

As You Were

Where fond military memories fall in

Sounds of Freedom

MY FATHER, Robert Howie of Chetek, Wisconsin, was part of the 5th Army under Gen. Mark Clark in WWII.

After the 5th Army liberated a town in France a day before Christmas Eve in 1944, the mayor asked the commanding officer if he had anyone who could fix the town's pipe organ, shot up by the Germans. The organ took up one whole end of the church.

My dad and Army buddy Bernard Pinnow of Bruce, Wisconsin were given the task of repairing the organ.

They determined that they could use shell casings from one of the big guns as a collar fit over the holes in the pipes. They welded them to the pipes to seal off the air.

The mayor then had the church organist tune the organ, and he started playing at noon on Christmas Eve and continued playing until late that night. The organ could be heard clear into the countryside.

People began gathering from everywhere to celebrate the holiday with the soldiers with church services, food and song. My dad said he couldn't believe how good he felt to be a soldier that night.

Dad passed away 9 years ago and did not know the name of the town. If any veteran remembers this, I'd appreciate a letter sent to me at 111 Jenson Blvd., Luck WI 54853.

—Tam H., Luck, Wisconsin

Sonic Boomer

IN THE 1950s, our U.S. Air Force squadron in Germany was about to depart on a joint training exercise with the Danish air force.

Our squadron leader gave us strict orders not to break the sound barrier. However, on a low-level pass over Denmark, our commander accidentally exceeded the speed of sound, shattering several windows in houses below. Thus, he became the only pilot that day to violate his own order.

As the commander touched down on the runway at Hahn Air Base in his F-100 aircraft, he was greeted by a large banner that read, "Welcome Home, Boom-Boom."

—Claude W., Puyallup, Washington

Peace for a Short Time

AS PRISONERS of war at Stalag Luft IV, near Kiefheide, West Prussia, Germany, we were allowed out of our barracks for a short time on Christmas Eve 1944.

The harsh setting of barbed wire and armed sentry posts was softened by huge star-like snowflakes lazily drifting down.

Suddenly, over the soft shuffle of feet, rising gently at first, then swelling as all joined in, came the sound of 7,500 male voices raised in song to the strains of White Christmas. It was a most unforgettable moment.

Christmas carols were sung for the entire hour, raising our spirits tremendously.

The following day, another surprise came in the way of an American Red Cross food parcel with turkey and plum pudding for everyone. Most of us ended the day by giving thanks to the Lord for His bounty.

—Lowell S., Buffalo, Wyoming