

A WWII Bio by Joe Schwan

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I volunteered for the Army when I was 18, but the Army would not allow me to enter the service because I had only my first citizenship papers, but in October of 1942 they relented and accepted me if I would "volunteer for induction", which I gladly did---I then had to wait two weeks until they got word from Moscow that my family had not been in the Communist Party, a cablegram that I paid for,\$7.50--but I had to stay in a local hotel for the two weeks on my own nickel. This is very important to me, as I wanted to serve so badly as my thanks to my new country for allowing me to become a citizen!!!!!!



Upon approval, I was sent to Ft. Benning, Sand Hill area, to the 10th Armored Division, newly formed in early July of '42, and had a minimal cadre. We had rice and pancakes for 2 weeks as they were not prepared for such a large influx of recruits--especially when we detrained at 3 am!!! So during our basic training as armored infantrymen, I became a tank commander, an M-8 assault gun, light tank chassis, which was a promotion to a Buck Sergeant rating. I was assigned to the HQs Co, First Bn, 54th Armored Infantry Regt., three tanks in the company, plus a heavy weapons platoon.

I had been asked to volunteer for OCS, infantry twice, by our company commander, Capt. Gamwell, but I refused as I was such a civilian rookie and felt that I knew little about leading men--my tank crew was enough, they were great guys!!! But in the spring of '43, the Army opened a new program, called the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), which offered me the opportunity to go to a university and learn the Army way of life and conduct and train to be an Army engineer, to go through engineer OCS

at Ft. Belvoir, and then a commission. I wanted an education very badly, as I was not able to attend college after my high school graduation, and with more maturity by then volunteered for this program--approved, then sent to Auburn Alabama for initial close order drill command training from platoon up through Bn., then was sent to Boston U., in the heart of Boston----carried 33 hours which included close order drill and P.E.

This lasted from Spring of '43 through May of '44, when the Army abruptly closed down most of the ASTP programs, and sent us all to infantry divisions for another session of basic training and thus as replacements for overseas----They knew that "D" Day was around the corner and they would need many, many replacements--- I trained with the 78th "Lightning" Infantry Division for three months, basic all over again, at Camp Pickett, VA, and to get overseas, I joined the paratroopers--sent to Ft. Benning again and in 4 weeks qualified to be an Airborne infantry soldier, got my paratrooper wings, and then to Camp Mackall, NC, for Airborne training etc.--finally sent to a POE, and there played touch football with my buddies, and of course suffered a broken arm !!!! So was sent back to Camp Mackall and upon arrival, the outfit was scheduled to make two practice jumps the next day---me, I went too!!! With one arm in a cast from my wrist to my shoulder---had couple rough landings!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Anyway, after a longer time training, in which I also trained to be a gliderman, I was sent to Europe and arrived in spring of '45 in time to join the 82nd Airborne Division [505th Parachute Inf. Regt.], on its way up through the Rhine, Cologne, Hannover, [I remember getting word that President Roosevelt died] and finally for the last battle of the war, the assault across the Elbe River, a single airborne infantry division with one attached armored brigade from the 7th Armored Division, which had been

attached to our division--they, like the CCB at Bastogne, were our only artillery and tank support----- Here we went through the heaviest exchange of artillery/mortar fire [per Gen. Ridgeway, the 18th Airborne Corps Commander] of the war, and first thing you know, the German 21st Army under Gen Tippleskirch, surrendered to our division, the first such instance in all the history of the U.S. Army, an entire Army surrendering to a single U.S. division!!!!

Speaking German, I was assigned to S2, and as an interpreter, was involved in liberating the local concentration camp at Woebbelin, which was near Ludwigslust, the surrender hdqtrs., transporting the German generals to the surrender hdqtrs, etc, etc,--here I have several interesting stories---for later--then contracted diphtheria, in a field hospital for several weeks, then back to Epinal, France to my original Company, for one day, then in a 40et8 for three nights and 4 days to Berlin--there as honor guard and then reassigned to the 508th Parachute Inf. Regt., at Frankfurt, in Nov. '45 again as the honor guard for SHAEF Hqs. at the IG Farben building. Here I waited and waited for replacements, but the Army had shut down the paratrooper training at Ft. Benning, so we had none!!!! Finally got to go home March '46 and discharged April 16, 1946---here I re-upped to the 335th Parachute Inf. Regt. Reserve, for three years---that was about it for my Army days in WW2 !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!