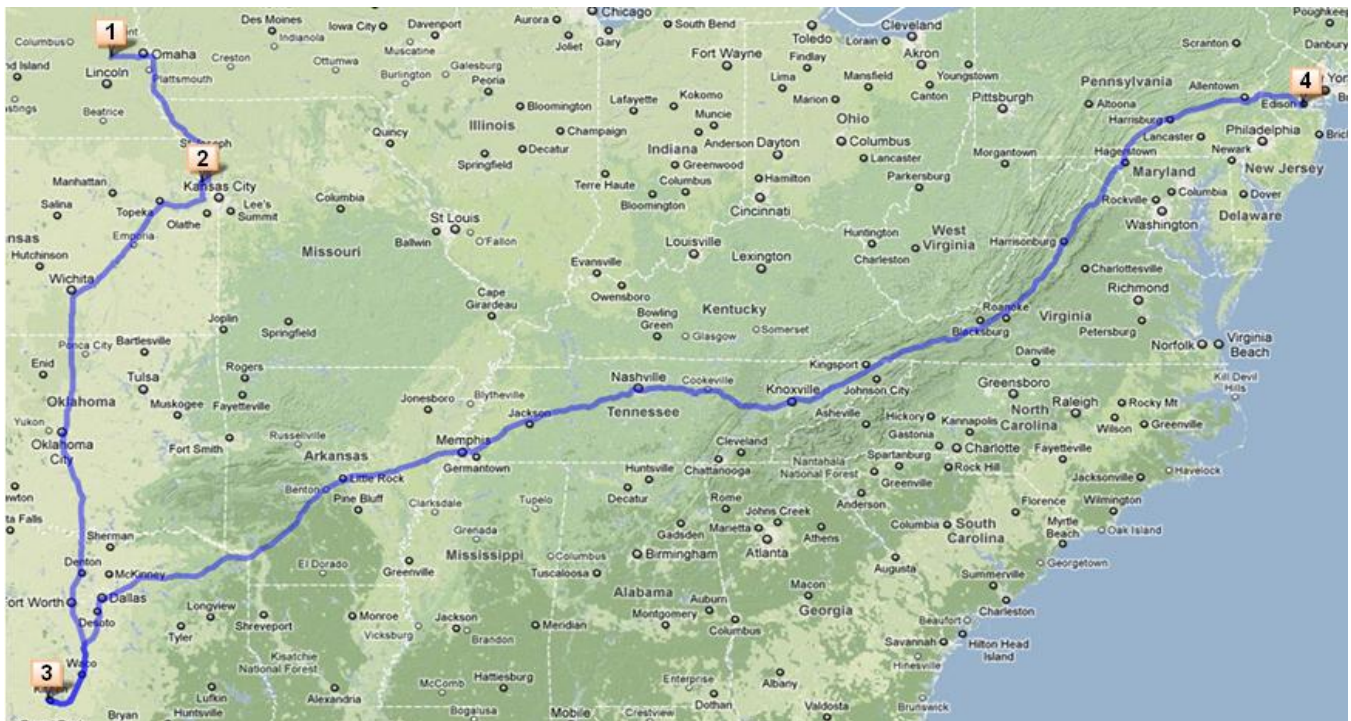
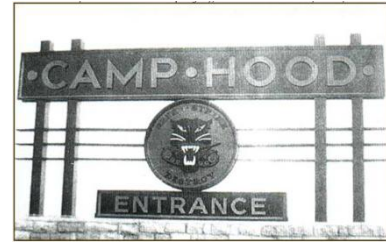


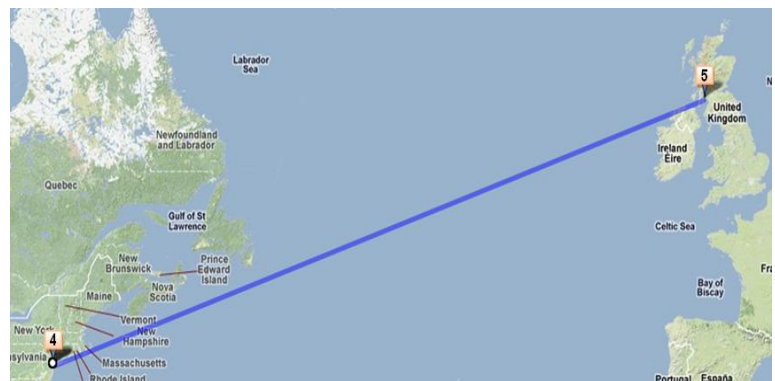
Ray R Cernik, Sgt. 6th Armored Division WWII Memoirs

I was inducted into the Army at Ft. Leavenworth along with more Wahoo, NE (1) area guys. Two of whom became lifelong friends; in fact, one of the two was in our wedding party (Milo Bartek) from Weston and Don Clabaugh from Columbus. From Ft. Leavenworth (2) we were shipped to Camp Hood TX, now Ft. Hood (3), for basic training, specializing in armored infantry. 17 weeks later we were given 10 day furloughs and a couple of days before Christmas 1944 we were sent to Camp Kilmer, NJ. (4).



After a week we boarded the Queen Mary. From there we took a 7 day trip zigzagging every 7 minutes to avoid subs (took subs at least that long to aim their torpedoes). The Queen was the fastest thing afloat at the time and as a result traveled alone without escort. We landed at the Firth of Clyde in Glasgow Scotland (5).

Voyage	From	To	From	To	Captain	Troops(T) Passengers(P) Crew (C)	Mileage	Passage Time (d-h-m)	Avg Speed
44E	New York	Gourock	45-Jan-01	45-Jan-07	Illingsworth		3,641	5-16-44	26.63k





We boarded trains and traveled to Southampton England (6), where we boarded LSTs (*Landing Ship Tank*) and crossed the English Channel to Le Havre, France (7). There we loaded into box cars for 3 days to Metz in France (8). (Colder than H---). No fires were allowed but once a bunch started a fire in the box car and set it on fire! At Metz we were assigned to the 6th Armored Division and trucked to Longwy (9) where we joined the Division on or about the 15th of January 1945.



The function of the armored divisions was to launch "spearhead drives" paralleling each other thru the German lines creating a corridor and splitting their defenses making it the function of the Infantry to advance between

those corridors. Occasionally, the armored would advance a considerable distance ahead of Infantry in which case they would hold up and refuel, etc.

The **Battle of the Bulge** was in progress and the 6th was attacking the Germans southeast of Bastogne. Fierce fighting had been going on there since January 1st. Progress was slow due to the severe cold. Tank turrets froze up and would have to be chipped free of ice, rifle bolts had to be beaten back and forth, tank escape hatches froze shut and had to be opened with blow torches. Feet froze in the fox holes. We went 29 days without a hot meal, rations only. No air support because of the weather. We got a break on January 20th – 21st when 5 surrounding towns were taken and the battle of the Bulge was over.

The weather finally cleared and in only one day, the Air Corps destroyed 4,192 pieces of heavy equipment including, locomotives, rail cars, etc. We advanced into Troisvierges, Luxembourg (10) (Three Virgins) and the town was taken after heavy fighting from house to house and captured on January 23rd 1945. One time we had a corporal in my squad by the name of Jackson. We got caught in some crossfire and luckily no one was injured. Jackson felt a tug on his boot however and looked down to see three bullet burns in the leather about a half inch apart across the top of his boot from one of the Kraut's infamous "burp guns" otherwise known as machine pistols. He was lucky that day. He could have lost his leg or worse.

The next morning was the day I was wounded.

Anyhow, as we advanced thru the town, some Belgians jubilantly pointed out a house in which "Boche" (used as a disparaging term for a German, especially a German soldier in World War I or World War II) were holed up. I took my squad and rammed into the house finding all the rooms empty except one and knew that it was the one. And (as I'm sure you have seen GI's in news clips), I gave the door an **a--- of a kick** and it flew open.

At the time, I had discarded my M1 rifle and got a BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) capable of 20 rounds per clip. Like a fool? (Don't know if I would have the guts to do it



today, but who knows what adrenalin will do), I jumped in the room with that BAR and a couple of the guys right with me. The Krauts all threw up their hands and the officer laid his gun on the table in surrender after a terse command to his men to do the same with their weapons. (If I remember correctly, there were 8 counting him which was probably all that was left of his command). Anyhow, I took the Luger and a couple of our squad marched them to the MPs towards the rear of the action. Interestingly enough, many years later, just before Elaine and I celebrated our 50th anniversary, I received a Bronze Star for bravery in the war. Don't know exactly why, but think this capture was probably the reason.

The division cleaned up the town without much resistance and since we were out so far, decided to hole up there for the night. My Platoon occupied a house on the very foreword edge of town facing an open area with forest perhaps a half mile away. (Wish I could remember what I slept on that night. No doubt on the floor. The next morning at daybreak, after we had awakened and were waiting for chow, (usually in those cases, a few would go at a time so as to leave some on watch) suddenly a German tank that had sneaked up in position in that forest, started firing rounds at our tanks and half tracks that were parked here and there close by. For some reason, they fired one last round into the house we were in.

Luckily it was a **solid anti-tank round**. Came thru a wall against which stood a huge china/glass cabinet. I was standing in a doorway across from that between 2 rooms, kitchen and dining. All I remember was a blast and the next thing I knew I was picking myself up from the floor across the room behind me. Apparently the concussion blew me over a large dining table because I found myself behind it against that far wall. The round went about 4 feet to my right thru a pot bellied stove and one of our guys was sitting in a chair next to it. Sadly he didn't fare as well from what we heard afterwards. Among some injuries was his loss of sight. My face, arms, and neck were loaded with plaster, glass and china. How I didn't lose my eyes is a miracle. Even at that, I remember helping herd guys into the basement, yelling "Come on everyone, get down here!". I was the last guy down the stairs even though I was bleeding and hurt like hell. Luckily another round never came. Our TDs, as we called them, (**Tank Destroyers**) were rubber tired light armored vehicles (Small Tanks,



sort of) that carried 3 inch cannon and were fast and mobile (could do 60 mph). There were always 3 of them in a Platoon. They took out after that tank and destroyed him. They operated like grey hounds on a coyote. We always used 3 dogs when we hunted. One dog usually comes up on each side while the 3rd goes for the throat. Same way those guys operated and the tank couldn't defend itself in 3 directions at once.



Anyhow, as they loaded me into the ambulance, the Mess Sgt. came up and said he would take care of my loot while I was gone, as it was apparent that I wasn't

hurt enough to be sent away. I said ok and went to the rear to a hospital. Don't remember getting there or anything as I was no doubt doped up. Next thing I knew, I woke up on a cot in a large warehouse type building that they had taken for use and the **Purple Heart** was lying alongside me on the cot. A few days later I was sent back to the outfit. Bet my face looked like ----. Also bet that Mess Sgt thought, S---, he's back. And so I still have the sidearm. I picked out little bits of glass etc. from my face even after I was home and married. Suppose it would work its way to the surface. After I got back to the field, my platoon Staff Sergeant Vernon Gray, from Missouri, came up to me and told me "You are now a Sergeant." That's how I got my three stripes for a buck sergeant.



Anyhow, bet you are bored as all get out but that's the way it was. My guardian angel was beside me that day.

While I was in the hospital, the Division took the town of Weiswampach (11), thereby pushing the Germans back to the Reich. We pushed on to the "Our" river and had to cross it. Not too wide a river but deadly and fast because of snow melt. The Engineers had to build a foot bridge across and



British M10 tank destroyers using a Bailey bridge to cross a canal near Lille St. Hubert, Belgium (September 1944). The bridge is supported by [pontons](#)

kept getting it destroyed by enemy fire entrenched on the other side. I was holed up in a big barn while they were building the bridge. They finally managed to get it built and started a Bailey bridge for men and vehicles. Finally with a lot of artillery from our batteries pounding the Germans they got it built but with the loss of 58 men.

Terrible cost getting across that thing. Lost men on the other side fighting to get a foothold. Kalborn (12) was the closest town and Dasburg (13) was the next.

On February 20th, the Division hit the Ziegfried line and by then I had received my stripes and took a squad to a forward observation post on the tip of a high hill overlooking the pillboxes far below us, spent 24 hours there. About 40 feet down the hill below us were 8 German bodies. The day before, a German patrol happened that way and one of our guys grabbed the .30 cal machine gun and charged the Germans firing that thing from his hip. Got them all. Apparently took them by surprise. Escaped unharmed himself. Gutsy or crazy??

That forward outpost was in a dense forest and we had to get there at night to avoid being seen. The only thing that guided us was rope strung from tree to tree. Some brave souls strung it before hand during daylight. The artillery had pounded the heck out of the pillboxes and most of them



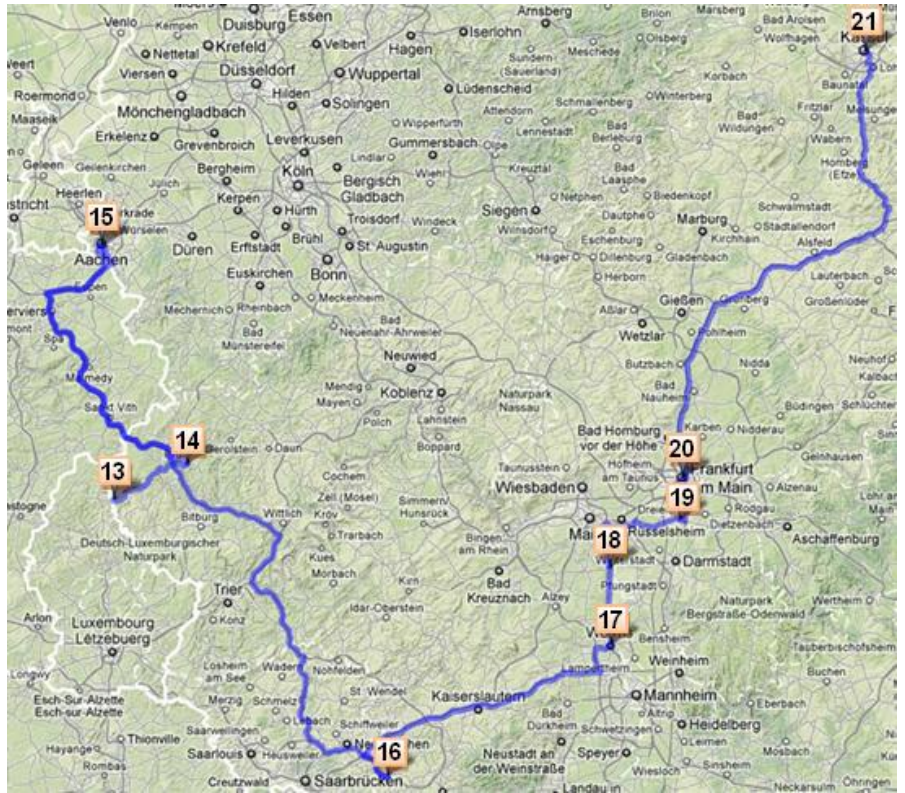
surrendered. There was one however that wouldn't and even though a tank fired point blank at the steel door no one came out. Finally they rounded up **450 pounds of TNT** and placed it at the door. **What a blast!** One officer and 11 soldiers came out of that thing pretty well shook up. We were then finally thru the line. Took 72 hours.



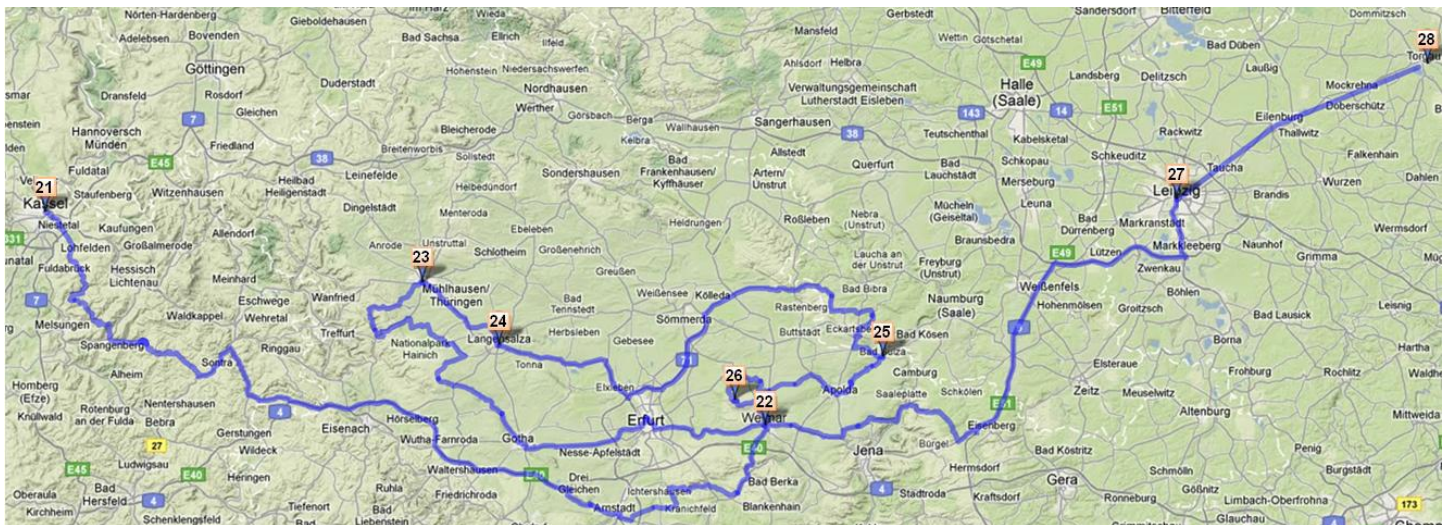
The 6th was credited with capturing 32 towns, 253 pillboxes, and 1033 prisoners.



Then we fought across the “Prum” river February 27th. When we got to Schonecken (14) on the Mims River, we were pulled back for R & R. On the 14th of March we got to Aachen (15). On March 20th the German line just sort of folded up and we really started to move. We went through Zweibrücken (16) and on to several towns by the end of the day. Had a rough scrap at Weisserhübel and Rosenkopp. By the next day we made our way into Worms (17). We then took Kaiserslautern and were at the Rhine River. Got across the river at Oppenheim (18) and pushed on fast to the Main River near Langen (19). Crossed the Main at “Frankfurt-on-the-Main” (20). From there we moved on to Kassel (21) at night and the Germans turned searchlights on us trying to see us.



Our tanks started knocking them out right away with direct fire. My head rang for a long time as we were advancing behind and alongside the tanks while they fired. Might be one of the reasons why I have been hard of hearing for years. From there we moved on to Weimar (22) and went across the “Fulda” river. On April 4th we moved into Muhlhausen (23) and met no resistance. The Germans were pretty well tired of it by then and were surrendering by the hundreds. Long lines of them were being marched to the rear units. Next we took Langensalza on April 5th. Our unit captured an airfield at “Bad Langensalza” (24) and a bunch of parachutes were in a warehouse. We just helped ourselves. I believe it is up in Chris’s attic. Who knows what condition it is in by now? It had a tear in it if I remember right. I have pictures of some of my buddies sitting on inactive bombs (we hoped, idiots) abandoned along the runway along with a couple of battered Messerschmitts.



Didn’t linger there very long as we were on a big push. Patton was in a hell of a hurry, as usual. Smart sucker and a good leader. Lots of respect for him.

At one point along the route we stopped along a stream to fill up all our canteens and then kept moving. About a half mile upstream, we came across four dead Germans lying in the water. Poor buggers. Needless to say, we dumped the water and refilled our canteens further upstream.

On April 11th we moved on and liberated a prisoner of war camp near Bad Sulza (25) and then liberated 21,000 prisoners from **Buchenwald (26)**. On the 12th though, we caught heck in the Leipzig area (27).



Watchtower at the Memorial estate Buchenwald, 1983

By then we were moving so fast that the quartermaster corps had to air drop fuel to us as their ground units couldn't keep up. Finally, we reached the "Elbe" river at Targau (28), where we sat for 2 weeks until the Russians came to the other side and our fighting was over.

Talk about some p----- off Americans over that deal. Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin at Yalta. At the rate we were going towards the end (and resistance practically non-existent] we felt we could have taken Berlin. In my estimation, the worst mistake Roosevelt and Churchill made when they agreed at Yalta to give concessions to Stalin thereby creating East Germany when we were on a roll and could have conquered Berlin. The rest is history. It would have been rough in Berlin as the Russians had a tough time with the last ditch Germans.



Photo from the Yalta Conference: Winston S. Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Stalin

We stayed in Germany as the Army of Occupation and our duties consisted of patrolling town etc. in case of delayed action, of which there was never any. They were done and glad of it (and so were we). They were friendly enough but somewhat reserved. Probably didn't know what to expect. The kids followed us everywhere. We weren't allowed to fraternize at all although enough of it happened on the sly.

Part of our job was to inspect traffic along roads in Germany. Once, along came a horse drawn cart with a husband and wife and a couple of kids. I searched their cart for contraband or maybe even hidden German soldiers. The man handed over a Schmeisser 25 caliber automatic pistol (small ladies purse gun), so I let them go after confiscating it. I brought that pistol back to the states with me but really regret that I later sold it when Elaine and I were hard up for money. I raffled it off when I worked at the Wilson's Packing Plant in Omaha, loading beef carcasses onto box cars one winter. Sure wish I still had that gun.



The name of our half-track was the Bellau Woods. It had shrapnel holes in it from the battle at St. Lo. After the fighting was over, we came across a winery. Naturally we helped ourselves and dumped the ammo out of the half-track and filled the ammo racks on the side with cases of wine. To the victor go the spoils. I remember a story about one of the guys in my company, our half-track driver from Pennsylvania by the name of Fahringer. One night we were sitting around a campfire and drinking the German wine in wineglasses that were very fine

and thin (war booty). Fahringer claimed he could eat the wine glass, so I bet him \$10 that he couldn't. He proceeded to break up that wine glass and started chewing. We all sat watching him munching away with our mouths agape! We could actually hear the glass crunching! He kept crunching and washing it down with water. Afterwards I made him open his mouth to see if he was hiding it anywhere to trick us. Nothing there, so darned if I didn't have to pay him his \$10. Trick or not, it was worth the price!

In August they demobilized the 6th armored and we were assigned as a "**Bastard**" **tank battalion** temporarily to the 28th division for rations as they were on their way back to the states. We were to get furloughs and then head for the CBI (China, Burma, India) campaign after a well earned rest. (I got married instead). But then, the big one was dropped on Japan and it was all over. We boarded a French freighter (the Marshal Joeffrey) for the trip back home. Boy did we hate the French and they hated us after we saved their A-- for them. Knuckleheads. Had a hard time keeping fights down on the way between the sailors and our fellas. A real slow trip besides didn't help.

What a sight when we entered New York harbor **(29)** and saw the Statue.

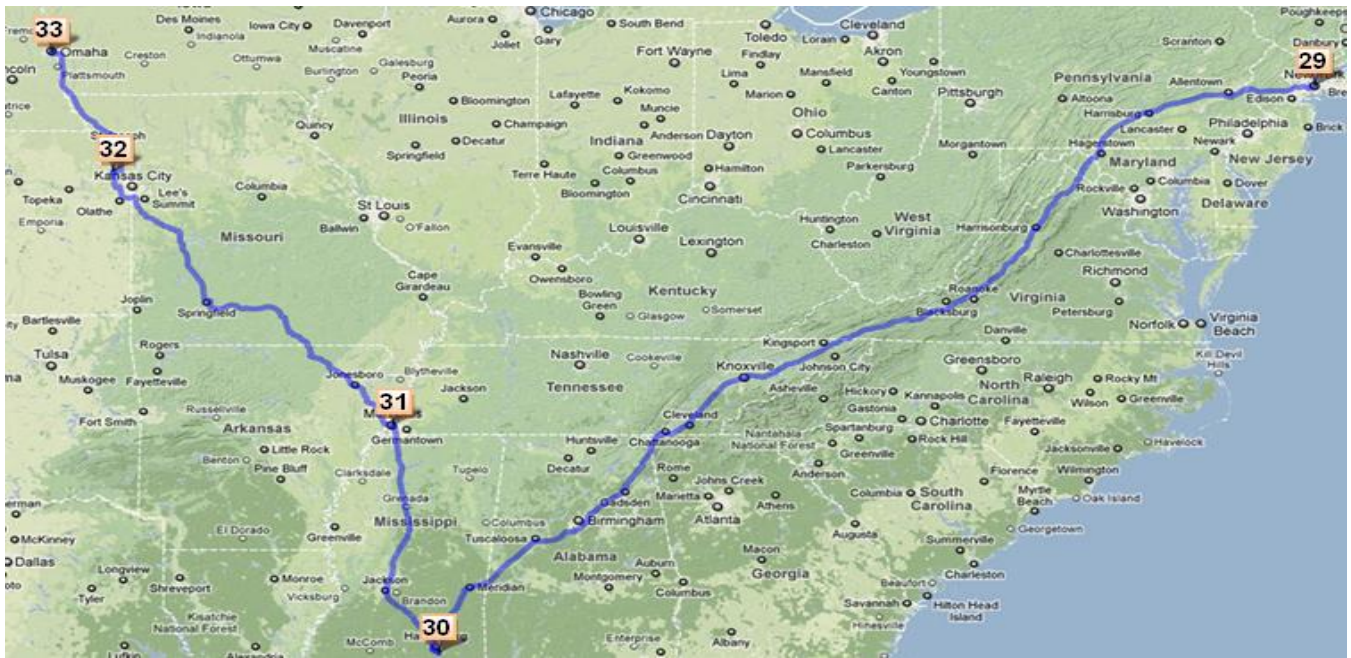
The boat was met by a whole launch or two full of various military women waving and blowing kisses. Naturally, everyone on board went to that one side causing the boat to list somewhat. The ship Captain got on the PA and made half of us go to the other side to right the ship.

What a blast. Arrived at the Camp and received our process papers. Scattered in all 4 directions. Headed our way were about 40 men and all were assigned to me in one car. We were sent to Camp Shelby, Mississippi **(30)**

long enough to get our furlough papers. When we got to Memphis **(31)**, there was to be a couple of hours stop while the train was to be shifted around. My guys wanted out of that car and after their solemn promise to be back, I let them go. (Fool). Anyhow each and everyone one came back all boozed up. Guess getting home was more important than taking off. Don Clabaugh was so drunk that Milo and I shoved him into the upper bunk to sleep it off. The fool fell out and so we put him in the bottom bunk for safe keeping. (He is now in a Alzheimer's ward in Columbus. Doesn't know anybody. Haven't seen him for several years as it does no good).

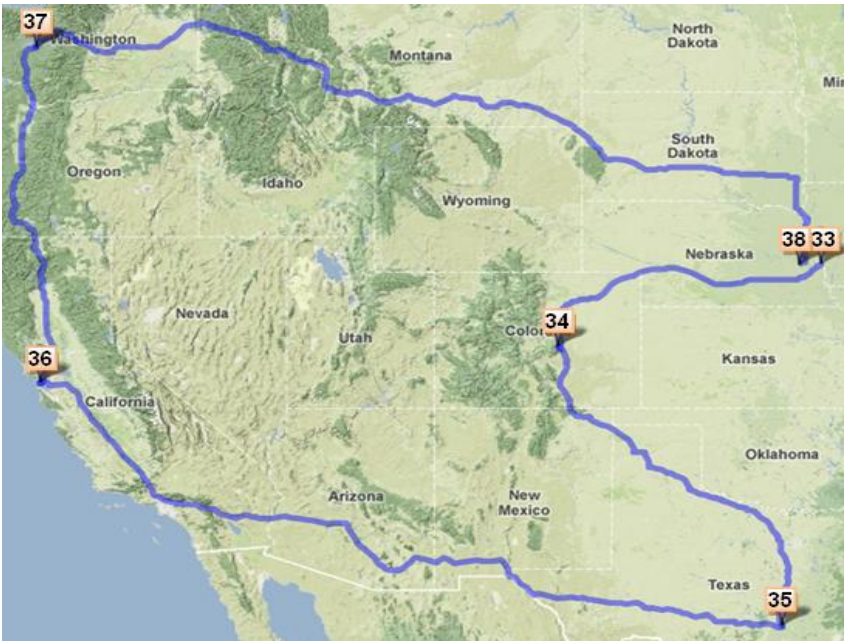
Arrived at Ft. Leavenworth **(32)** and scattered, mostly to KC to catch trains. We found out there wasn't one going to Omaha until the next morning so Milo, Don, a guy from Genoa, Ne. and I got hold of a cabbie and offered him \$100 to take us to Omaha right away. He said "hop in" and we paid him. He stopped at a liquor store, bought a fifth and plopped in the back seat, tossed us the keys and proceeded to get plastered. Anyhow we got to the Omaha Union Station **(33)** where folks were waiting for us. Last we saw of the cabbie was passed out on the back seat. Tossed the keys on him, locked the doors, and left him in the cab in the parking lot. Don't know what ever happened to him and we really didn't care.





A week later I was a married man and my buddies were there. Especially Milo, who was one of the best men. He and his wife now live in Wahoo and we have been good friends since 1944. In the meantime, Elaine and I needed wheels (I had left a peachy 1941 Chevy Club Coupe that I had). My brother drove it while I was gone and it wasn't in all that good shape by the time he got done with it. Rascal! Finally found a nice 1940 Buick 2-door sedan in Council Bluffs.

After our honeymoon in the Garden of the Gods in Colorado (34), I was assigned to the 2nd Infantry Division at Camp Swift, TX (35). Elaine went along and rented an apartment in Smithville. Along about the first of the year I received orders to report to Ft. Lewis, Wash. home of the 2nd. On the way we stopped and paraded down Market Street in Frisco (36). Once at Ft. Lewis (37) we rented an apartment in Tacoma and stayed there until about the end of April. They offered me more stripes if I would stay in and I said **"sorry boys, I'm going home"**.



We headed that Buick south to Portland and there saw that good old sign, Hwy 30. Headed down that sucker right into Wahoo (38). Elaine's brother, Bud, happened to be there and was heading home the same day, driving an old '37 Ford coupe. He picked up another GI and drove straight thru changing drivers. Beat us to Wahoo by 2 days. When there, Elaine stayed and I trained to Leavenworth and was discharged. And the rest is history.

I would like to relate a human interest story.

We had a fella named David Jones (Davey) who was scared spitless in Europe and would occasionally take off for the rear. He did that 2 or 3 times and the Platoon Commander wanted to court martial him. The Company Commander said to let him be for a while and give him a chance, so we did. He was in my platoon. One day, when the Division was assembling on the high hills overlooking the Rhine River for a crossing, a lone Messerschmitt flew along the valley below us and dropped a small bomb on one of the assembly areas. He headed our way, dropping duster bombs (small grenade sized personnel bombs). As he got closer to our company he came over the hill top perhaps 50 feet above and we could even see the pilot as he went by.

Anyhow, nobody knows what happened, but something must have snapped in Davey's mind. Maybe it just made him mad. Anyhow he jumped up on the half-track we were crouching next to and grabbed the 50 cal. machine gun in the turret. He started blasting away at that plane as it went by and lo and behold, smoke came pouring out of the craft and the last we saw of it was as it disappeared over the next hill. Naturally yells and cheers and Davey came down off that half track with a big grin on his face, got his back slapped time and again and practically carried around.

From then on, you couldn't stop that guy. He became hell on wheels. I believe he would have charged the Siegfried line with a sling shot if that was all he had. Stayed with us 'till the end and went home a hero.

Anyhow. I imagine you fell asleep long ago reading all this but I hope it gives you an insight into some of the action that took place over there. I had to go back to my book "**The History of the 6th Armored Division**" to refresh my memory about the names of many of the towns we went thru as there were so many. I surely didn't relate all of them and also some of the close calls and experiences that I had. Lost some good buddies and saw some pretty horrible things. No need to talk about those.

Ray

P.S. Both Don Clabaugh and Milo Bartek are now deceased. 7/29/17