

EPISODES OF WWII:

For our children
Experienced and related by Sam A. Nusz



1942

Compiled by Stel Nusz

Sam A Nusz

Recorded by Granddaughter, Nicole Nusz Kruse
until Stel, after a fashion learned to use the computer.

Being Stel was teaching, she needed to go to school Monday morning. Tuesday evening, Bill Massey, a school board member came with his family, and told Stel she could have the rest of the week off. That was a nice thing. Then one evening Mom and Dad had my aunts and uncles over for a gathering. That too was nice to get to see them.

Come Saturday, it was the end of my furlough and I had to return to camp.

When us GIs returned to camp, after a bit we were ordered to do more practice and training. This was the last stretch for us in the USA.

Shortly thereafter, we boarded a train, which took us to New York, New York. Upon leaving, we didn't know where we were going, but along the way we found out.

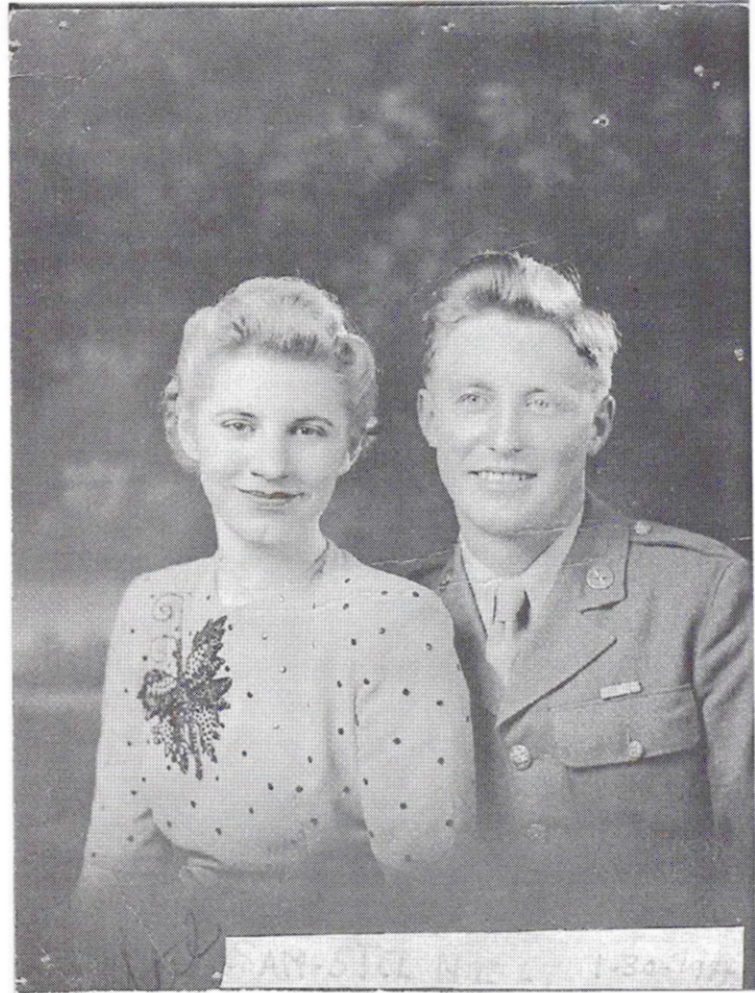


Figure 24: Stella and Sam Nusz married January 30, 1944.

AN AMAZING EAGLE

Back in 1942 while I was in military training at Ft. Lewis, Washington, this one day while walking to the PX, I noticed this one GI scanning the sky. (I've forgotten his name, so I'll call him 'GI Joe'.) I was curious about what he seemed so intent about. I stopped and asked him, "What are you looking at?" Naturally I too looked up. He said, "An eagle." This eagle was leisurely circling the sky above us.

As we were standing and watching, more GIs were gathering. Suddenly this eagle started descending and GI Joe held out his arm. The eagle, without further action, came flying down and as it leveled off, it carefully landed on his arm.

GI Joe told us this was his pet eagle. He then proceeded telling us how this all came about. He owned an acreage in the state of Washington, about 150 miles from this camp. It was there he raised this orphaned eaglet. When this young eagle matured to where it 'felt it could feel it's wings,' it flew off to wherever--- and would return to the acreage whenever, just to 'check' on things and again take off to wherever.

The eagle hung around about a half hour and flew off. GI Joe was ever amazed that the eagle was able to recognize him from so high up, at a strange place. And so were the rest of us. And how fortunate, someone was present to pictorially record this event.



Figure 25: The Amazing Eagle

FOXHOLES

During the time GIs took basic training in the States, before WWII began, digging a foxhole was part of the routine.

Then came Pearl Harbor and a few years later, D-Day, The Normandy Invasion. Finally the push in Germany and that gave rise to a different pace and attitude about digging a foxhole.

Time involved digging foxholes varies as to the situation you are presently in, also the availability of tools and soil conditions.

During waking hours in war areas, there is much motion and commotion and a definite need for foxholes.



Figure 37: Sam and a buddy, Walker, in a foxhole in France. The Telephone switchboard was hidden in the foxhole, which was on top of a big hill under a bush - we could see the German's but they couldn't see us.

To dig a foxhole for sleeping: you dig a hole about the length of you body and deep enough so the GI would be out of sight of the enemy. The width is narrow, just wide enough for you to fit in quite snugly, sideways---- so if a tank passed over, a soldier wouldn't get crushed. For forward observers, it was a bit different. Usually a forward observer would try to find the highest possible point and if there was a shrub in the area, that would be a plus, to dig a foxhole. For forward observers, the foxhole needed to be larger in area and deeper as they needed it for setting up instruments to observe the enemy. This is called Observation Point or OP.

Generally two GIs, forward observers worked together, if possible. At times it was more feasible for each to have his own foxhole. In that case, they pulled a wire between themselves to communicate.

Forward observers send information to the big Artillery gunners who may have been stationed eight miles form the target. The gunners never see the target.

BREWING

This episode occurred in Germany sometime before the Battle of the Bulge.

I had returned from a forward observation assignment to where the kitchen and maintenance crew were positioned, for something to eat. While I was eating, we were catching up on happenings and such. Someone from maintenance crew was telling about an interesting find. They had found two barrels, each containing approximately 50 gallons of fermented prunes. They then inquired whether I knew anything about building a still. After a short discussion the maintenance crew was able to provide the makings necessary to build a still. An empty powder keg from an artillery gun, which was constructed of steel and lined with porcelain, plus a cover that had a vapor seal, was provided. This container had the capacity of about 10 to 15 gallons. A 20 to 30-foot piece of copper tubing was rustled up. After coiling the tube, it was attached to the cover of the container to be used as a condenser. Now they were ready for the brewing business.

They filled the "powder keg" with the fermented prunes. To heat the containers, they used a blowtorch. Controlling the heat properly, the vapor came through the container as liquid. The result: alcohol.

It so happened I had to return to forward observation again. After several days, having completed the mission, I again returned to position. I'd been looking forward to indulging in a treat of "prune liquor", but all I got was about a 3 oz. shot, they had saved for me. The rear echelons got most of it. It was pretty good stuff.

Using the same still someone had found chicken mash. Naturally they experimented with it.

The chicken mash was soaked and stilling began. Stilling is a slow process. A buddy of mine, who was tending the switch board that afternoon, asked me to take over the switchboard for a little while, while he was going to visit the guys who were stilling the mash. Either the joy juice was rather potent or he overindulged, I ended operating the switchboard all night.

THINKING BACK TO THE NORMANDY INVASION

After about three years of training in different camps in the USA, our group left from New York and landed in England. Here we practiced the thing we had trained for until we left for the unknown, which turned out to be Normandy.

As I remember, it was a very foggy morning when the 204th Battalion of the 20th Corps, of which I was a part, left with a convoy from England to Normandy, France, by way of the English Channel. (I didn't know where we were going).

Along the way, the boat we were on, got hung up on a sandbar. I can't recall how long we were beached on the sandbar, but it seemed like it may have been overnight. During this time we didn't see any other boats. However, we did see several submarine periscopes going by. Not knowing whether they were friend or foe was an eerie feeling.

When a high enough tide came along, we were able to sail again. By the time we landed in Normandy, the attack had already begun. From then on there was plenty of action. Most of the time I didn't know what day of the week, or at times, what month of the year it was.

War is following orders! GIs do as they are ordered to do. Much is the unknown. And so it was when the 204th Battalion Unit was ordered to assist in liberating Camp Dachau. Until this point in time, this type of camp was just rumor to us. What we saw was reality! What we saw was appalling! There were bodies stacked up in heaps. Other bodies were lying in rows.

Mingling with working prisoners, they revealed the bodies were those of political prisoners and Jews. These died of starvation. Many died in gas chambers. Also these bodies had been processed for the lime pits, meaning clothes and jewelry had been removed from their bodies. Gold was removed from their teeth, had also been salvaged. Supposedly the Germans had run out of fuel to fire the crematories, thus the lime pits.

A working prisoner also revealed, they were fed one-fourth pound of meat a week, consequently dying of malnutrition. The workers met the same fate.

The 204th Battalion was a unit of the 20th Corps. They received the following recognition: GHOST CORPS

The march of the 20th corps from St. Jaques to Verdun, France, 600 miles in 30 days, was one of the fastest sustained marches in history.

ARMY REVEALS "GHOST CORPS" SAGA

The mysterious column that sped across nations was Waker's 20th Corps. On September 30th, 1945, the secrecy, which for weeks had surrounded the mysterious "Ghost Corps", was lifted. This disclosed major General Walton H. Wakers's 20th Corps as the

spearhead of lieutenant General Patton's 3rd Army. This great eastward drive across France, demonstrated bold tactics of encirclement, which won Prime Minister Churchill's praise in parliament.

Within fifteen days. General Waker led this Corps across six rivers, namely the Sain, Seine, Verle, Morne, Aisne, and the Meure to liberate scores of town and cities including Chartres, Melun, Monterau, Fatainblur, Chareauthierry, Epernay, Peimes, and Verdun. The Corps speed was such that it thrust through the Argonne Forest in a matter of hours as compared with the several months required to take these wood in World War I. At one place the armored columns of the 20th corps knifed through the enemy defenses with such force and speed, the staff officers of a German headquarters scrambled out of their mess hall and joined the fleeing troops to avoid capture. Their food was still hot when the Americans moved in.

Incessantly pushing the Germans back and off balance, the 20th Corps captured or destroyed 200 enemy tanks, 35 personnel carriers, 500 guns of large caliber, 80 planes, and 90 vehicles. Enemy troops killed or captured exceeded 20,000.

We were in the corps from the time we landed during Normandy invasion until the end of the war.

After go, go, go, sometimes day and night, for some months during WWII, suddenly it was over, and we began to think about returning to the USA. But before returning, the GI helped wherever needed. One of the duties was to deliver orders from Army Headquarters to the mayors in the towns of Germany.

Having completed the duty, we assisted with displaced persons. This duty completed, it was now time for our unit Battery B to turn in all equipment, such as guns, trucks, ammunition, and such.

Having done this, our army duties were terminated. Now we had time to think about returning to civilian life back in the United States. What do we have to look forward to?

It was now that us GI's were informed we needed deprogramming before our return. In essence, the following is more or less what we were told during deprogramming: "Some of you GIs are not fit to return to live among the civilians. Some of you have trained for five years to be mean and ugly; to do as you were commanded, to do it right – with no mistakes so you and your partner wouldn't get knocked out of existence. When you get back to the USA to live with civilians, it will be different. The civilians have ample money. You will have very little as your army pay is very little. The civilians own every square inch of land, so where are you going to live? You can't live in a ditch or in weed patch, as they will tell you this is our property and we don't want you on it."

"So that makes you think, think, think – do you really want to live as a civilian, no place to live, no ration stamps, no car readily available, except for black market?" These were some of the thoughts we dealt with before our "Sentimental Journey Home".

I hope all those years weren't in vain!

(August 14, 1995, marked the 50th anniversary of the end of World War Two, the Herald welcomes any experiences servicemen wish to share with readers.)

2006---I was inducted into the military service March 22, 1941 and was discharged November 1, 1945. This amounted to 4 years and 8 months. However in wartime, while serving overseas, in actual combat, time takes on a different meaning. One year is considered one and a half years. Our Unit spent 20 calendar months overseas. Therefore the time I spent in the service was considered over five years. Some nights seemed like a week.

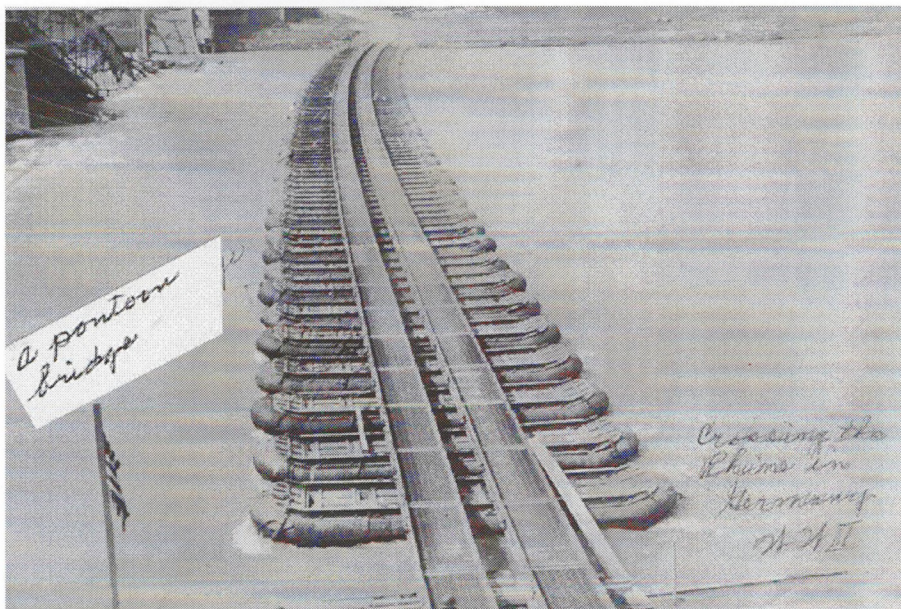


Figure 68: A pontoon bridge was used to cross the Rhine River in Germany.

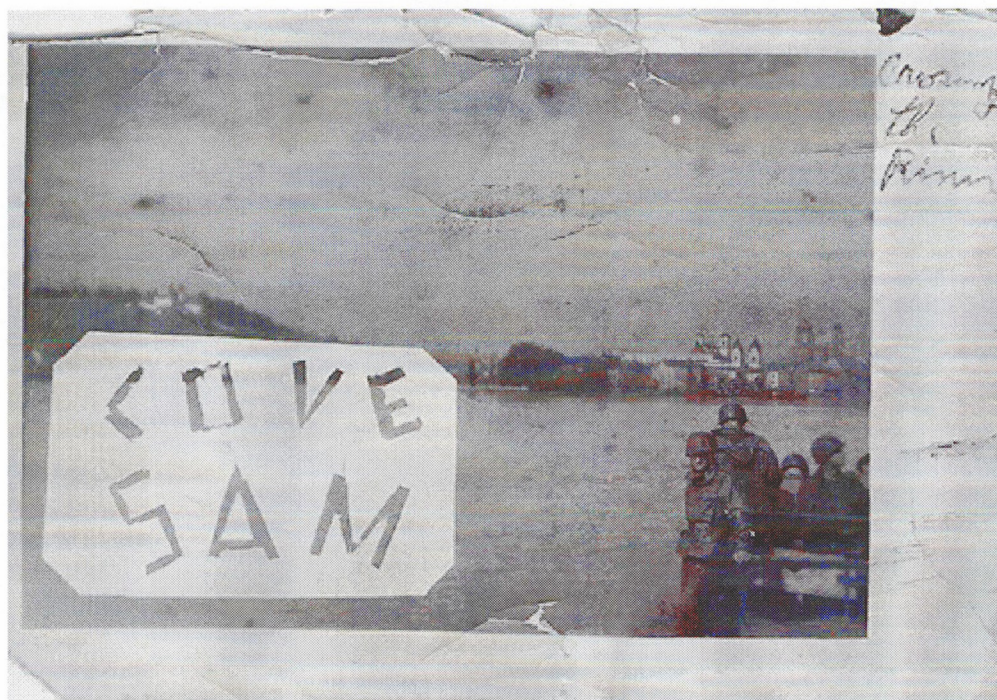


Figure 69: Pictures were taken during the war but were not developed until a train carload of sensitized paper was found after the war. A fellow GI with Sam knew how to develop pictures using simple chemicals from the kitchen (vinegar). A projector was made by taking an old camera apart then wiring it up with a magnifying glass to magnify the pictures/slides, which could be focused and enlarged onto the sensitized paper. The work was done in a dark room they fixed up at camp. A note cut out of paper with a razor blade was added to this picture to personalize it for Stel.



Figure 75: The 204 Field Artillery, 3rd Army insignia that was developed toward the end of the war. Sam says he trained for 5 years to be mean and ugly.



Figure 76: Roll Call after WWII.



Figure 77: Sam at Camp Lucky Strike waiting to go home. Camp Lucky Strike was one of the major staging points where the soldiers collected in Europe before coming home.