

Part II - Beginning December 15, 1943

Contributed by Charles Harper
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December 15 - we were all through and the Company broke up and all started the journey back to his Company.

It wasn't many days until we were all back in the groove at the company duties again except this time we were all working on the company vehicles, and it wasn't many days until we learned that we were to go to Louisiana for two months maneuvers so we started getting ready for that. January 26 we left as a Division for Louisiana maneuvers. We made this trip by truck. A couple of days later we got to our destination at Leesville, La. Here we were to maneuver against the 77th Division and a Div. From Shelby, Miss. February 26, I became driver of the maintenance truck and was also made Private First Class. About two months after entering the Army all enlisted men's pay was raised from \$50 per month to \$70. My P.F.C. rating bade me \$4 more. We had a very nice maneuver ground, a lot of trees and thick under brush. The nights were cool and the days were as a rule pretty hot but we all enjoyed it a lot after being in camp so long. We also didn't have too much to do except just keep up with things and keep the vehicles in running order. During this time I whittled out a chain out of some soft wood. I made several links and was about to decide it was finished when a fellow bet me I couldn't put a swivel in the end of it. I still had several inches of the stick on the end that I hadn't used so I started in and in a couple of days I had the swivel in it and it would even squeak so I pronounced it finished. Our training there was about finished so we soon made the return trip back to Camp Barkeley, Texas where we started from. On April 6, 1943 I left on my first furlow home. That was the first time I had been home in over a year. I got ten days and April 16 found me back at camp again. I didn't have any company duties except to work on the vehicles so I was fairly happy at it. On July 23 the company was again granted furlows and so I got another ten days at home. As soon as we were all back in camp we were shipped to Camp Granite, California for desert training.

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We unloaded at Blythe, California, just a dock along the railroad tracks and nothing to be seen except desert and mountains. The temperature was only 13° when we got there. The roads were of sand and our first experience with it was to get some of our trucks stuck. Our first lesson in desert travel was to let about half the air out of the tires and we got along fine after that. We arrived at this camp September 6, 1943. We set up our maintenance shop under a tent and went on with our work. About a month later we gathered up our equipment and pulled out into the desert and mountains for more maneuvers. The first day we had 18 flat tires due to the drivers running over the stiff stubs of the sage brush bushes that grew there. After that they drove around them and had a lot less flats. A few days more and we were into the mountains. Here we had ourselves a good time looking for gold bearing rock and any thing of interest. We found many places staked out for claims with their papers placed under a rock on one corner and usually in a tobacco can. Some places we could see where a mine had been started and hadn't paid out so nothing more was being done to it. Well as all things do it came to an end and we ended up back at camp. A

few days later we learned that all vehicles were to be put in as good a mechanical condition as possible and would be turned in to ordinance and that we were to be sent to a camp in the east. We didn't know where but we did know that our time in the states was about to an end. So on December 26, we boarded the train again for parts unknown in the east. A few days later we arrived at Fort Dix, New Jersey and learned that we would be given furlows immediately. Half of the company was to leave at a time. Each man got 15 days this time. Many of us traveled the same tracks back home as we had a few days earlier. We knew by now that this would be our last time home till we got our job done over seas.

Well needless to say it didn't take long for that fifteen days to go by and then we were all back in camp getting ready for that last push off to we knew not where, nor did we know how long it would be. Until we would be back. The next few weeks at Ft. Dix were very busy with inspections and all the things that had to be done before we were ready to take the next step. Finally the day arrived and we were all ready for it. All our bags and trunks were moved outside and the final inspection was held and immediately after that we shouldered our bags and loaded on trucks which took us to the rail head and then we were loaded on the train according to number. After about a three hour ride we arrived in Camp Kilmer, N.J. we had to march about a half a mile to our barracks and on the way we stopped at the theater for a brief talk on what we were to do while we were there. At the barracks we immediately claimed our bags which had arrived and had an inspection to see what equipment we still were short. After that we went to the medics for a typhoid shot and then to the mess hall at five thirty. The mess hall was large enough to accommodate several companies at a time and each had a certain time to eat. Right after chow three of us and a Captain went to the Quartermaster Depot to draw the necessary items that were needed. We finished up at 4 AM and then slept till five thirty then we loaded all the salvage equipment and turned it in for new equipment. By ten the next morning we were finished with that and then all equipment had to be marked with our serial number and inspected. That done we had to have more physicals and lectures on the use of gas masks, boats, life preservers, etc. Finally all was done and we were ready to go but it would still be a few days so we were permitted to go to New York to see the sights. After a couple of days the shipping orders came through and the next morning was bright and crisp with a light cover of snow and frost in the early morning air. At breakfast we picked up a sack lunch which was to serve as the noon meal. A few minutes later we were all lined up and marched to the train. This time we carried all our equipment. The train ride didn't last long and we were on the dock. This time we loaded on a ferry and while being taken across the channel most of us ate the lunch we had been given. We weren't hungry but it was a good way to get it out of the way and still save it. Upon arriving at the pier where the ship awaited us we were given donuts coffee and a candy bar by the red cross. By now we were in single file according to our loading number and headed for the gang plank. As we started up the plank our name and number was checked by an officer and that was to be the last check. Our quarters were on the 3rd. deck E section and were shared with the 1st Battalion. The bunks were made of one inch gas pipe and held up by chains. They were four high. Mine was on the top. By being so I didn't have anyone climbing over me and had a little more room than the ones below. We had to remain in our bunks until everyone was on board and weren't permitted on deck until after we were out of the harbor and that was sometime toward morning. So on the 23rd of March 1944 we were at last on our way and out of sight of land. No lights were permitted on deck at any time of course the stars and moon gave us enough light to get around. We slept the night through and after breakfast which we ate by companies we all went up on deck to see what there was to see. Each meal had to be checked on a card which we were issued. There wasn't too

much to see on see on deck except the ocean and the birds that followed along to pick up the scraps from the ship. About a hundred mile out they even left us. We found that we were in a large convoy and one could see ships Eœtill they were out of sight over the horizon. On our right there were destroyers and on the left was on oil tanker which we watched a lot as it was so low in the water that one could see the waves wash over it at times. To the back and on all sides was just more ships. We were issued only two meals a day and after the first meal we were all glad of it as they made most of us sick. By now we had learned that we were on an English ship by the name of the Athlone Castle. It had been a luxury liner before being converted into a troop ship. The food was terrible, some we ate because we had to eat something and some of it we couldn't eat at all. Some of the meat was spoiled before it was cooked, some of the eggs they served boiled and sometimes they were alright and sometimes a chicken turned up also boiled. Now you know why some of the soldiers don't like eggs. After a few days out we helped dump several hundred pounds of spoiled potatoes overboard. Guess the fish had a good meal. The third day out we ran into a storm which lasted three days and nights. We were pretty well shaken up as we were in the bow of the ship. Of course many were sea sick. I was one of the lucky and wasn't bothered. The food didn't help those any and they didn't care about eating anyway. During the storm the men serving the chow had a hard time staying put and keeping all the kettles in the right place. We saw one man lose his balance and end up standing in a kettle of prunes. The prunes were served anyway and that didn't help our idea of the food any.