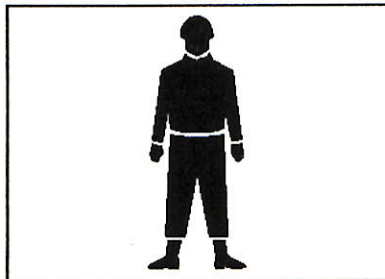


Memories of the forties
A soldiers story



In the early thirties, now 60 years, ago we lived in a different world. Television was unknown, and many families didn't own a radio. Automobiles were just coming into their own, but there were no Interstate highways. For homes with central heating many had coal-fired pipeless furnaces, with one large floor grille centrally located. An up version of this was the steam system with radiators in most rooms. These were fired by coal, and it was an everyday sight to see the coal truck backed up to a home, and the coal flowing through a chute into the coal bin in the basement. One of the chores for the younger members of the family was to cull the ashes for any unburnt coals.

The iceman made daily deliveries, as there were no refrigerators in the home. Every house had a card in the window to let the iceman know how many pounds of ice were needed, thereby saving him a trip into the house. As the ice melted it drained into a pan at the bottom of the ice box. If this were not emptied on time water flowed into the kitchen. My father overcame this by running a pipe from the drain outside the house.

Milk was delivered daily, and mail came twice a day. School buses were unknown except when travel to another town was needed. In those cases public transportation was used, buses, and in some cases, trains. There was no commercial air lines, and for long distances trains were used. The motive power of the trains was the coal-fired steam engine. For the motorist there were wayside motels, far different than those we know today.

Boy scouts and Girl scouts were in. We organized our own baseball and football teams. We delivered newspapers in the same way we do today. Movies were a favorite form of amusement. Movies were black and white, and "talkies" were coming in. Our comic books depicted Buck Rogers and travel in space. I don't recall any indication of computers in our future. My father finished school after the sixth grade. I felt a high school diploma was enough education. After the end of World War II and the GI bill more and more men went on to college educations. Now in 1990 it seems that a Doctorate is needed for an adequate education.

I spent five years in the US Army. All my time was spent as an infantryman. Although I had not been given the chance to select my branch of service, this is the one I would have chosen had I been given the chance. My AGC score was 144 which qualified me for most any position. I entered the Army on January 31, 1941 and left on January 31, 1946. I entered as a draftee, and gradually acquired the ranks of PFC, Corporal, Sergeant, and Staff Sergeant. As an officer I was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant, received a battlefield promotion to 1st Lieutenant and was discharged as a Captain.

In 1940 as Italy, Germany and Japan were flexing their muscles, Franklin Roosevelt became increasingly alarmed and Congress passed a law drafting young men into the armed services. The draft was for one year. The order in which men were to be drafted was determined by a lottery, and my number was low enough that I would be called early. At the time I was my own boss with a Service Station business in Gutenberg, NJ. I made arrangements to sell my inventory and went to work at Wright Aeronautical on the 12 midnight to 8 AM. shift.

I graduated Ridgewood High School in 1933 at the age of sixteen. I was sixth in a class of 256. Not wanting to go to college I enrolled at the Ridgewood Secretarial School for ten months. In 1934 I went to work for the Standard Oil Company of NJ for \$95.00 per month. We worked a 48 hour week. By 1938 I had my own business, and in 1940 I owned my first new automobile, a Ford four-door sedan for which I paid \$800.00.

Drafted:

Early in the morning of January 31, 1941 my father drove me to the Benjamin Franklin Junior High School in Ridgewood. In 1929 I had attended that school for my freshman High School year. When everyone had reported, we were bussed to the New Jersey National Guard Armory in Newark, NJ. where we received physical examinations. When all were processed we were sworn in and marched to the Pennsylvania Railroad

sergeant. Later I was put on detached duty and helped to train a cadre that was being formed for a new division. Each afternoon the non-coms pulling this duty would study the lessons to be taught the next day. When we were on maneuvers I was asked if I would like to volunteer to go to England and participate in and observe a raid into France. My Company commander convinced me this was not a good idea and so I declined. As a part of our training we boarded the Thomas A Stone for amphibious maneuvers of the coast of Maryland. Here we learned how to go over the side on cargo nets and load into the small boats that delivered us to the beach. The Thomas Stone was sunk during the invasion of Africa. In May the Company commander called me into his office and asked if I would consider going to Officer Candidate School to earn a commission as 2nd Lieutenant.

Fort Benning:

This meant I would be leaving friends because it was unlikely I would be returned to the 47th. However, after some deliberations I decided and when I applied I was accepted for the OCS at Fort Benning, Georgia. The training course at Fort Benning lasted 90 days and those that survived were commissioned as 2nd Lieutenants and known as 90-day wonders. I did not find the training too difficult. My 17 months experience stood me in good stead. Some men came to the school without any army experience and most of them washed out. Twice during the 90 day period we were required to rank all 24 men on our floor of the barracks, including ourselves, and give a reason for the rating. This task weighed heavily on the man doing the rating, particularly if his ratings were out of line with others. Near the end of the 90 day period I was made student company commander for several days.

After our morning graduation and swearing-in we eagerly returned to our barracks to find our assignments and to begin our short leave time. I was assigned to the 90th Division at Camp Barkley, Texas, and after a few days at home reported to the executive officer at that location.

Camp Barkley:

The 90th was a Texas Oklahoma National Guard Division with an infusion of draftees. The area was dry and windy and a standard joke about the sand storms was that it was Oklahoma blowing through. I was assigned to a rifle company and immediately detached to command and train a group of 200 draftees. I had another lieutenant and 4 non-commissioned officers under my command. Since the division shortly thereafter went on maneuvers we had the camp to ourselves. The training went well since I had a lot of experience in this role. My chief concern was to see that the men stood up to the frightening experience of being torn from their homes and thrust into an alien atmosphere. I remembered my own first days when the hardest days were Saturday afternoon and Sunday when we had nothing to do. The men were confined to camp with only a movie house and the PX for recreation. We put long hours in qualifying with the rifle. We had the usual dry runs and then I located and used the 1000 inch range so the men could get used to the sound and battering of the rifles. From there it was an easy step to the 200 and 500 yard ranges. Our percentage of qualifications was very high. We also spent some time on anti-tank work. For this I secured the help of a tank company in the area, and the men rode in the tanks, and sat in fox holes while the tanks went over their positions. We demonstrated all the then known tank defenses. During this training the division had returned from maneuvers and we wound up with the whole battalion at our demonstrations. When I finished recruit training and the men were assigned to companies, I was given the anti-tank platoon of the battalion. About two months into this assignment I was called into the regimental commanders office where I was informed that I was being transferred overseas as a replacement officer. The commanding officer went into great detail to let me know that he was not following the usual Army practice of getting rid of an eight ball, but had to certify as to my qualifications. I tended to believe him as all my work has been good to his point. I believe the overriding reason was that the majority of the officers had been with the division since National Guard days and it would have been difficult to transfer them.

During the time I was at Camp Barkley the allies had invaded North Africa, and had gotten severely mauled in several battles with the Germans. I knew that the 47th had been involved but did not know to what extent.

stuck at the city of Troina. Troina graced a mountain top and had been under siege for a number of days. The day before our scheduled attack on the city we spent in a wide gully just below the city. I caught hell from the company commander for wandering to where he thought I might disclose our presence. The men of my platoon had all been in combat before and I tried to observe their behavior.

After dark we assembled for orders, and I couldn't help thinking how one lucky shell or hand grenade could wipe out half the company. It seemed like a stupid move, but then I was not experienced at the time. The next day the remnants of the 1st withdrew thru our positions. I will never forget the misery in their faces nor the way they walked. They had wreaked so much damage on Troina that it had been evacuated and we moved into a dead city. From then until the end of the campaign in Sicily we had little contact with Germans. As the 47th advanced, elements of the 39th were making amphibious assaults behind their positions and they were forced to withdraw. In retrospect it seems to me that the Germans had made the decision to give up Sicily and were merely interested in a delaying action.

I recall a few incidents of the Sicilian campaign. One afternoon four Italian soldiers walked into my outpost desiring to surrender. We took them to the company CP and later they were sent back to battalion. No one was interested in making them prisoner so most of the Italians who surrendered were turned loose.

Another time I recall a girl of about ten coming into our lines at night. She had several wounds of the type inflicted by hand grenades or shell fragments. She was sent to the battalion aid station.

We made several night attacks one of which was single file with 800 men stretched out in a single line. Luckily there was no resistance, since a couple of men with a machine gun could have stopped the attack. While we got things done, it seemed that sometimes this was due more to luck than to good management.

Another time the officers went to an observation point to watch the Air Force bomb a city in our front to rubble. Soon after the attack started nothing could be seen but a huge cloud of dust. Several days later we watched as 500 bombers flew overhead enroute to a target in Italy.

The Sicilian campaign called for General Montgomery and the British Army to move up the east coast of Sicily and close the door so the Germans being pounded by the American forces could not escape. As so often happened with Monty he was too slow to accomplish this, and while we did take Sicily we did not maximize our opportunity to hurt the German forces. We moved up to our final position north of Etna (the Sicilian volcano) and near Randazzo. We spent two weeks at this location bivouacked in a vineyard. I headquartered in a stone building on the premises, and strictly against regulations played poker with men of the platoon. During this time we had one firing exercise in the hills.

After the end of the campaign we moved to an area on the hill above the Mediterranean, just west of Cefalu. Cefalu was a fishing town of poor people dominated by a rich cathedral. In the cathedral was the town's saint preserved in a glass covered casket. As was the practice in Sicily, this saint was paraded through the town on 'his' day. This seemed to be a town where the people were poor but the church was rich.

The first night we were in Cefalu our executive officer and Sergeant Reppetti found an ice cream manufacturer, and by furnishing the materials, supplied our company with ice cream. The F company mess was very popular with the battalion officers who just managed to 'drop by'.

We live in pup tents on the side of the hill. We ate melons, and got sick with unwashed grapes. We spent many days in Cefalu, and twice went to Palermo where I visited the catacombs. In Palermo we did not have the nonsense patrols we had in Casablanca. Below us on the beach was a black squadron who flew regular missions into Italy. At one time we were assigned to guard railroad bridges and tunnels. This got us out from under the noses of battalion and we had a relaxing time. We headquartered in a school yard and visited our outposts daily with food and occasionally mail. We made our own trails through the hills and when

location we passed the legendary Stonehenge. We had one overnight exercise the highlight being when I shared my liquor ration with the platoon when we awoke in the morning. One sip, pass the bottle and it soon returned empty. I was issued a carbine which was a personal protection weapon which I preferred to the .45. It held 15 rounds of .30 caliber ammunition and had pretty good accuracy up to about 30 yards. The platoon was issued a bazooka which was rocket type weapon issued for anti-tank work. We were also issued a sniper rifle and a grenade launcher with fastened to the end of an M6 and fired hand grenades.

One day we had a platoon attack problem. I did so badly I thought I would be cashiered on the spot, but almost everyone else also did badly, and they couldn't fire us all, and I got by. At one time I scavenged a lens, a mirror and other odds and ends and made an optical projector which I used for aircraft identification classes. On another occasion my platoon tried to infiltrate the camp defenses, and I wound up being captured. We had pinned our hopes on a secret underground passage into the house, but we never did find it.

One bright spring day the 9th division was reviewed by General Eisenhower and Prime Minister Churchill. We lined both sides of the road, and they very slowly drove down the road in an open touring car. Churchill was alert with his pasty white face, black hat and big cigar, while Eisenhower was mostly asleep. As they passed by Churchill carefully looked us up and down and then returned my salute. After we had returned to barracks I discovered one of my corporals had been drunk during this review. I had to consider how he would be punished. For one thing I didn't even want the company commander to learn of this if I could help it. After I let him sweat awhile I ordered him to my room where I told him he was being transferred out of the company. This was the worst punishment I could think of. After much pleading on his part I put him on probation, and had no more trouble with him. On D-Day I was given an ex-cook who had spent the last few days in the company guard house for being AWOL. He walked with a bad limp and the battalion doctor and I thought he was faking it. One day in combat we had to cross a field under long range machine gun fire and this man limped badly. I concluded that he was not faking, and the battalion doctor took him out of the line.

One of my duties was running the canteen. I had a small building which I opened once a week for the sale of cigarettes, chocolates and whatever else may have been available. All of these items were rationed. Cigarettes were 50 cents per carton and were rationed to one carton per week. I also got involved in other activities. About one-half mile from camp was a small ex-pub which was unused but in good condition. I rented this building one night a week and with the help of a local girl we rented a record player and a stack of 78's. The hall cost 15 shillings and the record player and records one pound. I believe a pound was worth about four dollars in American currency. We invited girls from the surrounding communities to be our guests at a dance. The mess hall provided thick meat sandwiches and fruit juices, items which were on the short list of the English diet. The men brought their cigarettes and chocolates, and the motor pool provided trucks for transportation. The first dance was such a big success we began to hold them every week. Since we could only handle about 80 people we had to ration invitations. Mrs Margaret Baker and her daughter helped in many ways. Mrs Baker ran a farm, where several men from the company spent their weekends helping on farm chores. Margaret's daughter and I still exchange Christmas cards. After the dance most of the men found girls to escort home, and we didn't see some of them until morning.

These little dances at the pub were so successful we tried it out on a company level. This affair was at our headquarters and featured live music. Later on regimental headquarters caught on to the idea and held a regimental dance in a ballroom only slightly smaller than a football field.

Alresford had a movie theater and many pubs. We ran a truck into town almost every night with men who were lucky enough to get passes. We had all been told that the English pub was like a club to the English and could be a little clannish. Beer and liquor was in short supply and we had to be careful to not drink up all available stocks. However as we became acquainted and the men stood for rounds we were accepted. There was little else to do in town unless you knew an English family, or went to the movies. We also had

We moved through the 90th the following day and broke through the German defenses with little trouble. Our orders were to cut the Cotentin peninsula as quickly as possible. By cutting the peninsula we would separate the German forces defending Cherbourg and by isolating them make it possible to capture the port. A secondary reason was to stop the nightly flow of captured paratroopers being sent back into prison camps in France. These paratroopers had been widely scattered on their D-Day drop. They fought in small groups and created confusion for the Germans, but many were killed, wounded or captured.

Near the end of daylight our advance platoons ran into a German bicycle company and engaged in a wild fire fight. This action proved indecisive and both sides settled in for the night. In the morning the Germans were gone.

While we were at this location one of my men found a wounded German officer lying in a gully. Several days before D-Day while driving he had been strafed. He managed to crawl into the gully. Our Air force had harassed the Germans for many days before D-Day. Our battalion MD said his chances for survival were slim. Also at this time we took in a German deserter. The man was Russian or Eastern European and had been impressed into service by the Germans.

Air Power:

During the Normandy campaign we never saw a German plane, nor did we ever see an Allied plane excepting one time when they strafed German positions to our front. Our Air force had virtually cleared the skies of German planes. Had the conditions been reversed I doubt if the invasion would have been possible. German movement was severely hampered and delayed the arrival of reinforcements into Normandy. Later in the Normandy campaign planes were used in a massive bombing attack hoping to soften German resistance so a breakthrough could be accomplished. This proved to be a disaster with many American infantry casualties resulting when the heaving dust and smoke caused the drop line to be moved back into American lines. Our only direct involvement occurred when we received strafing support before an attack. The strafing was so frightening we felt we were going to receive some of the 50 caliber machine gun bullets that were being used. On a whole we preferred our Air power to be used somewhere away from us.

France, continued:

At one point in our advance I was ordered to take my platoon up a hill on our left flank. The hill was bare and provided no cover, so we wasted no time getting to the top. Luckily there was no enemy present, and one machine gun could have stopped our platoon. Just over the crest of the hill was a deep gully where it was evident the Germans had prepared a defensive position. While checking this out we caught two rounds from an 88 to our left rear. We were lucky that the gunner could not get enough depression of his gun and the shots went over our heads. The 88 was an effective all-purpose gun and was much feared. We had several encounters with this weapon, and didn't always come off as well.

While we were involved with this action our first platoon ambushed a German jeep type vehicle with an office and several men. They put up a short fight before giving up. Battalion headquarters commandeered the vehicle. As we continued our advance we came across paratroopers who had ambushed the 88 that had fired on us. The crew was trying to move ahead of us and the troopers had spotted it when it fired on us. The gun was on its side and the crew was spread across the road. The paratroopers had a score to settle and none of the crew survived.

As we continued our advance we had very little opposition. My platoon was in reserve at the rear of the company. We spotted Germans on our left flank, but none to our front or right. I spotted Germans to our left front at a distance of about 600 yards, but they disappeared as quickly as they appeared and we had no chance at them.

During this advance we came to a French family who had dug out a cave under a hedgerow, and were living there until the battle passed them by. We investigated each of these caves as we came to them to make certain there was no enemy within. At this time we also acquired a local resistance fighter as a guide. We were suspicious of these guides as they could have been enemy plants, but for the most part they were very useful.

Another time we ran across a platoon of Germans who repaired vehicles. They were waiting for us and surrendered without a shot when we approached. Later that same day I lost half a squad to a screaming meemie" attack. What we called the "screaming meemie" was the German Nebelwerfer which was a six barreled rocket launcher. Originally designed to throw smoke grenades it had been adapted to throw fragmentation grenades. They were about the size of a bowling pin and about the same shape. As they tumbled through the air they made a screaming noise that was very unnerving. When they exploded they threw very large pieces of shrapnel. They had a short range so we knew that the weapon was nearby. After firing the crew would at once move the weapon so it was very difficult to pinpoint their location.

Later in our advance we were halted waiting a decision as to how to take a hill to our front. Frontal assault seemed suicidal, but there seemed to be little chance for bypass or envelopment. While waiting I spotted a group of four Germans 500 yards to my left front. I directed mortar and machine gun fire at their position and was rewarded with a white flag. This sign of surrender meant nothing however since there was no way to bring them into our lines. At the same time to our left rear a platoon of Germans came marching and singing up the road. Obviously they were unaware of us. I don't recall what happened at that point as I was busy at my own front. While at this location several Germans got to a position on the other side of the hedgerow from our executive officer. When he became aware of the situation he calmly tossed a hand grenade into their position thereby ending the threat.

It was decided we would do a frontal assault on the hill under a creeping barrage. With a creeping barrage, the artillery laid down a barrage on the hill and steadily increased their range. Meanwhile the Infantry advanced as close as possible just behind the barrage. The idea was to be in place as the Germans stuck their heads up as the barrage passed them by. It was a textbook attack, the kind you see in the movies. There were no Germans on the hill. We moved on until dark. (Dark came at about 10 PM). As we outposted our position two Germans were ambushed as they laid wire to our front. German troops were across the road to our front. It seems that throughout this time we moved so quickly the enemy was not aware of our advance. The next morning, instead of trying an assault on the group across the road it was decided to bypass them to the left and we moved to complete this maneuver by moving to our left and then turning towards Cherbourg. We ran into a trap and twenty of us were caught in an open field under fire from a depressed anti-aircraft gun. As we started to take casualties I realized our position was hopeless and I ordered everyone to move back to safety. One tough guy from Brooklyn told me to go to hell and continued to engage the crew of the anti-aircraft gun with his B.A.R. His covering action permitted us to escape without further damage. We discovered later he had been wounded and was unable to move. The wound was fatal. Our casualties were gathered in a concrete bunker to our rear.

After pushing through the 60th Infantry near Vasteville we attacked northeast on Hill 171 (Mont due Roc) supported by fire from the 39th infantry, our mission being the capture of the high ground east of strategic Henneville. During the afternoon of the 20th we were stopped by a heavy concentration of enemy to our front and left flank. Our battalion commander called all officers for a meeting to issue orders as to how we were to proceed. As I moved forward for this meeting we received heavy 88 fire from our left rear. As we hit the ground, shells hit within ten feet of where I lay. After the barrage stopped I got up and started forward again only to be met with another barrage. At this point I decided I might as well die doing something as to remaining where I was to meet a sure death. My runner and I got up and made our way to a safe position in a nearby hedgerow. As we walked out we passed an artillery observer lying on the ground and calling for fire across the front. He was mortally wounded and died soon thereafter, and unsung hero of which there were many. This barrage took the life of our battalion commander, wounded or incapacitated three of our

remained, but their prognosis didn't sound too great so I passed on this. While in the hospital Sgt. George King of F company found me, and we spent many hours playing chess on my pocket chess set. This was the beginning of a friendship that has lasted to this day.

After returning to the States aboard a hospital ship, I spent until May 1st 1945 in various hospitals. On May 5th my sweetheart of eight years and I were married. Since I was still in service this gave her a little taste of Army life. From the hospital I was sent to the Grove Park Inn at Ashford North Carolina. This was in ideal place to spend a honeymoon, and many returning officers took advantage of it. My orders on discharge from the hospital stated that I could not be required to do any duty requiring prolonged standing or walking, and then be readmitted to the hospital for review after six months. My first assignment was to a camp at Gainsville Texas where I spent six weeks as a company executive officer in a camp that was being eliminated. While there we lived in an old garage converted into living quarters. The mess at camp being atrocious we mostly ate in town. With the end of the war in Europe this camp was phased out and my next assignment was to the same job at another camp at Kileen Texas. Here we lived in one room of an old house. This room had two holes in the floor, one for the mice to get in and one for them to get out. Our landlady's first job in the morning was to spray the kitchen for roaches. While there we saw her make soap in a large kettle over a fire in the back yard. Our routine here was for Olive to come out to camp at night where we had supper in the company mess or at the officer's club, then on to a different 15 cent movie each night. We tried the movie in town one night, but it was so filthy we couldn't take it. While serving here the Atom bomb was dropped, and I could foresee the end of the war. Being anxious to get out and get a job before the influx of returning servicemen, I applied for readmission to the hospital for reevaluation. The hospital was at Bastrop, Texas and there we lived in a motel room, and ate in town, until one day we took a trip to Austin where we found a hot plate. We purchased this and rushed "home". From that time on we had full home cooked meals in our room every evening. Each morning I reported to the hospital and after rounds went back to our room in the motel. Mrs. Smith, our landlord gave us permission to store food in her refrigerator. She cried when we finally left. We spent some of our time making stuffed Mickey and Minnie mouse dolls. After due time a board was convened to determine my status. While waiting for the boards decision, we received ten days leave and drove through some of Texas. We saw San Antonio, Corpus Christie, and Laredo. Since the war had ended, I was discharged with the rank of Captain, and I returned to civilian life. Our trip home was memorable for the many flat tires we had along the way. When we finally reached home my hands were bleeding from using the hand throttle (the foot throttle not working). We also had to endure a large thump as the drive shaft slammed from one gear to another. Along with the usual "being there" ribbons I received the Purple Heart, Bronze Star, Combat Infantry Badge, and the Presidential Unit Citation. My injury was rated as 10% disability.

Presidential Unit Commendation:

The 2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry, is cited for extraordinary gallantry and outstanding performance of duty from 21 June to 26 June, 1944, during which time it assaulted and captured four heavily fortified enemy-held positions and penetrated the heart of Cherbourg, having advanced more than 10 kilometers from Crouville. Advancing toward Coudet on 21 June, the battalion came under heavy and murderous barrages of artillery, mortar and flat-trajectory fire which injured or killed the battalion commander, a company commander, and other key leaders. Reorganizing and rallying on the following day, they pushed forward in the face of heavy fire and overran the strongpoint, capturing 120 prisoners, 25 machine guns and 5 antiaircraft guns. Continuing their drive forward on 23 June they assaulted one of the strongest of the fortified German positions in the defensive belt around Cherbourg. The enemy was entrenched strongly in concrete pill boxes and deeply rivetted trenches on commanding ground. Three assaults were necessary to reach this vital objective, it finally being taken by violent hand-to-hand fighting within the German positions. Then, outflanking the enemy at Equeurdieville(sic) the position was assaulted and the enemy routed with rifle fire and bayonets. After enemy Nebelwerfers had been silenced, patrols infiltrated within the Cherbourg arsenal, fought off savage resistance, and held out until reinforcements were able to reach them. Shortly after daylight, the arsenal garrison surrendered. Within 5 days the *2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry* crossed more than 10 kilometers of heavily fortified and difficult terrain and engaged the enemy with a magnificent display of courage and devotion to duty.

in a ramshackle cart. Lois and I approached her and asked if this was her home. When she said yes we asked if she had been there during the war, and again she answered yes. I then asked her if there was a small circular water hole in the rear of the house. At this question she suddenly realized this was no ordinary tourist, and leaving her cart and taking the hand of what we learned was her grandson, she said "come, come" and started toward the house 150 feet down the lane. As we approached a young man came around the house toward us (her son), and behind him an older man (her husband). I pantomimed a man with a rifle and said "During the war I captured you". He threw up his arms in a gesture of surrender, and then pantomimed a man shaving!

After a visit of an hour or so we told them we would return the following day. The following day we visited Utah beach where we had come ashore and drove through some of the towns we had liberated. When we came to the farmhouse we were met by the farmer and his wife and their children and grandchildren. For several years I sent the grandson some of the wooden toys that I made, and they in return sent me a gift of a book about Normandy. When the father died, we received notice of his death.