

# Pfc. "Bob" Robert J. Warrner

## U.S. 3rd Army & 9th Army 108 Evacuation Hospital



### Pfc. Bob Warrner U.S. 3rd Army & 9th Army 108 Evacuation Hospital

Entered Service: Age 19  
Active Duty July 23, 1943 to Feb. 10, 1946  
2 years, 7 months

Awarded: 3 Combat Bars  
Europe-Africa-Middle East  
Combat Medal  
Good Conduct Medal  
WW2 Victory Medal

Interred: Born Sept. 16, 1923, LaSalle,  
Died: Illinois to Feb. 21, 2012  
[Elm Ridge Cemetery](#)  
Muncie, Indiana

FORM APPROVED  
Budget Bureau No. 33-7013-42

REGISTRATION CARD (Men born on or after July 1, 1924, and on or before December 31, 1924)  
(Also for the registration of men as they reach the 18th anniversary of the date of their birth on or after January 1, 1943.)

SERIAL NUMBER 1. NAME (Print) ORDER NUMBER  
W 40 Robert John Warrner 11996

2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) (Town) (County) (State)  
R.R. #1 Tonica LaSalle Illinois

THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON LINE 2 ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL

3. MAILING ADDRESS  
Same

4. TELEPHONE none 5. AGE IN YEARS 18 6. PLACE OF BIRTH  
DATE OF BIRTH September 16, 1924 LaSalle Illinois

7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS  
Mr. J. W. Warrner - R.R. #1 Tonica Illinois

8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS  
Student

9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS  
none

I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.

DSS Form 1 (Rev. 11-15-42) c18-21630-4 (OVER) *Robert John Warrner* (Registrant's signature)

REGISTRAR'S REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF REGISTRANT

RACE	HEIGHT (Approx.)	WEIGHT (Approx.)	COMPLEXION
White	5'10"	140 lbs	Sallow
	EYES	HAIR	Light
Negro	Blue	Blonde	Ruddy
Indian	Gray	Red	Dark
	Hazel	Brown	Freckled
Filipino	Brown	Black	Light brown
Japanese	Black	Gray	Dark brown
Other		Black	Black

Other obvious physical characteristics that will aid in identification  
none

I certify that my answers are true; that the person registered has read or has had read to him his own answers; that I have witnessed his signature or mark; and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:

Registrar for Local Board #2 *Doris Coddington*  
LaSalle Ill.  
Date of registration December 18, 1942

LA SALLE CO. BOARD No. 3 61  
Room 502, Central Life Bldg. 099  
OTTAWA, LA SALLE COUNTY. 003  
ILLINOIS

(The stamp of the Local Board having jurisdiction of the registrant shall be placed in the above space)

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE 16-21630-1

# BOB WARRNER GOES OFF TO WAR



# Introduction

On December 7, 1942, our father, Robert “Bob” Warner, was halfway through his senior year at Tonica High School in LaSalle County, Illinois. He had never been outside of Illinois. He knew so little of the world that he went to one of his teachers on that Sunday afternoon to see if they had a map showing where Pearl Harbor was located.

Two and a half years later, when he was discharged from the U.S. Army Medical Corp, he had traveled to six different countries and crossed the Atlantic Ocean twice. He had helped to treat over one thousand wounded men, most of them our soldiers, but some were Allied soldiers liberated from German P.O.W. camps, or allied civilians caught in the crossfire between the rival armies, or even a few German POWs.

Dad rarely spoke of his experiences until many years had passed. When he did it was mostly about the friends that he made and that he had served his country and protected his family from something very bad.

This report is the story of our Dad, Robert “Bob” Warner, a farm boy from central Illinois, and his service during World War II. We hope that it will help you know a bit more about "the greatest generation."

# Bob Warrner Goes Off to War

*All I hope is that in another twenty years that another Warrner doesn't have to have a birthday over here. I hope that we can get things settled here for once and for all.*

~ Bob Warrner, 1944

In many ways Dad was the typical member of Tom Brokaw's "Greatest Generation." He grew up during the Great Depression, and then went overseas to fight for his country in the greatest war in history. This chapter is primarily a description of Dad's military service. However, it will also include information on how I came to have my name, where some of Dad's ideas about food came from, how we almost became the children of a Tennessee undertaker, and how it shaped many of Dad's attitudes and values for a lifetime.

## War Comes to Central Illinois

I will start this section describing Dad's war service with the diary entries from his mother, Ida Warmer, for the weekend of December 7, 1941. That weekend, Japan launched an unprovoked attack against the United States at Pearl Harbor, resulting in our country officially joining World War II.

December 6:

*A nice day. Joe and Bob went to Tonica and brought Rich home with them. We all went out to a turkey dinner at Wendell's for their anniversary. Mary tried out her new stove.*

December 7:



*Sunday. Remember Pearl Harbor! The Japs started bombing us so war is started. Wendell's, Babe's, and Lou's were here tonight. A cold wind was blowing all day.*

December 8:

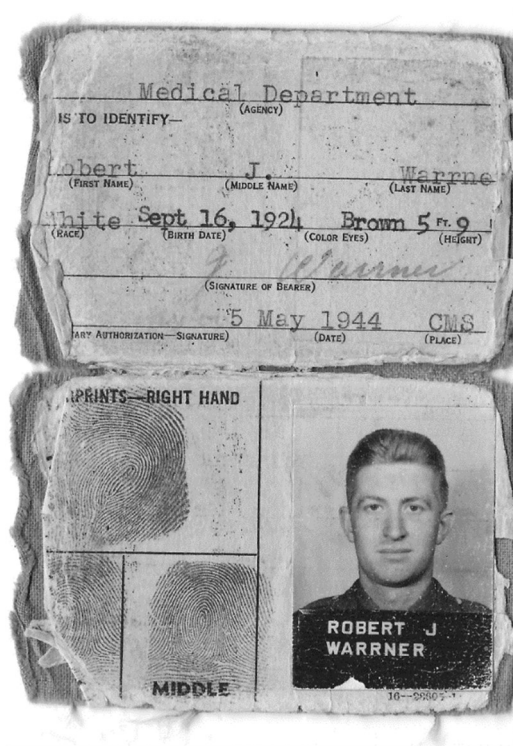
*War was declared today. Bob and I worked storing some dried food inside. We listened to Roosevelt's speech. War is declared! The Japs are all around the California coast.*

December 9:

*I went to Tonica with Bob to watch his basketball game against Grand Ridge. Tonica got beat badly. President Roosevelt talked tonight. He said it would be a long, hard war ahead.*

## Dad Joins the Army

During World War II, the draft (Selective Service) was administered by local county governments. In Illinois, representatives from each of the county townships served on the local county draft board. This ensured that the pain of the draft would be felt equally across the entire county and that the young men were selected by people that knew them and their family circumstances best.



**Dad's Army Identification Card**

Dad's brother, Lou, was within one year of being too old for the draft. However, the LaSalle County draft board knew that Lou did not have any children and that he and his wife, while not wealthy, had enough money so that living on a military paycheck would not be a hardship for them. Therefore, in the spring of 1943, Lou's name was included with those scheduled to be called up for military service the coming summer.

Dad had just graduated from high school the previous spring and was currently a student at the junior college located in Peru. When Dad found out that his older brother, Lou, had been drafted, he drove over to the LaSalle County seat to meet with the draft board. Once there he requested that

his name be added to the same draft call which included Lou. It was very unusual for the same draft call to include two members of the same

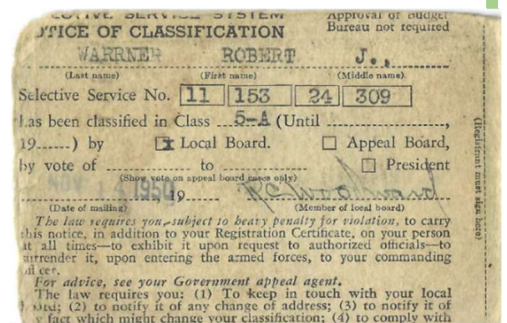
family, but Dad was very insistent. He did not believe it was fair for him to remain home while his older brother went off to serve in the war. The draft board told Dad that, to make it official, he would have to send a written request to be reclassified.

Ida Warner's diary recorded that day as follows:

May 15, 1943

*Bob wrote to the draft board today to ask them to change him to 1A.*

Dad did not volunteer for the service because volunteers did not count towards fulfilling the draft quota for each county. If he had volunteered, then the number of men called up in LaSalle County would have been the very same. But by being drafted, one less man from LaSalle County would be called up to the military that month. It would be interesting to know the name that was removed from the draft list and if he eventually did serve in the military.



**Dad's Draft Card**

Based on Ida's diary, Dad got a call notifying him of his army service on May 21, 1943. He went to the county seat in Ottawa on May 25 for a blood test. Having passed this initial screen, Dad was formally called up to the army on June 21, 1943, and he passed his physical exams on July 1. The Tonica News published the below article on July 6:

#### **FOUR INDUCTED THURSDAY**

*Four from this community were inducted and sworn into the service last Thursday in Chicago after they had passed their physical exams. They were Lou and Robert Warrner, Mason Hiltabrand and Joseph Livek. The first three have taken their furloughs and will leave for camp in two more weeks. The last was placed in the Sea Bees and he left this Thursday for Chicago for service.*

*The Warrner brothers are sons of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph W. Warrner of Lowell; Lou is the oldest and Robert the youngest in the family. Lou has been a resident of Tonica for many years, is a member of the village board, water superintendent and fire marshal at the present time. He has been captain of the fire department at the Green River Ordinance<sup>1</sup> plant for some time. His wife is the former Charlotte Phelps. Robert Warrner is a graduate of our local high school in 1942 and has attended the Junior college in La Salle the past year.*

*Mason Hiltabrand is a son of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Hiltabrand of southwest of town. He graduated from Tonica Community High School with the class of 1927. "Chum" has been in business in this visage for several years. His wife is the former Elma Rose.*

Thus, Dad and Uncle Lou reported at 5:30 a.m. on the very same day for duty -- July 22, 1943. Uncle Babe drove them over to the Rock Island Railroad Station in Ottawa. There they boarded the train together, along with four other local inductees, for the train ride to the induction center near Chicago.

Here is the entry in Ida Warmer's diary for that day:

*We all went to the train to see Bob and Lou off to the Army. They went to Camp Grant. Left Ottawa train station at 11 am. Mary had dinner ready when we came home.*

One can only imagine how it felt for Ida to see two of her sons join the war effort at the same time. She had no idea what units they would join, where in the world they

---

<sup>1</sup> The Green River Ordinance plant was located near Amboy, Illinois, about a 45-minute drive from Tonica. The plant, at its peak, had over 4,600 workers. It produced artillery and bazooka shells. Lou's role in the fire department was a very important one, as fires in munition plants could easily become disastrous. Some people in Tonica believed that his role should have qualified Lou for an occupation deferment from the draft.

would travel, or even if she would see either again. Ida did not record her personal feelings in her diary. However, posted to the inside cover was a poem that may reflect her feelings:

**A Mother's Request**

I'll be careful with cocoa,  
The coffee and the tea,  
And when it comes to gas and tires  
Uncle Sam can count on me:  
I'll save my paper and my scraps  
For bullets to those pesky Japs  
While as for rationed sugar cards  
I'll only think them fun  
If Uncle Sam some future day  
Just sends me back my son.

Ida did note on August 22, 1943 that it had been "*1 month ago today Lou and Bob left for Camp Grant. The longest time we have ever been apart.*"



**Dad with his Parents - Joseph and Ida Warner**



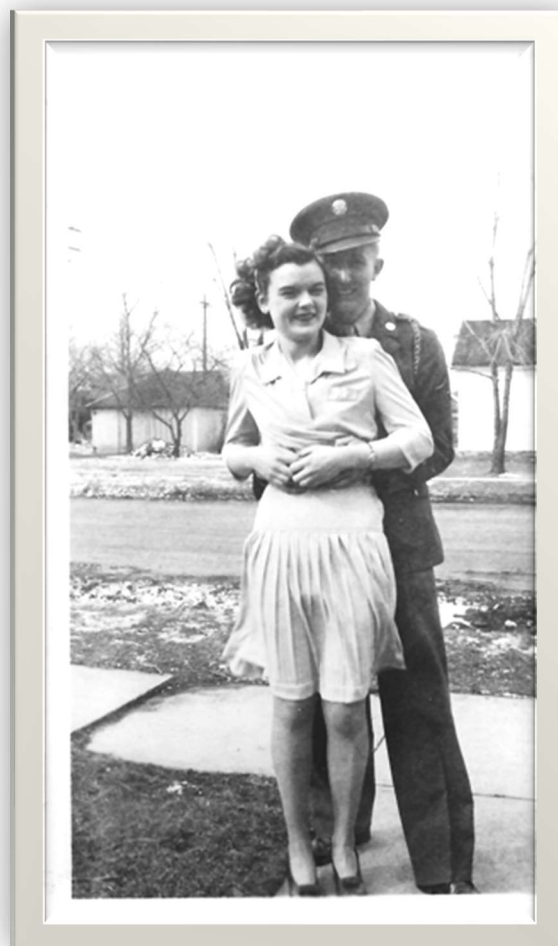
**Dad During a Visit Home to Lowell**

## **To Marry or Not to Marry?**

The question has sometimes been asked, "Why didn't Mom and Dad get married before he left for the war?"

It is true that they had been very seriously talking about the timing of their marriage ever since their graduation from high school. The U.S. was in its first year of World War II and at that time it looked to be a very long and bloody war ahead for our nation. Dad was in the prime pool of potential future inductees to the military. He would probably be leaving for the war soon. Marriage seemed very close indeed.

At this point my mother's father, Harvey Salisbury, weighed in. He was not opposed to my father as a future son-in-law, but resisted their marriage at this time. Grandpa Salisbury's great fear was that his daughter, my mother, would get married, get pregnant and then become a war widow with a small baby to rear. He feared that having a baby would make it very difficult for his daughter to find a new husband after the war (especially in the limited pool of possibilities in Tonica). He also feared, knowing his daughter, that the baby of her deceased husband would



**Mom and Dad During His Last Visit to Tonica Before Traveling Overseas**

become the center of her life and make it difficult for her to move on after the war ended. After much discussion, both my future parents agreed to delay their marriage until after the war was over. It was a decision that both would later regret. Of course, they had the advantage of hindsight later to know that Dad would not die in the war and that he would return to Tonica.

It would be interesting to theorize what might have happened if they had been married in the spring or summer of 1943. The most likely side effect would be my probable birth in early 1944 instead of late 1947, making me three years older and no longer a member of the famous post war "baby boom." I also would have had a different name, for my father had not yet met the soldier I am named for. Also, that early marriage would have moved the timing of the birth of their second child, my future sister, to 1947, putting her on the front wave of the "baby boom".

During the war, my mother went to work for the Tonica Hardware Store. There she learned a great deal about the hardware business (how to thread pipe, etc.) and how to keep the store's financial records. In this job she also saved some money to serve as a "nest egg" for when Dad returned from the war and they would get married and start their family. However, some of our mother's high school classmates left Tonica for jobs in war industry plants in the Chicago area. These women earned considerably more money than our mother did at the local hardware store. Once again, however, the influence of Grandpa Salisbury played the major role in keeping her in Tonica, near to her family.<sup>2</sup>

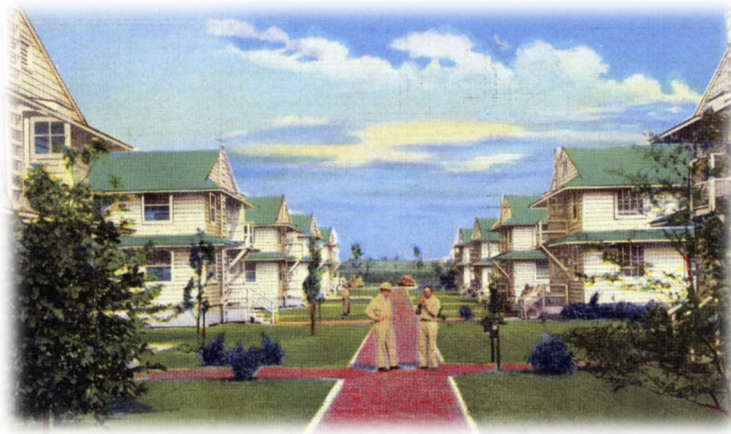
Dad was inducted into the army in July of 1943. With the exception of two brief visits, he would not return to Tonica for almost three years.

---

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see *"Team Warner – The Life of Elizabeth Anne Salisbury Warner"*

## Dad at the Induction Center

When Uncle Lou and Dad arrived in Chicago, they were driven to the military induction center by one of the military buses that shuttled the new inductees back and forth across the city. The induction center in Camp Grant in nearby Rockford, Illinois, was a huge building that operated from early morning to late evening, processing thousands of young men each day<sup>3</sup>.



**Barracks and Recruit Reception Center at Camp Grant**

The induction center had three main tasks to complete for all new inductees during their first day. First, all the young men were given a series of physical, vision, hearing, and mental tests to determine if they were suitable for the military. A considerable number of young men failed on one or more of these criteria, were rejected for service, and sent back home.<sup>4</sup>

Next, the new inductees were assigned to one of the three major branches of the armed forces (army, navy, or air corps) based upon the requisitions for manpower each branch had placed with the induction center for that day or week. This assignment was pretty much a random one. Finally, the inductees were assigned to their first base camp. They would also be assigned temporary housing at military facilities in Chicago while they waited for their transportation to be arranged (usually by public train) to their new base and the start of their military training.

When Uncle Lou and Dad arrived at the center, they joined a long line of men entering the building. Lou was determined to watch out for our Dad as long as possible. After all, Lou was almost twice our father's age and had considerably more experience in the "real world." Dad was eighteen (almost nineteen) and was only a year out of high school.

Lou was looking ahead down the line and saw that it was dividing into two equal lines. He turned to the man behind him and asked if they could trade places so he could stay with his brother. The stranger agreed and although the line divided, the two brothers remained together.

For the next few hours, they took a series of medical exams and continued moving through the building. It is interesting to note that the official army record says that Dad was 5'9" tall, weighed 134 pounds, and had brown eyes and blonde hair (although everyone else said he had red hair). Then, later that afternoon, once again Lou spotted the line dividing ahead and traded spots with the man behind him. And,

<sup>3</sup> It is estimated that 300,000 soldiers were processed through Camp Grant during World War II.

<sup>4</sup> The army test Ida referred to was not an academic test but a vocation aptitude test. Its purpose was to help assign new recruits to jobs in the military best suited for their skills and interests. After the war, army statistics showed that 49% of all recruits failed either their initial physical or mental tests.

once again, it worked and the brothers remained together. Lou was convinced, both then and later, that this division of the line separated the future army soldiers from future navy sailors. If that was true, you can imagine the troubles our father avoided by being in the "right" line and thus avoiding spending his next three years at sea.

In the early afternoon, Lou saw yet another division in the line nearing the brothers. But this time he was unable to determine the pattern for the division. It appeared that sometimes several men continued together and other times men were split off from the rest. So Lou took a chance and once again traded places with the man behind him. As it turns out, it would not have mattered what Lou had done at that point, it was inevitable that the brothers would have been separated. This division was between those who had graduated from high school and those who did not have a high school diploma. Uncle Lou had dropped out of high school to get married and go to work in the Lowell brickyard. Lacking a high school diploma, Lou was sent into a different line from Dad. It must have been a very difficult moment for both of them, not knowing when, if ever, they would see each other again.

Later that afternoon the military discovered that Lou had great skills in masonry and construction. He was assigned to a camp that trained engineers for the U.S. Army. He would eventually be assigned to the 1302<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of the U.S. Army Engineers and spend the war building reinforced bridges in southern England and later northern France. He would meet our father again, briefly, when they were both assigned to different bases in southern England in early 1944.

Meanwhile Dad continued his journey through the Camp Grant induction center without Lou. He was assigned to the army (good news for him) and given orders for his transfer to his first base and basic training. It would not be until he arrived there that they would determine what his specific duty would be in the army.

## Dad's First Army Meal

While Dad was at Camp Grant, he did not eat real army food. There was no mess hall at that station. Instead, he was given meal tickets that could be turned in at local diners and cafeterias in return for pre-approved army meals. Thus it was not until Dad arrived at his basic training camp that he encountered his first true army food.



When Dad first entered the army mess hall it was an overwhelming experience. Nothing in his life had prepared him for the noise, the size, and the chaos of the mess hall. Following the other new recruits, he picked up a three- partition metal food tray very similar to the plastic ones in use in many school cafeterias today. He then joined the others in the food line and followed the actions of the men in front of him.

At the first station in the line a slice of roast beef was placed in the largest compartment of his tray. At the next

stop he received a large scoop of mashed potatoes, followed by his choice of either butter or gravy.

The third compartment was filled by green beans. Then he was given a slice of white bread and his choice of drinks (water, milk or coffee). Dad chose milk; he was not yet the coffee drinker the army would later make him.

**Dad in His New Uniform**  
(note the traditional short army haircut)

He then took a seat and ate his meal. As he ate, he watched some soldiers turn in their empty trays and rejoin the food line, getting more food. When Dad turned in his empty tray, he asked the soldier stacking them why no one was stopping these men from cheating, from getting more food. The soldier laughed, and told Dad he was now in the U.S. Army. That meant he could take all he wanted, as long as he ate all he took (does this sound familiar to anyone else who grew up or visited at 217 South Cole?).

So Dad, more than a little dubious, went through the line a second time and got more of everything. This was quite a change from growing up in Lowell during the Great Depression. There Grandma Warmer placed the food on each individual's plate. There would be nothing left over in the center of the table for a second helping for anyone. When your plate was empty you were done eating

and ready to wash the dishes!

Amazed by this turn of events, Dad even went back through the line a third time. But on this trip he really tested the system, for he took only the roast beef, no vegetables or bread. He was amazed that no one questioned his actions and enjoyed the extra slice of meat.

That evening in the barracks his sergeant required all of the new arrivals to write a letter to their next of kin before they went to bed. They were to tell them that they had arrived safely and all was well with them. Dad wrote his letter to his mother, my Grandma Ida Warmer. He gave it to his sergeant for mailing and went to bed.

My grandmother kept that letter for over forty years. She read it to me several times as I was growing up (the last time I saw it was in the mid 1960's). It never failed to bring a tear to her eye when she read it to me. She said it showed how much her son loved her. In that letter Dad describes his first army meal, telling how he ate three pieces of roast beef. She would always smile at that line, commenting that she knew it wasn't true, that no one ever actually got three pieces of meat in one day, let alone in one meal. But, she said, that line was Dad's way of easing her fears about his welfare. She knew that he loved her and missed her so much that he was actually lying to make her feel better!

## Lessons Learned

After Dad arrived at his army basic training camp, he promptly forgot the single most important army rule regarding the mess hall. But he was quickly reminded of that rule. During one of his first meals, he was given a hot dog that had one end that was "burned and shriveled up." Dad ate about half of the hot dog, but he tossed the other half in the trash barrel adjacent to the pile of dirty trays. The soldier on duty called out Dad's name (it was printed on his shirt) and assigned him to kitchen patrol (K.P.) duty. Dad asked what he had done and the soldier told him he had wasted part of his food (the end of the hot dog). Remember, the first rule of the mess hall was you could take all the food you want, but you have to eat all that you take. Dad said if he had only remembered that rule, he would have placed the remains of the hot dog in his pocket, thus avoiding K.P., and thrown it away on the walk back to his barracks.

The next morning Dad reported for K.P. duty. He was assigned to clean the fresh spinach for that day's dinner. He started to clean it just as his mother, Ida Warner, had taught him back home in Lowell. He put it in the salt water, rinsed it thoroughly and then checked each leaf for possible spinach worms (and other bugs). After a while he had a small pile of spinach leaves done and ready to be cooked.

The "cook" came by and asked him "what the \_\_\_\_\_ was he doing?" Dad responded that he was cleaning the spinach so it could be cooked. The cook replied, "Cleaning? That's not how you clean spinach!" Then he grabbed a huge clump of spinach in each hand, quickly swished each in the water, and then placed it in the pots for cooking. In a matter of a couple of seconds, he had "cleaned" many times the amount of spinach that Dad had finished in almost an hour of work.

After that experience, Dad usually skipped anything green and or leafy in the army mess hall lines. In fact, after that time, even in civilian life, he often tended to skip anything that fell into the green and leafy category. His usual preference was meat, potatoes, and bread for most of his meals.

As mentioned in a previous chapter of this story, those of us that grew up or visited at 217 South Cole Street recognized Dad's firm belief that you should always "eat all that you take." It all came from that army rule and the resulting K.P. duty for those that failed to follow it.

## Basic Training and Special Skills

### Fort Devens, Massachusetts

After leaving Camp Grant, Dad was transferred to Fort Devens in Massachusetts. He described his trip and first impressions of his new posting in a letter written to the Tonica News:

#### **“BOB” IS IN THE MEDICAL CORPS**

*Dear Mr. Richardson: I am now stationed at Fort Devens, Mass., following a train ride of two days and a night through Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and a part of this state.*

*I am in the medical corps and training for work in an evacuation hospital. Our hospitals will be mounted on trucks about 1,000 yards from the front lines and we are able to leave on three hours notice.*

*This camp is located in the mountains, with Boston the nearest large town, thirty-five miles away. I am told that this camp was one of the finest and largest of the camps in World War 1. I do not know how many soldiers are stationed here, but when I say that there are 10,000 WACs<sup>5</sup> here you can visualize the size of the camp.*

*Pvt. Bob Warrner*

Although the U.S. Army did not officially tell them, it was obvious to Dad and his fellow trainees that they were not going to be assigned to a combat unit. Instead of rifles, they drilled with mop handles. Instead of grenades, they tossed empty tin cans. At this point in the war, the summer of 1943, the U.S. military suffered from shortages of many items. The real equipment was reserved for those in combat or those who would soon be in combat. Since they weren't drilling with real weapons, they knew they were going to be assigned to non-combat units at the end of their training.

Dad relayed details from his posting at Fort Devens in a series of postcards he sent to his parents:

---

<sup>5</sup> Women's Army Corps (WAC) – During World War II, WACs served numerous roles including switchboard operators, mechanics, drivers, clear-typists, bakers, and armorers.

August 13, 1943

Dear folks,

*Got your card tonight, but have nothing to say so will only send a card. I got another "shot" today, it made me a little dizzy, and my arm's stiff, but feel OK. If I'm alright tomorrow, I'm going to Boston. The undertaker<sup>6</sup> and I. Cool here all this week. None of that hot weather you have. Everything is swell, so don't worry about me.*

Bob

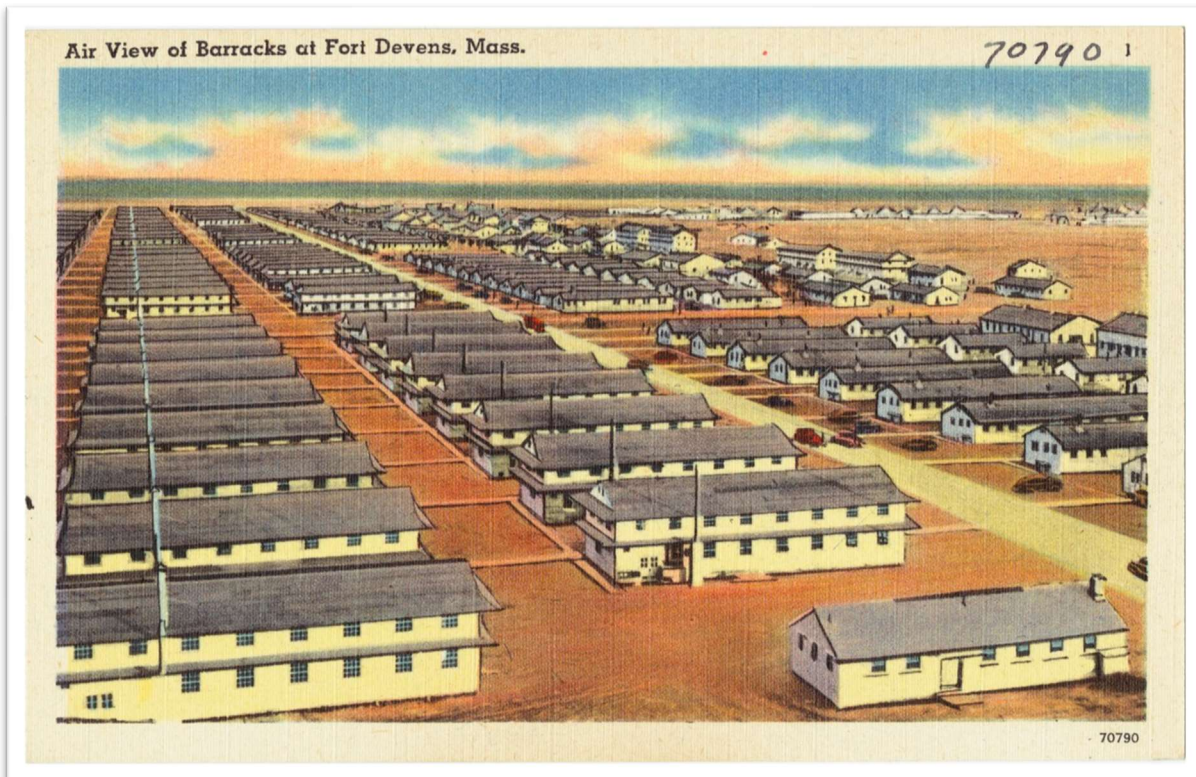
August 20, 1943

Dear folks,

*Nothing to write about tonight. Took a five mile hike today, was fine. We rested for 15 min and a truck came along selling ice cream bars. We all got a couple. Have my laundry ready to go out in the morning, well will close for now. Going to write Lefty.*

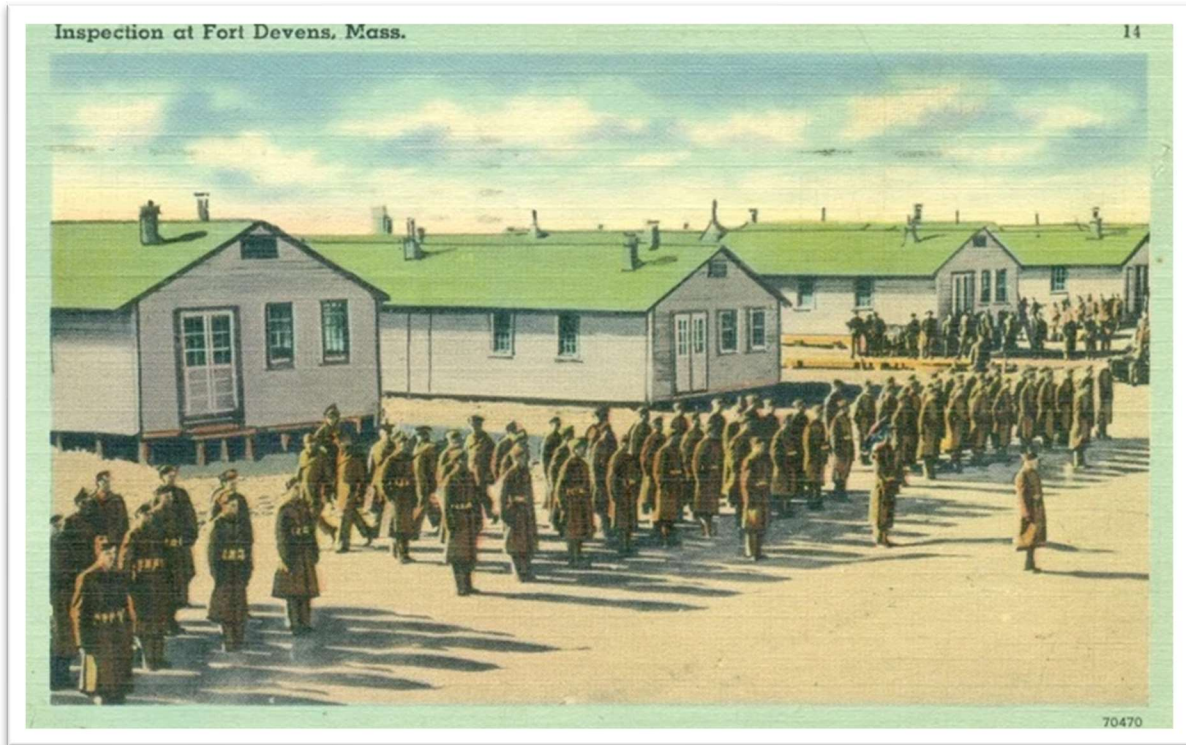
Bob

After five weeks at Fort Devens, Dad's suspicions were confirmed at the end of basic training. Dad was advanced to the rank of private first class<sup>7</sup> and assigned to Fort Bliss (in Texas) to start training as a pharmacist's assistant.



<sup>6</sup> "The Undertaker" was fellow soldier Tom Ziegler. Tom's prewar occupation was working in his family's mortuary in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. After the war, Dad considered joining Tom in his family business. It is possible that my brother Tom was named to honor "The Undertaker".

<sup>7</sup> The promotion to private first class gave Dad a bump in his pay to \$50 per month.



**Soldiers Under Inspection at Fort Devens**

While in route to his next posting, Dad was able to have a brief family visit in Chicago. Ida's diary notes that her reunion with Dad was limited to one hour. An article in the Tonica News (September 9, 1943) provided some additional details:

*Pvt. f.c. Robert Warrner called his folks by phone from Chicago Wednesday afternoon to let them know that he was on his way to El Paso, Texas, where he will attend a pharmaceutical school. Bob told them he had a few hours wait in the city and his mother and brothers Grey and Wendell drove to Chicago and got an hour's visit with him<sup>8</sup>. Bob attained the title of Private First Class in just five weeks from his induction.*

#### Fort Bliss, Texas

In early September 1943, Dad arrived at Fort Bliss, which was located on the U.S./Mexican border near El Paso, Texas. At that time, this post was primarily an anti-aircraft training post<sup>9</sup>. While at Fort Bliss, Dad settled into a routine. He described his daily routine in one of his early postcards to his parents in Lowell:

September 15, 1943

*No time to write a letter. Classes from 8 to 4. Drill from 4 to 5. Classes again from 6 to 8. Never was so busy in my life.*

<sup>8</sup>The drive time from Lowell to the downtown Union Train Station in Chicago was slightly more than two hours. Remember that gasoline was limited to three gallons per week by rationing stamps.

<sup>9</sup>After the war, the U.S. Army tested captured German V2 rockets at Fort Bliss. Dad would experience this German weapon on several occasions during his service overseas.

Dad describes in the following postcard, written on his birthday, to his parents:

*Just got back from classes. 8:35. Got a letter from Grey tonight, the first I'd heard from anyone. I had cake for my birthday at the mess hall for dinner. I had three pieces. It was good. Don't have anything to write about. Same thing here, lectures, notes, study. My head's in a whirl. Guess I know as much as some of the fellows do. Hiked 4 miles today.*

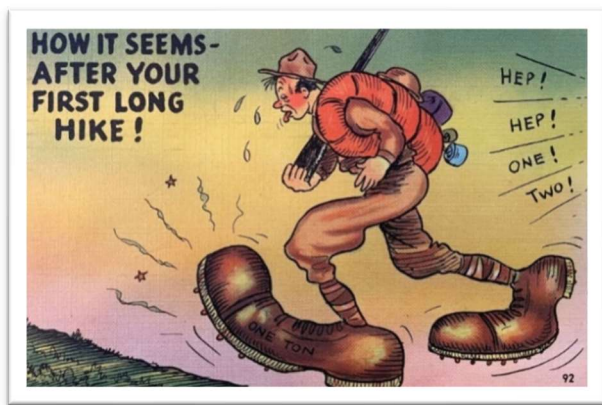
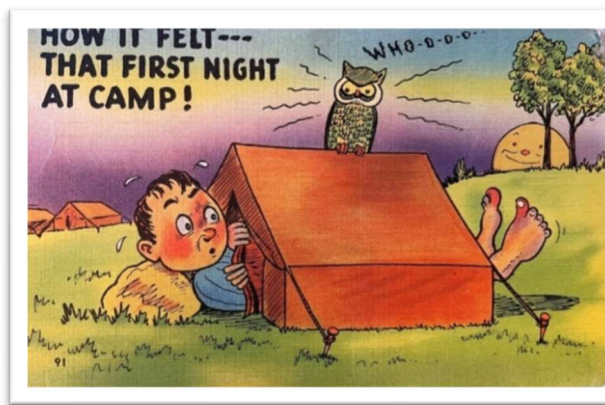
Later postcards reinforced what his training was like at Fort Bliss:

September 20, 1943

*Its almost 9 tonight. Classes lasted till 8:20. Have a big test coming up tomorrow. I got your letter and the book both tonight. The book was in good shape. I think it will be a help to me. We really don't have to work so hard, its just that they keep us busy all of the time. I really think the food is improving. Its not bad at all. If must be pretty cool there just like here. Took a five mile hike this PM.*

October 5, 1943

*Have a big test tomorrow so won't write tonight. Toward the last of the week I will have a little more time to write. Everything is OK here, and is the same as ever. Hope everyone there is OK. Nice weather here all of the time.*



**Dad's Postcards Illustrating Basic Training Life at Fort Bliss**

During basic training, and later during his service overseas, the editor of Tonica News would mail Dad a copy of the local newspaper. Dad periodically would reply with an update, which would then be published in the newspaper. In his letter to the editor on September 9, 1943, Dad describes life at Fort Bliss and his impressions on nearby El Paso.

### **Bob Writes of His Work and New Surroundings**

*Dear Mr. Richardson: The News came thru. Today I received the first copies to find me since I arrived in Texas, and to say that they were welcome is putting it mildly. Thanks again for sending it to me.*

*Our school is now in full sway, with classes from eight in the morning till the same hour at night. Materia medica, metrology, anatomy, physics and chemistry are now the most popular subjects with more to be added as we progress. They really “throw the book” at us here.*



**Dad's Postcard Illustrating Mud Adobe Huts near El Paso**

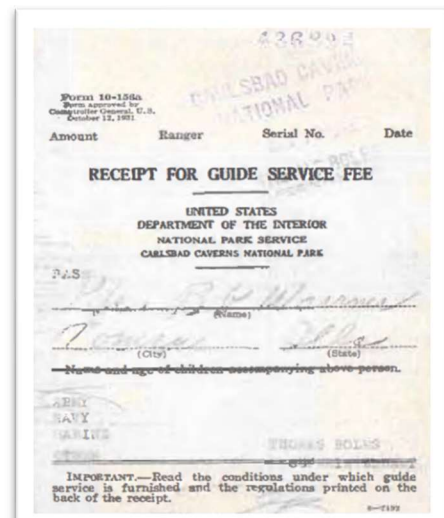
*The school itself is located about five miles from El Paso. The only signs of life around us are the cactus and yucca plants. However, if one looks around he can see several mud adobe type Mexican huts which, sometime in the past, have been inhabited. It is my impression that the site for an army camp is the only use to which this part of the country is suited.*

*In direct contrast to these surroundings, I found El Paso a very pleasing city. Altho I do not know the population<sup>10</sup>, it seems to be quite a large place, and they do their best to make the soldiers comfortable. They have four U.S.O.'s<sup>11</sup> and service men enter theaters at reduced rates. All the men are clad in ten-gallon hats and high heeled boots, showing they are true sons of the old west.*

*In closing, I want to thank you again for sending the News. It really is a fine gesture on your part for it enables us to keep in contact both with the people at home and with our friends who are also in the service.*  
Pfc Bob Warner

There were two major breaks in the camp routine for Dad. The first was a day trip in November with his unit to visit Carlsbad Caverns National Park in nearby New Mexico. This huge complex of caverns really impressed Dad. He kept the brochure he received during the tour that day. Many years later he would describe the cavern's size and beauty to listeners around the kitchen table on Cole Street. In fact, his memory of that visit is the reason that we detoured to visit Mammoth Cave on the Warrner family trip to Chattanooga in 1961.

The other major break in the daily routine was a trip with his friends to Mexico. Dad did not need a passport, for his U.S. Army uniform was enough to get him across any border. Although this was Dad's first visit to another

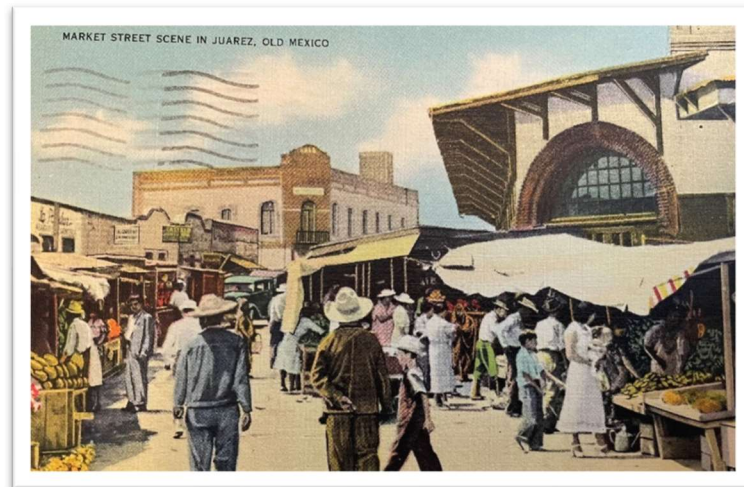


**Dad's Receipt for His Tour of Carlsbad Caverns**

<sup>10</sup> The population of El Paso in 1940 was 98,600 people.

<sup>11</sup> The U.S.O. was an organization that sent entertainers to entertain U.S. soldiers both in the states and overseas.

country and culture, not much he saw left an impression on him. The one great memory Dad had of Mexico was its food, or more accurately the preparation of that food.



**Dad's Postcard Illustrating a Market in Mexico**

He recalled, many decades later, how the woman preparing the food would lean over the various pots of ingredients (meat, tomatoes, etc.) as she assembled his taco. It was a hot day and some of the pots were probably hot as well. Dad was amazed at the sight of small streams of her sweat dripping off her elbows and forearms into the pot of meat as she was working. The thought of that sweat being one of the ingredients of his taco

completely took away his appetite. He never did eat that taco or sample Mexican food while in Mexico. In fact, in later years, Mexican food never really appealed to him. Taco Bell was one of the few fast food places that he would never stop at. The flashback of that stream of sweat would never leave his mind.

It was early in Dad's pharmacy training that the army discovered he was color blind. This was a serious problem, for many of the medicines Dad would have to handle in Europe were identified by their distinct color(s). Two factors kept Dad in the pharmacy program. One was the army's unwillingness to admit they made a mistake by switching him to another program. The other factor was that Dad, as generally happened wherever he went in later life, was popular and well liked by both his instructors and his fellow trainees. No one really wanted to see him "wash out" from the program. As a result, Dad remained in the program but would not be allowed to actually prepare any medicines once he was on duty overseas.

Dad summed up his army training in a letter he wrote to the *Tonica News*:

*Now that my school here is nearly over, I am beginning to realize what a fine time I had here and how much I've learned. In twelve more days I will be a so-called pharmacy technician, and will have a ticket entitling me to wash bottles and sweep floors in any army pharmacy in the entire world. We were told the other day that it costs the government between \$800 and \$1000 per person to send us here for three months. That is a lot of money<sup>12</sup>.*

<sup>12</sup> As a comparison, entries in Ida Warrner's diary noted that Dad was making three dollars a day on June 3, 1942, and five dollars a day one year later on June 2, 1943. Although Dad's pay looks small today, the minimum wage in 1943 was 30 cents per hour. Thus, his pay for an eight-hour day would have been \$2.40. In addition, it seems likely he was getting cash and not a paycheck.

How many times, later in life, did we hear Dad react to an award or commendation with the same type of modest comment ("*If you take this paper and twenty five cents into any restaurant in Muncie, you can get a free cup of coffee*") as he used regarding his army pharmacy technician license?

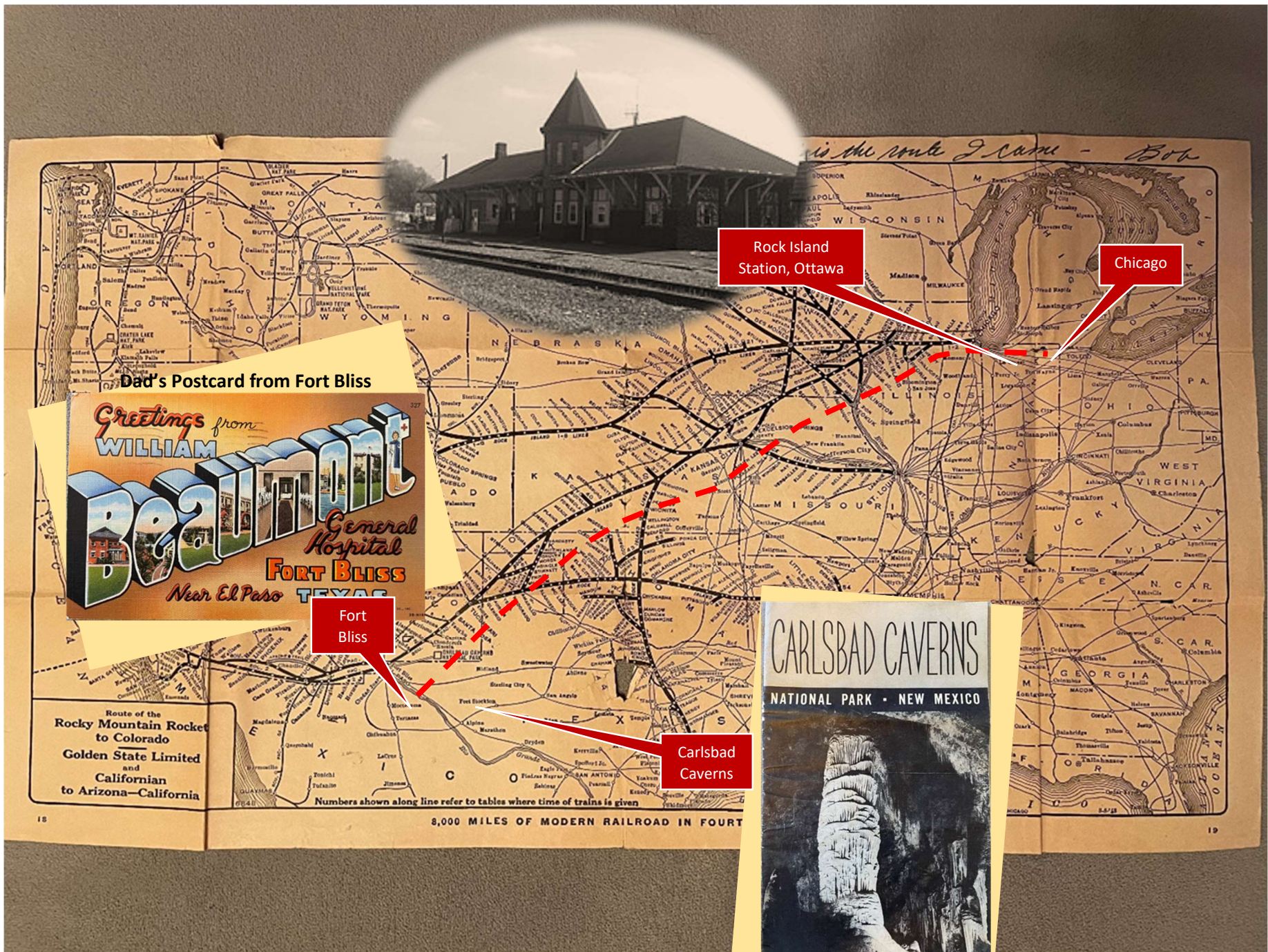
In that same letter to the Tonica News, Dad also described Thanksgiving at Fort Bliss:

*I have just finished my first Thanksgiving dinner in the army. It surely was swell – turkey and all the trimming, and bowls of oranges, grapes, nuts and candy on every table<sup>13</sup>. I filled a space this noon that has been empty ever since I hit Texas. I only hope that my friends overseas shared as well as we did.*



---

<sup>13</sup> Dad commented favorably on army food. Like most other U.S. soldiers, Dad gained weight during his time in the army. Countless mothers were disappointed when their sons came home heavier than when they left. Why did they gain weight? First, as a result of the Great Depression, most men were underweight when they were inducted. Second, the army had a policy, whenever possible, to allow the men to eat as much as they could. Finally, despite the grumbling to the contrary, except in the very front lines, the food was pretty good.



Dad's Map Showing his Train Ride from Chicago to Fort Bliss, Texas (red dashed line)

Dad's Souvenir Booklet from Carlsbad Caverns

### First Furlough

After leaving Fort Bliss, Dad was able to return home for a brief furlough. His train arrived in Ottawa on December 9, 1943. Mom and his brother Wendell met him at the train station. According to Ida Warner's diary, the weather during Dad's furlough was cold and snowy. She noted that Dad and Mom spent lots of time together, and that Dad was sick the morning he left (December 11). Unfortunately, he also missed Uncle Lou who arrived in Ottawa for his furlough on December 20.

### Tennessee

Leaving Ottawa, Dad traveled to Tennessee for additional training. While on maneuvers there, he wrote a letter to Uncle Babe on February 23, 1944:

*Well, I guess it is time that I wrote and answered your last two or three letters so will try tonight. I have this night off, so am in my own tent for a change. We have pretty good quarters here. I have all of my stuff hung upon nails, and today I swiped a box with a hinged top to use for a foot locker. I really have my corner of the tent fixed up pretty good here. It was a swell day here today nice and warm, just like spring, the kind of day that makes you feel so lazy.*

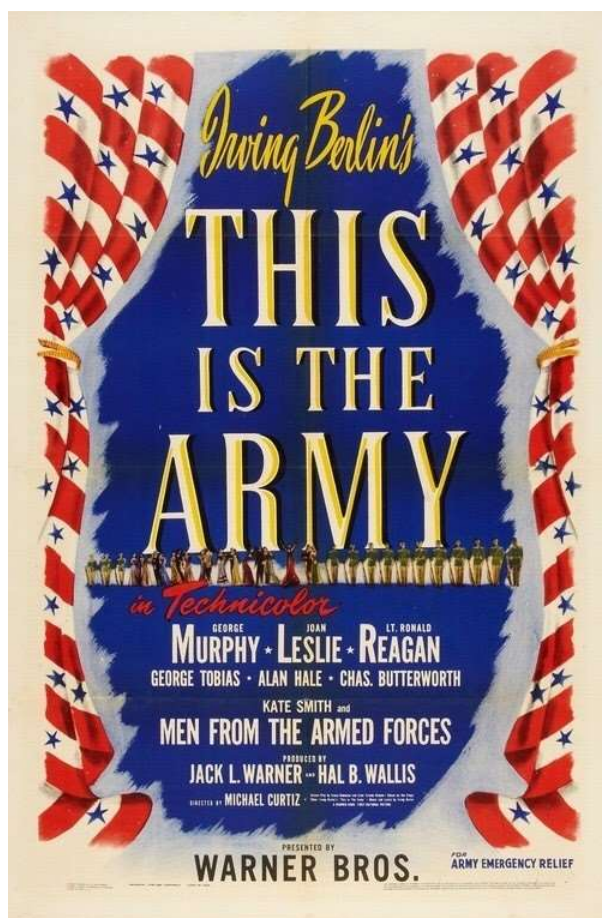
*Was glad to hear that you got another deferment, hang on as long as you can and during the summer don't get that patriotic feeling and go to the army, they have so many men now wasting time that it is pitiful. I'm glad that you got it.*

*Well, I guess I had better close for now, we have a quart of tomato juice here we are drinking that one of the fellows got off his ward. If I don't quite [sic] writing, I'm afraid that I will miss my share.*

*So long,*

*Bob*

With both basic training and his specialist training complete, Dad was now ready for his assignment to his new unit and duty overseas. But first, he received a short leave before he was to report to his new unit.



## Second Furlough

Dad returned home one final time before going overseas. He arrived via train from Nashville Tennessee on March 2, 1944, for a week long furlough. According to Ida's diary, his first stop was to see Mom as soon as he arrived<sup>14</sup>.

A break from military routine must have been welcome. Ida noted that Dad slept in to 11:00 a.m. on his first day. He spent lots of time with Mom. On March 4, Ida wrote that Dad bought Mom a ring and they stopped by to show it off. So, while Mom and Dad were not married before the war, they did become engaged before Dad traveled overseas. The remainder of the furlough was spent attending family dinners, church, and a movie in LaSalle ("This is the Army"<sup>15</sup>). Ida noted that the weather wasn't great – rain and snow. Mom and Ida both went to Chicago to send Dad off. They would not see him for nearly two years until February of 1946.

As noted in Ida's diary, Mom joined the

## **Movie Poster from "This is the Army"**

Warners on most of the weekly Sunday family gatherings in Lowell thereafter. Rich Warner, the son of Uncle Lefty and Aunt Mary, suggested that Uncle Lou had a major role in making Mom part of the Warner family. Before Uncle Lou left for the army, he told his mother that he did not want any pictures of his family unless Betty was in the picture. Once Ida was on board, Mom was official.

## Final Stateside Stops

Dad's whereabouts directly after his furlough are not known, but later correspondence suggests he may have returned to Tennessee for additional training. He then spent a month in Camp Campbell, Kentucky (April 1 to May 1, 1944). On April 14, 1944, he wrote a letter to the Tonica News describing camp life:

<sup>14</sup> This and future diary entries show Dad's emotional transition from his mother (Ida) to his girlfriend (Betty). Instead of spending time with his mother, he was spending "all" of his time with our future Mom.

<sup>15</sup> This movie, a musical comedy, was a big box office hit in 1944. Irving Berlin wrote 16 songs for the movie and the cast included future President Ronald Reagan. One might wonder why a soldier home on leave would attend a movie about the army. The answer might be that there was only one movie theater within a 40-minute drive of Tonica. It was an army movie or nothing. Of course, regardless of the actual movie, it was dark and private in the theater.

## **BOB LIKES NEW LOCATION**

*Dear Mr. Richardson: I received your "personal letter" this noon. It was surely swell of you to remember all of us fellows in addition to your kindness in sending us the News each week. I am sure that all of the fellows in the service were quite amused at your review of the "old home town". It was real interesting. Thanks a million.*

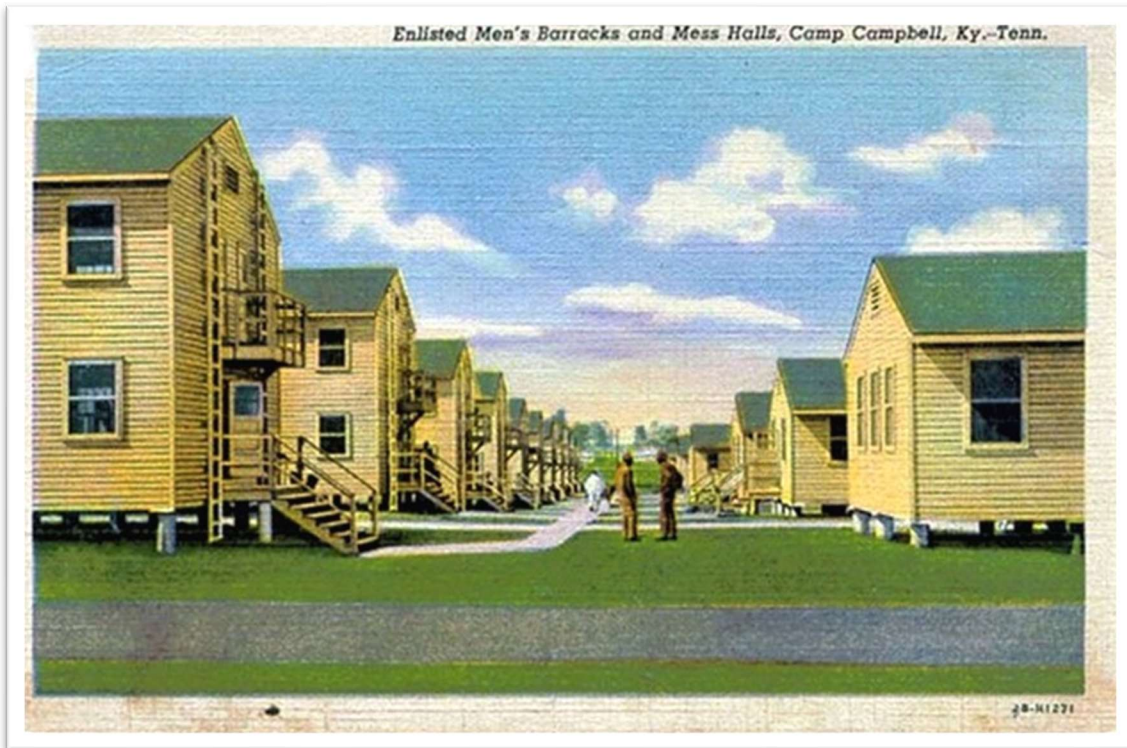
*I suppose I could write several pages telling what a wonderful camp this is, but I understand that Vernon Baker is located on the post, so he probably would think that I need have my head examined. Seriously tho, this seems like a pretty nice location after spending a little while in the hills of Tennessee. Since we arrived here, most of our time has been taken up with classes and plenty of inspections. We have had as many as four a day several different times.*

*Well, I must close for now. Guess I have rambled on long enough without saying anything. In closing, I want to thank you for sending the News. I surely look forward to receiving it.*

*So long,*

*Pvt. f. c. Bob Warrner*

Camp Campbell, located on the border of Kentucky and Tennessee near Hopkinsville Kentucky, was selected by the U.S. Army as an ideal location for a new training base during World War II. Its location mimicked the landscape of the European theater and had mild weather allowing year-round training. Due to material shortages, the war department issued a directive that required "all construction to be of the cheapest temporary character" including troop barracks. Perhaps the camp's reputation back home had preceded Dad's arrival. During the war, Camp Campbell could accommodate almost 50,000 soldiers at any one time. This camp is still in use today (with hopefully better accommodations).



**Barracks at Camp Campbell**

Leaving Camp Campbell, Dad next arrived for a few days at Camp Myles Standish, Massachusetts (May 3 to 6, 1944). This army camp was established in 1942 and was located in Taunton, Massachusetts. Camp Myles Standish was used as the main staging area for the Boston Port of Embarkation. At its peak, Camp Myles Standish had more than 600 barracks and 39,000 soldiers at any given time. During the course of the war, almost one million soldiers passed through the camp on their way to Europe with the same number returning through Camp Myles Standish on their way home after the war.

Dad's last stop before heading across the Atlantic Ocean was Boston, where he stayed until May 12, 1944. Here he officially joined his unit, the 108<sup>th</sup> Evacuation Hospital.

## **108<sup>th</sup> Evacuation Hospital**

The concept of an evacuation hospital was new to the U.S. Army in World War II. For example, during the Civil War each combat unit brought its own doctors with it when the men enlisted, and each unit cared for its own wounded (and then others from adjacent units). In World War I the front lines were fixed (moving only a few hundred yards in three years of combat). Large hospitals were already established near the front lines when the U.S. joined the war.

In the early days of our participation in World War II, our army developed the concept of mobile hospital units that would follow the front lines. There would be three levels of

care for our wounded soldiers. The first would be the medic that accompanied the soldiers. He would have medical training and supplies (plasma, sulfa drugs, and morphine). The combat medics would save thousands of lives during the war. The second level would be the evacuation hospital, where a full line of medical treatment would be available. This is where our father would serve. Then, after the men were stabilized, they would be transported to regular hospitals in England (or later hospitals in the rear areas of France). The effectiveness of this new system can be seen in the following statistic. During World War I slightly more than 9% of the wounded died. Less than twenty years later, in World War II, the death rate fell to 3.9% -- an amazing reduction of over 50% in the death rate.

The modern reader can gain a sense of what life was like in the 108<sup>th</sup> Evacuation Hospital by watching reruns of the TV show *MASH*. However, there were at least two major differences between these two units.



**View of a U.S. Army Evacuation Hospital in France in Late 1944**

First, the 108<sup>th</sup> was a true mobile hospital. It moved frequently, sometimes weekly and almost always monthly. The *MASH* unit on the TV show moved less than one time during each year of the show. Secondly, the TV show focused on the doctors and nurses of the unit, not the enlisted men. Dad was an enlisted man. He would have been one of the "extras" in the background of the TV show. But he was one of many "extras" without whom the 108<sup>th</sup> could not have done its job.

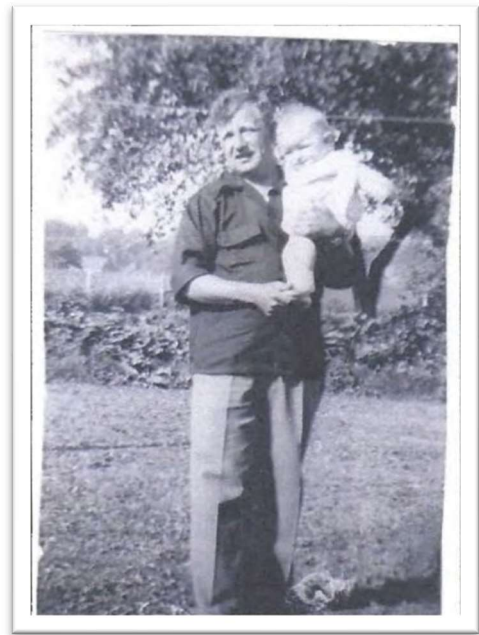
My brother Tom recalls encouraging Dad to watch *MASH* since it was so funny. Dad declined, saying he'd had the experience first-hand and *"didn't find it funny then, and suspected he wouldn't find it funny now either."*

When Dad arrived in Boston, he found that his unit was set up in the nearby countryside, using the actual tents and equipment they would use in Europe. It was their final practice preparation for the real thing that was quickly approaching.

## Two Good Friends

Dad developed two great friendships during the time he was in the U.S. Army. Both friendships were extremely important to him at the time and both lasted many years after the end of the war and his return back to Illinois.

One friend was Andrew "Andy" V. Kott. Andy, coming from a Polish American background, actually had a much longer family last name. But, as often happened to names in America, it had been shortened to Kott. Before (and later, after) the war he had been a fireman in Chicago. It takes a special breed of man to be a big city fireman. Although he first presented a tough exterior, he had a great sense of humor and would become a "big brother" to Dad during the war. Dad many times credited Andy for taking care of him during all the ups and downs and said he would not have made it through were it not for him. It should be obvious to all of my readers by now, that my middle name, Andrew, was to honor Dad's army friend. After the war, the Kotts (Andy and his wife Olga) and the Warmers visited many times. Andy died shortly after we moved to Indiana and his widow moved to the Pacific northwest to be closer to her family.



**Two Andys - Kott and  
Warner - After the War**

Dad's other special friend was Thomas "Tom" R. Ziegler. Although I have never heard this said, I sometimes wonder if my brother, Tom, was in part named for Thomas Ziegler. He was from eastern Tennessee (Big Springs). He had a very definite dream for his life after the war. He wanted to open and operate his own funeral home. Before the war he had worked in a funeral home and knew all the details on the embalming, etc. But he was not a "people" person. He wanted to team up with Dad (or "Red" as they knew him) to start a new business after the war. He would handle the actual mortuary end and Dad would handle the sales and people aspect of the business. There is no doubt that they would have made a good team.

Twice Dad almost joined Ziegler in his enterprise. Shortly after returning to Tonica,

but before my birth, he and Mom discussed moving to Tennessee. However, once he was back home, Tennessee seemed so far away and it was so hard to leave their families again, they decided against it. It would be interesting to see how different we all would have been if we had grown up as the children of a successful funeral director in Tennessee.



**Ziegler Funeral Home  
(2022)**

Tom Ziegler did follow his dream. After attending college, he opened his own funeral home in 1958 in Athens, Tennessee, located about an hour's drive north of Chattanooga. In the early 1960's Dad was once again considering teaming up with Ziegler, this time working for him in his already successful business. During our one family vacation, we stopped in Athens on our way back north. We visited the funeral home and he and Dad had a very long talk as Mom and the rest of us went to a nearby school playground. For whatever reason, Dad decided to stay with Omar. Tom retired from an active role in the business in 1979, but the funeral home continues in operation to this day under the guidance of his son.

## **Crossing the Atlantic**

Dad's first crossing of the Atlantic Ocean wasn't too bad. His unit crossed on the USS Wakefield, the converted prewar passenger liner SS Manhattan. Pre-war, the ship carried 1,700 people (1,300 passengers and 400 crew). After her retrofit, she could carry almost 7,000 people (6,000 troops with 900 crew). The ship was very large (little rocking along the way) and very fast. He would not be so lucky on the return trip. While we don't know much about Dad's experience on the USS Wakefield, we do have a first-hand account from another 18-year-old soldier<sup>16</sup>:

*Hot, stuffy, and smelly was the area where we were assigned....The bunks were four tiers high. Some had some climbing to do to reach their assigned bunk. No particular bunk was so-called comfortable... We had fresh water the first day only. We had been told to conserve the fresh water. Salt water was then put to use for showers and shaving... We were packed in the bottom deck liked sardines... Fresh air was all we wanted...The men had to share their bunks in 12-hour shifts. It was too bad if the guy in the bunk was seasick. He had to share his bunk for 12 hours. We pitied the poor guys that were seasick. They wanted to do nothing but lie down on a bunk and die.*

---

<sup>16</sup> "Just An 18 Year Old During World War II" by Earl Sutherland.



**USS Wakefield, Formerly the Passenger Liner SS Manhattan**

The 108<sup>th</sup> left Boston on May 12, 1944, and arrived in Liverpool<sup>17</sup> a few days later on May 19, 1944. From there, Dad traveled with his unit to Stockport, England where they stayed two days before departing on May 21 for Benchill<sup>18</sup> in Manchester, England. The 108<sup>th</sup> would stay in Benchill until June 17. While there, Dad wrote to the Tonica News on May 23, 1944:

#### **BOB WARRNER FINDS “SWELL SET-UP” IN ENGLAND**

*Dear Mr. Richardson: Received my first overseas copy of the News today and it surely was welcome – more so now than ever before. Thanks a million for sending it.*

*I suppose you know by now that I am in England. It seems that a good share of Tonica boys are gathering over here. From what I have seen, it is a very beautiful country and the people very friendly. We have a swell set-up here, the best so far by far that I have had since entering the service. How long it may last, I do not know. The English people I have talked to seem to think a few months will see the end of the war on this side of the globe. I hope they're right.*

---

<sup>17</sup> Eighty-four years before Dad arrived in Liverpool, the Warner family passed through this port city on their way to Illinois. Now two descendants of that family, Dad and Lou, were returning to defend their ancestral country.

<sup>18</sup> Stockport and Benchill were (and still are) part of the Manchester Metropolitan area. From the dates on Dad's correspondence, it appears that these were places for newly arrived soldiers to spend a few nights while waiting for transport to their new bases in England.

*I must close. Thanks again for sending the paper. I truly appreciate it.*

Pvt. f. c. Bob Warner

At this point, Dad's letters home came in the form of victory mail (or v-mail). To reduce the space needed to transport mail and free up valuable cargo space for war supplies, letters from war zones (after being censored) were microfilmed. The small film was then transported overseas, reproduced, and delivered. After being reproduced, the delivered mail was a quarter the size of the original letter. One estimate was 37 mail bags could fit within a single bag of microfilmed v-mail.

In today's world, with near instantaneous communication, it is hard to imagine the isolation from their loved ones that the people on the home front endured during World War II. From the day Dad left, to the day he returned, the only link was written letters. Mom wrote Dad every day, and he brought home all of her letters. Mom considered many to be too "hot" for others to read, so those letters were burned upon Dad's return<sup>19</sup>.

Dad wrote the following v-mail to Uncle Babe and Aunt Mary on May 25<sup>th</sup> <sup>20</sup>:

*Dear Babe and Mary,*

*I guess that it is more than time that I wrote to you but you know how that goes yourself. We have a lot of time to ourselves here for awhile at least, so I am getting caught up on some writing. Well, from what I hear, you must still have enough gas there to go out home, for I hear that Dad manages to have the lawn mower out and a couple of strips of lawn mowed every Sunday afternoon about three oclock, so you and Grey can get your weekly exercise.*

*Do you have all of the kids under your thumb at school<sup>21</sup>? You should be here, I don't believe they ever go to school here, for every time you look and the streets are full of them. A school teacher would starve here.*

*Well, I must close for now, write if you get time and take care of yourself.*

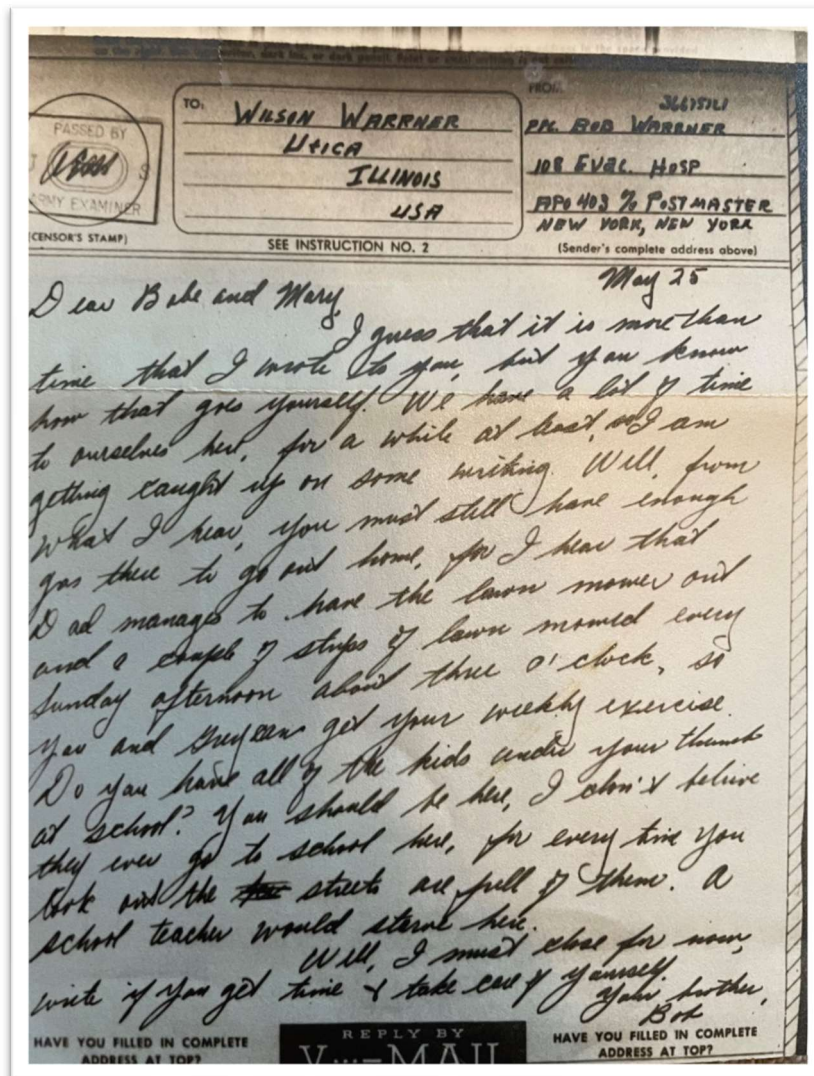
*Your brother,  
Bob*

---

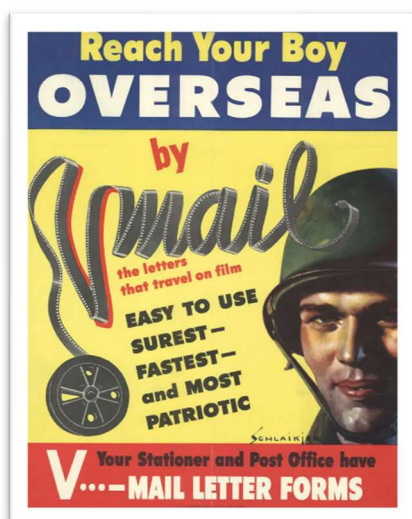
<sup>19</sup> Probably not a bad call given that some of Dad's war correspondence survived and has been reproduced here in this chapter!

<sup>20</sup> This correspondence occurred less than two weeks before D-Day, the Allied invasion of Normandy.

<sup>21</sup> "Under your thumb" is a reference to the fact that Uncle Babe was a teacher in the Tonica School District. Babe was just a few years older than Dad.



May 25<sup>th</sup> V-Mail from Dad (Actual Size)



One huge event during Dad's six weeks in England was a meeting with Uncle Lou. It was the first time they had seen each other since they had been separated in the line at the induction center a year earlier. They had a great visit, but the day passed much too quickly for them. It would be more than a year before they would see each other again. Dad described his visit with Uncle Lou in a letter to the Tonica News dated July 18, 1944.

### **BOB WRITES OF THE MEETING OF THE WARRNER BROTHERS**

*Dear Mr. Richardson: The arrival of the News tonight reminded me that it is again time for me to express my appreciation to you for keeping us posted on the "home-town news". Since my arrival in England the paper has meant more to me than ever before and I know that the rest of the fellows farther away from home than I feel the same. You are surely doing your part to make our stay away from home more pleasant and I know all of the boys appreciate it. Thanks.*



**Dad and Lou During Their Visit  
in England in 1944**

*The best news that I can relay to you at this time concerns the "Warrner Reunion" of about a week ago. I was fortunate to find out where Lou was stationed and managed to get down to see him. It lacked about two weeks of being a year that he had bade me goodbye at the reception center that I walked into his barrack and said "Hi, Lou!" I guess that he was about the most surprised G.I. in England at that moment – he wasn't expecting me at all. He is the same old Lou tho, happy and proud of his men, even tho there is some thirty pounds less of him to be happy and proud. We had a great time together, talking over things that had happened in the past and about Tonica in general. I stayed over night with him and then out to where he works. That outfit surely has a lot of work ahead of them, but they look like the ones who can do it – and they are.*

*Enough of my personal affairs, although the facts I can tell you about England are limited due to censorship regulations. I have been fortunate enough to see the greater part of England since my arrival here, but my route and points of interest must remain a secret until after the war. Until that time when I can see you again and tell you a few stories, I will simply say, "So long and thanks again."*

*Pfc. Bob Warner*

Dad's next stop in England was Camp Merritt in Wythenshawe, England<sup>22</sup>. He arrived there on June 17 and was there for about a month before leaving on July 12. From Wythenshawe, he wrote the following v-mail dated July 2, 1944:

*Dear Babe and Mary,*

*Got your letter in the mail today. Was glad to hear from you tho in spite of all the news that I get no one had mentioned that you were working in Oglesby. Well, at least you don't have as long to ride every day as the Seneca<sup>23</sup> fellows do.*

*Well, things are almost the same here as when I last wrote you. It seems the army routine never changes very much. I am on guard again today, so at least I have a chance to catch up on the letter writing. One good purpose of guard.*

*Well, it was a year ago yesterday that Lou and I took the army oath, I guess that we have both traveled quite a ways and managed to see a few things in that short time. It does not seem nearly a year ago that I was at home, but I guess it must be. I guess that next fourth of July we will all be together again eating fried chicken and all. I hope so.*

*Your brother,  
Bob*

Next stop was Stalford England, where Dad stayed until July 28. This was his last stop before Southampton, where he crossed the English Channel two days later on July 30, 1944. All told, Dad was in England for only two months. For most of that time he remained on army bases where he spent his time completing last minute training and preparations for his transfer to France. He did recall that on D-Day (June 6) he was working on various duties, including pulling the weeds on the officers' tennis courts.

---

<sup>22</sup> While many of the bases Dad was at in the U.S. are still operational, virtually none of the bases in England currently exist. They were built to serve the immediate needs of the American troops arriving there. After the war there was no longer a need for any of these camps.

<sup>23</sup> Seneca, which was located on the Illinois River, was known as the "shipyard of the prairie" and employed 11,000 people. This shipyard constructed nearly 157 landing ship tanks (LST) during the war (approximately 15% of all LST constructed by the U.S.). Seneca was about a thirty-minute drive from Tonica.

In one of Dad's letters to Uncle Babe, he commented that he would not return to Lowell unless one of the local farmers sold his John Deere 2 cycle tractor. He explained later in the letter the reason for his statement.

*The 2 cycle engine, when operating, produced a series of sounds: "pop, pop, silence, pop." It turned out that this sounded exactly like the German V2 rockets<sup>24</sup> that were bombarding England during the last part of Dad's stay there. The rockets would fly over the area, their engines making a series of "pops." Then, when they ran out of fuel, the engines would become silent, fall to earth and explode. As long as you could hear the "pops" you were safe, the rocket would continue its flight. But when it was nothing but silence, beware! The engine had stopped and the rocket would be falling to earth.*

It is not known if the John Deere tractor was sold before Dad's return to Lowell.



**German V2 Rocket Preparing to Launch**



**John Deere Two-Cycle Tractor  
1939**

---

<sup>24</sup> This would not be the last of Dad's experiences with the German V2 "buzz bomb" rocket during the war. In London alone, V2 rockets killed over 2,500 people and injured over 6,500 people.

## With the 108<sup>th</sup> in Europe

### Utah Beach, France (July 31, 1944)

The 108<sup>th</sup> left Southampton aboard the English troop ship Devonshire on July 30, 1944 and landed on Utah Beach on the Normandy coast the next day. The Devonshire, which was capable of carrying about 1,300 passengers, had already been active off the Normandy coast having been used to carry troops to support Juno Beach on D-day. The trip across the English Channel was very rough, and Dad was constantly seasick. As they reached the French coast, he had to climb down the netting on the side of the ship to get into the landing craft. Only the loud threats of his sergeant made it possible for him to start down that net.



108<sup>th</sup> Leaving England via the troop ship Devonshire



**The 108<sup>th</sup> Using Nets to Climb into a Landing Craft Bound for Utah Beach**



**The 108<sup>th</sup> Bound for Utah Beach in a Landing Craft (Devonshire in background)**

Dad arrived at Utah Beach on D-Day plus 55. He later recounted that the beaches were still covered with the destroyed equipment from the D-Day landings. This is further described in the unit's history log:

*Walking along the beach we saw the shattered hulks of the invasion crafts, pillboxes and coastal fortifications torn apart by the hail of shell fire that the Navy had poured in. Everywhere there were torn strands of barbed wire, remnants of foxholes, shell holes and general destruction. We walked on paths carefully marked off by lines of white tape. No one wandered outside these strips, for on both sides of the lane, signs in big red letters merely read "Mines".*

Once ashore, the 108th began a seven-mile march inland to a large assembly area where they spent their first night in France. Upon reaching camp, soldiers pitched their shelter tents. The day had been hectic, and members of the unit were not allowed to smoke or light fires because of the stringent blackout regulations. Many went to bed early, even though the sounds of gunfire could be heard in the distance.

The next morning, the 108<sup>th</sup> moved traveled along narrow rutted roads in Normandy. Yellow dust, stirred up by the recent travel of thousands of tanks and vehicles traveling through the area, filled the air and seemed to cover everything.

#### Carteret, France (August 1 to August 6, 1944)

Around noon on August 1, 1944, the 108<sup>th</sup> arrived at a field about one mile outside of the coastal resort town of Carteret, France. Approaching their new camp site, a group of peasants gathered offering cognac. This initiated some members of the unit into the exorbitant costs of French merchandise, driven up by the high demand caused by so many new "customers". Soldiers tried to barter with the locals for fresh eggs, which were a delicacy since fresh eggs were seldom shipped overseas because powdered eggs took up far less precious shipping space.

Members of the 108th, including Dad, swam<sup>25</sup> in the English Channel off the beach at Carteret. Large amounts of donuts and coffee were available to the unit at the Red Cross Club.

Six days passed until orders were received sending the 108th into operation for the first time. On Sunday August 6, 1944, after a short service from the unit chaplain, the 108<sup>th</sup> headed to Rennes.

#### Rennes, France (August 6 to August 22, 1944)

Members of the 108<sup>th</sup> were excited to put into practice all the training they had

---

<sup>25</sup> Knowing Dad's swimming ability, this more likely was "wading" for him. With the rough channel crossing and all the yellow dust in the air, a cool swim was likely welcome.

received back in the U.S. The route to Rennes was lined with cheering French. It had been just two days since the Allied Third Army had swept through the area. Locals were dressed in their Sunday finery to celebrate their first “free” Sabbath in four years. Women laughed, waved, and offered bouquets of flowers. Wherever the convoy slowed down, local men rushed out to offer bottles of cider and cognac. Members of the 108<sup>th</sup> dubbed the road to Rennes “Glory Road”. Up until this point, the business of war didn’t seem too bad. However, the 108<sup>th</sup> would soon witness the serious consequences of war.

At sundown, the 108<sup>th</sup> pulled into a large green meadow shielded by a thick wood at one end. The unit’s trucks lined the field and waited for the order to unload. The unit’s commanding officer, Colonel James E. Yarbrough, conferred with an excited infantry lieutenant who pointed out carefully prepared camouflaged machine gun nests around the edge of the field. The lieutenant intended to trap a squad of Germans who were expected to escape from the woods that night. With the proposed hospital site in the direct line of fire, the 108<sup>th</sup> quickly relocated.

Camp was finally struck at a local racetrack. Dad, as one of the enlisted men, pitched his tent on the inside the track. The track’s betting windows were converted into a supply room. Everyone was busy setting up tents or digging foxholes, which soon became handy. Every evening around 11:00 pm, a lone German plane would fly over the camp. Allied anti-aircraft guns, which were located around the field, shot at the plane resulting in large chunks of flak falling onto the racetrack. The plane’s approach drove members of the unit into the recently dug foxholes. The plane was nicknamed “Bed Check Charlie” because of its nightly punctuality in tucking members of the 108<sup>th</sup> in for the night.



### The 108<sup>th</sup> Setting Up Camp at the Racetrack

As soon as the hospital opened, it was quickly flooded with the wounded who poured in in huge numbers. As recounted in the unit's history log:

*"...we began to realize that war was terrifically hard work. Doctors, nurses, and enlisted men worked and grew weary. No-one thought of himself. The unspoken slogan was "take care of the boys". And as they worked, eyes and hearts alike cried. Torn bodies, mangled bones and burnt flesh were all seen during this time. It didn't matter if the flesh was white, black, American, French or even German – we didn't stop. Many of the patients during this stay were from the spearheading 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division and the veterans of D-Day from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions. We did all that we could. If those few moments before we slept were disturbed by the pitiful sights we had seen, there was also satisfaction for having helped to repair the damage."*

While at Rennes, Dad wrote the following to the Tonica News on August 18, 1944:

#### **SOUVENIR HUNTING QUITE A FAD AMONG OUR SOLDIERS**

*Dear Mr. Richardson: The arrival of the July 21st issue of the News tonight reminded me that it was again time to thank you again for sending me the paper and to tell you that altho my address is the same, that I am now in France.*

*Judging from the paper, Tonica is already quite well represented here, for it seemed full of the boys telling of their experiences here. Yes, there is a great deal to see in a place such as this, a lot to remember and a lot a fellow would like to forget.*

*Most of the boys mentioned German souvenirs. Collecting things seems to be quite a hobby here. I guess every G.I. has his pockets crammed full of them, ranging from various types of German ammunition to buttons and insignia off their clothing. I will enclose a few postage stamps I took from a German prisoner on my ward. It is about the only type of thing I can conveniently send.*

*I was lucky enough to get to see Lou again before I came over here. His [He] is the same old fellow like all the rest of us, anxious to get home.*

*Well Mr. Richardson, I must close for now – not a great deal to say. I just wanted to thank you for sending the News.*

*So long,*

*Bob Warner*



*Editor Note: The German stamps referred to contain the picture of the fanatic who started all this trouble – Herr Hitler. That face will soon be licked on the front instead of the back. We divided with Bro. Mac – and each now have two new specimens for our collections. Thanks!*

The 108<sup>th</sup> remained at Rennes for two weeks. The war rolled swiftly on, forcing the unit to move closer to the front lines.

Lannilis, France (August 22 to October 9, 1944)

On August 22, 1944, the 108<sup>th</sup> left Rennes after being transferred away from the rapidly moving U.S. Third Army into the new Ninth Army. It would remain under the Ninth Army until the war's end. The hospital next set up camp outside of



Lanillis, France, located approximately nine miles from Brest. The 108<sup>th</sup> was several miles closer to the battle lines than other medical units. As a result, the hospital received a higher percentage of seriously wounded soldiers who were brought there to spare them a long ambulance ride. During this time, members of the 108<sup>th</sup> worked well past their usual twelve duty hours.

In the distance, the members of the unit could hear the thundering of Allied artillery pounding the German occupied city of Brest. Allied bombers could be seen dropping bombs on forts and pillboxes carved into the nearby mountainsides.

About a month into his time at Lannilis, Dad wrote home to Uncle Babe and Aunt Mary. In contrast to much of his wartime correspondence, his letter had a somber tone. Perhaps this reflects the long hours and difficult work Dad was experiencing at the time.

**Dad in Europe (Location Unknown)**

September 15, 1944  
*Dear Babe and Mary,*

*You certainly had that birthday card timed near perfectly, for it arrived today. Thanks a lot, a card like that seems good over here. Yes, I guess*

*that none of us expected a few years ago that I would be over here, but that's the way fate had it planned. All I hope is that in another twenty years that another Warrner doesn't have to have a birthday over here. I hope that we can get things settled here for once and for all.*

*I was glad to hear that you finally got the tonsils out. I guess that after all these years it is about time you got them out. I hope that Betty hurries up and gets hers over with and then she won't have them on her mind. She seems to dread the affair, even though it doesn't amount to much.*

*Things are much the same here, of course something new happens every day, and I hear a lot of tales that will cause laughs when this thing is over. Right now there isn't much to laugh about, this is a serious game.*

*So long,*

*Bob*



3. - LANNILIS (Finistère). — Vue générale

**Dad's Postcard from Lannilis, France**

After several weeks, Brest fell to Allied advances on September 22, 1944. Shortly after, members of the 108<sup>th</sup> had the opportunity to visit the city and see what remained. Its 175,000 inhabitants were homeless, their homes now heaps of dust and rocks. The port was filled with scuttled ships and wrecked cranes. Unit

members toured the nearby U-boat base and repair facilities. It is not known if Dad visited Brest or these facilities. If he didn't see the destruction himself, he likely heard firsthand accounts from others in his unit. With the Allied war effort pushing east, it was time for the 108<sup>th</sup> to begin to move east too.

#### Coutencon, France (October 10 to October 20, 1944)

Leaving Lannilis, the 108<sup>th</sup> returned to Rennes for a night. The next day, the unit made it to Le Mans and on the third day the 108<sup>th</sup> arrived at the tiny village of Coutençon about twenty miles south of Paris. Constant rain made travel difficult and lives miserable. To further dampen spirits, no mail reached the soldiers while in transit.

During their stay in Coutencon, members of the unit took trips to nearby Fontainebleau, a beautiful town which had once been the summer home of the French Emperor Napoléon. Members of the unit visited the beautiful Palace of Fontainebleau and tracked their muddy boots onto the palace's rich inlaid wood floors. When the soldiers apologized, the English-speaking tour guide answered "I would rather see the muddy boots of the Americans standing here than the polished ones of the Germans."



**Members of the 108<sup>th</sup> on the Muddy Roads of France**

Day trips were also made to Paris. Dad was able to partake in at least one of these trips. Time in Coutencon likely provided a welcome break from the war to members of the 108<sup>th</sup>, especially after Lannilis. However, after two short weeks, it was time to move east.

## Borgloon, Belgium (October 12 to December 1, 1944)



**Apple Orchard in Borgloon**

The 108<sup>th</sup>'s convoy headed east, passing the historic World War I battleground of Verdun. Many of the old trenches and battlements appeared to be untouched even though 26 years had passed since the war. Skirting Luxembourg, the unit entered Belgium and camped in a pine forest near Bastogne. The following day, the 108<sup>th</sup> arrived at Borgloon, Belgium, setting up camp in a muddy apple orchard.

For the next six weeks, German V2 “buzz-bombs” were frequently observed. Some bombs landed near the unit when the German army attempted to attack the nearby city of Liège. Their faulty calculations caused the bombs to miss the city and drop close to the 108<sup>th</sup>. Foxholes, again, reappeared as described the unit’s history log:

*“...few were too fussy about jumping into one even though the mud and water had seeped in. Though it must be admitted that it is difficult to decide which would do more damage; a buzz-bomb falling close or a jump into a water-logged foxhole at night while still in your underwear.”*

Dad wrote a letter to the editor of the Tonica News from Borgloon dated October 24, 1944:

### **BOB SLEEPS IN A COT AGAIN**

*Dear Mr. Richardson: Just a line to let you know that I have received the News. What a wonderful job that paper does in following a fellow around. Too, I want to thank you for your second “personal” letter and the addresses of the boys in this theater of war. I had often wished that I had such a sheet as we support many outfits in acting as a hospital. I have my patients from Spring Valley and two that knew Tubby Beard, but I hope that none of our local boys ever have to come back for help.*

*Things look pretty good right here where we are now. We hope that they will continue that way. We have it nice now ourselves; have cots to sleep on and they feel OK after lying on the ground for two months. We can’t*

complain, tho, for some of the boys four or five miles ahead of us would surely like to have our places. We're plenty lucky.

I must close for now for I really don't have much to say. Just wanted to thank you for the News. We really appreciate it.

So long,

Pfc. Bob Warner

Members of the unit did find time to visit the cities of Liège and Tongres, twelve and three miles away, respectively. Dad wrote the following letter to Uncle Babe on October 29, 1944 detailing a welcome find he made potentially in one of these two cities:

Dear Babe and Mary,

Received your letter a short time back and was glad to hear from you. Thanks for enclosing the portion of the funnies with Moon Mullins in it. I guess old Willie has as hard a time as always. That section of paper made the rounds of the hospital. Was good to see them again.

Well, I guess that things are pretty good at home, I guess that Ma and Dad are pretty good. That is good news at least.

Two hours later – just came back from town, found out where we could get ice cream so had the first since I left the states. I ate two dollars worth, so you can tell how it tasted to me. Was really good.

So long,

Bob



**Moon Mullins – Example of Uncle Willie's "Hard Times"**

On November 25, 1944, while still in Borgloon, Dad followed up with a short letter that included a photograph. It must have been good for relatives at home to see him looking



well, and for them to read that he still had his sense of humor despite the war.

*Dear Babe and Mary,*

*Am enclosing the latest picture of me, had it taken a few days ago. The photographer did a good job but he couldn't make my hair look longer. Hope you like it.*

*So long,*

*Bob*

Terwinselen, Holland (December 1 to December 26, 1944)

Leaving Borgloon on December 1, 1944, the 108<sup>th</sup> traveled about 30 miles and crossed the Belgian-Dutch border near Maastricht. They followed a similar route, though in reverse, of the invading Germans in 1940. Here, for the first time, the hospital operated indoors at a converted schoolhouse. Officers and nurses were billeted in the homes of the friendly Dutch locals. Dad, as one of the enlisted men, occupied one of the tents set up in neat rows within the school's athletics field.

The volume of incoming patients was now

far below what had been encountered at Rennes or Brest. Being less busy allowed members of the unit to meet and interact with the local Dutch people, many of whom

were employed in the Queen Wilhelmina coal mines located at the edge of town. Members of the 108<sup>th</sup> visited the mines and used their showers and baths, a courtesy offered to Allied troops by the mine's management. Dad's notes indicated he visited the mines while in Terwinselen. Perhaps he got to partake in this rare luxury.

**Dad in Boogloon, Belgium  
November 25, 1944**

On December 14, 1944, Dad wrote the following to Uncle Babe:

*Dear Babe and Mary,*

*I received your Xmas package tonight, thanks a lot it surely was welcome. The candy is good, came through in fine shape, and the*

*stationary pad will come in handy. Was glad to get the tooth paste etc, that stuff is not plentiful over here. At present, that block puzzle affair is making the rounds of the hospital, somebody sees someone playing with it, then they want to show it off that really is clever, either the guy that invented it is a genius or a half wit. I don't know which. The Xmas cards are already in the mail too, so you can see I made good use of the box. Thanks a lot!*

*Well, things are much the same here as ever, everyone is still going strong, I am OK and feel good. Was glad to get that picture of Ma and Dad, the two of them really look good. I was rather surprised as long as they stay that way its good.*

*Your brother,*

*Bob*



It was in Terwinselen that the 108<sup>th</sup> spent the Christmas holiday. Christmas Eve was observed with services by the chaplain and the singing of carols. For Christmas dinner, the mess section outdid themselves with a huge dinner, complete with all the fixings. This was followed by a party for both officers and enlisted men. Per the unit's history log, "*members of the unit enjoyed ourselves in spite of the fact that their hearts that night were thousands of miles away.*"

The 108<sup>th</sup> operated out of Terwinselen for three and a half weeks. It then became imperative to move as a result of the German counterattack infamously known as the Battle of the Bulge (December 16, 1944 to January 25, 1945). During the Battle of the Bulge, Dad's unit was closer to the front lines than normal. That was because the front lines were being pushed back, closer and closer to the 108<sup>th</sup>. The people

back home in Tonica knew about the battle and could see the battle's location in the daily papers. They also knew that Dad's unit was close to the

**Dad in Europe (Location Unknown)**

fighting. It was at this time that there was almost a three-week interruption in Dad's letters to his family in Tonica. Many feared the worst and it was an especially hard time for Mom. When the letters began arriving again a great sigh of relief was heard in our extended family.

After the Allies pushed back the German Army at the Battle of the Bulge, Dad's unit again needed to pack up and move closer to the front lines to properly assist with casualties. Next stop was Vaals approximately 20 miles away.

#### Vaals, Holland (December 26, 1944 to March 9, 1945)

Vaals was located at the Dutch-German border. The 108<sup>th</sup> opened its hospital in Blumenthal, which was previously a convent and girls' school (Blumenthal Covenant Boarding School). Members of the unit were welcomed by its staff of nuns. The main convent building housed the hospital and sleeping quarters of the officers. A nearby dormitory, once occupied by students, was used as the enlisted men's quarters. The buildings were equipped with well-lit rooms, dining halls, bathing facilities, and fully equipped kitchens. After sleeping in tents on the ground or in cots, the new accommodations likely were a welcome change to Dad and members of his unit. Dad's letter to the Tonica News on February 13, 1945, confirmed this:

#### **BOB WARRNER HAS NICE PLACE DURING THE WINTER**

*Dear Mr. Richardson: The arrival of the December 22<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Tonica News today reminded me that I have been quite lax in my letter writing lately. You have no idea how good that big white envelope looks among a stack of letters, for it always contains the things that other letters seem to skip. Thanks a million.*

*As you know, I have been located in Holland most of the winter. We have really been fortunate to have such a nice location. We moved out of tents and into a large building vacated by the Krauts. We have ideal working and living conditions, complete even to chinaware we eat from. All of us rather hate to think of going under the canvas again, but spring can't come too soon – the boys at the front have had a hard winter.*

*I suppose you have heard that I made a trip down to see Crawford Cave, where they told me that he was back in the U.S.A. I was quite surprised, but glad for his sake. He put a lot of time over here.*

*Well, this must be all for now. News is scarce coming from this side of the world. Most of our spare time is spent in rooting for the Russians. As yet we haven't received any Red casualties. When we do, I'm leaving.*

*So long,*

*Pfc. Bob Warrner*

*(Editor's Note: It took just 49 days<sup>26</sup> for this letter to reach this office.)*



**The 108<sup>th</sup> Hospital at Blumenthal (1945)**

As of 2022,  
Blumenthal still stands  
(photos to the right)  
and looks remarkably  
close to photographs  
from Dad's stay there

<sup>26</sup> This gives a sense for how long



during the war. This includes a statue of Mary on a pedestal outside of the front entrance. This statue was covered by snow in the photo from 1945 (above).

In the nearby Ardennes Forest, the Germany Army was putting up a fierce resistance against the Allied forces, resulting in another large influx of wounded. The bitter winter weather also caused trench foot<sup>27</sup> and frostbite that required treatment. In a letter to his parents, Dad wrote on February 28, 1945:

---

<sup>27</sup> Trench foot occurs due to prolonged exposure of the feet to cold and damp conditions resulting in insufficient blood flow to the feet. Soldiers often got it by not changing their socks/boots frequently enough. If left untreated, trench foot could result in amputation.

*Dear Ma and Dad,*

*Just another short note to let you know things are going swell over here. Hope you two are getting along as well. I haven't had any mail now for several days but hope that some will come through any day.*

*They are still keeping us busy here. You know we are here for that so you hear no one complaining. The boys up ahead need all of the help they can get.*

*I did get a copy of the Tonica News yesterday. Ray enclosed a copy of the addresses of all the boys over here darned nice of him.*

*Well, I must close for now, don't worry as every thing is OK here. I am fine and hope you are the same.*

*So long,*

*Bob*

The 108<sup>th</sup> would spend nearly three months at Vaals. Their next move would be into Germany itself.

#### Kempen, Germany (March 9 to April 4, 1945)

The 108<sup>th</sup> crossed the Roer River near Jülich, Germany, a town of almost 9,000 people that was 100% destroyed by Allied artillery a short time before. The unit then arrived in Kempen, more than halfway beyond the Roer River and the Rhine River. There, the unit occupied a civilian hospital which was one of the few undamaged buildings in the town, a tribute to the accuracy of Allied bombers. Here, enlisted men took over what had once been a Hitler Youth School as their living quarters. The school was located about one city block away from the hospital, and members of the unit recalled many a cold stare from the civilian population still remaining in Kempen as they walked to and from their quarters.

The stay in Kempen was short (less than one month). As the 108<sup>th</sup> packed to move on, there was optimism that the war would soon be over.



**Hospital in Kempen**

**Enlisted Men's Quarters, Formerly a Hitler Youth School**



Hidingsel, Germany (April 4 to April 14, 1945)

Leaving Kempen, the 108<sup>th</sup> crossed the Rhine River via a pontoon bridge and headed deep into Germany. Next stop was Hiddingsel, located near the large and badly bombed city of Münster. Allied casualties were light as forces were only encountering mild German resistance. Each day, ten-ton trailer trucks rolled passed the 108<sup>th</sup> towards the allied rear full of German prisoners.

**Dad's German Rentenbank Note**  
**(Note: This currency was replaced by the**  
**Deutsche Mark in 1945)**



**Crossing the Rhine River via a Pontoon Bridge**

While in Hidingel, the unit began treating men and women slave laborers who had been freed from German prison camps. These people were previously citizens of Russia, France, Poland, Belgium, and other countries that had been overrun by Germany. While being treated and fed, it was said that these *“harshly treated people showed great appreciation for even the smallest kind act.”*

As a testament to the rapid and deep advance of Allied forces into Germany, the 108<sup>th</sup> only remained in Hidingel for two short weeks. Once again, it was time to continue eastward to properly support the front lines.

Schoppenstedt, Germany (April 14, 1945)

The 108<sup>th</sup> journeyed past Hamelin speeding down the wide four-lane Autobahn, skirted Hannover, and finally reached Schoppenstedt located about 70 miles from Berlin. Along their journey through the rolling, geometrically laid out farm fields, local Germans watched with half frightened, half defiant



**Dad in Germany, 1945**

stares. Except for the American tanks which had preceded the 108<sup>th</sup>, Dad's unit was the first American troops to advance into this region in Germany.

The hospital was set up in a large grassy field in the late afternoon of April 14, 1945. It immediately received large numbers of Allied prisoners of war who had been liberated from German prisons by the advancing Allied armies. These prisoners shared stories of their inhuman treatment by the Germans. These stories were supported by their skinny faces, shrunken bodies, and injuries. Though dazed, these now free men were unable to believe their good fortune at finally falling into and receiving friendly care.

Dad wrote the below letter to the editor of the Tonica News from Schoppenstedt on April 16, 1945. In it, he perhaps refers to some of these prisoners being treated by his unit. He also refers to his crossing of the Rhine River less than two weeks earlier.

### **BOB WARNER SEES THE RHINE**

*Dear Mr. Richardson: This note is long overdue I know, but I do want to let you know that the News is still reaching me in good time and that it seems I appreciate each issue more. Yes, that big white envelope is a pleasant sight among a stake of letters, for it always seems to tell something that everyone else manages to forget. Thanks a million.*

*Things are the same here as ever. After all, our type of work can't change much. Each day in the "Stars and Stripes" there appears an article where some one from Washing-ton says the war will be ended in a few days. They surely haven't been talking to some of the fellows we see come back from the front. Oh, well, they say the closer you are to where news is being made, the less you know about it. I guess that is true.*

*I had several chances to see the Rhine first hand. It is surely quite a stream, not too wide, but plenty swift. One could easily see how the assault troops had a rough time going across. Those boys really deserve a lot of credit.*

*Well, Ray, there's no news that I can write – things just keep on the same here. Thanks again for the News its just like another letter from home.*



**American Prisoner of  
War Recovering with the  
108<sup>th</sup>**

*So long,  
Bob Warrner*

Twenty miles away on the banks of the Elbe River, American troops met Russian troops. Rumors of peace circulated throughout Dad's unit. Several days passed before Germany unconditionally surrendered on May 8, 1945, officially called Victory in Europe (VE) Day.

### Summary

In almost a year of constant operation, the 108th had ten major (and innumerable minor) setup bases in four different countries as they followed the front lines across France into Germany. Dad's unit was close enough to the front lines that at times they could hear the artillery and bomb explosions. An occasional stray German artillery shell landed near their camp and many times German planes would fly over or very near. The soldiers in his unit often joked that the Red Cross markings on top of their tents were actually an "X marks the spot" for German planes and artillery.

One of Dad's duties was to keep track of the dates that each of the men in the unit donated blood. While the 108<sup>th</sup> received shipments of plasma, they did not get much whole blood. That was provided by the unit's members. Although you were not supposed to donate blood any sooner than sixty days after your previous donation, sometimes it was needed sooner than that. Often the donor was placed on a cot, the recipient on a stretcher on the ground, and gravity moved the blood from one to the other.

In addition to Dad's duties as a pharmacist's assistant, he was also responsible for proper and respectful disposal of the arms and legs from the amputations. Dad proved the classic army rule of "give a hard job to a lazy man" was a wise one. The U.S. Army had a special Graves Burial and Registration Unit. This unit did a remarkable job during the war of keeping track of our dead soldiers. After the war most were either brought home or moved to large, permanent U.S. military cemeteries in Europe. Dad would take the arms and legs and place them in the bags with the dead American soldiers. This way they would get a respectful burial and would be with their fellow American soldiers. Dad often said in later years he would like to see the faces of the archaeologists that dug up these American war dead. *"They would sure know why the U.S. won the war," he would say. "They would think it was because our soldiers had three arms and four legs each!"*

Dad was one of the younger men in his unit. One of the other soldiers was a big, rough man who was also quite the "blowhard." Once he asked Dad what he had done before he joined the army. Dad told him that he had been employed as a "candy wrapper," that he was the one who wrapped the paper around the chocolates before they went into the boxes. Amazingly, the man believed Dad. Several times he asked Dad to request that his family send him some blank squares of paper so he could show him how he did it.



**Enlisted Men of the 108<sup>th</sup> – Dad is in the Second to Back Row (arrow)**

After almost a year of constant operation the 108<sup>th</sup> accumulated several remarkable statistics:

- Total admissions: 13,733
- Total enemy admissions: 2,233
- Total surgical operations: 6,066
- Total men returned to duty: 2,317 (21%)
- Total died of wounds: 1 in 1,000 (approximately 1,300)
- Total prescriptions dispensed: 21,870<sup>28</sup>
- Total miles travelled by truck: 467,000<sup>29</sup>
- Total dental procedures performed: 1,367

---

<sup>28</sup> This statistic, in particular, relates to Dad's direct role within the 108<sup>th</sup>.

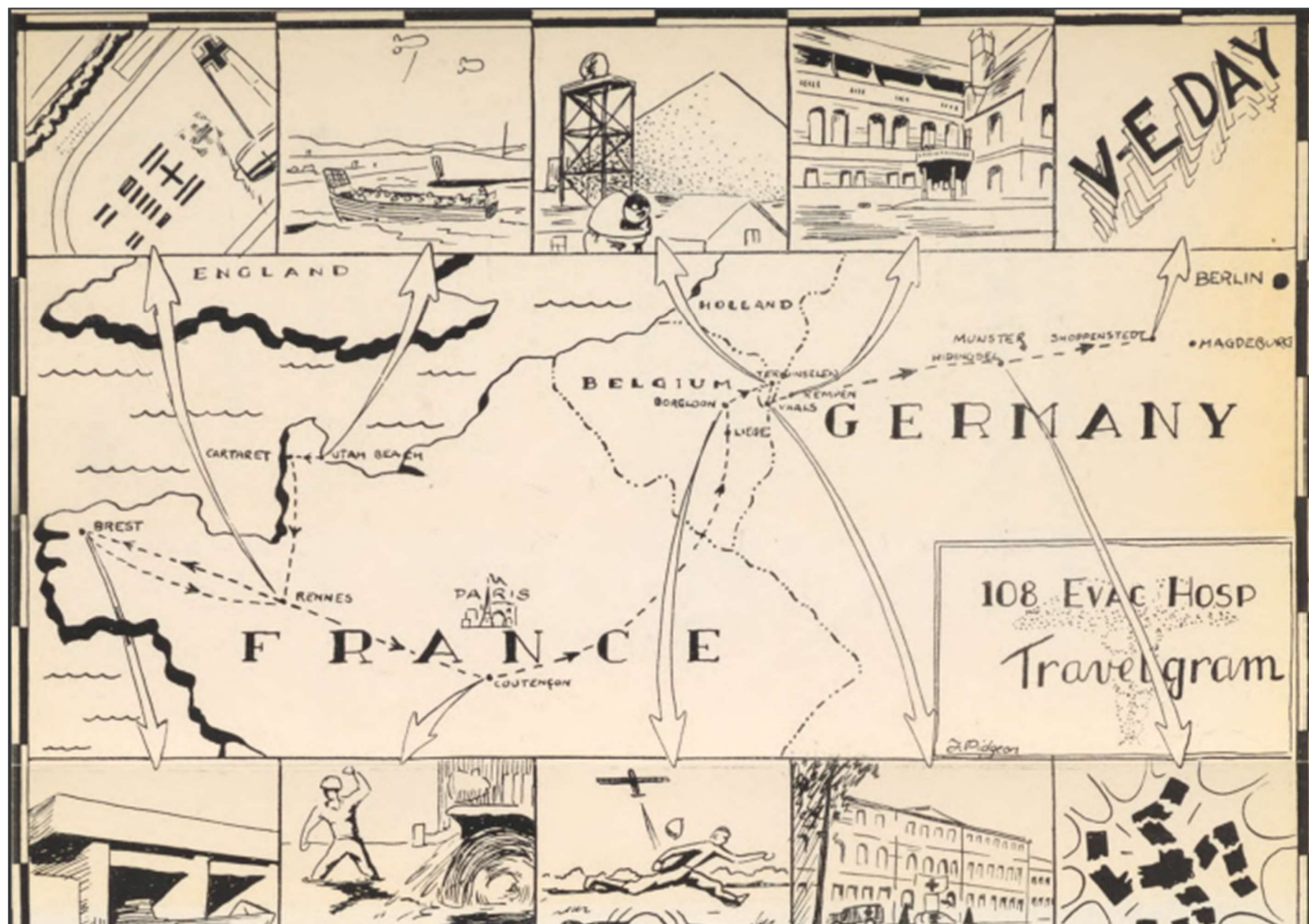
<sup>29</sup> The equatorial circumference of the Earth is 24,901 miles, equating to nearly 19 trips around the world.



**Members of the Lab and Pharmacy Section – Dad is Kneeling Front Row Left**



**Lab and Pharmacy Section in Action in France**



## Map Illustrating 108<sup>th</sup> Evacuation Hospital's Journey from France to Germany



HEADQUARTERS NINTH UNITED STATES ARMY  
Office of the Commanding General

APC 339  
2 May 1945

330.13 GNMSU

SUBJECT: Commendation, 108th Evacuation Hospital.

TO : Commanding Officer, 108th Evacuation Hospital.

1. The number of recoveries from severe wounds and the return-to-duty rate are considerably higher in the present war than in any previous one. This is extremely gratifying to me and is due not only to improved medical and surgical methods but also to the determined efforts and skillful services of our Medical Department in spite of the many difficulties encountered under combat conditions.

2. The personnel of the 108th Evacuation Hospital have brought particular distinction to themselves by their expert treatment and care of our sick and wounded, the rapid recovery of whom is the highest tribute that can be paid to the members of this fine medical organization.

3. I wish to extend my personal appreciation to each officer, nurse, and enlisted man of the 108th Evacuation Hospital for the excellent performance of their duties and the successful accomplishment of their mission in our recent operations. Your efforts have aided very considerably toward attaining the total defeat of our enemy.

/s/ W. H. Simpson  
/t/ W. H. SIMPSON  
Lieutenant General  
U. S. Army  
Commanding

Letter from the Commanding General of the Ninth Army

## A Letter Home

The final description of Dad's army experiences come to us through a letter provided by my brother, Tom. This letter was written on September 20, 1945, after the end of the war, while he was still in Germany.

*Dear Folks,*

*I hope you won't mind my using carbon paper in writing of my recent pass to the Rhine, for it seemed to be quite crazy for me to write two identical letters when carbon paper would accomplish the same thing. I am back at work today, the first time in five days, three of which we were almost convinced that we were no longer in the army. I will try to tell of the main events as they happened, and how they affected all of us fellows.*

*We learned that 20 fellows would be allowed to go on a pass to the "Rhine Valley." A few of us signed up, not knowing what the trip included. We left on my birthday, Sept 16, about eight in the morning. Our means of transportation was the ever reliable, "Truck, GMC, 2 1/2 ton, 6X6" as the army refers to the GI truck. We left Mergentheim, traveled through Wurzburg and Darmstadt, to Mainz, where we ferried across the Meine River. From there we continued to*



**GMC 2 1/2 ton 6x6 Truck**

*Bingen, where we once more boarded a ferry, this time to cross the Rhine. While we were waiting here for the ferry, we noticed a large statue*



**Germania with the  
Rhine River  
(background)**

*on the hill on the other side of the Rhine. The Germans, when questioned about it, said that is was "Germ-ania," but that was all any of them seemed to know about it. After crossing the river, we drove a few miles along*

*its bank to Assmannshausen, where we were to stay for the next three days.*

We reported to the hotel, and after we had our rooms assigned to us, we did a little inquiring as to what the whole deal was. We found that the hotel in which we were housed, The Krone Hotel, and a couple of others, were still being managed by the Germans who had always been in



*The Krone Hotel (2022)*

, they were now under the supervision of a U.S. Army officer and his crew of enlisted men. Incidentally, the first lieutenant who was in charge there was one swell fellow, and he did all he could to make us comfortable. We soon learned that we need not wear our neckties, which we had been accustomed to wear since the war ended over here. This alone seemed to be a privilege and a real pleasure.

As soon as we arrived, we were told that supper would be at six-thirty, so we had plenty of time to go to our rooms and prepare for the meal. I was in a room with two beds; Bill and I shared that room. It was sure nice to go into a room with beds, with sheets on them, with running water and all the convenience of a hotel at home. Bill and I laughed and admitted it was the first time that either of us had ever been to a hotel to spend the night. It took the U.S. Army to make us do that! We went down to the dining room for chow, not knowing just what was in store for us. The tables were set with table cloths, and it was a thrill to sit there and have the waitress serve us a four course meal. Tables with table cloths may not sound like much of a luxury to you folks, but when it has been nearly eighteen months since you've seen one, it looks pretty nice. So that was the way that I ate my birthday supper, in the dining room of the Krone Hotel, with the Rhine River flowing along not more than two hundred feet

*from where I sat. Fried chicken, baked potatoes and apple pie a la mode were the main constituents of my birthday meal.*

*Of course, I will have to tell you the part the lieutenant played in making the whole thing complete. When Wilke and I went in to eat, we said that since it was my birthday, we should have some of the other fellows eat with us. Bill and Art Walter joined us at our table. Wine was served with the meal, and as we were drinking that Wilke turned to the Lt., whose table happened to be behind ours, and told him that he and I were celebrating our birthdays there. "That's fine," he said, "I'll see what I can do for you." He went to the end of the dining room where a couple of fellows were playing a piano and a violin, and in a minute the strains of "Happy Birthday" floated through the room. Everyone recognized it at once and although only a few knew who they were singing for, all joined in. Seconds later, a waiter appeared at our table with two bottles of champagne, a gift from the Lt. and his crew. Most of the fellows from the surrounding tables enjoyed the champagne more than Wilke or I either one, but we each drank a glass to please the Lt. It was the first time I'd ever tasted the darned stuff. The Lt.'s only remark was, "Why didn't you tell me sooner, and I would have had them make you a cake?" He would have, too. He was that kind of a guy.*

*We went to a USO show after supper, and when we returned to the hotel, someone asked the Lt. what time we should get up in the morning. He replied, "Don't worry, we'll get you up." Bill and I were both sleeping soundly the next morning when a fellow came in, laid a copy of the "Stars and Stripes" on each bed, and said "breakfast in half an hour." That was another privilege we enjoyed every morning during our stay here.*



**Germania (2022)**

*After breakfast we got on a truck, and an English speaking guide joined us, and we were off to see the sights in the nearby village. We visited the statue "Germania," that we had viewed the day before from across the river, and learned it was to the Germans what the Statue of Liberty is to all Americans. The rest of the morning was spent in visiting the ruins of old castles, and monasteries, and churches and etc. We returned to the hotel for dinner and then spent the afternoon in much the same manner. We saw the famous "Mouse Tower" that Longfellow mentioned in his "Children's Hour," and various other old castles and towers located on islands and mountain tops. The people who built all of these various places must have had only one*

thought in mind, that being to build a house where no one would bother them. And they did just that.

W  
h  
e  
n  
  
t  
h  
e  
y  
  
c  
a  
n  
e  
  
i  
n  
  
t  
o



**Mouse Tower Located on the Rhine River with Ehrenfels Castle in the Background (2022). Note the Terraced Grapes Vines Referenced by Dad.**

ake us up the next morning, they gave us a sheet of paper telling us that there was a boat ride scheduled for the day on a 210 ft. river steamer. It listed the towns we would pass and the names of the various castles and points of interest that we would pass. Due to the fog, we got a late start on the boat ride, but we spent about six hours going up and down the Rhine. The ride itself was nice, and it gave us an excellent opportunity to see some more of the sights. The river banks on both sides rose quite steeply to great heights, and were terraced and covered with grapes. I never saw so many grapes in my life, and all day all any of us could do was sit there and estimate the time it would take to gather them all.

The Germans were surely determined that the allies would not get any use of their river barges, for many, many of them had been tied to the bank, and then allowed to fill with water and sink. All docks and wharves along the shore had likewise been destroyed. Now that it is all over and the Germans lost the war in spite of their precautions, many are busy now pumping water from the boats and rebuilding the docks. It surely will take them a long time to complete the job.

The next morning we ate breakfast, our last meal at the hotel, and decided to leave for camp at ten o'clock. Most of the fellows were going to cross the river once more to visit a castle they had been eyeing ever since our arrival, but I had enough of castle visiting and looking at something that was a hundred years old. Art, Walter, and I made a deal

*with a kid to get us some fishing tackle, and we fished while the rest of the group went to the castle. Art caught one, but I had my usual luck, so I can never truthfully say that I caught a fish in the Rhine. Our trip home was uneventful, we returned by a different route, coming through Frankfurt and Heidelberg, instead of the way we went down.*

*All agreed that it had been a wonderful trip, although it was not the scenic beauty of the Rhine that made the impression on us as did the accommodations that we had there. To eat and sleep as we did, to be able to dress as we wanted to, and to come and go as we wished were not things that we were accustomed to. Once more we had been treated like people, not as part of a machine as one becomes in the army. So it was with sad hearts that we got off the truck in Bad Mergentheim, for we know that our vacation had ended, and that in the morning we would find ourselves in the army again.*

*So long,*

*Bob*



**Kurhotel Viktoria in Bad Mergentheim, Germany.  
Note that Dad had Identified his Room (upper right).**

## Coming Home

When the war ended in Europe, Dad's unit found out that it was scheduled to be one of the medical units following up the invasion of the Japanese main islands. The men were told that they would be transported to the Philippine Islands, the staging point for the invasion.

Dad slept in the same tent as several other soldiers. After the end of the European War, things relaxed quite a bit. Some of the others would stay out late, drinking, before returning to the unit. One night one of the men returned, obviously drunk, shouting that the Americans had dropped only one bomb on Japan, but it had "blown them all to hell!" He kept insisting the war was over. Dad thought he was just another drunk, and after awhile put him to bed and went to sleep, never realizing that the war was indeed almost over.

When the official news arrived about the use of the new A-bombs and the surrender of the Japanese, great relief was felt by his unit. Dad was never one of those who later questioned the wisdom of Truman's decision to use the bomb on Japan. He always believed it saved many lives, including those of his friends and perhaps even his own.

With the end of the war the wait began for the trip back home. The U.S. had over 12,000,000 men and women overseas. It would take several years to bring them all back. A point system was created for the return of these people. Each person earned one point for each month of military service and an additional point for each month spend in a combat zone. Bonus points were awarded for each dependent (e.g., ten points for a spouse), for combat decorations and wounds received. Dad had about thirty points, but totals over fifty points were common. It was clear that he would have to wait awhile for his return home.

Then his father, my Grandpa Joe Warmer, suffered a serious stroke in late December of 1945. In an era before nursing homes and rehab centers, there was nothing the medical system could do to help him. The Red Cross, working with the army, arranged for Dad to get an emergency release from the military. Thus, Dad was able to come home much earlier than some of his friends in the same unit.

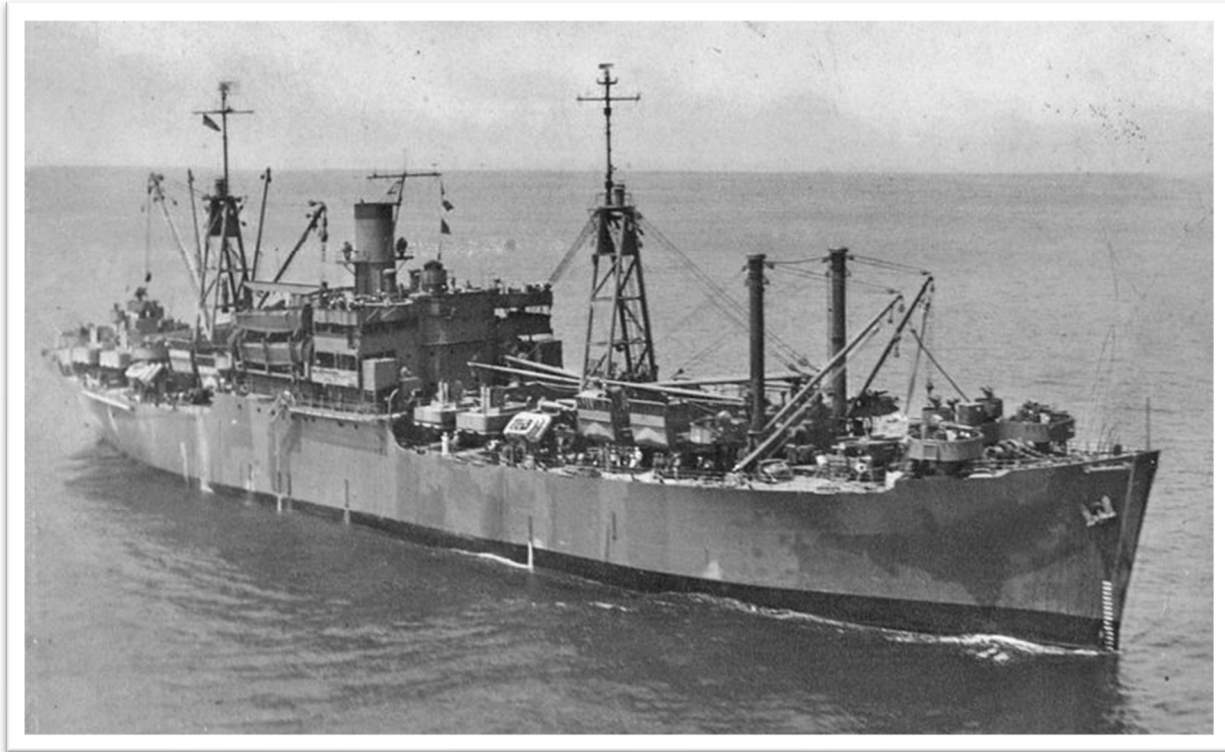
Dad, like many other soldiers, accumulated a sizeable amount of war "booty." His included a German flag, a bronze bust of Adolf Hitler, and some other items in a large duffel bag. As they were moved across Europe to the seaport, Dad's truck skidded around a curve and the bag fell out. No one was interested in stopping and going back for it.

The trip home was very rough. His first trip across the ocean was on a large liner, but the second was on a Liberty ship. These ships were not only very small, but very unstable in high seas<sup>30</sup>. Dad got very, very seasick on the way home. In fact, he claims that he started vomiting while the ship was still tied up at the dock in Germany! When his ship arrived in New York City, the loudspeaker called for all the men to come to the top deck so they could

---

<sup>30</sup> Liberty ships had a max speed of 11 knots, which was half the speed of the USS Wakefield (21.5 knots). Because of this, Dad's return trip across the Atlantic took at least twice as long too.

see the Statue of Liberty. But Dad so seasick that he was unable to come up at see her.



**Liberty Ship During World War II**

He arrived in New York City on February 10, 1946 and then took a plane<sup>31</sup> to Chicago. While he was waiting for his transport to his next train ride (to Ottawa) he heard that the Red Cross was paying \$5 to anyone who would donate blood. After several years of donating for free, this seemed like a good deal to Dad. So he donated blood and got a ticket worth \$5 from the army cashier. He was on his way to collect his money, when someone yelled that they were taking people over to the next train ride. He had the choice of \$5 or a quicker ride home. He arrived home with the \$5 receipt (now worthless) in his pocket. A few hours later he arrived in Ottawa. There his brother picked him up and took him to Lowell (where his parents still lived).

---

<sup>31</sup> This was likely Dad's first plane ride.

## Dad's Service Record

During Dad's time in the service he earned three different combat service bars (Northern France campaign, Rhineland campaign, and Central Europe campaign). He also received the European/African/Middle East Campaign medal with three bronze battle stars attached, a Good Conduct medal, and a World War II Victory medal. His total time of active service was two years, seven months and twenty-three days.



(Above) Three Overseas Combat Service Bars



(Above) WW2 Victory Medal

(Below) Good Conduct Medal



(Below) Europe-Africa-Middle East Campaign Medal



## Homecoming

Leaving New York City, Dad traveled by plane to Chicago and then by train to Ottawa. It had only taken the Red Cross 40 days to locate Dad, arrange for his leave from his unit, and get him back to the States. Just as his brother had driven him to that station three years earlier, so did he return now to pick Dad up and take him back home to Lowell.

I can think of no better way to end the story of Dad's army years than to pass my sister's description of Mom and Dad's reunion upon his return from the war:

*"When Dad finally came home from the war, he first went to Lowell to see his folks. One of his brothers came to Tonica to tell Mom he was home and to bring her back to Lowell to see Dad. In her own words, Mom "went crazy," screaming and running to see him."*

Jean later added:

*"I like to think that it will be that way in heaven when Mother finds out that Dad is on his way to be with her again."*

Dad later related that his family expected too much of him once he was back home. They overestimated his medical training and hoped that he could turn his father's health around. Unfortunately, it was too late for anything or anyone to make a difference for my Grandpa Joe, who passed away shortly after Dad and Mom got married.