

War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: Not given

Life has a way of throwing you a lot of curves. I'm thinking back to the time period when I was inducted into the army in January, 1943. From the beginning of my entrance into the army, everything that happened was random. Each time a decision was made by bureaucracy, I thought it would be the worst thing that could happen. As it turned out, I am here to tell the story. So that changes the whole equation.

Can you believe this? I lived in the Glenville Area all my early years. I was married to my wife Bess in 1938. We moved to the Kinsman Area on 146th Street during that time. Ironically, my draft district was picked up at once and I was drafted early that year. None of my eight personal friends were drafted because they lived in the Glenville Area. They were all the same age, around 28 years old; some married just as I was; some with children; and all of them with no other factor to eliminate them.

The question is why? That is the first of the many odd choices that occurred as I moved into actual combat 14 days after D-Day fighting in St. Lo, France.

Here is how it happened. I trained for seventeen weeks in Spartanburg, South Carolina as an Anti-Tank Team Soldier. I also learned how to fire a bazooka, which is used to destroy enemy tanks. That was my job description: Maurice Feren, Anti-Tank Soldier, 5th Division, 2nd Infantry, 3rd Army.

I was transported to South Hampton, England by ship, spending the next three days in an English encampment for soldiers. During our exercises to maintain fitness, we were compelled to perform the usual army routines that are considered basic. In the process, I was not issued any weapons, but I have somehow become a machine gunner (I had never loaded or operated that weapon).

While we were called to perform our marching discipline for the General, he addresses each of us personally face-to-face. When he spoke to me, he said, "How are you soldier?" I said, "Not so good. I am in a machine gun outfit never having had any training in that process." He replied, "You'll be okay, Soldier." He then turned and addressed the next soldier and went on his way. That left me in a somewhat nervous state, knowing my poor mechanical ability and the difficulty handling a machine gun.

Life went on as the army planned and we moved on ready for combat. My status was still unchanged. I had no machine gun but I was assigned a rifle. I thought that was a good sign, but I wasn't sure what it meant.

Not long after we arrived at our final destination, ready for combat, artillery fire was close enough for us to hear the canons. Those big, heavy shells booming their tremendous sounds when they landed close enough to feel the earth shake. We had already dug in. Our foxholes had been ready for hours. The Chaplain came by asking for Jewish Soldiers who wished to pray. Luckily for us, he was the only Jewish

Chaplain for 5,000 soldiers in our 5th Division. So, we did get the personal benefit of that prayer service. On the battlefield, things did not change. I didn't know if I was a machine gunner or an infantry man.

The Chaplain left. We were a small group of 10-12 soldiers who prayed with him. Now, the random curves come into play again. A loudspeaker spews forth a grim message to our entire outfit: "Are there any soldiers who are familiar or participated in any medical training?" It is a theorem in the army that no one ever volunteers for anything. You just wait for the ax to fall hoping it won't strike you.

Well, Maury doesn't fare any better in this situation. My name is called out first: "Feren, report to Tent C in the far corner."

"Yes Sir," I respond.

"You will be issued a medical kit with all the supplies you need as a medic. You are now attached to medical unit Headquarters Company. Report at once." There are no questions, no advice, and no sense of what's going to happen.

In the next hour, I was given a medical kit and an army medical box. I turned in my rifle, an M1. Now I am a full-fledged combat medic with no medical experience of any kind. I jumped on the company truck, fully unaware of what my new position entailed. In the short space of an hour, my whole life had changed forever.

What were the good parts? First of all, I never had to shoot to kill. Medics did not carry weapons. The total combat unit is composed of only 32 men. It turned over three times with 103 casualties over 11 months of actual combat. My status as "Doc" gave me special recognition because of my importance in helping to save lives on the battlefield. Everyone knows that whoever came in contact with a Medic had a better chance of survival.

There were many other choices that were made in the same random manner; some of them good, others not so good, but those stories are for another day.