

Stephen Robinson, Davenport

September 11th was a bright, clear morning when I was out flying the skies of northern Davenport, keeping them clear of Messerschmitts. It was my mission and I was good at it.

Suddenly: "This is Air Traffic Control. All aircraft are immediately grounded and will land at once. THIS IS AN ORDER!"

Back at the airport, a TV was on loud, reporting the details of the terrorist attacks.

I remembered Pearl Harbor. I was only four, but December 7th was my father's birthday and my parents were having a party. The men were swearing and the women were crying. I didn't know much, but I did know that this wasn't what you did at birthday parties. "Why are you crying?" I asked my mother. She hugged me tight and said, "The Japanese have done a terrible, terrible thing, and I don't know what we're going to do." I was having that same kind of feeling.

Afterwards, my wife and I were outside and saw the lonely contrails of Air Force One and its fighter escorts very high, heading back east.

I'm a volunteer pilot with the Civil Air Patrol now, and I don't play Messerschmitt Ace anymore.

Mark J. Gould, Bettendorf

I recall my first time away from home at Army basic training for the Korean war and I had missed Christmas with my parents and 9 siblings. Upon returning home in February, I was surprised and elated to see that my mother had left up the Christmas tree for me with all my presents still underneath it! What I thought had been the worst Christmas ever, turned out to be the most special and memorable of all—because of the kind and thoughtful gesture of my mother.

Kim and Mike Pestle, Wilton

Halloween 2006 our son SGT James Aaron Pestle left for his 2nd tour in Iraq with the 1st Calvary Division, leaving behind his wife Angie and 6 week old son Damian. We knew that Christmas was going to be especially hard on all of us. Whenever asked what she wanted for Christmas, Angie would reply "My husband, all I want is my husband" I knew this was not possible. As the Holiday came closer it was overshadowed by having a family member so far away.

5 am Christmas morning a call came from around the world, it was him telling us to watch Fox news and wishing us a Merry Christmas. As we brushed away the sleep from our eyes, there he and two other soldiers were being interviewed by an embedded reporter that had ridden with them on missions for the last week. The reporter had loaned them his phone to call and tell their families they would be on the news.

All my daughter-in-law could do is smile and say "He did it; I got my husband for Christmas". That was the best gift anyone could receive, one moment in time connected and he was safe.

Dinah Lohmeier, Rock Island

Over the past 6 years my husband and I have had two sons in the Army which has brought many holidays without them. The older one enlisted the June before 9/11 when he was going into his final semester of college. He enlisted as he did not know what he wanted to do and thought he needed to grow up a little. When 9/11 happened he wanted to drop out of his final semester at Iowa State and leave right away rather than wait for his delayed enlistment which was to begin Jan 3, 2002. We talked him into finishing college and thankfully he did. He left Jan 3, 2002 for Basic training @ Ft Benning in Columbus, GA. He enlisted for 3 years – while serving in the army he became an Army Ranger.

Our second son enlisted in the Army, specifically the Infantry, on April 30 of 2002 for 6 years. I think 9/11 was part of it but also to make him a better person- husband –father and have a secure job for his family. He was to finish his enlistment April 30 of 2008 but due to his unit being deployed for this the third long deployment in March of 2007 until June of 2008 he will wait until his unit returns to Ft Benning before he can start the out processing. He should be out by September of 2008.

Spending holidays without them is hard but what continues to be difficult is everyday worrying or thinking or wondering where they are or what is going on. I cannot tell you how many sleepless nights and nightmares I have had that someone is coming to the door in the middle of the night to bring us bad news or feelings that something is wrong. Before his first deployment my infantry son called from Ft Benning and said they each had to turn in a map quest to their commanders that would lead them from the nearest airport to their home should they have to contact us. He said it matter –of –fact to me but I did not see it that way. Discussing his will and funeral were also things that I was not ready to talk about.

My husband took it all much better than I – as we sat one early morning in 2003 following FOX news and saw them covering the tanks and humvees going across the desert while also showing military personnel at different bases they were setting up in Iraq – anytime they would show a group of soldiers I was sure I saw our son –'oh, there he is – the one in the back – see I know that's him because he is one of the tallest', my husband would say – 'no, that is not him' – but assuring me he was ok. I do not know if he truly believed it or was just trying to make me feel better. Men have

a way of saying 'it will be ok – he will be fine' maybe to convince themselves but certainly to make us feel better and it does.

In sharing this story I will say my older son – finished his enlistment in 2005 and is back in the US. The younger one has until mid June 2008 to be in Iraq then he will be able to start the process of finishing up his paperwork to exit the Army around September of 2008. In having them both in a war over the holidays was hard but just as hard has been having them in a war at all. I know they both feel strongly about their enlistment – they have grown up more than any job could have taught them – they supported their leaders and did the best job they could do along with doing it with pride. They never complained about the job they were ask to do as they knew it was their job to do it. I hope that what they have been through – the scenes they have had to watch and the bloodshed they have been exposed to ensures them that their service has allowed us the freedom we sometimes take for granted. I hope that the long term effect of their experience will always make them realize how proud and thankful we are and how wonderful our country is along with how many others have done the same before them. My husband, daughter and I are extremely proud of the sacrifices they have made along with so many others and will always be thankful. To all those serving: 'Keep Your Head Down & Be Safe'.

Happy holidays to you and your family.

Charmiann Palos, Rock Island

This Christmas story dates back from the Korean War. Marine Cpl. Marcelino Palos was barely 18-years-old when he went to war. He was desperately trying to get home to his expecting wife. The snowstorm in March 1951 was one of the worst seen during that year. Recently suffering a severe back injury, when the truck he was riding in went over a mountain side, he was trying to get to the States from Kobe, Japan, in time for my birth. I came into the world on March 12, 1951, at 3 a.m. weighing 4 pounds 15 ounces. Many years later in 1991 my father was dying of cancer. On a cold wintery day in December I received a phone call from him. He asked me, "Have you looked outside?" It was snowing! He was so excited, and began telling me the story of how he made it home in time for my birth. Times were certainly hard back then for all those war veterans but our family made it through. I still have that picture of my father kissing my mother on that joyous day, and wonder, when it snows does my mother still smile and remember that cold wintery night, the night that my father made it all the way back from the Korean War?

David R. York, Camanche

It was December 1969 with Christmas a week away. I was a Marine in Vietnam with Golf Co. 2/7. We had been out in the bush for several weeks and hoping to get back to our base camp for Christmas, but things didn't go as planned. I became very ill and had to be medavaced out. The chopper, much to my surprise, landed on the hospital ship "USS Repose."

After triage, I was assigned a ward and settled in. What a change! From mud, rain, c-rats, little sleep and being sick...to hot chow, clean sheets and a warm, safe environment. Christmas Eve arrived and we were told we'd meet another hospital ship, the "USS Sanctuary." Near midnight, we pulled up along their portside and continued up off the coast.

Exactly at midnight, staff, crew and patients came out and shouted greetings and well wishes and sang carols across the water. Being away from home for the first time and lonely, this was a comfort from God. This one event was truly a peaceful moment that encouraged and gave me hope.

Deb Heileman, Muscatine

Dear Mom;

I just got back from Xmas Eve Services. About 30 from my platoon walked across the jungle to attend. As usual it was hot and rainy. Anything but white down here!

This is the beginning of a letter written to his folks in Blue Ridge, Ill., by 23-year-old John Nurse of Company C, 98th signal battalion. When all the sounds and events the world spoke against this holiday, these men stationed in the tropics of Sanspor, New Guinea, were seeking faith, hope and comfort. "Church" was outside the headquarters of the 6th Infantry Division. They sat on tropical tree logs and stumps. The very forceful Chaplain Steve P. Gaskins, Jr., led worship. As silent tears fell, eight Christmas Hymns were sung and the sermon was "No Room For The Christ."

Afterwards, the men walked back to their tents in silence. There was a special closeness among them and hope was reborn and continued to live not just that blessed day, but through all that lie ahead.

I am proud to be told the stories and memories of 86-year-old John Nurse. You see, he is my dad.

Herb Doden, Milan

In 1944, I was a member of M Company 393rd Regiment 99th Infantry Division. Since November we had been on defensive position near Siegfried Line in the Ardennes Forest. It was suppose to be a fairly quiet area, according to intelligence reports. All of this changed at 5:00 a.m. the 16th of December, our lines were hit with intense artillery

barrage followed by tanks and assault infantry. Our line held that day and night, but on the 17th, regiment ordered a withdrawal to a small village called Krinkelt in Belgium about five miles back. It was soon clear that Krinkelt could not be held and what was left of our battalion fell back to a high ridge outside the town of Eisenborn. This was a no retreat line. And our high ground position was good.

I had become a good friend and buddy of Karl Wagner of Davenport. But during the chaos and confusion I lost contact with him. I later learned he had been evacuated with severe trenchfoot. I was relieved to know he would be alright.

During this time the weather had been extremely bad, and we did not have any air support. Christmas dawned on a very cold, but clear and sunny day. The Air Force threw everything they had into the sky and appeared in full strength. We looked up and saw a cross patch of hundreds of con-trails. It was quite a sight, and it was Christmas morning.

MSG Jack A. Hoots (Retired), Riverdale

I was in sunny Southeast Asia (Vietnam) and part of a reconnaissance team.

Christmas Eve (night) we were on a recon mission off a small base camp. The day prior to this we had been out scouting the area and found trails coming down out of the mountains. We were out there watching for movement and it started to rain – no big deal. In Vietnam you wait for the sun to come out and then dry out. During that night (12/24), the base camp was probed. Instead of going in that morning, they had us check out the area where the contact had come from. We came in late that afternoon.

A Captain from the unit we were supporting came over and told us we didn't have to go back out that night since it was Christmas. Then he said he wanted us in a couple foxholes with our night scopes so we could watch for movement along the perimeter.

When morning came, Christmas was over. I had been rained on, up for 38 hours, no shower or clean clothing for 15 days and had to eat LRRP rations for Christmas dinner.

I will never forget Christmas 1968.

John W. Kautz, Blue Grass

Completing our European invasions, the USS Thurston (an attack transport) was scheduled for Pacific duty and eventually the invasions of Iwo Jima and Okinawa. This meant using the Panama Canal on Christmas Day.

I was fortunate to qualify for shore liberty in Colon on Christmas Eve. The first memorable event was to witness a series of woman boxers slugging away at each other. This included imbibing in a series of local drinks that took their affect in due time.

Returning to the ship and struggling up the swaying gangplank (stairway), I lost my best dress hat overboard never to be replaced but never to be forgotten along with the exposure to female boxing.

Joy Sayles, Bettendorf

My wartime holiday experience is written on behalf of my parents. They were both enlisted and have passed on, but their story is one of a new beginning.

Dad was a Marine returning from the Philippines via California in December 1945. Mom was a Wave, and had returned to her parents' farm in Central Illinois while waiting for his return. Once he was discharged he got on a train to Chicago with other soldiers returning home. Many had been in the tropics, all were issued one overcoat, and they were freezing.

Mom was to meet Dad in Chicago, so Grandpa worked an arrangement with his neighbor for two "newer" tires for his car so Mom could drive there. Being December in Illinois there was snow, and lots of it that year. Dad anticipated arriving on December 23 or 24 so Mom made a hotel reservation just in case. He arrived on the 24th as a tired, cold and very happy soldier. They stayed the night and headed back to the farm the next day – what a great Christmas present for the family!

They bought a house, started a family, and made more holiday memories in that house for 59 years!

Lyle Wiggins, Davenport

Christmas Menu 1966

Dak To, South Vietnam

(1) Whiskey

(2) Prunes

Christmas 1966, I was with "C" Company 1/327 101st Airborne Division, and we were on an operation in the mountains around Dak To. Several days after Christmas, we returned to our base camp. I was met by Tom "Doc" Kilbride. Doc was our platoon medic.

We were going to have a hut Christmas meal, after a strip show. Some girls were flown in from South Korea for the show. The stage was a flat-bed trailer inside the motor pool. The Sergeant had left the back gate and cab of the truck unlocked for us.

Doc and I got inside the cab of the truck, and found two bottles of whiskey. We opened the whiskey and watched the show through the rear window of the truck, and enjoyed the liquor. After several hours, the show was over and the troops went over to the mess tent. For the duration of the Christmas meal, Doc and I remained in the truck; talking and drinking.

Several hours past by, and we planned a night raid on the mess tent. We picked up two armloads of large numbered cans, and returned to our pup tent. All the cans were filled with prunes. The next day was the worst day of my life... I am writing this story in honor of my friend, Tom "Doc" Kilbride, who helped me maintain my sanity during difficult times.

Lt. Col. Marlin F. Schauland, Muscatine

On the morning of December 25, 1942, my crew of 11 and I drew a Weather Mission in the Aleutian Islands. No other flights were scheduled, but the weather ship had to go. The weather temperature was below freezing, and the cloud cover was extremely solid.

Our first objective was Kiska where we dropped half of our bomb load, five 100-pounders. We were flying about 2,500 feet; there were four ships in the harbor and we got our usual amount of anti-air craft fire. Next stop was Attu Islands, the tale gunner reported an airplane was taking off and he counted five-zero C-Plane Floats. By the time we counted the fifth plane, the first one was firing on us. We dropped our bombs and headed for the clouds. We picked up a number of bullet holes and got into the clouds. The zeros were unable to follow us in the clouds. When returning to Amchita, our home base, our airplane had bullet holes, but no one was injured.

We were promised a great Christmas dinner which consisted of ham and the trimmings. It was the first meat we had in six months. Unfortunately, the cook had not soaked the ham to remove the salt and as a result, it was inedible. Christmas Day in the Aleutinas was not like home cooking.

After dinner we went to our tent and were surprised to see that my co-pilot made a Christmas tree from coat hangers and green canvas strips. We sat on our bunks and told stories of how we had celebrated our Christmas at home. My memories of being a 24 Bomber pilot in the unfriendly skies of the Aleutian Islands for 15 months are still vivid. At the age of 89 and recalling all of the 28 years and contemplating 57 missions I served in the Air Corp, I still give thanks to all of our Veterans serving today. I extend my sincere thanks for their service and wish them God Speed to come home safely.

Pearl Gillespie, Rock Island

It was Christmastime, 1942. Dale and I and one-year-old David lived in Rock Island. Dale's grandmother was coming from Iowa to spend Christmas with us. We bought a beautiful cedar tree. We put it up in the living room and decorated it. It was a beautiful tree! But, it began to drop it's needles and by Christmas Eve morning, it was nothing but bare branches.

There was nothing we could do. Dale had to go to his job at the Arsenal and I had to meet the train bringing grandma and tell her our sad tale of the tree.

On his way home, Dale found a lot that was still open and bought another tree. On Christmas Eve, we took down the old tree, put up the new one and decorated it. It was beautiful and so big that we had to saw off some of it and it had cost Dale the magnificent sum of .25 cents.

Sally, Bettendorf

My mother was at a Red Cross Picnic which was held in honor of the Carrier Yorktown coming home from Okinawa at the end of the war. The picnic was held at a park overlooking the welcome home festivities and awaiting the arrival of the Yorktown (Carrier Fighting Lady). Unbeknownst to her, my father-to-be was on deck hoping to get in touch. He was a highly decorated Naval Commander. He received the Navy Cross after he sunk a Japanese sub in 1942. He never lost a man. Mom and Dad had met earlier in Miami at my Uncle Bob's wedding. My father and his brother shipped off to war together and retired on the same day as Naval P.T. boats Commanders. They have had many wonderful holiday memories and we all feel fortunate to spend Christmas with them.

Ray Waeyaert Lt. Col USAF Ret., Moline

Ripe old age of 20 and flying the Himalayan Mountains transporting material and gas to China for the Doolittle raiders going to Japan hoping to bring the war to an end... We Hump pilots shared a Basha hut and flew daily as the Hump never closed.* On Christmas Eve I did not return from China 'til late and my buddies had already started celebrating. It often was a hazardous flight between the Jap Zeros, worst weather anywhere and the mountains...each return

flight we felt was a good one. Little did we know that for one of our guys it would be his last Christmas...a few days later he crashed in the mountains.

*The only night the Hump closed was January 6, 1945... Twenty-five fully loaded planes left India for the trip to Kunming but part way over the weather became vicious and our planes were buffeted like feathers and flight time was longer. From the other planes in the area we were hearing May Day May Day. I made it to Kunming, last flight in before it shut down. We soon learned that only two of us made it and twenty-three planes went down that night. Much has been written about that storm and I guess I had an angel on my shoulder.

Walter F. Sterk, Maquoketa

In December 1945, I was with the 20th Army Air Corp, 46th Fighter Squadron, 21st Fighter Group on the Pacific Islands of Iwo Jima and Saipan. On December 18, 1945, I boarded a ship in Saipan and headed for home. I remember Christmas Eve very well. I was appointed Acting 1st Sergeant and was responsible to complete the records of 174 soldiers who were returning to the States. Another soldier and I had worked on the records all day. There were no computers in those days so we had to do everything by hand.

In the evening, the officer in charge stopped by our room and said, "You have worked hard enough." He handed us a bottle of Christmas "cheer." We stopped working and had a "toast" to Christmas with some of our friends. Otherwise, Christmas Day was pretty much like any other day. Everyone was happy to be heading home to be with family. I arrived in California on December 28, 1945. As soon as I stepped on United States soil, I bent down and kissed the ground.

Charles Woodson, Morrison

As a 19-year-old light machine gun instructor in 1944 I was sent to join an outfit establishing a replacement training center just south of Rome, Italy, in a compound that was formerly Mussolini's Blackshirt Elite troop base. My best friend at the time was Jewish and I was raised Presbyterian. So wouldn't you know that on Christmas Eve we decided to go to St. Peter's Basilica for Mass.

This was shortly after Rome was liberated and the crowds were huge. We managed to get in the Basilica and saw the Pope carried to the Altar but decided it was time for us to exit the closest door and return to base. We stopped for some roasted chestnuts from a street vendor and will always remember Christmas 1944.

A fond Christmas memory from World War II.

Evelyn Barton Schaefer, Davenport

"Combat Cook," a book written by William C. Barton (deceased Oct. 29, 1998) is about a Christmas he experienced while serving in the 42d Rainbow Division, 242d Infantry.

"It is Christmas Eve in Niedernsil, Austria, 1945. There is a foot of snow on the ground and still snowing making it just beautiful. We are all thinking of home and family. The other cooks and I made up plates of goodies for all the guys. There was a man and a woman living about a block away whom I had befriended. They invited me to come to their house. I took another GI with me. We were shocked when we walked in because they had a real Christmas tree with lighted candles!

They gave us some coffee and cake. We stayed about 30 minutes all the time in fear that the tree would go up in flames. We wished each a Merry Christmas and got out of there.

About midnight civilians were going to church across the street from us. We all decided to go. This did not meet with approval, but once they saw we all sat quietly in the back of the church, we were all brought together by a strange force. The service was short, all spoken and singing was in German, but we understood the message. From then on the soldiers and civilians were much closer."

Evelyn Kmiecik, Maquoketa

I am a World War II veteran but not an American one. From 1938 to 1947. From 1938 to 1941 I was in the regular Army attached to 54th light-training regiment Perhaw Down. I got married in 1940, left to have my baby and was put on reserve but attached to National Home Guard in my home village. I trained villagers on how to handle warfare even putting them all through a gas chamber that was built in my village.

Enough about me, I want to tell you a story when I read your article in the paper last Sunday it took me back to 1942. America built two Army camps at my village Nettlebed, Henley-on-Thames Oxon. They called them North and South. Christmas of 1942 the Americans of North Camp invited all wives, mothers and children to a Christmas dinner at the camp. I had to help organize getting everyone together. They had to have husbands serving away from home or be widows and their children. We had many widows from Dunkirk we lost a lot of our boys at that time.

I have never seen so many happy children's faces, what a feast that was. Turkey and all the trimmings. Food that our children had never seen. They were introduced to peanut butter and chewing gum and oranges. Every child went home with a gift bag.

I often wonder how all those Americans are and if they made it through the war. I got to know some of them as my mom and dad were managers working men's club and all Americans were made honorary members during the war. I even got to know Max Baer the heavyweight boxer. My sister married one of those Americans and had a long happy marriage. She came to Des Moines in 1946.

My husband and I came in 1964. We have both lost our husbands to cancer.

I want to give a big thank you to all those Americans who made so many children and their moms so happy that Christmas of 1942.

I am now 86 years old and it seems just like yesterday. I can see that Nissan hut with all those mums and children trying to forget that there was a war going on outside.

I lost my only brother in September of 1939. He was in the fleet air arm on HMS Courageous which was torpedoed with no time to get planes off and he went down with his ship.

My mum had three girls in the Army. We all survived and are still living. My sister is still in Johnston, Iowa. Merry Christmas!

G. Warren Collier, Durant

I served as a battery clerk and truck driver in the 687th Field Artillery in the Army from 1943-45.

December 1944 was a time I shall never forget. We were stationed in Diekirck, Luxembourg, from October 1944 until December when our unit had been fired and sent to the Bastogne, Germany, area.

The weather was terrible. Lots of snow and freezing rain. We wore most of the clothes we owned and many times were frozen stiff.

Late one afternoon at a crossroad south of Bastogne we were sent to guard an antitank gun. Across the road on a rise a quarter of a mile away we could see the Germans walking around and could hear trucks nearby all night. The next afternoon the antitank gun lobbed a shell into their building and left.

The German's retaliated and we were surrounded. We were told to go to Neuchatel, France, however we could get there – an adventure of fifty miles. We walked most of the way or got a ride. At night we followed the stars.

At Neuchatel we got reinforcements and were sent up to the battle lines.

During the Battle of the Bulge we lost most of Headquarters Battery A, B and C. Our unit was awarded five major battle stars.

James C. Schaefer, Davenport

The Christmas that is most etched in my mind occurred in 1944. In November 1944 the three Infantry Regiments of the 42d Rainbow Division were shipped over to France. I was a member of Company I, 232d Regiment.

At that time I believe that General Eisenhower was of the opinion that the war in Europe was all but over. Just needed a few more battles. He was very wrong. We were probably sent to be occupational troops.

The Battle of the Ardennes started in December and is very well known as the Battle of the Bulge. Our units were committed on Christmas Eve. We were short on ammunition. Our company suffered our first casualty at that time.

The temperature was below zero by 10 or 20 degrees, and it was very foggy with lots of snow on the ground.

We lost 3,000 men in 10 days as the German Army kept attacking. That is the setting for my Christmas dinner. I was in an approach march formation which stopped for a few minutes. I was hungry. I had one frozen C ration can of pork and beans. I could not dig out any of the beans. A civilian lady living adjacent to me came out and offered to heat the beans. I hesitated at first as I wondered whether she might poison it. I gave it to her thinking that I really did not know what the future would bring.

The beans were hot and delicious. I savored every bite of that small can.

The Army newspaper later reported that all front line troops enjoyed a large turkey, etc. Only 19 of my original company survived at the end of the war in May.

Lelon Schmidt, Davenport

Thinking about this menu brings back some of the good times. The war was over and relations began to get back to normal.

Sasebo was a Japan naval base 30 miles north of Nagasaki.

The USS Coasters Harbor was there to make our observations of the effects of the Atom Bomb. We had many scientists on board. I never had any contact with them however.

Christmas Dinner aboard USS Coasters Harbor (AG74)

25 December 1945

Sasebo, Japan

Cream of Tomato Soup with Toasted Croutons

Green and Ripe Olives

Sweet Mixed Pickles

Roast Tom Turkey with Giblet Gravy

Sage Dressing
Cream Whipped Potatoes
Cranberry Sauce
Creamed Peas and Carrots
Fruit Salad
Sweet Mayonnaise Dressing
Hot Rolls and Butter
Fruit Cake and Pumpkin Pie
Ice Cream
Mixed Nuts and Hard Candy
Cigars and Cigarettes

Mrs. Alfred J. Cook, Davenport

My husband was in the Navy aboard the USS Weeden 797 Destroyer serving in the Atlantic and Pacific theaters of war.

During the Christmas season of 1945 he came back to his homeport of Boston, Mass.

I took the train from Davenport to Boston and just before we got into Boston there was a big snowstorm. So we waited until they cleaned the tracks, which took about three hours. Then we finally got into the airport.

He had a one-week leave and we really enjoyed the Christmas sights in Boston, although the snow was really deep. It was a memorable Christmas and I will never forget it.

He passed away in August of 1998. I have so many memories.

We have two children, six grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren that I can tell all my memories to.

Robert Bell, East Moline

After completing basic training in June 1945, I was sent to Aberdeen Proving Ground for a 12-week Ordnance Parts Course.

From APG I was sent to Camp Beale, Calif. There, in California, I had a wonderful Thanksgiving Dinner.

From Beale I was sent back across the country to Camp Shank, N.Y. From Camp Shank in New York we boarded a victory ship for LeHavre, France. From LeHavre we traveled to Mamur, Belgium, where I had Christmas dinner.

From Mamur we were put aboard 40/8 boxcars for our trip into Germany. We spent New Year's Eve of 1945 in the 40/8 boxcars.

After arriving in Heidenheim, Germany, I was given a pass to attend the War Crime Trials in Murmberg. There I saw Goering, Hess and the rest of the defendants face to face.

So my holidays in 1945 were Thanksgiving in California, Christmas in Mamur, Belgium, and New Years on a 40/8 train into Germany.

In June of 1946 I boarded a ship for the good 'ole U.S.A. and my discharge from the Army.

Bob Urmie, Stockton

While I was in the army during World War II, I lived in the barracks with about 300 other soldiers. Every day they had mail call. If you weren't there, they would put your mail on your bunk. One day while I was on guard duty, the mail was delivered and a package was put on my bunk because I wasn't there. After guard duty, I stopped at the mess hall to eat supper. While I was eating, some of my friends walked by with great big smiles on their faces and called out to me, "Hey Bob, you got a package in the mail!" Others walked by with great big smiles on their faces telling me that I got a package in the mail. When I got to the barracks, I found a box on my bed and to my surprise it had been opened. I looked inside and found a candy bar. Later on when I came home on furlough, my mother asked me how I liked the cookies she sent? She had sent me my favorite cookies "Danish flat cookies". I hadn't known until then that she had sent me some cookies! Everyone must have thought I had opened the box and had it out to share because that is how it was in the army; if a package came it was usually shared with your buddies. Before I went back from my furlough my mother handed me a large box of cookies to share with my friends.

Earl S. Burklund, Moline

It has been 57 years and the memory is still as vivid as though I was there again, re-living the circumstances that caused the images to be forever inbedded in my mind. It is not just the memory of one holiday but a blending in of Thanksgiving into Christmas.

I was a member of L Co. 187 Airborne known as the Rakkasans (the only airborne regiment that has participated in every conflict since the inception of airborne warfare.)

I was in the 4th platoon, 60mm squad,initially as a gunner but moved to squad leader after our first combat action in which the squad leader, a friend of mine from Milan, was killed.

Shortly after this action we made a combat jump into North Korea. We had taken over the North Korean capital, General MacArthur proclaimed the war to end shortly and we would all be home for Christmas. We even were entertained by Bob Hope while in North Korea.

Moral was high, then the Chinese put a damper on everything by entering the conflict. Our regiment began a strategic withdraw (not a retreat as headlined in news media) through the mountains on the west side of the Korean peninsula. The Korean weather was becoming colder and snow was accumulating and everyone figured there would be no holidays in 1950, but to our surprise the regiment was going to be treated to a Thanksgiving dinner, ham, turkey etc. as we had finally reached what was thought to be friendly territory.

As we were getting ready to go to the battalion mess area L CO. was given orders to load up on trucks and move to the assistance of an army unit being attacked by North Koreans. We accomplished our mission, however it was dark by the time we returned to our regiment and very little was left of the Thanksgiving Dinner. No meat, just a little bit of potatoes and gravy and some pumpkin pie which I never cared for.

As I stated I can see it clearly in my mind. I was walking through the darkness towards my squad area and decided to take a bite of the pie and found that it was very tasty. But, as events seemed to be happening to me I tripped over a trooper's gear and my mess kit with everything in it went flying in the dark. That night I opened a can of C rations and tried to conjure up a feast in my mind to satisfy my hunger.

With Christmas just around the corner I was determined that if the situation arose again that we would get a fresh meal that it would end with better results. It did in a much better surrounding and with a South Korean family I had grown acquainted with after we had moved south of Seoul and our regiment was in a re-training phase awaiting further orders.

My family in Illinois was supportive of me in many ways, letters from my brother four sisters and parents, and a package arrived at Christmas time. My mother had placed a large can with a whole chicken in it in the package. Since the men in my squad members and I were well taken care of for Christmas dinner, I decided to visit with the South Korean family, a man, his wife and three children, and I took my assistant squad leader and the can of chicken to the Korean home. We spent the evening with the papasan while the mamasan cooked up a special dinner for all of us with rice and special spice and herbs.

I can still remember the special joy on all their faces and although we had a difficult time with the language we understood the meaning of giving and sharing even in a war torn country. I often wish I could go back to that Korean village and that little hut with the unusual but unique cooking system and again share with a generous family who there after saw that my men were supplied with hot water and a place to bathe during our time in that area.

Norma Thoeming, Davenport

I am not sure this is what you are looking for.

I grew up in England just 48 miles north of London during World War 2 and my parents befriended some GIs, so they would come to our house a lot and we would share with them what we had for Sunday dinner. And being kind and thoughtful the way most of them were they would bring things that we could not get as things were so hard to get at the time. It didn't matter if it was food or clothing or toys. I was 8 years old in 1944 so we my sister and brother didn't think about Christmas very much as we knew there wouldn't be much of a Christmas, since the war started it had been almost just another day of air raids and getting up in the night to go to the shelters or at least stand under the stairs until the all clear was sounded. And so hanging up stockings was a hit and miss thing as there wasn't really anything to put in it. But the Christmas of 1944 was a wonderful CHRISTMAS the 2 American flyers that my parents had opened our home, to spend time when they had free time made it one magical Christmas. They said we had to hang up stockings so we did, they spent the day with us or at least part of the day. And that morning when we got up we had fresh fruit some nuts and some other little things in our stockings. Then we had toys I can not remember what my brother and sister got but I got a bright red scooter and a big chalk board on legs, it was the most wonderful Christmas I can remember, I have no idea how the two GIs got the toys and my parents got food tins of fruit some peanut butter (I had never had peanut butter before) tea sugar and candy bars and all kinds of good things to eat we hadn't seen in years. I wish I knew the names of then all I know is Dick and Scott they were stationed near Bedford. They were my Santa Clause and Christmas Angels.

Amy Chung, Bettendorf

My name is Amy Chung and I have lived in Bettendorf for three years. I am a Wisconsin native and grew up just outside of Madison. This is my Grandma's story. She tells it to us every year around this time and it always brings tears to my eyes. It is the most magical story and I hope you are able to share it with your readers. This is the meaning of Christmas: It was a snowy Christmas Eve in Green Bay, Wisconsin in 1945. Marijean Trodahl, was on her way home from her job at Prange's Department Store. She had taken a shift from a gal whose husband was on leave from the Navy-he was home for Christmas, Marijean's husband, Wilmer, was not. Marijean and Wilmer married in May, 1943. Wilmer had been serving in the Tenth Mountain Infantry Division and during combat, had been stationed in the mountains of Italy. Even though the War had ended, she had not seen him for twenty two months as he was still on active duty in Texas.

Marijean walked through the falling snow to the bus stop that was near the train station. The stop was bustling with servicemen and the "regulars" that Marijean saw on her trips home. She found a seat and sat down for the ride home. Little did she know that in a last minute decision, President Eisenhower ordered all combat troops on active duty home for the Holidays. (Wilmer had been one of the servicemen coming off of the train and getting onto Marijean's bus! She never thought a thing of it-seeing servicemen at the station- because she was not expecting Wilmer to be home!) As more people boarded the bus, Marijean looked up and saw Wilmer before her. She screamed with delight and jumped for joy! And everyone on board cheered and clapped. Folks in Green Bay would remember that night whenever Marijean took the bus. It was a moment of inexplicable joy, dreamlike surprise and as Marijean told me, "It was the most beautiful night."

Warren S. Smith, DeWitt

During the Korean War, I was a member of the 6th Helicopter Unit. Although helicopters had been sent overseas before, they were usually attached to some army or marine company. The 6th was the first to be sent to a war zone as a separate unit unto itself. Unlike the strategic role of helicopters today, our main duties were hauling supplies and transporting wounded. We were being tested as to just how useful helicopters could be.

We left San Francisco on December 16, 1952, aboard the General E. T. Collins troop transport ship for a 14 day trip to Japan and then on to Korea. There were many memorable moments for me, as there are for anyone in a war torn foreign country. But one that stands out in my mind happened on the way to Korea.

Somewhere in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, everyone on the ship went to bed on Christmas Eve.....but we woke up the "day after Christmas." During the night we had crossed the International Date Line, which obliterated Christmas Day!

Forty years after our tour in Korea, members of the 6th began locating and getting in touch with one another. A reunion was held in 1993 and we have continued with a reunion every year since then; and invariably when we are together, one subject is always, "the Christmas that never was!!"