The GHOST ARMY *of* WORLD WAR II

How One Top-Secret Unit
Deceived the Enemy
with Inflatable Tanks,
Sound Effects,
and Other Audacious Fakery

RICK BEYER & ELIZABETH SAYLES

Princeton Architectural Press ★ New York



The USS *General O. H. Ernst*

14

A TOAST TO FREEDOM

Now, if you've been in the darkness for all that time, and your lights are going on, that's spectacular. And the city was mobbed. The town square, you didn't see anybody until the lights went on, and suddenly you realize there's thousands of people here. What a feeling! All the blinds in the houses opened. The streetlights went on, people cheered, they carried torches. It was absolutely thrilling to see.

— John Jarvie

★

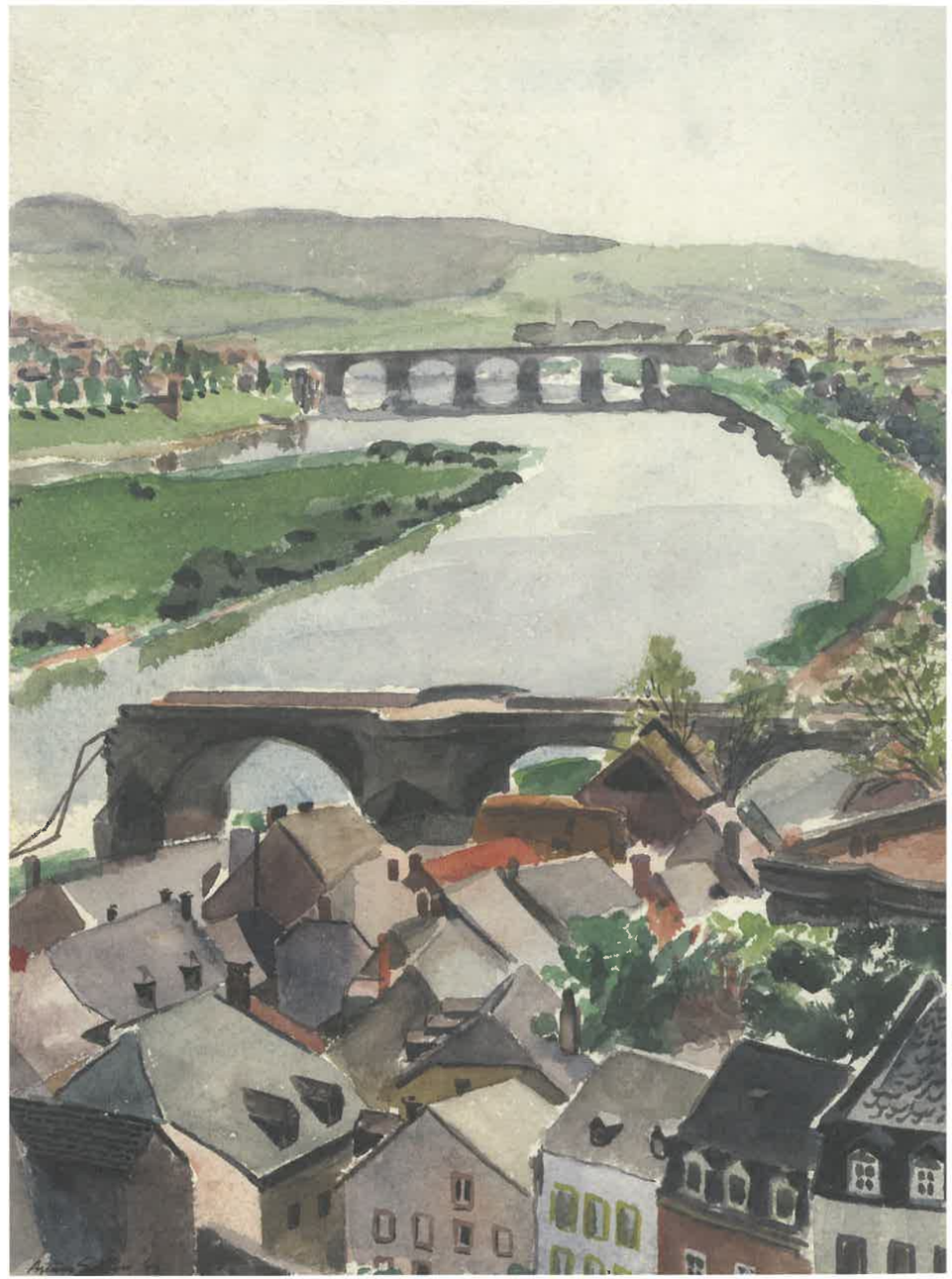
Trier is one of the oldest cities in Germany, established by the Romans more than two thousand years ago. A Roman bridge constructed in the second century carries commuters across the Moselle River to this day. But in April 1945 the city was in ruins, having suffered devastating damage from Allied bombers. It was here that the Ghost Army came for the final stop on their long trek across Europe.

Despite the destruction, Trier retained a haunting beauty. Climbing the hills east of town, some of the Ghost Army artists painted the

Trier by Alvin Shaw, 1945

(opposite) *Trier* by Arthur Singer, 1945





(top) *Germany 1945* by Ned Harris, 1945

(bottom) *Bridge over the Moselle* by Belisario Contreras, 1945









(left) *Bill Blass* by Victor Dowd, 1945

(right) Making curfew signs at one of the camps. Clockwise from top left: William Sayles, Frank Geary, Bill Blass, Gil Switzer, and David Taffy

bombed-out bridges crossing the Moselle. (The Roman bridge had survived with only minor damage.) Their deception days were over. They had been sent to Trier to carry out one last mission that brought them face to face with Hitler's dirty work and brought home the reality of war. The men of the Twenty-Third Headquarters Special Troops were assigned to help guard five camps for displaced persons (known as DPs) in and around Trier.

By the end of the war, millions of people in Europe had been displaced from their homes. They included victims of the Holocaust, those who had fled the fighting, and huge numbers of people forced into slave labor by the Nazis. The camps now guarded by the Twenty-Third contained tens of thousands of refugees from all over Europe.

> These wretched people were officially called Displaced Persons but they were really liberated slaves of Nazi Germany. They needed food, shelter, clothes, baths, orientation and transport back to their native lands.... The DPs were divided into 26 foreign nationalities - many who hated each other - and all were feared and despised by the native Germans.
>
> — Official History of the 23rd Headquarters Special Troops



These were people who had been horribly mistreated by Hitler's regime, "and they had just gone crazy," recalled Sergeant Jack McGlynn. "One can hardly blame them. They were pillaging, they were killing people in town, and they had to be guarded so that they wouldn't kill more Germans." The assignment didn't sit well with many of the Ghost Army soldiers. Locking up the DPs (many of whom were from Allied nations) to protect the Germans (with whom they were officially still at war) seemed to have an Alice in Wonderland quality.

April 15, 1945
Russians and Poles stealing everything they can get their hands on, and I don't blame them. Resent having to guard a goddamn Heinie. Some Russians are hiding in the hills with guns and raiding the Germans at night. If we were smart we'd turn our backs.
— Diary of Sergeant Bob Tompkins

Ghost Army soldiers were posted in pairs outside the barbed wire. Corporal John Jarvie witnessed many escape attempts. "You would hear





(left) *Breakout* by John Jarvie, 1945

(right and opposite) Displaced persons camps, Germany, 1945

the slightest jingle on the barbed wire and flash on a light, and you'd find some guy maybe five feet away from you, crawling at you. They didn't care if they killed you to get out or just beat the hell out of you... and you'd throw a burst of Tommy gun fire across—not to hit them, to push them back in."

One night, Sergeant Tompkins and other soldiers were assigned to sleep at a local estate to protect it from marauding DPs. Some mornings he had to ride shotgun on a German farmer's milk truck to prevent the farmer from being robbed as he went about his rounds.

On April 17 six Russians from the camp in Wittlich, Germany, entered a nearby village looking for flour. Angry townspeople attacked them and killed two of the Russians. The next day, soldiers from the Twenty-Third raided the village, bringing angry Russian DPs with them to identify the wrongdoers.

April 19, 1945
Russians went first and when crowd came out with pitchforks, Jeeps with 50's [.50-caliber machine guns] closed in. Russians choked hell out of Heinies and Tony [Young] let loose with 50's to stop Heinies from running away.
— Diary of Sergeant Bob Tompkins

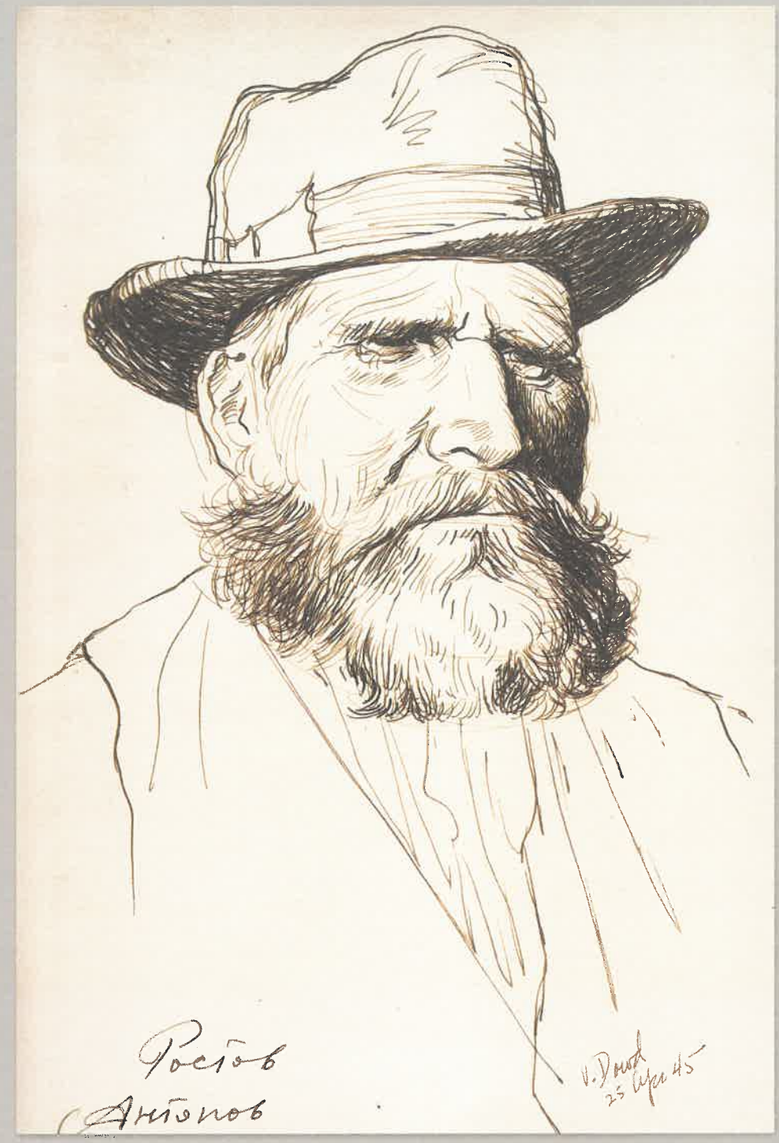
A villager with a pitchfork ran at Private Charles Boulliane but was tackled by a Russian DP. Six Germans were arrested. The refugees wanted the GIs to take more aggressive action in incidents of this sort. "They wonder why we don't shoot the Germans," wrote Bob Tompkins. "I wonder myself."

GALLERY

Displaced Persons

Many of the artists in the 603rd, moved by the character and suffering they saw in the faces of the DPs, sketched portraits of them. Sergeant Victor Dowd made dozens in a single day. "It was a really interesting experience for a young artist. I asked somebody to sit, and I did a five-minute sketch, and the next thing I know there [were] three or four people waiting to have their pictures drawn. Some of the best drawings that I did are [of] these displaced people, because they are drawings of arrogant young men, tired-looking old men, haggard-looking women, young women in costumes. They were fascinating and wonderful for somebody who is interested in drawing people."

The refugees were eager to sit for a portrait. "We would let them sign their names on the pictures," Private Ned Harris recalled. "They had lost everything, so to them the simple act of having their portraits drawn was to let the world know they were still alive. It gave them back some of their dignity."



The Old Man by
Victor Dowd, 1945



© ELLSWORTH KELLY, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

Joseph, Chudzik, Displaced Polish Boy, Bitburg, Germany by Ellsworth Kelly, 1945







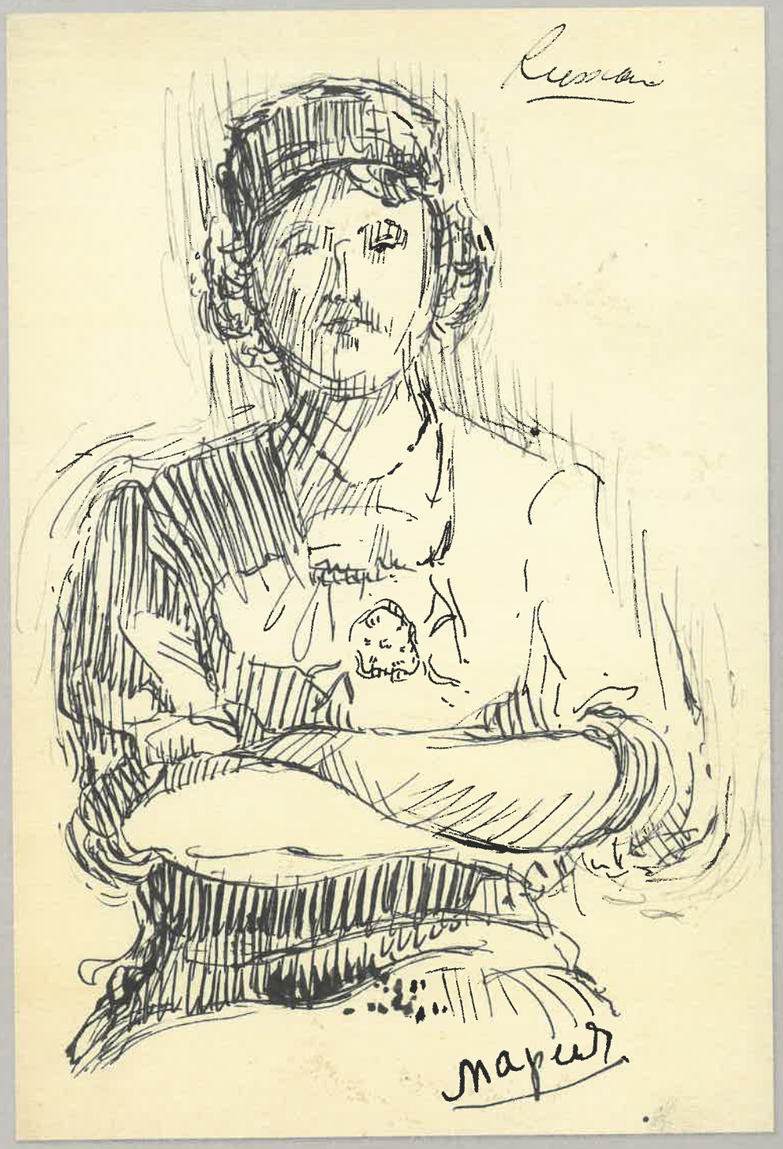
Portraits of three refugees by Victor Dowd, 1945



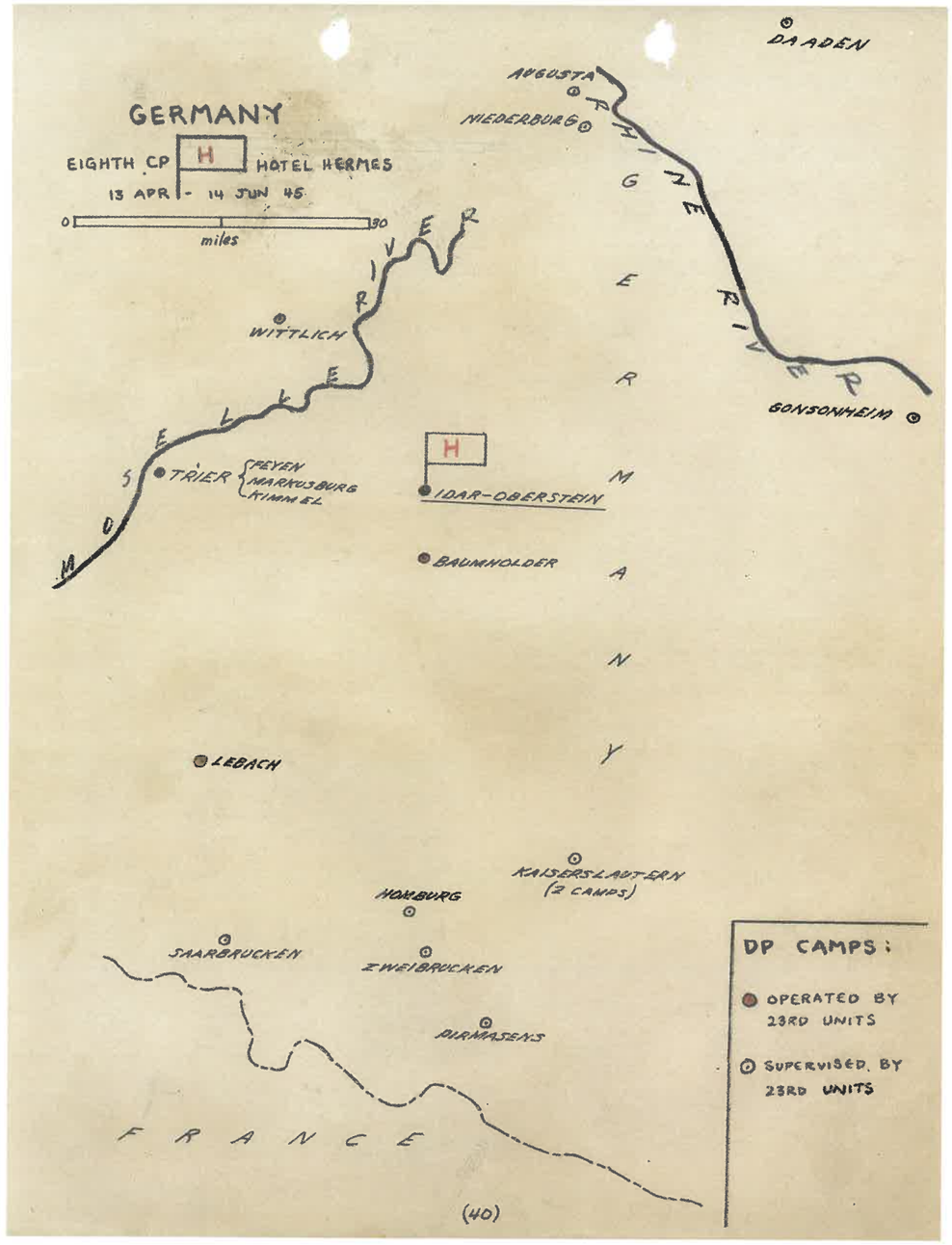


(left) *A Comrade '45* by Edward Boccia, 1945

(right) *Olga* by James Steg, 1945



Maria by Ned Harris, 1945



(opposite) Map created in 1945 depicting the DP camps guarded by the Twenty-Third Headquarters Special Troops

Sergeant Victor Dowd couldn't believe it when he got orders to lead a patrol into the countryside to round up another batch of Russian DPs who had escaped and were stealing food from villagers. "Talk about ludicrous. Now the army is going crazy. They want us to capture Russians because they are harassing Germans. Don't they remember that we were shooting at the Germans just a little while ago, and more importantly, they were killing us?" Searching through the woods, .45 in hand, Dowd came across a Russian whom he judged to be just about the same age as he was. The man surrendered voluntarily, "for which I'm very grateful, because I don't know how I would have handled the dilemma of having to shoot somebody whom I considered my ally."

On another such expedition, Private Buzz Senat did shoot two Russian teenagers who had been terrorizing German families in the vicinity. "These two kids were shot in this forest, lying on the floor like sacks of flour," recalled Corporal Jack Masey, "and we had to throw them on a truck. They were dead. I never quite recovered from that." Masey had just been through one of the most horrible wars in history. But perhaps because this incident happened when the war and the killing were all but over, this incident shook him up more than anything else that had happened. "I'm nineteen or twenty. Here they are. They're sixteen. What kind of a blow is this? What kind of fate are we dealing with? Why am I the lucky one, and why are they the unlucky ones?"

Things were little better inside the barbed wire. Several of the camps contained both Russians and Poles. "They hated each other's guts," recalled Bob Tompkins, "and they were killing each other every night. And we were supposed to control things. And we'd had no experience in police matters, and so there was a lot of chaos at night." The Russian DPs used stolen potatoes to distill a powerful homemade vodka that fueled the problem. Food was in chronically short supply. Officers went into Trier and gave the mayor a list of foodstuffs required to feed the DPs. The next day they brought trucks down into town, but there was almost no food available. The mayor said the people in his town simply did not have any food to spare. Lieutenant Gil Seltzer remembered that one of the officers told the mayor that if the food wasn't there the next day, the Americans would open the gates of the camp and let the DPs loose upon the city. By the following morning, all the requested food had been supplied. Eventually the army started trucking in rations.

One of the goals of the Allied forces was to repatriate the displaced people to their homelands. But many of the Russians did not want to go. "A lot were fearful of returning," said Victor Dowd. "Maybe they knew more than we did about what lay in store for them." Jack Masey had the unpleasant duty of getting the Russian refugees to board trains that would take them back to Moscow. "We noticed that they didn't want to get on these trains. 'You're going home—aren't you happy?' 'No, we don't

want to go home.'" The DPs had heard rumors, which turned out to be all too true, about the circumstances that likely awaited them. Joseph Stalin's paranoia led the Soviet dictator to suspect all Russian soldiers and civilians captured by the Germans of being collaborators. (He had his own daughter-in-law arrested when his son was captured by the Germans.) Those who headed back would most likely face harsh interrogation, imprisonment in the Gulag, or execution. They didn't want to go. "And these were families, maybe a husband and wife and kid, not wanting to get on these trains," recalled Masey with some anguish. "We forced them on the trains."

Their assignment guarding the DP camps extended into early May. By this time the Russians had been separated from the Poles. A Soviet army officer who had arrived on the scene encouraged the DPs to stage a May Day parade with banners and singing. Several Ghost Army officers, including Lieutenant Fred Fox, stood on a reviewing platform featuring a large picture of Stalin. Smiles seemed to be missing all around.

Life in Germany wasn't too hard for the men of the Ghost Army. Like American soldiers all across occupied territory, they turned people out of their houses and took them over for themselves. "I'm getting

May Day parade at DP camp







(top) *Wittlich, Germany* by William Sayles, 1945

(bottom) *Peeling Potatoes with Two Russian Girls* by Victor Dowd, 1945

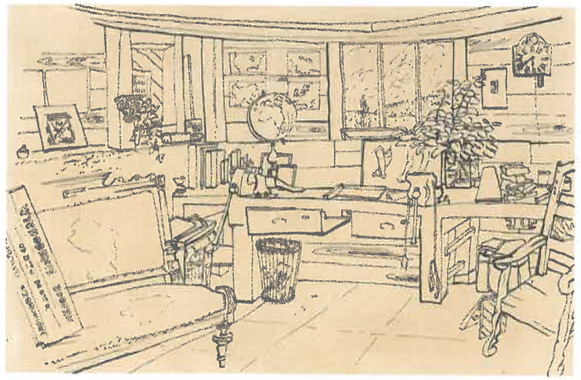
to be quite a German," Private Harold Dahl wrote home. "Sitting on a German bed, writing a letter by the light of a German candle, in German ink, with a German geography as a board, while German rhubarb cooks on our little stove and we have German music piped in thru a German telephone."

Every platoon was given a house, recalled William Sayles, set on a pristine quarter of an acre of land. His house "was gorgeous, like a dollhouse, everything perfect." Upstairs, Sayles found documents showing that the family who owned the house had lost three sons in the war, which saddened him. In a cupboard he found a little souvenir pitcher with a picture of his hometown, Albany, New York, painted on it, an uncanny coincidence. A sergeant in Sayles's platoon ordered his men to dig up the backyard, guessing that's where the owners would hide their food and valuables. They found their buried treasures: sacks of potatoes and crocks of butter, along with a few fur coats. "We did nothing but make french fries, day and night!" marveled Sayles.

The DP camps were not too far from Luxembourg City, and the soldiers occasionally had a chance to visit. John Jarvie recalled being there when the lights officially came back on after years of wartime blackout:

> Now, if you've been in the darkness for all that time, and your lights are going on, that's spectacular. And the city was mobbed. The town square, you didn't see anybody until the lights went on, and suddenly you realize there's thousands of people here. What a feeling! All the blinds in the houses opened. The streetlights went on, people cheered, they carried torches. It was absolutely thrilling to see.

Back in Germany, another one of the artists in the 603rd, Sergeant Stanley Wright, commandeered an attic that he and others used as a studio. On May 8, 1945, they were painting a girl named Janina "with a wonderful radiance in her eyes," as Wright wrote home that night to his mother.



The Studio by William Sayles, 1945

(opposite) Discharge papers for Ghost Army soldier Marion Pastorcich

> We all sipped wine as we worked and we worked hard and fast as the beautiful ball of fire was quickly slipping behind the purple hills. Then on the outside voices, at first like a murmur and then in the form of shouts, told us that at long last it was over. The voices were muffled but we sensed the meaning - a rush to the windows, let out a burst - an inner prayer, a toast to freedom - then back to painting for another hour before dusk engulfed us all. Back home I can imagine the joy, the celebrating, the enthusiasm - but to most of the boys over here a moment to relax, an unbelievable calm with a chance to let the mind slip back a year or so and wonder if it was all a dream - [or] nightmare.

Hitler was one week in the grave, and German generals had surrendered to General Dwight D. Eisenhower the previous day in Reims, France. The fighting in Europe was officially done. Everyone celebrated. "It's a beautiful world tonight," Bob Tompkins wrote in his diary. "It's been a long hard road and we thank god it's over."

Army of the United States

SEPARATION QUALIFICATION RECORD

SAVE THIS FORM. IT WILL NOT BE REPLACED IF LOST

This record of job assignments and special training received in the Army is furnished to the soldier when he leaves the service. In its preparation, information is taken from available Army records and supplemented by personal interview. The information about civilian education and work experience is based on the individual's own statements. The veteran may present this document to former employers, prospective employers, representatives of schools or colleges, or use it in any other way that may prove beneficial to him.

1. LAST NAME—FIRST NAME—MIDDLE INITIAL	2. ARMY SERIAL No.	3. GRADE	4. SOCIAL SECURITY No.
PASTORCICH, MARION	15 322 317	Pfc	Unknown

5. PERMANENT MAILING ADDRESS (*Street, City, County, State*)
1221 Addison Avenue, Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, Ohio

6. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE	7. DATE OF SEPARATION	8. DATE OF BIRTH
21 Sep 1942	20 Oct 1945	8 Dec 1921

9. PLACE OF SEPARATION
Separation Point
Camp Sibert, Alabama

MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS

10. MONTHS	11. GRADE	12. MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY
3	Pvt	Engineer Basic (729)
34	Pfc	Camoufleur (804)

SUMMARY OF MILITARY OCCUPATIONS

13. TITLE—DESCRIPTION—RELATED CIVILIAN OCCUPATION

CAMOUFLEUR: As a member of 603rd Engineer Camouflage Battalion trained in the United States and in combat conducted a campaign of deception against the enemy. In five (5) campaigns, used dummy tanks, vehicles and guns to deceive enemy as to strength of Allied Troops and deployment of same. Drove light vehicles on which these dummies were mounted; also chauffeured officer in charge of platoon. Possessed a high degree of color discrimination and blended paints to produce natural effects. Understood effects of changing weather conditions on camouflage.

WD AGO FORM 100 — This form supersedes W.D. A.G.O. Form 100, 15 July 1944, which will not be used.