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FROM: LTC Dante D. Crifasi. AUS (Ret)  
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Class 17-43

Dear Richard,

I received the March Signals the other day and was thrilled to read about the movie stars who attended the Signal Corps OCS, Jeffrey Lynn in particular. He was in my class and he even was billeted in my barracks

I remember him as quiet, courteous and a very nice person. Did you know he was married to the singing movie star, Kathryn Grayson? She attended our class graduation party with him and sang several songs Wonderful voice and a gracious lady.

I had a very interesting military life. I was drafted on 15 Jan 42 into the U.S.Army and was sent to Ft. Dix for my army inprocessing. As a civilian, I had been working for Press Wireless (a radio communications company for newspapers) as a service clerk and apprentice radio operator. After recruit training I asked for a transfer to the Signal Corps and, with a letter from the president of my company recommending such an assignment to support my request, I was transferred to Ft.Monmouth, N.J., for my basic and advanced training.

After finishing basic training , I was picked to attend the Army Japanese Radio Operator Interception school at Ft. Monmouth, N.Y. I learned the Japanese Kata Kana code. and practiced on special Japanese KK typewriters for several months. Upon completion of this special course, the students in the class were assigned to Signal Radio Intelligence Companies and I was transferred to the 126th Signal Radio Intelligence Company in Camp Crowder, Mo. At that time I was a Private First Class. I was just 22 years old and was classified as a Graduate Japanese Intercept (Kata Kana) Radio Operator.

I had heated correspondence with my fiancée and wanted to get married before going overseas.

My future father-in-law (being a WWI soldier) told me, via phone, that I couldn't support his daughter on corporal's (I was promoted by then) pay and that the only way he would approve of the marriage was that I became an officer. I immediately applied for the Signal Corps Officer Candidate School (OCS) at Ft. Monmouth and went before several officer boards for evaluation as an OCS Candidate. Once approved, I transferred to the OCS prep school in Camp Crowder, Mo., and following that, was sent to the Signal Corp OCS at Ft. Monmouth in December 42. There, my TAC Officer was Lt. McClung, who helped me break my record of no demerits. After the first day with him, I had four demerits for an unkempt bed, dusty shoes, etc. And from that point on, McClung kept a close eye on me. For example, I was going to be married a week after graduation so I fudged a little about our weekly close haircuts. I tipped the barber handsomely and he shortened my hair just a little. During the following Saturday morning inspection, Lt. McClung stopped in front of me and said, "Mister, what are you trying to be, a Don Juan?" Needless to say, I received more demerits and had to report to him with my regulation haircut that very day.

The following week, my fiancée and her father visited me. I had to go to the lieutenant, who had his office in the basement of one of the barracks, to ask him for a pass. My fiancée and her father watched me through the basement window as I marched to him, saluted and gave him my request. He looked at me stonily and said, "Mister, go back and report to me the right way!" This went on three times, back and forth, while my future father-in-law and my fiancée were laughing outside the window. Finally the lieutenant asked, "Do you know what you are doing wrong?" "No, Sir," I said. He then told me that I was swinging my arms sideways and not straight forward and straight back. Live and learn! But I got my pass. Graduation was on 6 Mar 43 and I was commissioned a second lieutenant, Sig C. AUS!

I was married on March 14, 1943, and came back to report to the Sig Corps Officer field radio school. Almost a hundred of newly commissioned second lieutenants were in attendance.

We were out in the field one week and suddenly 10 of us were ordered to the school HQ. Upon arrival we sat around and one by one we were interviewed by a Navy lieutenant commander. My turn came and when I went into the room he told me to sit down and wanted to know if I smoked and a lot of other personal questions, i.e., do I like women, how are my nerves, etc. Finally he asked me if I knew why he was here and did I ever hear of The Office of Strategic Services (OSS). I told him I didn't and I asked him what that was. He hemmed and hawed and said it was an intelligence service. Then he asked me if I wanted to volunteer for it. Rapidly going through my mind I thought -- hey, here I am going to be able to pick my next assignment myself and not be sent to the pool. I accepted and he said that if I passed background checks, my orders would come in about a month. Meanwhile, I should stay at the Ft. Monmouth's officers club (they had rooms then) with my wife and wait, just check with HQ every morning to see if the orders came in. Out of a hundred officers in the class, 10 were chosen to be interviewed and only three were picked.. I was one of them.

Orders finally arrived and I was to report to the "Q" building in Washington first thing Monday morning. Trained to Washington and was met at the station by a 2 1/2 ton truck, a driver and four new arrivals. We were trucked to a secret site in Maryland and we started our training in our new jobs. We were taught how to kill with a knife, how to shoot a 45 colt pistol, the Fairborn Way (two quick shots aimed at the feet since there is a stiff pistol recoil), codes, map reading, Morse Code, etc. We were to continue training until we were ordered to report to a Col. Morgan at the "Q" building. We all knew that when that came you are going overseas, where and how, who knew? One day, that order came!

Off to Washington on a Monday morning and I went to see the colonel. He was very cordial, offered me a cigarette (a second lieutenant has to watch out when a high ranking officer offers you a cigarette and says to sit down). He asked me many questions about my marriage, my nerves, do I frighten easily, etc. Then he went over to a big wall map -- pointed to the China- Burma-India area and told me that that is where we were next going to invade. I was to parachute or infiltrate in with a OSS team and help organize resistance and do intelligence work. He sent me to the message center officer to see if I had sufficient message center training, especially being able to make up new codes. No, I replied, I didn't have that expert knowledge.

He looked sternly at me and said, "Lieutenant, you are to totally forget what you saw and what I told you today. Understand?" I said I did and walked away in a dither. Why did he do this to me? What if I'm captured, tortured and made to reveal that super secret information. What a dilemma!! I went back to the

training site and stewed around for awhile. Then the order came for me to go back to the "Q" building to see the Colonel. Again!

I went into his office and he told me he had another overseas assignment for me. The orders were secret and I was not to see them until I was on the plane. In the meantime, I was to go to the State Department and be processed for a civilian passport. I asked him why I had to have a passport since I was a serving uniformed U.S. Army Officer. He said that I was to do as I was told.

I went to the State Department and there they told me to take off my blouse and army tie and put on a civilian tie and jacket, which they supplied. They took my picture and also gave me a gun belt with a Colt 45 pistol which seven dum-dum bullets (which were illegal -- if caught you would be shot).

This done, I waited for several days before my orders arrived, then went to the airport and boarded my plane. I was being sent to the OSS office in Cairo, Egypt. Before getting on the plane, I was given a phone number to call when I landed at Paine Field, Cairo. The trip took several days later as we were detained in Brazil because all available planes were being used to bring supplies to the troops in the Battle of the Bulge. After landing in Paine Field, I walked to the nearest PX and made the phone call. Horrors of horrors. A sweet, female voice said, "Sorry, that number has been disconnected. No number replaced it!" Here I was, in the middle of a desert, and I didn't know where to go. Just at that moment, a 3/4 ton truck stopped beside me and a voice shouted, "Hey, Dante, what the heck are you doing here?" It was my friend, Eddie Povraznik,\* who was in my OCS class, had trained with me and was sent here before me. I threw my arms around him with a profound sigh of relief!

Eddie drove me to the OSS HQ in Cairo where I met my new Station Commanding Officer. He asked me what my technical electrical/radio training was and I told him that all I knew about radio was how to tune up a receiver. At that, he blew his cork. He told me that he had requested an officer with much radio/electrical knowledge and they sent him - ME! I knew I was on his s--- list from then on. He sent me to be the officer-in-charge of our radio intercept station in the desert. Boy, was I glad to go way out there and stay out of his way.

Worked there for several weeks and one day I was called in to see him. When I came in he asked me, "How would you like to go to Bari, Italy, and take charge of our Morse Code School for our agents who are going to go into enemy territory?" Foolishly, I told him I did not become an overseas officer to oversee a boring Morse Code school! Hey, he asked me, didn't order me! What a big mistake! My friend, Eddie was sent instead and within two months he was promoted to Captain.

Two weeks later I was again called in to see him. This time he just told me that I was being transferred to our Istanbul, Turkey, OSS Office as a military attache code clerk. Oh, the irony of it, I didn't want to go to Italy to take charge of a boring job and here I was being sent to do a non-entity job, so I thought. At the end of our conversation, he ordered me to go see the finance officer and receive a new wrist watch and \$500 to buy several suits, shirts, etc. I had them all hand made. Beautiful stuff.

Boarded a BOAC (British) plane for Istanbul via Adana in civilian clothes and a passport. No uniforms allowed in Turkey, a neutral country. Landed and took a taxi to my new quarters (our office building). I noticed I was being followed

in the cab but later found out that it was the Turkish Secret Police, who followed all foreigners.

It was interesting work I was sent to do. At that time, one of the Balkan Countries was trying to surrender to us and the communications between President Roosevelt, the Balkan people and my boss all came through the message center, which was manned by a sergeant and myself. Lots of complex detailed work but it was thrilling to decode, encode and paraphrase important messages, knowing you had to keep absolutely mum about what you were doing.

Being in a neutral country has its moments. We used to eat at a famous restaurant in a really nice hotel in Istanbul surrounded by other diners who were personnel from the German Embassy and the Japanese Embassy as well as people from many other countries, friend and foe --all trying not to be conspicuous and all trying to hear whatever the other people are saying or doing. Strange to sit with your country's enemies.

We also lodged, fed, trained and made travel arrangements for the Greek soldiers, sailors and civilians who were going into the Greek Mainland and the Greek Islands to gather intelligence for us. By the way, all OSS personnel came from all of our Armed Services and civilians. One big conglomerate of people, all striving to help their country. We gave the Greek civilians \$20,000 in gold and a small transistor radio so they could send us enemy military and naval information from various locations. Some we heard from and others were captured or took the money and fled.

Finally came the time when it was decided that we had to go into the German Occupied Greek Mainland and Greek Islands to get better and timely intelligence. A team of us -- two officers, two navy enlisted men and a civilian writer -- went to sea in a Greek caique (small Greek fishing vessel) and set up our high powered radio equipment on the island of Limnos. This was necessary because our agents had small radios incapable of transmitting over long distances so they sent intelligence (rail, ship and troop movements) to us and we relayed the messages to HQ in Cairo and other places. It was satisfying to hear our planes come over and bomb the targets that we helped get to headquarters.

The Germans had high quality mobile direction finders on trucks, seeking transmissions, so we had to move around very often or risk being captured. This would be disastrous for us because we wore only our khaki shirts and trousers. We had an American Flag with small clips and our rank in our pocket so that in event of imminent capture, we could put them on rapidly and be classified as prisoners-of-war, not spies.

Unfortunately, the day finally came when a small detachment of German soldiers (not SS Troops) spotted us in a clearing and they captured the five of us before we were able to attach our military insignias and flag. They immediately declared us spies and put ropes put around our necks preparing to hang us from the nearest tree. At that point, we heard shots and were thrilled to see a small group of Greek guerilla forces emerge from the tree line to stop the Germans from completing their task. The Greeks greeted us, removed the ropes and then marched the Germans into the woods. They probably killed them, but not in front of us. We were left to thank God that they had arrived in time. The experience left me with a lifelong aversion to neckties or any clothing that fits snugly around my neck.

After that adventure, we returned to our usual activities, with even more caution than before. One activity handled by the civilian news writer was to make up stories about victories our forces were having against the Germans. Every day he would imaginatively write these stories and radio them, via our communications equipment, to the German soldiers in the nearby islands and territories. These were intended to make the soldiers quit or want to go home. We thought the stories were hilarious but, after a while, they unintentionally came too close to the truth and we received orders from Cairo to stop broadcasting our next battle plans. We also channeled false information about the German officers with their troops. We told them that the officers were stealing their food, pay and other nonsensical things. We later found out that we vilified one of their officers unfairly. According to the peasants and the German prisoners, he was a decent man. Poor Guy!

A bad case of malaria and infectious hepatitis sent me back to Cairo to recuperate in the American Hospital and I was sent home, arriving at the Miami airport on Christmas Eve. I had been overseas for 13 months.

I had orders to report to the "Q" Building in Washington and to report to the same colonel who sent me out. He greeted me with news that, after my 30-day leave, I was being assigned to a team to parachute or infiltrate into the CBI area to gather intelligence and be the communications officer. I looked at him as if he was crazy. I then asked if this tour was a volunteer one. He said it was, so I immediately requested a transfer back to the Signal Corps. I was sent to the Army Security Agency (ASA) in Vine Hills Farms in Virginia as a shift officer in the Traffic Analysis Section of the ASA. The section received hundred of thousands of intercepted radio messages from our Signal Radio Intercept stations all over the world -- friendly and enemy. It was amazing what these professionals did with "fist" information. I was the graveyard (midnight to 8 a.m.) shift officer. I walked around all night with a loaded 45 pistol in my gun belt.

Later I was transferred back to Ft. Monmouth and was the OIC of the (guess what) the Morse code school for newly graduated second lieutenants from West Point -- could never get away from that. I was finally promoted to first lieutenant and was released from the Army 6 January 46, almost 4 years to the day that I entered.

I was put into the Army Security Agency inactive reserve. Was inactive for several years and then joined the New York National Guard in the HQ, II Corps Artillery under the command of Brigadier General Ralph Schirm--a real tough task-master. Was the executive officer of the HQ Battery for awhile.

Then came Korea. All of the units in the Armory were recalled except the II Corps HQ with a BG in command. However the Army did not want a National Guard BG to be part of regular army so that unit did not go. Instead, they sent me to Ft. Sill, Oklahoma, to attend the Basic, Advanced and Field Artillery Observation Battalion Officer's courses. This was mandatory for me to transfer from the Signal Corps to the Field Artillery Branch of the Army. I was there for a year. Then, because I was married and had two children, I was transferred back to NG II Corps Arty HQ as a captain and was assigned as the HQ Battery Commander.

After all the National Guard units in the armory were disbanded, I decided to join the Army Reserve 77th Infantry Division, headquartered in Manhattan, N.Y. My last assignments were as the S-3 of the 187th Field Observation Battalion as a major. Was promoted to lieutenant colonel and then became a Battalion

Commander of the 6/5th Towed 105 Artillery Battalion and then as the commanding officer of the 3/42nd self propelled 8in How battalion.

In my civilian life, I was transferred to California in several high management capacities in the John Hancock Life Insurance Company and had to leave the active reserves.

I retired on 4 Apr 80 (my sixtieth birthday) as a lieutenant colonel with a full army pension. Thank Goodness!

I celebrated my 87th birthday this past April 4th and still get around. Miss the army, though!

-end of story-.

\*Note: I read in a previous copy of the "Signal" that my friend, Eddie passed away a few months ago. I'll always remember him for finding me .

Richard -- I didn't intend to write such a long story. You can use any part of it in the Signal.  
Keep up the good work!

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