Into the Army and World War II

The war was coming closer to the United States. It had already engulfed a good part of Europe, and the riveting radio reports of Ed Murrow brought the Nazi menace home to us all. My mother and father both were very opposed to the idea of my enlisting, even though the Nazi juggernaut had completely destroyed the families they had left behind in their ancestral home, the border country between Poland and Russia, now crushed under Hitler's heel. They had both pleaded with their families to leave Europe, to no avail. Only my mother's brother Isak had come over, years earlier, with her help, and had lived with us for an uncomfortably long while. The rest were swallowed up by the Holocaust, except one distant cousin of my father's, who now lives in Israel.

It was becoming harder to make any plans for the future. I wasn't getting anywhere in my acting career, and very often I had second thoughts about having left the field of science, particularly with the booming demand for engineers to fuel the war effort. I noted that Dad, who had worked as an engineer during the first World War, but had been out of the field for twenty years because of the depressions of the 20's and 30's, and the anti-Semitism then rampant in the field, and had survived by taking anything he could find, from teaching Yiddish to selling real estate, had manufactured non-existent experience, and lied his way back in, once the US became involved in the war effort. He eventually was put in charge of an eight-man team of engineers at Ebasco, a large, international engineering firm. Maybe something in a more technical field was the direction I should follow?

So, I took a few courses in radio communications. To my surprise I was offered a job almost immediately, teaching elementary radio at Long Branch, NJ. The students were civilians bound for jobs with the Army Signal Corps. It was all right, but I got restless pretty soon, bored with repeating the same simple lessons over and over.

Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in December 1941, and we were now officially at war. I figured it was only a matter of time before the draft would get us all. Better to enlist and have a better shake at getting something I might like. I also felt I should join up, to participate in what I considered a just war. Only a few friends shared my views. Most were casting about for ways to evade the draft, and some took off for Canada, or other foreign havens. I did not fault them, but that way was not for me. Then too, I envied the friendly smiles given to the men in uniform on the street—especially by young ladies. They would just look through me, or frown; after all, here I was, young and healthy, and in civvies, when so many others were fighting for their country. I could have remained a civilian for an indeterminate time, because what I was doing was considered vital to the war effort, but I didn't want that. So I enlisted. Actually it's generally not understood that draftees and volunteers went into the Army of the United States (AUS), rather than the United States Army, (USA) which was for career, regular army men.

I commenced Army life at Fort Dix, the same place where I was discharged four years later. What stands out most in my mind about the enlistment was the physical. When my turn came to step forward, a very bored looking doctor said: "All right, short arm inspection." I was completely dumbfounded. I didn't have the slightest idea what he was talking about. He repeated the phrase "short arm" and when I still did nothing, he hollered at me. "Drop your pants and pull your peter out and skin it back. Haven't you ever jerked off?" The rest of the exam, mercifully, was routine.

I received my basic training at Camp Leonard Wood, a satellite of Fort Monmouth, a little further down the Jersey shore. If I had thought that Camp Rising Sun was full of new, broadening experiences for a provincial lad from the Bronx, the Army had it all over the camp, in spades.

Immediately, they threw us into the Army chickenshit routine of doing everything by the numbers, from 4:45 reveille to hours of close order drill, extensive exercise on obstacle courses, and orientation and indoctrination talks and films by sincere but rather inarticulate non coms. There were daily inspections of the quarters, to make sure we had all our socks and underwear properly aligned in our footlockers, that our beds were made with proper hospital corners, the sheets and blanket so tight and trim, that quarters could be bounced off them. (A number of soldiers, having made a real tight bed, would sleep on the floor, so as not to have to make their bed again) They would even slide a hand under a buttoned up shirt or jacket on the hanger, to see if the pants underneath were all buttoned up. If they weren't, you were gigged, and it didn't take too many gigs to have you restricted to quarters, no passes off the base. And remember, we were only an hour away from swinging New York! A few of the men tried to get a medical discharge by feigning undue stupidity, or chronic back aches, or whatever, and usually were refused. But most of us tried hard to do what was required and be good soldiers. We were assigned to tents alphabetically, and I still remember some of my tent mates—Tony Pietras, who spoke an inner city dialect so extreme I had trouble understanding him, Clem Rohon, the "Old man," all of 37, who used to tell us open mouthed youngsters, in his soft high pitched voice, how to really make a woman happy. (Clem was eventually mustered out, because of his "extreme age.") And David Rudnick—who had only one testicle, but didn't let that stop him.

I know now that the discipline was necessary to whip us untrained civilians into the army model—blind, immediate obedience to an order, a knowledge of weapons. We all learned to fieldstrip and reassemble our carbines and M-1's in the dark, and how to fire a machine gun. And we gained the ability to withstand physical discomfort for long periods. I didn't mind the obstacle course at all, climbing up a rope ladder with a full field pack, and then coming down shakily on the other side. I became adept at jumping up and scrambling over sheer seven foot walls and fences. I also learned to holler "Yo!" like the southern boys, and the difference between snafu, tarfu and susfu

(*situation normal, all fucked up*; *things are REALLY fucked up;* and *situation unchanged, STILL fucked up*).

The exercises I wasn't so crazy about involved crawling under fifty feet of barbed wire, strung two feet off the ground, while a grinning, delighted corporal fired a machine gun just overhead, and kept screaming at us to keep our fucking heads down, if we wanted to stay alive. The general opinion was that the rounds were live, but I'm not sure that was so. The other was the session on poison gas. We put on our gas masks—uncomfortable as hell, difficult to breathe and see—and went into a concrete cell where various gases were released. The idea was to make sure your mask fit tightly, and to prove you could survive a gas attack. A few of the men had masks that fit too loosely, and I remember them dashing out, vomiting and coughing all over the place, for a long time. The experiences did concentrate my mind wonderfully, though, and brought the violent world of war somewhat closer. We saw quite a few training films. Most were rather insipid, not very convincing propaganda. But two I remember very well. One concerned venereal disease, always a problem in the military. The hero was a clean cut young corporal who was going out with a very pretty young woman, like the girl you wished lived next door. When the medics informed him he had gonorrhea, he said, in a voice so plaintive, I still remember his inflection. "But Doc, she was so nice!" The other one concerned booby traps. That lesson took place in a house that had been captured from the enemy, and where our boys were relaxing, sprawled out, drinking beer. One soldier picked up a poker to straighten a picture hanging askew over the fireplace. As he did so, the booby trapped room went up in a blinding explosion.

After Basic, I graduated to Private First Class, entitling me to one stripe, and moved to Fort Monmouth proper. At one point I was assigned to a platoon that consisted mainly of Minnesotans. I marveled at the habit they all had, of stashing a bottle of rot-gut whiskey under their beds, and having a large, eye-opening swallow the minute they woke up. I learned to drink in the Army, but I was never able to take any of the stuff at 4:45 in the early, as they did. We had a lot of strange birds in the training company. Like Leonard Mashioff, a professional fuck-up, who enjoyed upsetting the sergeant with his antics. He was shrewd

however, and was known to be able to get almost anything—for a price. Sort of like George Segal in “King Rat” which I saw long after the war had ended.

After a few months I became a Tech Corporal: two stripes, with a T underneath, which distinguished us from the line non coms who just sported stripes. (Line meant chain of command, from corporal up to the top kick, mostly regular army men in those days. Us Techs were specialists, radio in my case, who were tolerated for their knowledge, but never gave orders.)

My courses concluded, I was all primed to fight for my country, fired up by dreams of glory and genuine patriotism. In a rash moment I volunteered for either the combat engineers or the infantry, but the Signal Corps had its eye on me, and I was kept at Monmouth. I was sent to OCS, the Officers Candidate School, mostly because I had a college degree, and that brief job teaching radio. This meant three months of even more chickenshit training, more discipline, harsher punishments designed to test the leadership of us commissioned officers, who were held—and rightly so—to a higher standard of conduct. A number of the men washed out, including one long time regular army first sergeant, who just couldn’t take the discipline. He was too used to his former command functions and perks, and felt he’d be better off as a top kick, than as just another shavetail, another disposable second lieutenant. Actually, I think he was right.

And then . . . graduation. Mom and Dad attended, to see gold bars get pinned on their son, now an officer and a gentleman by act of Congress and Presidential proclamation. Imagine, one generation away from the shtetl, and now an officer in the Army! We waited impatiently for our assignments. I was able to spend some time in New York, visiting my parents, who showed me off to all the neighbors, and dating Naomi. This time, everybody smiled at me, including the girls, and I could hardly pick up a tab—everyone wanted to buy me a drink. Back at camp, still awaiting orders, we were marched to a few make-work classes in platoons, like recruits, to the smirks of the permanent party enlisted men who had nothing but contempt for us "ninety day wonders" as we were referred to. Monmouth may have been great for soldiers, but awful for the thousands of second lieutenants being churned out, who, as it turned out, were in fact the most expendable of all the troops in actual combat.

Finally, I got my orders: the top secret Signal Corps Intelligence operation at Vint Hill Farms, not far from Washington DC. Only a handful of us were sent there, and I was proud to have been among them. Vint Hill was entirely different from Monmouth. We were treated as extremely valuable intelligence officers, and the instruction was quite specialized; military German, elementary code and cipher breaking, the use of direction finding equipment, survival in the European combat zone, the handling of top secret documents and equipment, and so on. Secrecy was impressed on us constantly, with much emphasis on being particularly circumspect with dates. Vint Hill was in the Virginia horse country, and we were instructed to tell any civilians who asked us about them, that those big towers—actually an antenna array designed to intercept long range German radio signals—were hitching posts for cavalry mounts! It was fascinating and exciting, and we all started to feel important. I can still see big, blonde Sergeant Middendorf, a naturalized American, born in Germany, teaching us how to conduct close order drill using German army commands. (I remember a few of the commands to this day.) "If you are apprehended behind the lines, and not in uniform, and you do not want to be shot as a spy, the best thing to do is to act calm. Nod your head a lot, repeating the last phrase your interrogator was saying, and use words like

“Doch” (“still”) or “Also” (“and so”) in a dignified, reflective way.” We all realized that if we were ever in such a situation, there was no way we could really pull it off, make anyone believe we were German, except for one of the students, German-born, who spoke the language fluently. It just added a frisson of spice to our upcoming adventures.

Washington was fun, a soldier’s paradise, with all the young women who were working at government jobs. The one I liked the most (and who is still a Christmas-card-every-year friend), was Mabel Stallings from Tennessee, or “Tinisee,” as she pronounced it. I loved her southernisms. I remember one I never heard before or after. “Back home,” Mabel said “we call a kiss a ‘Yankee Dime’.”

After a final week’s leave, and goodbyes to Mom and Dad and Miriam, and Naomi, we were shipped overseas. Today, as a father—and grandfather, I can appreciate the deep concern and fear my parents must have felt, and tried hard not to show. But I was young, and eager for adventure, and too involved with me, and what was ahead, to properly appreciate their feelings.

In the gray, early morning mist of a late fall day in 1943, we gathered on a New York City pier, under the looming bulk of the Queen Mary, the largest, fastest ship in the world, formerly a luxurious ocean liner for the rich, but since pressed into service as a troop carrier, easily able to outrun any lurking submarine. To our huge disappointment, we were walked past it, and onto the HMS Andes, a smallish British mail packet, designed to carry 900 souls and bulging now with 5,000 soldiers. As officers, we had reasonable accommodations in small cabins, four to a room. The enlisted men were in the various holds of the ship, sleeping in swaying hammocks, strung up eight deep. Second day out, I was the officer of the day in the main hold, and the smell

of vomit, urine and unwashed bodies, and the sight of those tiers of hammocks swaying from side to side as the ship rolled, was overpowering, and has stayed with me all these years. I barely made it through my tour of duty, before bolting on deck to heave my cookies.

It was a rough crossing, with high seas, and a constant roll and pitch that made most of us seasick. The British crew, having their fun, suggested sure-fire remedies for mal de mer to us landlubbers, the most bizarre of which was to tie a piece of bacon on a string, swallow it, and then pull it up, over and over. But after a couple of day of misery, I got my sea legs and enjoyed the heave and swell of the ship, the chill breezes, and the mesmerizing, endless ocean, as we plowed toward England. There was only one incident of note, and anxiety; we were chased by a German sub in the Irish sea, and in fearful fascination, watched the trail of a torpedo heading for us, which our speedy ship was easily able to evade.

After five days at sea, we landed at damp, foggy, misty, cold Liverpool, hoisted up our duffels and were off to London for our "finishing school." We were assigned to the BOQ (Bachelor Officers Quarters). Herb Stauderman, Bill Ives, and I hung out a lot together. Herb came from the wealthy Short Hills area of New Jersey, a member of the hoity-toity riding group, the Essex Troop. He had a prep school vocabulary which was foreign to my ears, but amusing. For instance he referred to the throat clearing and spitting out of a wad of mucous as "hawking a ginder." Bill was a street smart, wisecracking Chicagoan. We attended classes at a top secret school on Audley Street by day, and prowled around London's bars at night, looking for fun (translation: *girls*) and beer. We even got to like the warm British brew—so different from the ice cold stuff back home. Herb's twin brother Bruce joined us, and we had lots of laughs together. I can still picture Bill Ives lying on his back in a darkened room, entertaining us by holding a lighted match to his butt and farting, the plume of blue flame shooting out half a foot or so. Soldiers, especially young ones, have such a strange sense of humor! Bill also liked to talk to the prostitutes who prowled the streets in great numbers, asking them earnestly and seriously, what they would do, for how much, and what their various measurements were before walking away, to their angry taunts.

For some time now, the Germans had been fire bombing London. They sent over buzz bombs, huge, pilotless V-2 rockets, which were considerably faster than any pursuing fighter planes. We heard them clearly as they approached, the drone of their engine getting louder and louder, until there was a sudden silence, signaling the start of the bomb's whistling descent into London. That was when peoples' nerves got frazzled, and they would look desperately for shelter. The V-2 was only accurate enough to hit somewhere in the general vicinity of London, so one never knew where the bomb would land. With the cockiness of youth, we were a bit blasé, and fatalistic. "If it's got your name on it, there's nothing you can do anyway," we would say, not really believing it. One night, Herb and I finished a meager dinner at a downtown hotel. A scant quarter hour after we left, a bomb smashed into it, killing everyone there.

All in all, the stalwart Londoners had held up remarkably well until now, under strict blackout restrictions, barrage balloons everywhere, the threat of a possible invasion a constant worry. But the unpredictable, enormously destructive buzz-bombs were particularly unnerving, driving thousands of civilians to sleep in the underground subway stations every night. I believe that if Hitler had intensified the bombing, he might have

broken England's spirit. Night after night, we would watch from the roof of the BOQ in morbid fascination; the best description is the cliché: London was a sea of flames.

We Americans hadn't faced anything like the lack of heat, the unappetizing food, the difficulties in getting around, and the annoying blackouts that the British had become used to. The war effort didn't leave much room for the amenities of life. The best places to hang out were the pubs, dark, smoky, full of good cheer and fine, if unexpectedly warm, beer. We were able to talk with the people, discussing the war with the men, and flirting with the girls. It was heartening for us to hear how much the Brits appreciated our presence. But I was very glad when we got our final assignments, and left London in the spring of 1944. I was ordered to the newly activated 3255 Signal Service Company, the cover name for a radio intelligence company. (For fun, we would describe it as a pigeon repair company, and that always made people respectful, figuring we must be top secret hotshots, which we actually were.) There were only four or five of these companies in training, all of them to be assigned to a section of the front, once we invaded Europe. And invasion talk was in the air: it was coming soon, no one knew when, but it was coming, no question, it was coming.

The 3255 was put together the way cars are built, with bits and pieces trucked in from all over, to a central assembly point. Our assembly center was Eastbourne, on the south coast of England, a pretty town known as the "watering place of royalty," because some duke or earl, or maybe even the king had once spent some time there, sneaking away from the queen to be with his girlfriend, as opposed to Coney Island-like Brighton, which served the lower classes. It was expected that all those disparate "parts"—men and equipment—would be welded into a fully integrated, functional company, before the invasion.

We had a "host" company in Eastbourne, the already operational 129th Radio Intelligence Company, which, like Vint Hill, was engaged in long distance intercept work. They helped us get it together, and best of all, took care of food and transportation, until we were self sufficient in those departments. We also had a British Captain assigned to work with us on operations. (The British were miles ahead of us in that

kind of intelligence work.) We were grateful for his expertise, even though personally, he was a real pain in the ass, as I found most upper class British to be.

Captain Walter Drozdiak, of Shamokin, Pennsylvania was the commanding officer of the 3255. He was a big, insensitive, pig-headed man, not overly bright, with a funny looking little moustache and a rolling walk, as if he had just gotten off a ship. Nobody liked him. In addition, six lieutenants were assigned to the company. Bill Bateman of Seattle, stocky, always squinting through his thick glasses, a veteran of the Washington State National Guard, was the supply officer, and assistant Company Commander, and the oldest and most level headed of all us officers. Bill and I maintained a friendship until he died in the early 90's. Herb Kephart was in charge of the kitchen crew. He hailed from Memphis, was the most popular, a large, friendly golden retriever kind of a man, with the affable smile of a salesman, and lots of funny, Southern sayings. (He would refer to a heavy rain as "It's like a tall cow pissin' on a flat rock.") He had absolutely no talent for languages; how he was able to buy fresh food supplies in France and Germany, to supplement Army rations later on, was a mystery to all of us.

Joe Francis, a tall, somewhat supercilious Ivy League graduate handled the message center, and the couriers. He was given to fits of high pitched snickers, whenever anything tickled his fancy. He spoke often about sex, and how he liked his women to “just lie there, while I pump away.” There was Ken Heintzelman, a compact, crew-cut, broad-faced Iowa farm boy who ran the motor pool. He was essentially inarticulate, but fortunately, he did know all about cars and trucks. George Leonard and I, both New Yorkers, filled out the complement. We were assigned to operations and reconnaissance. George was a very handsome part-time actor, with the added distinction of being married to Anne Saks, of the Gimbel fortune. He and I used to argue all the time about love, sex and morality. He thought it extremely wrong for a single man (like me) to fool around with any woman I didn’t love. I felt HE was the more immoral, for permitting himself the luxury of an emotional attachment with some girl, when he was already married to someone else. We never did resolve the issue. After the war, as a favor to my old buddy, I signed the papers accepting responsibility for his pregnant French girl friend, Ginette, in the States. George couldn’t, because he was still married. I was a little nervous about how that would work out, if they broke up, but to my relief, he eventually married her, after divorcing Ann. (In reciprocity he gave me the key to his well furnished apartment in the East sixties.)

The company complement numbered one hundred ten. There were basically two types, the overhead staff: drivers, cooks, guards, and the like; and the operational staff, responsible for the actual intelligence work. The raison d’etre of our company was to work with whatever outfit we were assigned to along the front, usually at regimental level, to intercept, decipher, and translate German military radio messages, and try to pinpoint their transmitters using direction finders. Real cloak and dagger stuff! Operations was split into three main groups: the intercept operators, the traffic analysts and the translators. I was involved with the analysts, when I wasn’t doing reconnaissance, or being in charge of first platoon, my other jobs. Let me jump ahead for a moment to describe what our actual work was like after we became operational.

There were different kinds of German radio transmissions in those days. One was “low grade,” such as firing commands to artillery units, usually sent in the clear, that is, in plain language, which is where the translators, fluent in German, came in. A second was cipher, which is simply the substitution of one letter for another, according to a prearranged system. This was breakable on the basis of the well researched data and practical knowledge of the British, who had been at it for years. For instance, it is a fact that “E” is the commonest letter in Western languages. So if a certain letter, let’s say “v,” comes up the most often in messages, we can assume that “v” is really “e”—and so on. So, day in, day out, the intercept people sat in front of the Hallicrafters radios, mounted in racks in the bodies of four specially outfitted trucks, with very tall whip-lash antennas on top, and searched for German military radio signals, which they would transcribe. If it wasn’t clear language, but cipher, the traffic analysts would work over this material, and try to make sense out of it.

The third type was code. Code was really too difficult for us to work on in the field, and was handled at higher headquarters, back at Division or Corps level, where there were British and American experts qualified to break it. In code, all the involved parties have books, which are essentially lists of words and phrases that have specific meanings. For instance, the word “cloud” might mean “artillery barrage begins at four PM.” Its tough to break, and requires special training. And as if that wasn’t tough enough, the Germans changed their codes almost daily, on the off chance that we might have broken the previous day’s

code. Whatever coded material we intercepted would be sent by courier to the Corps headquarters every morning. If we felt it was very urgent, we telephoned it in, if we had lines. On rare occasions, for very hot stuff, we would communicate with the higher headquarters by radio, which was dangerous, because the Germans were also looking for American signals, so they could zero in on them, with their Direction Finding equipment and tell their artillery batteries where to find us. We always wondered if their direction finding equipment was better than ours. Ours was terrible. Once, when I was out with a DF unit, tracking a German radio signal, by the time the operator was able to pinpoint the enemy transmitter, we could actually see it, less than one hundred yards away!

We stayed in Eastbourne for several months. The local girls loved us, because we had more money than the British soldiers, and goodies, like candy and chocolate and coffee and cigarettes (everybody smoked then). Of course the Brits resented us stealing their girls, and the grumbling often escalated to fist fights. Also, Americans are more informal than the rigidly class-conscious British, and I think the British rank and file secretly envied us, even as they disliked us. On days off, I was able to drive about a bit, to East Anglia, to Devon, and Cornwall, and Brighton and Oxford. But mostly, it was train, train, train for the big day, D-Day, when the Allied forces, Americans and Canadians and British, would invade the continent and attack the German army.

Welding this group of strangers into a cohesive unit was hard work. We all made mistakes, but we learned from them.

For example, as a very inexperienced second lieutenant, I wasn't sure-handed with the enlisted men, especially the noncoms. One day, as I was walking past one of the tents, I heard someone inside cursing out "those brainless ninety day wonders, especially that fucking New York Jew, Lieutenant Olds." Without thinking, I walked into the tent, and chewed out the man doing the talking, Sergeant Vinson, a veteran regular army man. About an hour later, one of the privates sought me out and said, awkwardly, that Sergeant Vinson sent his compliments and requested that I visit him in his tent. I realized that I had made a grave error in dressing Vinson down in front of his men, and decided

it would be wise to do so. Vinson had set up two chairs, and a small table, with a bottle of whiskey and two glasses on it. Not a word was said. He poured a glass for each of us, and we tossed it down. He poured another round, never once looking at me, and we polished that one off. This went on for perhaps twenty minutes, until we finished the bottle of rotgut. I was lucky. Vinson passed out a minute or two before I did. That established my credentials, and I never had any more trouble with him, or anyone else. In fact, I got to like and trust him. I like to think the feeling was mutual.

The Invasion

June 6, the big day came. Weather had given a qualified approval, despite the clouds, occasional rain and gusty winds.

General Eisenhower ordered the invasion to start, after a horrendous bombing attack to soften up the German troops. The 3255 was not a participant in that extraordinary day. We had mixed feelings—relief and regret. Relief that it wasn't us in those vulnerable boats pitching and heaving as they strained towards a heavily defended shore under lowering clouds, and murderous artillery fire, and air attack—after all, it is an article of faith that the first wave dies on the beach. Regret that we weren't involved in one of the great military events of our generation, that we would not be able to say to friends and family, "When we went in on D-Day."

When we weren't working, or hanging around

the pubs, or taking a girl for a walk on the beautiful downs, (open fields atop the hills that rose behind Eastbourne) we clustered around the radio sets, listening for news. We were too far to hear any battle sounds, although we did see wave after wave of Allied planes heading South to bomb the German defenses. Finally, on D plus 13, we went down to the staging area, loaded onto the landing craft, the LSTs, and landed, wet and sick, on Utah Beach on the Normandy coast. The tenuous beachhead, carved out at so much cost in human life, had advanced beyond clinging by its fingernails, to a sizeable, relatively secure military force, but not yet linked up with the other three invasion beaches. A combination of tents and foxholes had sprung up on the sand. MP's were everywhere, directing traffic, as more men and supplies arrived and were unloaded, around the clock. Our company spent the next days preparing, checking all the radio intercept equipment, getting briefings, passing rumors around, and swapping stories, mostly untrue. My favorite was about the ranger who was dropped behind the lines, blew up a German artillery position, barely escaping with his life under heavy enemy fire, and yet had the chutzpah and the savoir faire to contract the clap from a willing young Frenchwoman while all this was going on!

The Germans, dug in all around us, were still shelling the invasion beachheads, Omaha, Utah, Juno and Peacock, regularly and heavily. They had ceded control of the skies to the overwhelming number of American and British planes, but their murderously accurate 88's and heavy mortars were still very effective. Finally our forces broke through at St. Lo, and commenced a rapid drive East and South through the hedgerow country, and then the open plains, under the erratic but brilliant General Patton, whom I was to meet personally later on.

From there on, it was a case of the Third Army hurrying to catch up with its leader, as Patton charged ahead, usually standing up in his open command car, with its big red-starred license plate, siren wailing away, wearing riding pants, glossy boots, and fancy jacket, the famous pearl-handled 45's strapped to both sides.

The 3255 had been assigned administratively to the XII Corps, a part of the Third Army commanded by General Manton S. Eddy. We moved

around from division to division, always looking for high ground for our intercept antennas. We had one great advantage: our company was classified top-secret, so we didn't have to answer too many questions, and we usually just bulled our way past the MPs to get what we wanted.

There was mass confusion as Third Army troops moved out through the hedgerow country, then along the narrow, mined roads, into the little towns filled with the cheering French, to whom we would toss cigarettes, and candy and K-Rations, the emergency food all soldiers carried (chocolate bar, fruit bar, biscuit, canned spam). We seemed to be constantly moving along a very fluid front, where it was easy to get lost. The incident I remember best occurred when I was scouting ahead in my jeep, in a blinding rainstorm, and got lost. Finally we saw a convoy of army trucks, and relieved, followed them. As we got close to the last vehicle, my driver, without saying a word, pointed out the German Army markings on its bumper. Very, very carefully, we slowed down, made a fast U turn and hightailed it the other way.

Most of that part of the campaign is blurry in my memory. We would move ahead, set up the intercept trucks on any hill we could find that was relatively secure, pick up what radio traffic we could, and have the transcripts driven back to headquarters. We had one courier I remember very well, "Shady" Levine, a "dese and dose" guy from Brooklyn. With his eyes half shut most of the time, and a vacant expression on his face, he always looked like he was about to fall asleep. But he was an amazing driver, negotiating those pitch black, rutted roads, headlights off by military order, and always finding his way. We would stay a day, sometimes two, then it was strike camp, haul down the antennas, and on to the next area, which I had scouted out in my jeep, the windshield always down for better visibility. We were lucky. We learned a little later on about a favorite German trick; stringing a steel wire across the roads about four feet high, designed to decapitate motorcycle riders and anyone in a jeep with its windshield down.

I never did get along with Captain Drozdiak, so I was very glad to be out on reconnaissance most of the time, searching for our next bivouac

site, with my regular driver, Howie Krebs, also late of Brooklyn. All in all, nothing too much happened in our dash across France until we got to Nancy, the "Little Paris" of France. It is near the Moselle river, a charming town of a quarter million or so, with a magnificent central square, the Place Stanislas, built around a cathedral and an old palace. It is also the place I had my momentous meeting with General Patton.

On the road to Nancy, several miles of tanks, twenty yards apart, were idling on the narrow, two lane road, while reconnaissance made certain the road was clear, the bridges weren't mined, and it was safe to proceed. The left lane was reserved for General Patton, who was understandably nervous. Stalled tanks on the flat road were an open invitation for a strafing run by enemy planes. There were strict orders that no one, repeat NO ONE, should drive in the left lane at any time, repeat, ANY TIME. Well, I had my own job to do, finding high ground, and it was too frustrating to be just sitting there behind a stationary tank, wasting time. So, I decided to hedgehop around the tanks, after making certain no one was coming up in the left lane. Besides, I figured, even if there were, the space between tanks would make it easy for my small, highly maneuverable jeep to duck back in. We proceeded this way for a little way, skipping in and out carefully. Then I heard the wail of the General's big command car, from way back of us, and scooted into the next open space. The open car squealed to a halt beside us. I stole one look. It was the General all right, bolt upright in the back. I stared straight ahead, my posture as stiff as his. I heard the General shout, in his high pitched voice. "Major, get the name of that Goddamn lieutenant. I want him on report." The major, his aide, leaned out and hollered to me. I identified myself and the 3255 to him, with a sinking heart. 'There goes the ball game—I may well get court-martialed for disobeying an order,' I thought. The major tucked his scribbled note back in his pocket, and winked at me, as they roared off, red light flashing, siren wailing. Can you imagine—here was Army Commander Patton, in the middle of a war, taking the time to cite a young lieutenant for a traffic violation! P.S. I never heard another word about the incident.

Nancy had beautiful villas and quaint back streets, medieval churches, cafes and restaurants, the usual stores—patisserie, boulangerie, and so on—and best of all, very friendly people. It was thrilling to see them lining the streets, hanging out the windows, as we drove into town, waving little American flags, and blowing kisses to us. There was one very pretty young teenager who smiled at me from the sidewalk and I tried to make a date for six that night, but there was so much noise and confusion, and my jeep was rolling at such a good clip, I never did get the message through.

I drove all around, looking for a suitable site for the antennas. On the outskirts of town, I discovered a large estate on top of the tallest hill in the area. I introduced myself to the owner, the tall, pince-nez wearing, pointy-nosed Doctor Bretagne, about fifty, I would judge, who beamed and invited me in for a drink. Over some fine old cognac, I discussed the possibility of the 3255 temporarily taking over his property. The good Doctor hesitated, mentioning the love and care that had been lavished on the house and grounds for generations. I glibly pushed Franco-American friendship, the war we were fighting side by side, and the absolute necessity for his high ground to help us jointly vanquish Les Boches. I was pleased my French was holding up well, since he did not speak English. "And how much time is it that you will rest here?" he wanted to know. "Oh, no more than a week, maybe two." I replied, confidently. To my surprise, the subject of any payment for the use of the property, or for temporarily resettling him and his family never came up. I suppose it would have been unseemly for an upper class Frenchman to speak of such things to the American liberators. By the fourth glass of cognac, he was won over by my appeals to his patriotism, and our budding personal friendship. He even offered me the keys to the cellar, with its wine racks. "For the officers, eh bien?" he said with a wink.

The very next morning we moved in, trucks, troops and all. I billeted the officers in the big house, the enlisted men in several other buildings on the property, including a barn and a hen house. The ground was wet from recent rains, and I winced at the ruts the vehicles left as we drove them into position. I still blush when I think of the great harm we did to that poor man's property. He had been so happy to

demonstrate his patriotism and friendship by agreeing to let us stay, for what we all thought would be only a few days. However, for either logistical or political reasons, Patton was forced to cool his heels in Nancy for more than two months. And so of course, were we.

We dug slit trenches—outdoor latrines—all over the beautiful green lawn of that lovely estate, really tore up the damp ground with our trucks, and on top of that, I'm ashamed to admit we all behaved like pigs. For example, one night Lieutenant George Richmond Leonard III got careless heating up a can of C rations in the living room fireplace; it exploded and spattered that entire room, with its ornate wall paper, gilded mirrors, and graceful, upholstered couches and chairs, with baked beans in a particularly sticky sauce. And there were lots more incidents like that, many of them worse. Since there were more enlisted men than officers, they did even more mischief. We really behaved terribly.

Nancy in the fall of 1944 was a wonderful place for the men and officers of the 3255. The front lines, where the poor bastards of the 4th Armored and later, the 26th Infantry were dug in, facing the determined, battle-hardened German troops, were far enough away to be almost forgotten. Meanwhile WE fortunates were in a charming, civilized city—great food, good wine, even chocolate and coffee—all of it in absolute safety, and in glorious fall weather. Almost everybody found himself a girlfriend. Many men left the "barracks" and moved in with them. The "friend" or her mother would do their laundry, and perform miracles with the dull Army rations Lieutenant Kephart allowed the men to draw. For many, it was like a vacation at some pleasant resort.

A few incidents stand out. Once, a few of us drove up to Metz, about 40 miles north, to celebrate Rosh Hashanah. A captain at headquarters I played poker with had located a relative there, who had miraculously survived the occupation. It was an exhilarating, unusual night, sitting there with a dozen or so survivors, listening to them recite prayers in French accented Hebrew, smiling and laughing with us in grateful friendship. We conversed in a mixture of broken English, broken French, and Yiddish. Even though the ceremony itself meant little to

me, It was moving to see how much it meant to them to celebrate the New Year with their American deliverers.

But the oddest of all was the time the Military Police closed down the entire red light district, a snarl of streets with appropriate names like "Rue des Dames," immediately surrounding the Cathedral. When First Sergeant Cliff Barham asked me if I could do something, because the men were complaining about the deprivation, I called an MP officer I knew, who told me a most bizarre story. It seems that General Patton was out inspecting the front lines, and the troops in the Fourth Armored, his favorite division, bitched to him about the lack of female companionship. So, the General obligingly closed down all the whore houses in Nancy, and ran the tankers through, one squad to a house, until he had taken care of all his boys. Only then did he reopen the area. Now who would believe a story like that? Well, I do.

The official story behind our long stay was that we had run out of fuel and had to wait for resupply. There was a strong rumor going around however, that it wasn't petroleum at all, but politics. The Russians didn't want Patton overrunning Germany ahead of them, and demanded that Eisenhower hold Patton back, until they had advanced farther into Eastern Germany, so they could capture Berlin. Most of us believed the second story, and were certain that Patton, unchecked, could well have gone and taken Berlin by himself, months earlier than it actually fell.

But finally, regretfully, on a raw, rainy day in mid November, after the men bid tearful farewells to their girlfriends, we packed up our gear and left Dr. Bretagne's ruined estate in Nancy, heading north and east, towards the Saarland, an area that has been fought over for centuries, alternating between French control as Alsace-Lorraine, or German, as Elsass-Lothringen. Once again it was set up, stay a day or two, pack up, and go on to the next high ground, and keep repeating the procedure. We were intercepting pretty good stuff and passing it on to headquarters. A few artillery batteries got knocked out as a result, and some gaps in the intelligence patterns were filled in. There was no hint at all of what was to come, when in the middle of December, the Germans under the redoubtable Marshall von Rundstedt, counterattacked without warning in a salient that took all by surprise. The Germans knew they were losing the war, and this was their hail Mary desperation move to pull it out. They almost succeeded. We now refer to this last major German offensive as the "Battle of the Bulge." It is also famous for the immortal response of General MacAuliffe when asked to surrender his beleaguered troops. "Nuts!" he said to the Germans, who, translating literally, couldn't understand exactly what he meant by that!

Eisenhower threw all the men he could find, any warm bodies, including non-combat troops like cooks, dish washers, supply clerks, and the 3255, into the battle. We were hurriedly shunted up from the gritty, industrial Saar basin to Luxembourg. On a snowy December 23, we pulled into the town of Kirchberg, on the outskirts of Luxembourg city. It looked like all the other small towns we had gone through—cobbled streets, modest houses, a smallish church with a large steeple, and cheering, friendly people. I billeted the men in the school—the kids were delighted with their unexpected holiday—and set about finding rooms for the officers.

I had grown to dislike Captain Drozdiak more and more, and I found just the right place for him, a room over a stall for livestock, with lovely bovine smells percolating up through the floor. For myself, I took a room in the Schwartz home, entranced by the lovely young woman who had opened the door to the modest house, Leonie Schwartz, the oldest of three charming daughters, blonde, and with the strawber-

ries and cream complexion of many north Europeans, the others being Maria, tall, dark, giggly and talky, and shy; retiring Anneliese; along with Papa, he of the calloused hands, two day growth of beard, straggly moustache and battered cap of a workman; and Mama, a gentle, smiling little be-aproned housewife who reminded me of my mother. Papa looked suspiciously at me for a moment, when I told him I would like to be billeted in his house, then relaxed; after all I was an American officer. Of course the room he gave me was on one side of his bedroom, with the girls' room on the other. I would have had to walk right over his bed, if I had tried to get near his virginal daughters! I scattered the other lieutenants around in various houses, set up the kitchen in the school basement. And voila! We were moved in and operational within half a day.

Christmas Eve 1944 was very special. We were all invited to the church for services. It was lovely, youngsters in red choir robes filling the church with their clear soprano voices, flickering candles all over, and the warmest welcome imaginable from what seemed to be all the Kirchbergers. They had set up a huge spread of bread and cheese and sausages and cookies and coffee—where they got these luxuries at this point in the war, I do not know, perhaps hoarded against just such a day. I remember a lot of hugging and smiling, and our lads bellowing out American songs, from Steven Foster to Frank Sinatra, and handing out chocolate and cigarettes and chewing gum, and everybody feeling so good.

For the next few weeks, most of us had it easy, except for one of our intercept teams and one direction finding team that were way up, near the front lines. Kirchberg was very safe with only an occasional strafing run by a German plane, and rarely, a mortar shell. In fact it was so quiet, I took Leonie to an Engineer Battalion dance in a nearby town, after prolonged discussion with Papa. It was like something out of a Sicilian novel. I promised to get her home before 11, and swore to him—on the honor of an American officer—that I would respect the honor of his daughter. The dance was like a small town USO affair, middle-aged ladies serving cookies and coffee and soft drinks, a pick up band that played American pop songs with more enthusiasm than skill, and the soldiers, so happy to have the local girls to dance with.

It was great fun to dance with Leonie. After her initial shyness, she relaxed and enjoyed herself. So did I, just like being on a date back in the States. I drove her home and we exchanged the chastest of kisses, as we said goodnight, promptly at eleven, as I had promised Monsieur Schwartz.

As in Nancy, the townspeople did our laundry, and cooked for us, using our rations, and just loved us to pieces. They spoke a Luxembourg patois among themselves, a sort of low German, but spoke mostly French or German to us. I do remember one semi-serious conversation with Papa Schwartz, in which he blamed the war on the machinations of international Jewish bankers, rubbing the fingers of his right hand together in the universal symbol for money, not realizing I was Jewish. It brought home to me how deeply embedded anti-Semitism was—and unfortunately still is—throughout Europe. I didn't make an issue of it with him, I'm sorry to say, but then, maybe it was best not to at the time. We were sorry, very sorry to leave after three weeks, when the tide of battle had turned, and it was obvious that the German thrust had failed.

Back in the trucks and jeeps, we continued our inexorable advance into the German heartland. Crossing the Rhine at Koblenz was a thrill for all of us. We were in the heartland of the enemy now, and it was amazing to see the difference in the reaction of the local population. No more cheering crowds lining the streets, and waving from the second story windows. Now, there were only sullen, hostile faces, averted eyes, closed doors. And of course, we began to see more and more of the devastation our bombers were visiting on the Fatherland. (It is ironic that our path went through the province of Hesse, only a few miles from where Jenny has lived for years, in Nauheim.)

The XII Corps was following the classic invasion route to the heart of Germany, through the Fulda Gap, as Patton barreled on. The 3255 had its moment of glory when we deciphered a message giving the exact location of a whole column of German tanks and trucks. The Air Force was able to bomb the head and tail of the line, leaving the ground troops to mop up the immobilized Germans troops. We got credit for helping to destroy an entire German battalion. We had another moment

of glory, or rather weeks of it, when we discovered an abandoned railroad car on a siding, full of roughly 10,000 bottles of green Rhine wine. We took better care of them, than of our equipment. We made a deal with headquarters—one case of wine in exchange for a week in Paris for one of our men. I'm pleased to report that everyone in our company got to go.

Along the way, Captain Drozdiak had managed to "liberate" a German staff car—a big, beautiful Mercedes. It was the apple of his eye, and he allowed no one else to get near it. But he came a cropper, when he drove it to a meeting the headquarters staff had called. Some colonel up there spotted it, requisitioned it, and poor Walter D. had to go back to his old jeep.

About halfway through the campaign—I don't remember exactly where or when—while on reconnaissance, my jeep took a shell hit on the left side. Gearinger, my driver, was a big man, well over six feet and two hundred pounds. I didn't know him well, beyond the usual pleasantries, but his bulk shielded me from the worst of the blast and the shrapnel, and saved my life. We both dived for a ditch, where I bandaged him up the best I could, and fired my carbine and my 45 pistol at anything that moved, until a passing American patrol sent up the medics. All kinds of feelings and thoughts went through my head—guilt for getting us into that pickle, anger at whoever had done it, frustration at being pinned down, fear about what might happen to us. The patrol took us to the nearest field hospital, where Gearinger died the next day. I spent a long week there, while they picked out dozens of shrapnel bits from my arms and back. Actually, the worst part of it was the blast effect. My left ear drum was torn, which deafened me, and the retina of my right eye had hemorrhaged, leaving me partially blind in that eye for many weeks. It was very scary, and I had a bad time. To repair my left ear drum the doctors put a small square of cigarette paper over the hole, which encouraged skin to grow on both sides of the paper, and more or less restore the drum, which consists of just three layers of skin. Another note: In 1997 my right retina hemorrhaged again, leaving me virtually blind in that eye, a belated present from Adolph.

But I recovered sufficiently to rejoin the company in a month. For a change the Captain was nice to me, and gave me a field promotion to first lieutenant. Once in a great while I dream of the jolting shock when we were hit, and the terror Gearinger and I felt, lying there in the ditch, afraid the German soldiers would find and kill us. I also sometimes think of the random, incomprehensible, meaninglessness of life, where a man I barely knew lost his life, and unknowingly saved mine. I sent my condolences to his family, but I never heard from them.

Our route lay east and south, on the heels of the 4th armored division. Those tank men were a tough, strange lot. For instance, to show their contempt for the Germans, they liked to empty dresser drawers in the houses they occupied, defecate in the drawers, and then close them. And of course they took whatever valuables they could find; since there was room in the tanks to carry loot. I had felt some pity for the German civilians as we rousted them out of their homes and villages, left hungry and shivering cold along the rainy, muddy roads, their few pitiful possessions in bundles and battered suitcases, bewildered children in tow, but these feelings vanished when I saw Dachau.

We knew that the camp had been liberated the day before. I had no real business there, since we were pushing steadily south and east, and I should have been out casing new sites for the antennas, but I decided I had to see it for myself. Shady Levine, little, quiet, rather homely and prematurely stooped but an amazingly good navigator, who had replaced Gearinger as my driver, bounced us along roads torn up by shells and tank treads. We came to the town of Dachau first, a pretty little farming village, green grass, a church spire, neat little houses—a German Currier and Ives. From the village you could see the smokestacks of the ovens, just a few miles away.

As we drove to the camp, up to the tall, barbed wire topped fence, a peculiar smell filled the air, like food gone bad, mixed with body odor and smoke. A few MP vehicles and tanks were parked near the gates. Shady parked alongside. The gates were wide open, and we just walked into the concentration camp. It was a madhouse. Pitiful stick figures in striped pajamas, obviously the camp uniform, were milling about, limping and shuffling around, apparently unable to grasp that they

were really liberated. A team of American MP's were trying to restore some order, setting up a mess line, and a delousing tent. It was heartbreaking to look at the ex-prisoners. All were emaciated, unshaven. Up close, they smelled nauseatingly of sickness and dirt and decay. But the worst was their eyes—hollow, staring dark circles in their pasty faces.

As we walked in, we saw a commotion going on in one corner of the large open area. A bunch of the stick figures had surrounded a guard, who hadn't left with the retreating German soldiers. He was an older man, in his fifties I judged, in a gray uniform. The Nazis had run out of younger, able-bodied men, and had scraped the bottom of the barrel to find any camp guards. The inmates were screaming, faces contorted in rage, their open mouths displaying ragged, discolored stumps of teeth. They were holding pieces of wood they had picked up, iron bars, stones, whatever came to hand, as they closed in on the guard, who was on his knees, terror in his face, pleading for his life. The crowd began to beat him, their terrible anger lending strength to their pipestem arms. The MP's stood by, watching, making no effort to intervene, as he was beaten to death. Then the crazed stick figures darted away, shouting, shaking their fists, looking for more of the hated guards.

Shady and I walked across the forbidding, graveled square to the crematoriums. The brick ovens were cold, their doors open, the chimneys looming over them. It was obvious that the camp authorities had tried to rake out all the bones and ashes, but enough remained as mute witness. The ovens gave off the sickly sweet, dreadful smell of burned human flesh. Around the corner, behind a shed, we saw a pile of corpses, twenty five or thirty, in the striped ticking uniforms, pitifully thin, like skeletons, most with mouths open in ghastly rictus, stacked up one on top of the other. The cliché came to life for me: they really did resemble piles of cordwood, ready for the fireplace. Shady turned away and threw up. I was close to it myself. A terrible rage shook me. I wanted to find a German, any German, and kill him. Shady and I stood there, pulling ourselves together, then we walked back to the jeep. We took out all the cigarettes and candy and food we had, and came back in, distributing them to all to the outstretched hands

that encircled us. Many of the liberated prisoners were crying, sobbing, holding each other, staggering about. Others, overcome by their liberation, and their hunger and fatigue, sat or lay on the ground, staring, mumbling, trying to comprehend it all. I wanted to stay, I wanted to go, I wanted to drive back to that pretty little town and ask the people how in God's name they could have lived their lives next door to that horror, and remained sane. There was no way they couldn't have known what was going on those few kilometers away. I wanted to destroy the town, and all its stone-faced, stone-hearted inhabitants. But there was nothing we could do, and we drove off.

At the company's next stop, in some dreary farm village, we didn't follow our usual procedure of giving the locals two hours to take what they wanted, and vacate their houses. I waved the trucks in immediately, scattering the people already on the road, smashing the carts with their belongings piled on, and ordering everyone out, at gunpoint. After that, as the German Army started to disintegrate, we pressed on faster and faster, usually only a few miles behind the tanks. One happy day, we liberated a half dozen American prisoners of war, who were being held in the jail of a town whose name I have forgotten. I took a beautiful Luger pistol from the sergeant in charge of the German detail, and we packed the rest of the bedraggled squad off to the rear, to a POW camp. Hitler's vaunted army was tired, hungry and beaten. They were far more afraid of the Russians advancing from the East, than of us, and started surrendering to us in droves. The war in Europe was coming to a close.

We went all the way to the Danube river, to war torn but still beautiful Regensburg, and then down to the German-Czech border, where we wound up the war in the little town of Grafenau. The Russians had been moving fast too, and when hostilities were officially declared over, they were only a few miles from us, also at the German-Czech border. We had a monumental, incredible three day drunk while we embraced each other, bellowed out oaths of eternal friendship between "Ivan" and "Johnnie," and staggered around, swapping Scotch and vodka, cigarettes and stories. Our rear echelon troops came up in droves, so they could brag about actually seeing a real live Red Army soldier, and could one of us take a picture of them standing arm in

arm? Otherwise, they'd never believe it back home. One lovely memory of those days: Emboldened by all the whiskey, Sergeant Patenaude came up, threw me a wobbly high-ball (salute) that knocked his hat off, and said. "Begging your pardon, sir, but I have been observing the lieutenant, and if he ever needs a job back in the States, I own a company in Providence, and would be happy to hire you." Another wobbly salute, and off he reeled, leaving me with a good feeling inside.

Then all of a sudden, on the fourth day, things changed drastically. The Iron Curtain had descended abruptly. There were no more smiles and backslaps; suddenly, we were the enemy. The Russians had posted grim-faced sentries to keep us apart, and no communication was permitted. No more Ivan-Johnny buddy-buddy, no more drinking, laughing, fumbling with language—it was the beginning of the Cold War, which was to last for decades. Now that our common enemy, the Nazis were beaten, we found new ones—each other.

It was all quite anticlimactic, and hard to grasp. The journey, the crusade, the war was over, really over. We had reached our goal, accomplished our mission. It took several weeks to pack up our equipment, and ship it back to Corps headquarters, and start the tedious process

of returning no longer needed soldiers to civilian life. While we waited for orders, us lucky officers were sent to Rosenheim, a beautiful resort town in the lake district of Bavaria, for a little R&R. Rosenheim to me looked like a combination of the English Lake Country, and upstate New York. We took over a bunch of houses on a small, pretty lake, and spent a wonderful month relaxing and swimming, and eating and dating the local women.

RHIP—Rank has its privilege—and we lucked in. Each of our six officers took over a lake front cottage, stocked it up with food from the commissary, and a "housekeeper" from the local ranks of women. Of course there were strict orders against fraternizing with any Germans, but no one paid any attention to those rules, since the commanding general's new girl friend was openly living with him in his villa. Also, there were a number of refugee camps in the area, full of women who had been uprooted from their homes in Poland, and Czechoslovakia and Italy, to work in the German factories, and were now free, and trying to make plans for the future. All were delighted to move into the charming lakeside cottages with us, keep house, cook, be available, and assure themselves of decent food and comfortable quarters, for a little while anyway. At any rate, it was a fun time, probably our best ever in Europe. And with all the fraternization, we compiled one enviable record. No one in the 3255 ever got VD in the two years we were together.

Finally, it was time to deactivate the company. I was 25, a kid really, with the silver bars of a first lieutenant on my shoulders, used to the authority and perks of an officer in a conquering army. What would I do back home? Go back to school, and study what? Sell low-priced shoe in Macy's? Become a faceless, unimportant nobody? I hated the thought of it, even though my mother's letters were full of joy now that I would be coming home.

In the end I couldn't do it. When the opportunity came to stay in Europe with the Occupation Forces in Austria, plus receive a promotion to Captain, I jumped at it. I was named the U.S. Radio Officer for Austria, promoted as promised, and stationed in Vienna for a year. I worked under a Major Long, a jolly, fat southerner who loved doing

nothing. Which was what his job entailed, when he wasn't sipping whatever alcohol was around. There were four powers involved in the Occupation: British, American, French and Russian, each controlling a quarter of the city. Every month we held four-way meetings to decide what to do about the communications mess we had inherited. Telephone cables and broadcast facilities had been totally destroyed, along with utilities, transportation, roads and houses.

The center of the city was in ruins, the streets almost impassable. We had to decide how to repair the systems, what to do about radio stations in those pre-TV days, the telephones and the telegraph. So, once a month, the four representatives would gather for several hours to discuss what should be done. Each country had its own agenda, and politics ruled the day. We may have been allies, but you'd never know it from the acrimony that was the hallmark of the meetings. Major Long and I would roll our eyes at each other and doodle on our writing pads, as the meetings went nowhere, with nothing accomplished. Then we would disband, all of us smiling frostily at each other, and make a date for the next meeting, four weeks hence. For the rest of the time, between meetings, we were free as birds, once a little bit of paper work was taken care of. I had only one permanent assignment, to make sure the portable radio that Commanding General Mark Clark took with him on his extensive travels, was always in working condition. For this they needed a captain and several technicians? All in all, it was such a waste of time and manpower.

I shared a large apartment just off the Ringstrasse, not far from the Opera, with Lieutenant Virble Buck, a Montana lad, who resembled Li'l Abner, physically and mentally. We had lots of fun, dating, hunting out the few restaurants that served anything worth eating, despite the shortage of food in the city. (I was bored with the Army mess halls that most civilians would have been very happy to visit.) Sometimes in the evening, we would pour some bourbon and take pot shots—and I mean for real, with carbines—at the uneducated country boys the Russians had brought in as soldiers from Kazakhstan or Tajikistan or someplace like that, who were always trying to steal our jeeps at night. Otherwise we just bopped around town, but we were very naive and unsophisticated ourselves, and didn't know enough to avail ourselves of what

Vienna had to offer, even in its straitened days. For instance, I've always regretted I didn't get to learn how to ski, in that prime ski country. Once a bunch of us drove up to Kitzbühel, one of the world's premier slopes, strapped on skis and parkas, took pictures of each other, then unstrapped the skis and promptly went back to Vienna.

Things were very tough for the Austrian civilians. With the economy and the infrastructure all torn up, there were few jobs. The winter was cold, and heating material—mostly wood—was expensive. The best jobs were for the provisional Austrian government, and for the occupying forces, but there weren't nearly enough of them. The others had to scrounge. Many women became full or part time prostitutes, men would chop wood in the forests, travel far out to buy farm produce to sell in the city, making themselves generally useful. For example, one middle-aged civilian, who may have been Jewish, latched on to me. He was very ingratiating, not pushy at all. He made his living by swapping collectibles for American cigarettes and whiskey, which were the most valuable currency around. I didn't know beans about such things then, to my later regret, but I did get a beautiful set of blue and white Meissenware cups and saucers for two cartons of Camels, which we still have. I got to like that funny little man, and admired his enterprise in scratching out a living in those days of mass upheaval and uncertainty. I tried to talk with him one day about how it was for him during the war years, and did he have a family, but he was either too shy or too scared to say much of anything.

It was really a whole year of R&R for me. I met a charming girl, Lisl Pennetsdorfer. She was blonde, blue-eyed, pug-nosed, very cheerful and lots of fun. Not a great brain by any means, but good hearted, and best of all, very fond of me. She was rather Rubenesque, and I alternated between calling her "Lisl" and "Chubby." She was a native of Vienna, and knew it backwards and forwards. We went all over together; to the charming, arty town of Grinzing, up in the hills, a sort of Viennese Left Bank cum Greenwich Village, visited beautiful Salzburg, the home of Mozart and other Baroque composers, spent a few days in Steyr, Austria's Detroit, where I was having a waterproof top made for my jeep. We picnicked in the foothills of the Alps, particularly beautiful in the late spring. Lisl married an American pilot some

time after I left, and came to live in St. Thomas, where I saw her briefly, years later. Like most such reunions, it was disappointing.

When the Occupation year was up I toyed with the idea of staying in the service. But I would have had to revert to the rank of second lieutenant in the regular Army, with the prospect of years before I could expect to become a captain again. “And could I request to be stationed in Washington, or San Francisco, or New York?” I asked the recruiter. “Are you kidding? You go where they assign you, Captain. Could be anywhere.” It sounded worse and worse. A junior lieutenant again, no idea where they might post me, perhaps exiled to a lonely atoll in the Pacific, or some godforsaken fort in the middle of Death Valley. Besides that, I had learned firsthand how much drinking went on in the army, and I didn’t want to go that route. (Although an interesting story had come out at war’s end about a squad of GI’s who had gotten trapped inside a brewery cellar in Bavaria, and hadn’t been able to get out for two weeks. When they were finally rescued they were in great shape, which is an argument for drinking beer—or living in a brewery cellar!)