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Yours for Victory: The Wartime Story of Howard Peach

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Howard Peach graduated from Bryant College in August of 1942 in the midst of World War II. Although he would say he is no hero, his life has been nothing short of extraordinary. Howard has been a student, a member of the United States Army, an entrepreneur, and devoted husband and father.

With World War II as the backdrop for his college years, Howard Peach played his part in the war effort while attending Bryant College. He was a founding member of the Bryant Service Club, a student organization that supported Bryant alumni serving in World War II. Founded in March of 1942, the Club's mission was "to send monthly packages of cigarettes, candy, cookies, letters, and knitted articles to Bryant men and women in the service."¹

Howard graduated from Bryant with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (B.S.B.A.). He enlisted in the Army immediately after graduation in October 1942. Because Howard wanted to be a member of an elite group, he at first wanted to be a glider pilot. However, due to the fact that he wore glasses he was unable to enter the program. As a result, Howard opted to join the Signal Corps and reported for duty in Boston, Massachusetts where he attended the Army Signal Corps Radio School.

Shortly after Howard joined the Signal Corps, he received a package from the Bryant Service Club. Writing from Boston on March 22, 1943, Howard thanked the club for their kind gesture:

Words cannot adequately express the feeling of gratitude, not only for the swell gift, but also for the thought that the girls and fellows at Bryant are thinking of us. You see, fellows, that it is somewhat of a shock to leave a swell school like

Bryant on one day and the next . . . report for induction in the best army in the world. Then, and only then, do you really appreciate letters and other thoughtful remembrances.²

After six months of training in Boston, Howard was sent to Camp Crowder in Neosho, Missouri for his basic training. Camp Crowder was constructed in 1941 to serve as a training center for the Army Signal Corps. It was one of the largest Army installations in the Midwest. The camp was named for Enoch Crowder, a general from Missouri who implemented and administrated the Selective Service Act during World War I. At its peak, nearly 47,000 troops were stationed at Camp Crowder. Between December of 1942 and May of 1946, Camp Crowder housed more than 10,000 German and Italian prisoners of war. In 1946, the camp closed as a basic training sight and was completely deactivated by 1958.³

The United States Army Signal Corps was founded in 1860 by Army Major Albert J. Myer. In its early years, the Signal Corps provided communication to the Army through the use of flags and torches. By World War II, the technology was much more advanced, including the use of radio devices and RADAR.⁴ Howard was a member of the 583rd Signal Depot Company. The Company was activated on January 12, 1944 at Camp Crowder in Missouri. Originally, the Company consisted of one officer and twenty enlisted men. By March 30, 1944, it had expanded to nine officers and 182 enlisted men.⁵ In the same letter written on March 22, 1943, Howard described his life in the Signal Corps:

Take my word for it, the Signal Corps, in this war is a fighting unit and are the first on the scene in every action. The equipment we use is the finest obtainable

and very, very interesting to a fellow, who a short time ago, received a B.S.B.A. degree.⁶

Howard had indicated to the Army that he had a B.S.B.A., and the Army inferred from this that he had two degrees: a Bachelor of Science Degree and a Bachelor of Arts Degree. Therefore, he was sent to the highly-selective training center, Camp Murphy in West Palm Beach, Florida, for six months. At Camp Murphy he, along with graduates from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of Michigan, learned Radio Detection and Ranging (RADAR). When Howard explained that he only had one degree, he was told he would be sent back to Camp Crowder in Missouri. However, he felt that RADAR would be, in his own words, “a big deal” and was determined to complete his training.

Research on RADAR was headed by Colonel William Blair, director of the Signal Corps laboratories at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. RADAR research began in the 1930s with the production of two RADAR sets: Signal Corps Radio (SCR)-268 and SCR-270. The SCR-268 was short-range radar that controlled searchlights and antiaircraft guns; the SCR-270 was mobile RADAR with a range of 120 miles. Later, the SCR-271 was invented, similar to the SCR-270; however it was fixed to an object.⁷

Camp Murphy was activated in 1942 and served as the Southern Signal Corps School for RADAR operation. The Camp was named for Lieutenant Colonel William Herbert Murphy who was instrumental in the development of radio beams and military aircraft equipment. On 11,364 acres, the Camp housed 854 officers and 5,752 enlisted men. There were nearly 1,000 buildings, including a bank, movie theatre, church and bowling alley. Camp Murphy was decommissioned

in 1944 and on June 9, 1947 the property was transferred to the State of Florida to be used as a state park. The camp was opened to the public as Jonathan Dickinson State Park in 1950.⁸

While at Camp Murphy, Howard married his longtime sweetheart, Glenna Makant, in October of 1943. Howard and Glenna met on blind date in 1941; however they were not each other's dates. Howard's best friend was taking Glenna out, and Howard was only invited as a date for Glenna's roommate. Eventually, they got together as a couple and decided to marry before Howard was sent overseas. Glenna, her mother, and Howard's mother took an overnight train from Attleboro, Massachusetts to Camp Murphy for the wedding. Glenna remained with her husband until he finished his stateside training.

Wartime marriages, such as Glenna and Howard's, were a common occurrence in the United States at this time. There were one million more marriages from 1940 to 1943 than would have been expected at prewar rates. War marriages were even featured in popular culture. For example *Life* magazine's June 22, 1942 cover pictured a war bride holding a bouquet of Victory-stamps.⁹

Howard and the 583rd Signal Depot Company were deployed to the European Theater on April 5, 1944 on the *HMT Arundel Castle*. Howard recalls the nervousness he had while on the British tramp steamer.

As we left New York harbor, the ship put Gabriel Heater¹⁰ through the loud speaker...and we heard his infamous line, "There's bad news tonight." Heater went on to discuss how a U-boat sank an Allied supply ship off the Irish coast. That made me very nervous

because on the ship, I was on 'A-Deck'. At first I thought I would be sunning myself all day. I didn't realize 'A-Deck' was so far down I could hear the water. To get there, I had to go down manhole ladders. When I got down there where all our bunks were, I looked at the little opening and thought to myself, if a U-boat ever got us, there is no way we would all get out. So naturally I aged very much on that trip¹¹.

The 583rd arrived in Glasgow, Scotland on April 17. From Glasgow, the 583rd made their way to a depot in Herefordshire, along with other U.S. fighting men that were dispersed throughout southern England as part Operation Bolero¹². The major escalation of U.S. fighting men in Great Britain rose from approximately 774,000 troops at the beginning of 1944 to 1,537,000 in preparation of the D-Day invasion of June 6, 1944. Arriving in England, a local Attleboro paper commented on Peach's arrival:

Word has arrived of the safe arrival of Pfc. Howard I. Peach in England. Pfc. Peach enlisted in October, 1942 and attended the Army Signal Corps Radio School in Boston for six months. He received his basic training at Camp Crowder, Missouri, and had six months' RADAR study at Camp Murphy, Florida. Pfc. Peach was married to Miss Glenna Makant of this city [Attleboro], in Florida last October....¹³

Upon his arrival in England, Howard immediately took notice of how British RADAR techniques differed from those of the United States. Describing British RADAR some sixty years later, he noted, "The British with their RADAR were not as sophisticated as we were.

They attached their RADAR to their search lights and the Germans quickly found out if you took out their lights; they [the anti-air craft guns] became less accurate”¹⁴. To avoid this problem, the Army Signal Corps moved RADAR considerable distances away from search lights.

By 1944, the development of more efficient RADAR strategies and technologies enhanced the accuracy of Allied bombers on their German targets¹⁵. By launching daily attacks on German manufacturing industries, greater strain was placed on German decision makers and German morale. The Allies wanted to “undermine the German people’s will to fight by making the ordinary city-dweller’s life-style intolerable” as well as strain the German economy into submission¹⁶. Gaining air superiority and weakening German industry paved the way for the planned invasion of Normandy in June.

In Herefordshire, the company took up its first mission at the Signal Supply Section General Depot (G-22). The 583rd was ordered to unload signal wire from freight cars shipped over by U.S. companies for telecommunication. According to the official history of the 583rd, “The mission at G-22 proved to be one of the most difficult the company was to encounter. The volume of receipts and shipments, moderate at first, reached a peak just prior to the invasion of France which was almost beyond the physical endurance of the personnel involved.” In fact, the men of the 583rd were sometimes required to work twenty-four to thirty hours without rest.¹⁷

For Howard, the quantity of shipments did go beyond his physical endurance. He was diagnosed with a severe breathing infection. As a result of this illness, Howard was hospitalized in May of 1944. After a brief stint in the hospital, he realized that he ought to get a license to drive armored vehicles. This would provide him with new job options in the Signal Corps. After earning his driver’s license from the British government, the Signal Corps Radar division offered

Howard the opportunity to be a driver for a RADAR truck that would eventually be used during the Allied advance in Europe.

Howard was not part of the initial D-Day invasion of June 6, 1944. Instead, on July 8, 1944, the 583rd moved 145 miles south to Frampton Court, to receive “a refresher course in basic training”¹⁸. The refresher course would prepare the 583rd for joining the Allied advance. On August 16, 1944, the 583rd Signal Depot Company landed on Utah beach and proceeded by truck to a “bivouac in Transit Area ‘B’”, near Sainte-Mere-Eglise. The 583rd landed in France with nine officers and 172 men¹⁹.

The RADAR truck became Howard’s responsibility when he arrived in France. Whenever he drove his RADAR truck, he always looked for the cover of trees and other camouflage. In addition, he slept next to the truck and, often times, next to the road. He recalled that this made him nervous because he felt that if someone else was coming by, they might run over him. So, he never slept very well.

Traveling through Europe, maps were crucial for Allied soldiers to navigate through the terrain. Howard’s company, the 583rd Signal Depot, was given specific maps to navigate through Europe, but this was not the standard issue U.S. Army map. He was given a map originally intended for showing gas lines through Europe owned by the Standard Oil Company. In Howard’s words, “the map got me where I needed to go”²⁰.

From Transit Area “B”, the 583rd traveled to LeMans, France on August 18, 1944. One of Howard’s most memorable wartime experiences came in LeMans, just days after arriving in the French city. While looking for a safe location for his RADAR truck, a member of Force Française d’Interior (FFI)²¹, also known as “Fee Fees”, found Howard. The resistance group had cornered a group of German soldiers in a farm house and believed the sight of an American

soldier would convince them to surrender. When Howard arrived at the farmhouse, the plan worked and fifteen enemy soldiers surrendered. According to Howard, “They thought Patton’s Third Army was right behind me, but there was no one behind me”²².

On August 25, 1944, a detachment consisting of one officer and eleven enlisted men left the company to improve the flow of signal supplies to advancing armies, including Patton’s Third Army, also known as Patton’s “Hell on Wheels”. When Patton was traveling, he insisted that the Signal Corps put wire in ditches to avoid using the radio waves that could be intercepted by the Axis Powers. To keep the advancing army on the move was very difficult at first. Meiser underscored this supply problem, noting that “it was necessary to divert trucks carrying signal supplies over unmarked and often unmapped secondary routes. It was impossible to instruct drivers in these routes which were traveled night and day. Consequently, convoys were being badly scattered”²³.

Problems of supplying advancing armies eventually subsided following the establishment of the Red Ball Express in August 1944. The Red Ball Express was a supply system where soldiers would drive trucks carrying supplies to keep advancing armies, like Patton’s Third, fighting and on the move. Notably, seventy-five percent of the Red Ball Express were African-Americans.

On September 5, 1944, the company moved to Reims, France to establish Signal Depot S-855-A. The 583rd was authorized to classify, store, and issue spare parts for repair. Repairing equipment on the battlefield greatly increased the ability of the Allied army “to perform its mission efficiently”²⁴. In Reims, Howard also met a French family who often provided him dinner²⁵.

On October 9, 1944, the Company traveled 121 miles from Reims to Steinfort, Luxembourg to organize another repair depot for radios²⁶. Arriving in Steinfort allowed Howard and his company the opportunity to shower and properly wash their clothes for the first time since arriving in France. While stationed at Steinfort, combat weary Howard Peach traveled to Paris on a three-day furlough. He persuaded local pilots that traveled from Steinfort to Paris to give him a ride.

I had a three-day pass in Paris. At that time, a three-day pass to Paris was a big deal. A lot of the men with liberty pass would go to Pigalle Place²⁷. At that time, prostitution was rampant and every house in that area was involved in prostitution. I didn't take part in any of the business because I was married. But I was curious and wanted to see what was going on. Later on, a lot of the men that took part in prostitution had problems with sexual diseases²⁸.

Following the liberation of Paris in mid August 1944, the city became known as the "silver foxhole". Hal Boyle, 1945 Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, returned to Paris in 1949 and reminisced about life in wartime Paris:

Gay Paree, the 'silver foxhole' in wartime is gayer than ever now.... It is odd to come back and see it as thronged with tourists as it used to be with soldiers. Your memory misses the color of khaki.... These wartime tourists from the front were a kind of living reproach to the natty troops who headquartered here in safety. The tanned and gawky combat men embarrassed them

merely by their presence – a reminder that all foxholes in the war weren't silver²⁹.

Howard, one of those “gawky combat men,” had a much greater respect for his responsibilities as a married man following his 72 hour liberty pass in Paris.

In mid December 1944, a month after his brief furlough in Paris, Howard found himself thrust into what would later become known as the Battle of the Bulge, the last major German offensive and one of the bloodiest battles of the war. On December 16, 1944, some 30 German divisions launched a counter offensive against Allied forces in the Ardennes region, the critical point of the attack. The 583rd was ordered to patrol areas around Steinfort to create road blocks and lay out mine fields. Once the strength of the German offensive was acknowledged, the members of the Signal Corps had the option of retreating southward.³⁰ If they retreated southward, the 583rd would regroup with Patton's Third Army located in Metz, Luxembourg³¹. A vote was cast and the Signal Corps decided to stay in Steinfort. Howard's commanding officer gave a stern reply when asked why the 583rd was staying in Steinfort:

We have come this far and nobody will back us up from here. If we start retreating now, who knows when we will stop retreating?³²

According to Stephen Ambrose, on December 19, “Eisenhower met with his senior commanders in a cold, damp squad room...” as German tanks prepared to surround Bastogne. “Eisenhower walked in, looked disapprovingly at the downcast and boldly declared, ‘The present situation is to be regarded as one of opportunity for us and not disaster. There will be only cheerful faces at this conference table.’” As discussions about a counterattack began, General Patton quickly spoke up and offered a plan where his Third Army would attack the southern

shoulder of the German advance. Patton could cut off the enemy supply lines and essentially destroy the enemy. “When Eisenhower asked him how long it would take for the Third Army to turn north and attack the German southern flank, Patton boldly replied, ‘Two days.’” His peers openly laughed, but in fact Patton was already halfway into the movement because when he left Metz, he ordered his staff to begin switching the attack line to the north³³. Consequently, even if the 583rd had retreated to Metz, they would have still found themselves on the front lines.

On December 23, 1944, the repair depot at Steinfort was strafed and bombed. Howard manned an anti-air craft gun but “it was so hard to shoot down those planes because they moved so fast”³⁴. When reminiscing about the Battle of the Bulge, Howard remarked that the Christmas of 1944 was one of the scariest times of his life:

It was awfully cold; I don't know how we didn't freeze to death. I had a small fire going and was ordered to put it out but I have no idea how anyone saw it, most likely a plane radioed it in³⁵.

Some sixty years later, Howard still finds it difficult to discuss those horrific days of late December 1944.

Unlike John Renza, a fellow Bryant alumni and classmate that took part in the Battle of the Bulge, Howard never received his Christmas 1944 package from the Bryant Service Club. His package was destroyed in Liege, Belgium. The Postal Department stationed in Liege was forced to destroy all the supplies that could benefit the advancing Germans³⁶.

Over the course of the war, Howard wrote only three letters to the Bryant Service Club. However, he and his wife, Glenna, exchanged hundreds of letters during the wartime years. On August 31, 1944, a postcard he sent stated:

Another little card for our collection! Just wanted to say ‘Hello!’

How is your new position? Write all about it love...Be home

before you know it. Love, Howie³⁷.

On January 9, 1945 the 583rd was taken off alert after the Allies turned back the German advance. The early portion of 1945 proved difficult for the 583rd Signal Depot Company due to extreme cold weather and security measures created by Allied decision makers to avoid another German surge. The company was ordered to maintain high efficiency repairing radios and RADAR equipment to keep the Allied advance pushing Germans closer to Berlin. With the volume of material increasing, the repair depot was expanded through the construction of railway spurs, loading platforms, and more storage space. Howard and the 583rd remained in Steinfort until April 25, 1945. From Steinfort, the members of the 583rd were sent to Nuremberg, Germany³⁸.

When the war ended in Europe in early May 1945, Howard and the 583rd Signal Depot Company were in the war-torn city of Nuremberg. In celebration of the end the European war, they began throwing hand grenades, but were quickly and sternly reprimanded by their commanding officer who reminded them that a war was still raging in the Pacific and they would soon be part of the planned invasion of Japan. Of course, the war against Japan ended in mid August 1945, and the planned invasion never took place.

After returning home in early 1946, Howard started his own business as a representative for jewelry manufacturers which he ran until his retirement in 1985. He and his wife, Glenna, celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary October 2008. Together, they have two sons and three grandchildren. A resident of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, Howard remains an active and proud Bryant alumnus, and attends many campus events, especially those pertaining to World War II.

In a recent Bryant Alumni Spotlight featured on Bryant’s website, Howard remarked, “Bryant has lost none of what made it special all these years.”

NOTES

¹ Bryant College, *The Ledger*. 1942

² Howard Peach, letter to Bryant Service Club, March 22, 1942.

³ “Camp Crowder,” Global Security,
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/camp-crowder.htm>.

⁴ Kathy Rae Coker, “Signal Corps History,” *US Army Signal Center of Excellence*,
<http://www.gordon.army.mil/ocos/historian/>.

⁵ R.J. Meiser, “583rd Signal Depot Co. History: France to Belgium”, unpublished typescript, 1.

⁶ Howard Peach, March 22, 1942.

⁷ Rebecca Robbins Raines, *Getting the Message Through* (Washington, DC: 1996)
www.history.army.mil/books/30-17/Front.htm#toc 233.

⁸ Julie Szabo, “Camp Murphy Site”, *The Historical Marker Database*,
www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=14314.

⁹ Judy Barrett Litoff, David C. Smith, Barbara Wooddall Taylor and Charles E. Taylor *Miss You The World War II Letters of Barbara Wooddall Taylor and Charles E. Taylor* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1990) 11.

¹⁰ Gabriel Heater was a renowned news broadcaster and commentator during WWII.

¹¹ Authors' Interview conducted with Howard Peach on February 6, 2009.

¹² Operation Bolero was the codename for the massive American military build-up in England prior to the D-Day invasion of June 6, 1944

¹³ From an unknown newspaper article printed in Howard's hometown of Attleboro, Massachusetts.

¹⁴ Authors' Interview conducted with Howard Peach on February 6, 2009.

¹⁵ For example, the introduction of a radio navigational aid, codenamed Gee, enabled aircraft to fix its location by "the position of blips, transmitted from ground stations" John Ellis, *Brute Force: Allied Strategy and Tactics in the Second World War* (New York: Penguin Group, 1990), 172.

¹⁶ Ellis, 182.

¹⁷ Meiser, 2.

¹⁸ Meiser, 2.

¹⁹ Transit Area 'B' was near the French city Sainte-Mere-Eglise

²⁰ Authors' Interview conducted with Howard Peach on February 6, 2009.

²¹ The FFI stood for French Forces of the Interior, part of the French resistance movement that used guerrilla warfare to weaken German defenses throughout the war. During the D-Day invasion, resistance fighters wore armbands with the Cross of Lorraine to be

identified by Allied soldiers. "Charles de Gaulle," <http://www.scrapbookpages.com/natzweiler/index.html>.

²² Authors' Interview conducted with Howard Peach on February 6, 2009.

²³ Meiser, 4

²⁴ Notably, most of the signal spare parts at S-855-A were captured from the enemy. Meiser, 4.

²⁵ In 2004, Howard returned to Reims and was reunited with the family. Sadly, Monique, the eight year old girl, that befriended Howard in 1944, died just months before Howard came back to France. Authors' Interview conducted with Howard Peach on February 6, 2009.

²⁶ At Steinfort, the 583rd was to establish an Advance Section Communications Zone Signal Depot, S-857. Meiser, 6.

²⁷ Pigalle Place was a well known area of Paris that was home of prostitution and adult entertainment for soldiers.

²⁸ Authors' Interview conducted with Howard Peach on February 6, 2009.

²⁹ Hal Boyle, "Gay Life in Silver Foxhole," St. Petersburg *Evening Independent*, June 9, 1949.
<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=950&dat=19490609&id=k7ILAAAIBAJ&sjid=hFUDAAAAIBAJ&pg=6105,1099305>

³⁰ For the attack, the Germans had 2,277 fighting vehicles, 1,500 planes, and 1,322,000 men. "Overall the Germans had a three-to-one advantage in the Ardennes" Stephen Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 199.

³¹ From Metz, the Third Army would “attack the southern shoulder...cut the enemy supply lines, isolate tanks inside what was already being called the ‘Bulge,’ and destroy them. Stephen Ambrose, 208.

³² Authors’ Interview conducted with Howard Peach on February 6, 2009.

³³ Ambrose, 208.

³⁴ Authors’ Interview conducted with Howard Peach on February 6, 2009.

³⁵ Authors’ Interview conducted with Howard Peach on February 6, 2009.

³⁶ All mail, rations, ammunition and gasoline was burned.

³⁷ Howard Peach, Postcard to Glenna Peach, August 31, 1944.

³⁸ Meiser, 8.

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