

# *U.S. ARMY EXPERIENCES, Harry L. O'Neal, T/Sgt. , ASN 19028070*

Page last updated: 11/25/55422 19:20:06

---

## *Part 5*

Things kept dragging along, boring as usual when there was nothing to keep you busy. VJ day, August 14, 1945, came and went, which didn't seem to excite us near as much as VE day had and then suddenly the orders came to start us moving towards home. The whole airbase received their orders and we all started the packing and listing that we'd gone through so many times. When the actual move day developed it turned out that all of the Fighter Groups and all but thirty of our outfit could be moved with the aircraft at hand. There had been over five thousand personnel on the base and suddenly it was reduced to the thirty of us. They left miscellaneous bits and pieces of gear, (Including all the liquor from the Squadron bar).

The Commanding Officer took me off to one side and told me he was leaving the liquor behind because he didn't want the guys drinking until the outfit was settled. We could drink what we wanted, which we promptly did. We were there more than three weeks, so while we waited we visited some of our friends in Rimini. In the family there were three girls about our age, a slightly younger brother, and an aunt. The aunt was in her forties and had been the fiancée of a Colonel in the Italian Air Force who had been killed in action. Apparently she was assigned the responsibility of chaperoning the younger girls. She had a brother that was the Military Commander of Venice. The family must have been well connected because someone in the family was the Italian Consul to Libya. I was unable to really keep track of all the relations since they only spoke Italian and my Italian wasn't all that good. We discovered that they had been unable to see the brother because of the war. We went back to camp and wrote out permission for ourselves to transport civilian personnel, and travel orders directing us to the city of Venice. The following morning we loaded the aunt and two of the girls into the jeep and drove to Venice. The brother lived in a palace on the Grand Canal and treated us like visiting royalty. I don't know how long it had been since they saw each other but they sure enjoyed their visit. We got there in late afternoon, had supper with them, and stayed the night. We had to leave the next morning in time to get us back to our base in daylight. No one showed any concern where we'd been and we let it stay that way.

The planes finally arrived to move us to the Foggia Air Base where they'd taken the rest of the outfit. By the time we got there the mess of moving had been sorted out and they were starting to turn in the things we'd been issued, along with the things we'd commandeered along the way. Two or three days later The Commanding Officer called me in and explained that anyone with 120 or more points towards discharge could be returned home immediately rather than sticking it out with the outfit. In reviewing each man's records they'd discovered I had 125. He explained that if I really wanted to go he'd transfer me to the 14th Fighter Group and my paperwork could be processed with theirs. They were in the process of being deactivated at that particular moment. He also told me that if I'd

stay with the outfit until it was deactivated he'd see to it that I was promoted to Master Sergeant. It took me about ten seconds to figure out that with all the service men returning home I had little or no chance of staying in the service, so I thanked him and got transferred to the 14th Fighter Group. As I was getting ready to leave I went to say goodbye to the Shop Chief, Farnum Lawson. He told me there was a Schmeisser machine gun in his tent and that I could have it if I wanted it. I had to tell him no thanks, that they'd be searching our luggage probably, and machine guns were prohibited back home. From there I went up to the Supply organization to say goodbe to them. They told me they had a Speed Graphic Camera outfit I could take with me and I had to tell them no also. I got the Commanding Officer to give me papers saying that my 9mm pistol was my personal property and the permission to carry it concealed on my person. When I went to see the Pilot and Co-pilot of the B-17 the Co-pilot told me there was an aerial camera in the plane, to throw it in my barracks bag and take it home with me. He got the same answer I gave the others.

When the goodbyes were finally over they threw my bbags into a jeep and hauled me over to the 14th Fighter Group. I only stayed there one night and the following day we were taken by truck to Naples to the site that Mussolini had planned to have the next world fair at. It was a huge placebut I'd done so much sightseeing that I wasn't interested in walking all over the place just to say that I'd seen it. They had a huge theatre and there a lot of advertisements that the Andrew sisters were singing that evening. We didn't have tickets so we stood as close to the door as we could. Little by little we kept edging forward. The guy with me asked how we were going to get past the M.P. at the door. I told him to do like I was going to do, to hold out his hand palm down as though he had something in it, and then reach out and hit the M.P.s hand and start running to the seat area. He was afraid that the M.P. would come after us and I had to point out that if he did no one would need tickets, there wouldn't be anyone taking them at that door. The doors opened and we were the first two through. It worked like a charm, they were admitting through about eight doors and the minute the guys got inside they started running for the seats. I doubt if they could have caught us if they tried.

The following day they moved all the Master and Technical Sergeants into the town of Naples to a schoolhouse that was being used as a holding area for G.I.s headed home. We were there several days and finally notified that we had a ship to go home on. We missed sailing on the SS West Point, which had 10,000 troops aboard, and instead got an old style Liberty Ship. They didn't have any ballast or cargo, they just loaded 400 of us aboard and put out to sea. We set a new record from Naples to New York for that class ship, sixteen days. It was a pleasant trip, probably lots different than the guys had on the West Point, for we had lots of room, and they fed us good. With no ballast and no cargo every time the ship passed over a wave or ground swell the screw came partially out of the water and the engine speeded up. From the landing in New York it was The original trip in reverse. When we hit Camp Kilmer, the minute I unloaded my barracks bags, I headed for the Finance Office. I'd put a hundre dollars into Soldier's Savings, to be spent in New York the minute we got back. I showed them my deposit book and they acknowleged that I had the money on deposit, but they wouldn't give it to me. I got so obnoxious with them that they finally got a Major to speak to me. He didn't give it to me either, and ended up warning me to return to my area immediately. Just as I got there they called a formation. When everyone was lined up they said for all those living in California, Oregon, and Washington to stand fast, everyone else was excused. They told us to get our belongings and loaded us into trucks and moved us to a section of the post where they processed those going by air. That evening they had a super meal, all the returning troops got one, they served steak, as much as you wanted, and had all the

trimmings to go with it. Fried potatoes and gravy, all kinds of vegetables, fruit, coffee, and milk (That we hadn't seen for two and a half years). Everyones eyes were bigger than their stomach and lots of the food ended up in the garbage can. We found out that you can't change your eating habits in one meal. The following morning they fed us an early breakfast and trucked us to the Newark, New Jersey air terminal . There we were loaded on an old DC-3 and flown to to the main Los Angeles air terminal. We stopped for in Tennessee, Texas and Arizona for gasoline only. No one got on or off the plane and the minute they finished servicing it we took off immediately. The plane didn't have regular seats, just bucket type seats along the fuselage. The minute we got airborne most of the guys laid down on the deck and tried to sleep. The deck sloped to the rear of the plane, and due to the turbulence, those on the floor ended up in a pile at the rear of the plane. I suspect the pilot had a time keeping his plane trimmed due to his cargo shifting from one end of the plane to the other. The trip took fifteen hours.

When we landed in Los Angeles we were loaded on a bus and started towards the old splinter barracks at San Pedro that I'd enlisted at. When the Corporal they had herding us asked if anyone had 120 points, we all replied that we had more. He then asked if we wanted to go to a replacement depot or be discharged. We took a quick vote and decided on a discharge. When we were unloaded in front of the orderly room I spotted a telephone and called my mom and dad to tell them I was finally home. They said they'd be down right away. When I hung up I went into the orderly room and told them I needed a pass to get off the post. This got such a laugh out of them I had to ask why. They said the barracks were overflowing, and that everyone had to get off the post. Anyway by the time the folks got there I had the pass and as soon as the greetings were over we went home. Three days later I went back and got discharged, Reduction of the Armed Forces as the reason. Dad had been discharged the month before, in August, so we went around and visited wit our old friends. Every morning we decided we wouldn't have anything to drink and every evening we came home half loaded. When we finally passed through this phase we decided to go into downtown Los Angeles and get straightened out with the Internal Revenue Service. I took all my records and the forms I'd filled out and when my name was called I laid them out on the counter in front of the IRS man. He examined them and said it looks like you owe \$20.00 for 1940 and \$120.00 for 1941. In 1942, 43, and 44 you're excused from paying anything by law. Then he went back and looked at 1941 again and said "That doesn't sound right, I think I'll transfer it to 1942. Just give me \$20.00 and we'll call it square". I told him I came to pay what I owed, not to try to cheat my way out of anything, that I didn't want somebody reviewing the papers at a later date and deciding that I still owed something. He said "Son where I'm putting these papers no one's ever going to find them". Of course for this exercise I was dressed in my Army uniform with the ruptured duck emblem sewn on it.

My outfit received a Presidential Unit Citation for our efforts in the field. I had a Good Conduct Medal issued for having no bad time in my length of service. Because I was in the service when war was declared I received the American Defense Medal, and for service in Africa and Italy I received the European-Africa Medal with four battle stars for the time I spent in those war zones while the war was being fought. I was allowed to wear Flight Engineer's Wings, five overseas hash marks, and one hitch mark. We normally wore the Air Force Insignia of the Air Force we were assigned to on our left sleeve at the shoulder. They came up with permission to wear a previous Air Force Patch if we'd been assigned to one so I had a 15th Air Force Insignia on the left arm and the 12th Air Force Insignia on the right arm. I also got a medal for sharpshooter for the course I fired with the Springfield rifle. In the course of service I also fired the 45 calibre automatic pistol, the 30 calibre carbine, and the 45 calibre

Thompson sub machine gun on regulation courses. Because we won the war I'm eligible for a Victory Medal if one is ever issued. My Military Occupational Speciality number was MOS 925, Aircraft Engineering Technician, Aircraft and Engine Mechanic, and Air Inspector. I was authorized to to repair, or attempt to repair, any of the aircrafts structural components or any of the engines components. They relied on our good judgement to not attempt repairs that we didn't feel capable of accomplishing. Naturally no one tore carburetors, starters, or any other accessory apart, you simply got a replacement for them and exchanged them.

Not too long after I'd returned I looked up Wanda Dillon, who had been writing me letters all the time I was over seas. I hadn't pursued her very long when I asked her to marry me, but that's another story.

In reviewing figures in an old Hammond Almanac we have I found that the United States had 16,112,566 persons in the services from the start of the war until it was officially declared over in 1946. 291,557 of these were killed in battle and 113,842 died of other causes. 670,846 suffered less than mortal wounds. World War II caused the greatest movement of people on the face of the earth since time began.....