

## **Sidney Schochet**

Sidney Schochet was a 24 year old salesman for a company that sold industrial cleaners and disinfectant in December 1941. He was outside Elizabeth City, North Carolina, heading to a sales call, when he heard news of the Pearl Harbor attack. Pearl Harbor was not the first time he had been exposed to the war. As a member of the Jewish community in Asheville he had friends who had brought over family from Europe to escape the Nazis. Fortunately his entire family had emigrated years before.

Schochet remembers periodically checking the draft notices posted in the front window of a downtown department store to see if his draft number had been called. By the summer of 1942 it had been called and he was ordered to report to a reception center in Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. It so happened that he was ordered to report on a Jewish holiday. He called an officer at Ft. Bragg who informed him to stay in Asheville another week then report with the next group of draftees.

The next week Schochet duly reported to the square in front of the courthouse in Asheville and boarded a bus for Ft. Bragg. At the reception center he was being issued a uniform when he found that the quartermaster, who handled supplies for the troops, did not have boots big enough for his feet. The sergeant in charge of the quartermaster unit said he could stay and help him out while his special boots were ordered. Schochet had worked in his family clothing store before the war and was able to give good assistance to the sergeant. He worked for weeks in the quartermaster office and got to be good friends with the sergeant. Finally the sergeant admitted to Schochet that his boots had been in for a long time but he hadn't given them to him. Schochet had done such a good job that the sergeant hadn't wanted him to go. Unfortunately for the sergeant the major commanding the quartermaster unit had discovered the boots were in and was moving Schochet out. He very decently gave Schochet a choice of going to Ft. Lewis, Washington for infantry training or Ft. Lee, Virginia for quartermaster training. Infantry training didn't sound appealing at all to Schochet so he chose Ft. Lee.

By December 1942 Schochet was at Ft. Lee, outside of Richmond. He had first gone to officer's school because of his high marks in recruit training and reported to quartermaster school as a brand new second lieutenant. While at Ft. Lee he and the other officers would go into Richmond on the weekends. There they would go out to eat, see movies or visit the local USO club. Schochet also spent a great deal of time at the Jewish community center. He was there one night by himself when he saw a girl dancing by herself. He decided to ask her to dance and they hit it off. The next night he had dinner with her family and they started a correspondence.

At the time the Army had an embarrassing surplus of lower ranking officers, "thousands of second lieutenant's" as Schochet said. They weren't sure how to make use of all of them and consequently sent many off to training just to give them something to do. Consequently, when Schochet was done with quartermaster school in March 1943 he found himself transferred to Ft. Knox, Kentucky to learn how to set up and run a mess hall! While there he continued to write to the girl he had met in Richmond. When he completed his training in Kentucky he happily returned to Ft. Lee to see her. In late 1943, he was again sent away to train, this time to Columbus, Ohio at the Army supply depot. He was going to be there for New Year's Eve and asked the girl to come up and visit him for the New Year. It so happened that she had an aunt in

Ohio that she could stay with so she agreed to visit him. He was so enamored with her that he went out and bought an engagement ring New Year's Day 1944! They were married shortly after in February 1944.

He had originally gone to Columbus to train and assumed he would only be there for sixty days. One thing led to another and he ended up being stationed at the depot permanently. His new wife moved up to Columbus and they found an apartment in a brand new complex across the street from the depot.

The depot was a large complex with multiple warehouses that served as a transshipment point for supplies going to troops fighting on all battlefronts. Schochet was in charge of one of the warehouses in the depot. They had an early version of a computer built by IBM to track the massive amount of supplies that moved in and out of the depot. Many of the men didn't care for the work but Schochet enjoyed it. He felt he was contributing to the war effort, especially when an increase in supplies going to some particular location would indicate a big operation was getting ready to commence there. Schochet spent the remainder of the war in Columbus with small side trips to Utah and Nevada for additional training. He was finally discharged in March, 1946.

After the war Schochet and his new wife returned to Asheville. His old company had put his car in storage and told him that he could have it and his job when he returned from the war. By that time Schochet had rethought his career plans and decided he preferred to set up his own business. He opened a shoe store in downtown Asheville called the Bootery and ran it for many years. He and his wife were also very active with the local Jewish community. In fact, Schochet had considered becoming a rabbi for a time while in college. After the war he was offered a job with Hillel, the Jewish campus life organization, but this would have involved moving to Minnesota. Instead they both became active members at the Jewish Community Center and at one point led a movement to keep it from being closed down. Schochet's wife was also very active in Hadassah, the women's Zionist organization. She also worked as his partner in their business and in raising the children. Schochet says "God was good to me when I met her."