

War memories of Lee Williams

25 Nov. 42. I am 21 years old. Induction into the infantry in Fort Lewis (near Tacoma) Washington.
5 Dec 42 to 13 June 43. Camp Gruber, Oklahoma. Basic training in Service Co., 349th Inf. Regiment, 88th Inf. Div. After basic, transferred to Enlisted Men's Section, Adjutant General's Office, Division Headquarters.

13 June to 31 Aug. 43. Battle style training in swamps of Louisiana. Hot and humid.

1 Sept to 6 Nov. 43. Division moved to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio. Texas for further training.

9 Nov to 23 Nov. Division moved to Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia, a staging area for shipment overseas. Cold, constant work details.

23 Nov. to 10 Dec. 43. Via the Atlantic Ocean on the Liberty Ship, USS James Turner. Unbelievably overcrowded. Food vile and inedible. Always hungry. Treated like rats unprotected by a Humane Society.

10 Dec to 17 Dec 43. In Camp Don B. Passage, Casablanca, North Africa. A 12 hour pass into Casablanca with Jack Delaney and Ted Wist. Wonderful time. Delicious food and wine. Tried speaking French. Pleasant guard duties with much chatter about the human race.

17 Dec to 20 Dec. Transported by train to Oran, Algeria in 40 by 8 boxcars. Cold, crowded, hungry, miserable.

20 Dec to 26 Dec 43. Staging area outside of Oran. Muddy, cold, much work details building roads.

26 Dec.43 to 29 Jan 44. Near Magenta in the Atlas Mountains of frozen Algeria. Almost starved to death. Had a 12 hour pass to visit Sidi-Bel-Abbes with Gene Hillman and Bob Riddel. A mirthless, tiresome trip.

30 Jan to 3 Feb. 44. Embarked from Oran on the English HMS Highland Chieftan. Slightly seasick, but held everything down. Much more comfortable than an American Liberty Ship. Passed Sicily and Capri before docking in the harbor of Naples.

3 Feb to 4 Feb. 44. Naples, Italy. Cold, hungry, sleepy and angry.

4 Feb. to 3 March, 44. Piedmonte d'Alife, Italy. Can hear distant shelling of Cassino. Cold, muddy. Unlike the sunny Italy I had imagined.

3 Mar to 27 May 44. Casanova di Carinola, Italy. Arrived in a torrential downpour. The villagers of Casanova are very friendly to American soldiers. I have supper with the Erbosetti family nearly every night, and spaghetti dinner every Sunday. Papa Erbosetti is the village baker. He lived and worked a few years in Brooklyn, New York, and saved enough money to return to Casanova and establish his bakery business. Mama Erbosetti works with him. They have five children, the oldest is a son named Giovanni. Giovanni wants to learn English, and I am helping him with English and he helps me with Italian. When he is grown I doubt if he remains in Casanova. He wants to live in Milano or New York.

Italy is beautiful in the spring. Delightful hikes in the mountains overlooking the Garigliano River and the blue Tyhrranian Sea. Casanova was bombed by the Germans on the night of May 26, our last night there. George Sumakis of our Division Post Office was killed instantly. Scared and sad.

27 May to 31 May 44. Itri, Italy. After taking hundreds if not thousands of casualties, the 88th Inf. Div., dubbed the Blue Devils by the Nazi, finally fought its way across the Garigliano River, and we are on the Appian Way, the road to Rome. Div. Headquarters made camp just outside of the village of Itri, which has been completely destroyed by bombs and artillery. Flynn, Graham, Kelley and I pitched our tent under an olive tree just off the road, which is being bombed a couple of miles beyond us. Frightened. Rebert, Flynn and I dug slit trenches about 5 feet deep, but didn't feel very safe.

31 May to 4 June 44. Fossanova, Italy. Thomas Aquinas died here, sometime ago, of course. Gene Hillman and I went swimming in the nude in a canal with very swift flowing water through downtown. We had a terrible time swimming back upstream to our clothes. Many hungry people here. How can they be fed? They eat our garbage. Sickening. We live in a three room suite of an old hotel.

4 June to 13 June 44. Rome, Italy. Our truck convoy entered Rome at dawn. A red sun rising could be seen between the arches of an ancient Roman aqueduct. Rome had been declared an open city, *citta aperta*, and showed no sign of damage. Some German snipers were still in the city, but the Romans came out en masse to greet us, throwing roses and other flowers in front of our passing trucks. We had a wonderful time here. In town every night after work. Division Headquarters moved into the Villa Clementi, just outside the city, home of Clara Petarci. Clara was not at home, but was traveling with Benito Mousalini. Roads and bridges bombed and strafed all over neighborhood, but Villa Clementi untouched.

about a week, Albano, Italy. Another town "liberated" and completely destroyed. One pass back to Rome (20 miles). Visited Anzio (40 miles). horrible destruction. Bombed. Much ack, ack. First beer for the troops since leaving the U. S. A. Issued half bottle per enlisted man. I gave my half to Rebert, as I have never drunk the stuff.

about a week, Tarquinia, Italy. Very, very hot. Living in tent and working in tent. Many swims in nearby Tyhrennian Sea. Much ack ack over Civitavecchio, about 40 miles to the south. Mr. Modaffari, the warrant officer in charge of the Enlisted Men's Section, threatened to court martial me for taking too long to have a bowel movement. Gene Hillman intervened on my behalf with the argument that enlisted men should be the sole judges for how long it takes for an enlisted man to have a bowel movement. Mr. Modaffari was furious and threatened to transfer Gene to a line company. He reported the incident to Colonel Burkes, who let the matter drop. I probably did take longer than usual, but I was immobilized by the heat in the latrine tent.

about a week, Pomerance (Tuscany) Under German artillery observation for one day for first time. No shells fell. Battle moved quickly northward. Beautiful mountain scenery. Rolling hills of grain. Mr. Modaffari has maintained a tension in the office all week. No one is allowed to speak. As a group we are usually quite jovial. There is a small boy named Bino who comes often to our area after work. He is very clean and neatly dressed and very curious about Americans. He never asks for candy or cigarettes as most children do. As we were leaving Pomerance I gave him the copy of Dante's *Inferno* that I had borrowed from Clara Petarci's library.

I assume you know that a division in battle is arranged with a front line of of infantry men armed with rifles and bayonets. These are the men that do all of the hard fighting and are the ones most likely killed or wounded. There is another echelon of men behind them that include the medical teams, the engineers, the reconnaissance troops, etc. Behind these are the echelon of artillery troops. Somewhere behind these are the men and trucks that get the supplies to the fighting troops. There is a echelon for the generals and their advisers who direct the battle. Finally there is the rear echelon that provides the personnel needs of the division. As the rear echelon does no actually fighting, it is usually kept far enough behind the fighting troops to be out of immediate danger. That is where I was and is probably the reason I am alive today. So many of our fighting men were killed during our long Italian campaign.

17 July to 14 Sept 44. Spedletto, Italy (20 miles north of Pomerance, in view of Volterra) I am not sure that this place, Spedletto, is spelled correctly. There really is no town here, just two or three houses and a big barn where the enlisted men have been ordered to sleep. Hot, dusty, dirty buildings. No wine and no villagers to befriend us. Much artillery the first night, but all our own. Rebert and I swiped a two man tent and pitched it among some scrub oaks. Graham and Flynn also took a tent and pitched it next to ours. So we now have a little community of four, away from the hot, stuffy barn where all the enlisted men are supposed to sleep. The chaplain plays selections from

the musical, Oklahoma, over the public address system every morning at breakfast time. Mr. Modaffari is allergic to dust and his eyes are very red. He has been transferred to a hospital in Rome.

14 Sept to 22 Sept 44. Woods overlooking Florence. First night our artillery sounded very loud, but now all is peaceful. We are in a pine forest, and can see Florence in the distance. Mr. Modaffari was transferred to a PBS outfit. Ted Wist is now section chief. Swell guy. We don't really need an officer in our department. Got a large beer ration, and for the first time drank all of my ration. Reading Lamb's Essays.

22 Sept 17 Oct 44. Petrona (10 miles north of Florence) Winter returned. Much rain and mud. Sleeping in tents. Strafing for the first time and bombed by the German air force. Very frightened. No casualties. Colonel Burkes was magnificent during the strafing and bombing. He stood under an olive tree and called out the direction of the German planes as they dived at us, as if he were totally immuned to destruction, while the rest of us remained as flat in our slit trenches as we could get. Generally miserable here. Hope to move into buildings for our next move. Mr. Modaffari wrote the colonel for permission to return to the Enlisted Men's Section. That cast gloom upon gloom.

17 Oct to 11 Nov 44. Belvedere, Italy, small town on the crest of a mountain ridge about 20 miles south of Bologna. Work in stone house and sleep in cellar. Night of 18th road shelled about half mile away. Could hear shells whistling in for first time. Dreadful sound. Night of 19th shells fell within 100 yards of our town. Extremely frightened. On 13rd we were shelled during the day from 1 to 2 pm, during which time 89 shells fell in the immediate area, and spoiled our lunch. Building directly across the street hit and collapsed. A shell landed 20 feet from cellar where we hugged the basement floor, splattering the building with shrapnel and breaking windows. Ripped tents and latrine tent. Thirty mules killed, and two Italian soldiers wounded.

About 10 of us have decided to move our sleeping quarters to the building across the street. It has already been hit once, but was not badly damaged, and is much less crowded than the cellar where we were. Shelling continues from our right flank, which the British are supposed to have closed. The Britons are apparently having tea. We are completely surrounded by our own artillery batteries, which fire constantly with deafening sounds. Last night we were shelled every 30 minutes throughout the night by big, German 170 mm. shells. Two shells fell within 50 yards of our kitchen and blasted craters 6 or 7 times larger than the average 88 mm. shell craters. For some reason these shells did not whistle, and I thought the explosions were coming from a new type of British artillery moved in yesterday. On the nights of Nov. 5 and 6 we were shelled from 11 pm to 4 am. We found a store of chestnuts in the house, and every night Flynn, Graham, Rebert and I roast some in the fireplace. We are on the defensive. Rumors are we are to be relieved soon. German air force bombs and strafes the front every night, but so far has left our rear village alone. A lone American plane flew into a German 88 shell today, and crashed in our back yard. Pilot parachuted safely. On 9th it snowed. On 10th everything froze. I want to go south.

11 Nov to 20 Nov 44. Montecatini (about 20 miles from Florence) 88th Inf Div pulled back from the front for a rest. Had dinner in Florence on way to new area. Montecatini is a beautiful town of resort hotels. We live in a hotel with electric lights, running water and real plumbing. Mr. Modaffari wants all work re-done that was done in his absence, so we have a lot of work to do. But we still are having sort of a rest, for we are out of the combat zone. Harold Dean Flynn bought a bottle of grappa one night, and we all got drunk.

20 Nov 44 to 14 Jan 45. Frassinetti. Left Montecatini, which was too good to be true, and moved into Frassinetti in the Appennines Mountains above Bologna. Cold, muddy, windy. No shells yet, but we are within German artillery range. Occasionally hear shells whistling into Highway 65, about a mile and an half away. Frassinetti is the most primitive hamlet we have seen, hanging on sheer mountainside. We have to sleep in tents. There are only about 15 houses, and they are still inhabited by their Italian owners. It began snowing about a week before Christmas, and has continued snowing almost constantly. The snow is about a foot and a half deep now. Our office is in a barn, and we have to spend half a day chopping wood to keep a fire burning. Mr. Modaffari is

raising hell, but, what the hell, I think I am enjoying this area more than any. Everyone is receiving Christmas parcels from home, and we sit up every night making toast, eating, reading and enjoying ourselves. It is good to be in a warm place when the wind is howling outside. We even have a radio. Gene Hillman has been in the hospital for a month, and we have a couple of new fellows. On Christmas and on New Year's Eve we had hilarious parties. The American ack ack batteries shot up strings of V for Victory shells. Beautiful. The Germans did the same thing with their ack ack. I am growing used to the cold and the snow. Of course, we have managed to get a lot of cognac and wine here.

15 Jan to 25 Jan 45. Montecatini. Montecatini again. Warmer than last trip. Visited Florence with pass with Morgan Gibson and Courtland Vanderbeek. Visited the leaning tower of Pisa on 18th with Harold Dean Flynn. Wonderful time, wonderful day. Climbed up to Montecatini Terme.

25 Jan to 3 Mar 45. Monghidoro. In the mountains again on Highway 65. Snow again. Much cognac. By 16 Feb. all the snow has melted. Most of February has been springlike. Flynn, Graham and I hiked over to our old home in Frassinetti. There is a delicious feeling of spring in the air, and I feel like running, jumping and gamboling over the hills and dales. For the past two weeks the Germans have been throwing 6 to 8 shells into town every 2 or 3 days, but no one expects to be injured and everyone is in high spirits. Monghidoro on the whole is pleasant. The closest German shell fell about 100 yards from our sleeping quarters, and about 50 pounds of ceiling fell on us while we were sleeping, but no one was hurt. Bombed once and strafed once. Usually after work I read until about 8:30, then go over to Flynn's office, where we drink a beer and fix some toast. Continue to take hikes. Doesn't grow dark until 6:30. Spring is truly here.

3 Mar to 6 April 45. La Fogliaia. We are camped in the commune of Calenzano in the valley of the Arno about 12 kilometers from Florence. It is a climacteric period for me, as if I had suddenly ceased to be who I was, and I am now someone different whom I have yet to get to know. I know I really got drunk on wine for the first time, and I haven't been sober since. Primo vino and vino bianco. Mrs. Pierro does our laundry. Eggs are \$3.80 a dozen, and we usually go every night to Jina's Place in the Nome di Gesu and eat eggs and drink wine. Drinking wine in Jesus's name. Many South African troops in this area. Nice chaps. Motorcycle hit Ted Wist and broke his leg. Then we burned him trying to keep a hot electric pad around his leg and he had to be repatriated to the United States. Mr. Modaffari will not let me have a pass to visit Florence because both Gene and Ted are hospitalized. Calvary in the Nome de Gesu.

6 April to 22 April 45. San Benedetto in the Apennines overlooking Bologna. Took Italian lessons under the tutelage of Luigi, the town tutor. Nice town. Bought eggs and potatoes from a woman we call Mrs. Carbuncle. She has a horrible skin problem. Delicious spaghetti dinner at a farm house. Bombardment of German lines and installations started on April 15th preliminary to our push forward. Terrific racket but little headway made. Ayers, Murphy and Kelley have been promoted to 2d Lieutenants. As commissioned officers, they can now defecate in the officers' latrine. As a matter of fact they now must defecate in the officers' latrine. To do otherwise would be a breach of military discipline, and that, of course, would never do.

22 Apr to 25 Apr 45. Cravalcore, Italy, in the Po Valley. A most memorable move. Night with a full moon. Our truck convoy was strafed and bombed throughout our movement. Flynn fell from back of our truck when phosphorescent bomb exploded right behind us, and I jumped out of our truck at high speed to get Flynn off the road before he was run over by the truck behind us. Both unhurt. Our truck stopped and waited for us to catch up. Live in old Fascist Headquarters building now taken over by the Partisani, who are now very active. Town cleared of Germans morning after we moved in. Delicious omelette at Irio's.

25 April to 29 April 45. Ghisione, about 4 miles south of the Po River. Many horses and German equipment abandoned. The Germans are running out of gasoline. Lots of eggs available. Some German strafing and bombing

29 April to 3 May 45. Vicenza, Italy. Moving toward Venice. We live in a nice place with a woman we call Mrs. Room and Board. She keeps our room clean and fries eggs in butter for us. The war in Italy is supposed to be over now.

3 May to 6 May 45. Bessano del Grappa. Live in dormitory of Fascist Artillery School. Cold and wet. At foot of Alps. Rumor has it that we will soon move to Austria. War definitely over in Italy. Steele visited us.

6 May 7 June 45. Bolzano, Italy in the Italian Tyrol. Live with Austrian woman we call Mrs. Helping Hand, who is very kind to us and goes out on three day foraging expeditions to hunt eggs for us in the far away villages of the Alps. A town of about 200,000 people, mostly of Austrian decent. It was the German Headquarters in Italy under General Wolff before General Kendall put him in jail because General Wolff refused to disarm the German troops. It is a very clean city. I miss the Italian people, but we are having a wonderful time.

7 June to 1 Oct. 45. Desanzano sul Garda. I was too busy enjoying the city at peace to write much in Desenzano - horseback riding, swimming, boating, dancing. The war is over and no one is doing much work. Mr. Modaffari sometimes misbehaves, but even he is more relaxed and appears to be enjoying himself. I like Desanzano. Some day I will come back.

1 Oct to 22 Oct. 45. Naples, leisurely trip by truck from Desanzano through Pisa, Rome to Naples. Flynn got sick in Naples and did not get to come home with us. I visited him every night in the hospital before we were shipped back to the States. Mr. Modaffari committed suicide. We are all stunned. Could it be that we were as difficult for him as he was for us? He talked to Colonel Burkes before doing it, but the Colonel couldn't persuade him not to do it. Why didn't he talk to us? We knew him better than the Colonel did. Our unit in the 88th Division Headquarters was transferred to the 34th Infantry Division for shipment home. Left Naples on 22 October and arrived at Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia 3 Nov. 45.

5 Nov. to 9 Nov. 45. Left Camp Patrick Henry arrived at Camp Gordon, Georgia 6 Nov. Discharged from the Armed Forces on 9 Nov. 45. I am a civilian once again, and plan to return to the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington, to finish my degree.