

**This interview is being conducted on Wednesday, September 20, 2017 at the home of Leon D. Mowrer. My name is Fran Prokop and I am speaking with Mr. Mowrer, who served in the United States Army and is a veteran of World War II. Leon Mowrer learned of the Veterans History Project through a mutual friend, and has kindly consented to participate in the National Archives Veterans History Project. His daughter Kathy Lutz is also present today. Here is his story:**

**Leon, When and where were you born?**

December 9, 1923 and I was born in Joliet, Illinois

**What were your parents' occupations at the time?**

My Dad was an automobile mechanic and my mother was a homemaker.

**Did you have brothers and sisters?**

I have step brothers and sisters.

**Did any of them ever serve in the military?**

Yes, but not in World War II.

**Well, that doesn't matter. Who served?**

One of my brothers.

**Where was he at?**

I really don't know. I really don't know. He was in the Marines is all I know.

**What did you do before entering the service?**

I was a machinist apprentice.

**How old were you when you entered the service?**

Let's see, I just turned 19 in December.

**When did you enter the service?**

March of 1943.

**How long were you in?**

Two years, 11 months and 4 days.

**So almost three years. You have your DD 214.**

Yeah, it's not a very good copy.

**Did you graduate high school?**

No. I was little over 3 and a half years.

**So almost – How did you enter service – drafted or enlist?**

Well, I was drafted, but I volunteered too – because my buddies were going and I wanted to go with them.

**Did you just pick the Army, since you went in voluntarily?**

No, I didn't pick the Army. When we went up to fort Sheridan and we were in line, all they were doing was saying Army, Navy, Army, Navy – well, I was hoping I didn't go to the Navy because I didn't want to unbutton 13 buttons to take a pee.

**Ha, ha, okay – so you wanted the Army – all right. How did you get to Fort Sheridan, by train, by bus.**

By train, by train.

**Did you have to go to downtown Chicago or did you enlist in Joliet?**

I enlisted in Joliet.

**Did you take the train from Joliet to Fort Sheridan?**

Yeah, yeah.

**Was Fort Sheridan your boot camp?**

No, that was just my enlistment camp -- I went to Fort Lewis, Washington after that. I think I spent 3 or 4 days, maybe a little more at Fort Sheridan.

**Oh, so that was just a transfer point?**

Yeah, yeah – well, we had aptitude tests there – what we were supposed to be doing in the Army.

**So how did you get to Fort Lewis, Washington, by train also?**

That was by train.

**You had boot camp at Fort Lewis.**

Yeah.

**Could you tell me about boot camp, I mean how was it – how long were you there?**

It wasn't very nice when we got there in March; they had bad weather in March and when we got there the barracks weren't completed so we had to live in tents.

**Oh, and how was that?**

Oh, man, I'll tell you – terrible; terrible.

**Well, did they complete the barracks while you were there?**

They completed the barracks about after a month we were there; that was a new section of Fort Lewis.

**And that was 1943?**

1943, March.

**Anyway, tell me about basic training. What time did you get up, what did you have to do – what did they make you do?**

Well, the normal things – doing different things and stuff, well, when I went there I was assigned to the 65<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion – and we practiced climbing poles and stuff for phone lines and stuff, and wireless applications – I don't know what they called them.

**So you practiced that.**

Supposed to be -- We learned how to lay field wire and stuff like that too.

**Was that considered special training?**

Yes.

**How long did you do that – weeks, months?**

Well, it's kinda hard for me to remember –

**Well, couple of months, more than that?**

Well, it was a couple of months but we spent three months on maneuvers in Oregon. And I was still with the Signal Corps then.

**So that was a part of your basic training – maneuvers.**

Yeah, it was on maneuvers, you know.

**Was it rough?**

Well, it was a little bit hot in the daytime and cold at nighttime.

**What did you have to do on maneuvers? Did you hide in the forest – what did you do?**

Well, we stayed out in the desert – yeah, we stayed out in the desert.

**Is that like – you have to depend on yourself – sometimes they throw you out there and you have to get your way through this field or whatever.**

No, we lived with C-rations and stuff like that, and we actually – what we did out in the desert was – we built a telephone line from Bend, Oregon – to some little ranch – it wasn't a very big town; but we built that pole line for Bend, Oregon out there – and we were out there for three months. Then we had marches and stuff out in the – in the volcano out there – what the heck do they call it – Crater Lake – we did some bivouacking at Crater Lake.

**And how about gun range – did you practice that?**

Oh, yeah, we had rifle practice; that was in basic, before we went on maneuvers.

**How did you adapt to military life – how did you get along with the barracks and the tents –**

Well, I got along pretty good. I was in trouble quite a few times though.

**How so?**

I got put on K.P. and stuff like that, yeah.

**I'm sure you weren't the only one.**

Geez, I'll tell you, we had a lot of fun sometimes too.

**So did you meet fellas out there – did you go in with your friends?**

I went in with people from Joliet but they were all like from Wisconsin and Indiana.

**So you had Midwestern guys with you.**

Yeah, yeah, from around this area – these three states.

**So you adapted okay – you didn't have any problems.**

No, it was hard at first, being away from home, naturally.

**Was that your first time away from home.**

Yeah; wait a minute, I was in Wisconsin at a YMCA Camp. I forgot about that. That's the only time I was ever out of the State.

**After you finished maneuvers and bivouac, what did you do?**

We went back to Fort Lewis for awhile.

**And then what?**

Then we were transferred to Fort Bowie, in Texas.

**What was your job there – what did you do there?**

More training and stuff like that.

**Did you put up more telephone poles?**

No, we didn't do nothing like that down there?

**What did you do there – not much?**

Different things to do like cleaning – that was almost the end of my time with the 65<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion.

**How long were at Fort Bowie?**

Not a heck of a long time – we were told we had to go out and fix the area; go out and get some gravel and a truck and spread it all around our area.

**Really?**

Yeah. So we got the truck, went out to the gravel pit to get the gravel, and we were there doing it by shovel, the hard way. You know, it's really hot in Texas too. So then, another truck pulls up with German POWs and they have a – not a fork lift – but one of them scoops that scoops it up – and we're standing there watching them scoop it up, and we're over there sweating our butts off, so that kind of got us a little bit stirred up. So we were back in camp for awhile but then a directive came down from Army Headquarters that they were looking for recruits for the Infantry – and we were still peed off about being, you know, and nine of us volunteered for the Infantry. They couldn't stop us from volunteering at that time because they were so short of infantry troops at the time, so we volunteered. What a mistake that was!! We went from the frying pan into the fire, because we went from Camp Bowie to Camp Van Doren in Mississippi – what a hellhole that was; right near the swamps and that's where we redone our basic training actually.

**So you went through basic training all over again?**

You might as well say so –

**A different kind of basic training.**

Well, a lot of it was usually training like maybe – like jungle warfare, or something like that, because we were in the swamps most of the time.

**Yeah, this was Mississippi.**

The barracks were up on stilts, tarpaper shacks –

**Too late, though – once you volunteered you were stuck there.**

Yeah, well, you know, at that time too we were getting volunteers – or a lot were just let go from different units – like Air Force units, and the horse cavalry units that came in with us too. We were a big mix of medics, all kind of medics came in there –

**So it was a mixture of everything. How long did you go through this training again in Mississippi?**

Well, until we left for overseas.

**But how long a time was that, one month, two months?**

More than that – I can't remember how long it was.

**After that training you got orders to go overseas?**

Yeah, yeah.

**How did you get overseas, by ship?**

Yeah, that's the only way we could go.

**Well, I don't know, maybe they flew you there.**

We didn't have many airplanes at that time to fly anybody over.

**So what kind of ship were you on, a troop ship?**

No. We went over on a luxury liner.

**Really?**

An Italian luxury liner – the Saturnia.

**They also had the Queen Mary – they converted those liners into troop ships.**

They converted it – we made the last trip with it and then they turned it into a hospital ship; it was a real luxury liner too.

**So how was your trip over – rough seas or anything.**

No, on our ship it was pretty nice.

**Did they cram you into there – how did you sleep?**

How could you sleep when they got you piled one on top of the other –

**Did they have hammocks?**

And some guy on the top gets seasick – oh, Jesus.

**So they had hammocks?**

No, no, they were bunks about five high – at least five high.

**And how long was the crossing?**

It took us almost, let's see, 14 days or 10 days – you know, this ship, we could have made it over by ourselves because it was a fast ship. But they decided to send us over in a convoy that's why it took us so long.

**So you went with other ships—**

Ten to 14 days.

**Probably safer that way maybe?**

No, it wasn't safer, no. In a convoy you had – you coulda got shot up by a submarine or something like that. This ship was so fast, like the Queen Elizabeth; it was fast enough to outrun the submarines, but at that time we had no ideas of submarines or something; we were just on the ship and that was it.

**So where did you land when you got off the ship – where did you go?**

Port of Marseilles, France. It was just taken. Matter of fact all the French ships were scuttles in the harbor there.

**Oh, really?**

And we had to wait; we had to wait till the tide come in so our ship could get in. Yeah, I landed on my birthday.

**Happy Birthday in France. So what happened after you landed? Where did you go and what did you do?**

You didn't ask me where we left from. We went to Camp Shanks, New York.

**What was special about Camp Shanks?**

It was a place where we got processed to go overseas.

**And that's where you picked up the Italian luxury liner, at Camp Shanks?**

Well, we didn't know where we were going to be assigned to, all the big shots took care of that.

**So you landed in Marseilles so where did they send your unit – what was the name of your infantry or battalion?**

Oh, the 63<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division. We didn't all land together though. My regiment was on that ship, the 254<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment.

**Where did your Regiment end up going?**

We went up someplace that was colder and damper than a son of a gun outside of Marseilles; there was nothing but rocks and stuff around there and coals; we had to pitch our pup tents. Every night some nut, what did we call him – oh, man, he was just some old German pilot that they would send out; he wasn't very good and he'd come out over the area and get everybody scared and stuff; didn't drop no bombs or nothing –

**Just sort of cruised over. I've heard that before.**

Yeah, it was just like that one in MASH – BED CHECK CHARLEY – that's who it was.

**He would just fly over –**

Yeah, that's all he would do. He wouldn't drop no grenades or nothing.

**So, did you have to put your tent up every night?**

No, the tent stayed up until we left.

**So hot long were you at this place?**

We weren't there too long. They shipped us out. I forget where the heck it was – to tell you the truth – on those 40 and 8s – we went through a lot of towns and stuff –

**Did you ride through the town or did you have to march?**

No, no, we were still on the trains.

**So you rode through different towns.**

Different towns to get up to the combat area.

**And where was the combat area exactly? Where was the front at?**

We started, I think at Sagermeins, France or something like that, then actually, being green horns, we didn't have none of our equipment; no tanks, no artillery, nothing heavy with us, so what they done with us, they sent us to the Third Infantry Division. They split this whole division up and sent each regiment to a different infantry division. We were sent to the Third Infantry Division; the Third Infantry Division was attached to the First French Army. I'll tell you – oh, geez, that's where I learned to hate the French.

**Oh, really! Why? That's what's interesting – tell me why. What happened there?**

We got pinned down by the French coming up to help them and every darn thing, and, I don't know, a couple time they done that – they couldn't recognize us or something or didn't have no recognition signals –

**Really –**

But they had us pinned down – I'll tell you –

**So this is actually where you spent time in the war – this was the front lines?**

Yeah, it was pretty dang close to it.

**What was the name of this area? What part of France was it?**

Yeah, we did have something to do when we first go up in the area we were camped in old cavalry barracks of Germans – that was before we were sent up at the Third Infantry Division.

**So you took over the Germans' barracks.**

Yeah, and they were just taken too – they were just captured when we got there.

**What general area of France was this?**

Camp D' Oeverhoffen (phonetic).

**So what did you do, day in and day out over there? What happened there?**

You know it's hard for me to remember a lot of this stuff.

**Did you witness a lot of destruction of homes or did you ever see casualties?**

No, we didn't have no casualties.

**I don't mean just American; I mean even French. Did you see French or German casualties?**



No, no, no, not yet. But we got with the Third Infantry and they gave us a lot of hard work to do –

**Like What? What was that hard work?**

Well, first we were lined up to actually go into combat and the first combat we really experienced casualties; we were going to go on an early morning attack, and the snow was pretty heavy on the ground, and we got caught in a minefield. That was supposed to be going to capture Hill 216, and we had casualties right off the bat –

**American casualties?**

Yeah, yeah, in the minefield, yeah. The gun in front of me – friend of mine in front of me, it was still kinda dusk, kinda dark yet, all I heard was a boom and I seen a helmet fly up in the air –

**Oh, wow!**

And I said oh, geez, what's going on and I heard, it was the company commander holler out, "Watch it; don't go near anybody that fell down because you'll probably step on another mine." So we just had to left them lay there – and this was cold weather too – real cold weather yet – yeah,

**How did you get out of that minefield?**

Very carefully. See, these mines weren't detected because they called them "shoe mines" – they weren't meant to kill, they were just meant to maim a person.

**Really – shoe mines.**

But the reason the guys got hit with the mines – they couldn't get the medics in there right away, and being so dang cold, it helped the blood congeal fast because it was around 16, 17 below zero.

**Really.**

And these shoe mines are just a little wooden box with a half a pound of TNT in them. But we got through there; we got through the woods that were supposed to be taken before we were supposed to go on the attack on Hill 216. We had casualties there too.

**How did you do that – tell me about Hill 216. How many men –**

Well, the one battalion, I think it might have been the First Battalion, went on first and they had quite a few casualties. Our battalion actually was held in reserve, and then we were called up and Hill 216 was taken and it was lost again. So the Third infantry Division, it think it was the 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment, they went up there and they got kicked off.

They got kicked off twice. That's where Audie Murphy – I missed part of that – they took it then and they lost it again and they'd send us back up in there, and we retook it; we held it; we kept it.

**So it had to be taken three times, back and forth.**

Yeah, just about three times.

**And you met Audie Murphy personally?**

Yes, I met him – I skipped something in there. This one time we were just coming up there to get into combat, we were staying at a big chateau and there's a great big barn there, and the chateau – the only way we had lights is we had Coke bottles and they put wicks in them and light 'em that way. It was too damn smoky for me, so I decided to go out in the barn and sleep with the sheep.

**Okay.**

So I was out in the barn and some guy came in there, all dressed in a new uniform and everything else, and he says, "Is it all right to go in the chateau?" I said, "Well, if you like smoke and stuff, you go on in there." So he decided to stay out there with me and sleep with the sheep. We got talking and here it was Audie Murphy; he was just coming back from being wounded again.

**Wow!**

So that's the only time I met him.

**So he had been wounded and was just coming back now –**

Just coming back – yeah.

**He was a pretty brave guy.**

I'm going back and forth here –

**That's okay; that's okay, just generally. Nobody expects anybody to know exactly what happened. How long did you stay in France? Did you spend the entire rest of the war there?**

Well, actually we were in the Colmar Pocket – had a bunch of Germans, 17<sup>th</sup> SS Division; that was Herman Goerring's division.

**Did you have to meet up with them or capture them or what happened?**

Yeah, we had one helluva time.

**Well, why don't you describe it for me.**

Well, a lot of people don't know this, very many people don't know, but this was called the Second Battle of the Bulge. Eisenhower was thinking of transferring us from where we were and help him up at the Battle of the Bulge. But this French General, he fought it vigorously because if they would have sent us up to the Bulge, that would have really hurt the French First Army and do a lot of damage to them. They'd probably have more trouble with the Germans than they ever thought of. So we stayed there in the Colmar Pocket, and one town that we took, we had a lot of casualties and stuff – a town named Jepsheim (phonetic) – it's the border because people – it was shoved back and forth between the French and the Germans over all these years, so they spoke both German and French, the people did. I got a book down there about the people – a younger person wrote a book on the Battle of Jepsheim. So we got through Jepsheim – it took a couple of days to get through there, but I know it was so dang cold – I was in, like a great big shed and it was all burning, and I just stood in there and the smoke was coming off my pants because my pants were frozen, you know, from being down and up and stuff.

**Wow.**

And I didn't give a damn if the building fell down on me. And we got through that, but there was a sister city. We thought we had Jepsheim captured but – we had the one but we had to get the other one too, so that took a lot of time.

**What was the name of that city, do you remember?**

That was Jepsheim – it was still Jepsheim – just a continuation of the city.

**What was the highest rank you ever achieved?**

The only rank that I wanted was P F C. That was the best because PFC lasts and the privates last longer than anybody else.

**Oh, really?**

Oh, yeah; sergeants – we went through Sergeants pretty fast; Lieutenants pretty fast.

**You mean they were –**

Well, they were exposed more than we were.

**Okay, so they were in more danger really.**

Yeah, because if we were in a hole or something, a foxhole and they were strung out, the Sergeant had to go by and tell each one what orders we had and stuff like that.

**So how did you dig foxholes when the ground was frozen?**

Well, sometimes you'd dig down so far and maybe put a grenade in there and see if we could blow more of a hole.

**Oh, my gosh! I never heard that, but it makes sense – why would they dig more?**

**Did it work?**

No, not too good.

**So you had to dig in the frozen ground.**

Well, one time we dug in on a river; we didn't know it. We were getting stuff out; it was dark, and we were digging and digging till we got it down about so far so we could lay in it and wondering why the heck the dang water was seeping through.

**So how much time did you spend there – once you got to France did you spend all your time there?**

No, no, no, no – went to Germany.

**Where in Germany?**

Oh, boy, you got me there again.

**Well, you were fighting in Germany once you finished Jepsheim – where did you go after Jepsheim?**

Well, after the Colmar Pocket was done, then all of our equipment came – our tanks and everything so the Division went back together –

**So it was complete.**

That completed our Division.

**And where did they go with all this stuff?**

I'm trying to think; I know shortly after that we were about ready to attack the Siegfried Line – there's a line in between there, I can't remember.

**That Siegfried Line was in Germany. One other veteran had a map of the entire area and I saw that Siegfried Line.**

I've got a lot of stuff down in books like from our Division where everything goes all the way through to the end. Well, we did capture Mannheim and a couple of – Heidelberg and that walled city, Rothenberg, we captured that.

**So you had battles at each one or were you able to walk into these cities?**

Well, Rothenberg and Heidelberg were not touched.

**They were not bombed.**

No, no, no damage. I guess there were agreements made between the German forces and the American forces; those were historic places.

**Yes, they were. How about Mannheim, did you battle for Mannheim?**

Yeah, Mannheim was pretty bad; pretty bad bombed up. At that time – see, I was – you know, I think what helped me that I'm here today – whenever they needed a wire team, you know, to lay the wire between the companies, I was pulled back. I was pulled back in Mannheim to help string wire and stuff right there. That's when they were short of men. As soon as they filled their squads and stuff up, then I went back up to the front..

**Oh, okay – right.**

So that gave me a little bit of leeway in stuff like that.

**Right. So your knowledge in knowing how to string up the lines really helped you.**

See, they knew I had a background of being in the Signal Corps.

**Okay, we went to Heidelberg and Rothenberg – any other cities that you remember after Rothenberg –**

That weren't hurt?

**Well, no, that you went through after that.**

Oh, geez, I can't remember the names of the towns. The town that we had to capture to get to the Siegfried Line was Ensheim, Germany.

**Was there a battle for that town?**

Yeah, so, we laid out – and we laid out getting ready to go in the attack on Siegfried Line; it was early in the morning.

**When you would spend the night would you put your tent up again or sleep in a foxhole?**

Oh, no, no, no, you slept where you were.

**Where you fell – by trees or**

Yeah, dig a hole or something like that. Or sometimes we'd capture a town we'd go to houses and stuff like that – throw all the furniture out so we could make –

**So you're getting up to the Siegfried Line – how did that go?**

That was pretty rough; casualties on both sides.

**Really?**

Yeah.

**How did you feel about that – witnessing casualties related to combat? Both your friends and Germans.**

My friends – my best friend, when I seen him when I come back – at that time they pulled me back awhile too. But then when I come back up, I seen bodies laying at this – with no arms and no legs – just completely blown apart (weeping) – a shell landed right in his foxhole

**Oh, wow! – Hard to go through it, being a young man, young kid, just there –**  
Dead bodies – just stacked up like cord wood and be frozen.

They had some vehicle called “the weasel” that was just like a big golf cart – It took about 3 or 4 days before – maybe it took 4 days for those Germans – those Germans had communication trenches like they used in World War I, so the Germans would stay out there until things got too hot, then they’d shoot back into their bunkers. And those bunkers were real constructed, sometimes as high as maybe 6, 7 rooms in them, ‘cuz they could live in the darn thing.

**They were really entrenched in these bunkers; they were there; really solid.**

Oh, yeah, and all these bunkers had crossfire – the ones that we captured, they’re in the woods, in the woods, and they could fire – they had to have .88 guns in there; that was one of the most fearful guns that we, you know, was scared of, was an .88. that was one of the best weapons the Germans had – an .88. They’d shoot that thing like a rifle at one man, but yeah. The way we captured the bunkers – couple times we’d close their apertures up so they couldn’t shoot at us, you know. So couple of guys would get up there and get in back of the bunker and drop grenades down in their ventilating system. But that wasn’t a very good idea because they had the ventilating system fixed up where the grenade would roll out and it would injure those guys -- (turn tape) Getting what they called the Bangalore torpedo. And they took it up there; we’d close ‘em up again and the guys come up – it’s a Bangalore torpedo – it’s a tube like an old rain gutter, filled with TNT – and put one section on another, make it as long as you want. So they got up there and put that Bangalore torpedo down there and blew their ventilating system out, and it wasn’t long after that they’d come out and they’d give up.

**Oh, pretty clever, whoever thought of it.**

It was a private; they still never found out the name of the guy.

**Really – you should have got medals; that’s somebody who should have got medals.**

Didn’t get nothin’.

**Maybe he didn’t survive.**

But then after the Siegfried Line things left us static, you know; you’d get in a jeep or something like that; you’d chase Germans and stuff; come up to a town or something like that; if we got any resistance we called back for air or artillery and blow the heck out of them ‘cuz we didn’t want to have too many more casualties after that.

**Yeah, right.**

But there was a lot of in between stuff – I can’t think of it. I might think of it after, you know –

**Well, if there’s anything you want to add, just let me know; we can put it in.**

That was rough, but we went back there, a bunch of us in 1985 and 1987, went all through our battle areas – what a surprise!

**Wow – Did you go with any of the men that you served with?**

Oh, yeah.

**They went with you?**

Yes. From our Regiment – the first time I think we had about 50 of us.

**Oh, wow!**

With our wives too. The next time, in ’87, I think we had more; I think we had three bus loads.

**That would be interesting.**

Well, we had a nice guide. She took us through every damn area that we –every town – because we took over 11 cities – not cities, but villages and towns. Then we come to Ensheim, and this girl is kind of – mind scrambled where we were supposed to go up to see the bunkers in the Siegfried Line. I said are you having trouble honey? She said, Yes, I can’t recollect where it was.’ And I said, “The airport’s right there; go to the left side of the airport, because this pathway that they’d come back and forth up with the weasels was still there, going down in the valley. See the bunkers were up on an elevation, so I said, follow me. Some of the guys didn’t really recognize it but I recognized it right off. I took ‘em right back down there, right through the first bunker that we had taken.

**Wow, so it looked the same to you, more or less.**

A lot more vegetation, and right up there, the bomb craters and everything was still there.

**Really – yeah, they don't change much in Europe.**

The bomb craters and even those trenches they never tried to fill up. They tried to blow the bunkers up – all they done was put cracks in them – that's how strong they were built. And up there, there's a little cemetery with Germans and Americans buried together.

**Wow!**

It's still there. Some of them decided to take people out. I still think there's a lot, maybe about 30 casualties up in there yet – in this nice little cemetery.

**And those bunkers are still there too.**

Oh, yeah. Some of those bunkers are pretty big.

**So where were you on D Day – June 6, 1944 – where were you?**

I was still in the States.

**How about when the war ended -- Where were you in August 1945 ?**

Hmm. Let's see, I got that letter –

**Well, you were in France somewhere; you didn't come home, you were still there in France.**

Oh, I was in Germany.

**Germany, okay.**

We got the Army occupation – I'm trying to think the name of the darn town – we crossed the Danube River, and shortly after that the war was over.

**And how did that go? How did the guys celebrate with the war ending?**

Well, if we could find schnapps or anything like – there was one thing too about what we captured one time – and we got really took over the coals by the upper echelons for not letting them – we a champagne factory; everybody took how much they wanted and also in Bitche, France, there was a beautiful place there that made glass – all kinds of expensive glass and stuff; and we destroyed most of that. See, whatever would be good for the rear echelon, we'd always try to destroy it; if we couldn't have, they couldn't have it neither.

**You can't carry glass around.**



No, we got a lot of things we shouldn't have done; we weren't angels, that's for damn sure.

**While the war was going on, how did you stay in touch with family and friends – letters?**

That's all.

**And how long do you think it would take a letter to reach you from home – couple of weeks –**

Well. Yeah,

**Would they find you in the field?**

I didn't get much because I didn't write much. I was always getting heck – well, I wasn't married then but my mother was always hollering I wasn't writing – we didn't have no time.

**Okay, you didn't have time for anything else either, as far as – you were in the thick of battle all those months, so you didn't have any off-duty pursuits – or recreation –**

Oh, after the war was over?

**Well, no, I'm talking about during the war.**

Oh, no; every so often they'd take a guy out of the line and they'd send him either to London or to Paris.

**Oh, for R and R?**

Yeah, so I got pulled out and I wanted to go to Paris. I'd never want to go there again. I was back there; took my wife back there and she got a load of it too and she didn't like it neither. The people, they don't treat you too nice.

**Yeah, I heard that. Okay, the war is over now and it's 1946, what did you do there after 1945 – you still had a mop-up operation or what?**

Oh, yeah, little bit here and there. Then we'd get into towns and take 'em over, you know, and get settled down for awhile. Then they start, what would you call it, sending guys home – they broke the Division up and the guys with the higher points got to go home first.

**That's right; you had a point system.**

Then, I would have gone home earlier too but, they didn't award me the Purple Heart, see, because the decorations stopped; you got five points for each decoration. Well, they started out with the 80-pointers, I think it was, and all I had was 58 points, I think.

**Were you injured during the war?**

Well, yeah, that's what I'm saying, I was turned down, even when I come home. I tried to get the Purple Heart and they turned me down because most of my records were burned up down in St. Louis when they had the fire.

**Where were you injured?**

Here (indicating).

**On your nose?**

We were getting ready to cross the Rhine River – there was only about four of us left in our squad, and we just got a couple of new recruits to fill in – this is still during the war period. I was standing in my hole with my head sticking up and I had my helmet right in front of me. Well, the Germans – it was just sporadic shooting and stuff like that, and all of a sudden Bang! – stuff come down – and through my helmet, my nose and broke my nose – couldn't stop the bleeding or anything like that.

**Wow!**

The company medic come up he couldn't stop it; they sent me back to Battalion, and they couldn't stop it. So I got sent to a station hospital and they had to cauterize it. But I was at the station hospital for about seven days; and none of that stuff was in my records.

**Wow – that should be, really.**

The nose was broke; they didn't do nothing with that; didn't put no bandages or nothing on it; they just let it heal. You could see it's crooked – and even when I went down to Nice, France, a guy took – he sketched people, you know. He sketched a picture of my wife and sketched a picture of me – and the nose is crooked in there.

**Medals received – the Combat Infantryman's Badge –**

You had to be in combat for 30 days to earn that badge. And there's a saying, I don't know if it's on there, it says, "The Man who wears the Blue Badge of Courage will surely go to heaven because he's already been to hell."

**That's true. You were finishing up about your nose; they had to cauterize the nose and you were hospitalized for seven days. Was it a field hospital or a regular hospital?**

It was a station hospital; that's a field hospital. They had it when I was in a hospital after the war was over.

**So, I wonder – you were injured – I wonder why you didn't get a Purple Heart?**

They turned me down.

**Wow! Surprising! Have you ever tried to do anything after you got out?**

Oh, yeah, yeah, I had a service officer in Joliet working with me trying to get it. I still got the stuff here.

**I see here on your, what is this, BARP, it says here – The Bronze Star medal is based on the award of the Combat Infantryman's Badge.**

That's the one here – the CIB they call it. And then I got one for Meritorious Service. See, I'm missing a lot of stuff in here.

**Well, you can't say everything in here; you've got a limited amount of time too.**

When I got that one for Meritorious Achievement, almost three days we didn't have no sleep, I got – that's when I got pulled back again to the wire team.

**Well, that wire team was important for you – it saved you a lot.**

We had to go out – go out there and fix that stuff anytime of day or night, with machine guns –

**It's very important to keep communications open.**

Yeah, we got machine gunned; we were artillery – had everything thrown at us, but for almost three days we didn't get no sleep.

**And where was that? Do you remember?**

Oh, geez –

**In Germany or in France?**

Oh, yeah, yeah.

**All right, if it comes to you later, just let your daughter know.**

**Okay, the war was over; you had mop-up operations and you went through other towns. When you finally got your points, how did you return home, by ship again?**

Yeah, William and Mary.

**Was that also a liner?**

No, that was a victory ship. We didn't see – we didn't breathe no fresh air all the way home; the seas were pretty high and bad. Man, when we come into the harbor in New York the ship was just all covered with ice. People say how can salt water freeze? It freezes, oh, yeah.

**A victory ship – so how did people seem? Were you sick on board during the crossing?**

No, I didn't have no trouble; lot of guys did.

**How was your readjustment to civilian life?**

Real fast.

**What did you do – get your old job back?**

Well, I took 90 days off. I had to report back in 90 days or I wouldn't get my job back. Not like these kids now; they go out and they don't get their jobs back.

**Right. Where did you work?**

I went back to the E J & E Railroad..

**Elgin, Joliet and what else.**

Elgin, Joliet and Eastern Railroad.

**Is that where you worked when you entered the service?**

Yeah, I just worked a little bit before I went in. I got out of high school. I didn't graduate like I told you. The real reason I didn't finish high school, because it wasn't -- it didn't have no trade or anything. I went to Catholic High School and all they had was an academic or a business course, which I wasn't interested in. So I wanted to be a machinist. So, I had the best job after the war was over –an occupation – they split us up all the time. We'd have certain groups, they'd have high points and go home. Then they'd send us to different places and so I wound up in Frankfurt, Germany, and boy, they questioned me about what I could do and stuff like that and they asked me if I ever operated a switchboard, and I said no. And they said well, with your little bit of experience in the Signal Corps, you should be able to do something about it. I said okay, what do you want. They said we got a couple of guys, they're operating a German switchboard, and they're real easy to learn. So, they took me in there for two nights, for 12 hours and taught me how to work that German switchboard. Boy, that was nice. I'd

work one shift, that would be one day, about 12 hours; then I'd be off three days, and I could go around the parts of Frankfurt that weren't bombed out, you know.

**Well, this was after the war ended?**

Oh, yeah, after the war. I met my cousin over there in the USO and I had some friends out on an air base out there and went out there and they took me through all the airplanes and stuff. I wanted to fly when I first went in, but I passed every test but the eye test; I was colorblind; they wouldn't let me.

**Okay, so you went back to the railroad job. Did you stay there for a long time?**

Forty-two years.

**Really – so you retired from there.**

Yeah.

**And what was your job on the railroad?**

I was a machinist.

**You were not an engineer – you didn't run the train?**

No, no, well I could run them for testing and stuff; I knew how to run them.

**Okay. Have you had contact with fellow veterans over the years?**

Oh, yeah; we used to have a Division Reunion every year in a different state.

**And you attended those?**

Yes. I didn't get to all of them, but I attended most of them. Our company commander was – he was a great guy; he lived in North Carolina. He could never come to our Division Reunion so I made a suggestion one time, why don't we go and see him. So we got in contact with him and the first reunion he made all the arrangements. The first time we got together we didn't have too many of them there; we'd have it just once a year, of our own company. After the first year and news got around, we started getting 40-50 guys from our own company, including their wives, you know.

**Well, that's nice to get together –**

I've got pictures; I've got so many pictures.

**Today do you have membership in veterans' organizations?**

I belong to VFW and American Legion.

**How do you think your wartime experience affected your life?**

Discipline – discipline, and to this day I like a little discipline.

**That's very important, yeah.**

I try to do everything I can, at my age, and stuff like that. I try to keep the house clean. I don't clean the house, I got a lady comes cleans it all the time, but I keep it pretty neat.

**Oh, yes, very nice.**

I got so much stuff, you know; downstairs I got about 15 books full of stuff – of pictures and different things that happened – from the war – lots of stuff.

**You did very well; lots of stories – what are your life lessons learned from military service?**

Well, I don't like to hurt people, because a lot of stuff we done during the war – killing people – it was hard –

**I'm sure it was hard, but it was something that had to be done –**

I still – I try to treat everybody – I don't have no enemies; I got all kinds of friends – at the YMCA and different places.

**Very good. Well, that's it, so you did your share.**

Then my buddy takes me to the World War II Reenactments in Dellwood Park in Lockport.

**Where in Lockport?**

Their park –

**When do they have them, on holidays?**

No, this year they had it the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> (of September). Just two weeks ago.

**World War II Reenactments at the Park District in Lockport? I'll look into that.**

You'd be surprised; they have real enactments, bombs and stuff like that. And they have different encampments, like the German encampment, American encampments, Russian and Japanese encampments, and they're all authentically dressed, all the weapons that they used during the war. (Further dialogue not transcribed herein).

**Is there anything else you wish to add to your story?**

The Allied Headquarters was in Frankfurt; we had a demonstration there one time. The General said that the guys left there didn't see much fighting, and we demonstrated; we did get a little action; they started sending us home a little bit faster.

**So you left from Frankfurt when you came home?**

Yeah, from Frankfurt, to Antwerp, Belgium where we caught the ship.

**Well, I think you were very thorough, we almost covered both sides of the tape.**

**Thank you very much for this interview and thank you for your service to our**

**country. If you remember something else that's pertinent, we'll include it. Thank you very much.**

I wish I could have remembered more.

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**P.S. After completion of the interview I took a photograph of the display case With medals earned; the photograph will be included herein.**

