

Recollections of Military Service – Fredrick Walker Cline, 8/08

Moving through France; around Nancy; Alsace-Lorraine; 16 tanks in front, three half-tracks (Fred was in one); when you come to a town, the tanks take out the steeple, and the machine guns take out the second story windows of all the houses.

In the early going, his unit had been under very good fire. There was a sheep and a shepherd on a hillside. When they sent a few fellows over, turned out he had a radio and had been sending in coordinates.

Patton wanted a toe hold on the Rhine river; on the 8th day of November the 4th armored division went through the 26th infantry division in a snow storm, into unknown territory. About the second day they ran into an SS unit, with the death head on their uniforms. Every day for several days they would lose men, and lose equipment; finally another unit got them out, running.

Pulled into a potato field, pulled off the machine guns. Fred's half-track had the clutch burn out. Three shells later, the half-track was blown sky high.

A few days later Fred was pulled out with feet black as the ace of spades. He spent a week or so in a hospital in Paris (best Thanksgiving meal he'd ever had); then he was transferred to a hospital in England. Then he was assigned to the military police, and spent four months in Southhampton, escorting convoys to the ports. Then across to Le Havre, marching German soldiers onto ships to send back to England.

Once VE day came, Fred took a train to Marseilles, got his yellow fever shot (that's a bad sign), and there's only one possibility: headed for the Pacific. As he crossed the Panama canal (going through on the 7th of July), Fred got his Dear John letter (she's going to marry the doctor); 35 days later, they're in Manila. Only been there a few days, near Clark field; a kid's out there hitchhiking and Fred's driving a jeep. The lieutenant says "isn't this a beautiful city." Fred had just been on the Riviera, and wondered where someone could be coming from to have that opinion of this rubble-strewn city – Karatchi, India. Don't ever accept free transportation to Karatchi, India.

The old men went home first. Married people got points; those who'd served longer got more points. When Fred went home he went on a decommissioned ship, passing through the Panama canal going East seven months to the day (February 7th). Morning of the 13th of February he got word from the sergeant that if they'd double time it he'd have them out there that day. Fred jumped on the bus to Rockford; caught the train to Galesburg; and made his parents' anniversary in a big snowstorm.

Fred remembers being knocked down by a shell, ears ringing, and being hauled up by an officer who declared that he'd never seen anyone that close to a shell and survive.