died of wounds.]

## **1945**

1-13 January – After the defensive positions had been completed there was little to do.

7 January – The Bitche Salient had stabilized.

8 January – Major General Charles H. Haffner, Jr. announced his return to the United States for health reasons.

9 January – 103<sup>rd</sup> Division still Lorraine occupying holding positions of the MLR in the Forbach area on the stabilized western rim of the Bitche Salient.

11 January – Brigadier General Anthony C. McAuliffe assumes command.

12 January – U.S. Liberates Philippines

13 January – Received orders that the 103<sup>rd</sup> Division was to be relieved in place by the 70<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Thereafter, the 103<sup>rd</sup> was moved back 70 miles east to the La Sauer River in the Woerth-reichshoffen area and occupy the Philippsbourg Line where the 70<sup>th</sup> Division had been holding. It was felt that a battle-experienced infantry was needed in that area. The 103<sup>rd</sup> Division's new mission now would be to establish a holding and blocking position to prevent enemy penetration of Alsace from either the Bitche Salient or from Germany into northern Alsace. The new position now placed them on the eastern rim of the Bitche Salient.

14 January – Regimental positions were taken over by elements of the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The 409<sup>th</sup> entrucked from hellimer to Woerth, near its former area in Alsace. Relieved infantry troops of the 70<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

15 January – By 2345 relieved the 70<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

20 January – At 1200 orders were given to withdraw south of Alsace proper to a new defense line. At 1400 actual withdrawal began and continued under cover of darkness. Franklin D. Roosevelt elected to fourth term as President.

21 January – Arrived at Ringeldorf after 16 hour march.

22-24 January – Digging of the Regiment's newout post line below Mietesheim and more digging below Kindwiller, La Walck and Ueberach. Regimental CP was located at Ringeldorf.

25 January – Enemy attacked near Kindwiller but was repulsed.

26 January – Experiment of artificial moonlight, but ineffectual because of a snowstorm.

31 January – In accordance with a plan for readjustment of forces and sectors, the 506<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry regiment of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division was oriented on positions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion.

[With little combat action in January, the 409<sup>th</sup>'s casualty list was reduced considerably over the two previous months with a total of 117 men. Of these, 21 were killed in action, 1 died of wounds, 29 were counted as missing, 32 were slightly injured in action and 34 were slightly wounded in action.]

8 February – Raid on Kindwiller.

9-28 February – With exception of the raid on Kindwiller, the month of February saw practically no combat action by the 409<sup>th</sup>. The Regiment was placed in Division reserve and the men were entertained. The men were quartered in small French towns in the vicinity of Bouxwiller and a daily 8-hour training schedule was maintained. Defensive positions in each front line regimental battalion zones were continuously being improved.

[February 18<sup>th</sup> was the completion of the 100 days in combat. Regimental CP was moved from Ringeldorf, where it had been for nearly a month, to Bouxwiller.]

1-11 March – Training and entertainment continued.

12 March – Regimental Headquarters issues a “top secret” alert for the beginning of a new offensive to uncover and relentlessly penetrate the Siegfried Line upon which success the attack would continue indefinitely to the northeast.

(15-31 March – OPERATION UNDERTONE - Saar-Palatinate )

15 March – D-day was 0900. 410<sup>th</sup> and 411<sup>th</sup> would launch a coordinated attack seizing the ground along the Zintzell River. The 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion of the 409<sup>th</sup> would be in reserve but would create a Task Force to be known as Task Force Cactus, the mission of which would be to seize Climbach, 25 miles to the north. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion would then follow the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, relieving it at Climbach and passing through it to attain Bobenthal which lay across the German border.

16 March – 1<sup>st</sup> moved to Zutzendorf, then to Uhrwiller  
2<sup>nd</sup> moved to Engwiller.  
3<sup>rd</sup> waited for the green light at Bouxwiller

17 March – Moved to take over the zone of the 410<sup>th</sup>.  
2<sup>nd</sup> moved to Schillersdorf  
0700 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 409<sup>th</sup> attacked Schirlenhof  
1<sup>st</sup> to Eberbach and Woerth, France  
Froschweiler and Reichdorf liberated.

Town of Gundershoffen was cleared by the 410<sup>th</sup> whereupon the 409<sup>th</sup> relieved them by passing through and continuing the attack to the northeast.

18 March – 1<sup>st</sup> to Climbach  
2<sup>nd</sup> from Froschweiler to Climbach  
3<sup>rd</sup> went 15 miles to Climbach, its objective, in less than a day. All three divisions in Climbach.

19 March – Attack resumed at 0730. 3<sup>rd</sup> being released from Task Force Cactus, went on reserve. 1<sup>st</sup> received orders to move to Reisdorf. The enemy offered violent opposition. 3<sup>rd</sup> was committed in the sector on the left. 3<sup>rd</sup> received order to attack on the left side of the trail to take Hills 518 and 426 at 1700 hours. Up against the Siegfried defenses of pill boxes, ditches, trenches, dugouts, foxholes, and fortifications.

20 March – Fighting continues. 1<sup>st</sup> in atop a hill and 3<sup>rd</sup> in the valley to the left of Reisdorf. Six pillboxes were taken during the day.

21 March – Attack resumes. 1<sup>st</sup> takes heavy fire. 3<sup>rd</sup> met nothing but sporadic artillery and mortar fire.

22 March – High ground above Reisdorf and the town had been cleared. The mission of the Task Force and the 409<sup>th</sup> infantry was to exploit the breakthrough, which was accomplished.

23 March – Heavy fighting - Silz taken. Moved into Birkenhorst. Assembled troops in strategic locations north and south of Klingenstein to pick up enemy troops moving to the Rhineland from mountain passes and along the roads leading east.

24 March – Heavy fighting - Klingenstein taken. 103<sup>rd</sup> ordered into VI Corps reserve in the evening.

[It took 7 days for the 103<sup>rd</sup> Division to crack the great German West Wall, the Siegfried Line. The Division contributed to the destruction of the German First and Seventh Armies west of the Rhine. For its victory in the Siegfried, the 409<sup>th</sup> had 31 men killed in action, 9 missing in action, 3 died of wounds, 41 seriously wounded in action, 199 slightly wounded in action, 1 seriously injured in action and 27 slightly injured in action, for a total of 311 men.]

26 March – 103<sup>rd</sup> Division of VI Corps were retained west of the Rhine in SHEAF RESERVE.

28 March – 103<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division began the relief of the 71<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division west of the Rhine to assume the mission of occupation duty. The 409<sup>th</sup> Infantry, with headquarters in Oggersheim, assumed responsibility for the area from Oppau to the southern limits of Ludwigshafen. Occupation duties here involved river outpost duty, search of surrounding towns and service as guard for Allied Military Government. Also they guarded the massive prisoner of war cages; searched the area, woods and villages for ex-soldiers, weapons and fugitives; guarded the Rhine River line; assisted in the re-establishment of law and order and assisted in the control and movement of thousands of displaced persons.

25-31 March – Operations were devoted to the river outpost. Search of surrounding towns and guard for the Allied Military Government.

(1 April – 5 May – Danube River to Innsbruck, Austria)

1 April – In Oggersheim and Ludwigshafen and along the Rhine River. 409<sup>th</sup> went into Seventh Army reserve.

2 April – Saw USO show starring Marlene Dietrich where she politely displayed her garter with the Cactus Patch.

4 April – VI Corps was ordered not to proceed beyond Heilbronn. 103<sup>rd</sup> would be available in a few days to give more power to VI Corps.

7 April – Crossed the Rhine River following the advance of the Seventh Army. Occupied Rossdorf, east of Darmstadt to continue garrison and police duties.

8 April – 409<sup>th</sup> moved to the east side of the Rhine to Steinau. Remained in SHAEF Reserve.

11 April – Rounded up prisoners who still sought refuge in the hills. A displaced persons collecting point was set up in Gelnhausen.

18 April – Began preparations to move south using DUKWs (Ducks).

19 April – Alerted for a long movement to the south near Heilbronn.

[The 103<sup>rd</sup> was ordered to effect a mounted attack southward. Seize the village of Pluederhausen and Lorch; thereafter be prepared with the 410<sup>th</sup> and 411<sup>th</sup> to secure the town of Kirchheim via Uhingen. 409<sup>th</sup> to follow this route behind.]

20 April – Movement south started. 7 hour ride. 409<sup>th</sup> was in Division Reserve and followed the advance of the 411<sup>th</sup> Combat Team.

21 April – Seizure of Kirchheim. At Houbersbronn. 411<sup>th</sup> at Ober Schlechtbach.

22 April – 3<sup>rd</sup> in Kirchheim. 1<sup>st</sup> in Schorndorf. 410<sup>th</sup> at Schlierbach. 411<sup>th</sup> cleared Reichenbach, Rendern, Hochdorf, Notzingen, Wendlingen, Otlingen, Lindorf and Nurtigen.

23 April – In Unter-Boihingen and Unter hausen and Neuhausen.

24 April – Near Geislingen. 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was assigned the mission of reconnaissance. 409<sup>th</sup> still following the path of the 411<sup>th</sup>. Attacxking toward Metzingen. 409<sup>th</sup> moved to the south of Geislingen and began relieving units of the 44<sup>th</sup> Infantry. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion cleared Stubersheim, Hoff-Emerbuch and

Ettlenschliess. 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion cleared Neenstetten and Albeck-Bofingen. 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion cleared Hulben and urach and concluded the fight in Erkenbrechtswiller and on to Wittlingen

[A new VI Corps order was received where the 103<sup>rd</sup> was directed to relieve the 44<sup>th</sup> Infabtry which was then deployed on an east-west front north of Ulm on a line in the vicinity of Zgeislingen. The 103<sup>rd</sup> was then to move southward from Geislingen to effect a crossing over the Danube northeast of Ulm, to attack in exploitation to the southeast on the east side of the Iller River, through Schongau to Garmish-Partenkirchen, and to be prepared thereafter to continue the attack into Austria to seize the city of Innsbruck and the Brenner Pass on the Austrian-Italian Border.]

25 April – Attack was launched, headed by the 10<sup>th</sup> Armored Division and the 409<sup>th</sup> Infantry. The route was Geislingen, Albeck, Leibi (on the south side of the Danube), neu Ulm, Neuberg, Buchloe, Landsberg, Schongau, Oberammergau, Garmish-Partenkirchen, Mittenwald, Scharnitz, Seefeld, Innsbruck, and to Brenner Pass. Reached the Danube River at 1700. A site was selected for an assault crossing at a point between Unter-Elchingen on the north side of the Danube and the village of Leibi on the south side. .

26 April – The remainder of the 409<sup>th</sup> made the crossing and continued south to the vicinity of Burg, a distance of about 40 kilometers.

27 April – 409<sup>th</sup> cleared and passed through the town of Burg (2 kilometers south of Thanhausen) and overtook an enemy column of horse-drawn vehicles (between Burg and Balzhausen). Another column was overtaken near Zaisertshofen. Regiment advanced over 70 kilometers to the vicinity of Schongau. During the night sensational and long-awaited news of link-up of american and Russian troops was announced which cut Germany in half.

[This was a march of more than 200 miles to the south in less than 10 days. The roads now leading up to the front were congested with endless processions of now-benign prisoners moving to the rear of the Cactus columns on foot. ]

28 April – Assembled in Schongau pending completion of the bridge across the Lech River gorge..

29 April – Crossed the Lech River at Schongau in the morning and advanced southeast toward Oberammergau. The 409<sup>th</sup> continued on into the town, established a Command Post and immediately initiated reconnaissance for a by-pass through the mountains to Mittenwald.

[103<sup>rd</sup> was given the mission of capturing Innsbruck, Austria, which was just over the mountain and contacting the 5<sup>th</sup> US Army in the vicinity of Brenner Pass.]

1 May – Advanced from Mittenwald, Germany to Scharnitz, Austria which was cleared by 1500. By the end of the day, the 409<sup>th</sup> Combat Team reached Seefeld. At east of Zirl.

2 May – Advanced to Auland and Reith. 3<sup>rd</sup> in Seefeld. Innsbruck, the largest city in the area and capital of the Austrian Tyrol, capitulated.

[1605: In Austria a Security Committee of the Resistance Movement has taken office. The Populace is asked to be calm and orderly.

1710: An Armistice between the allied Command and the High Command of the Germans Southern Army has been declared as of 1400. The Armistice had been set at 1700 in some areas. All military commanders are to cease resistance and to take necessary action.

1730: All members of the Austrian Resistance Movement must report immediately to the City Hall in Innsbruck to serve as Auxiliary Police.

1745: All people are to obey the command of the Allied Troops and are to keep order.]

At 1930 the order came down to “Mount up. We’re riding into town.” The city had been declared open. Rode into town at 1945.

3 May - 3<sup>rd</sup> Advanced to Maurach.

4 May – Contacted elements of the XXI Corps at Wörgl. The formal surrender of Innsbruck was accepted.

6 May – German Surrender Notice Received

5 May – 3<sup>rd</sup> moved from Maurach to Schwaz.

7 May – The Commanding General of the Cactus Division received a message from SHAEF advising that a representative from the German High Command had signed the unconditional surrender of all land, sea, and air forces in Europe to the Allied Expeditionary Force and simultaneously the Soviet High Command at 0141 7 May 1945, Central European Time, under which forces all will cease active operations at 0001 hours, 9 May 1945.

9 May – ***Peace was officially placed at 0001 hours.***

10 May – Pictures taken on ski trip in Innsbruck, Austria

13 May – Area assigned to 3<sup>rd</sup> was extended. Moved to Hotel Seehof on Lake Achensee.

29 May – 409<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Review in Innsbruck.

June – Trip to Paris on Furlough

26 June – United Nations Established

24 August – 103<sup>rd</sup> Moved to Landsberg, Germany for pre-departure

9 September – Promoted to Technical Sergeant – Service Company 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry located at Bamberg, Germany. 103<sup>rd</sup> Boarded ship at Le Havre.

While demobilization was right around the corner for many soldiers in the European Theater of Operations (ETO), others did not have enough points to go home. Many men would be transferred to units slated to participate in the invasion of Japan; others would be assigned to occupation duties in Germany and Austria. Among the senior leaders of the Big Red One came the realization that somebody was going to have to oversee the demobilization of the German armed forces, provide security for occupation forces and installations, and ensure an environment that allowed for the stabilization of German society until local, state and eventually, national government officials were elected and assumed responsibility for running the country. Until the Germans could rebuild their governmental infrastructure, the occupying forces would have to fill the vacuum, and the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division was one of several divisions selected to perform the role of occupation force.

September 1945 – The 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division was responsible for the security. Preservation of law and order, protection of captured installations and for military government within its zone.

22 September – Sailed for the United States

4 October – Arrived at Camp Myles Standish, Boston, Massachusetts

16 October – Discharged at Fort Sheridan, Chicago, Illinois