

A Soldier Reflects on a Long Ago War.
By Armand Perreault

I saw my father cry only twice. The first time was at my brother Bob's wedding. The second was when the doctors at the former Fort Devens Hospital told my parents, at my discharge from the service, that at the most, I had three years to live. The doctors had diagnosed me with mitral insufficiency due to rheumatic fever.

This is how it began...

In 1944, I was a sergeant in Company "C" of the 54th Battalion of the 10th Armored Division. My parents spoke both French and English at home and I grew up fluent in both languages. For this reason, I was sent to a unit of the FFIC (Forces Francaise de L'Interiour) that was stationed in a town on the Moselle River, a short distance from the French city of Metz. My assignment was strictly intelligence duty. While there, we lived in damp, humid cellars.

Shortly after returning to my unit, I developed a sore throat and was sent to a field hospital where I was diagnosed with a strep throat. After three days in the hospital, my company commander came and asked for my discharge from hospital, which the doctor in charge refused to give. My C.O. claimed he needed me. Finally, the decision to leave was left to me. I rejoined my unit. I felt it was my duty.

After Thanksgiving, 1944, our unit was the first to enter Germany at the Siegfried Line. We were there for two days – lived in wet smelly underground bunkers and had to walk in trenches that had been flooded by the Germans. The water almost reached my knees.

It was after this that I again began to feel ill – tired, no stamina, my joints started to ache. I had been promoted to staff sergeant – my duties were not easy to perform. We ended up at the Bulge, and on Christmas day, 1944 I woke up feeling very ill. I was feverish and to stand was a misery.

I was carried on a stretcher to an aid station and from there to a U.S. hospital in Luxembourg where I was diagnosed with rheumatic fever. From Luxembourg, I was sent to a hospital in Bar-Le-Duc, France then transferred to Cirencester, England and then to the U.S. on the Queen Mary where I was

admitted to Halloram General Hospital in New York and eventually wound up at Fort Devens, Massachusetts on March 17, 1945. My home, in Leominster, Massachusetts was just a few miles from Devens.

With regards to my treatment, I do not recall what medications I received; but the order of the day was complete bed rest with limited bathroom privileges. I had to be wheeled to the washroom. There were no dietary limitations. I graduated to being an ambulatory patient about three weeks before discharge.

I had completed one year of college studies when I was drafted. So, I returned to my studies, and shortly after mid-year exams in my junior year had a recurrent attack of rheumatic fever and was hospitalized from the end of February 1946 to the end of May. Again, complete bed rest, limited bathroom privileges and no dietary restrictions. This time, I received several weeks of penicillin (which had recently become available).

I am sure that the doctors who gave me three years to live in 1945 have all gone to their eternal rest. I am 92 years old and still a very independent person. Deo gratias.

Author Bio: Armand Perreault was born on May 4, 1918 in Leominster, Massachusetts. He is a 1948 cum laude graduate of Holy Cross College in Worcester MA and did graduate studies at Boston College. In 1994, he was made a Citizen of Honor by the City of Quettehou, Normandy for his wartime service.