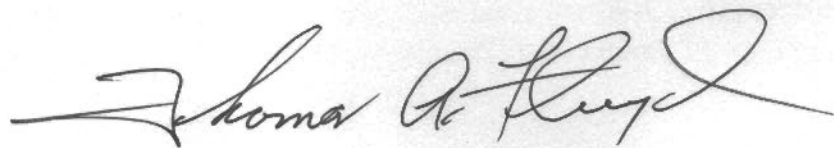


“A Walk in Time”
1944-1946

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Thomas A. Floyd". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

MSG E-8 Thomas A. Floyd (Ret)
ER38617455

"A Walk in Time" 1944-1946

Why am I writing the account of what was to me a "Big Adventure"? As an infantryman, the miles I walked had a definite effect on my life and I want to share this written account with my three sons – Albert, Allen and Steven. So as they grow older and wonder what Dad did in WWII, they can check it out for themselves.

For some, it's too late to do, but I have taken the time to share my experiences before they grow cold. So here goes, let's walk together.

When the big day came 17 July 1944, my day of induction. It was in an old building in Chicago, the Municipal Auditorium. This is where everyone would gather there. We were all packed into the Army.

I looked for Dad to show up, but he didn't. We were loaded into old buses and taken to Jackson Station to catch a train. Just as we were pulling out of the station, I had my head pressed out the window, trying to find Dad. I heard him call. He was running along side of the train, waving at me. I was very disappointed that I couldn't hug him, to say goodbye. It was the last time that I saw him until the war was over in May 1945. We communicated by letter. He moved back to his hometown of Apalachicola, Florida and worked in a small air force base. Not sure how long he stayed there, before moving back to Chicago.

We shipped out to Camp Beauregard in Alexandria, Louisiana to receive clothing, to begin to look like soldiers. It was a strange time, to be thrown in with all those people and not knowing anyone.

They would wake us up at 4 AM to get ready for the day. Had roll call, some was reported missing. They call it AWOI (Absent Without Leave). Going Over the Hill (didn't see my hills there). A whole new language to learn.

We marched off to the Mess Hall, what a large place, lots of noise and a big Mess Sgt. shouting at the beginning of the serving line, giving instructions, how to go through the line. Don't forget what he said to us. "You will eat everything on your tray" and he meant it. First time I saw God.

MSG E-8 Thomas A. Floyd (Ret)
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In 1943, that year I decided to enlist in the Navy, knowing full well I couldn't go in wearing glasses. I had heard about an optometrist who helped prospective candidates to join the Navy, free, this being his contribution to the war effort.

For 3 months on Tuesdays and Fridays I would go to his office, after school, to use his machine to exercise my eyes, to build up the eye muscle. I tried hard but it didn't work. So I waited for the draft. In the mean time I went down to the Custom's Building where the Navy recruiting office was located, to try and see if I could pass the test. No such luck, I failed without the glasses, so back to waiting and it came "Greetings", so I registered for the draft, took a physical test, passed and all that was left to do was to wait for my enlistment call. I had gotten a job through a friend, H. C. Messina, working for the American Optical Co. grinding lenses for glasses. I worked there for 3 months before I was inducted into the Army. While I worked at A.O.C. I had a pair of prescription sunglasses made that I carried all during the war. I was known as the guy with the dark glasses.

Well, the big day came 27 July 1944, my day of induction. It was in an old building in front and across from the Municipal Auditorium. This is where everyone would gather there, who was inducted into the Army.

I looked for dad to show up, but he didn't. We were loaded into old buses and taken to the old Union Station to catch a train. Just as we were pulling out of the station, I had my head hanging out the window, trying to find dad, I heard him call. He was running along side of the passenger car, waving at me. I was very disappointed that I couldn't hug him, to say goodbye and that I loved him. It was the last time that I saw him until the war was over in May 1945. We did communicate by letter. He moved back to his hometown of Apalachicola, Florida and worked at a small air force base. I'm not sure how long he stayed there, before moving back to New Orleans.

We shipped out to Camp Beauregard in Alexandria, Louisiana to receive clothing, to begin to look like soldiers. It was a strange time, to be thrown in with all those people and not knowing anyone.

They would wake us up at 4 AM to get ready for the day. Had roll call, some was reported missing. They call it AWOL (Absent Without Leave), Going Over The Hill (didn't see any hills there). A whole new language to learn.

We marched off to the Mess Hall, what a large place, lots of noise and a big Mess Sgt. standing at the beginning of the serving line, giving instructions, how to go through the line. I'll never forget what he said to us, "You will eat everything on your tray!" and he meant it. First time I saw God.

I remember at noon meal they had bread pudding for dessert and I took on more than I could eat but I ate everything and learned to be more selective about what the food was and how much was put on my tray.

A funny thing ----- we were in formation that first morning and met "God" again. He was a PFC who acted as if he was a Buck Sgt.

He asked some special questions: "Who has college education?" Step over here. They were sent to work on roads with shovels. "Who has high school education?" Step over here. We were being sent to the mess for 24 hour KP.

"Who has elementary education?" step over here. They were sent to police (pick up trash) the camp area.

"Those that are left out of the group with no education were made company runner. They spent their time in a tent C.P. (out of the sun - cold water to drink and coffee) what a life!

Our next move was to catch a troop train (Army Train) - we were being sent to Camp Hood, Texas. Just the ring of the word "Texas" caused me to begin to feel good, for I loved Texas (spent 2 months in Texas in 1935, believe it or not, in Beaumont).

Aug. 44 It took us about 2 ½ days to make the trip to Killeen, Texas by way of Ft. Worth, Texas. We finally got there, and received our assignments. I was put in Co "D", 157th Bn, in South Camp Hood. South Camp Hood was for infantry training and North Camp Hood was for anti-tank training.

One of the unexpected things that happened to me was being appointed an acting corporal, better known as an acting gadget, a squad leader. A group of us were to report to the CO, Capt. Hays, (now I had only been at Camp Hood for a couple of days, and already had to go before the old man). One of the good things about the appointment, was I didn't have to pull KP, in fact, in all my military duty, I only pulled KP 3 times. Also, I found out later on what basis I was selected to be acting corporal. It was based on the fact that I had Boy Scout Training; that was one way to find and pick leadership material.

So the race was on, 17 weeks for infantry training, starting in August heat and winding up in the cold of December - a great place to train though.

One day we were marching out to the motor pool to hear a reading of the Articles of War, in the hot August sun. We could stand "at ease" and only that stance. It took about 3 hours to read and several of the men passed out from the heat. I made it "ok", a long afternoon.

Met a lot of good people and palled around with them - some from Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Chicago people. Had a great time with them, they made the time more tolerable.

My good friend from New Orleans, Jack Smith, came to Camp Hood for a weekend and we made a trip to Austin, Texas. It was good to have someone to come and spend time with me.

By the time 17 weeks was coming to an end, winter was really cold and the barracks walls with one layer of tar paper around it didn't help much.

We finished training in the last of November, with expectations running high, looking forward to furlough to home, but that didn't happen. I was selected to attend a Cadre School to train to become an instructor for the I.R.T.C. for two weeks. I was disappointed, for I wanted to be assigned to an overseas unit. All my friend's were going home, I was staying.

I didn't want to go to the school, but I couldn't get out of it. So, I was just going to let school slide by, do my job and hope they wouldn't keep me. I talked to my C.O. But there was no getting out of it. It was a long two weeks but it came to an end. Most of the men were gung ho to stay, but I wasn't.

Dec 44 After finishing Cadre School quite a few of us were sent to a holding unit waiting for orders to come out. That was when the action picked up on 16 Dec 44 - The Battle of the Bulge began. I was lying down, and someone had a radio on, and we heard the news and it was not so good. Activity in the camp picked up. Any I.R.T.C. unit that had 10 weeks or more training was about to be packed up soon and shipped out. Everyone had a delay in route of 5 days, and to report to a new assignment.

So I went home and spent 5 days in New Orleans with Aunt Catherine, Uncle Percy and their son Buddy. Got to see many other friends. Dad couldn't make it, don't remember why, probably work stopped him.

I enjoyed my time, seeing the old town. It seemed like years since I was last there. My friend Jack Smith, who came to visit me at Camp Hood, had moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Jan 45 After 5 days, I caught an old coal burner to Ft. Mead, Maryland. Plenty of snow up there, most I have ever seen. Ft. Mead was in the area of Washington, D.C. Spent a few days getting all kinds of shots and new equipment.

From there, shipped out to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, waiting more orders, training how to climb up and down a rope ladder (this stuff was getting serious) to load in landing crafts. The hardest thing there was waiting for orders, and being confined to the barracks.

Finally, we received orders, we crossed the Hudson river by ferry, to our new transportation, in New York Harbor. The ferry was huge, probably could hold a couple thousand people. We arrived on the other side, walked up a gangplank with all our gear. We boarded a former luxury liner called the U.S.S. Manhattan, now called the U.S.S. Wakefield. We were told it could hold over 10,000 men.

About 11 AM we were on our way to England. We could see the Statue of Liberty on our way to Atlantic. We spent 5 days on the high seas, had good weather and the ship didn't need

any escort because we had great speed and could out run the U2 boats.

I spent most of my time on the topside, breathing good clean air. Staying below deck was conducive to getting seasick from the fowl air that was being produced by the men, up-chucking or motion sickness. Going to the galley was a real bummer. You could smell the powdered eggs being cooked. I passed up eating breakfast twice, never liked being sick before you could eat.

I slept about mid-ship on the deck where there was very little up and down motion, but the fresh air was the difference.

Jan 13 I celebrated my 19th birthday aboard the ship with a candy bar. About the 5th day we saw the coastline of Ireland, then passed it, going between upper Ireland and England, docking at Liverpool. We disembarked at night, walked through town to the rail station. We boarded a typical passenger train, with compartments like you see in the old movies.

It took all night to go from Liverpool to the coastline of the English Channel, to the town of Weymouth. We loaded on an English LCI (Landing Craft Infantry). The next day we shipped out to Le Harve, France.

We disembarked at the Port of LaHarve, marched up to the plateau where our camp area was located. A tent city with about 2 feet of snow on the ground and in the tents. It was a very cold night.

Next morning we moved down from the tent city to the railroad station, to take up house keeping in a French boxcar. Better known as the 40x8 (40 men or 8 horses) could ride in these cars. These boxcars were similar to the kind of boxcars the Germans used to move the Jews to the death camps.

These box cars had just enough room that everyone could lay down to get some sleep. While we waited for the train to pull out, a group of French kids came by selling bottles of wine and Schnapps that would warm us up. The best is yet to come, we were ready for anything.

About midnight that rotgut hit bottom, and I had a good case of the GI's (dysentery). I had to crawl over people to get to the sliding door to take care of myself. Made 2 trips there, just in time, but the 3rd time I had to use my steel helmet and found a place to hang it up, hoping it wouldn't fall down.

Next morning when we stopped for breakfast, I jumped out of the boxcar into the snow and cleaned my helmet out. That was the first and only time for that to happen.

Along side of the tracks was an outdoor mess kitchen set up to feed replacements who were going up to the front.

One of the interesting sights we experienced during our 2nd day was a loud, rumbling

noise that sounded like a tractor. Someone yelled buzz bomb (a V-2 German rocket), it was heading for England. I only saw 3 on this trip.

On our 3rd day out, we finally got to our destination of Liege, Belgium, where our redepot was located (Replacement depot). While in Liege, we were issued an M-1 rifle and ammo, and took us to a 1,000-inch rifle range to zero them in. And finally, we loaded up again, on 2½ ton trucks and headed, only God knew where, and to our surprise, a neat place in a beautiful setting, a castle that was surrounded by tents. Anything was better than boxcars. Temperature about 20 degrees.

We had to pull guard duty, my shift was early that morning, and when I finished I headed for the cot. I was still awake when I heard some other men come in, they were talking and then it quieted down, then all of a sudden a big loud gunshot woke everyone up. One of the men, who got off of guard duty, screamed out. It seems that he shot his big toe off. It seemed strange that this GI was doing some tall talking about what he was going to do to the Germans. Did a lot of bragging, how he had a family at home, and wanted to get the war over quickly.

I believed he took the easy way out. They hauled him off, we never saw him again. What he did get was a court-martial offense, and he would be dishonorably discharged. He carried this the rest of his life. I hope he has peace about this now. They shipped him out quickly. I believe why they were quick to act upon his problem was a moral factor.

Mid Jan 45 We finally found out where we were being sent to. They took us to a small town named Malmedy, Belgium. This is the place where the Germans took a large group of captured GI's out into a snow-covered field, and opened up on them with their machine guns. Some escaped the massacre.

When we got to Malmedy, we found out which unit we were assigned to. I was assigned to "Co G", 119th Inf. Reg., 30th Div. It was late at night when I got there. In town there was a building, partially blown away, that we gathered in. So the different Co's could meet the men and get their replacements. The building used to be a bakery, we built a fire on the concrete floor to get warm. It was in the teens that night.

Suddenly, we heard, in a small voice, calling us to come to attention, the commander of the 30 Div. He had come to welcome us to the division, gave a good pep talk as to why we were there. He had us to do some exercises, to get the blood flowing. And in the process of all this, we were issued the 30 Div patch.

"G" Co was holed up in a one-story schoolhouse. Everyone who was in the 1st Plt. was there. Not many left from the Battle of the Bulge, only 12 left out of 41 that made the Bulge fight.

My new Sqd. leader was Sgt. Holmes. He took us to a large empty classroom, all the windows were blown out, but over on the opposite side, was a large haystack. He told us to take our sleeping bag and stick it in the haystack, leave just the head part out. We did, and it was the

warmest I've been since I got on the train. It was toasty and I never forgot that time. It was cold enough to freeze meat.

Next, we got better acquainted with the men, showed off our new 30 Div patch, and sewed them on our shirts. The older troopers complained they never received a patch, and was wondering why they didn't get one. That night I pulled my first combat duty. Went out to an outpost on top of a hill. It was a bunker covered with logs and branches of pine needles. About a half-mile, to our front, we could see a line of Germans heading east. We didn't fire on them, we were strictly there to report what we saw, besides we would have wasted our time trying to hit someone at the distance, M-1's weren't made for that.

Next day we received orders to pack up, take our patches off and be ready to move out. No one knew where we were going, but we guessed it was back to where the Div came from, to help in the Bulge. Probably going back to the 9th Army. There were more replacements showing up and soon we were back to full strength. "G" Co was at its lowest strength.

We went back to a town in Germany named Wurselen. We arrived late that night, unloaded from the trucks and marched down a street and we were assigned to houses to stay in for the night.

I thought that maybe we would get a bed to sleep in. Being low man in the pecking order there was no such luck. I came into a room in a 2-story house and the only thing left to sleep on was a large baby bed. I looked at that thing and it kept looking better, more and more. I was determined to sleep in a bed, not to sleep on the floor and I did. My legs hung over the end and I slept that way all night. By morning I was stiff as a board and almost didn't make it out of the crib (Didn't want to try that again).

Next day we caught up on equipment and anything else we might need. We had shower call for all that wanted to get a good hot shower. We went to a town called Kohlscheid. A coal mine was located there and they had a huge shower room, all lined with ceramic tile, a very clean place. We got a good, hot shower, felt clean for the first since leaving the U.S.A. (I thought I had died and gone to Heaven). Only thing wrong with the shower, is that we could only stay in it for 5 minutes, but IT FELT GOOD even for that short time.

Next, we moved out again to another town, Kohlscheid, just outside Aachen. The 30th played a big part in capturing this area. Aachen, Germany was the first major city in Germany to be taken by the Allies.

We were set up in a very quaint home, with a large courtyard and outhouse. I had a bed all to myself to sleep in. We received rations, plenty of cigarettes. I made a trip to the outhouse, and lit a cigarette (first one since a young boy).

After inhaling a few times, I almost fell off the pot from dizziness. Almost didn't make it, but I survived. So each day I increased intake to 6 to 8 a day. This was the beginning of 20

years of smoking, until I quit in '65. A long, long time sucking in this junk, little knowing what it could do to you.

The next day, we fell out for a hike, where "G" Co. had fought the Germans, before the Bulge. They were teaching us tactics, to help us prepare for our next move, crossing the Roer River.

Next day we moved up to a small village about ½ mile from the river. In the mean time the Germans blew the dam, on Feb 8, called Scwammenauel Dam. All these movements were supposed to be secret, but as it happened the enemy had an idea of what was going on. Axis Salley gave accounts that talked about the 30th returning to the Aachen area.

The Roer River swelled from about a mile to several miles wide, with floodwater, so we had to stay in buildings, or houses, out of sight and wait on the river to recede. Our movement was restricted, so we were always looking for something to do. We'd clown around, impersonated the English, taking a black comb, and combed my hair the way Hitler would comb his, then hold the comb under my nose. Raising my right arm, "Zig Heiling" as Hitler would do, and say, "In case we lose". Found a top hat, had a lot of fun making like an Englishman. Everyone roared, it helped to let off steam.

While clowning around, we heard machine gun fire. It was a 50 cal. anti-aircraft gun trying to shoot a German plane down. The plane was moving so fast the bullets couldn't catch up to the plane. We found out later that it was a jet plane, first one we ever saw or heard. It was probably moving about 500 miles an hour.

Another incident I remembered was while waiting for the water to recede, we had plenty of guard duty to pull. One morning I was pulling my duty where we were staying, the time was 3-4 AM. About 15 minutes before you go off duty, you would wake your relief up to give him a chance to put himself together. The guy who was supposed to relieve me was James McGee, an old man of 38 years, from New York. He was really too old to be in the infantry and I might add a little off his rocker.

So 4 AM rolled around, no McGee, went back again to waken him. Went back to post and waited, 4:15 AM and no McGee, went back and threatened him. As we were facing off, my Sqd. leader, Sgt. Holmes, jumped in and stopped us. Needless to say it was a bad day.

This guy McGee had a passion for "D" bars. A "D" bar is a highly concentrated chocolate bar. You had to nibble on it, scrape it, chop it in order to eat it. It was an high energy chocolate bar. Sometimes they would sell from \$1.00 to \$10.00 a bar. Back to McGee, he would buy all he could. He believed "D" bars were his salvation to keep him going. He would give a \$1.00 for each bar.

Another time we were leaving a bivouac area. McGee was walking behind me, I could hear him talking to himself, (he always talked to himself), eating a "D" bar. Every time we

walked up a hill, he would take a bite out of his bar, then say to himself, "I can make it, just a couple more bites, I can make it."

My last encounter with McGee was after we crossed the Roer River, we stopped in a blown out town to rest and eat, other troops were advancing through us, and we became the reserve.

McGee was off by himself eating, so I went over to where he was eating, trying to make friends with him. No such luck, he told me to go "Go to Hell". So I left him alone to eat by himself, and it was the last time I saw him. Heard later he was wounded and shipped out.

On Feb 23, the big push was on, time to cross the Roer River. We crossed by way of footbridge; the engineers did a good job preparing the way.

A couple of times, while running across open ground, a couple of stray bullets passed my head, now I was not thinking after hearing them, I said to myself, "a guy could get killed out here."

I remember the morning well. After crossing on footbridges, we picked up the pace on this wet ground. It was soggy, so soggy, as I was running, I stepped in a deep bog, my foot came out of my boot and I kept running. I stopped about 50 yards from my boot and decided to go back for it. There was gun fire all around, but I made it back to my boot and it took both hands and a lot of pull to get that boot loose. It had a tremendous vacuum pull; this reminds me of the gumbo mud in SE Texas. My foot and socks were totally soaked with water and mud.

I finally reached our objective and was told to set up a guard. While a couple of riflemen and I did this, I took a little time to clean my foot, and boot, and put on a pair of socks I carried in my field jacket.

Our Plt. Sgt. received some mail for us. I received a v-mail from Aunt Laura warning me to beware of the evils of the world. I guess she didn't realize where I was, in the middle of the evils of the world. So much for a letter from home, sure wasn't a moral builder. Ha!

The town we captured was Konigshoven. The day wore on and we came to the Hambach Forest. As we entered the forest, the German artillery started pumping shells into the forest, causing many tree bursts. What was happening, the shell would explode at the top of the trees, causing not only shrapnel, but also large splinters of the tree wood to fly down and out. Between the metal and wood this was no place to be. This kind of artillery fire would tear you up. There was no safe place to be. We all managed the barrage and move on.

Our next assignment was to set up a defense on the edge of the forest. We found some holes dug, so we broke off in two's and piled in. It was nighttime, we received the sign and counter sign for the night.

I dug some holes in the side of the foxhole and with some broken limbs off a tree, I made a place I could sit down and see just above the foxhole. As we sat down and waited our feet began to take on water. The ground had been so saturated from the flood, it kept seeping in. So we dug more holes on the side that we could put our feet in to keep dry. We took on about 8 to 10 inches of water, and it was cold, just below freezing.

A tragic thing almost happened about 11 PM that night. Everyday we are given a password to challenge anyone approaching our defense. Also a counter password (our counter sign). It was my turn to watch for any movement around and saw someone coming towards us. I gave the sign and did not get a response. I unlocked the safety on my M-1 and challenged again with my M-1 aimed at him. Finally (it seemed like a long time) he gave the countersign - I told him to come ahead. It was our Plt. Leader, 1st Lt. Tom Giblin, he was checking to see how we were faring. I told him later, 44 years later, that he was about a second and a half away from being shot by taking so long to give the countersign. Boy, it was good to see day light the next morning.

During the night just to our front, fog began to creep in. And looking into the fog it appeared to us we could see people moving from left to right at about 100 yards. This kept us on the alert until daybreak, light began revealing to us what we were seeing, a road in front of us, lined on both sides of the road were trees. Through the fog, they appeared to be moving in a single column on each side of the road (we thought). The trees kept us awake all night and we found out later several others saw the same thing. So much for trees.

Another small community was before us and with caution we searched all the houses, about 6 or 8 of them. Another unit from F Co. came about the same time, checking things out. Everything was quiet as we came upon a strange site. We walked into this house, searching for German soldiers. As best as I could remember we found 8 dead soldiers, some on the floor, some lying in a bed, and some in chairs. Strange thing about this, their eyes were open, all of them. You could go from one to another and their eyes would seem to follow you. We double-checked to be sure they were dead.

I remembered the first time our Co. Commander, who was Cpt. John Faris from Rock Hill, North Carolina. We were walking down a road to move on the offensive; we stopped on the edge of a large sugar beet farm. Lt. Giblin and Plt. Sgt. John Nolan went into conference with the C.O. There was a lot of brass with them. I believe it was the Bn. Commander and Reg Commander, observing our preparation for crossing the large sugar beet farm. We could see about a quarter mile beyond the beet field, 2 rows of trees with a few houses at one point, which turned out to be cross roads, with a few houses on both sides.

"G" Co moved out in a classic formation, scouts out in front of a diamond formation. We moved fast across the field, drawing some fire from the Germans. We made it to the crossroads, occupied the houses, set up our defense. Things went well, everything under control.

We were looking for enemy targets, when the door to our room popped open. A German

took one quick look and took off down the hall, with us chasing him out in the open. As he turned to the right he was shot down by someone in another house.

Later, we saw our first American POW that had escaped from a stalag. He was one happy GI, even with a damaged eye, he seemed to feel no pain, freedom had him sky high.

We moved again down the road and headed east to the Rhine River. Other units worked their way through us, while we stopped to rest.

That night, just before midnight, we moved into a small town, cleared the Germans out. Boy, you talk about spooky, creeping from house to house, and trying to be quiet while walking on cobblestone streets. We were doing pretty good until Sgt. Nolan stopped us in our tracks. He could hear someone walking toward us and he had a pair of hobnail boots on and they make a lot of noise when hitting the cobblestone.

So everyone got into position to fire, but it became apparent he was one of us. This guy had swapped his GI boots for a pair of German hobnail boots. Needless to say he didn't keep them very long. It would have been his time to go had we not held our fire.

That morning we pulled back in the town, and took 2 days to clean up, rest. During our rest period, I received my first promotion, PFC, and also one other award was given to me - the Infantry Combat Badge. I was proud of the badge; it came with a \$10.00 pay raise (Combat Pay).

Another time before going to Issum Woods, we pushed the Germans out of a small town just before dark. We set up a roadblock and outpost before we could settle down for the night. It had become a habit for those who were not pulling any kind guard duty, or searching for Germans, to go from house to house to look for food to eat. We searched several houses before we struck gold.

In checking the cellar's we didn't find much, no weapon, no prisoners, but we went into a large bedroom and in it was a large chifferfaobe. We began checking it, and we discovered it had a false front. We began to pull on a few knobs and the whole front opened up. There were about 15 large cured hams. We found supper; we passed several hams through out the Plt. for them to enjoy. It was a quiet night and a comfortable night.

From there, if I remember correctly, we moved into a forest near Issum. We spent 3 days preparing to cross the Rhine River. We dug in, built a 2 man bunker. My buddy and I built the bunker about 4' to 5' deep, covered crisscrossing logs and plenty of dirt. We had steps going down into it, had the floor dug down from end to the other at a slight angle, cupped out where our hips or bottom would fit comfortable for a good night sleep. We dug a few recesses on the side of the bunker to burn candles, and store our toilet kits and anything else we could put there to add to our comfort. I put up a sign by the entrance of our bunker with address on it - "Canal St. & Rampart Ave, New Orleans, LA"

Our Plt. Scout was quite a guy - wild looking and he was. His name was Lou LeFever, a farm boy, tall and lean and full of get up and go. Early the 2nd morning he decided he was hungry for pork chops. So he took a stroll down into a small valley below and about ½ an hour he was back with a pig. He strung the pig up, cut its throat, and did all the necessaries to prepare a pig for lunch. While he was doing all this, we got permission to build a small fire and cooked pork chops all morning long.

By suppertime we had all the fresh pork chops we wanted, so we decided to check the mess tent out to see what they would have for supper. And would you believe - they were cooking pork chops. I was the first time since 1 Jan that I was full.

Prep for River Crossing March 16-21

Next, we began to train for crossing the Rhine River. We went back to the Mass River for training on different watercraft - storm boats (they would hold a half of a squad of men) LCT's, LCVP's, and CDL's. We trained on all of them. It was quite a day. Little did I know that some day I would be making a living working on boats and outboard motors. All this to prepare for the last Big Push.

Later, on the evening of 23 March all units prepared to move up to the river. All the houses in the town were emptied of civilians, and we moved into them, for final preparation. We got to see a sand table showing where we would cross and our objective, to the Lippe Canal.

Our Plt. Sgt. came through and gave us last minute instructions - check your gear, write letters if you could. For some it would be their last time. You could hear a pin drop, it was so quiet, not much talking going on. No, I didn't want to write, just wanted to think.

At 11 PM the sky was full of bombers, US and British. And when they finished, the artillery started firing, pounding the east side of the river bank and using moving fire, they worked from the river bank inland to the east.

The 2nd Bn "G" Co and "E" Co were picked to lead the attack across the river. Here is a little info on the Rhine River, it was 1,100 foot wide where we were to cross and the current was swift. The closest town to us was Wesel and Friedrichsfield.

So all the bomb dropping and artillery fire, we began to assemble, to pick up our storm boat (literally). By the time we carried, by hand, the storm boat up and down a levee to launch, it was getting close to jumping off time.

A 0200 on the 24th of March we launched the storm boats (they would carry 7 infantry riflemen and 2 engineers to operate the storm boat). This boat had a double bottom, a 50 hp. Johnson mounted on tri-pod, so that when we would hit the beach, it would kick itself in the boat and the engineer would turn it off.

One engineer operated the motor and steered, while the other engineer would give direction by the use of two hand paddles with florescent paint. With a paddle in each hand he could direct the pilot right, or left or straight ahead.

The riflemen lay flat on their front side with legs spread open so that the man behind could put his head between his legs, that they could stack us in the boat. We had about 16" free board, for protection.

Halfway across the river I raised my head to see what was happening. I saw one of our storm boats had stopped. I could see machinegun fire down the river and they were drifting towards it. Next thing we knew we were sitting high and dry on the east bank. It took 40 min for the entire battalion to cross the river.

I had often wondered what happened to the storm boat that stopped in the middle of the river. 51 years later I got the rest of the story. Will explain later.

We hit the beach, and took off straight-ahead, everyone had a white band on their left arm, so we could ID who were Americans and who was not. With two Co. landing at the same time, you couldn't tell who was "G" Co or "F" Co or "E" Co. Three of us were separated from "G" Co while we helped "F" Co secure their objectives.

The 3 of us worked our way over to "G" Co. We found the 1st Sgt. and he took us out to where the "G" Co defense was set up, prepared for a counter attack. 1st Sgt. assigned us to a buddy already in a foxhole. PFC Virgil Whitesell from Waterloo, Iowa was in one and I was put with him.

Virgil spoke to me to jump in and I laid down my M-1 ready to jump in when all of a sudden three artillery rounds came in on us. I was standing on the side of the foxhole, then the next thing I remember I was being knocked down, my helmet flew off, and I was covered with about 3 feet of dirt. I worked my way out of the dirt and ran to a road near by and jumped into the ditch beside the road, for protection.

The other two men who were with me were chased to the ditch also. Someone called out for a medic and came up in a weasel (a small track vehicle, made to carry people on stretchers to an aid station). In the process the man who was hurt didn't make it to the ditch or he crawled out on the road, and the weasel ran over him. He was really hurt bad. Never knew how it turned out for him.

As for me, I was wearing GI glasses, and the concussion from the explosion made one of my lenses pivot as if had a pin, from top to bottom, for it to spin. I took them off and popped the lens back in place.

The 1st Sgt. came up to us, told us to follow him to the C.P. which was located in a small cave. I wanted to go back to see about Whitesell, but 1st Sgt. said wait till daylight. When it

came we were told to move out, we were heading in deeper into Germany. I told the 1st Sgt. I wasn't going without seeing about Whitesell and to get my M-1. I went back to the foxhole and there was Whitesell, with dirt up to his chin, with his head leaning forward, with the back of his head missing. I couldn't believe it. I can still see him, in the foxhole with all the protection a man could use, and me standing on the side ready to jump in with no protection, and with no wounds. I was full of mixed emotions.

Virgil and I had become good friends; we came into the unit about the same time. I admired him very much, for he knew what he wanted to be when he returned home after the war. He wanted to own a wrecking yard; he was into cars and enjoyed working on them. As for me I had no clue what I wanted to be.

Through all the years I would think why me? Why did I escape death? He had more going for himself than I did. In 1989 I finally had peace about it all. Pastor Dabney and I talked about at length and then he prayed for me. And the peace of God settled over me. Pastor knew about the war, being in the Marines and in combat on 3 islands.

There is an addition to this story I share at the end.

We moved on from the Rhine River to clear a large island formed by the Lippe Canal and the river. At 1700 we were relieved by the 3rd Bn on the Div. right flank. The whole regiment continued to move east with the support of tanks. We finally got some rest on the 26th. We had been on the move since 0200 24th of March. A short rest was welcomed. The 2nd Bn attacked east with hardly any opposition. We worked with the 8th Armored Div.

Side note: my M-1 was blown up at the Rhine River, and I was assigned a BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) which holds 20 rounds in the magazine. The ammo belt for the bar has a thin strap to go over your shoulder (like suspenders) to help support the ammo belt around your waist. The belt would hold 8 magazines; that would make me carrying 160 rounds in my belt and 20 rounds in my BAR.

After carrying it a day, the ammo belt suspenders just about ruined my right shoulder to the point that I could hardly walk. Had to stop and take a break. As I watched my Plt. moving down the road, almost out of sight, I built up enough determination to run and catch up with them.

My mind was on how could I change the way I carried the ammo? I decided to clear my 4 front pockets of my field jacket and put 2 magazines in each pocket, with the bottom of the magazine up. This would make it perfect to reach to any one of the 4 pockets, slip the magazine into the BAR. It was a simple idea and it WORKED.

The BAR was not my weapon of choice, so I talked the Sqd. Leader, Sgt. Knockie, to let me have an M-1. One of the problems with the BAR was lack of allowance for dirt. It had to be kept clean, clean, clean, clean or else no fire.

We took a lot of prisoner's that afternoon. We came out of a small town to a clearing next to some woods. Our scout, LeFever, was pointing out the Germans with tracer bullets. We opened up on them - they surrendered. Another dogface and myself were delegated to take them to the rear. After clearing all the weapons from them, we marched them back, quick time, to the next unit behind us about ½ mile or so. We talked them into taking the Germans off our hands and double time back to our unit, we didn't want to be separated from them.

Side note: A couple of German officers were in the group we captured, one had a P-38 pistol which I relieved him of. Later that day I traded it for a Luger.

We made a lot of miles and in the mean time I acquired another weapon to carry. An M-1 carbine and a bazooka. Shot a few rounds for practice, some old model shells. They wouldn't explode on impact.

During this time we received some reinforcements, several NCO's from the Air Force. They had very little infantry training. It was good to get some bodies to help carry the load.

2nd & 3rd of April 45 Next up was a range - single line, north to south ridge called the Teutonberger Wald, a wooded foothill, which made into a formidable natural obstacle. It had a heavy growth of pine, interlaced with gullies and ravines. The road network of the plains on either side of the Wald had narrow twisting passes.

It was a cold day, light rain ever so often and the Wald was rocky, hard to dig in. The 2nd Bn had the job to relieve the troops in Augustdorh to protect the armor as Bn reserve. Just on the other side of the Wald was a Nazi officer candidate's school; loaded with SS officers and EM's.

We were called out of reserve status and moved up to the front line. Our position was on the right side of the road. We were told to dig in. Rain started up again, and our digging wasn't too productive. We dug down about 8 or 10 inches, nothing but rock. Sgt. Knockie came by and we asked him to talk to the CO to let us go over the hill, so we could go to the next town to find shelter.

At 1630 "G" Co drove up and over the top, turned to the right, we were faced with an anti-tank gun. We over whelmed the German SS and moved on to Pivitscheid. We seized the road junction and houses in town. The mopping up in the woods and in town was completed by 1830.

We set up in town in a large 2-story house, and prepared for the night. Sgt. Knockie worked up a guard roster. Sgt. Muro of the Air Force was assigned to me and we were to go on at 2300, a pull a 2 hr shift.

Sgt. Muro let me know real quick he knew very little about pulling guard in the infantry. I told him just do what I do and follow my instruction, that he would be ok. We would go on at

2300 hrs.

The house was located on the corner of an intersection, with a shallow fence around the yard facing the intersection. In the corner of the yard next to the intersection was a bunker large enough for 2 men.

Muro and I relieved the guard at 2300 (11 PM), and I told him I would take the first hour and he could take the second. I suggested he should take a nap and I would wake him up at midnight.

At 2345 (11:45) I could hear talking, so I nudged Muro, and told him what I heard. I whispered to Muro to aim his M-1 directly in front of us and don't fire until I do. I could still hear the German's talking, so I aimed my carbine at the sound. It was very dark, no light anywhere, and the sound was all we could go by.

I pulled the trigger on my carbine; all it did was click. I pulled the bolt back, ejected the dud round, pulled the trigger again - nothing but a click again - pulled the bolt back again to eject another dud round - put another round in the chamber - pulled the trigger one more time - this time it fired. With all this thing going on about dud rounds, I could still hear the Germans talking, I was expecting them to throw a potato masher (hand grenade) but our action was quick enough to beat them to the draw. I emptied my magazine, which had 13 rounds left, and Muro pumped out his 8 rounds. We reloaded and waited. The action with the carbine couldn't have taken more than 3 seconds.

Then as our action subsided all hell broke loose in town. It was a full-scale counter-attack. It lasted for about 15 minutes, seemed like 15 hours. Just as quick as it started, it ended. We were prepared for more, but it didn't happen. Muro stayed in the bunker until 0400, when Sgt. Knockie came out and called to us in a very low voice. I answered him, letting him know we were ok. He gave us orders to come in one by one so that they could cover us. So I sent Muro in first, he was one happy GI, and then I went in. Needless to say I was happy going in, someone had coffee on. It sure hit the spot.

I had heard we lost a couple of tanks, but at daybreak we were ready to go. Before I moved out. I went out to where I thought the Germans were, sure enough I found a first aid kit and a pocketknife laying on the ground and a pool of blood. It appears that Muro and I did our job.

My next adventure was quite an experience. We were told to load up on tanks, 2nd Armor Div tanks with the newest tanks in Europe. They were known as the M-26 Gen. Pershing with a 90MM gun for firepower to match the Germans 88'.

We formed a combat team of infantry and armor. We were in for a heck of a ride. The combat team covered 39 miles on April 2. In some towns as we drove through, all we had to do was fire into the houses as we passed through. To the south the army group was encircling a

massive German army forming a pocket, taking many prisoners. Our job was to see how far we could get from the Teutonberger Wald east to open ground, covering many miles.

We stopped in one town, the CO of 2nd Armor Div. told a group of us to get off the tank and search a group of houses to our left, and to be sure there were no German soldiers setting up an antitank gun. We were Pershing tank protectors. About 5 of us approached a 2-story house, did all the correct things approaching the house, then entering the front and back.

I found the cellar door, called down "Come in zee here wit the handi ho". The cellar was full of women and children. Sgt. Knockie, my Sqd leader, wanted me to check upstairs and so I did. I came to one room, kicked the door in - all was quiet - I rushed in, looked behind the door, brought my M-1 up in position to fire, when I saw the soldier moving. I was ready to fire when I realized the soldier was me. I saw myself in the large mirror behind the door. I went back downstairs laughing, Sgt. Knockie wanted to know what was so funny?

"I saw the enemy and he was me" I laughingly replied. I was gross looking, dirty, hadn't shaved since we crossed the Rhine River. There was an old lady that came up to me and started beating on my chest. She thought we were going to kill them. I grabbed her arms and assured her as best I could that we were not going to kill them.

By this time things were moving fast, we were approaching the town of Hamlin and the River Weser, home of the Pied Piper, didn't see any rats running around. We crossed the river, came to another town. Got off the tank, received orders to get information to move out across the open field to take the little village.

There were trenches dug all around the road by the Volckstrum, (the people's local old men, who were to fight the Americans). We started across the field when the Germans opened up with machine gun fire and rockets. They were hitting all around us; I hit the ground to make a smaller target. While lying there I looked around to see where I could go. I was about 50 -75 yards from the trenches, it was too far to get up and run to them, so I decided I would crawl backwards, not to give them a target to shoot at. So I did - it seemed like hours but it only took 20 minutes. The closer I got; the guys in the trench would encourage me to keep moving. I got close enough to pop up and run and dove in the trench while the men would fire into the town to give me cover.

When I was stuck in the field a P-51 was supporting some of the other troops when he was hit with machine gun fire. The pilot bailed out of his plane and it looked like he would drift towards us, but the wind changed and he landed in the German lines. Don't know what happened to him.

In the days that followed, it was a case of dismount, fight, get on the tanks and ride some more. We were headed for Magdeburg and the Elbe River. According to the record we covered 425 miles in 13 days, we were only 60 miles from Berlin. Spent the night in a fine house - slept comfortable for a change. Early in the morning I pulled guard duty, and after that was done we

had our K ration and listened to a radio that one of the men found. BBC was on the air announcing the death of President Roosevelt that day in Warm Spring, GA. Needless to say we were saddened by his passing. Too bad he couldn't have lived long enough to see the conflict end, but I believe he knew it was just a matter of time.

While we were listening to the radio we heard a big explosion outside near where we were staying. A young Hitler youth shot a Panzerfaust (a bazooka) at one of our tanks, and missed, one of our GI's took a bead on him and got him. He was just a kid giving his all for the Fatherland.

We spent the rest of the morning in our sector of Magdeburg clearing houses and apartment complexes. We were looking for soldiers and weapons. While looking for weapons I found a Nazi flag that was hid among the clothes in a drawer in a dresser. I have that flag to this day.

Later, we took off to the south along a road next to the Elbe River, and after a short run, we found a bridge intact, crossed to the east side of the river. We were stopped, and required to go back to the west and wait for orders.

Our Plt. was to set up in a bunkhouse along the river, and wait for the Russians to contact us. If I remember correctly, we waited 2 days. Best guard duty I ever had. One night we heard a shot and the next morning we learned that our Plt. Scout LeFever challenged someone across the river, and didn't get a reply. So he fires and hits a Russian soldier who did not give any recognition as to who he was.

After the Russians officially contacted the U.S. Army we moved to the south on 5 May 45 to a town called Oschersleben, things got better for us, we were billeted at a German military post that would hold a Co. of men. We had bunks to sleep on, a place to shower and a good mess hall. Duty was easy, and it got better when we heard that hostilities would cease at 0001 the night of the 6 May 45.

I pulled guard at several parts of town; one place was a warehouse full of food. We were guarding the warehouse so no one would steal the food. One afternoon while on duty, two women approached me; they were looking for food. They were slave labor that was brought to Germany to labor in fields and factories. One was about in her 20's and other in her 60's or 70's. They were a long way from home, Latvia, west of Russia.

I told them I couldn't help them at first, our orders were to give no food to anyone, you could get in big trouble if you did. But, after talking to them (they could speak English) and looking at them, seeing the starved look in their face, I thought of a way to help them. I told them I have to make rounds in the building to be sure everything was OK. That they should be in the back by the fence and I would put some food (in cartons - can food) at a certain place the next time around.

So when it came time to make my last round for the day, I put a couple of cartons at the destination, and kept on walking till I finished my rounds. They were very grateful and I felt good about what I did.

The next day was a fun day. I was sitting on my bunk when one of our guys came in telling me about several other GI's who went fishing in a swimming pool, just a block away. They were pulling in rifles. So I made a hand line, with some heavy cord with a bent nail and tried my luck.

I came up with three .22 cal. rifles. We went back to our quarters, cleaned the weapons, greased them down, wrapped for shipment. I sent them to my cousin, Buddy Floyd in N.O., LA. Even to this day Buddy has one .22 rifle left. He wore the other 2 out hunting, I believe.

Well, we were on the move again, for occupation duty in the SE corner of Germany, in the mountains, to a town called Hershberg, about 20 to 30 miles from the Czechoslovakian border. Hershberg was a beautiful town, set on the side of a mountain. Here we caught up on our rest, equipment, records, letter writing and plenty of softball.

The houses were located on the side of the mountain. All civilians were moved out so we could have a decent place to rest. Down at the foot of the street was a small beer parlor that would open at 5 PM each day so that the GI's could drink some beer. I had a few myself.

The house I was billeted in was 3-stories, a very nice home. In fact it was better that I had in N.O., LA. Basically, we were preparing to go back to the U.S., to take training for the invasion of Japan. Found out later that the top-level brass had shipped out right after V-E day to make the plans for the invasion.

While in Hershberg I had the opportunity to try out for the Div. baseball team. It was a fun time, working out twice a day and the rest of the time was free time. After doing this we were called back to our unit, to be processed for returning to the U.S.

We were trucked back to Frankfurt, Germany and spent 2 days living in a pup tent. What a come down! Later we loaded up on a train to Reims, France where Camp Oklahoma City was, for more preparation to move to Camp Lucky Strike in LaHarve, France. While at Camp Oklahoma City I had the opportunity to go to Paris, France twice, saw a lot: Eiffel Tower, Arch De Triumph, Cathedral Notre Dame and helped celebrate Bastille Day, the French 4 of July - Independence Day. Also spent some time on the English Channel in a town called Danville, France. I just spent the whole day on the beach, thinking and being thankful that I was still alive.

The 119th Reg (2 Bn. "G" Co - my unit) was shipped out on the General Black - we called it a banana boat. Meanwhile, when we were at Camp Lucky Strike, the U.S. dropped the 1st A-bomb on Japan. We were really excited about this, hoping Japan would give up.

After we were aboard the General Black heading towards the U.S., the PA system

announced the 2nd bomb was dropped. We rushed to the topside to see which side of boat the sun was rising, we figured if the sun was on the other side, we would be heading back to Europe but it didn't change, we were still heading for Boston, Mass. and peace again. It was a great day - "V-J Day".

We docked in Boston, Mass., we came ashore, the bands were playing, there was donut's and coffee, then caught a GI bus to Fort Miles Standish for 2 days, got our orders and everyone went home for 30 days, had 15 more days added. Then reported to Ft. Jackson, SC, home base for the 30th Div. From there, I was reassigned to Camp Blanding, FL, to help close it down. Met some good men there, had a great time together.

Next I was assigned to Kennedy Hospital in Memphis, TN, to help close part of the installation down. I was put in charge of a warehouse for storing furniture that was to be crated and shipped out. It was an easy job, had a lot of time on my hands, but finally my time came to be released.

The people I was working for tried to talk me into staying for another 6 months, promising buck Sgt. stripes. But no, I was ready to go home. So, I headed south to Camp Shelby, MS to be discharged.

While at Camp Shelby, I enlisted in the Army Reserves. My thoughts were if there would be another war in 10 years, there was no sense going back in as a private. I spent 21 years in the reserves, attained the rank of Master Sargent E- 8. It proved to be a good decision. My total years were 23 years: 2 years regular army (WWII) and 21 years reserves. I did get called up for Korea, took a physical - passed - received orders to report to Ft. Hood, Texas. It seems that I made another decision that turned out right for me. This was 1950 - spring, I heard on the radio that the Army was establishing a reserve unit in Beaumont, Texas. I had been married in '49 and we had a new baby on the way. I became an active reservist, and because of being an active Boy reservist my orders were canceled because the army wanted to build up the reserve units. So much for that.

Earlier in the story I mention a flash back to 2 events and here they are:

The Rhine River crossing - 2 years later

The other story - what happen to the storm boat that lost the power in the middle of the river in 1945.

On the crossing of the Rhine River - In '47, I was living in Beaumont, Texas and pursuing my new career, becoming an outboard motor mechanic and boat repairman. I was standing on a platform in front of test tank, when a new customer drove up and got out. He walked towards me and began talking. I was wearing one of my O.D. shirts with a patch on my left arm. It was the division patch of the 30th, and he wanted to know what I was doing wearing that patch.

"Well," I said (still wondering what the concern was about the patch). It was the division I served in Europe during the war." Then I asked, "Why was he inquiring?" He said, "Well, that was the division I was in during the war."

"What unit were you in", I asked.

He said, "In the Artillery."

"Were you at Rhine River crossing that night?"

"Yes", he replied - "supporting fire during the crossing."

I asked, "Did you have any rounds fall short?"

He said "Yes, 3 rounds." Boy did my ears perk up - "3 rounds? At the Lippie Canal?" "Yes", he said. Then there was a long pause. I began to cuss him out, but stopped and apologized for doing that. He wanted to know why I was so upset?

I explained to him, he almost got me killed and you did kill a friend of mine at the same time. I asked why they fell short - he said they could not find the reason why. (Today, they call this friendly fire - wasn't too friendly). We parted friends.

To finish this story - It was my desire to contact Whitesell's family, but in the process of getting some clothes cleaned, my address book was in my shirt pocket. The dry cleaning man pulled it out and threw it away. So we now need to fast forward to 1989.

About Feb of '89 I became a member of the American Legion and in the 1st issue of their magazine there was a list of units of WWII who were having reunions all over the country. Boy did I get excited, I could see in my mind attending one that where, for the first in 44 years, I might get to see some of my old friends, and so be it, I attended my first reunion in Greenville, SC. It was a great, great time for me. Our Co. Cpt. John Faris had copies of "G" roster and on the last page, was Whitesell's address, in Waterloo, Iowa.

2 years later with the help of Albert, my oldest son, who gave me a list of Whitesell's still in Waterloo. 8 names - I looked at them and wondered if they were his family? I almost didn't write, but I remembered my desire in '45, wanting to share with his family, what took place that morning.

I wrote 3 or 4 letters, mailed them and got 2 replies back in 2 weeks. Basically I asked them if they would like to know what happened to Virgil? One was brother and another was a sister, they both said yes!

So I wrote an 8-page letter describing the details. The other made a 1 hour long tape doing the same. I received a letter back from his sister stating "She was disturbed by the story,

but also it gave her peace.” She said, “It was like opening a window and letting a breath of fresh air in her life.”

She had gone to Holland, visited his grave, and wondered if it had just parts of his body in the grave. But I assured her his body was intact, with only the back of his head missing. It is good to have a desire to do something, even if all possibility were lost. And the new opportunity was presented to me and it gave me great peace.

Storm Boat Story

Earlier, I made a few remarks about crossing the Rhine River, raising my head to see what was going on. One boat to our right stopped and was drifting toward machine gun fire. That was the last the last I saw of that boat. Fast forward to 1994.

Sgt. John Nolan at that time in 1944 wondered also what happen to the storm boat. When John Nolan (Col. John Nolan, Ret) went back to Germany for the “D” Day celebration and visited many other places that he had fought across France and Germany, he caught a bus to go to the Rhine River where we crossed.

Sitting across from him on the bus was another man with his grandson, heading to the same crossing. John told the bus driver to hurry; he wanted to see where we crossed. The other said that he was anxious also. John asked did he cross the river also? He said, “Yes, I was one of the engineer operators.”

John asked, “Do you know what happened to the one boat that stopped, and was drifting in the water?”

“Yes, it was my boat”

John asked, “What happened?”

“We sheared a pin in the prop and stopped to change it.” They had hit a log. “We changed it, cranked up the motor and headed back to the beach and discharged the men.” For me it was a happy end to that incident that you would always wonder about.

In reflection of 22 months of active duty in WWII, I want to say how grateful I am to be able to pass through this tough time in history, and am able to continue my life through time. There were so many good men that probably had a much greater future ahead of them, makes you wonder why I am here. All things considered, I am a most fortunate person to be blessed, and to have the love of God, to wait on me, in time to come to know Jesus as my Lord and Savior in January 1970.

So according to the scriptures and my personal relationship with the Lord, Roman 8:28 is active throughout my life; "That God causes all things to work together for good to those who are called according to his purpose."

MSG Thomas A. Floyd (RET) 2002