

## Dad's account of his WW2 experience

Arlington Heights Daily Herald Jan. 5, 1945. "**Heck of a Life**" by a guy that served at Anzio, Italy with the Army Combat Engineers. "Enough" says Steve Urick sending an account of his army tour in Africa and Italy is Steve Urick of Arlington Heights. "It was no big surprise to me to know I had been picked for the traveling bunk when you're low on the totem pole. It is great to know the folks back home are thinking of you. For the past two years I have been reading with great interest of the whereabouts and experiences of my friends through the medium of the Herald. Finally I decided I should write, as my friends may be interested in knowing what I've been doing. My life in the Army started in April 1st, 1942.(I was drafted two days after the attack on Pearl Harbor). My basic training was in the ordinary manner. I spent that first year roaming the cities counting my 'hup two's', picking up cigarette butts and match sticks, learning to make a bed without a wrinkle, pitching pup tents like rows of corn. Now I wonder what all that training was for, as we police the grounds here by pushing the debris from the streets with a bulldozer. We don't have a bed to make, and when we get through pitching tents, It looks more like a gypsy camp, with no two fellows doing it alike."

**Landing in Africa/** "I landed in Africa with 'U Base Ordinance' doing carpentry work with the utility section. It was mostly heavy, rough construction. We put acres under roof to be used for shops. We built elaborate trailers for the generals, to be used as living quarters---one was for Patton and another for Bradley. The last six months of our work there we had two crews of Italian prisoners. They were willing workers and helped a lot in the construction. Our mechanics serviced many of the tanks and vehicles that took part in the Tunisian campaign. Our job was just like that at home with regular hours, good food in our tent, electric lights, etc. On our days off we would go to town and meet a lot of doughboys from the front. They would kid us about our clean appearance saying 'some guys get all the breaks--they ought to start another draft.' ...feather bed to soggy dugout. That's just what happened. I got caught in the second draft, except they called it 'Utilization of Limited Servicemen'. The 1-A men were to be replaced with re- classified, recuperated men from the front. It was our turn to do our share of combat. Unlike most of my friends who stayed in Africa getting weeks of infantry training, in a little over a week I found myself transferred from a feather bed soldier to a wet soggy dugout on the 'hot spot of the hour', the "H x I O ATV" beachhead, which was a truck outfit supplying the Anzio beachhead by ferry system. **Anzio, Italy/** We would load with tons of supplies, mostly ammo, drive onto the LST at Naples, and arrive at Anzio overnight. I'll never forget that first trip. We were all green at the job. As we pulled into shore I could see those shells dropping where we went to dock. We had our motor running and warmed up, foot on the clutch, ready to make the dash when the doors opened and runway let down. I could feel my knees shaking. Anzio-- what a morose, dismal looking place. The miserable cold, rain and mud added to the gloomy atmosphere. At that time our troops weren't sure they could hold the beachhead. They could neither advance nor retreat. There didn't seem to be anyone in town except for an occasional MP hiding in shelter of shells and ruin. Everything seemed to be so mixed up and no one knew where anything was. I wasn't up on the news, and hadn't the slightest idea how large the beachhead was. ...so when I was misdirected that the dump I was looking for was on a 'certain road', I kept on going until a shouting MP, who crawled out of a hole, bawled me out for being too near

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the front! That's the way it was all of the time. At first I was too dumb to be afraid. I didn't know the difference between our shells and Jerry's, but I soon learned. What a rapid change that life was compared to what I had been used to. Everyone lived below ground, including our trucks. We had basement excavations alongside the trucks where we would sleep. Even the ammo was bunked up. It was hard to relax-- I don't believe I had one night's sleep there. In order to sleep a person has to relax, and that was hard to do with the Anzio express (280 mm railroad gun) coming over all night long, plus a battery of our guns right next door. Then the Jerry sandman would come over dropping his sand in the form of bombs. He wasn't particular where he threw them, relying on playing the percentages to get a few of us. One morning I crawled out of my hole to find three craters on all sides of me within 200 yards. Another time I got the crazy notion I didn't like my dugout, so I went into the town itself, and found a building where the walls were three feet thick. I thought I'd be safe-- but what a night! That was one of the two nights the Krauts threw over 4/10 shells, one hitting the building next to me. After that experience my dugout was good enough for me. The 'Get Supplies from Jewel Tea Experience' was like that. That was life on the beachhead. We carried all of our equipment with us, doing our own cooking. We had the same rations packed by Jewel Tea of Barrington, Illinois. I kept going back and forth hauling supplies for four months. Every time we'd pull out of the harbor I would get a feeling of relief, only to come back again and find less of the town remaining. The only place we gained ground was in the cemeteries. When the 'push' started we kept supplying the swift moving front That's when I saw the most gruesome sights I ever hope to see. There were dead Krauts all over the roads. We had to weave in and out of all the bodies. It was more important to keep the Krauts on the run than take time to bury the dead. We saw the cheering crowds in Rome the second day. That was the time we got word our truck group served its purpose.

Our truck supply group had recommendations, and was soon to break up. We were all sweating out when we'd be moved. Anything would have suited me except the infantry and combat engineers. ...and you might know I'd be sent to the combat engineers. I appeared to be 'working my way up front'--- a rugged life. Ever since I've been with the combat engineers, we were blazing the trail through mines, blowing bridges, filling craters, blasting road blocks, having the elements against us as well as the Krauts. ...but it's not as bad as we expected, or else we've been lucky. It's interesting for we move around a lot. We live in buildings if there are any-- otherwise pup tents. I'm living in a building tonight. It used to have windows until a tank fired its gun and the concussion blew out the glass. A large percentage of our work is 'Daily Bridge', a British design-- prefabricated steel, and put together with pins and bolts. It's a swell idea even though it is back-breaking. If the job is classified 'hot 1' it's done under cover of darkness. That's when I was amazed to see what could be done in the dark. Imagine reading a tape measure or level to the light-of a cigarette. I never knew a country could have so many bridges, and most of them have been destroyed. There isn't a bridge we start without finishing before stopping, so you can imagine the time it takes. When the front moves up the bridge is replaced with a permanent wooden one at the convenience of the 'service engineers'. We must test for mines. Everywhere we go mines are always suspected, and the land has to be swept with a mine detector, which

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works swell with steel mines--but the Germans now have wooden, plastic, and cement box mines. A person has to be extra careful in this work for you can make but one mistake. A small creek is repaired with a culvert, while a bulldozer does the rest. We also have to blast and clear Jerry concrete posts that were planted in the road. The Krauts will do anything to stop us, like blowing down rows of buildings where the streets are narrow, and blowing down trees in criss-cross fashion. It does the heart good when I read of our forces doing the same thing to Jerry roads. Doing this kind of work makes it easy to understand why a winter front moves so slow. When I say I've been lucky, I mean I've kept out of the infantry. Those are the boys who have it tough, if anyone thinks he has it rough, ask him to get into the infantry. They should get first priorities when time comes to get out of service. I've traveled a good many miles and I'd say any corner of the U. S. is better than over here. If the U. S. didn't progress at all in the next 500 years, Italy will still be far behind." Submitted by Steve Urick. His address is Pvt. First Class Steve Urick, 36311652, APO 4M, c-n 1 J M, New York, N. Y,