

As You Were

Where fond military memories fall in

When a Real Star Came to Saipan

FROM JUNE 1944 to December 1945, my time of active-duty service with the Army's 544th Quartermaster Supply Depot was on the island of Saipan in the Pacific.

The action had already passed us by this time, and subsequent boredom and homesickness were our worst enemies.

I had initiated an evening broadcast I called Island Radio, but my readings of official wire reports and announcements of visiting brass were met with a less-than-enthusiastic response.

Our entertainment was provided by Big Band singers and movie actors whom no one seemed to have heard of, although we did appreciate seeing an outside face on our little coral lump.

Then, I got word off the wire that Betty Hutton was coming to Saipan. I was the one to meet Miss Hutton and escorted her around the island. The next day, when I arrived at her quarters to take her over to our stage, I asked if I could snap her picture. She said, "Sure! Let me show you my boots!" and donned her characteristic grin as she hiked up her skirt for a picture.

That night, we had a first-class performance that the 544th wouldn't forget. Miss Hutton was the only "A" entertainer who came to our remote island, and it meant a lot to us.

—Dean Evans, Media, Pennsylvania

GI Had the "Write" Stuff

IN 1943, during basic training at Camp Wheeler, Georgia, the fellow

in his mid-30s who bunked next to me had one bad habit. He'd chew tobacco and spit into a tin can between our bunks, often missing the can and making a mess.

Each night, he'd write a letter to his wife, a task that seemed to take a lot of effort. One day, after mail call, he asked me to read him a letter he had received from his wife; I discovered he couldn't read.

I read the letter to him—several times, in fact—and then told him I'd make him a deal. If he'd improve his aim while he was chewing tobacco, I'd read his mail to him every day. Each day, he aimed better.

One day, I asked him how he could write to his wife each day yet couldn't read. He said that before he left home, his wife wrote a letter to herself, and each day, he copied it and mailed the copy so she knew he was okay.

I asked him if he'd like me to write a letter for him. He seemed very pleased, and the letter we wrote together was quite long; it was obvious that he missed her very much.

Some of our later letters were copied by others in the barracks—not because they couldn't write, but because of the emotion in the letters. Some of the letters had quite a circulation!

The two of us—became good friends, but we went our different ways after basic training and never met again.

—Thomas Nealeigh, Hilliard, Ohio