

From Alvin Warren

Jan 14, 1943

[Fort Benjamin Harrison
Indiana]

Jack BJose

Executive Secretary

Veterans of Abraham Lincoln Brigade

100 Fifth Ave

New York N.Y.

Dear Jack:

I am very sorry that I have not gotten the details of my situation to you earlier than this. I have been waiting to find out definitely as to the disposal of my request for a furlough to New York. It has been definitely refused, with the statement that I would not be permitted to enter any coastal areas. However, they are permitting me to travel to Chicago. So I guess you will have to answer all questions and act as my representative in N.Y. Below is a statement of the facts starting from the date of induction.

I was inducted into the Army June 8, 1942. I was held at Camp Upton, N.Y. for one month before being sent to a Replacement Training Camp. I arrived at Fort Knox Ky July 7 1942. Here I received my three months basic training attached to a gunnery platoon. During my training period, I was interviewed by my superior officers and recommended for Officer Training School. At that time I was the only drafted man out of my entire company to be so recommended. Later on I also received the highest recommendations for officers not specifically attached to my organization. (During that period I was promoted to Squad leader.) The company commander asked if I would [like] to stay on as a cadre (training personnel) after the training period was completed. I told him that I would rather not as I preferred to join an active division or enter one of the tank technical schools.

Near the end of the training period I was called in by the Battalion commander for an interview before going before the Officer Candidate School board. This interview lasted well over an hour, when the usual interview of this type lasted only about ten minutes. During the discussion many questions were asked about my attitudes toward labor unions, Harry Bridgesⁱ, my political

affiliations etc. Several days later I was ordered to appear before the Medical Board for a physical examination for officers school. This in itself was unusual as it was customary to go before the Officers School Board (and if accepted, then go a physical examination.) The examining officer turned me down because of certain alleged defects. I was told at that time, that the findings of the medical officer would not affect my status as an enlisted man and that I would be sent out to active service. From then on, until I was transferred, I functioned as acting cadre on the company training staff. The Commanding Officer told me at that time that I would soon go to a division or to one of the technical schools.

On October 27, 1942, I received a War Department order to entrain for Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana. Here, I entered the H.Q. and H.Q. Post Company, 1530th Service Unit. Let me tell you something of the character of this company. It is composed of I-B or limited service men, many of whom, in my opinion, are malingerers. Further, there are Japanese, Germans, and Italians in this company who are not allowed to go to combat outfits. Some are suspected of Fascist-Nazi leanings. In addition there are deserters, A.W.O.L.s, drunkards, and general troublemakers. It was until recently, staffed by non-coms who have been rejected by regular outfits and many of whom have been in the guardhouse at one or another. The main function of the company is that of a work outfit. There is no military training carried on at all. It supplies K.P.s, sentries, prison guards, work details and a host of other non-descript details. It has all the characteristics of a dumping place for undesirables and problems. You can well imagine the state of morale in such an outfit. Then there is this further fact. My mail is censored along with that of the foreign born and the suspects.

Upon my arrival at Fort Benjamin Harrison, I immediately asked my first sergeant if he knew why I had been sent there and what steps could be taken to secure a transfer into a combat outfit. He told me that he didn't know the reason that I had been sent in, but that more than likely it would fall into one of the three categories.

1. Physically unfit or limited services.
2. Being of foreign origin, with relatives in the land of my nativity
3. Having participated in labor or progressive activities, such as my background as a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade during the Spanish War 1936-1938

I asked if he would attempt to find out from the Personnel Division, Post Headquarters what was the reason and what I do to effect a transfer. He said he would. The result was, as he stated, that H.Q. did not know the reason why, that I had merely been transferred in on a War Department order. He further suggested seeing the Post Chaplain to see what he could do about the situation. This I proceeded to do. The Chaplain told me, as a result of his inquiries, that I was there because of physical condition. He suggested as the next step, that I apply for a physical examination to find out the exact nature of the alleged deficiencies and take the necessary steps to correct them. I did this. The medical findings were that I was perfectly fit for full and active duty. With this information I went to the head of the Personal Division, Lt. Thomas, to find out what my exact status was and how I could be transferred out to combat duty. He told me that he did not know nor could he find out what the exact reasons for my being sent to this post were. This was in contradiction to the findings of Chaplain. He stated further, that there was no way I could be transferred to other services. The only developments since then is that the Military Intelligence has been visiting many of my former friends and employers, soliciting information of a political nature, about me.

In closing I want to remind you of certain facts which I think are important. You know that the Army is desperately in need of technical men. I have five years experience with Diesel engines. To make that experience more valuable to the Army, the year previous to my induction, I attended a Diesel Engineering School so that I could qualify as an expert in my field. This knowledge is needed by the Army now. Further, my two years experience in Spain has provided [me] with knowledge that can be very useful in the combat services of our Army. I feel that I can help achieve successes with a minimum of cost in life in blood. All I want out of the Army is the chance to serve like any ordinary American soldier to be able to go overseas to participate in the battles which will bring the downfall of countries enemies. Any source of action which you may decide upon has my full agreement. You may use my name and the facts in the case in any way you see fit.

Fraternally Yours

Pvt. Alvin Warren

ⁱ Bridges, allegedly a Communist, was head of the San Francisco waterfront workers' union.