

Military Service

By Jack R. Gannon

Deaf Heritage Excerpt

Joining Up

On that fateful day, December 7, 1941, some 5,000 miles east of Hawaii at Gallaudet College, stunned deaf students gathered around a radio-as did millions of other Americans-to learn through an interpreter's hands that our country was at war.

As thousands of Americans marched off to army recruitment offices deaf people wondered glumly what they could do to aid the country's war effort. A number of them even attempted to enlist, four of them from Gallaudet. One of them was Eric Malzkuhn, who was classified 1-A by his hometown doctor. Malzkuhn had been deafened at the age of ten and when he returned home for his registration, which was required of every 18-year-old American male during the war, his doctor was unaware that Malzkuhn had become deaf. Malzkuhn assumed his doctor knew of his deafness and, being a good lipreader, the physical went off without a hitch. When he received his papers later, a surprised 1-A deaf Malzkuhn headed for the local induction center at nearby Fort Mead, Maryland as instructed, with visions of glory in the offing. At the induction center the waiting lines were so long that many of the men were put on paper-picking detail to keep them occupied. Malzkuhn was one. While he was leaning on a pole to rest, a sergeant came up behind him and started giving orders, which, of course, Malzkuhn ignored. Finally, the sergeant tapped Malzkuhn on the shoulder and demanded, "What's the matter with you-you deaf or something?" A startled Malzkuhn turned around and nodded sheepishly, "Yes."

Of the four Gallaudet students receiving call-up papers, two were drafted. Archie Stack spent the war as an intelligence clerk in the United States and Wayne Schlieff was with the Mortar Division stationed at Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky.