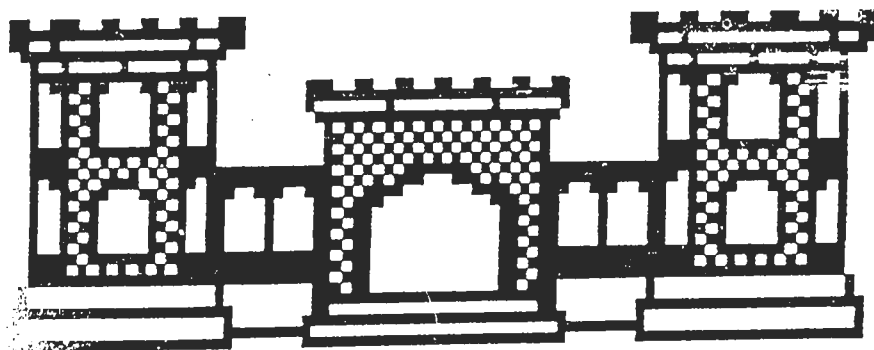


# 163RD ENGINEERS



## COMBAT BATTALION

## PRELUDE

This narration is dedicated to the men of the 163 Rd Combat Engineer Battalion of World War II who fought so bravely and did the job they were assigned to do.

My wife "Geraldine Johnson" deserved credit for saving all the letters I had written her while in the service. And having been the company clerk of co. B. I had access to the daily reports of our outfit from the time I joined it in Mississippi to the end of the war in Austria.

At the time of this writing it is Feb.. 1991, almost 50 years since I was inducted in the U.S. Service June 20, 1941. Much detail I have forgotten, among all the sadness there is much humor which I wish I could remember, for in the army during war time you become a very close nit family..

One thing I have noticed, during the war I never ran across any GI that used pot, narcotic, etc. or was a homosexual. They drank of course, but that has always been a scourge. Many of my buddies are no doubt passed on because of age.

Co B clerk  
Harold A. Johnson Tsgt  
2359 Sunflower Lane  
Fremont Mich 49412  
ph 616 924 3598

Edited by John P. Kandra Tsgt  
163 rd combat engr co .b. radio operator  
1645 Ball Ne . Grand rapids Mi . 49505

page.2

## Introduction

Throughout this narration it is not my intention to blow up a picture of myself as some hero, for I was far from that, when we were assigned overseas my job was company clerk, our company B, saw lots of action and had their share of loss of life, for the part of the war that was played by the Combat Engineer Battalions was very dangerous. Their work was constructing and tearing down bridges of various types, maintaining the roads at the front, removing mine fields placed by the enemy, assaulting enemy fortifications, bunkers, supporting the infantry, assigned to the front to protect our lives so that the Germans would not break thru, etc.

My part was to keep the company records up to date, make out the payroll data and other clerical work. Did guard duty, sometimes in isolated spots where I was all alone as we advanced across France and Germany, etc. I estimate I was within artillery range and enemy aircraft over 275 days including sometimes mortar fire. Whenever there was danger of our company being captured, I was custodian of the service records, they would send the service records back to battalion headquarters, I being the custodian, therefore, I was sent back to battalion headquarters also.

The 163 rd Combat Engineer Battalion consisted of Headquarters co, and co's A, B, C. I was assigned to be company clerk of co. B. it was my job till the end of the war. The company clerk has the responsibility of keeping the personal records of each soldier up- to- date. Each soldier has a small about 4"x 12" booklet consisting of all data pertaining to him, typed in a very abbreviated form. Before going overseas there was supposed to be a stamp in the records certifying we had taken a twenty-five mile march with full field pack, this designated we were physically fit. All of us clerks stamped the records with out the march, why not?

Camp Van Dorn , Miss .  
the home of the 163rd Combat Engineer Battalion

A Lot of the northern Boys came from camp GEO E .MEADE Near Baltimore MD. I came from Baltimore And was inducted at Ft. Meade Maryland. others came from other camps scattered around the country.

The Northern boys found it hot & muggy while the southern fellows didn't mind it at all. anyway basic training was the name of the game at camp.

Left for overseas

Feb. 17 ,1944 left Camp Van Dorn, Miss. by train, Feb 20, arrived at Camp Shanks, New York. Feb. 27th left Camp Shanks for New York to debarkation for Britain, 27 Feb 44 Left NYPE at 0750 hrs for port debarkation

We boarded the boat CRISTABOL, a luxury cruise liner which previously operated from New York to Cristabol, Venezuela or Columbia, South America. It was a relative small ship, but nice if it weren't so crowded with G.I.'s. As we pulled out of the New York harbor the morning was rather misty, I could see the statue of Liberty in the mist proudly holding up her arm with a unlit torch. I thought of my grand-parents and my father coming to America and seeing that for the first time and traveling on a emigrant boat crowded with people looking for an opportunity in the promised land. WE wondered if we would see this beautiful promise of hope in returning.

We had not gone very far out of the harbor when I saw some of the fellows hitting for the rails & vomiting, I noticed that there were GI's on the deck below, so I couldn't understand all these sick GI's all the 12 days going over, The seas WERE ROUGH from the February storms, I never got sick or had motion sickness as a boy I used to like to climb high trees & swing down to the ground on the branches. We got out into the Atlantic ocean we joined other convoys from Boston and other ports, this constituted a very large convoy. Some of those quickly built liberty ships ,built by Kaiser on the west coast were bobbing like corks. But all around us were U.S. destroyers patrolling the waters for submarines. The waves were so high that the destroyers in the distance would disappear from view. We went north close to Iceland and then across to northern Ireland, as we got nearer the British Isles there were military planes circling to protect us.

It took us 12 days to cross the stormy Atlantic with convoy zig-zagging. A scene I still can see in my minds eye. ,when we went between Scotland and Ireland, passing the Isle of Mann, the water was so beautiful aquatic green, along both sides were the white stucco houses of the residents along the hill sides. We landed at Swansea, Wales, there we disembarked and got on a truck convoy to go inland. It was dark when we passed thru Birmingham, England, it was there I saw the first ravages of the war. also near by Coventry. Both cities were industrial cities and were prime targets for the German Lufwaff. It seemed that block after block the factories and buildings looked like skeletons. In a couple days we arrived at a little town called Chipping Norton , there we were to be located on the edge of town for 4 months prior to the Normandy Invasion of France. Chipping Norton is about 20 miles from Oxford, England. While there I got to see Oxford, noted for Oxford University, Also the town of Stratford-On -Avon, Shakespeare's birthplace ,also Ann Hathway Cottage,(which is thatched roofed) .Took in a Shakespearean play at the Shakespear Theatre.

As we traveled thru the English country side we saw along the roads and in the wooded areas, armment, artillery shells stacked like cord wood. We knew this was building up for the invasion of France . There were lots of British and American airports, one was near Chipping Norton where we were bivouacked. At night the German planes would come over and we could see the search lights scanning the skies in their arc formation.

We traveled to London which was 80 miles away. Traveling in the British train was an experience, each car was divided into booths, The British people are very private , very reserved. While in London we rode on the double decked buses, went by the Prime Ministers residence No 10 Downing St., went thru Westminster Abbey where many Kings have their Burial coffins ( Dr. Livingston of Africa is here). The Abbey was very impressive for it is here where the Kings are crowned and many ceremonial events takes place.

May 6 1944

Our Company Commander 1st Lt. Petrinni was promoted to rank of Captain. I didn't know until later on ,that our outfit was scheduled for "D" day invasion of Normandy France. As it was ,we were in camp when the news on June 6th 1944 Invasion of Normandy began, news received in the headquarters by commercial radio. So this is to be the beginning of the real war for us , all the highways, byways were stocked with war material.

June. 21st

We left Overnorton Camp in England, for Southampton on the coast where on the 27th we boarded a LST and arrived in France on the 27th of June. While waiting at Southampton it was reported that two German V-2 rockets landed. We disembarked at Utah Beach, at 2000 hrs preceded to a de-waterproofing area for overnight bivouac 10 miles inland. The landing craft pulled unto the shore let down the front end and we waded ashore.

When we arrived at Utah beach, there were a number of observation balloons used for tangling with the German planes. We preceded inland we were astonished to see a number of large glider planes that had crashed, split in-two, some landed in the trees. you see these glider planes had no motors, they were toed by bomber planes across The English Channel and supposedly hauled inland to behind the enemy lines.

The enemy fire along the coast was so intense that the bombers released the gliders in the darkness and the poor souls had to land where ever fate directed them.

As we moved inland we went thru the town of Isigny and Carentan, was near here where we bivouacked. These towns were hit hard as the paratroopers landed. I talked with one of the paratroopers and he related some of his harrowing experiences.

While the infantry were trying to battle their way thru the hedgerows of Normandy, our outfit was working on road construction. near the limestone quarry there was a downed ME-109 the report was that the pilot was a women. Occasionally at camp we would hear what was sniper fire, but this was not very often. The French were glad to see the GI liberators.

Cpl Anderson stood along the side of the road near our camp when along came GENERAL PATTON in his command car, Anderson didn't salute the General, so the The General stopped and asked him "DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM ? , AND Anderson replied " DO you know who I am" (in his drunken stupor)!! In a few days an order came thru our office to punish Anderson, he was reduced to private, in a few days later he was made Corporal again.!! That's why they say the Combat engineers will stand up to anybody!!

BREAKING THRU THE HEDGE-ROWS IN NORMANDY

2 aug 44 Co. B. moved to new bivouac area near St.Lou

The latter part of July the Allies had their big drive to break thru the hedge rows into the heart of France. I never saw so many bombers, it seemed like thousands flying over, some of the bombers in a few minutes were returning back to England, this is known as the ST. LO breakthru. It was here that General McNair was killed and some of his troops. Our outfit then moved out of Normandy towards St. Lo. where the main break thru took place.

We saw bomb craters all over, bloated cows lying dead in the fields. The town of St. Lo. had to have Bull-dozers to dig a way for us to go thru the streets. The smell of the dead was terrible, This was the first taste of real war, We were in the 2nd Army behind the infantry fighting the hedge-rows, then they formed the 3rd Army and made General Patton the head and we then were with him in his Historic Drive across France , I believe he was made a four star General at this time.

Later we had another encounter with General Patton when he stopped our convoy and ordered our battalion commander to have us put our steel helmets on and look like soldiers, we did, for awhile. General Patton drove hard to get to Berlin first. We made tremendous strides now that we were thru the hedge -rows. The third Army spearheaded across France, large pockets of German troops were trapped in pincer movements.

Aug 12th Our company commander "Capt Petrinni" was seriously injured while hunting snipers reported hidden in a barn, He was sent back to England for convalescing, he later joined our outfit at the end of the war.

Aug 8th Left LaHayes DePuite ,arrived at Ernee, distance of 76mi

Aug 9th moved to Renne 60 miles

Aug 11 Moved to Maunt FT, DeRotrove 34-mi & assigned to XV Corp, was in support of the 79th Inf Div.

Aug 30th Moved to new bivouac area distance 10 mi ( this was 50 mi south of Paris"Jouy LaChatel

Sept 7th Left Bivouac area to Bar-le-Du 114 mi

Sept 9 fh PFC Harold L. FISHER wounded , first battle casualty of Co B.

Page 7

Aug 13th Battalion area bombed and strafed by enemy planes consisting of 8 in all. This attack represented the first initial action by the enemy against our unit. The following day three more planes passed directly over our area and drew fire from our AA, machine guns and fire from adjacent units.

Once we broke thru the hedge-rows of Normandy we traveled fast. As our troops spearheaded across France, large pockets of German troops were trapped in pincer movements. Our Engineer Battalion was the first to build a bridge across the Seine River north of Paris.

Aug 22 .

We built the first bridge across the Seine River, we built what is called a treadway bridge enabling us to make a beachhead. This was built by company A & C. Lt. Byrd received a silver star. Six enemy planes were shot down by members of the battalion. All were shot down in the vicinity of the bridge built by our battalion in Rosny on the Seine. Four planes were accredited to Clark of Co. C one to Lt. Sides and E.M. Holloway of Co. A. All were brought down by 50 cal. machine gun fire, Clark got lightly injured in the heel.

Aug 23 rd

Our Co. B. was attached to the 106 th Cavalry Group, the report states that one German Anti-tank gun was knocked out by a rocket launcher manned by a man of Co. B. Four Germans were killed by other means. Two were credited to one man, no casualties by Co. B.

Aug 24th

Our Battalion transferred from the Third Army back to the First Army. Co. B. attached to the 106 th Cavalry Group, one German soldier was killed by Co. B. action.

Aug 28 th

Co. B. relieved from duty with Cavalry, understand that a Combat Engineer Battalion can be shuffled around to where ever needed, that is why they are called a bastard outfit. At time we would be attached to a infantry division, which was the 79 th, which we stayed with all across France.

Page 8  
PARIS LIBERATED

While we were in the vicinity of Paris, the Free French had liberated the city. This was pre-arranged deal as Gen. De Gaul wanted to be the first to enter Paris with his Free Army. A few days later the American troops came in. By then the city was liberated and the French citizens were absolutely wild, everything was open. We were given one day of leave in the city. Most of the time I spent myself looking at places of interest until my feet got tired. Saw the Notre Dame Cathedral, It is difficult for the mind to grasp what this meant to the people. As for the guys that wanted to live it up they had their chance, girls beckoning in the doorways, a few days earlier they could have done the same to the Germans.

If we were a part of a division like the 94 th Inf. Division that I took my basic training with ,they have their own historian to record the events, but as for our small outfit it was not possible.

As we drove across France our nerves were really on edge especially at night . we would sleep on the ground where ever we found a place to lay, we would hear the rumble of the tanks, wondering if they were friend or foe.

I'll never forget the sight of seeing people liberated , as we went thru this town. We were walking, perhaps we were the first Allied troops they had seen ion their city. The people lined the sidewalk, they cheered Free French flags waving out the up-stairs windows. This was very moving experience. Some of the fellows were offered bottles of wine, suddenly a young girl ran out to us and placed a wreath she had made around my neck. It seems that the French had something like four years under German Occupation. May I never take my Freedom in the U.S.A. for granted!!!

Another incident , I was alone with another G.I. and we were riding into town in our jeep, the people in the village rushed out to us gathered around our Jeep jabbering in French, it seems that the Germans a couple days before had taken 15 or 20 men out of town and into a field and shot them . Incidents like this alerts you to the possibility of running into some of the pockets of Germans left behind as the German Army retreated.

The day we pushed so many miles across France, we had bivouacked in a small wooded area alongside the tarvy road, we spotted about 21 planes flying overhead going west, we tried to identify them, soon we knew they were German planes as they were strafing on their return flight.

I believe it was Sept 7th we were all bone tired and beat. Our battalion commander didn't know just where we were, it was dark, he moved our convoy into a large field and put us into a circle (like covered wagons of old) only this was not in the 1800's. I lay down on the ground beside our vehicle and went right to sleep. During the night three German soldiers came towards the guards, saying "hello" "hello" they wanted to surrender, the war was over for them. What awoke me in the morning was the loud roar as some planes came sweeping down on us. I was scared out of my britches. What it was, they were American planes trying to identify us, we had large bold crosses on the roof of each vehicle identifying who we were. We quickly assembled our selves and started back from whence we came, about 10 miles back. We had gone way into enemy territory, infact close to a German Airport. We stopped in a small village, there was sniper fire, a few of us went searching for the sniper, we looked thru a nearby barn, checked the hay mow, but didn't find him. during that day we saw a dog fight, the American plane shot down the German plane, we saw a puff of black smoke out of the German plane, it turned over on it's side out tumbled an object, soon a parachute opened a few fellows took a jeep and drove over to where he had landed, found he got a 50 cal bullet in his arm.

By this time we were all keyed up. We were ordered to move on. I was placed in the lead vehicle, Manley was driving, I told Manley you know how our planes would knock out the lead vehicle of the Germans and the tail vehicle and mop up the convoy! If I see a German plane I'll shout to you and you stop the convoy so that we can desperate into the fields, as we were taught.

We hadn't gone a half mile when I hollered to Mainly, "There's one way over on the right on the edge of the woods heading towards us, "" here's another coming right down the center of the road" By then I had jumped from the moving jeep, some of the others in the convoy did also I skinned my knees quite badly, I ended up in the wheat field. But something I didn't know is that out in the fields were anti craft 50 cal guns both planes went down in a pillar of smoke. One of the fellows broke his ankle jumping from the truck.

You see we were very close to the German front, we had more planes attacking after we were bivouacked a little ways down the road. Lt. Busby from Chicago, our administrative officer, always had a whiskey bottle nearby, the first thing he did was to dig his fox hole and he stayed in it with his bottle. After a day like this your nerves are pretty well thread bare. I know many of our soldiers had it a lot worse than I had it during the war , but this is exciting enough.

As a company clerk , when the situation got rough for company B. The service records were transferred back to battalion Hq. and I was custodian of the records,thus that is where I went. Beside clerical work would be called out to do guard duty, or be posted way ahead of our convoy when pressing forward and I would be stuck alone out in some desolate place, maybe a small wooded area wondering if there was some German near by, especially when we crossed the Maginot line and Zigfried line into Germany. My contact with the enemy was mostly artillery or mortar a limited amount of air-craft, I had somewhat over 275 days within German artillery range.

Occasionally we had the privilege to be entertained by some Hollywood star, I remember one evening we were to hear and see Dina Shore, that evening the program was interrupted by a sudden order to move on.

Another time we were entertained by Bing Crosby and a fellow who accompanied him on a accordion , that morning two mortar shells were fired in the ares where he was to perform. We enjoyed his singing. After the program was over we saw a half-track vehicle of ours cross a field in a few minutes some shots were fired as they entered a wooded area ,I presume they got the Germans.

About this time some were sent back to Nancy France for two or three days rest period after that we were approaching Gerberville, France,there was Meurthe ( a river that had the bridge blown up. We had to ford the river , it was not very deep. Built a timber bridge Sept 23,24, 25.

Sept 28 1944 Battalion transferred to part of XV Corp. to the 7 th Army.

While we were waiting to cross the river I walked around and looked at the many shells that the Germans had shot over but had not detonated, this indicated that some of the help in the factories had damaged the shells on purpose. This was an encouragement to us. After we crossed to the other side we saw foxholes where the enemy had dug in, there were dead Germans in some of the foxholes, one boy lay dead, he was so young he hadn't even started to shave yet!. This showed how desperate the Germans were, not only that , the older ones evidently left the young lads to be the rear guard during the retreat while the others left!.

We were a few days in Luneville, France ,that morning we arrived General Eisenhower supposed to have been there. While in Luneville we were able to be out of the cold. It was getting in the fall of the year and much rain,after a long period of weather like this we fellows would get somewhat on each others nerves, awake in the morning and perhaps snow on the ground.

### PARROY FOREST

Nearby was Parrooy Forest, a place that the Germans were lodged in and our outfit was ordered to make a corduroy road thru the forest. The Germans had to be ousted, they had planted mine fields in area.

Oct. 10 th 1944

The following story as related by Cpl. Merritt E. Hubbert, Co. B. 3rd Platoon, 163rd Engr. Battalion.

#### The third platoon in Parroy Forest

The terrain in the forest is very suited for defensive warfare, knowing the enemy, it is needless to say that he used this to his very best advantage. At this season it was raining almost everyday. This added mud , the very worst kind. Besides the weather being against us ,the enemy used all the mines of every type he could get. There was only one thing to do and that was to find the mines and de-activate them. That was what the platoon did.

All these operations took place within mortar range, and often in small arms fire range.

Here is where the third squad was lost, including the platoon leader, Lt. Bennett, that is with the exception of George Hill, assistant squad leader who was manning the 50 caliber machine gun at the time. There is several stories how it happened. The most authentic one is this.

The day before the squad had cleared mines and booby traps until dark and had marked their place so as not to lose time sweeping the same area again the next day. All the men walked in a path to avoid exposing themselves to danger needlessly. The enemy evidently knowing this, crept behind our lines and planted an anti-personnel mine in the path. It so happened that this is the place Lt. Bennett chose to orient his men. During this time either the Lt. or Sgt Morgan stepped on the mine.

The well known bouncing type, known as "Bouncing Betsy" exploded. Fortunately the mine exploded before reaching its maximum height, if it had, probably the whole squad would have been killed instantly. The shrapnel and steel balls hit most of the (all except one) in the legs. Sgt Morgan was so seriously injured that it was necessary to amputate one leg immediately. This was done by a Capt. from the 106th Cavalry rifle squad. It took about six hours to evacuate the men. Lt. Bennett died some weeks later in a hospital in the states. Some thought he might of died of a grieving heart, he could have thought he had failed his men. Lt. Bennett was highly thought of, I always admired him.

From Company Daily Report:

On Oct 10th When Lt Bennett's squad was wounded--- Casualties were:  
Lt. Bennett, Thomas E. Morgan, Crawford, Cummings, Kline, Fisher, Miller, Hill, Ross, of that squad eight were very seriously wounded.

These men had to be hauled out on tanks, the mud and rain, over the corduroy road. There never was a more brave man than Lt. Bennett, always thinking of his men first. Many times he exposed himself to danger so his men could benefit from his leadership. Every man in the squad wanted the other to get medical attention before him. These are words from an officer in the 106th Cavalry Squad, who had seen plenty of action. "Never before have I seen men with more guts" The platoon was reinforced and the work was continued until the job was done, Under the leadership of Lt. Harris. These were Lt. Harris's words "I only hope to be the man that Lt. Bennett is".

A little detail about this corduroy road . It was approximately 2 1/8 th mile long, every foot was built under mortar and artillery fire. At times we were so close to the enemy that he could hear us if we made any loud noise. We were fortunate that the enemy left us good deep entrenchments all along the road. We cut the small trees on both sides of the road for about 75 yds, and laid them across the boggy mud. During this time dump trucks were hauling gravel to cover the poles . Almost every day it rained and turned cold at night. We had to work constantly to keep the road in repair . At times it was not possible for anything but wagons to run on it. We used wagons and mules to get the supplies to the front. There was places that even a wagon could not cross. We were fortunate that the enemy had the same trouble with his supplies. This reduced the amount of shelling that he could do and contributed to his defeat.

Note: Later onto the end of the war after Capt. Petrinni had rejoined our outfit as company commander, word was received that Lt. Bennett had died. Capt. Petrinni wanted to send a letter of condolence to Lt. Bennett's parents, he didn't know what to say, so he asked me to write the letter, which I did,

It was about this time I read an interesting article in the Stars & Stripes, written by an army nurse. She wrote how her heart was moved by the brave soldiers under her care . The serious injures she tended to . She served in the evacuation hospital set up in the front lines, It was about 2 weeks later a notice was made in the Stars and Stripes that a German shell had landed in her tent killing her , This was heart moving to us that read the news.

Nov 5 th Today we were issued pretty good all wool long sleeve sweaters that button up quite close around the neck. It sure is dandy. Those that are out on the line received combat boots that were leather top and rubber, they were buttoned with a felt liner sole that can be removed and washed. Also heavy wool socks were issued to those who received the boots . We received a heavier jacket that had a wool liner which we are to receive later, of course I would rather be home !!!

### Under Enemy Fire

Nov 11, 44

A few days before Lt. D'Amico was injured, we were relieved by the 121st Cavalry to clear mines for the 106th Cavalry to move to a new position. They were going to relieve the 121st Cavalry in the town near by. As the Cavalry vehicle tried to pass the intersection the enemy would throw mortars, we were getting ready to park the trucks and walk up and clear some mines a little distance from the trucks. We didn't know that our position was under enemy observation. We had worked our way into the town before the first shelling came and cleared our section of the road. Then the enemy started laying their pattern and finally opened up and gave the trucks a good shelling. Anderson and Jackson were guarding the vehicles and had to make tracks for cover. Bebe was in his Jeep and Townsend and Bebe thought they could save the trucks, so they got up too close and came near getting hit by mortar fire, they were shell-shocked and had to withdraw.

One shell bounced off the tail gate of the truck and knocked Townsend down. Bernard was badly shell-shocked, the other platoons were trying to get out of range of the fire by going through the woods with their vehicles, two trucks were knocked out, they had to walk back by foot to their place of bivouac. The above is as told to me by one of the men in the unit.

Nov. 11th, Bull-Dozer Blown up by Mine

Incident of Hogan's injury with the bull-dozer as told by Anderson.

This happened the same day Sgt. Ryan and Lt. D'Amico were injured. An American tank had been knocked out by the enemy mines and our job was to go clear a by-pass around the tank through the enemy mine field. We figured it was thoroughly cleared of mines, because we had carefully used the mine detectors and carefully probed the area which our bull-dozer was to go through in by passing the knocked out tank. All of a sudden there was a big explosion, I thought the enemy had started pouring artillery in on us. I looked and saw the bull-dozer was overturned and practically cut in half. All of the transmission was knocked to pieces. I knew the dozer had run into a mine, the explosion had thrown T/5 Hogan, the operator about 10 feet from the dozer. In the excitement we went to see how serious he was hurt, he thought his back was injured. Gasoline was running out of the dozer on the ground toward Hogan, so we picked him up carefully and removed him to a safer place. Shortly Skiff arrived and in a little while we had him off to the hospital.

## Attacking A German Outpost

The following incident happened about Nov. 15th 44 . On top of a sort of German outpost dug into the hill and all around it foxholes were with machine gun emplacements. The German position was protected by mine fields and wire entanglements. The Hill was supposed to have been taken by the 70 th infantry div., but as we advanced slowly up the hill using a mine detector , we encountered one "S" mine and small arms fire. It was evident that the hill was not taken, so we advanced cautiously. After we had cut our way through the enemy barbed wire we had to get down on our hands and knees to avoid being seen by the enemy. A small hump in the hill was semi-protection until we had to knock out the outpost by killing and capturing some German soldiers. We had one hand grenade among us and the Cavalry officer insisted that we throw it down the German strong hold, down the doorway, he threw it down the doorway but forgot to pull the pin, immediately the Germans began to throw mortar first at us , we had to withdraw, this meant running and hitting the ground, down the same trail we had come, we were subject to mine fields. Rose had to take charge of one prisoner by guarding him with a sub-machine gun, The prisoner didn't know that Rose had an empty clip ,which he changed as soon as a clip was available--- to the German's utter amazement!!!

As soon as the mortar fire started the Germans rose up out of their foxholes and started pouring machine gun fire at us , and small arms fire. There was but one thing for us to do and that was to make a hasty withdrawal, lost radio, mine detector, and food supplies

Nov. 11 th

The 2nd platoon of Co. B. had to clear a 180 yd gap to get the platoon of Co. B. and 106th Cavalry to take the town of Caricourt, France. A Sherman tank had made it through a barb wire entanglement and up to the top of the hill where it was knocked out by a mine. We followed the tracks until we went through the barbed wire and Lt. D' Amico accidentally stepped off the tracks onto a mine seriously wounding himself and Sgt. Ryan and Cpl. Rose. Sgt. Townsend, Meserve and Douglas and some of the men of the 3rd platoon. It took two hours to clear the wounded from the place where the accident occurred. Carrying them by hand through another mine field the 163rd were clearing. Finally we reached a Jeep which carried them to a hospital. I later learned that Lt. D'Amico was an excellent piano player and he fretted about not being able to play the piano again!!

Nov 23 rd

Thanksgiving Day, we had just moved into this town in eastern France. The Germans had just left, I was walking across a vacant piece of ground and heard an incoming mortar, I flattened to the ground, near by was a dead GI, I was of course scared stiff. In the town another GI and I went down into an underground shelter, rather it was the basement of a house with reinforced concrete ceiling. The Germans had just been quartered there, there was an abundance of canned goods, sour kraut, etc. they had left behind in their hurry to leave. We are now in what is called Alsac-Lorraine, this is a part of France and Germany that has been shuffled back and forth for centuries, thus even the homes were somewhat fortified against artillery.

U.S. Army had promised we would have turkey with all the trimmings for Thanksgiving. It was Turkey, mash potatoes, cranberry sauce, gravy, and lots of extras, it was a real treat. The only thing in the negative was eating out in the chilly air, out of our mess-kits. There was a stack of dead Germans and along side was a stack of dead GI's, on Thanksgiving I have flashbacks of this scene, then I thank God I am home with my family, with all the blessings of God.

In December 1944 We moved into a small town by the name of Adamsville<sup>W R</sup>, this was also in Alsac France. Winter had set in and the front was somewhat stationary for several weeks. Our men were sent out to strengthen the border between the opposing lines. One night after dark I was sent up to the front to a neighboring town several miles away, to get the payroll signed. We went at night so the enemy wouldn't see us. I had a driver with a jeep, It was scary as all we had for lights was a small beam of light because the headlights were all covered except for a small slit to let the light thru. We came to a cross road there was a GI posted to direct the way, he was standing alone in the darkness of the night. When we got to the village the Germans were on the edge of town dressed in white to camouflage themselves in the snow, it was scary with occasional rifle fire.

In Adamsville<sup>W R</sup> my squad was bivouacked in a stone building, one half was the barn with about 3 stalls and the other half was the residence the people lived in. The two were separated by a sort of hall. In front of the house was a fairly good sized manure pile, This seemed to be the custom of the people in that area. The larger the manure pile, the more Prosperous was the residence!! There were no animals there so we made our bed on some hay we gathered.

Dec 25 1944

For Christmas dinner the Army again put on a good feast, the usual with all the trimmings. Yesterday the chaplain had the Ule-Tide Service ,we sang Christmas carols and in between he read passages of scripture of the Christmas Story.

Often I had to take my turn at guard duty, this meant you were awakened in the night by some GI. saying "Guard Duty" and out I had to go in the cold of the night, walk to the edge of the town and sand guard duty. On this particular night, it was biter cold, the snow creaked under my feet, the air was clear and crisp, the stars shone brightly, as I stood there meditating while watching the bright flashes of cannons in the distance a poem started formulating in my mind, any way here is the final product, the last verse was completed while back in the states.

"The Lonely Sentinel

O' lonely sentinel on white parapet of snow  
Gazing at the star studded sky  
What are your thoughts as you stand there alone  
Knowing there are many who die  
You see the distant flash as the cannons belch forth  
In the cold, cold frosty night  
The creak of the snow and the chill from the north  
You don't feel bold in your fright  
Is it really worth while, such suffering and pain  
With men giving their final moan  
Yes right will prevail and they'll be no more pain  
When Jesus comes back for his own  
" HAL-A-LU-YA "

By Harold Johnson T/sgt.  
Christmas, Adams<sup>W</sup>viller, Alsac, France  
Dec 1944

It is interesting to note how the houses were built in Adamsvill<sup>er</sup>. the walls were very thick, if the house should burn down, they would rebuild on the same stone walls, we had one house that burned down while our troops were in the building. It seems the GI's had a 30 gal drum with some fuel oil dripping into the drum so that could keep warm, anyway the house burned down. Each house and barn had a manure pile in front of it, the largest manure pile probably was the town magistrate. As for news they had a town crier who announced the news on the street in the morning.

Our battalion was ordered to move to another town closer to the front, our battalion commander had a sort of trailer to serve as command post, also he slept in the trailer. I was on guard duty about a half block away from the command post, it was somewhat towards midnight, the night was freezing cold, I stood there next to a house trying to keep warm out of the wind and cold, when the door opened and a French woman came out and offered me some schnapps to warm up my blood, I drank it and it did warm my blood, suddenly I heard a loud bang and clamor at the command post, I ran over with my rifle, not knowing what I'd see, what happened was the commander was sleeping when he tossed his arm and knocked over a lantern, anyway we got the fire out then things went back to normal. I heard a lot of firing nearby, in the morning we were given orders to move out and move back to Adamsvill<sup>er</sup>, we were too close to the enemy front, there was danger of service records getting captured.

Jan. 12th 1945

Company B. crossed into Germany, tonight I'll go out to the company to get the payroll signed,

When we crossed the Maginot and Sigfried lines there is a bit of no-mans land between the two fortifications. As we crossed, people on foot were crossing into France, When we got into Germany we were briefed on absolutely no fraternizing with the Germans as we were crossing into enemy territory. The first town we came to the people had the white bed sheets hung out welcoming us, the girls were on the porches waving and greeting us, I must say that some of the first ones that started to fraternize were our officers!!

Jan 19 th We managed to get a few musical instruments and we had sort of Jamboree in the evening. We had a mandolin, guitar, Violin, and button styled concertina, which I played, Gale Zundel Played the trumpet!!

Our battalion built a pontoon bridge across the Rhine River, and we crossed over into the lower central part of Germany, near Worms, We then followed the main river up stream thru beautiful valley of grape vineyards. The long sloping sides of the valley were just covered with vineyards. .

Feb. 16 th I see by the Stars & stripes where we get 5% increase in pay for each year over-seas. According to that the 27th of this month I should receive an extra 5% in pay, I get 20% now for over-seas service, 5% for 3 yrs longevity, making a total of 30% above base pay up to \$85.80 per month, Remember when I got \$21.00 per month??

March 4th

I was promoted to Tech. fourth grade (Buck Sargent). a little more money it brings my pay up to \$97.50 a month now!!

April 8th

Sunday--- We have sure passed through some beautiful country. Much of it is mountains. At some elevations you can look down in the valleys and can see winding streams and rich farming land . One time I counted 12 villages within sight from the top. We are now way in the heart of Germany, on the road one meets almost every nation in the world ,this is result of refugees that have been freed from slave labor camps. Some are thin ,haggard and even without shoes. Sure a different picture than riding thru France last summer. Perhaps the war won't last much longer!!

In Germany there is a city known for its HOT Baths, this is the city of Bad-kissingen ,the strange thing about it is the city was declared a neutral zone. There were many German hospitals, our convoy drove thru , we sat in the trucks with our loaded rifles, on the streets were a lot of German soldiers in their uniforms--we couldn't even stop to take them prisoners.

We went thru Nurnberg, Germany ,where later the war crime trials were held. There in the middle of the city the convoy stopped and there were a couple of piles of German swords, a pretty good size pile. A few of us got out and picked some for souvenirs. I chose 2 nice shiny swords, kind that officers wear in dress. Later I shipped them back home and had them for several yrs until some collector came by and I sold them to him.

## PART OF TASK FORCE TAKING MUNICH

Our battalion was attached to Gen. Mark Clark's 7th Army, which came up from the south of France from the Mediterranean sea along the Rhone river. We were attached to the 1st Infantry Division as they took Munich.

As we approached Munich, we could hear the rifle fire just ahead, along the street was a Volkswagon with the top down setting side of the street, behind the steering wheel was a dead German Officer. Capt. Petrinni said he would get us the best Hotel in town. That, he just about did!! Only one thing I couldn't sleep on the stiff beds. We stayed there just a few days. A friend of mine told me if I would like to see something special, I said OK. I got into his jeep he drove across town to the university in Munich. We went inside. Down stairs there was a room with several hospital gurneys, the kind you wheel patients around in. On several carts were naked bodies of people who had died, you could see that the Germans were using the refugees for experimental purposes. Over in one spot they had a newborn baby in a large (probably formaldehyde) bottle, the baby had two heads. A freak of nature no doubt.

It was near Munich that the prison camp Daukau was located. I have a couple of actual photographs taken by our company photographer of starved to death people lying on the Flat Bed Railroad car. When the Army invaded Daukau the men that could walk went into Munich taking advantage of their freedom. They funnelled in to our chow lines at feeding time. The poor souls thin, haggard, they were wearing their stripped clothes, truly a sight to behold. They soon had to be rounded up to protect us from the spreading of cholera. These are pictures I will never forget.

The job of the 163rd was to guard the property that Hitler had stolen from the other countries of Europe. He had raided valuable paintings, jewelry, any thing that was of extreme value. I was taken down to the underground radio station the Germans had. Along the corridors we saw where the German officers had ripped off their shoulder patches, which identified their rank. I picked up a few of the souvenirs, also a couple of swastikas.

We left Munich headed south, crossed the Danube River, we could see the foothills of the Alp mountains in the distance. I couldn't help to notice how the foothills of the ALPS were denuded of the trees to supply Hitler's war machine.

April 14 th

One of our Radios got damaged we finally located replacement but the power supply was bad so we wired it to a german type supply it worked fine ,so now the German equipment will be working for Uncle Sam now.

May 17 1945

War is over peace declared

Announcement came that the war was over, peace was declared, Boy What News. There was rejoicing all over Europe and of course back in the United States the celebrations were going on, Churches praising God for the victory. About the only celebration I remember going on in our outfit was, we were camped by a lake and a few of us got hold of a boat with an outboard motor on it, we took it out in the lake to go fishing, we threw some hand- grenades in the lake and caught fish. Some reason they automatically drifted to the surface.

Our battalion was going south towards the Alp foothills down a German auto-ban, this is a very fine highway 4 lane . As we were going down hill toward a rather large river I saw an American Jeep that had been blown up it was completely demolished . I don't think the occupants knew what happened to them . Little further on we came to a large bridge that had been blown up hindering us crossing the river at that place We wound around thru the countryside where later we crossed the river at another spot and continued on our way.

May 4th

Capt. Petrinni was taken from our outfit, I often wondered why, he was with us such a short time, May 7 1945

General Eisenhower " The mission of this Allied Forces was fulfilled at 0241 hrs local time.

May 14 th

Company daily reports shows " COMPANY constructed new road to be used as by-pass around blown auto-ban, 2 miles in length, completed.

May 19 th

Arrived in new area 54 miles into Austria . It was an interesting sight as we saw German Soldiers trudging north with out their rifles they looked beat.

At this time we were thinking how many points we needed to get out and be shipped home. I ended with 4 battle and campaign medals " Normandy, Northern France ,Rhineland and Central Europe ". Decorations and citations: American Defense Service Medal, European African Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, 4 Bronze Stars, Good Conduct Medal American Campaign Medal World War II Victory medal," I figured I should have 80 points, right now I need 85 points to get out.

June 19 th 1945

We moved from Salzburg to Linz, Austria which is located on the Danube River. a beautiful city, but what we were confronted with was the aftermath of the war. On the eastern side of the Danube where we were located was a German Military place. They had some fine quarters, had some beautiful riding horses, military horses, which we took advantage of till my bottom got sore. I rode alone about a mile from camp when I came across lots & lots of barracks that were houses for displaced persons. It seemed different nationalities had their barracks a little ways from each other. Thousand and thousands of refugees that are wondering about homeless because of the changes that have taken place there. In some of these camps were hundreds and hundreds packed together, if you were to go there you would see a mess of foreigners that are hungry and eager to do anything for something to eat.

They are poorly clothed and look a lot like ignorant half humans. If you would mix with them you would find many that are highly cultured, many that are highly trained professional men along some line or other. Many can sit down to some instrument of music and play the most beautiful music you have ever heard, and yet look at them you would think they lived among the river rats. Our outfit had some of these people over one evening to entertain us. They were excellent musicians. There is nothing that goes to waste, after we finish eating and dump the excess in the garbage can there are always several refugees lined scavenging for food. Coming across Germany in the later part of the war we had Germans doing the same thing

July 2 We had a Polish Band that occasionally entertained us they were from the refugee camp. Some real talent, one fellow a good piano player, claimed he was a close relative to that noted pianist Paderewski. One fellow played a nice accordion, he borrowed it from me, I purchased from 1st Sgt. Howard Snyder who looted it from somewhere!!

We were about to leave the eastern side of Danube when we noticed some railway cars about half mile away, loaded with people, even the roof was loaded with people, evidently the Russians were sending them back to who knows where. We found out later that the Danube was to be the dividing line between the East and the West. In the Russian hands they still had to live like cattle. When we crossed the Danube to get to the West side there were people walking, some pushing wheel barrows, hauling all the possessions they had to get to the American side. Somehow by the grapevine they found out that the Danube would be the dividing line. This was no doubt taking place all along the Allied front.

July 16, 1945

We had returned to Salzburg again. This forenoon while I was working I thought I would step outside for a breath of fresh air, I was standing in the doorway ND couple of trucks full of GI's were passing by one of them waved, I didn't pay much attention, but I asked one of the fellows near by what outfit that was, he said the 1264 th Engr. I thought for a moment, why that is the outfit that Paul Mattson and Keith Anderson is in. Paul was from my Church back home in Kent City, and Keith was my next door neighbor, play mates in our youth. After a while the trucks were coming back. I ran outside and stopped one of the trucks and asked if Paul Mattson was on their truck, they answered no, but he is on the truck behind. I started towards the truck and in a second we were in each others arms and talking. We both were stumped over the sudden meeting and hardly knew what to say, he said he was in the Seventh Army located in Stuttgart, Germany. Said he was on tour just passing through Salzburg. By then the trucks started to move , we talked about 30 seconds and that was all. Stuttgart was about 200 miles away.

We moved into the city of Salzburg , the only war damage I saw was some buildings that had been destroyed, probably by bombings. We were stationed across the river on a hill where there was a nice apartment complex. We stayed in the location under Sept 1 st. when I started for home. Salzburg is a beautiful city, it is famous for its annual music festival , they reopened the annual festival in one of the theatres, I attended the occasion , quite impressive. Salzburg is Mozart's birthplace, I walked by his humble dwelling, in the center of the city upon a small mountain is a castle, which is very picturesque, it dates way back in mideval times

As you walk up the long trail to the castle you pass by ancient tombs, which I was informed dates back to 300 AD. Took a small tour of the castle ,could see in the dungeon where they hung people up by their thumbs, you can't help but daydream about life hundreds of years ago, how they lived . This city is on the edge of the Alp mountains. Salzburg is where the history or story of " Sound Of Music" took place. When I see and hear Sound of Music it brings back memories of what I had seen.

One evening some fellows and I walked down town in the park, there was a gypsy outfit , with their colorful wagon, their colorful clothes, horses, etc. They played their instruments while girls danced to entertain us.

While in Salzburg the Army took us on some GI trucks and took us into the Alps to see Hilter's Berchesgarden home. Mountains were beautiful, the white waters of the rivers rushing over the rocks. We wound slowly up the mountain toward the top when we came to the places of Hilter, Gorman, and other high ranking henchman and their sort of palace. All three places were bombed out by the allied bombers, The military had signs all over the place, any soldier caught taking part of this place for a souvenir would be prosecuted. I looked for something, but it seemed that everything was raided. I took my flashlight down in the basement, there I found a Mouse trap , Hilter had mice just like the rest of us, I have that mouse trap to this day ,inscribed on the back of the trap where it was from!!

Aug. 2 1945

We are still in Salzburg and will be here until next Friday when we will board a cattle car and go to Rhemes, France, and board the boat

Sept 1945

On the way home, riding in a cattle car, the 40 and 8 , room for 8 horses and 40 men, we didn't have horses but we had straw to sleep on, anyway we were on our way home. We were held up at LaHarve , France quite a while because of inoculations and other units had priorities. We finally boarded the merchant marine boat "Sea Wolf" and on our way home. On the boat I ran into some of the fellows of the 94 th infantry division I used to belong to, We exchanged our experiences. Their outfit had seen a lot of action, some of the friends I knew never would return, you picture them as they were, but now they are gone.

Upon entering New York Harbor, it was a beautiful day, sun was bright, we could see the statue of liberty in the distance welcoming us O' it looked good!! As we approached the Hudson River a fair sized boat came out to greet us, bands were playing, girls were waving, streamers flying as the boat was decorated. I had tears in my eyes for such a warm welcome. The country appreciated what we had done and were thankful.

We went up the Hudson part way, then the boat stopped, some ladies came aboard and gave us all the milk we wanted to drink, that was the best milk I tasted in a long time, you see we lived on powdered milk , which keeps you alive, but it sure lacks the taste of good pasteurized milk, it wasn't 2% either!!

The boat went up as far as Camp Shanks, which we had left when we departed for Europe. That night some of the fellows had leave to visit New York City. I just wanted to stand in line and call home. It was so good to hear Gerry's voice, I think she pinched our little daughter so I could hear a sound. I might mention that going up along the Hudson we saw the bright shiny cars, I thought , this is America the land of the free!!!

Discharged Oct. 31, 1945

The next step was to take a train to a camp in Indiana, and it was there I was discharged. They gave me \$250.00 for me to get home and start my new life with my wife. When the train arrived in Grand Rapids, there was Gerry , holding Joy in her arms, Her mother Ethel Rice, my dad and mom waiting for me. What a joyous reunion.

I thank the good Lord for his watching over my loved ones , and his watching over me during this stage of my life. I feel proud having served my country, with all its short comings it still is the best in the world--- BEST WILL BE WHEN I REACH MY HEAVENLY HOME.

When I stepped into our own home in Fremont Mich. , clean curtains on the windows, clean comfortable bed, tears flowed down my cheeks, the job was done, we thanked our LORD!!.

Several years later October 17, 1992

We were having a missionary conference at our church, the 1st Baptist Church of Fremont Mi. One of the missionaries is John and Alma Bettig, Representing Trans. World Radio. He is Mid-West Representative. A most interesting couple.

In talking with him I found that when the World WWII ended I wrote about the misplaced persons at Linz Austria. He was very well acquainted with the situation because he was a part of the displaced persons, that is he and his mother, dad and sisters and brothers. As I mentioned about the Danube River at Linz Austria was the dividing line between the east and West. He said that his family was divided, and I recall some went East and some West. But as they were shuffled about the eventually were reunited and went west into Germany.

He explained that those that were set on trains were sent East to go into far off Siberia, and many died. They worked in the forest, the women worked in the forest and many never saw their families again. He gave illustration after illustration about their struggles. I just wished that I could have taped his conversation with me to document it.