AROUND THE AREA

THOSE WHO SERVED

COMPILED BY
HARRIS 'DOC' BRAUN

James L. Parker

In honor of the 50th anniversary of World War II, this paper is reprinting articles about local people who served during the war.

Parker enlisted Nov. 21, 1941, at Ft. Riley, Kan., where his father, Maj. Stevie B. Parker, served as Army chaplain. he was inducted at Ft. Leavenworth, Kan., and held there until Dec. 8, 1941, when his group went to Camp Roberts, Calif., for 13 weeks of basic training.

He remained at Roberts as an instructor in the clerical school until November 1942, when he was ordered to infantryman school at Ft. Benning, Ga. On completion of this school Feb. 12, 1943, Parker was discharged as a staff sergeant and commissioned a second lieutenant.

His first assignment as an officer was to New York Port of Embarkation, where he instructed soldiers in hand-to-hand combat and bayoneting. Parker had been sent there under temporary duty, which was changed to permanent duty. So he and his high school sweetheart, Betty Gern of Littleton, Colo., decided to get married.

Parker's father had been ordered overseas, so he planned to perform the ceremony when he was in New York April 30, 1943. However, the preacher shipped out April 29, so another minister performed the marriage.

The ink was hardly dry on the document when his permanent duty status evaporated as well, and in June, Parker was aboard a cargo transport, serving as the commander in the newly formed Army Transportation Corps. Officially, he was still attached to the New York Port of Embarkation. His first ship carried bombs and gasoline to Algiers and Sicily before returning to New York. The trip took three months.

On his second trip,Parker was the transport commander on a troop transport ship he boarded at Hampton Rhodes, Va. The transport went to Martinique in the West Indies and picked up 500 black "free" French soldiers and took them to Casablanca, Morocco.

He was not supposed to go on the ship, since his original orders were for a transport going to Algiers, but Parker's father was attached to the 6th General Hospital in Casablanca, so he had his orders changed. Ironically, the ship to which he was originally ordered took a direct bomb hit down the stack, killing the transport commander.

After returning to the United States, Parker spent about one year at Newport News Port of Embarkation before receiving orders to go to the Holding and Reassignment Depot at Horseheads, N.Y. — a railhead where the bulk of the cargo destined for the Normandy invasion was assembled and shipped to England.

Betty Parker, who joined her husband at Newport News, gave birth to their first child, Marilyn. He was promoted to first lieutenant Dec. 20, 1944. When the last of the supplies left Horseheads, he returned to New York Port of Embarkation and became the transportation commander of a shipload of cargo bound for Bristol, England.

After unloading, the ship was given to the British under the lend-lease plan. Parker celebrated VE Day twice: May 8, 1945, in London, then he flew to the United States and celebrated May 9 in New York.

A fourth trip overseas took Parker around the world. Leaving from New York with a shipload of cargo, he went through the Mediterranean Sea and Suez Canal to Calcutta, India. After unloading, the ship was given to the British again under lend-lease. He and 15 Air Force officers of a search and rescue team from Calcutta boarded the Dutch ship, the Tjilbak, for San Francisco via Australia. They were off Sydney when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan. The Tjilbak arrived in Frisco in September 1945.

In October 1946, Parker joined MAGIC (Military Advisory Group In China) and was stationed in Peking. The Communists and Nationalists were fighting bitterly, and MAGIC was sent to try to get both sides to stop fighting and resolve their differences. They failed. He was second in command in an ordinance maintenance shop from October 1946 until April 1947. Parker, who says he has trouble hanging onto a pair of pliers, could not understand why he received the assignment.

In April, however, the Communists cut off Peking, and MAGIC was forced to evacuate by water. Then he knew why. Hundreds of vehicles were lost to the Communists, which prolonged the war.

He managed to get all 2,300 men and their dependents aboard the ships in the harbor until there were only two men, himself and a signal corps officer named Baker, and one ship left, a coal-burning Japanese freighter. They were the only two English-speaking persons aboard. They had a mountain of C rations with them — the crew was eating "fish heads and rice."

Nineteen days later, they reached Kobe, Japan. The ship was of ancient vintage, so on some days the ocean current drifted them closer to China than they were the day before.

At Kobe, the ship was loaded with coal by female coolies, who carried the coal in baskets on their heads. "They worked like and looked like ants," Parker said. Eventually, the freighter arrived at Yokohama, where he disembarked.

He was immediately assigned two years to the "Second Major Port." Brian Parker was born at Fitzsimmons General Hospital, Denver, Colo., in February 1947, while his father was in China. Now Betty, Marilyn and Brian went to Yokohama to be with Parker. They all returned stateside in August 1949. Thus ended his fifth and last trip overseas.

Parker was assigned to Fort Bragg, N.C., where he served as the executive officer of the Quartmaster Service Company in the 5th Army Corps until he was discharged Jan. 18, 1950, as a first lieutenant. He was in the Army more than eight years.

Parker received the American Defense, American Theatre, European-African, Middle East Theatre, Asian Pacific Theatre, World War II Victory, Army of Occupation (Japan) and Breast Order of Yun Hui (China) medals.

He returned to college, and he graduated in 1960 from Iliff School of Theology in Denver with a bachelor of divinity and a master of theology degree.

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