GOING HOME: August 22 - October 2, 1945

(written on the way and upon reaching home)

With few exceptions, American soldiers in Europe want to get out of there and home as fast as possible. They will say that they don't care if they have to stand up all the way home, or on their heads for that matter, if they have to eat out of tin cans or even live on bread and water. No one can imagine the state they are in who has not lived among them. It is a violent passion and a reckless desire, the surge of blind love before fulfillment. The thought of every single one of the millions of objects in America sets their blood racing. Only when they finally arrive back do they realize that their homeland can't be gobbled up like a box of cookies.

Many of the high-point men come back alone, in the sense that, although they were physically more crowded than ever before, they had left their old units, the comrades of many months and years, and lived in a transitional period of many new faces, treatment "by the numbers," and constant shifting about before they were finally carried to their separation center and there freed to the civilian world. The feeling of aloneness occurred for the first time when my group set out from its station in Germany on August 22 to report at Thionville, France, for shipment to America. It stayed with us and made us ever more anxious to get home until the group landed at Newport News on September 28 on the *Hawaiian Shipper.* The five weeks were the longest of our lives - dull, wretched, anxious days, seemingly without end. This particular group was not unusual. As it went along it found out to its surprise that it was actually typical, both in its expectations and in its experiences. Most homecoming men went and will go as we did, and the stories told will be similar to its story.

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There were six of us from our detachment who were on orders to return to the United States. The Seventh Army had cut

orders on all Seventh Army personnel having the required number of points (100 for enlisted men, 110 for officers), directing them to report to the 14th Reinforcement Depot at Thionville and prescribing travel to America by plane, ship or government motor transport. The men on the orders knew that they were being considered for return because, although they were stationed at Wiesbaden and Army Headquarters were at Heidelberg, they were exerting constant pressure on the Headquarters, politely and as determinedly, and knew all rumors and the regulations on readjustment. They had been waiting ever since V-E Day in May to go home. They believed that the setting of 85 points as the prerequisite for discharge meant that a man with 100 points would get prompt treatment, and they were told that only some 250,000 men in the European Theater of Operations had as many as 85 points. (I possessed 122 points.) Month after month their patience was tried, while their hopes mounted. Out of some fifty 85plus-point men two-thirds of my reduced company, only three had been sent home before the six of us left, so that when the orders finally arrived, the men concerned were only grimly satisfied.

The departure was a big event in the company and the larger organization of which we had become a part a few weeks earlier. The parent organization was composed completely of low-point men who were rendered slightly uncomfortable by the constant griping of the combat propaganda company. On the night before departure the company gathered in its villa for the last time. Most of those who were off-duty were sitting with long faces in the master-sergeant's room, passing around a bottle of cognac and taking sips of Coca-Cola for washes. Those who were being left behind felt badly. Every man in the detachment, with three exceptions, has been overseas for over two years and they were all sick to death of Europe. The men who were leaving were some of the oldest and best non-commissioned officers in the outfit, the maintenance sergeant, the chief clerk, two technical sergeants and the chief cook. Myself, I was their Captain, and I had more points than anyone in the company.

Each of the men got from the men staying behind the addresses of people to call and of places to meet afterwards in America. The men who would be left rued the fact that they didn't have enough points to leave, and they calculated for the thousands time their chances of following soon. Everyone could see that the end of the company was near and there was little to be done about it. But it was a sad fate to be left behind and, although they knew it was impossible, they talked of how much better it would be to go back as the original group with their own supply sergeant fixing them up for the final landing party, their own maintenance sergeant checking the vehicles for the final run, their own first sergeant giving one of his famous blasts at the final days of military snafu and their own cooks saving some coffee for the late brews.

The next morning Lt. Col. Stanley, the District chief, assembled the officers to say good-bye to the group and presented it with a bottle of cognac. We climbed into the weapons carrier and departed. Our route ran down the mountains to Wiesbaden, across the Rhine into French territory at Mainz and along the Rhine to Dusseldorf. It was a gray day with intermittent rain, but the men were quietly happy, secure for the first time that they were actually going home and not merely being prepared for another disappointment. The ties with Europe had been cut. They would be pushing through it yet for some time, but only physically, not emotionally. Their mail had now ceased. They would hear no more of their families until they would arrive in America. They would see no more of their army friends until perhaps in the distant future in the United States.

At Dusseldorf the driver turned left to follow the Moselle southwards, along a highway which wound through pretty hill country, devoted in large part to vineyards, with its villages garrisoned by French troops. For once no one had bothered to pick up some rations before leaving and, since the French were not notoriously generous in their hospitality to Americans and

the Germans were bound by complicated ration regulations, the group got along during the day on fruit picked from orchards along the roads. Towards mid-afternoon we reached the Duchy of Luxembourg where the Oisne Base Section had set up an immaculate camp, amply staffed and worked by German prisoners, where one could drink as much hot coffee and eat as many beef and spam sandwiches as he liked.

The plan was to stay in Luxembourg that evening and report as early as possible to the 14th Reinforcement Depot at Thionville on the morning of the twenty-third. Therefore, when we drove through the attractive and intact city of Luxembourg in the early evening, we sought out the headquarters of the Fourth Mobile Radio Broadcasting Company, several of whose men and officers had been attached to us in the Seventh Army during the campaign. One of them, Sgt. Joe Green, who used to operate a loud-speaker truck across the lines down South, was now in the plush job of managing the Hotel Continental for the various officers and civilian personnel of Radio Luxembourg. He set us up in the hotel and we spent the evening talking over the campaigns of the Rhineland and Southern France and exchanging the experiences of the troops that first invaded Germany for the attractive experiences of life in a liberated city, the usual coin of conversation between army and base friends.

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At supper we encountered two officers who were out of the 14th Reinforcement Depot on a visit to Luxembourg and fell into the first of a series of depressions. (I must say – it is important to insist – that the dismay and indignation to be found in these pages and among the troops of the Return Home may appear exaggerated and un-heroic. But remember that these were the Conquerors! And we were given promises! And all heroism was declared officially at an end! All challenge had been erased! We were reduced to a rabble.)

They – the two officers –told us that no more people were being

flown home, and that there was a period of at least a week of idle waiting at the 14th Reinforcement Depot before we would be moved out.

This news and a heavy rain of the following morning subdued our mood during the twenty or so miles to Thionville. The countryside looked duller than most in France. The villages were dirty and lifeless, lacking the picturesque unity of the Southern French towns. Where there were industries, the cities looked even more dirty and ugly, with rows of factory dwellings that reminded one of West Virginia and South Chicago, on a small scale, however, without the grandiose industrial atmosphere that makes some of the American squalor exciting. At Thionville we stopped in the headquarters and were assigned to the 102nd Reinforcement Battalion, about an hour's drive from the city and in the center of the Maginot Line. We approached it through poor villages and rolling hills which began to show more and more signs of fortifications - senseless holes, concrete pill-boxes, unwarranted roads, dragon's teeth and uncultivated land. After making numerous turns, the road carried us over a crest, below which lay a cluster of buildings of jaundiced and cracked pink stucco which our practiced eyes recognized immediately as our new home.

The men were led off separately to one of three large barracks where they were put into squadrons containing about fifty men each. When enough officers had collected at headquarters, a guide was furnished them. He walked with us down the road two hundred yards and pointed out a row of small bungalows and walked up stairs into the first one. The front yard was unkempt and some of the wall had been chipped away by a shell or bomb. From the open door of one of the rooms in the dark hall came the odor of an untended latrine and, as I entered the hallway, a lieutenant was jamming the door shut and swearing about the stench. Three or four small rooms on the first floor were completely occupied. Each corner held an army cot, and val-packs took up most the remaining space. In the

middle of the room were several Puerto-Rican officers playing poker on one of the cots.

I climbed up the narrow staircase to the second floor and found an empty room with a cot which I claimed by putting my baggage on it. A moment later two or three officers looked into the room, cursed a little, muttered to themselves, and withdrew. I could hear them descend the stairs and, shortly afterwards, they came back from across the street carrying folded cots which they brought up and set up in the room with me. The room contained no other furniture and the wall was peppered with the holes made by the clothing nails of past occupants. To accommodate oneself it was only necessary to pull a nail from an inconvenient hole and push it into one more accessible.

When the baggage had been piled properly and the beds made, we all lay back and took stock of the situation. Neither the Lieutenant Colonel nor the Major nor the First Lieutenant, who were the three other occupants, felt happy. Like everyone else, by this time they had learned that “high-pointers” were no longer being flown to America and that the usual stay here was eight to ten days. After the pleasant quarters of Germany, this abandoned and dilapidated Maginot Line camp seemed most dismal. Already the lack of interest of the cadre was evident. Against the background of our impatience, the coming days looked endless. Almost immediately officers began talking of a subject that became increasingly emotional and tiresome as time went on, of how well they had lived in Germany and how disgusted they were with France. It became more and more a tirade, wandering from a simple comparison of privileges enjoyed to absurd irrationalities. It was hard to tell on whose side they had fought. As they became more unhappy and harassed, they displaced and projected more of their feelings onto the French. For their last month in Europe, a large part of the American casuals had not a single kind word to say about France. They ran the gamut of invective against all things French.

The first meal was eaten under conditions corresponding to the general appearance of the camp. It was in a low, dingy house formerly used as a mess for the French *sous-officiers* who had been garrisoned here. The meal combined the worst of the army's rations with disgusting cooking, a discontinued C-ration of hash, bad coffee and a bit of canned peach in sugar-syrup. The implements were rough and unclean by the tenets of army cuisine, and the tables were cleared and the coffee poured by slovenly French girls.

But the soldiers could actually look back upon the meal with some fondness when it was finished, because there was nothing to do for the remainder of the day except to wait for another meal and, finally, bed. It was announced that the next morning the new arrivals would be given an address of welcome by the commanding officer of the camp. The officers looked forward with some anticipation to this because they felt that someone ought to explain a lot of things. They had expected better treatment. In their view, they had done more to win the war than most people, civilian or military. Here, privates or colonels were distinguished, but all alike were treated with the same neglect and indifference. Among those who had just arrived, for example, was Colonel Lewis Ferry, who had been Executive to the Assistant Chief-of-Staff for Intelligence (G2) in the Sicilian, French and German campaigns and had, for the past few months, been acting as G2 of Seventh Army Headquarters. He had been my boss, to whom I reported my detachment's operations. He had been one of three officers primarily responsible for plotting the intentions of the German army before its big counter-attack against the Seventh Army in December last. A waggish officer could remark happily when the threat had subsided, "The Bitche Bulge is now a patch pocket and there's no use having a flap over it." But the Colonel was not to be numbered among the grousing warriors and only smiled sympathetically when he happened to hear us agitating.

The new consignment had hardly settled down in the camp

before rumors began to generate from the dunghill of dullness. Pessimists spread optimistic rumors and the more happy-go-lucky, pessimistic rumors, so that one had constantly before him a choice. While one might report that plans had been changed and that all would go by air in two or three days, another would confide that we were stuck indefinitely in this hole until the congestion at Le Havre had been removed. In the end, it was the pessimistic rumor that had more truth to it.

Next morning the officers gathered immediately after breakfast, again an unhappy affair, to meet the Lieutenant-Colonel commanding. Several of us went in early and waited for the rest of the officers to gather. The Colonel, meanwhile, came in and stood at the front of the room, staring glumly into space. He shuffled pieces of paper about, but when it came time to talk put them aside, for in reality his message was simple and the sum of his talk, delivered in the accent of the hill-billy hardened and developed by some years in the army, was this:

> "I know things are tough here, but they're tough for us, too. I wouldn't ask you to do anything I wouldn't do. I wash out of a helmet just like everyone else. We're under-staffed; we have a lot of limited service people; our personnel is being constantly lost through redeployment, and we have a much larger number of men than we expected ever to handle. However, I know you can take anything for a few days. We expect to get out of here just as soon as possible. But we have no control over that. You'll probably be here eight to ten days. We can't get labor to fix up your quarters. Don't think the men in this outfit don't realize your situation. A lot of them are old combat men themselves. We were supplying reinforcements to the infantry before we took over the job of redeploying troops home. I hope you enjoy your stay here, and if there is anything you have to complain about, you can see me anytime."

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Unfortunately, the next day he left to spend some time in Paris, and was not too accessible for complaints. Anyway, we realized, a complaint in the camp would do little good. As one lieutenant said, "If the old bastard is dumb enough to wash himself in his helmet that's no reason for making the rest of us wash in it." And, point by point, the Colonel's speech was torn apart, chewed to bits and spit out in the long hours that remained them. Officers who had commanded troops under all conditions knew that proper supervision might eliminate discourtesies, improve recreational facilities, make bad food better, and get more help from civilian sources and from prisoners-of-war. One of the reasons the cadre gave for the general untidiness was that the camp had been expecting to close down for many weeks and still expected to do so. Still, many army units were faced continually with this problem in the war and solved it by giving themselves the benefit of the doubt. If they felt a bivouac area might last for a week or more, they fell to work making it as comfortable as possible.

The *raison d'être* of the camp at Thionville was the processing of casual soldiers prior to their departure for the United States. It is probable, however, that other reasons lay behind the system of camps set up for casuals, because the processing done there was most superficial and could not benefit army administration or hurry the discharge of soldiers. The majority opinion was that this was just one more unnecessary link or channel that the army was so bent upon constructing wherever it had the slightest opportunity.

Most of the processing occurred during the second day. The men were processed separately from the officers. The enlisted service records were checked over by a group of half-qualified clerks, most of them men on limited service or in the replacement system by virtue of pure chance. The enlisted man got to know what was on his record and could ask for other things to be included on the record. Whether a statement was taken at face value or discredited entirely depended mainly on

the good nature of the interviewer. This information concerned chiefly campaign credits, credits for decorations and seeing that full entries were made in all blanks regarding character, former organizations and in the individual supply records. The first of number of supply checks was made and a certain amount of clothing was taken away or given to the men. At first it was thought that the casuals would go by ship and therefore they were given odd bits of clothing, for some of which they had no real use and for the rest of which some use could be found in the two or three extra weeks which the voyage by ship was supposed to take. But when the group was finally changed to the "Green Project" to go by air, this surplus clothing was taken away and each man was reduced to thirty-five pounds of luggage besides his blanket and mess utensils. This was enough for a change of woolens and an extra set of fatigues. When one considered that an old soldier overseas possessed souvenirs and personal objects which he prized highly for reasons sentimental and practical, the weight allowance seemed small. It was in this clothing and by their own laundering that the men traveled until they arrived home, except for one exchange of fatigues at Calais, the staging area for the "Green Plan," another change of woolens at Camp Patrick Henry in Virginia, and a final one at Fort Sheridan, Illinois, just before separation.

Every officer in the service has a card, known as his "sixty-six dash one," which contains all the personal and service data considered relevant to his classification in the army. The card gives his dates of rank, a summary of his civilian experience and a summary of his war decorations, and positions held, duly recorded by the personnel officer of his organization. This is the official record of the Adjutant General Department on the officer and, if properly administered, is an important document about the man and his qualifications. In reality, however, officers have been known to play loose with their 201 files, of which this card forms the backbone, and at Thionville each officer was given a last chance to make additions, omissions,

erasures, and comments. What was left when he had finished his editing of the card was in many cases a subjective estimate of his own worth and pretensions.

Then the officer went on with additional forms. He made a statement of leave accrued and due him, which was later to be overridden by an official auditor. He signed a receipt for a helmet from which to wash and a mess kit which was to be used on the train ride to Marseilles.

There was little to do but wait. For enlisted men there was a sort of program devised, which amounted to walking in a bedraggled column a mile or so outside of the camp, sitting down, and waiting for time to march back to the next meal. In the afternoon there was a motion picture and at night the same film was repeated. The shows were given in a small, crowded, smoky hall where one had to double his knees up in order to slide into a seat.

Other pastimes for the men were the crap games and the bull sessions. Never had antagonism towards things French been so bitter and outspoken. I found it distressing, but the phenomenon should hardly have surprised me. France was an ally. As an ally, it demanded full equality and even a little more because of its greatly damaged pride. Troops might not go through France and treat the French as an occupied people. They might not requisition any house they pleased. They might not raid any wine cellar. They might not indulge themselves in many little anti-social acts which compensated for the discomforts and discipline of the life of the army in the field. The French obstructed them just as any free man with rights and privileges would obstruct an intruder.

It was different with the Germans. The American army found a passive, obedient people, living under physical conditions more comparable to the Americans, with a supply of luxuries, especially in liquor, unparalleled in other European countries,

not excluding England. Soldiers took what they wanted of the houses and their furnishings, of the food, of the countryside and the wines. If they didn't like a German they could tell him so directly and as brusquely as they desired. They didn't have to control their irritations as they had to with the French or with other free people.

The war in Germany for most of the troops was an easy one, composed of quick marches, undamaged villages, and good weather. Such conditions make liking a country easy. We could get in and get out before the billet was destroyed or damaged and before the small luxuries of the environment were exhausted. We underwent new and pleasant experiences as the frustrating and destructive experiences diminished

The month or two after the war were spent in relaxed effort and comfortable circumstances, with a minimum of regimentation before the occupation "spit and polish" began. Many officers found mistresses among pliable and tolerant German women. What a German girl gave and asked very little for in return, some were inclined to call love; but what a French girl gave and asked an equivalent for, they called prostitution.

The officers had an advantage over the men in that they could go out of the camp if they could manage the means. A few with foresight had retained cars under one pretext or another, mostly illegal, and used these cars to take them to Luxembourg, Metz, or another of the several large towns in the general area. Paris was a little too far away and no one wanted to take the chance of missing a shipment. The reason for not allowing the men out was the fear that there might be some incidents in the surrounding towns. It was the old army policy that the whole should suffer for the crimes of the one. As it happened, a Warrant Officer was shot in a Luxembourg escapade the night before everyone shipped out, but there was no question of restricting the officers on that account. Probably the relaxation of the rules with reference to the officers was founded on the

fear that the officers might become unruly if they were required to spend all of their time in the camp.

As far as we could sift truth from rumor, the inmates of the camp, or "*Konzentrationlager*" as the men called it, were first scheduled to go to Le Havre, but that was put aside in favor of sending us down to Marseilles where the "Green Plan" for sending troops home by air was being reactivated, even though it meant another three days of delay. Orders were cut September first on the men and officers who had entered the camp on August twenty-third. The order for the officers was similar to that for the enlisted men, but referred to reception stations instead of separation centers. It went in part:

> 30. (Stat Code PKB) PAC WD Ltr, File AG 200.4 (14 May 45) OB-S-E-M, subject: "Instructions for Return of Individuals from the European and Mediterranean Theaters of Operation to the United States on the "Green Project," dtd 15 May 45, the individuals named below are reld fr AU 102d Repl. Bn, Repl Co Ind, and are asgd to Reception Station under which their names appear.
>
> Individuals will travel under the "Green Project," and WP o/a 2 Sept 45 by rail and/or motor T to Staging Area No1, Pas de Lanciers, France, for forwarding to the United States by air. At the United States port of aerial debarkation the individuals will report to the ATC Debarkation Officers for certain processing and will then move to a port staging area or other installation as designated by the Commanding General, Army Service Forces.

The day the orders were being cut, there was a hurry-up call to fly about a thousand men down to the airfield at Marseilles, where planes were waiting without men to ride them, but the plan collapsed because the arrangements could not be made in time, and the camp waited another two days to take the long

train ride from Thionville to Marseilles, a ride about which much had been heard, all of it bad.

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About seven in the evening of the third of September, we boarded a long train on a track near the camp, composed of third-class coaches, with one second-class coach for the officers, a box car made over into comfortable quarters for the permanent train crew of one Major and several enlisted men, and two mess cars, old box cars fitted with regulation army ranges and stocked with rations for the passengers.

The troop train was organized with its permanent crew and a temporary organization composed of passenger officers. Each Lieutenant and Warrant Officer of the shipment was assigned the personnel of one railroad car, and it was his responsibility to see that the property in the car emerged from the trip in no worse state than it was to begin with. He had to keep the men in his car off the tracks while the train was stopped, he had to organize them for mess and he had to prevent disorderly conduct throughout the trip. The officers were put under the command of a Lieutenant Colonel who rode in the officers' car, and the overall casual train commander was Colonel Perry, who rode under fairly comfortable conditions in the car of the regular train commander. This Major, dapper, hard-faced, who had once been a First Sergeant and who was of a temperament not easily ruffled by the accidents and irritations of a troop train. Shortly after the trip began, he and several officers sat down to a poker game which lasted for most of the trip, and from which he came out comfortably ahead.

We moved out of the yard at a good pace and by nightfall were in Thionville. Thenbegan a series of interminable delays which in the end added up to a trip of fifty hours to cover a distance which should have taken fifteen. There was no place to sleep, even if the floors of the cars could be considered as bunks, because there were too many men. There were four in each

two short seats, six in the long European style coach seats. It was a matter of sitting up most of the time and finding an empty spot on the floor of the coach when sleep was necessary. Most of the men did not shave during the trip because water was hard to get. Toilet facilities, of course, were practically non-existent. The tracks of previous troop trains showed that very well. The longest mess lines in the world formed at each stop as the 1,800 men went through with their mess kits. Each stop for eating cost three hours. At Lyon the train spent practically the whole of the second night in one spot, advancing a few yards now and then and backing a few yards a little later, a combination of annoyances which some of soldiers laid to the unfriendliness of the French. One time a train of "forty and eights" loaded with troops of the 99th Division passed, and a lively discussion ensued between the occupants of the two trains over whose accommodations were more uncomfortable. At one point the train stopped at a well-constructed railway battalion camp where the men could adequately, although they couldn't eat there. From then on, the soldiers felt that they had licked the situation and would not feel too badly when they finally got into Marseilles. And in fact, the rest of the trip was marred only by one incident. The train stopped in a long tunnel some miles south, and the passengers had to sit in the complete blackness for forty minutes while the noxious fumes from the engine poured backward. By the time the train finally moved out of the tunnel, practically everyone was coughing, and the men had begun to yell and climb out of the coaches. About midnight the train pulled into a railroad yard near Marseilles, where large Quartermaster trucks came up and hauled men and baggage to the Redeployment Center of Callas, about fifteen miles from Marseilles. When the troops unloaded from the trucks there, they were met by a Sergeant who announced to them that they would only have to wait three or four days until the eighth or ninth of September, whereupon they would be put on planes and sent off on the first lap homeward. The soldiers hadn't had anything to eat since that noon, but the Sergeant said that the "Green Project" had not

been expecting this shipment, despite the fact that the train was two days in getting there and that everything was supposed to have been "coordinated" from above. But the news of going home was enough in itself to send everyone to bed happy.

When the trainload from Thionville looked about itself the next morning, it was pleased to discover a "GI" camp. As long as the American army found itself amidst the ruins of another society and had to treat with foreigners, it did very poorly for itself, but once it was put out on an open prairie with only nature to contend with and the American army materiel for support, it could make a very pleasant sort of camp existence. A great deal of labor had gone into the Callas Staging Area. It had been designed and built principally for the redeployment of troops directly from the European Theater of Operations to the Pacific Theater of Operations. The job had been done thoroughly and well. There were acres of long, low huts and rows of pyramidal tents built in block fashion on both sides of a long highway. Toilet facilities were ample, because the army built them itself. There were no labor problems because all of the work was done by American soldiers and German prisoners, neither of whom formed a bargaining agency. There was a PX for every two or three blocks and several vast amphitheaters. German prisoners did most of the police details and took over the KP entirely. The portion of food given to each man as he arrived at the head of a long line were not too large, but they were much better prepared than at Thionville.

Most of the men and officers spent their first day at Callas washing up after the dirty train ride. In the afternoon word got around that there was a PX beer garden, one for officers and one for men, which was selling coca-cola and beer, and a great many men took their canteen cups and had them filled with the first American beer in quite a while. The beer gardens were also open in the evening and there was a choice of three movie theaters, of which the largest was the Glen Miller Theater, some half a mile from the "Green Plan" camp in a deep ravine below

the plateau on which the camp was perched. Its seats were half of stone blocks and half cut out of rock, rising toward the summit of the ravine. The sound system was excellent and the films as fresh as those shown at home. The films were paired with stage shows, French, U.S.O. or G.I., varying in quality from the excellent presentation of Block and Sully to the fourth-rate effort of an army Special Service Unit that was drowned out by the hoots and cat-calls of the audience.

Our personnel from the 102nd Reinforcement Battalion had been told that they would leave by plane on the eighth or ninth for Casablanca, but on the seventh a shipment of new men came in and before they had been in the camp a half hour, the older men knew who they were and what it meant. The newcomers were "railroaders," men who, three months after the announcement of a severe rail crisis in the United States, were being pulled out of their units in Europe and sent back home for discharge. They held a first priority on air transportation, regardless of points or precedence. In a few hours the report was confirmed by the announcement that all those in the shipment that had been scheduled to leave on the eighth would be leaving on the ninth. It was also announced later on that day that the last planes would leave on the tenth, and, therefore, that the remaining men of the shipment who had been scheduled for the ninth would get out on the tenth.

Since there was a general feeling that they had already lost several days by the various incidents at Thionville, the men were furious. Conversations with the railroad men did little to comfort them. All that came out of it was a realization that the railroaders were taking advantage of their situation in a manner for which no man could blame them. But many of them had far less points than the older casuals and many another had little experience on railroads that would qualify him for helping out in the crisis at home. Anyone familiar with the army system of classifications of jobs could lift an eyebrow at the way in which these men were selected to go home. It seemed reasonably

doubtful that a number of them would ever find their way into a railroad job. Moreover, like the rest of the men overseas, they had no intention of going to work immediately upon arriving in the United States. The officers expected to take their leave and report for work in good time. The men expected to spend as much time as they could afford with their families and in enjoying their new civilian status. Therefore, back of all the resentment the non-railroad men felt was a conviction that the whole thing was futile, that the country would not benefit by the tactic. Many an officer and man protested to the over-worked and badly organized staff who handled the shipments, but they could only point to a directive from the War Department which they had received through the Delta Base Section in Marseilles.

Luckily, a few men from Thionville were retained on the shipments for September eighth and left by plane for Casablanca. From the best information we had upon arriving back home, they reached the United States a little over a week before we did because of delays at airfields en route. The last plane-loads on the "Green Plan" left at 2:00 A.M. on the morning of the tenth, leaving behind most of our shipment.

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All the soldiers who had come from the 1-2nd Reinforcement Battalion were now scheduled to go by ship and were lumped into "Shipment 2097." The Major in charge of the "Green Plan" Administration announced that it had first priority to go by ship, but cynics wrote harsh words beneath his notice on the bulletin board. On the seventeenth of September it was finally announced that 2097 would leave the following day on the Hawaiian Shipper, together with several other shipment numbers containing in all about 2,800 men. Each shipment number was divided into separation center groups and each man was placed in a group under the leadership of the highest officer or enlisted man going to his particular center. At 7:00 A.M. the next morning, separation center groups were formed and mounted trucks. After an hour's ride they dismounted at an

army dock on the outskirts of Marseilles and formed in long columns by shipment number and separation center groups preparatory to boarding ship. There were several Red Cross girls at the dock handing out coffee and boxes of candy to those who were fortunate enough to have time to receive them before having to move on. Apparently the disposition of the troops had been considered in advance, for the boarding took place quickly. The men began boarding at 9:00 A.M. and by noon the ship was loaded. It waited while a final desperate little group argued with the boarding officer for another half hour as to whether they were authorized to board or not, and finally, after the majority had won their case and climbed aboard, the ship was tugged into the middle of the stream and sailed off around a long breakwater out to the open sea.

The Hawaiian Shipper was one of those medium size, fast, diesel-powered cargo ships, constructed under the supervision of the United States Maritime Commission for use in the highly competitive sea transport industry. It was operated by the Matson Steamship Company and was now converted into a troop carrier. The super-structure of the ship had been heightened by the addition of two new decks in order to create living quarters for the crew, for some officers, for the officers' mess and ship's hospital. Machinery had been cleared fore and aft to give more deck space to the troops, but the benefit was small. The ship's crew were of the Merchant Marine. There was still a Navy armed guard of forty men with the ship, although their usefulness had passed. They said that the Navy armed guard camps in the States were crowded and that they were told to stay with the ship until ordered differently. The army had two officers and several enlisted men to organize and maintain order among the passengers.

All of the enlisted men were placed in the four holds of the ship, two forward and two aft. These were originally for cargo storage and had little to commend them as habitations for humans. The only ventilation came from above through the open bulkheads.

The men were supposed to sleep on canvas hammocks, four deep, of which there were some six hundred in each hold. As one descended into the gloom of the hold, he could see an enormous number of these hammocks crowded together around the central entrance to the hold. Here and there a small bulb cast light upon a few nearby hammocks. As far back as one could see into the darkness there were beds piled over each other. There was hardly room to move about or to unpack a bag. Barracks-bags were simply hung from the chain holding up each hammock, and the operation of swinging it down and opening it up in the narrow aisle and then hanging it up again was so exhausting, complex, and lengthy that not many men attempted it for the duration of the voyage. There were not quite enough hammocks aboard the ship for the total number of passengers. The discrepancy of two hundred or so was taken up by the number of men who refused to sleep below or who were seasick and sought open air.

Each hold opened up on to the deck above through a bulkhead: Discomfort made men restless and they crowded the narrow bulkhead passageways throughout the trip, climbing up or going down, hoping to find a slightly more comfortable spot somewhere else. The deck space allotted the soldiers was quite small. When all the men were on deck there was not enough room for them to sit down, and during the drill periods and the inspection periods, when all personnel were required to be on deck, the deck space was as crowded as the subway at rush hour. Nevertheless, the men remained cooperative and responded to commands from the ship's loudspeaker quickly. At first, life belts had to be worn at all times, but, although the command was never rescinded, during the second half of the voyage, the most men either abandoned their life jackets or used them as seats and pillows. The life jackets were unspeakably dirty, as was the ship until it had been rubbed clean by the bodies of the hundreds of men clinging, lying, sitting, or kneeling when shooting craps. Unfortunately for moralists on amusement, dice is a game which qualifies

remarkably for the conditions of life that the soldier encounters. Its chief drawback is its increasing exclusiveness. Towards the end of the voyage, one man possessed fifteen thousand dollars in small bills and had hired several men to help him carry it.

There were many books in the ship's library, but the system of distribution was badly worked out. It was so difficult to find a man with all the restricted areas, crowded gangways, sickening heat and movement, and darkness of the holds, that the representative of each hold who was supposed to get books for men was difficult to find. It was just as well, for they could never accommodate the demand in the one hour or so of time they were allotted them to draw books from the library. Nevertheless, many books did get around, from the packs and the library, so that one could always espy men curled up in the most extraordinary positions against bulkheads, cranes, and railings, reading. The officers could amuse themselves with greater facility. Their small mess hall was cleared off between meals for an hour or so and late in the evening, so that a few could sit there to play cards or read. At any particular time a high-stakes poker game would be running alongside a penny-ante game, with a bridge game going a few feet away.

The Special Service officer aboard ship, a Lieutenant who traveled back and forth with the ship, worked hard to furnish diversion. He sponsored a ship's newspaper, a ship's band and a variety show, and supervised the ship's library and the distribution of games and reading materials. The ship's newspaper was put out by mimeograph and edited by a passenger Lieutenant. The paper came out every afternoon around four, and was eagerly snapped up by the passengers, who sought in it the most reliable reports of the ship's progress, announcements regarding shows, news bulletins received by the ship's radio, and gossip regarding the passengers and their conditions of life. The Lieutenant was assisted by several enlisted men who volunteered to write articles, draw cartoons, and type up the stencil. During the rockiest part of the voyage

they sat pasty-faced and sweating in the chaplain's office, a tiny cabin that was used as a place to publish the newspaper.

During the nine full days afloat, eight different variety and musical shows were presented, none of which could have made a hit anywhere save on a ship crowded with bored men. An officer volunteered to organize the musicians and another to organize the stage show. An announcement was given over the loudspeaker for all interested soldiers to volunteer their services. Out of those who were enticed out a show was created. Some cheap and damaged instruments were stored down deep in the ship and they were brought up to be given to the musicians. The ship's first concert, done after one rehearsal, featured the accordionist and the tenor saxophone player. Each man was announced with a great deal of exaggeration by a Lieutenant and was greeted with great applause by the soldier audience, who had learned long ago to play make-believe. The tenor sax soloist was announced as a "hot" tenor sax man, but he might better have been announced as the only man who ever played a hot tenor sax solo with three keys missing. The accordionist was a Corporal named Bizek, from Cleveland, whose extensive repertoire of Slovak polkas and mazurkas would get a great ovation every time. There was also a drummer who thumped without brushes or cymbals, but who by smiling and waving his hands made the audience feel that a great deal of drumming was giving forth. The master showman was Corporal Schmidt from Nebraska, an expert in corn-fed humor who had the ability to improvise indefinitely, a most useful talent for when the show bogged down or when an accident happened to one of the instruments. He was slightly handicapped on the Sunday show, because on that day he decided that his religion forbade off-color jokes or cusswords. Captain Mann, who was a concert singer before he entered the Army, was the second greatest attraction, and he sang "On the Road to Mandalay" from fore to aft and for every performance. It was about the only song that could combat successfully the winds forward and he was particularly well received there. There

were no music stands, or chairs for that matter, and therefore the repertoire consisted solely of “standards,” which every day increased in number as they were remembered and talked-out before the performance.

The movie films were old and second-rate, but the soldiers were indefatigable in viewing them. The night before the ship docked, three full features were shown, beginning at dusk and ending at midnight. The screen was originally set up between two ventilators aft and could be viewed by only a hundred or so men, even though they put themselves into the most tortured positions for watching it. The last two night, during a calm sea, the screen was rigged between two tall booms farther aft and an additional couple of hundred men were able to watch. The competition for points of vantage was bitter and most of the good places were occupied an hour or two before the film commenced. All the while the oily soot from the smokestack came down on the after-deck fouling the air and dirtying everything.

Everyone agreed that the chaplain had a difficult job. He had some three thousand miserable people to preach to. Granted that they were going home at last, they were temporarily too unhappy to think of goodness and charity. They were uncomfortable as men could be in war and were not even possessed of the fear which at times converted atheists in the foxhole. The Chaplain stood bravely on the officers’ deck each morning at ten-thirty and delivered a sermon and a few prayers through a small loudspeaking system placed there for the purpose. He had a portable organ brought on deck and got a passenger soldier to play it. He would sing atonally and beat the air in a futile attempt to get the soldiers to raise their voices in holy song. As far as one could judge from the above deck, he looked into perhaps a dozen faces in all who were slightly attentive. The rest of the crowd on the after-deck had their eyes shut or their backs turned, their books open or their faces out to sea, or their attention fixed on a crap game. On Sunday, a

special concession was made to religion, and all crap games on the rear deck were forbidden. The minor games seemed to have been impeded by the order, but the bold, big gambling game which was the strongest and most flagrant aboard ship ran right through Sunday, church services and all.

Feeding the ship was a drawn-out process. Two meals a day was the rule, with a snack at lunch time. The first chow line formed around four-thirty in the morning and the last chow line at around seven at night. From one's bunk he could hear, long before dawn, the ship's loudspeakers blare out the call: "All mess tickets Number One form in the mess line." That would go on and on at periods of a half hour until nine shifts were called. The officers ate in four shifts, beginning at six-thirty and ending at eight-fifteen. The food was good at breakfast and at supper, but it was a long wait between. For the men who sweated out the lunch line their reward was a bologna sandwich and an orange. Three days out, PX rations were sold and a man could buy two cartons of cigarettes, several boxes of cookies and two or three cans of fruit juice. The more self-controlled of the men and officers rationed themselves and stretched their personal supplies for several days.

A large part of the men went most of the time without touching fresh water except to drink it. Only salt water was available for washing and shaving. Some of the officers were fortunate enough to have freshwater taps available. By the time the ship docked, everyone was well enough acquainted with the sources of fresh water to get just enough to shave before the ship docked. Many grumbled about it, but a shave and a change from fatigues to woolens was the order of the ship's commander and he got good compliance from the men. The transformation of their physical appearance in the several hours before docking proved that blood can be squeezed from a turnip.

The Merchant Marine crew aboard the ship gave most of the men their first experience in a long time with a group of

American civilians and they were not favorably impressed. The ship was dirty beyond a reasonable explanation. The crew hogged the deck space. The deck above the officers' deck, which was just as large, was completely empty during the voyage because it was reserved for the crew. And there were two others, on each of which the crew had ten times as much space per man as the soldiers. With one or two exceptions, the mates were considered uncooperative to the point of insolence. One steward forced the ship's orchestra to move because their rehearsal disturbed him in his cabin. A waiter, who earned as much as a Lieutenant, complained bitterly because he had no leave in Marseilles, where he expected to buy and sell on the black market. He complained that time was going too slow on this, his first trip out. Several of the crew sold cotton sweat-shirts to officers at twice the price that they had paid them in the ship's slop chest. However, they were reported to the Captain, forced to return the money and docked part of their wages. For many of the soldiers it was the first glimpse of the "civilian strut," and they were a little shocked and alienated by it, no matter that basically they may have sympathized with any expression of independence of character.

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On the morning of the twenty-eighth, the ship neared Newport News. At two in the morning various mess shifts began, and by seven-thirty everyone aboard had been fed. The first deep sea buoys were sighted many hours before land, and about seven in the morning the ship pulled into the bay and stopped. After an hour of waiting, during which the customs and health authorities gave it a general check, the ship got under way and, within thirty minutes, pulled up to the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad dock. As the boat neared shore a military band struck up some lively tunes and a delegation of Red Cross workers waved and cheered. While the men lined the rails and gawked at the civilians and the shore installations, the disembarkation by shipment number began and within three hours all passengers had stepped ashore.

On the dock, officers were separated from men, white soldiers from colored soldiers, and the three separate consignments were put on two trains which left almost immediately for Camp Patrick Henry. At the Patrick Henry siding the troops dismounted quickly, a band struck up a march and the whole column moved off in fairly good order to the camp theater for an orientation lecture. They received a brilliant lecture on what they could expect at the Camp by a Major with a courteous and helpful manner that came as a surprise. The group leaders were called out and sent over to a meeting to receive orders, and the rest of the men were guided directly to their quarters. They were immediately given a hearty and excellent meal of steak and all the fixings, served on ceramic dishes by German prisoners-of-war.

As soon as they had eaten, a large number of the men walked the two or three blocks to the telephone center where they might place calls to their homes. There were comfortable benches on which to sit and wait once the call had been placed. Large fans kept the room cool. A call even to Los Angeles took only a half an hour to an hour to get through on the line - a miracle of coordination in the experience of the soldiers. A man would get a call through to Pittsburgh and rush into the booth assigned to him with a pale, grim, or anxious face, and come out a few minutes later with the most peculiar expression of inexpressible joy, or dumb dis-belief, or simple shock. He would stand there in the middle of the waiting room, looking around him dizzy and uncomprehending, perhaps light up a cigarette and finally, ignoring the amused and happy onlookers, stagger out into the bright sunshine. When the time came it was an individual matter and the experience was indescribable and completely personal. I did not call Jill; it seemed to me to be inadequate. Quite a few of the men had their first experience with their children at that moment and one could hear, as they passed through the waiting room, various descriptions of how the baby sounded for the first time over a telephone. That

afternoon at Camp Patrick Henry, after a good meal, hot showers, telephone calls to home, and clean beds, was the happiest time since the day they had left their homes. A month incommunicado had built up a store of anxieties. Now they were relieved.

At the meeting group leaders were told that the only processing the Camp required was for the purpose of cutting orders and issuing clean clothing for the men. The Captain in charge told the leaders that by the next night everyone, with the exception of the Indiantown Gap contingent, would be cleared out of the Camp and be on troop trains bound for home. They left the meeting as Santa Clauses with bags of good news for their groups.

Everyone spent his evening pleasantly. Some lay back in the luxury of clean beds and slept; others went to the cinema or to the clubs to eat and drink and listen to the juke boxes. I sat among a group of officers discussing the remarkable difference between Camp Patrick Henry in these United States and all the camps overseas. One man mentioned that the general who was reported to command the Camp Patrick Henry area was formerly the manager of Madison Square Garden. Another reckoned that he would vote for the general any time he wanted to run for Mayor of New York. The officers felt that here in America were the effects of the democratic system. Much of the consideration they were getting in the States had come from the pressures exerted by their families, and from their Congressmen. to thank. Overseas was too far away. There they were trapped.

The bands played all night for the shipments going out ahead of us. The men formed lines, tossed their heavy bags onto waiting trucks and, with their small handbags, formed in a column to march behind the band to the train. The next day the groups of shipment 2097 marched off, at intervals of an hour. Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, and Fort Sheridan, Illinois, were called in

the mid-afternoon.

Our group, bound for Fort Sheridan, was on a long train of some twenty cars. There was roughly the same organization on it as there was on the train from Thionville to Marseilles. The ride was much more comfortable. For the first time this reception station had been assigned tourist sleeping cars, some thirty-five men to a car, one man to an upper and two to a lower berth, an officer in a berth by himself.

The train ride did not go as well as expected. One of the Camp Patrick Henry soldiers had said in the beginning, somewhat to everyone's surprise, that the train trip would take thirty-five hours. That seemed excessive for a journey a civilian could undoubtedly make in twenty-four hours. Even that was optimistic, however, because it finally took fifty hours to go from Newport News to Fort Sheridan. One of the causes of the delay was a landslide which blocked the Chesapeake and Ohio right-of-way, but undoubtedly the most important cause was the inferior position relegated troop trains by the railroad companies. In the first place, the train was routed on a secondary line, appropriate only for freight trains. In the second place, the train was stopped by yardmasters and dispatchers at the slightest excuse. Other trains were given precedence, even though they were not very important. No one could prove it, but men would swear that freight trains were continually passing the troop train, and no amount of railroad "double-talk" could convince the men that a dozen engine changes were necessary for a voyage of that duration. Apart from the comforts of the trip, which the French railroads could hardly be expected to arrange, the showing of the American railroads was at least as bad as that of the French.

The train was under the command of a young and inexperienced Lieutenant who was too timid to speak up to the railroaders and who underestimated the requirements for food. The first four meals were all that were stocked aboard the train.

They were poorly cooked and served in tiny portions. But, because of the train's delay, the fifth meal had to be arranged during the halt in Cincinnati in the middle of the second night, and it turned out to be the hash component of C-ration, which was served to the troops with coffee on the morning of the third day. That was the end of food on the train and, although delay after delay occurred throughout the day, the troops got nothing to eat until the train finally pulled into Fort Sheridan at ten o'clock that night. For three and one half hours it stood at one place in the Chicago switching yards, while suburban trains raced by and everything else on the tracks seemed alive and moving. Several men from each car could be seen disappearing over the tracks, headed for home. I urged my men to stick it out, reminding them of the money and proper discharge they would get. No trainman could be found to accept any responsibility for the state of affairs. It was always some unknown and unreachable policy maker or dispatcher. One trainman added, when someone protested to him, that the troops were lucky to have sleeping cars. Another agreed, after the men had not eaten for ten hours, that the men, who were as angry as they could be without doing violence, might be "restless." When the train did pull up to the reception halls at Fort Sheridan the men piled out and rushed to the food counters where coffee and doughnuts were being given out.

Afterwards they were led to their barracks, and the officers were brought to an office to sign for their groups. Thenceforth, every officer and soldier was processed individually, and quickly freed. Local interest in their quick release from service was so strong that they could read in the newspapers full accounts and criticisms of their final army days. It was three o'clock in the morning before I could make my way to my home, which I had never seen, to my daughter whom I had never seen, and to my wife who was last seen at the shipyard gate, shortly before my troopship sailed for Africa, 874 days earlier.

By midnight the Captain has been signed out of Fort Sheridan. There are few people out and around. He catches a bus, then an electric train, then an elevated train, then a cab, and by three o'clock is cautiously reconnoitering a tan brick apartment building numbered 5436 S. Ridgewood Court, then carefully rings the doorbell where it is written that he lives.

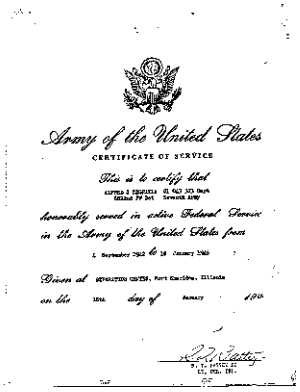
She wakes up. She lets him in, with a polite hug and kiss. Then you stand back, and test reality: yes, she is there and I am here. Now see in the light of the hallway what has happened over the past 845 days. In her cotton nightgown she looks just as she did then, pink-faced, twinkling eyes of Baltic blue, thick tousled reddish light hair, high-pitched voice, a good body smell, embraceable, nothing to worry about at first sight. A drink of whiskey is called for. A shower. Chit-chat.

Time for bed. Laughing at her big Murphy bed that springs out from the wall helps them feel close again. Time to make love. He has prefigured well this first night, our clever Captain, whose beribboned jacket hangs flagrant upon a chair.

From the baby's room comes a call. "Shh!" An impatient call. "Don't answer." A loud cry, then, really loud, an imperative shriek, unending. She won't stop, dammit. "Oh, honestly!" Jill exclaims, "What a nuisance!" And she gets out of bed. "Kathy!.. What is it Darling?.. Daddy has come home!..You know Daddy!.. Wouldn't you like to see Daddy?" "No!"

Finally, Dad and daughter...

Brother Ed, about to join the Occupation Forces in Germany, and Al, the returning soldier.



Army of the United States

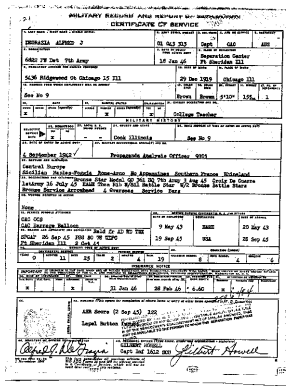
CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

This is to certify that

honorably served in active Federal Service

in the Army of the United States from

Al's Certificate of Service.



MILITARY RECORD AND REPORT OF SEPARATION

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

Al's military record.

End of "Going Home", October 1945

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