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The Final Chapter

With the ending of the war, crews were kept busy with rescue missions to Northern Italy, carrying food and medicines to the starving Italians; flying sightseeing missions for ground personnel; flying older crews to Naples for return to the States; flying personnel to rest camps.

Word soon came down from 15th Air Force Headquarters that the 2nd and 97th Bomb Groups were to remain in Italy as part of the Occupation Forces. A point system was established, 85 being the magic number as I remember it. Those with more were to be rotated home by means of other units going home. Those below 85 were to remain. Replacements for those going home were to come from low point personnel of other units.

It was a hectic time for the Records Section, not only shipping personnel out but receiving the replacements. Many men had to wait for, and train, a replacement before being placed on shipping orders. My replacement arrived on the 26th of May and I immediately began the orientation process. Some tent mates began to leave. We had hoped to all go together.

My orders came to go to the 456th Bomb Group on June 29th but still remained at the 2nd. By this time, only 1st Sgt. John McWeeney and I remained in "TURMOIL VII."

July 3, a contingent departed for the 456th Bomb Group but I had been removed from the orders - reason unknown. July 4th I found myself on orders to report to the 301st Bomb Group with John McWeeney and others. Upon arrival we were lined up to check in. Somewhere between "M" and "R" there was a cutoff, and I was returned to the 2nd. I was angry, discouraged and disheartened. All my friends were gone. Unbelievable happening! July 6th I was on orders again to report to the 999th Engineering Squadron and found some of our men there already; so I was among friends. Physicals, shots, etc. kept us busy.

July 9th we loaded onto trucks for departure to Naples. A strange scene occurred at this time. Our truck was open bedded with drop down benches on each side. As we climbed aboard and sat down, one fellow crawled between the legs of others and under one of the benches. As the convoy pulled out from the walled and gated compound, I noticed a horse and buggy near the gate. In it were an older Italian man and a young, very pregnant Italian girl. The man was peering intently at each truck as it passed through the gate. We had progressed, perhaps 75 yards, when this fellow crawled out from under the bench, stood up, and waved and called goodbye to the girl. With that, the driver of the buggy took off, whipping the horse with a large whip. Suddenly the convoy stopped, the buggy was getting closer and closer. The G.I. began pounding on the truck cab and shouting for the driver to "GO, GO!" The driver had no idea of what was happening and could not have moved had he wanted to. Just before the buggy reached the truck, the convoy started to move and pulled slowly away. I don't know what might

have happened had he caught up to the truck. I didn't see a gun but that whip looked very dangerous. So much for Italian-American relations.

We arrived at a staging area in Naples and assigned quarters. Beds were slats, no mattress. Sleeping was a back breaker for the time we were there. We had more physicals and traded in our Lira for American money. July 19th we boarded the S.S. Argentina, a sister ship of the S.S. Mariposa on which I had sailed to North Africa. I was assigned a stateroom with 29 others. Bunks were three tiers of steel and canvass.

The trip was uneventful and I spent most of my time on deck, soaking up the sun and reading. Card and crap games were in process all over the place but I stayed away from them.

The morning of July 29 we entered New York harbor. We were greeted by fire boats spouting streams of water and other ships sounding their horns and whistles. We lined the rails watching all that was happening, and as we passed the Statue of Liberty tears came to my eyes. I am sure that I was not the only one to shed a tear. We quickly debarked and Red Cross girls were there with milk and ice cream, a band was there also.

We were loaded onto a train and soon on our way to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. This is from where I departed over two years ago. I remember passing through some town with three and four-story housing developments. The back porches faced the tracks and were lined with flags and bunting. People were out waving and children were running along the tracks calling and waving. What a wonderful feeling! We were more excited than they were.

We arrived at Camp Kilmer, were assigned quarters and told we would be processed for a 30-day leave as quickly as possible. By this time it was late afternoon and we were directed to the Mess Hall. What a feast! The t-bone steak was the largest I had ever seen and there were all the trimmings to go along with it, and, all we could eat.

We were then told where there was a long bank of telephones available to call home, free of charge. There was a mad dash for the telephones. It finally was my turn and I dialed home. Mother answered the phone and I said, "Hello Mom, it's Charles, I'm home," and tears flowed on both ends of the line. I explained I had just arrived at Kilmer, was to be given a 30-day leave, and was to be processed from there as soon as possible. I said I would call again as soon as I knew anything further.

The next day I was shipped to the Military Reservation at Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. There I received orders for a 30-day leave and to report to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, September 1 for further assignment. I called the Greyhound Bus Line for departure times for Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and transfer to my hometown, Steubenville, Ohio. I called Mother, told her where I was and my travel plans. My sister, Wilma Skinner, was home at the time and insisted on picking me up at the depot in Pittsburgh.

I was told to keep what I wanted to take home, pack the rest in my barracks bags, identify them and they would be shipped to Sioux Falls. I never saw them again!

The ride to Pittsburgh through the Pennsylvania countryside was a wonderful sight to me. The rolling hills, green forests, farms were a real contrast to the stark countryside of North Africa and Italy.

Wilma and a nephew, George Ross, were waiting at the Bus Depot and we were quickly on the way to Steubenville, about 35 miles away on the Ohio River. We crossed the Ohio, over the Fort Steuben Bridge, into town. As we drove down tree lined North Fourth Street, I felt that as last I was home.

Mother, three other sisters, older brother, nieces and nephews were there to greet me. Only brothers Robert and Walter were not there. Bob, in the Navy, was on the West Coast about to ship out to the Pacific and Walt was in Austria. He was in the 80th Signal Corps, 80th Infantry Division. They had entered France shortly after D-Day, fought across France, diverted to the "Bulge" to help relieve Bastogne, back into France, across Germany and now he was part of the Occupation Forces in Austria. I hadn't seen him in three and one-half years.

What a joyous reunion and what a wonderful month! Picnics, other family gatherings, fishing with my oldest brother Louis. Many an afternoon was spent in the Fort Steuben Hotel Grill drinking beer with other veterans that had just returned, swapping tales of our experiences. There was sadness also; news of many of our friends that would not be coming home - Ledley Basden, Edward Daugherty, Robert Dunkle, William Erwin, John C. Kaufman, William Mabius, John MacIntosh, William Mushrush, Howard Nickolson, Robert Reiger, Loren R. Thompson, and Robert Thompson to name a few. The real tragedy was that many of these young men were the only son in the family. Now no one to carry on the family name. Then there was the fun of becoming reacquainted with those wonderful American girls!

It was during this month that the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the surrender of the Japanese - "VJ Day." Debates still continue about the need for using those bombs. It is a known fact that the Japanese were preparing for an invasion. The loss of life would have been terrible on both sides and devastation of the Japanese homeland would have been catastrophic. If one American life was saved by the use of those bombs, they were worth it! It must be remembered that the Japanese started this war, and we finished it! What a relief to Mother that her three sons were coming home.

The month passed quickly and I received orders to report to Camp Atterbury, Indiana on the 1st of September. I reported to camp and received my discharge on the 7th of September, 1945 and was on a train for home.

So it was over! Nothing spectacular, no heroics, just proud to have served, and survived. I still get a lump in my throat when the "Flag" passes by and when I hear the *National Anthem* or *God Bless America*.