

WORLD WAR II

When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, England and France declared war on Germany, starting World War II. In anticipation the United States would become involved in the war, the United States Congress passed the Selective Training and Service Act in 1940. The Act provided for one year of military service by eligible Americans. On July 1, 1941, I was one of those selected for one year of military service. Local Selective boards instructed me and nine other men to report to the Waterbury Railroad Station for transport to the U.S. Army Induction Station in Hartford, Connecticut. If we passed a medical examination, we would leave immediately for the Recruit Reception Center at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. Those who failed to pass a medical examination would be rejected and provided with transportation back to their homes.

On the appointed day, Mayor Vincent Scully of Waterbury met us at the railroad station. He made a short patriotic speech: "...giving a year of your life to serve your country..." It was a tearful scene. Relatives and friends saying goodbyes amid tears, hugs, and kisses. The mayor put me in charge of the group and provided me with the official documents needed for our trip to Hartford. As the train pulled out of the station, some relatives and friends, including my girlfriend, Agnes Zumpf (who ran alongside of the train), waved until it disappeared in the distance.

The trip to Hartford gave us time to get to know one another. We were all first-generation Americans. Our parents represented the different nationalities who immigrated to the United

States. We were a composite of the “melting pot” that made America. We came from all walks of life, but military service would reduce us to a common denominator—Soldier!

Upon our arrival at the Army Induction Station at Hartford, we joined hundreds of other inductees. We were herded into a large building where we were told to disrobe for physical examinations. We went through a series of marked stations: eyes, ears, dental, chest X-rays, and dexterity of arms, legs, and feet. Flat feet was an immediate cause of rejection. In those days, soldiers were required to march long distances, particularly the infantry soldier. They needed good strong feet and legs. I found one station in particular fascinating. The psychiatrist asked only one question: “Do you like girls?” I replied, “You bet I do.” He passed me on to the next station. These physical examinations were not meant for weak or timid souls. Hundreds of naked bodies standing in a row with doctors checking penises for venereal diseases and then ordering everyone, “Bend over and spread your cheeks.” The assembly lines of the examinations later produced such comments as, “If you see lightning and hear thunder, you’re in.”

Once the physical examination process was completed, for those who passed, their papers were stamped “ACCEPTED” and those who failed were stamped “REJECTED.” Those who were rejected for military service were released and provided with transportation back to their homes. All ten of us from Waterbury passed the physical examinations and were accepted for military service. We were ordered to dress and assemble in the reception section of the building. There we were instructed by an officer, “Hold up your right hand and repeat after me: I, (name) do solemn swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same, and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States, and the orders of the officers

appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice, so help me God!" With this oath, I became a soldier in the United States Army as a private.

FORT DEVENS, MASSACHUSETTS

We were placed on a train headed to the Recruit Reception Center at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. It was a short trip. The train clicked along until we reached the train station at Shirley, or was it Ayer? There we were met by a sergeant. He ordered us to climb into one of the nearby Army trucks. We later learned the correct nomenclature of these trucks was “deuce and a half”—that’s how much the trucks weighed, 2½ tons.

Upon our arrival at Fort Devens, we learned that the fort was the home base for the 1st Infantry Division, later to become known as the “Big Red One.” We could see troops out in the field engaged in close order drills and marching in unison to the cadence of a shouting sergeant. We were ushered into a large building, where we underwent a long, extensive orientation and record process. We were issued a government serial number. Mine was 31048740. All soldiers, officers, enlisted men, horses, and mules were issued serial numbers. As such, we all became U.S. Government property. Hence, the acronym GI (government issue) became a common expression. Next, we were given a series of tests measuring our intelligence quotient (IQ) and qualifications based on education, background, civilian occupation, special talents, and skills. From this, we were evaluated and designated a military occupational specialty (MOS). All this information was recorded on a large yellow (buff) punch card called a Form 20. This became the enlisted man’s military record. In my case, I was awarded an MOS of Rifleman 0745. As a private, my monthly military pay would be \$21.00 with deductions for laundry, life insurance (\$10,000.00), and the Old Soldier’s Home, leaving me with a net of \$13.00 a month. My last

