

John E. Freese Memories

John was born in Illinois in November of 1922. His father had a farm where he and his sister spent many days of work and play as youngsters. Father Freese grew corn, milked a small herd of cows with a milking machine, had pigs for pork meat and chickens for eggs.

When the time came to join the Army, Mr. Freese, who was single, enlisted in Peoria, Illinois on December 22, 1942. He had training in New Jersey then on to California for infantry training.

While in California, Mr. Freese remembers that Mr. Earl Simborski's (1781st) father died. Earl was allowed a furlough to attend the funeral. He stayed a little longer than his furlough allowed and was considered AWOL. Considering the circumstances of his offence, Mr. Simborski's punishment was very lenient.

Mr. Freese tells us that the Liberty Ship that transported the guys of the 1781st to Europe was a slow moving one. The 416th guys had traveled the seas on another ship days before. They met up with them at Wethersfield airbase in England.

While in England, Lt. Winship committed suicide. Mr. Freese went to his funeral with other boys of the 1781st. It was a sad day for all of the 1781st.

His rank was Corporal under Sergeant Pebble working in the parts department of the 1781st ordnance group. His section provided parts for the trucks and Jeeps. They ordered the parts from a supply warehouse about 40 miles away. The warehouse usually had the parts they needed. Later, at the end of the war, the parts were harder to get due to the gasoline shortage and the increasing distance of the factories in the states to the front lines. If a part could not be picked up, usually the machinist, James Roan, could be relied upon to make a replacement part. Sometimes Wayne Roe drove a large truck and picked up the parts and transported them back to the airbase.

Mr. Freese remembers sleeping on a straw tick mattress, eating lots of powdered eggs and drinking lots of coffee with powdered milk. He remembers taking leaves in Braintree and Paris a lot during in the war. The guys went in large trucks as a group most of the time. The nearest town from Wetherfields, with any night life, was Braintree, about ten miles away. According to Wayne E. Downing, "The base would run a couple of 2 and 1/2 ton trucks into Braintree each night around 6 PM. Anyone who was off duty could go. The trucks returned at 10:30 PM. Braintree had quite a few pubs. They all had plenty of English beer (both mild and bitter) and Port and Sherry Wine. We were rationed to one bottle of Scotch an evening so it went the first hour. Pubs were open from 6 to 10 PM. The routine was to have a beer at each pub until we found one that had some action, i.e. friendly natives and or a lively English dart game, then we would stay a while. Whenever we could wrangle a two day pass, we would go to Braintree and catch a train to London for some big city activities." (Submitted by Wayne Sayles)

After the war, Mr. Freese returned to his home town and resumed his life as farmer, retiring at age 82. Soon he married a lady named Mary who is now a retired Registered Nurse. The happy couple was blessed with 4 children, all of whom are college graduates, and 9 grandchildren. Mr. Freese kept himself busy with agriculture serving on Farm Bureau and 4-H boards among others.

Mr. and Mrs. Freese are frequent attendees of the 416th Bomb Group Reunions where he enjoys rekindling old friendships and reliving WWII memories. The two even revisited a few European airbases where Mr. Freese served many years ago. Before Mr. Otha McCormick passed away, he and Mrs. Freese enjoyed visiting with the McCormicks on their way to Florida each fall. They have a happy peaceful life in Seymour, Illinois. Thanks to Mr. Freese service years and many, many more like him, we all can enjoy a happy, carefree life as well. Thank you, Mr. Freese, for what you gave to all of us.