

Twenty-One Plus

1941 – June, 1944

In the fall of 1941 I was twenty-one. Sometime that Fall my aunt Josephine Whelan, actually my mother's aunt, came to Indianapolis from her home in Chicago to give me a gold watch which was a family heirloom. In the back of this watch was inscribed the name Lida Brown and a date. I have no idea who this lady was or what was the relationship to our family.

Aunt Josephine was a person for whom time stood still in places other than Chicago. (For example, on one trip to Indianapolis, she wrote to ask my parents if they could find someone with a horse and buggy to meet her at the Union Station!) At this time she came to the Indianapolis News, where I worked, and asked the receptionist for "Billie Dick" Fuller. That was my nickname as a kid. Later, for some reason I told this story to Army buddies and it immediately became my nickname. Their ready acceptance of this two-word name is consistent with southern practice: Billy Bob, Daisy Mae, etc.

We were very naive kids, We "believed" in Santa Claus and the Easter bunny. I think we even believed that the doctor actually did bring the baby in that little "black bag" he carried. We were really quite naive about sex. I don't recall knowing about much sexual activity among my peers. Only one of my friends ever discussed having sex. When four of us, including this friend, celebrated our 21st birthdays, we visited a "house of ill fame." Only this one guy availed himself of the services offered. We other three sat in the Parlor trying to ignore what the girls were offering.

At that time I thought that I was "called" to the Christian Ministry. In 1940 I had started going to a night Bible School, called the Indianapolis Bible Institute (IBI). It was located at 1927 Park Avenue. Dr. P(eter). E. Smith ran the school. His wife Aula was the music teacher. A Dr. Turnbull was one of the teachers and there was at least one more. I had been quite active in a small non-denominational church in Ravenswood, had taught a bible class there and even served as Lay preacher.

At IBI I discovered that I had a good voice for story telling and was complimented for it by one of my teachers. This led to an ambition to be a radio announcer and I did have at least one audition; at a radio station in Fort Wayne Indiana.

In 1942 Dr. Smith changed the name of the school to the pretentious Indiana Christian University. It continued under that title until 1945,

but I didn't go there any more. I can only remember the name of one other classmate besides Marie Gish whom I mentioned toward the end of *The Teen Years*. That other classmate became a very important part of my life.

Back on January 7, 1923, John C. Bailey, of Coal Valley (Rock Island County), Illinois, had written in a diary which he kept religiously for 65 years: "It snowed today. Nobody went to church. Edna had a girl." That girl was Louella (Lou) Myers Peterson and J.C. Bailey was her great grandfather. She is the other person I remember from IBI! I met her in Indianapolis where she had come from Moline, Illinois, to work for the U.S. Government's Farm Security Administration.



Lou and me - 1941

She also started attending the night classes at the seminary.

When I learned that Lou lived at the YWCA's Blue Triangle, a YWCA residence for young women near 7th and Pennsylvania Street, I contrived to drive through that area on the way to classes at IBI. Thus, I "accidentally" found her waiting for the streetcar on a corner nearby. It seemed only natural that I would offer her a ride.

Typically, after class, a few of us went to the nearby Martha Washington ice cream shop for ice cream – Pumpkin was my favorite flavor. After a few weeks Lou started going with us for ice cream. I was the one who invited her and I recall her mentioning something about a pre-existing relationship between me and Marie. I guess I assured her that this was no problem. It really wasn't, as I had never sparked any interest from Marie. Even if there had been, I think it would have dissipated soon as I very early decided that I wanted something to come of a relationship with Lou.

I invited Lou to have dinner at our house on Sunday, November 30, 1941. She agreed to come. However, there was one problem. I didn't yet know her name. I called the school office and, having described her, found that her name was what I have noted above. The invitation to dinner which was also repeated for the following Sunday.

After dinner on that second "date" I went to Schulmeyer's Bakery for some reason and there I learned that the Japanese had bombed some place called Pearl Harbor. This, of course, was Decem-

ber 7, 1941 - "A day that will live in infamy" according to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. It was this special sequence of events that engraved these dates on my memory!

Lou and I began to date rather regularly. I had very early expressed to her my desire to make this relationship permanent. She was not so eager. First of all, she had a boy friend back in Coal Valley, near Moline, Illinois. Second, I was not like the men she had known before. As she told me later, she had confided to her Mother how different I was: "He doesn't know anything about cars." Her brother, Ed, and her boy friend were natural mechanics.

Most of our week night dates were following classes. Lou continued to be a regular guest at our house on Sunday. We didn't spend much time at the beach, but one night I took Lou for a canoe ride. Not being a swimmer, she was apprehensive about this, especially at night. It rained and we got soaked. We didn't repeat that activity.

Our dates began and ended at the Blue Triangle. The house mother, Mrs. Gore, was very sticky about the girls being in on time. Our signal that it was time to say good night was the lighted clock on the American States Insurance office building across the War Memorial plaza going off. Needless to say, Lou seldom went in before that light went off. I have always had a soft spot in my heart for American States Insurance.

On Pennsylvania Street, just north of the Blue Triangle, was the Toll House Cafe. Among other things, they served chocolate pie. Delicious. Nearby there was a White Castle serving those tiny five cent hamburgers.

As Lou and I continued to date, much of our activity centered around Christian activities.



At Taylor University

A friend, Hartsell Wilhite, was a young minister. He engaged in street corner preaching in small towns around Indianapolis. We were frequently involved in these activities. He also bought Sunday morning time on one of the Indianapolis radio stations and had a preaching ministry there. I was the announcer. Lou and I frequently wrote

scripts for the broadcast; not the sermon, that was Hartsell's, but the rest of the show. This was as close as I got to being a radio announcer. Later

Hartsell officiated at our Wedding Ceremony.

Lou and I, with some other friends, also attended Bible Conferences at Taylor University at Upland, Indiana, and one in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains.

Even before Pearl Harbor, and before I met Lou, I had written to England about enlisting in the Royal Air Force (RAF). (See Page 176) My reading about flying aces and building models of their planes had given me a desire to fly. However, the RAF replied that they were no longer accepting enlistments from U.S. nationals unless they were fully trained. They suggested (9 September, 1941) that I try the Royal Canadian Air Force. I didn't follow up on that. It was just as well, because a few days later I met Lou.

America declared war on Japan and Germany on December 8, 1941. The country began to mobilize immediately. Friends, and my brother Holy, were entering the service. Eventually, all three of us, Holy, Bob and I were in various services: Holy - Air Corps, Bob - Navy and Me - Army.



Bill, Bob, Holy
April 24, 1943



Bob
A few months later

As the U.S. Armed Services were seeking to win volunteers, they offered the Service of one's choice in exchange for volunteering. During the summer of 1942 I thought of this option and volunteered for service in the Army Air Corps in August of that year. I became Private William R. Fuller, 15107994. I probably would have been drafted soon and in that case you couldn't choose your branch. (See my Registration Card on Page 179)

Incidentally, enlistments were "For the duration, plus six months."

Along with a lot of other recruits, I boarded a train at Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indianapolis. We were no sooner underway than a rumor

circulated that we were going to a Field Artillery camp. I didn't believe this as we had been promised the service branch of our choice if we enlisted. I knew we were headed for an Air Corps base! The idea that I might have been duped as to branch of service had never entered my mind; I had even bought Lou a locket to wear with the Air Corps insignia on it! What I had failed to understand was that the "Air Corps" was part of the Army; not a separate branch. I think it was viewed as separate long before it actually became so after WWII.

The rumors were correct, so, while I thought I was going to the Army Air Corps, I ended up in an artillery unit at Camp Sutton in a red clay field near Monroe, North Carolina. The unit was the 141st Field Artillery, a federalized National Guard unit from Louisiana. My disappointment vanished when, at an assembly of the recruits, we were welcomed by the General with these words:



The Recruit

"Men, when you go into town and edge up to the bar and say 'I'm a cannoneer,' they'll make room for you!" I report this a bit 'tongue-in-cheek,' but he really did say it. I also learned to sing:

We're from the L.A.N.G.
 One forty first artillery,
 Try us our crest,
 The field artillery's the best.

In the 141st Field Artillery, I first encountered Creole food. Also, being in the south, we had grits every morning for breakfast. A lot of the recruits, like me, were from the north and grits were not accepted too well. I learned that equal parts of hot grits and butter made a very palatable dish. I got lots of grits.

It took several weeks for me to understand what was going on. I was disappointed not to be in the Air Corps. I went through two weeks of basic training with all the recruits, but I was not assigned any real duty. I was made a radio operator which I enjoyed because I had liked the radio stuff Kenny Wise and I had done. We had talked about getting licenses one day. So learning Morse Code was perfect for the moment. I got up to 12 words per minute. My other duty was to work with the Mess Sergeant to study the Officers Handbook and various manuals on artillery equip-

ment. It turned out that tests showed that I had a high IQ (despite my high school career) and I was pegged from the start to be a subject for Officer Candidate School (OCS). The Sergeant wanted to go to OCS also.

The Army's predetermination of my future was also very fortunate for me, because somewhere in this time frame, Lou had agreed to marry me if I got a commission. Since she knew something of my high school record, she probably thought this was a way of saying "No" without saying no.

Lou claims that my telling this story makes her look like a "gold digger." I think it shows her practical side.

The precariousness of my position was under scored when I asked her to send me a photo of herself. She readily complied, but when the photo arrived, it showed her wearing a locket given



Lou in 1942

to her by her Coal Valley boyfriend. I would have recognized the one I bought. I had been so trusting of that recruiting officer that I had bought a locket for Lou with the Air Corps insignia on it. Lou claims she was not sending me a message; she just hadn't thought about it all!

Incidentally, soon after I departed, Lou became ill with pneumonia. Mrs. Gore, the Blue triangle House Mother, blamed it on a weakened condition due to my having kept Lou out late too many nights.

After several weeks of training at Camp Sutton, the 141st was transferred to Camp Blanding near Stark, Florida. Camp Sutton was embedded in a mire of red Clay. Camp Blanding was a sand pile. Sand was everywhere; it was almost impossible to keep one's rifle and other gear clean. The humidity of north Florida was outrageous. In the morning dew dripped off the roof onto the shutters sounding like rain.

Then about Christmas time 1942, we were transferred to Fort Sill near Lawton, Oklahoma, to provide practice artillery for the Officer Candidate School there. We left Florida in our light khakis and arrived, thus clad, at Lawton, Oklahoma, in freezing weather. Our Christmas packages which had been mailed to us at Camp Blanding eventually caught up to us at Fort Sill.

I continued my studies of artillery equipment. I learned from the books how to operate an Aiming Circle, the Gun Sight, angles of deflection, big T and little T gunnery (referring to the angle at the target between the guns and the observer), sizes of shells and powder portions, etc. Eventually I described these functions to a panel of officers set to decide if I would go to OCS. I guess my performance was acceptable because I did get that assignment. At that time I was transferred to OCS at Fort Sill.

An interesting note is that I had never seen any of the equipment whose use I was called upon to explain. I had only read about them in army training manuals.

Along with this assignment came a promotion to Corporal and the first step toward meeting Lou's condition. The Mess Sergeant didn't make it to OCS. It is sometimes said that the Army travels on its stomach, so why would one change a good cook into an artillery officer?

The winter at Fort Sill was quite severe. There was always a lot of wind. We joked that Oklahoma had no soil of its own; the soil there was just in transition from Texas to Kansas or vice versa.

Our days at OCS were long; rushing to meals, rushing to classes; learning to use actual aiming circles, transits, etc., often in freezing rain requiring that we keep our hands over the lenses when not in use so they would not freeze over. One of the things they had us do to improve our command capability was to go out along nearby Medicine Bluff and shout commands at the top of our voices.

(Legend says that Geronimo rode his horse off Medicine Bluff to escape the U.S. Cavalry. This act is thought to be the origin of the WWII paratroopers cry "Geronimo" as they leapt from their planes.)

I especially liked artillery practice. Directing the guns (that's what artillery pieces are called) when they were sometimes behind you; sometimes off to one side or the other presented interesting geometrical problems. Later, when I was in a combat unit, we built "smoke tables" on which ar-



*On leave before OCS
January, 1943*

tillery firing could be practiced in the recreation room.

On April 14, 1943, having completed Officer Candidate Class #60, my enlisted career as Corporal ended by reason of: "Convenience of the Government to accept assignment as a 2nd Lt and active duty in the AUS, Sect X AR 615-360." My new serial number was 01 180 504. (See Page 177) We recent graduates were given a ten day leave before reporting to our next assignments. So I prepared to return to Indiana to verify that Lou had meant her promise.

My train to Indiana was one of the latest in the day. While I waited I wandered around Lawton, wondering what I had gotten myself into. A few years ago a kid who flunked English rather than give an oral book review was now expected to command others, sometimes older than he. It was the end of one era and the beginning of one completely different from any past experience. This different era changed again nine days later when, on April 23, 1943, Lou and I were married in Ravenswood, Indiana. Our friend, Reverend Hartsell Wilhite, officiated and the ceremony took place at the Light House Church of Ravenswood, an independent, but Baptist-like, congregation.

After OCS, I was assigned to return to Fort Sill for advanced training in Survey Course #13. Many of the subjects I studied in OCS and in Survey school called for mathematical knowledge which I had somehow picked up while pursuing my path of "credit for effort" in high school. I was one of those lucky people for which mathematical things "just make sense."

Lou and I left Indianapolis by train the morning after our wedding for my assignment to Survey Course #13. We went by train as far as Oklahoma City; then by bus to Lawton, Oklahoma. When we arrived in Lawton, we registered in a hotel. The next morning I went off to Fort Sill to report in. When I returned, Lou had checked out of the hotel. I wondered if she had left me already. Finally, she showed up. She had gone to a clearing house for rooms and had found us lodging. That was typical of her thorough approach to problems.

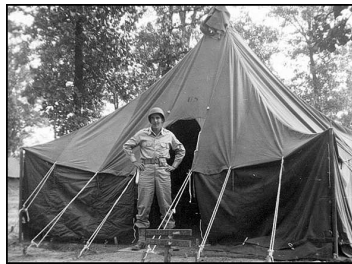
We lived in a rented room which meant taking our meals in restaurants. Early on a serious problem in our marriage developed. I always liked to have dessert after my meal. Lou usually didn't want dessert, but wanted a "taste" of mine. I insisted that I bought dessert so I could have it. If she wanted dessert she should order her own. Somehow we got past what could have been an impasse.

Naturally, Lou was alone all day. There was only so much to do in Lawton, so she spent a lot of time in our room. Unfortunately, our landlord wanted to be “friendly.” Lou rebuffed him, but such happenings were one part of the unpleasantness young military couples faced. We also made a few friends among the other recently made “shave tails” and their wives. I often regret that the press of “getting on” after the war resulted in gradual loss of contact with most of them.

After Survey school there was a small period of waiting for an assignment. The army set this period as one of physical training. My fellow fledgling officers and I spent a good part of the day directed in calisthenics by an officer who made Simon Legree look like an angel. I came back to our room at night too stiff to move. This lasted about two weeks and then, in June, 1943, I was ordered to report to the 30th Infantry Division in Tennessee.

The Division was housed in tents along the highway connecting Winchester to Tullahoma. It was called Camp Forrest - an appropriate title because it was in a forest.

The 30th was the federalized Tennessee and North Carolina National Guard. So once again, I was in a southern unit. The grits continued. But I learned some folksy sayings: Of a slim guy who eats a lot - “He eats so much it makes him po’ to carry it.” Of a place far from the



At Camp Forrest

road - “They’re so far back in the woods, they have to pipe in sunshine.” On stopping in a small town to ask directions - “Don’t move a durned foot.”

A Division, like the 30th Infantry Division, was made up of three Infantry Regiments, three light (105mm howitzer) Artillery Battalions and one medium (155 mm howitzer) Artillery Battalion. There was also a Service and Supply Company and a Headquarters Company and other support groups. All told, a Division involves about 30,000 men. An artillery battalion consists of three Batteries and support units. A battery has four howitzers and involves just over 100 men.

We arrived in Tullahoma, Tennessee, and another search for lodging. There were, basically, two kinds of people around army posts: those who wanted to make money from soldiers and those

who made or paid for the signs that said “Dogs And Soldiers Keep Off The Grass.” We were fairly lucky. Lou found a family in nearby Estill Springs which was taking in army couples. The Ingleberger family had five children. They had a five room house. They rented out two of the rooms. We also had kitchen privileges.

The seven family members didn’t include the mice. I have no idea how many of them there were, but Lou set me to catch and eliminate them. Traps set would go off at all hours of the night. Lou could not sleep with the trapped mice thrashing about so I had to eliminate them. I simply threw mouse, trap and all into the yard to wait for morning. It wasn’t just their presence that was a bother, but their destructiveness. They would climb an extension wire, cross the ceiling on it and come down on a bedside table. There Lou kept some chocolates. The mice didn’t really like chocolate, but they didn’t know that until they took a bite out of every piece.



Ingleberger’s House

I was assigned to be Survey Officer at the 30th. My first job was to lay out certain areas for the Division survey personnel to practice on. I decided that the best way to do that was to reconnoiter the area from the air using one of the observation aircraft assigned to the Division.

The morning on which I scheduled this operation was the morning Lou decided to cook her first breakfast for me. Sausage and eggs. Estill Springs was really just a wide spot in the road. It had one general store. This store sold most really necessary food stuffs, but didn’t have refrigeration; just an “Ice Box.” Thus, the sausage had not been well refrigerated. Not only did I not get to complete my aerial survey of the area, but I was in a lot of trouble with the pilot for what I did in the front seat of his plane.

I did get the survey program going. However, I soon learned from the Colonel that the training I got at Fort Sill was not complete. They just didn’t teach surveying the way they did in the “old days.” I had not been taught what I agree is a perfectly logical procedure. It is this: Survey Closure: When you start from point A and locate point B in reference to point A, there must be some doubt unless returning to A from B by a different route does indeed bring you to A.

In July, 1943, my days were filled with survey

exercises. On one occasion, after being in the field for a couple of days, I returned to our room. The other couple who shared a room at the Inglebergers was a Sergeant and his wife – Wood and Annie Whitten. Lou told me that Wood and Annie had left for a week-end after Annie had baked a faux-apple pie – one made with Ritz Crackers. She said that Annie had said we should eat some of her pie. I wouldn't do it with them out of town. Later Lou confessed that it was her pie, but she was afraid it might not be good so she attributed it to Annie. I don't think I ever got any of that pie.

About this time I committed an act that ended my assignment as Survey Officer. One Sunday night I "borrowed" the general's Jeep and drove out to a small church to see Lou. Unfortunately, I forgot to cover up the General's star on the front. This malfeasance led to a \$75 fine and to my being transferred to Battery A of the 113th Field Artillery Battalion, a 155mm howitzer battery. I had been wrong to make the night-time junket, but I never regretted being assigned to the battery. There I was one of four officers; not one of about 20 or 30. Also there was less protocol. Being on hand to have breakfast with the general wasn't required.

On another occasion, while leading a conditioning march, I led a group of enlisted men past Ingleberger's house where I stopped them for a drink of water much to Lou's consternation. No trouble resulted from this escapade.

After some time getting all the new recruits integrated into the Division we were ordered to engage in "maneuvers." That is, living in pup-tents and moving across the fields, setting up the guns (actually, there is different terminology for different kinds of cannons. Howitzers have shorter barrels and a high arching trajectory; rifles have longer barrels and a flatter trajectory. I just use "gun" to describe what we had.), etc., in simulation of actual combat. This was in September and October, 1943. As an officer, I had my own pup tent. Enlisted men each had a half tent.

During this time Lou found a room in Murfreesboro, which was closer to where I would be and afforded easy access to Nashville where I could come for an afternoon and evening, usually escorting a group of enlisted men in a 2.5 ton GMC truck. We frequently met at the Noel Hotel in Nashville where we could not only be with each other, but could visit my brother Holy and his girl friend Sarah Frances Graham. Like so many of the scenes and places of my youth, the Noel Hotel no longer exists.

In spite of my fondness for country music, engendered by the National Barn Dance, I had never heard of the "Grand Ole Opry" in Nashville. Our entertainment usually involved a movie.

In Murfreesboro, Lou finally got me to keep an appointment and we had this "wedding" picture taken. While we were living in Murfreesboro Lou became pregnant.



Our next move was to Camp Atterbury, near Franklin, Indiana. While I came in convoy with the Division, Lou rode up with Captain Weatherly's wife and found a room in Franklin. Abbott Weatherly was the C.O. of Battery A. He was an experienced National Guard officer whom I held in great respect.

Camp Atterbury was not a permanent establishment like Fort Sill. The latter had brick barracks and other permanent structures. However, Camp Atterbury was a big step up from Camp Forrest. It had wooden barracks instead of tents and it had an Officer's Club. A little reading in the Officers Handbook and the experience of the Officer's Club introduced me to matters of etiquette which I had never known. The order of silverware on the table, use of napkins, and most of all, the etiquette of gentlemen rising from their seats when the ladies joined or left them. I took to this life very easily and very well. I was living better than I had ever lived before.

As part of preparing for overseas duty, the Division had us all complete "Last Will and Testament" forms. (See Page 180)

In February, 1944, the 30th Infantry Division was ordered to Europe. According to the official history, from Camp Atterbury the Division went by train to Camp Myles Standish in Massachusetts. From there, early in February, we went to Boston's port of embarkation to load on the ships. The division history records that our convoy numbered 40 ships plus accompanying escort vessels.

Parting from Lou was extremely difficult, especially with her pregnant. Of course, she was worried for my life. It never occurred to me that I would not return. I guess that is the way of indestructible youth.

Starting at the time of leaving Camp Atterbury and Franklin, Indiana, I couldn't tell Lou ex-

actly where I was until mid May 1945, 15 months later. On February 3, 1944, in the first of 150 letters I wrote to Lou in our twenty months of separation, I wrote from "Somewhere in New England." On February 5, I wrote that her allotment would be \$150 per month. I don't know why we didn't know that before that date.

Battery A and many other units of the 113th and 118th Field Artillery Battalions were loaded onto the Motorship John Ericsson. This ship had been the Kungsholm before being chartered by the army. It was a beautiful little ship. For example, wooden paneling lined the spiral staircase that led to the dining room. The Kungsholm was said to be a gyroscopically stabilized boat and apparently it was. We had been warned that crossing the North Atlantic in the winter time was rough. The nine of us who were assigned to a particular cabin made a pool by putting in \$10 each with the understanding that the last one to get sea-sick would take the pot. The Kungsholm was so stable that none of us got sick during the eleven day crossing and we just split the pot upon arriving in Liverpool. Sleeping was not quite so luxurious. What had probably been a stateroom for two, now had three banks of triple-deck bunks.

It is hard to imagine, but the Kungsholm brought me to a higher level of living than even the Officer's Club had. The ship had been chartered by the Army, apparently directly from the tourist business. The main dining room became the Officer's Mess. On the balcony a chamber orchestra performed numbers from the classical repertoire at dinner every night. (At that time I didn't know what "classical repertoire" meant.) We wore our dress greens to dinner. The menu offered us a choice of three entrees at dinner. For a little on the side, our waiter would bring us more than one entree or would bring something to our cabin later in the evening.

The enlisted men's mess was not so luxurious. It was in a large space below decks with inadequate ventilation. The smell of hard-boiled eggs at breakfast time was particularly hard to take. My experience here came from the fact that the officers had to take a rotation of being with the enlisted men during meals.

Naturally, there wasn't much to do during the crossing. Part of our days were filled with lectures about England, her history and her people. I enjoyed going on deck, especially onto the bow, to watch the sea and face the wind and mist. The Kungsholm's Captain must have thought this unsafe, as he sent word I should not go onto the bow.

While our ship was stable, one could tell what the North Sea was like for lesser vessels by watching the destroyer escorts bobbing up and down. As far as one could see there were ships. Many were Navy ships along to protect the troop carriers and cargo ships. The crossing was uneventful except for one morning when we heard that during the night there had been an engine breakdown on the Kungsholm which forced us to lay to while it was repaired. By morning, with our extra speed we had regained the convoy. German submarines patrolled the area so I suppose that was a night of danger. We slept through it. It could have been one of those rumors that grow unimpeded in large groups of people.

We landed in Liverpool and went by troop train to a camp near a town southwest of London called Bucks Green. This "wide spot" in the road is on what is now A281. We were quartered in Quonset huts; rectangular based buildings whose sides and roofs were a continuous dome of corrugated metal. England isn't as cold as Indiana, but with the dampness, it was even more uncomfortable. Tiny coal-fired space heaters about two feet high and a foot in diameter made a feeble effort to warm the hut. Our big "Warm Morning" stove at primitive 1608 Haynes would have spit on these in contempt. It may have been that that Spring was particularly cool. In any case, I found that the only time one could go out without a shirt for a little tanning was between 2:00 and 2:15 in the afternoon.

We weren't allowed to reveal our whereabouts again until March 2. For more than a month, Lou had no idea where I was. Then, we were only allowed to write "Somewhere in England." I few days early I had been allowed to reassure her that we were not on a transport that was sunk, nor were we in the Italian beachhead. I also was able to let her know that life wasn't too stringent by relating that Bernie Levy and I had gone into the nearby town for dinner where we ate Pheasant! In a letter on May 8, 1944, I wrote about going to Oxford to visit Lee and Diane Whalen and being invited to her mother's home the following weekend for "real" Yorkshire Pudding. On another occasion I wrote about going skating so she knew that life was not all training.

I only went through London a few times by train - on the way to visits to Lee Whalen in Oxford and to his wedding which was also in Oxford. Even during the war, English trains ran on time! I also wrote to Lou how attractive I found the countryside. Brits kept saying: "You should come

back after war when we have the place cleaned up.” Most of my sight-seeing was enroute to artillery ranges for practice.

England lived under a complete and total “blackout.” Vehicles, even when operated at night, had only a running light to avoid being run into. They cast no light for guidance. The streets were cobblestone and the British soldiers wore hob-nailed shoes. They struck sparks off the street as they walked. Moreover, it really didn’t get dark until quite late. To keep the entire theater of operations on the same time England had double or triple daylight saving time.

There was at least one movie house which provided some entertainment. I was impressed by the fact the performances opened or closed, maybe both, with recorded versions of God Save the King and the Star Spangled Banner. While not entertainment, another nightly activity was watching the searchlights over London, hearing the aircraft overhead and hearing the rumble, like thunder, of the bombs falling. It made me not want to spend a night there.

Later we were moved to another camp – I think it was also called Camp Forest – near Slough in Buckinghamshire. It was nearer Beaconsfield, but that was a smaller town. Beaconsfield was the home of Benjamin Disraeli one of England’s past Prime Ministers. He was the Earl of Beaconsfield. There was also a Pub there by the same name. With fellow officers, I spent many evenings there. I learned about the game of Darts. Every Pub has at least one Dart Board. I also learned about Scotch Whiskey. The British consider the term “Scotch Whiskey” redundant. To them there is no other whiskey. I didn’t like Scotch as much as Bourbon, but I didn’t drink much anyway, so it didn’t matter.

The local British Army headquarters was on Disraeli’s ancestral estate. Our Division officer corps had been invited there for tea one afternoon. On one of our later trips to England, Lou and I looked for the Pub. It was gone and a supermarket stood in its place. We also visited Disraeli’s home which I recognized for the most part. Upon my questioning an attendant, he confirmed that the entrance drive had been in a place I remembered it being in 1944.

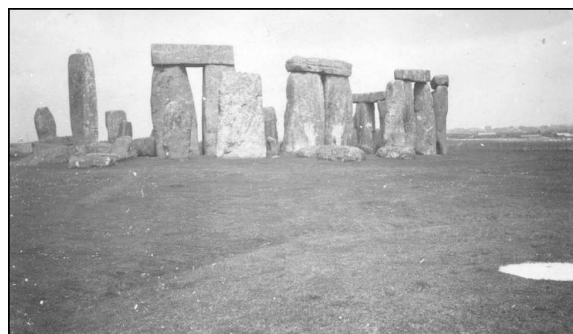
We held gunnery practice on several ranges both in the south and near the North Sea. We also practiced gunnery on the Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire county. This gave me a chance to visit Stonehenge at a time when you were allowed to walk right up to the stones.

We spent a lot of time practicing gunnery; that is directing the guns to hit a target. This is called “adjusting fire.” This means to start from the position of one shell burst and remotely correct the aim of the guns to hit the target. The person directing the fire can be several miles from the guns he is directing. The guns can also be off to one side or the other.

When adjusting fire, a mandate is to “get a bracket.” That is, if one round falls on one side of the target, the goal is to get the next on the other side. I saw officers fined the cost of a round for not getting a bracket soon enough. This can be tricky when the guns and target are both a long way from you. (155 mm howitzers, such as my unit had, had a range of about 16 miles.) Rises and falls of the terrain provide another variable. How far is it between two ridges, each of which is many miles away? On this occasion I got to participate in an artillery spectacular. This particular operation is called a “Time on Target,” or TOT. The firing of several batteries is coordinated taking into account time of flight, so that all shells arrive at the target more-or-less simultaneously.

The General in command of the operation was with our battalion at a time when I was called upon to adjust fire. When my first round was short, I made a bold correction, getting the bracket I needed with the second round. The third round was very close to the target. The general was impressed and chose me to make the adjustments for the TOT to be fired later that day. It was spectacular!

England made real many of the historic places I tried to avoid studying about in high school. I was actually surprised at what I knew of England’s history and some of her famous men and women. I remember seeing the home of the astronomer Herschel in Slough and having it register on me that history was real!



Stonehenge in 1944

On June 14, 1944, I wrote Lou “Somewhere in England.” My next letter, on June 17, was headed “Somewhere in France.”

Our first fine date soon led to more,
The next, 12/7, dawned gay,
But then bombs fell at Pearl Harbor,
Where's that, I had to say?

To get a place in the Air Corps,
Join up, the fine recruiter said,
But where was I? It made me sore,
I was a cannoneer, instead.

I won space and finished OCS,
Sped home to claim Lou's hand,
To end her days of single bliss,
She took my golden band.

Then all too soon, my training over,
I lived for months in "Somewhere,"
While back at home my darling lover,
Bore Dick, my first born heir.