

### This Was The Army

In May 1943, I completed Officer's Candidate School at Camp Lee, Virginia and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps. My first unit assignment later that month was to the 1930<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster Truck Company at New Orleans Army Air Base near Lake Pontchartrain. The extent of my automotive talent was that I owned a 1936 Chevrolet. Three years earlier I had become a Certified Public Accountant. Apparently, someone must have thought that my ability to learn was greater than the need for prior experience.

The 1930<sup>th</sup> was manned by Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican draftees who spoke very little English. They seemed a sullen lot, resentful at being away from their home island. Our Commanding Officer was Captain Fournier, an educated upper class Puerto Rican of French extraction. He was genial and easy going, a ladies man, always carrying a bottle of wine or flowers on his frequent dates. I believe he was married.

My assignment was to train a platoon of these Spanish speaking draftees in close order drill, the disassembly and reassembly of the M-1 Carbine, map reading, and other duties. They were rather unhappy at the beginning but over six weeks we managed to work out matters to the satisfaction of all. Also, I learned a few Spanish words in the process.

I have fond memories of New Orleans and the pleasant off duty social life. The Court of Two Sisters and the restaurant at the Hotel Monteleone were two of my favorite haunts. I remember dining at a high class restaurant, Antoine's, where the aristocratic looking waiters in formal dress looked down their noses at you as they took your order.

My short stay in New Orleans was a prelude to transfers to other training units. On June 20, 1943, I was assigned to the 2130<sup>th</sup> QM Truck Company (aviation), part of the 40<sup>th</sup> Service Group at the Avon Park Bombing Range in Florida. We encountered massive swarms of mosquitoes so big that we talked about putting saddles on them and flying off. On August 20<sup>th</sup>, I was ordered to Waltersboro, South Carolina where I was trained at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Air Force Camouflage School and received a certificate of completion for 103 hours of training.

After returning to Avon Park, I was transferred on September 22<sup>nd</sup> to Army Air Force headquarters at Venice, Florida. Two days later I received movement orders to arrive at Camp Kilmer, NJ on my way to the New York Port of Embarkation. There I boarded a former Pacific luxury liner, the Monterey, which had been converted to a troop ship. I was assigned a cabin with 5 other junior officers.

We were soon on our way (we did not know to where). A number of us became seasick, but I was fine. During our ten days at sea, a more pressing concern was the danger of a submarine attack. We were not then aware that the Allies had broken the secret German submarine code and the risk was considerably lessened. We landed at Liverpool, England where we disembarked, and were greeted by a bevy of middle-aged English Red Cross ladies who served us tea and crumpets and gave us a cheerful welcome to Britain. They were sympathetic mothers who understood that we were young men, far from home, arriving in a strange land and needing the kindness they offered.

I was soon attached to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bombing Division of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Air Force as a casual officer, awaiting assignment to a unit. This was in October, 1943, less than a year after I was drafted. Within eleven months I had been given basic training, sent through

officers' training school, commissioned as a Second Lieutenant, assigned to many training missions and shipped to England, ready for assignment to a permanent unit. This was remarkable, considering that ten million draftees were processed in the War.

While waiting, we stayed among very young B-17 bomber pilots who went out on long early morning missions to hit targets deep into Germany and Eastern Europe. Casualties among them were very high. They were required to complete twenty five such missions before they were relieved. The extreme tension often led to off duty drinking and gambling bouts. We were with them, in East Anglia near Norwich, until the end of January, 1944, when I was assigned to the 2206<sup>th</sup> QM Truck Company (Aviation), stationed at an airfield at Bishop's Stortford, about 30 miles north of London. While there, we witnessed the arrival of German V-1 bombs, which we could see off in the distance, hear a putt-putting noise which would suddenly stop, and then the bomb would drop and explode. On the morning of June 6, 1944, we woke up to see the skies full of hundreds of bombers with special markings of three stripes on each wing and the fuselage, on their way to support the invasion of German occupied France and our landing at Normandy. It was a sight I will never forget.

On July 1, 1944 I was promoted to First Lieutenant, Ninth Air Force. I was often detailed to pick up empty vehicles from depots in Northern England and deliver them to new units which had arrived from the US without equipment. My jeep driver and I, accompanied by a truckload of drivers, would pick up a specified number of 2.5 ton trucks. We would form a long convoy through the narrow winding two lane roads, trying

to keep on the left side, and finally deliver the vehicles to the assigned unit. I led several of these missions and never missed a turn, thanks to careful preparation.

On August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1944 I was ordered to London for six days to attend a combat orientation course, for which I received an “excellent” rating. During that visit I remember being kept awake in the hotel at night, listening to German bombs dropping and exploding in the center of London. Not very pleasant!

In early September our company departed for the Devon coast in southern England in preparation for our voyage to Normandy. We and our equipment were loaded into landing craft and arrived on D-Day + 126 at Omaha Beach in Normandy, where we stayed the night on the beach. The next morning, October 8<sup>th</sup>, we were loaded onto our trucks and rode to our first assignment in France, in the beautiful cathedral town of Beauvais. We stayed in what had been a German occupied caserne (barracks). I was able to spend some time in town and became acquainted with a French florist, Monsieur DeFoix, and his family, including his attractive 15 year old daughter. The family and I hit it off and we had many interesting visits and conversations, during which I could not keep my eyes off his too young daughter.

Around the end of November, my comrade Lieut. Brieske (see note at the end of story) and I were concerned about our company commander, Lieut. George Feehery. We both felt he was turning into a drunkard, and affecting the performance of our company, the 2206<sup>th</sup>. We met with our Colonel and advised him of our observation. His solution was to transfer us to different units! On Dec.1 I was assigned to the 2251<sup>st</sup> QM Truck Company (Aviation) which was located at Doncourt, an airfield 12 miles west of Metz. We were part of the Air Service Group that supported the 10<sup>th</sup> Photo Reconnaissance

Group which serviced General Patton's Third Army. Among other duties, I was the Transportation Officer, in charge of the motor pool, located at a brewery called La Bière de Jarny, in the town of Jarny, 8 miles west of Doncourt. There, I was often the guest of Madame Hellbach, who resided on the property with her son. He was in his twenties and very reserved in my presence. He had been a sailor on one of the Vichy French ships which was attacked by the British at Oran off the coast of Algeria in late 1940 when they refused to join the British. He seemed reticent and wished not to talk about it. I did have many pleasant conversations in French and German with his mother, since I spent a good part of my time at the motor pool. During this time, I was billeted with a French family in Doncourt, Mme. Pièrnè and her granddaughter, who lived in a house within the town, and was a superb cook.

In all of my assignments to various truck companies there were occasional vehicle accidents for which the Army required a formal report. It seems that the Commanders and Adjutants thought I could write, and I was often sent out to investigate and provide such reports. On December 16, 1944, I had the sad assignment of looking into an incident where two enlisted men were blown up in a truck. They had been curious and stopped to look at some Claymore mines, and picked them up to ride off with them, apparently as souvenirs. The mines exploded, and their body parts were found scattered about. My report termed it "in the line of duty."

It was at this time that the Germans mounted a massive attack, not too far from us, that became known as the Battle of the Bulge. In the early days of the assault we were greatly concerned about English speaking German troops in U.S. uniforms who were infiltrated among us. One early evening when I was out on a mission, I was repeatedly

challenged by guards who asked me questions about American topics such as politics or baseball, to validate my identity. On one occasion I found myself reciting the lineup of the 1926 New York Yankees, which I still recall today. Here it is:

Pitcher: Many, often Herb Pennock, Waite Hoyt or Dutch Ruether

Catcher: Benny Bengough

Infield: 1st base-Lou Gehrig, 2<sup>nd</sup> base-Tony Lazzeri, Shortstop-Mark Koenig ,3<sup>rd</sup> base-"Jumping Joe" Dugan

Outfield: Right field-Babe Ruth, Center field-Earl Combs, Left field-Bob Meusal

Postscript: I frequently read the Wall Street Journal. About eight years ago, I noted a front page article on some issue about options trading in Chicago. The story contained the name of a trader named of Leo M. Brieske, Jr. This prompted me to call for his telephone number, which they gladly gave me. He was indeed the son of my old Army buddy and was glad to give me his father's number. I was very happy to be able to talk to Leo and his wife Joan, and recall a few memories of our joint endeavors.