

February 24, 1997

R. Wayne George  
9 Crestridge Drive  
Huntington, WV 25705

Wayne,

Thanks for the nice letter and the pages from your personal history book. You have done an outstanding job of conserving your personal history. I wish more did so. If it is not put to print it seems that it fades away.

I cannot answer your question as to actual location of the photos taken by Durbaum. Another 106th vet has been in correspondence with him. Maybe a note from you to him could clear up your answers. I did not go through Camp Lucky Strike. I was flown from an evacuation hospital to a large hospital in Paris, then home. I was back in the states by May 5, 1945. Looking back I guess I was in pretty bad shape also. Since I was not there I took Durbaum's photo with an inscription that showed the landing strip to be in the back right side of the photo to mean that the airfield was nearby. You say in your diary that Camp Lucky Strike was situated on a plateau to the northeast of LeHavre and it was about a two mile hike up the hill. In your letter you say that the little town shown in Durbaum's photo was about 40 miles from LeHavre. I wonder if the little area he drew on the photo, for me, was saying, "Camp Lucky Strike is way over there." I took it to mean the airfield was on the hill to the back right side of the photo."

MacDonald's book was what turned me on after having put my head in the sand. I read it in mid 1987 and joined the Association after finding it had been in existence since 1945. In fact a reunion was held in Milwaukee, WI in 1980 and I lived in madison, WI. Didn't hear about it, so I missed that chance. I have the large book "Then and Now." It is an excellent reference book and I have enjoyed it. A little costly, but from it you learn that many of the photos depicting the German soldier in the Bulge are nothing more than "propaganda" photos, not actually taken in the battle, but from "staged" scenes. I've seen that photo of the tough German soldier, with a jutting jaw, in many of the documentaries on the Public Channel.

Thanks for sharing with me Wayne. I'll keep this section of your diary. Maybe I can find a spot for some of it as time goes by. I am supposed to write up some of the mass of material that I have and do a sequel to the book that I did in 1991, *The CUB of the Golden Lion: PASSES in REVIEW*. I have about two feet "stacked" of diaries and personal material, plus a file drawer full of notes, after battle reports. Much of what I receive is too much for The CUB.

The idea of another book is to preserve the history. The CUB gets pitched after it is read, most of the time, and I will also use the interesting stories that appeared in CUBs from 1991 to date, in order to conserve those stories for history.

Again, thanks for sharing.

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February 12, 1997

Dear John,

This is not a letter for publication, just an inquiry concerning the last, fourth quarter issue of "The Cub."

After the recognition of "D Day" in June of 1994, I yielded to pressure from my family and put to together about 30 pages on my Army experiences, as mundane as they were. I have always acknowledged that timing and fate were always in my favor.

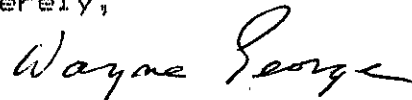
I was pleased to see pages 20 through 24 on "Camp Lucky Strike" since the pictures would allow me to add more graphics to my write-up. I was there from noon April 3rd to the evening of April 5th of '45. The topography of the Le Havre picture agrees with my memory, but Herr Durbaum's description of an airport/Camp Lucky Strike 40 miles east of Le Havre does not. Pete House's descriptions seem to be more accurate although I was not aware of the existence of an air strip from my tent location there.

Is the Le Havre picture pre- or post- WWII? I see no indications of docking facilities.

At first I was going to include copies of pages 8 and 9 on which the references to "Lucky Strike" occurred. Now I am going to include copies of pages 5 through 16 of my write-up. It's a contrast as an individual replacement with the journey as a member of a viable unit as you experienced. They also cover a period of the 106th that you may or may not have researched.

My first days in the Army, at Atterbury, coincided with the preparation of the 106th for departure. The 106th returned on the "West Point," the ship I rode going over.

Sincerely,



R. Wayne George

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422/189 15184

7/84

John

P.S. I decided to look up Durbaum's St. Valery en Caux on a French map. The town is about 40 miles northeast along the coast from Le Havre. If he provided the picture on page 20, then that explains why the town (St. Valery) is much smaller than Le Havre as I remember it although the topography is very similar.

I am currently reading MacDonald's "A Time For Trumpets." His scope is wider than "St. Vith - Lion in the Way." I also have "The Battle of the Bulge - Then and Now." I have delayed reading that one for about five years.

I went through the "Bulge" area in the back of a truck in June of '45, but I didn't know any of the details then. In '85 a friend and I drove most of the area in a day's time---much too quick.

RWG

was sent to the hospital and to surgery for lancing and draining of the finger plus sulfa treatment. I missed three days of training including the infiltration course under machine gun fire, machine gun firing range and squad advancement under artillery with live ammunition firing, among other sessions. This brief interruption ultimately would delay my leaving Camp Robinson for six weeks.

I did return to my platoon in time to go on bivouac for the full week and to make the ten mile hike with full pack and gear, in the rain, back into camp.

ABOUT JANUARY 15, 1945 (end of 14th week): All four companies of the battalion had now left for home leave with Ft. Ord, California, as their destination. Only a few of us were still left. I asked the First Sergeant for a pass to Little Rock to see Oklahoma State play the University of Arkansas in basketball. Bill Kurland, the seven footer for Oklahoma, was the drawing card. The First Sergeant refused my request, so I signed out to attend a camp movie. I rode the camp bus over to the movie, but I kept on going and went on to the basketball game. I was very careful about saluting all the officers I met and avoiding the MP's. Hank Iba's style of basketball was the most boring I had ever watched. Perhaps the First Sergeant was not being arbitrary after all, he just had better insight than I did.

ABOUT the 21st of JANUARY: I was transferred to a new battalion in their last week of training to pick up some odds and ends of training. Again, the entire battalion left for home with Ft. Ord as their destination. Ft. Meade was still overflowing with the late December influx of replacements for the "Bulge."

ABOUT the 1st of FEBRUARY: I was transferred again to a new training battalion, my third. By then, the pressure for replacements had eased; and the training cycle had been extended to 15 weeks, including two weeks of bivouac. This unit was just starting their first week of bivouac, and I was trapped into going out with them. I was assigned to being the First Sergeant's gopher--doing all of his errands and digging his foxholes. By this time all that I needed was the infiltration course back in the main area. However, he decided I should repeat the night problems for the endurance training. I soon developed a painful cold in the kidneys and bladder from lying around on the cold ground. It became so bad that I told the 1st Sgt. I was going on sick call. Apparently, this company was having a problem with extensive "sick call," and so I first had to be screened by the Company Commander. He told me he didn't believe me, that I was just malingering, and I should go back to my duties.

I had set up my pup tent in an area with a couple of others away from the main company area just to avoid a number of "keep busy" assignments. So I went back to my tent, picked up a few personal items, and then went over behind a hill where the medic ambulance would have to pass on its way back to the main camp, 10 miles away. I flagged down the ambulance, explained the situation to the driver that I was going to die out there if I didn't get back to the main area where I could get off the ground and keep warm. He said, "That Captain must be crazy; you really look terrible, so get in; but this is all I can do for you, you are on your own back in camp." He did agree I could ride back with him when I felt better.

I spent the next four days in the Company's main area. There were a dozen men in the area with a mess sergeant in charge. I always stayed around to do "KP" after each meal so the sergeant would remember me if I had to prove my location. He commented that I was a reliable "KP" who looked as if I needed to eat more and work less.

When I got back to the company bivouac area, the First Sergeant greeted me with, "Where in the 'h' have you been hiding?" I told him the Captain would not let me go on sick call. I had become so sick I could barely crawl out of the pup tent, and I had been getting by on just bread and water. He said he was going to give me the benefit of the doubt, and thus gave me a few light assignments to do for him. He also said my mail had been collecting, and he thought he soon would have to list me as AWOL if I had not appeared when I did.

ABOUT FEBRUARY 15th: The two weeks of bivouac were over, and we were back in the main camp area. Since the replacements at FT. Meade were still overflowing, this battalion also shipped out for Ft. Ord with about twelve of us stragglers still left. This meant I had been in training with about 2,000 men, all going to the Pacific. I finally completed the machine gun infiltration course make-up class on a wet, muddy day; and had to take my rifle into the shower with me to clean it. After about a week of waiting around, we finally got orders; and by some quirk, a few of us were sent on our way to Ft. Meade, Maryland, by way of home. I was pleased with that. I knew I would like Europe much better than the Pacific area, and the ship ride would be much shorter.

MARCH 1st: I arrived in Huntington on a Thursday morning at 1 AM by way of Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee, and Louisville, Kentucky. Friday night I got to watch HHS play their last regular season basketball game against East Bank. Gene Carter and Elwyn Johnson, my close friends from the previous season, were on the HHS team.

My date for the game and several other occasions was a very pretty, blonde HHS senior, named Laura Kenaston. She had taken time from her busy high school activities to write letters regularly over the previous five months.

ABOUT MARCH 6th: I left Huntington late at night on the C&O train, the George Washington, and arrived in D.C. early the next morning. Several of us toured the Capitol and visited a session of the Senate. We reported in that evening at Ft. Meade, Maryland.

There were plenty of men in the holding areas, so things moved slowly with the drawing of new equipment and taking booster shots. There were no passes to Washington nor Baltimore.

ABOUT MARCH 14th: I arrived at Camp Shanks in New Jersey not too far from the George Washington bridge to New York City. We were allowed three passes into the city. The first evening was a visit into Times Square, including a dinner at a top restaurant where the "Ink Spots" were performing on a Saturday night. The next trip was on Monday, the 19th, to watch the first two of four games in the first round sessions of the NIT at Madison Square Garden. I was a guest of Coach John Brickels and the WVU team. Jack Dial and Dave Wilson, my teammates from the previous year's HHS team, were starters on the WVU squad.

The first night of the tournament I sat with Brickels and Joe Lapchick, the former Celtic pro and the coach of the St. John's team. As we watched Rhode Island and Tennessee finish their warmup for the first game, they both picked Tennessee as the winner. They asked me what I thought. I mentioned, "There is a player out there for Rhode Island that looks great (he turned out to be Ernie Caverly), I'll take Rhode Island." Rhode Island won by seven points, but I didn't get any compliments. The next year, Ernie became the most valuable player for the tournament.

The next night, March 20th, WVU was defeated by DePaul and their seven footer, George Mikan. By the time the tournament was over, I was at sea. During the eight or so days at Camp Shanks, we did a lot of hiking around the roads as well as doing drills of unloading from a ship by way of rope nets and life boats.

MARCH 22nd: In the evening we were loaded onto a train and taken to an embarkation dock at the lower end of the Hudson River for boarding on the troop ship "West Point." Earlier in the day I had developed a high temperature and sore throat, so I rested as often as I could since I did not want to report to the infirmary. I had made up my

mind I did not want to have more delays and transfers. The next morning of the 23rd, when we were at sea, I reported to sick call. I was put in sick bay with a bad case of tonsillitis. For the first four days I was in heaven. I was in a small cabin by myself with a bed and sheets and a medic orderly to bring my meals. He told me about his sea assignments, and how nice it was to be part of the regular crew rather than to be down in the hole where the canvas bunks went 4 to 6 high. Such a good situation could not last forever and didn't. Whatever the medicine, it cleared up the problem too quickly.

The ship had a public address system, and we were kept informed on the war and sports information. On March 26th, De Paul beat Bowling Green for the NIT Championship, and then the next night Oklahoma State beat NYU for the NCAA Championship. As events went, I had been able to see both winning teams play during that season.

I had missed out on all of the adjustments the troops down in the hole had made to the initial sea sickness experiences. For some reason, of the thousand or so men on board, none appeared on the main deck except for exercise drills. There were a lot of high waves and swells, but the March days were very sunny. I spent most of the remaining six days on deck watching the rest of the convoy, especially the small destroyer escorts which bobbed up and down like corks in the water. That I would not have enjoyed. The only eventful report was that on a foggy night two merchant ships had collided, causing several casualties.

APRIL 3rd: I was up on deck early again as this was going to be the end of the trip. Still no interest from the guys down in the hole of the ship. There were just a few officers, who had upper deck cabins, interested. I could see clearly the white cliffs of Dover to the northwest. Soon I would see the Port of LeHavre, France to the east. As we moved in to be tied up to the dock, all of a sudden, I could feel my gut tighten a little as I realized I could be in a foxhole by the end of the week. By this time the Remagen bridge over the Rhine had been crossed, but there was still ground to be taken.

Finally, the men below in the bunk compartments had to come up on deck. Carrying our possessions stuffed into our dark green, khaki duffle bags, we unloaded to the long dock.

After the initial D-Day fighting and the following several months of battle, most of the troops came through the tent camp site of "Camp Lucky Strike." This was situated on a plateau to the northeast of LeHavre. It was about a two mile hike up the hill with the duffle bag

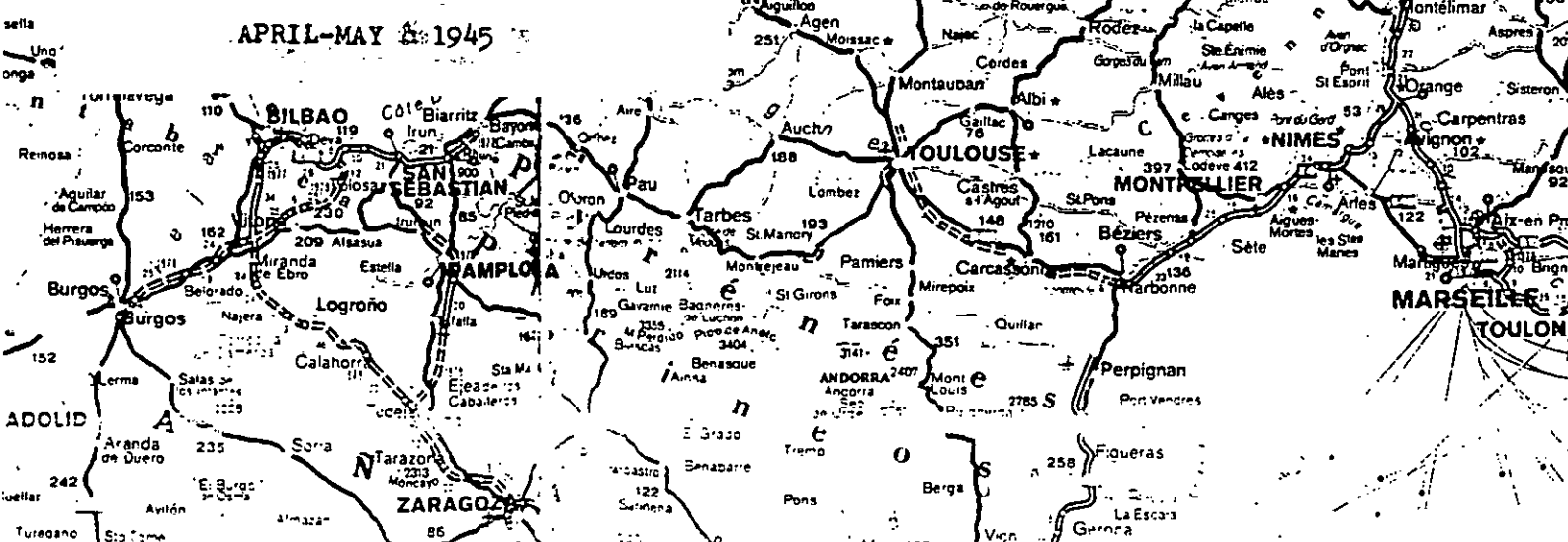
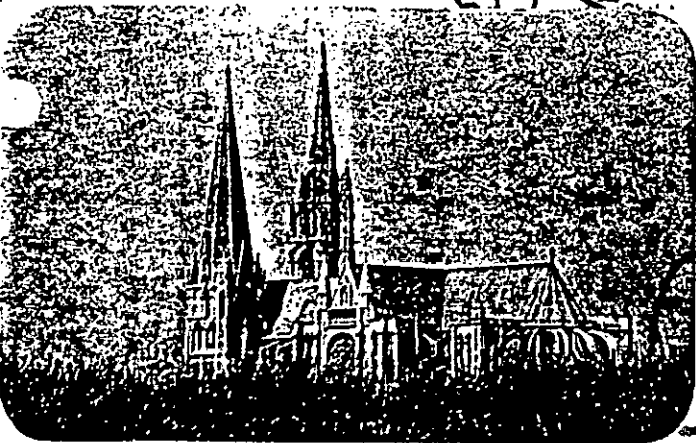
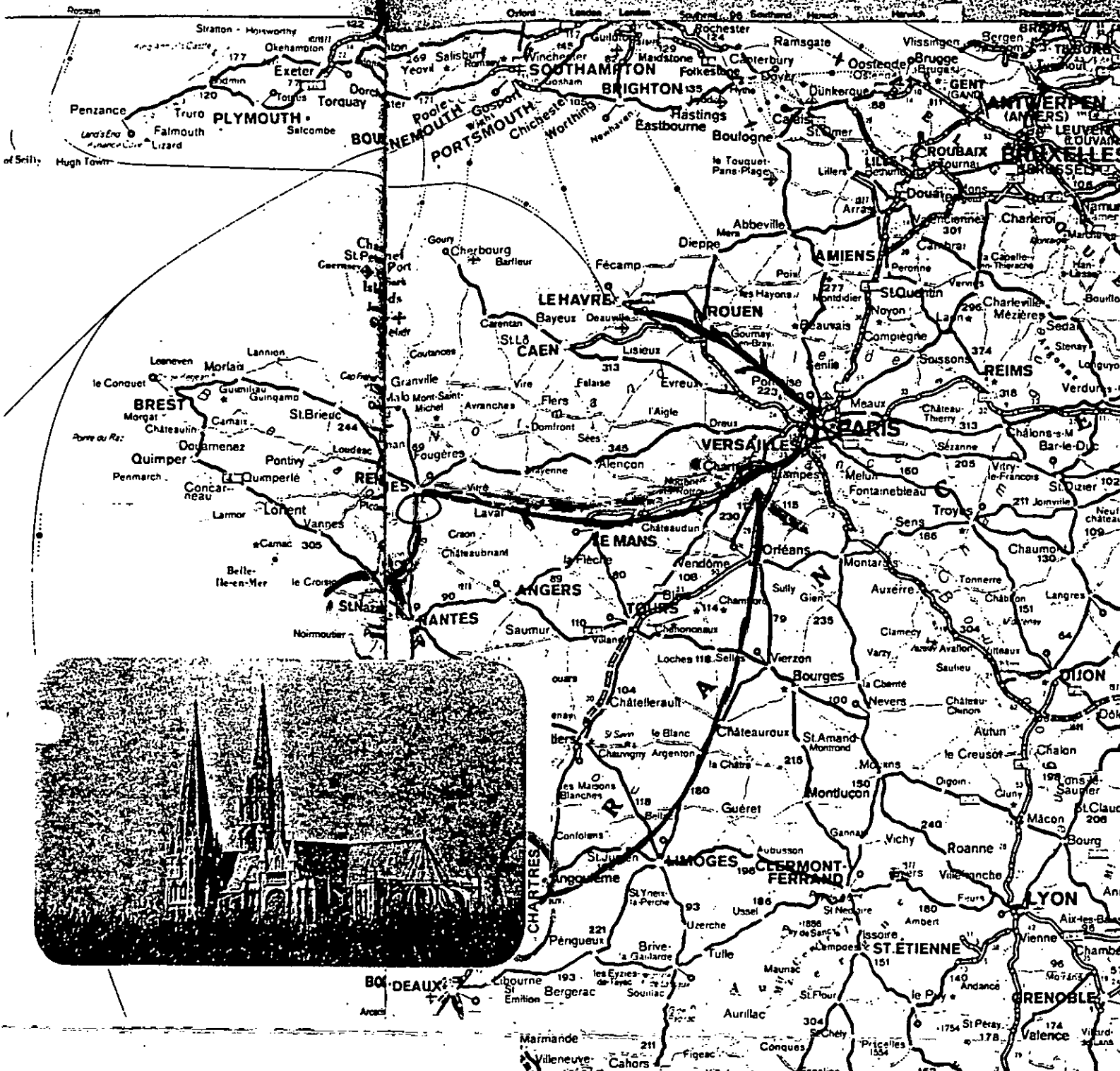


to the camp. Lugging a duffle bag is very awkward, so one trip was enough sightseeing. Each of the tents had about six canvas cots which kept us off the ground, but it was still damp and cold that close to the Channel.

APRIL 5th: After two days of waiting, we were loaded into French box cars; and the train started moving eastward toward what we expected to be the next reinforcement center in the chain to the front. The train had about 500 men, so that is about half of what disembarked two days earlier. It was difficult sleeping that night because there were forty men to a small box car. These box cars were the origin of the American Legion expression from World War I of "Forty Men or Eight Horses."

The next morning we awoke to a beautiful, sunny day with the train moving along slowly on an elevated track bed. Out the left door we could overlook Paris. In the distance we could see the Eiffel Tower and all the magnificent stone buildings. It was the sunny morning that made it such a beautiful view. A half hour later we were into the countryside and moving faster. The orientation of the bright sun did not seem right, but then this was Europe. By late morning, I could look forward out the box car door and see huge church spires rising out of the flat farm fields. It was an impressive and strange sight, a cathedral I would expect to see in a major city. Utilizing my year of French in school, I tried to remember a few of the geography lessons. I finally realized we were not traveling toward the Rhine River. The sun orientation meant we were traveling westward toward the Atlantic, and this was the Cathedral of Chartres, one of the most famous churches in France. I told the fellows they could stop thinking about fox holes, at least for a couple of weeks. We passed Chartres and later came to LeMans further toward the coast. By late afternoon we arrived at a large rail center in Rennes and loaded into army trucks.

We were driven to a site in the nearby countryside which had formally been a French training center near a small air field. The tents and cots were already set up for us. We were told we were going to be part of the rebuilding of the 422nd and 423rd Regiments of the 106th Infantry Division, and that some of the survivors from the 424th Regiment would be the non-coms. We were lined up in a field, and our names called out for assignment to various units. I drew an assignment to the I&R Squad of Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion of the 422nd Regiment. It turned out to be a choice assignment. Within a day or so, I was told we had been assigned before we had arrived at Ft. Meade a month earlier. Fate had intervened for me once more.



The rest of the men from the ship at Camp Lucky Strike had proceeded on through the normal replacement channels toward the Rhine with assignments still to be random.

While I was among the first in the company, it continued to build up over the next week. Early, the company was drawing extra rations, and the cooks were excellent since the Battalion Commander and the Battalion Surgeon were going to be served the same meals. The cooks urged us to keep eating, but after about four days I had to cut back. I just was getting too sluggish.

The following are direct quotes from the 1948 book, "St. Vith, Lion In The Way", the story of the 106th Division and its trials in the Battle of the Bulge:

"The Division had moved out of the battle zone on 14 March. Its mission was to reconstitute and train new units with the same designation as those of its elements lost in the Bulge. It would prepare for another operational mission, at the same time becoming tactical reserve for the 66th Infantry Division in the "forgotten war" against the Nazi pockets of Lorient and St.Nazaire, later to take over for the 66th.

So the Division had moved again; this time to Rennes, ancient capital of Brittany, closing on the 6th of April. Also arriving were the 3rd and 159th Infantry Regiments and the 401st and 627th Field Artillery Battalions, just arrived from the United States by way of Camp Lucky Strike. Here too came individual replacements, to the tune of 6,606 officers and men; 2,227 of them from infantry replacement centers in the States.

So on 15 April, at the huge airport in Rennes in solemn ceremony, a total of 35,000 men in parade formation, with all of the extra attached units counted, witnessed the rebirth of the 422d the 423d as they received their respective colors and guidons.

The next day big Tom Riggs of Illinois football fame (and a Huntingtonian from 11th Avenue West)--- who had stopped the Nazis at the threshold of St.Vith---reported in from his odyssey of imprisonment, escape and fighting in the Russian ranks to take over his old 81st Engineers.

And the next day the Division was tapped for its new assignment---Germany and the POW's. Leaving the reconstituted units attached to the 66th Division, the revamped 106th moved to the Rhine, the 159th to Remagen, Division Artillery to Mannheim (I was later to go through this bombed out city many times), and the remainder to Stromberg. The move was completed by 25 April and the preparation for thousands of German POW's was begun.

By May 1st, all units still in Brittany had closed in to take over for the 66th Division in the St. Nazaire sector. It had been a static line since August of '44 with the Germans finally surrendering after the peace signing in Reims, France."

APRIL 30th: By this time the I&R Section (Intelligence and Reconnaissance) was up to partial strength with five PFC's, a Staff Sergeant and a 2nd Lieutenant. The mail was arriving within three to four days from the States, and a number of the fellows were getting their hometown newspapers with death and casualty lists. I read several papers where the fellows killed in the Philippines had their training units listed the same as mine back in January and February at Camp Robinson. April 30th turned out to be a fateful day. Anthony Wayne Hutchinson, one of the two men leaving Huntington with me and in the same training company at Camp Robinson, was killed by a sniper on the Island of Negros. Wayne had a easy going personality and also had the coolness and confidence to accept the assignment of lead scout without hesitation. Those attributes most likely cost him his life.

I learned about his death sixteen months later and did not see his burial notice of August 1949, until after the fact. I was busy preparing to go back to Iowa State for my last quarter of college. That oversight had always bothered me, so I spent 20 hours or so in 1990 at the ~~Cabell and Wayne Court Houses and Library~~ researching his family connections. Ultimately I found his grave site at Mt. Vernon Cemetery out old Route 52 going toward the Town of Wayne. Since there are no immediate family relations in the area now, I take the responsibility of putting a flag on his grave for Memorial Day.

During this last week of the war, the Commanding Officer of the 422nd, the oldest ranking Colonel in the entire Army, wanted some sort of token action for his regiment which he had given the motto of "Smash and Drive." Obviously his nickname became "Old Smash and Drive."

Apparently, his token effort was to be a night patrol by our I&R Squad of the 1st Battalion. This was to be into an area the Germans had been able to hold since the invasion of June 1944. Fortunately, wiser heads at the Division level prevailed; and the plan was countermanded. There would have been all seven of us on the missing list until they had a chance to find our bodies in the mine fields. Our Company Commander was accustomed to losing men and would not have hesitated to initiate the assignment. He was a Jewish fellow, 1st Lt. Blau, a transfer from the 28th Division. He had been wounded and decorated with the Silver Star at Brest on the salient point of Brittany. The U.S. had taken thousands of casualties there before success. The lesson was learned, and it was decided not to pay a similar price at Lorient and St.Nazaire. Our S-2 Officer was a short, 2nd Lt., retrained from an Air Force administrative position. I am sure Lt. Blau would have enjoyed seeing him squirm before leading the patrol on a likely one way venture.

Part of our company camped on the large, front lawn of a beautiful French Chateau, and from there we did jeep patrols around the perimeter of St.Nazaire. The purpose was to intercept any German soldiers attempting to avoid surrender by escaping in civilian clothing. All of our checking only turned up Frenchmen with the proper papers and pictures. I am sure the Germans were glad to surrender with their pride intact and a chance for a decent meal after months of privation. The patrolling continued quietly for several days there in contrast to all of the celebration in the United States. We received copies of the "Stars and Stripes" with all of the details of the formal surrender at the Reims, France school of technology. I still have my copy of that paper.

During the five weeks we spent in the Brittany area, I was able to visit both Rennes and Nantes on several occasions. They had not been major targets during the war and had suffered limited damage. The Red Cross centers were a pleasant diversion from the pup tent life in the countryside. One of my worst oversights was the failure to record the names of the smaller towns where we camped, especially the exact location of the elegant chateau on VE Day. Over recent years determining those positions has been a minor project of mine.

In the summer of 1985 I learned about the 106th Infantry Association that had been organized after the war. They actively recruited original members and those that returned with the Division in September 1945. Those captured in the Battle of the Bulge make up 90 percent of the organization. A quarterly magazine is published

devoted to the personal letters and stories of the members. Such a letter was from Lt. Thomas Boyd of C Company of the 422nd:

.....I last saw the Bulge battered 106th on the hillside above Schoenberg (Belgium). Lt. Col. Mathews gave Lt. Harry O'Neil and me his map with instructions to infiltrate westward toward St. Vith. After making our way through the hills and hiding out in the day time, with a few encounters with the Krauts, we found the 7th Armored on the third day and were eventually evacuated to England, with exposure, frostbite, etc.

Recovered we wound up back with the outfit when it was reconstituted in Brittany to hold a line enclosing a German Brigade and the submarine pens at St. Nazaire and Lorient.....

So after five years of membership, I finally had a possible chance to learn something from someone who had access to maps, etc. My letter to him follows:

June 14, 1990

Dear Thomas:

I joined the 106th Association in early 1985 after reading about the organization. I now read all of the issues of the "The Cub" with much interest and admiration. Most of the contributors are former POW's. Your letter is the first from a 422nd member to express an experience for the months of April, May, June and July of '45 which probably was similar to mine.

In order not to retype previous information, I am enclosing a copy of a previous letter printed in the 3rd Quarter, 1988 issue of "The Cub." Also there are some copies of maps (1983-84 vintage) that may help refresh your memory.

I remember the 1st BN Commander was a slightly built Major with sharp facial features who enjoyed going fishing with the BN Surgeon. The CD for Hdqts Company was a Lt. Blau who had a Purple Heart and a Silver Star for action at Brest with his Division. I remember the Regimental Colonel, supposed to be the senior Colonel in the Army, came up with our motto of "Smash and Drive." I also remember the large parade (35,000 men or so) on the airfield near Rennes and the Red Cross location in Rennes.

What I failed to note were the names of some of the small French towns where we initially camped; and especially around VE Day, those located near St. Nazaire and Lorient. Headquarters Company was located at a chateau, and we were doing jeep patrols to look for any German escapees. So I don't know how close we actually were to either of these main ports. Perhaps, as an officer, you saw the maps and knew the positions of the 422nd Regiment.

I hope you can help me with these site questions. This has bugged me for years.-----

August 26, 1991

Dear Wayne:

I apologize for the belated response. I kept hoping I would find an old photo of "Old Smash and Drive."

After looking at the map you provided, I remembered that my Company C was located at Bouvron. It was a cluster of two dozen or so houses of farm families that worked the surrounding fields. The important feature was the east-west road at the south edge of town that ultimately led to St. Nazaire to the west. The road crossed a creek on a battered bridge and just next to the bridge was a small meadow with a big oak tree---an important site.

The German command in the St. Nazaire enclave had not yet surrendered the submarine pens on the coast or the infantry brigade and supporting troops with them. My company was designated to put an OP overlooking the bridge and I also put out an LMG section with supporting rifle positions and a telephone line back to Co. HQ. The Division Signals people brought out a card table and put it under the oak tree, with telephone lines running from our rear HQ patched into a line the Germans ran from their HQ. Next morning after everything was connected, we were greeted by a fully armed company of German engineers there to repair the damaged bridge. With them was a German naval officer who looked exactly like Rudy Vallee and spoke authentic American, without Rudy's Yankee twang. He subsequently was joined by another American speaking infantry colonel and an infantry major who sounded very British. Our matching field grades soon arrived.

We were a bit spooked at first, outnumbered by the German engineers, but "Rudy" assured us they had only peaceful intent and if we didn't bother them, they wouldn't bother us. After about a week there was a big meeting with a brigadier general from both sides, a Red Cross official

and some local French officials and lots of interpreters. Soon there were lots of hand shaking and the war was over in that spot of France.

All that remained was for the same Kraut engineers to remove their minefields west of town. We had found mines in dirt roads, cowpaths and fields.

I remember the German BG arguing fluently that now we had agreed on peace, we should immediately join forces and go after the Russians together, as "in the long run they would turn out to be our mutual enemy." And I have thought about that until the recent collapse of the Cold War.....The sharp-featured major commanding the reconstituted 1st Battalion was Douglas F. Post. "Old Smash and Drive" was Col. "Wild Bill" Tuttle, so he had two nicknames.....

Our Company probably wasn't more than a quarter to half a mile away from this surrender site. All of these events happened and we were not told. The working tent of our operation's sergeant was always close to I&R, but he was very protective and secretive with his maps. At least I now had a town (Bouvron) on which to focus.

ABOUT MAY 13th: Orders came down that we were to prepare to move again; this time up into Germany---no other details than we would go by rail cars. Also it was to be in relative luxury with lots of straw on the floors and 3 I&R men in each of the first two cars to guard battalion and company records and special equipment. The first day out we just about retraced the original route from Paris. This time it was Paris on a late, hazy afternoon, not nearly as pretty as the first time. It was now almost a sightseeing trip totally without the apprehension of five weeks prior. During the night we passed through Reims where the peace treaty had been signed less than a week before. Later I would see Reims in the daylight many times and visit and take pictures of the signing room.

~~The next morning we had progressed as far as Metz,~~ France. The previous September and October of 1944, there had been a long struggle here between Patton's 3rd Army and the Germans. Most of the fighting had been on the perimeter, and the destruction in the city was not nearly as bad as we would see later in Germany. As we moved on eastward, we soon crossed the border and were winding our way through Saarbrucken. The devastation was unbelievable. Only partial walls were standing, and I do not recall seeing one roof in place. We then headed in a northeast direction toward Kaiserslautern where the bombed out structures appeared to be almost total again.



The train picked up speed, and we were on our way to Mainz on the Rhine River. Thus far, this was the largest city in Germany; but again there were just partial walls standing. The civilians must have gone to the smaller towns to live.

This was the point where we would turn north and travel beside the river down toward Koblenz. There was a lot of wreckage in the river at various places where the typical long barges had been partially sunk.

We soon came to a switching yard where the train stopped to wait its turn. There was a lot of traffic as train loads of dispossessed persons were going in both directions. Some were headed back to France, and others were headed back to their eastern origins. The German war plants had collected people from everywhere. The Army transportation system was functioning amazingly well considering all of the repair work that had to be done.

Soon the men from our train were raiding a few unprotected box cars loaded with canned fruit and fruit juices. The meals for the last two days had been skimpy and short on liquids.

On an adjacent track a train crew was switching cars, and one of those rare moments of instantaneous recognitions occurred. I thought I knew the engineer. I jumped out of the box car and went back to the engine where it had stopped momentarily. Even though I had not seen him for about six years, I asked if he was Frank Harless from Charleston, WV. "Yes." I told him I was his first cousin from Huntington. He really didn't recognize me since I had been in the sixth grade the last time he saw me. My train was blowing its whistle, and that was the end of the brief and unexpected crossing of our paths.

We moved on as it was getting late in the day. The train side tracked for the night in the rail yard at Koblenz. That was to be my last box car ride, ever.

The next morning we unloaded to trucks and began the trip up the Rhine hills. We headed west on a plateau through the small city of Mayen. We then proceeded on another ten miles or so to an unused German military reservation where we set up camp in pup tents. The reservation was about a mile north of a small town, Nachtsheim. This was to be our encampment for the next two months.

ABOUT MAY 18th through JULY 15th: We felt this was going to be an extended stay for training for reassignment to the Pacific. Our camp site was inside a cultivated forest with the pine trees planted in military rows which ever direction one looked. So we started taking steps to make ourselves as comfortable on the ground as possible.

SUPPLEMENT TO PAGES 9 THROUGH 15: The second week of September 1996, I was able to take advantage of an inexpensive trip to Washington, DC for five days. While there, I visited the National Archives II in College Park, Maryland and did some research on the records of the 422nd Regiment for the period of April 1st through July 31st of 1945. I made copies of about forty pages of daily journals, letters and map overlays. Most of my questions about the weeks of April and May were answered. And my memory on the dates had not been as sharp as I had thought. On the move to St. Nazaire, I was a week early.

The first encampment (April 6th) was near the St. Jacques Airport just a few miles southwest of Rennes. The 422nd was detached from the 106th Division and attached to the 66th Division on April 15th. On the 21st, we moved to the French military base, Camp de Coetquidan, near St. Malo and Bellevue, about 20 miles further southwest. This move I had remembered well (my father had trained in this area in WWI). We were there until May 6th when the move to the St. Nazaire pocket was ordered.

The route of this move was clearly defined in the records as going through the larger towns of Guer, Loheac, Messac, Bain-de-Bretagne, Derval, Nozay and Heric to the small community of La Tomaric just east of Fay-de-Bretagne and Bouvron. The map overlay for the disposition of Hdq. Company and Companies A, B, C and D of the 1st Battalion had Company C at the most westward position. That would explain the choice of a platoon of Company C under Lt. Thomas Boyd to take defensive positions in the town of Bouvron before and during the surrender ceremonies. Otherwise, Outposts #120 through #170 and 2 motorized patrol routes were maintained 24 hours a day by the various companies.

According to the Regimental Unit Journal, the 1st Battalion had a relatively quiet sector. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions both reported the exchanging of rifle fire and in one sector mines were activated. Even two lieutenants were seriously injured by the inadvertent tripping of friendly mines. We didn't hear any of this, so the distances were too great. We were not informed either, so the old rule of "need to know" prevailed. I guess that is why rumors were so prevalent in the Army. There really was very little dissemination of information. On the 13th of May, Companies B, G, I, and Cannon were ordered back to the St. Jacques Airport near Bruz and Rennes. On the 16th, the 422nd was released from attachment to the 66th Division and reverted to control of the 106th Division. On Thursday the 17th and Friday the 18th, the remainder of the Regiment moved to St. Jacques to prepare for the move by rail to Germany on May 20th.

PLUS  
LARGE MAP