

War Era Story Project 2012

Submitted by: Martin L. Kahl

Current home town: Miamisburg, Ohio

Age: 94

Martin Kahl said, "I was sent to Europe to fight the German Army. The irony of the story is that my father, in his youth, served time in the German Army." – Note by Kathy Lehman, who recorded this story for Mr. Kahl.

SSgt Martin L. Kahl , as told in his own words

I was at the age of 15 and signed up for the C.C.C. I don't think my parents knew anything about me signing up, but my mother might have had an idea. I was in for a little while, (had to be in April 1934). They took me to Ft. Knox, Ky., put me on a train, and took me to California. The train stopped at an orange processing building. They came through the train and I went in for two oranges. Two officers came up to me and wanted to know how old I was. I said, when the train went through Portland, Oregon, "it was my 16th birthday."

That officer looked at me – shook his head and said, "some guts!"

Did he mean that thought towards me because of my age, or toward my parents for letting me go at that age? I don't think my parents even knew that I signed up. I was shipped to a camp outside of Priest River Idaho, while there I was on two forest fires. One of the fires was for 33 days!

Then, my enlistment time was over. I think there was two parts to this program: to get the young fellows off the street, pay them \$5 a month, give them food and shelter and clothing and then send \$250.00 home to parents. Why did I want to go in? I don't know why – just wanted to.

Then I was discharged. At the age of 18, I joined the 62nd Field Guard Artillery of the National Guard of Dayton, Ohio, for a three-year hitch. I was out a little over a year when President Roosevelt started the draft. I received a card telling me to report to a building at W. Monument St. I thought my name must have been at the top of the heap.

They put me on a bus and took me to camp Campbell, Florence, Ky., along with other fellows for examination to be inducted into the Army. Regular Army people took us in a building and said, "STRIP --- ALL OF IT"! We went down a line of doctors and they examined us from head to toes. The last stop was the scales. The low weight limit for the Army was 115 lbs. I weighed 112. The next thing I felt was a boot on my bare butt. Somebody said "we'll put the other 3 lbs. on you." Next thing I knew I was in the Army!

From Camp Campbell I was shipped to Camp Roberts, an infantry training camp at Mineral Well, Texas. After training, I was shipped to California to join Co. K, 184th reg. of the 10th infantry div. of San Luis Obispo, California. This Co. K was a National Guard outfit that was mobilized and we were brought there to bring that Co. up to strength.

This company is where my cook and Mess Sgt. career started. When we first arrived at the company, the 1st Sgt. told us to check the bulletin board to see if we were on any details for the next day such as K.P., latrine or garbage. One night, I checked it three times – at 9 o'clock, I went to bed. The next morning, I went out in field with the company for training. Coming back, I checked the bulletin board and saw I was to be on K.P. that day. I went into the orderly room and told the 1st Sgt. that I didn't do that on purpose. He said, "OK, we'll make up for it." Checking the board later, I saw I was on K.P. the next day. That evening, checking the bulletin board, I was on K.P. again for the next day. That evening, after getting off K.P. the second day, after checking the bulletin board that evening, I was on K.P. for the 3rd day.

I was ticked off. I went into the orderly room and asked for 1st Sgt. Was he getting even with me? He said, "no, the 1st Sgt. asked for you." I asked to give me that job steady – that's something to do. I guess I was quoted as being a cook's helper. That's where it saved me an overnight march. I was sent out with the kitchen crew to have breakfast ready when the troops got there.

Then some time later, they needed a truck driver. Someone said that I had a driver's license, and the next thing I knew, I'm driving a truck again. Then I was transferred out into military police, Co. 535, Poston, Arizona. I was there for a while, then transferred again to 1088th Ordnance, Greenville AF Corps Greenville, South Carolina, as a truck driver.

I was on K.P. one day when two cooks were studying the menu. I believe it was chicken. Standing behind the two cooks, I said, "Why don't you do it this way?"

The both asked, "Hey, have you ever cooked before?"

I said, "a little."

Two days later, I was asked by the Mess Sgt. if I would help out in the kitchen for a little while. I said yes. Then I went back driving a truck – but, I didn't see any trucks, through! Once again, I was asked if I would be willing to help out in the kitchen. I said, "no!" I didn't like it. Somebody came up to me and said you are wanted in the orderly room office. There sat the Captain looking down at a paper as I walked in, he just looked up and then looked down at his paper.

"Kahl", get yourself ready and report to the kitchen! The Mess Sgt. was standing there with two other cooks. He introduced us and really took off. (I soon found out why he took off.) While standing there facing the other two cooks, I asked which one of you is the 1st cook? They both said we understand you are. I said ok, I'll take the meat, you two check the rest of the menu and do it.

The meat was two gigantic hams in red rime salt. I really did not know what to do – all new to me – but something told me I gotta get the salt boiled out of them. I did boil them twice. I feel I had guidance from above. The butcher cut the bone out of them. For some reason, I found myself in the basement. What I was looking for, I don't know. I spied a jar of whole cloves, I thought "my mother used to put them in a ham." Then I took this jar of cloves up stairs and put the cloves throughout the ham. Put them in the oven. Once again I found myself in the basement. I don't know how I got there or what I was

looking for, when I saw a gallon can of sliced pineapple. I took them upstairs, and a half hour before chow time, I put these slices all over the ham.

After the meal, 2nd Lt. McGowan (all new, and we all chowed together) came up and asked the mess sgt. who fixed the meat? The mess sgt. pointed at me. The Lt. said to me, "Real good"! I just thanked him - all this time I was just a Pfc, a one striper. I was then promoted to 2nd cook which would be a corporal.

I was sent overseas as a 2nd cook. I was then sent out on a cadre as a potential mess sgt. I was lying around, waiting to be assigned to a company, when the acting 1st sgt. walked in and said "fellow, hop to. Capt. McGowan is now our C.O." I knew I was going to be a mess sgt. I soon found out I was a mess sgt., 7 days a week, I had no time off. That was work! Course, that's what you get paid for.