

Serving My Country

I left Schulenburg on a Greyhound bus to go to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio. Daddy and Mama came to see me off. I'd never been so far away from home before. San Antonio was at least 100 miles from Schulenburg.

I had already made a choice. I could have gone in the army, the navy, or the marines. My friends Matt Janacek, Herman Heinrich and I were inducted into the service together. They called Heinrich first – Heinrich, Janacek, Langhamer – alphabetical order.

Heinrich came out and told us, "I had a choice and I joined the marines."

Janacek went in and came back a little later. "I don't want to walk," he said, "so I joined the navy."

I said, "But I'm scared of the water."

When I got in there, they asked me, "What branch of the service do you want to join?"

I didn't know what to say so I told them, "Put me where you need me the most."

"Maybe God will help me," I thought.

So they put me in the army and that's where I served. The three of us, Matt, Herman and I, got separated and neither of them got to come home. I never saw them again. They bombed the ship that Janacek was on and Heinrich got killed on a beach somewhere.

I have told much about my experiences in *World War II Memories*, a book compiled by Florence Hertel Farek in 1998, but I will add some more details now.

I was inducted into the Army on April 29, 1944, in San Antonio. I was scared, you know, scared to death.

Before I went in the service, Norman and I had wanted to change our last name. I didn't like the name Langhamer. It was too long but that got Grandma Langhammer all fired up. She

was so hot she was going to disown us. Then Daddy got involved and they wouldn't let us go to the courthouse in La Grange to change our last name.

When I went in the service and we were filling out paperwork, I asked, "Should I put my name down with two 'm's' or one 'm'?"

The guy

said, "Whatever you put down, that is going to be how it's going to be spelled from here on out."

So I put down Langhamer spelled with one "m." I thought I'd try it. I thought I probably wasn't going to get home anyway so it didn't matter much. Norman liked what I had done so



I was 18 years old when I went into the U.S. Army. The picture below is of me in uniform with Daddy and Mama.



when he went to college in Houston, he spelled it Langhamer. Then Leon came



along and he used Langhamer, too. Now his sons use it. It's a long enough name even spelled with one "m."

In the cemetery, one day there are going to be Langhammers with two "m's" on their tombstones and Langhamers with one "m" on their tombstones. People might not even think we're related.

When I got in the barracks at Fort Sam Houston and turned on the lights, now that was really something. Electric lights? I'd never been around electric lights much before. I was really living!

Everybody said, "You need a watch," so I bought one for \$10. That was a lot of money

for me to spend. It was a good watch and I was so proud of it – my first watch. I was told to go and shower so I took off my watch and laid it on my bunk with my clothes. When I came back, my watch was gone.

I told the guy who was over us, "I laid a watch over there and it's gone."

"What did you do?" he said, like he hadn't heard right the first time.

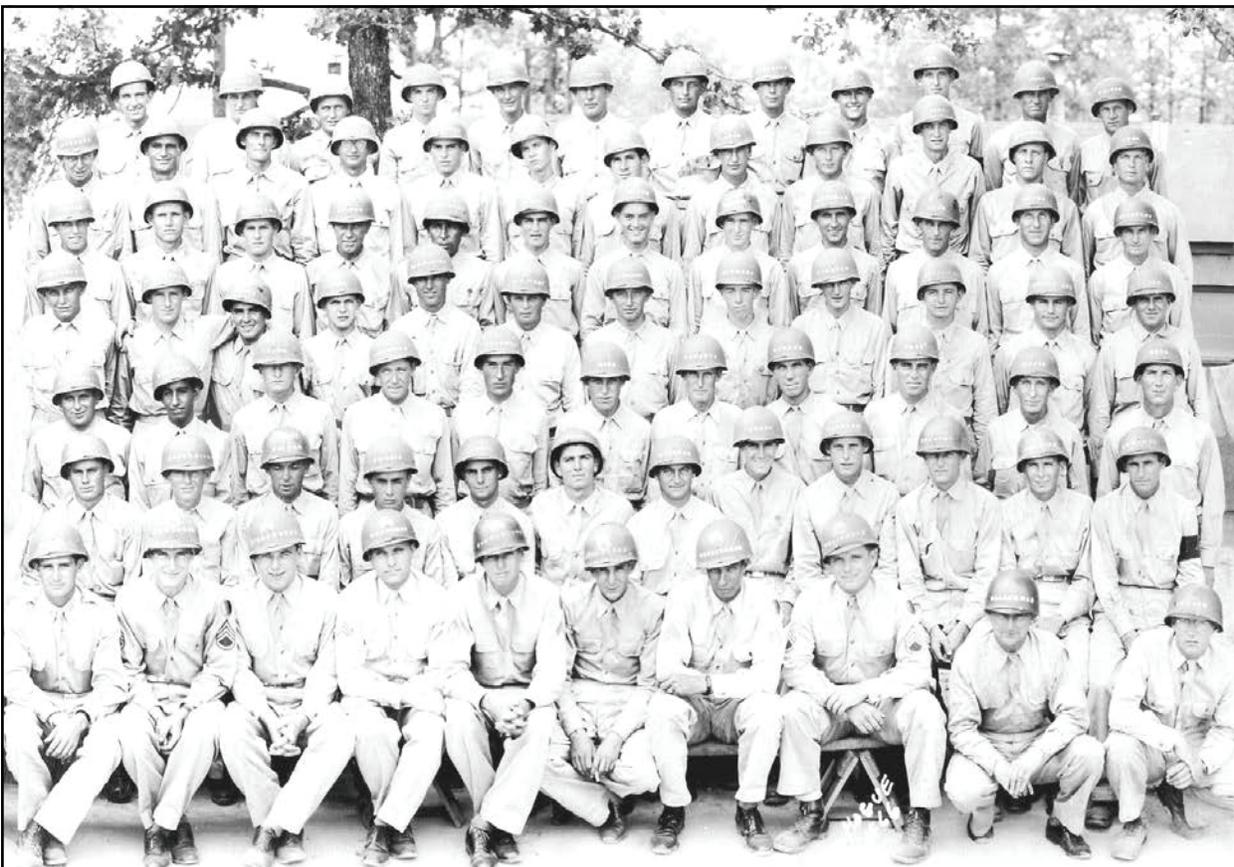
"I laid my watch over there," I said.

"And then you went to take a shower?"

"Yes."

He told me then, "You don't leave stuff lying around here. What are you, crazy?"

That's me during training at Camp Shelby, Miss. I had never been so far from Schulenburg in my life. Below, my platoon. I'm the first man on the left in the fourth row from the bottom. Next to me is my buddy from Luling, Texas, Jewel "Mac" McClanahan.





I never got my watch back. Someone took it, the dirty dog. That was the first lesson I learned in the service. But what are you going to do?

After San Antonio, we got on a bus and then we got on a train to Camp Robinson, Arkansas, where we had to take a 16-week course of infantry training.

I didn't think about the fact that I could speak German when I went in the service till I got to Arkansas in the barracks and told them I was German. They called me a "Damn Nazi." That taught me right quick that from then on I was going to be Polish all the time I was in the service. I had put that I could speak German down on the papers when I went in the service, though.

After I completed basic training, I was sent to Camp Shelby, Mississippi. We had a delay en route, which gave me time to come home for 10 days. It sure was nice to come home!

After arriving at Camp Shelby, I was assigned to the 69th Infantry Division. My stay



(Above) When I came home on furlough, I rode my horse, Filli. (Below) I sailed to England on the Queen Mary. (At left) My friend, Mac McClanahan, and me. I didn't tell the boys I met in the army that I was German because they might have thought I was a Nazi. I told them I was Polish.

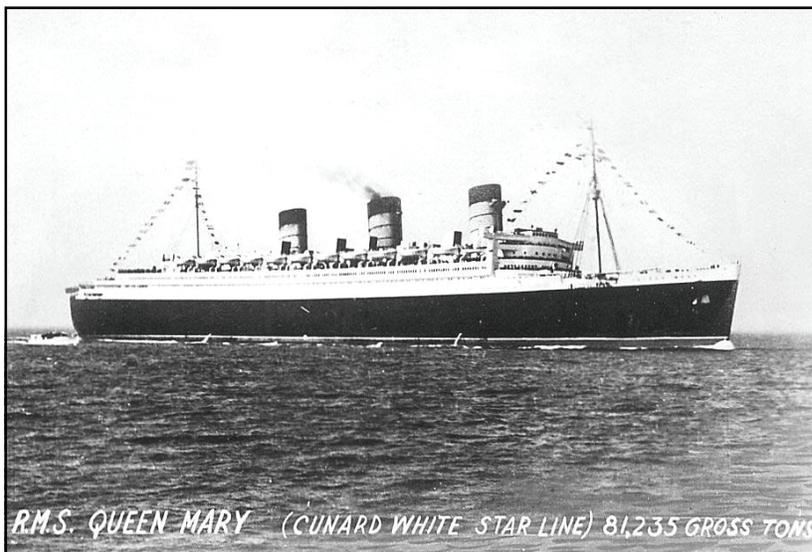
there was about six weeks. We then moved out to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, the demarcation port. We didn't stay there long, only about a week.

While we were there, I bought a postcard of the New York Empire State Building and sent it to my parents. While I was in the service, part of my pay went to my parents. I got \$16 to \$24, something like that. It wasn't much. They got a little less than I did.

We boarded the ocean liner, the Queen Mary, on November 15, 1944. The trip across the

Atlantic was terribly rough. Everybody was seasick. They gave us live ammunition and sent us to stand guard on deck. Most of us were hanging over the rail sick as dogs. A couple of the men went overboard and I never saw any attempt to rescue them.

We docked in England on November 26, 1944 and spent a few days in Birmingham. I was transferred to the 83rd Infantry Division, part of the 1st Army, as a replacement, to go to France during the massive German air attacks called the Blitz-



krieg. Blitzkrieg means “as if struck by lightning.” That’s what it was like, too. We got on a boat to cross the English Channel and landed in Le Havre, France.

We hit the beach and started walking. Then, they put us in railroad box cars called “40 and 8” – 40 men or 8 horses. Everybody tried to get into the cars first because the last ones in had to stand and couldn’t sit down to rest. We stopped so often it seemed like we were going backward instead of forward.

It wasn’t long before we were being strafed (attacked) by German planes. We bailed out and started walking from France through Luxembourg and into Belgium. There were two or three feet of snow on the ground with more falling each day.

The first day we moved out, I got my first look at the Germans. I spotted about a dozen of them. Our sergeant counted down, and each of us was to take one out. I was the third one in line so I was assigned number three. When the sergeant gave the order to fire, I sighted my target and fired. We heard them holler and saw some of them fall. Of course, we didn’t know if they were dead or if they just ducked. We were all scared to death and did the best we could. There was a lot of praying going on.

Sometimes things quieted down a bit and we found a house to stay in. One time, we got to a house that had a barn connected to it. I saw a woman milking a cow. After she left, I went to check to see if the cow had any milk left. I got a little

warm milk for myself. The other guys wanted some, too, but the cow had been drained. We found food in some of the houses but were warned not to eat it.

I saw a lot of GIs and Germans get killed and wounded. The ones that got killed didn’t bother me too much but the wounded ones did. They were begging for their lives. Things were so confusing during the heat of battle. At times, as many of our men were killed by our own artillery dropping short as were killed by the Germans. There is nothing as terrorizing as a shell screaming overhead through the treetops. You never overcome that feeling. Getting through it alive was just a matter of luck – it had nothing to do with intelligence.

A couple of other soldiers in my platoon said to me, “Tex,” (they called me that because I was from Texas), “you know how to pray. Will you teach us?”

I taught them the words to the Lord’s Prayer. “Our Father who art in heaven...”

I told them, “That’s all I know. Just ask Him to help us.”

They were all scared. There was nobody that tough. There were a few of them kind of smart-alecky but when it came down to it, they weren’t all that tough.

I thought to myself, “Maybe I will get out of this mess or maybe I won’t.”

The first scout in our platoon was a GI named Iacco. The platoon leader knew I could speak German so I was

appointed second scout.

I thought, “Man, I’m a goner.”

I wasn’t too happy about that but I found it wasn’t all that bad because a single man wasn’t as likely to be fired on. I came across German panzers on several occasions. Looking down that big gun barrel really takes the starch out of you. I found out, though, that they wouldn’t shoot a single man. They were looking for bigger targets.

At times, I just walked right by the Germans. Then I’d hear gunfire behind me. I just ducked behind a tree. We were in the Ardennes Forest at this time.

Iacco and I captured about 100 to 160 Germans total. Most of the Krauts that I captured were Polish. They didn’t want that war any more than I did, they told me in German. They were so glad they got captured. They gave up. They were about 45 years old, average. I found out they were family men just like us.

The young ones were Nazis, though. They were out there to kill, one way or another. I would strip the Germans of everything as Iacco stood guard. On occasion, after I left the prisoners with our company, I heard shooting as I walked away. I think they must have shot the soldiers we captured. That has always bothered me. I don’t think that was fair. I know they were our enemy and we’d shoot at them when they’d shoot at us but I couldn’t shoot or kill anybody if they gave up. I don’t care who it was. We weren’t supposed to harm them



“At Trou de Bra Armored Artillery fired 24 hours a day at German targets in the receding salient.”



Signal Corps Photo

“Riflemen on their way to the line of departure for the attack on Petite Langlir.”



“MP’s nervously stood at this road intersection in Petite Langlir, probably the ‘hottest corner’ during the Battle of the Bulge.”

In case you can't read my handwriting, I wrote, "This is what it looked like where I was at." The U.S. Army took these photos.

what it looked like where I was at Alvin



Winter conditions in Belgium were terribly harsh. Our platoon got cut off from the main army and we had nothing. We ate K-rations. When those were gone, we ate the crumbs out of our pockets. When there were no more crumbs, we ate snow. We slept in the snow but we were still fighting. We didn't think we would make it.

if they surrendered. Those prisoners had nothing on them to fight with. I had stripped every one of them of their weapons.

The GIs told me, "What can we do with them? We have no place to go."

We were cut off from other American troops, completely surrounded by Germans. It was bad. They couldn't get any supplies to us and there was no way out. We had about eight or nine men left in our group. There was nobody to pull us back. We were on our own. I don't remember ever lying down to sleep. We learned to sleep standing up. All we ever got were short naps.

During this time, we never got a hot meal. All we had were K-rations. These were 3,000 calorie meals carried in our pack that were to be consumed

only under emergency conditions. These were emergency conditions, let me tell you. When we ran out of K-rations, we turned our pockets inside out and ate the crumbs. Then we ate snow. Can you believe it? It's true. We ate crumbs and then we ate snow. There was nothing, nothing at all to eat for days on end.

This was during the Battle of the Bulge, the bloodiest of the battles that the U.S. experienced in World War II. About 19,000 Americans were killed then.

One day a tank driver asked, "Dough boy, you want a ride?" (Dough boy was slang for American soldier.)

"Yes," I said and jumped on.

It wasn't long until a German Panzer tank zeroed in on

the tank. I jumped off and ran for my life. While riding on this tank, I saw wounded GIs and wounded Germans begging for their lives. The tank just ran over them. I also saw wounded Germans lying begging for help and American soldiers just shooting them.

I got acquainted with one GI whose name was Tate. One night, we paired off on patrol and we heard some Germans talking. We started walking back through the woods down a trail but the Germans started shooting at us. We started shooting back.

Tate said, "Hurry, Tex."

All of a sudden, he was not behind me. My buddy had been shot by a German Burp gun, some of those lightweight portable submachine guns.

When I got back to the others, I told them, "I think Tate got shot."

Maybe he wasn't dead yet but we could not get him help because the Germans were firing all around us. Right after daybreak, three of us walked back to see what had happened to Tate. He was dead. Frozen. I'll never forget that. Maybe I could have helped him.

Iacco, Fortini and I were standing watch on a road block one night when we saw 10 to 12 Germans coming toward us. We heard the Germans coming and first we thought we'd capture them. Then we decided to shoot. The soldier with the Browning Automatic was going to shoot first and then I would follow. We found out our guns were frozen – we couldn't shoot. We didn't know what to do.

I told the Germans, "Throw down your weapons." They stopped but then they came closer.

The leader came up and stuck his rifle in my belly and said, "I'll shoot you," and I told him in German, "Don't shoot us. We are Germans, too."

He said, "You are wearing American uniforms." I told him we took them off dead American soldiers.

"I guess you can speak German well enough," he said. "Come with us."

So we went with them. I did all the talking. I thought the Germans really believed us. I hoped that they did. I did not want to be tortured.

I don't remember just for how long - about 10 or 12 hours - they held us. Then the leader said, "I really don't know if you are Germans or not. You three wait here."

We did that. After a few minutes, they threw two grenades at us. It ripped half my clothes off and I was wounded in my legs but I didn't even know it. They left us for dead.

I fell into the snow and I heard someone calling. A voice said, "Tex, is that you?"

I said, "Yes."

"I am Iacco," he said. "Are you hurt?"

I said, "No."

"I have only got one foot left," he said.

I got up, dazed. "Where is Fortini?"

"Here," he said. "He is dead."

I walked off in the snow. I don't know what direction. I didn't know where I was going but I ran into four or five GIs. I

did not know at the time that my rifle was gone. I told them that one GI was back there with one foot blown off. They asked me if I was hurt.

"No," I said and they shone a flashlight on me and discovered blood running down my leg. I was wearing long johns, ODs, fatigues and a shredded overcoat. My legs were exposed and bloody but I couldn't feel any pain.

After a few hours, I was put on a jeep or weapons carrier, I don't know which, and taken to a makeshift tent where they bound me up and then sent to a hospital in France. There they cut off my combat boots. My feet were black and cracked so they started treating me for frozen feet. After three days or so, I got really sick.

I asked the male nurse, "Why are you not changing my bandages?"

He said, "You are here for frozen feet."

I said, "No, I got hurt with a hand grenade."

My legs were nothing but red streaks by then. A raging infection had set in. The nurses started giving me penicillin every two to three hours for three days and nights and then sent me back to England and later to Scotland for about two or three months.

I never saw a medic while I was on the front lines. If you got hurt, you got hurt. You just hoped that you would find a weapons carrier or a jeep. When we started out in France at the end of November or early December 1944 till I got wounded on January 16, 1945, I never took my clothes or my

boots off until I got to the hospital. When I got to the hospital, I did not remember what month or day it was. I had missed Christmas 1944 completely. I didn't even know when it was.

When my Mama and Daddy saw that they were going to get a telegram from the army, Mama crawled under the house where we stored the potatoes and onions. When that man from Schulenburg came driving up our road, they knew what it was. It was bad news. He was a dreaded man because he could be bringing a telegram that would say, "Missing in action," or "Injured" or "Dead." Mama didn't want to hear it, whatever the news was. But it wasn't that bad.

The Schulenburg Sticker reported, "A telegram was received here this Thursday morning by Mr. and Mrs. John Langhamer stating that their son, Pvt. Alvin Langhamer, had been slightly wounded in action some place in Belgium Jan. 16. He is in a makeshift hospital in Belgium and more details are expected from the hospital."

Later on, another news item ran in the paper. "Mr. and Mrs. John Langhamer this past week received a letter from their son, Pvt. Alvin Langhamer, in which was enclosed the Order of the Purple Heart. It will be remembered that Alvin was wounded in action in Belgium Jan. 16."

When I got back from the hospital, I got a little mail. I asked for cameras and my family sent me three but I never got one of them. They must have kept them in the post office. I never received the packages that were sent to me. Most of

CLASS OF SERVICE

This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.

WESTERN UNION

1204

SYMBOLS

DL = Day Letter
NL = Night Letter
LC = Deferred Cable
NLT = Cable Night Letter
Ship Radiogram

A. N. WILLIAMS
PRESIDENT

The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination

SJ DC 27 GOVT

Washington DC 246A ~~XXX~~ Feb 1 1945

John J Langhamer

RT 3 BOX 32 Schulenburg Texas

Regret to Inform you your Son Private Alvin J Langhamer
Was Slightly wounded in action Sixteen January in Belgium mail
address follows direct from hospital with Details

Ullo The Adjutant General

013A

THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

When Mama saw the man who delivered the army's telegrams coming up our road, she hid under the house where we kept the potatoes. She didn't want to hear what that telegram said. It was always bad news. At least the army had finally found out where I was.

the food packages weren't delivered either. I don't know what was done with some of them. We didn't get paid because they couldn't get to us. No food for so long. Is it any wonder I had bad feelings about being in the service?

These are some of the letters that were returned to my family. I didn't get to read them until I got back home.

May 19, 1945

Dear Alvin,

Today we received your letter dated May 8 where you say the war is over. We feel well that you are safe and hope

that the time will come soon when you can be home. That is our wish. We are all well and hope the same with you. Today we got the second letter we sent you back. Got a letter from Alton Meyer today and he says that he is glad that the war is over. He is still in Italy. He wrote you 3 or 4 times a week and didn't get no letter back.

We have about two more days to chop cotton. So far if it only would rain this week so we make good corn. Evelyn wrote you yesterday on a different address so I write you at the address which we got today. Norman and Evelyn are going to town and will mail this letter in town.

Norman will play at Ammanns-

ville tomorrow with some of the other boys from High Hill. Last Sunday they had a ball game at Hostyn. We have a Memorial Celebration at High Hill (noon) where they have a statue to be blessed at the cemetery.

Yesterday, Mrs. Tilicek was out after Evelyn to come and work for Frank's Place but we got a lot of work to do so we don't know yet. Well, I hope this letter gets to you safe and good luck and best regards from us all. Always, Dad, Mama, Bro and Sis

May 28, 1945

My Dear Alvin!

We didn't hear from you for a few days. Hope to hear from you tomorrow. We are all well and hope you are the same, dear son. We are all very glad that the war is over in Europe and I believe you are glad also. Hope you can come home soon. I am waiting for you

every day. I only wish that day would come soon.

Today Norman went for the mail and he came with 3 packages what we sent you that came back, one from us and one from Emil L. and one from Rudolph B. That sure makes me mad. I had to cry, I could not help myself. I sure felt sorry that you did not get them. Almost everything was spoilt. Just some nuts and pecans were good yet. We sent you a package some time ago. Hope you get it but they make you move always and maybe you will not get it either but I hope you will. I would like to send you something again if I would know that you would stay there. Would you please let me know what you would like to have? I will be very glad to send it to you as you know we all love you so much.

Today we were chopping cotton for the second time. It is not much to chop. It is too dry and we need a good rain. If it don't rain soon we won't make no corn crop. The potatoes we have out early we sold for \$16. We had plenty but all too small.

My only wish is that you come home soon. Try your best and tell them you cannot work. Tell them your legs hurt you. You can't do nothing. Maybe it will help you. I hope so.

With turkeys we have no luck. We have only 30 left. The others died. If we only get some big ones so that when you come home we can kill some. We had one gobbler yet and last week one day he did not come home and we looked for him. We found him by the pecan trees, torn to pieces by a dog. The other day that dog had the turkey hen.

Alton Demel will get his furlough this week and he is in the Navy. Henry Kloesel is in California and he is in the Army. Well Alvin, could you write us a little what you are doing? I am glad that you get a good bed and good food to eat. I hope you have a good time. You said you saw some nice looking

girls. That's fine but please come home soon. We all would be more than glad to see you. Good luck. May God bless you. Your Loving Mother, Dad, brothers, sisters. A kiss. Answer soon please.



I was awarded the Purple Heart Medal after I was wounded while serving my country during World War II.

June 4, 1945

Dearest Brother,

How are you getting along? Hope fine, as we are all OK. Did you receive any letters from us lately? Hope you did. We got 3 letters back today again, those that we sent you. I guess they couldn't find you. In all we got 11 letters back already and I guess we will get some more back. That sure makes us mad. I don't see what those darn big shots do with those letters. I think every soldier is happy when he receives a letter from home.

Yesterday Grandma moved to Rud. Hilschers. She is to stay two months with every child. She didn't want to go there at first but then she finally went.

Evelyn started to work at Frank's

Place again. Just to help out. She wanted to come today but Mrs. Tilicek wasn't at home so she had to work tomorrow. My friend will start to work there next week. I don't think she will be able to stand it because she's so fat and they do pretty much running there.

Clarence Meyer came by just a few minutes ago and took Norman along. They still want to have some good old times together cause he's leaving this coming Wednesday (June 6). Alton Demel is here on his furlough. They might come and see us tomorrow night.

It didn't rain for so long already. The corn is starting to burn up.

Next Sunday, High Hill will play baseball against Hostyn. Last Sunday, we played against Schulenburg. Some old men played and we lost. The score was 2 to 3. It wasn't so bad. Ha. Ha. We girls might play the Ammansville girls.

Gee, I wish you could see us. I guess I'll have to stop cause I'm writing this on a shaky table upstairs. Ha. Ha. Hope you can read everything. So good-nite and may Gold bless you, keep you from all harm now and always, Mother and Dad and the rest are sending you best regards. You see I have to take Evelyn's place in writing. She isn't at home tonight. Well, we hope to see you soon. Your loving sis, Elizabeth.

A kiss from Mother.

July 30, 1945

Dearest Alvin!

We got three letters from you today and were very glad to get them and that nice handkerchief you sent me. Thanks a lot, my dear. Sure is nice remembrance. We would like to send you something but those packages come back. Just two of them did not come back. Hope you get them yet. In one was the fountain pen you asked us to send. You asked us if we received the Purple Heart. Yes, we did. Sure is nice. We receive every month two checks - one for

\$37 and one for \$15. Do you need some money? If you are short, then let us know and we will send you some.

Dear Alvin, do you think you can come home? I sure hope so. Many soldiers are coming home from Europe. I only hope you don't need to go to Japan. That would be too bad.

Evelyn is home today to help us pick cotton. We got 500 pounds on the first bale. I think the cotton crop will not be too good this year. I know you would rather help us than work there so far away. I picked the first day but my back was so bad. I wished we were finished early.

Leslie Lippman is home also. Leo Blaschke is on his way home also.

Grandma Demel is with Frank D. now. Hope she likes it.

The rest are in bed early. Only Evelyn and I are up yet so I guess I have to close with all good wishes and loving regarding. May God bless you always. With all my love from you, Mother, Dad, Bro & Sis

We all like to hear from you. A kiss. Evelyn said she will write you tomorrow. She will write you some news again from her boyfriend. Goodnight and goodbye.

August 6, 1945

Dear Brother,

Well, it's Monday and I'm at home. See Frank's Place closes every Monday so I'm off that day. All the girls that work there are glad when that day comes but it passes by so fast.

I helped pick cotton today. I am ashamed to tell you how much I picked. Last Monday, I picked over 50 lbs. and today I only picked 28 lbs. See in the morning, Dad and Mom and I went to church. It was the memorial service for Pvt. Lawrence Herzik, who died on Mindanao Island in the Philippines. So this makes 4 gold stars on the service flag. I sincerely hope that there may not be another. Four is already too many.

Well, Mama is washing dishes while Elizabeth is mixing bread. Dad, Norman and Leon are lying on the floor sleeping trying to listen to the war news. They are tired. They picked hard all day. Daddy hauled the first bale this afternoon. It weighed 526 lbs. at 22¢ a lb. so he got \$133. We intend to finish the second bale this week yet. The cotton crop won't be so good this year, although Norman figures about 7 bales. Not much, is it? The cotton is really open now as it is really hot. I guess I will have to stay home about one week and help them pick. I don't mind, as I like farm life just as well as I do city life. A person has to work everywhere — if — you want to eat.

James Stanzel is a private too. He wrote Norman a card. He was drafted about 2 weeks ago and is stationed at Camp Roberts, California. I had a card from him this morning.

Thanks a million for that beautiful round handkerchief you sent me. It looks cute and expensive. I bet you paid a lot for it. Thanks again. A nice remembrance too.

Good luck and God be with you always. Love, Evelyn

Love and regards from the rest.

August 27, 1945

Dear Brother,

We had a letter from you 3 days ago and you wrote that you are waiting for a discharge. We would be glad to see you come home. Every morning at 9 o'clock from station WOAI San Antonio, they read out names of Texas boys who arrived from overseas. Today they just read one name from Schulenburg. Guess who? Alfonse J. Boehm. So he arrived in New York today. We hope to hear your name soon.

How are you getting along? We are all fine and hope the same of you.

Last week I was by Rd. Demel's picking cotton. I stayed there over-

night. Elwood and I had plenty of fun playing poker and sixty-six. Last night, Elwood and I went to Weimar. They had a carnival there: milk bottles, bingo, dice, etc and many other games. Elwood and I really were hitting them milk bottles and shooting them dice. After we quit, we found that Elwood broke exactly even and I made one nickel. So we took off for Frank's Place and drank some Pepsi-Cola.

There is a hurricane or storm on the Texas coast. It did much damage in Corpus Christi and Galveston. It was supposed to hit Houston tonight. We have a rather strong breeze here tonight and quite a bit of rain.

Well, Norbert Wick went for his physical Wednesday and he passed. August Gold was rejected. Fred Munke also passed. Freddie Winkler is home from overseas and received his discharge. He was overseas for over 3 years.

Sunday the Boy and Girls Society from High Hill had a barbeque in Robert Heinrich's pasture. It was chicken. Adolph Winkler, Audie Winkler and Benno Demel made it. This coming Sunday we will play softball in Praha against Praha.

We have five bales of cotton out and 1 open and 1 closed. That makes 7 bales or more.

Sept 9 High Hill will have a church picnic. There will be no dinner, just supper and probably a few kinds of games. Last year at this time you were at home. This year Alphonse Boehm will be at home. We will have High Mass on Sept. 8 because it is on Saturday.

I will close as I am getting sleepy. Hope to hear from you soon. Best regards from all of us and may God bless you, Your Brother, Norman

P.S. I want to tell you that Leo Blaschke is home and has a discharge. He is working at Keuper's Meat Market. We wish you good luck and good health and a safe return home soon.

By the time I was well

again, the war was over but that didn't mean I got to come home. I was sent to Aachen to join the 368th Engineers as an interpreter. A colonel gave me a weapons carrier to drive to Merkstein, Germany, to oversee a coal mine that the Americans had taken over.

I got to know some of the German workers and was interested in getting a look at the inside of the mine. One of the men offered to take me down at a certain time one Wednesday. He swore me to secrecy – no one must know



(Above) The German prisoners of war at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. (At right) This picture was taken in Le Havre, France. I am standing on the left and my friend, Marburger, is the third man. (Below) While we waited for a ship, we slept in tents like the ones behind Marburger and me. I brought the gun on my hip home by hiding it under my helmet during the inspection on the ship.



what we had planned. I promised not to tell. I couldn't wait. When Wednesday came, I showed up 30 minutes early to meet him. Here comes an old man, my guardian angel. Somehow, he had found out that I was supposed to go down in the mine and he warned me. He said those men were all Nazis and if I went down with them I would never come back up alive. They had set a trap for me. I

was 30 minutes away from disaster.

I enjoyed being an interpreter. I had the time of my life. All I had to do was see if all the coalminers came to work and report which workers did not report. That old German fellow, he was no Nazi. He took care of me. He gave me the reports of who didn't show up for me to take down to the office and I didn't have to do anything.

There was a rule that the American servicemen could not talk to people on the street - no fraternization - but I could talk to people on the street. I had a pass. I had to go to the houses and see why people didn't come to work. I met a lot of nice people. All the Germans that I met



(At left) When I got into the service, I learned quickly that it was always good to have a buddy. That's me with my helmet on a little sideways. (Above) The kitchen crew at the prisoner-of-war camp at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, stands in front of the mess hall. My friend, Robert McCormick, is fourth from the left and I'm on the far right.

there, they didn't want the war either. Some of them took me down in their cellars and gave me some wine to drink.

We had 12 military police in a house and I stayed with them. Sometimes, we would have some coffee left over and I would take it to people in the town who didn't have any coffee. They were so grateful. Some people didn't have much to eat but others had food stored down in their cellars.

The only Germans we had to watch were the young boys. They were Nazis. They were mean. I think Hitler raised them that way.

Merkstein was the one time in the service that I had it made. Then suddenly, the British took it over. I didn't want to leave.

I told that colonel, "Man, I don't want to go. I'll sign up for a year or two. I want to stay here."

"You can't do that," he told me. "You might get a chance to

come back here."

But of course, I didn't. I was sent to Camp Lucky Strike, France.

We were scheduled to board a ship, go through the Panama Canal and head for Japan. We waited around for 10 days. Then we found out the French had not unloaded the ship that we were to board so we were put on a ship bound for the U.S. That was fine with me. When we arrived in the U.S., we were to get a 10-day leave and then go to Japan. I felt good about getting to go home first.

We docked on September 10, 1945. I had to wire home for money so I could catch a train for Texas. After I got home, I got a notice that I could stay for two weeks. A second notice informed me I could take 45 days. When my time was up, I was sent to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, which was a training camp. When they discovered how long I had been in the

army, they decided I was in the wrong place. They told me I didn't belong there.

I then shipped out to Fort Belvoir, Virginia. This was a German prisoner of war camp. They made me a mess hall inspector! I didn't know anything about mess halls but that was my job. All I had to do was make sure the food was fit to eat and they were keeping the kitchens clean. That was easy. I enjoyed doing that. I stayed there until I was discharged on May 5, 1946.

The decorations and citations that I received for my service in World War II were: the American Theater Campaign Ribbon, European-African-Middle Eastern (EAME) Campaign Ribbon with 2 bronze stars, Good Conduct Medal, Purple Heart, Army of Occupation Ribbon (Germany), World War II Victory Ribbon, I Overseas Bar and Combat Infantry Badge.