

Willie Smith Parker born October 22, 1916 in Nash County and lived in Edgecombe County. He married Margaret Phelps, and he served in World War II, in the European Theater of action as First Scout in his Squad. Ninety Fifth Infantry, 379th Regiment.

RELEASE

EDGECOMBE COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

909 Main Street
Tarboro, N. C. 27886

Thank you for participating in the Edgecombe County Genealogical Society's Oral History Project. By signing below you give your permission to include any tapes and/or photographs made during the Oral History Project in public archives where they will be available to researchers and the public for scholarly and educational purposes including publications and exhibitions. By giving your permission, you do not give up any copyright or performance rights that you may hold.

I agree to the uses of these materials as described above.

(Signature) Willie S. Parker

(Date) July 13, 1997

(Researcher's Signature) Minnie Jo E. Gay

Date: July 13, 1997, 3:00 PM

Interviewed by Minnie-Jo and Norman Gay

Interviewee Information

Name: Willie Smith "Billy" Parker

Address:

Whitakers, NC

Telephone #

Birth Date October 22, 1916

Birth Place Nash County, Buck Etheridge Place

Genealogical Information

Father of Interviewee:

Name: Willie Walter Parker

Birth Date: April 13, 1887

Birth Place: Halifax County

Death Date: January 28, 1953

Death Place: Wake Co. Raleigh, NC

Mother of Interviewee:

Name: Lottie Smith

Birth Date: July 20, 1888

Birth Place:

Death Date: December 20, 1966

Death Place: Whitakers, NC

Wife of Interviewee:

Name: Margaret Phelps daughter of Franklin Gray Phelps
and Bessie Fennel

Notes: WSP: Three Parker brothers came over from Ireland and settled around Hilliardston. One of them never married and lived in a tobacco barn. Said he needed the fresh air and a house was too tight. The other two married. One stayed around Hilliardston and the other came to this area and may have been Thomas Parker. My Aunt, Victoria Parker, Mrs. Otis Weaver told me this. But I don't remember the names of the brothers.

MJFG: Today we are interviewing Willie Smith Parker better known as "Billy" and he was born in Nash County and grew up in Edgecombe County to a large extent. He is a veteran of World War II and we are going to be talking about the time he spent in Europe and something of his early childhood. What does the S. in your name stand for?

WSP: Smith. My mother was Lottie Smith and married Willie Walter Parker.

MJFG: Where were you when Pearl Harbor happened?

WSP: I was working at "M System" in Enfield at that time, cutting meat. Pearl Harbor was on Sunday morning. I was at home. I did not work on Sunday.

MJFG: Was that the first job you ever had?

WSP: No! Good Gracious! I was about 27 years old . 1916 from 1941 -25. I had two children, well one was born, Peter. Joyce was born later.

MJFG: How did you happen to go in service?

WSP: I was drafted! I was invited! They said you will be in .. in such and such a day and I went that day.

LNG: What year did you go in, Billie?

WSP: I think it was April 4 or 5th in 1944 and see I went overseas just as soon as I finished my basic training .

LNG: Where did you have basic training?

WSP: Fort McClellan, Alabama. I had seventeen weeks training. Eight weeks of infantry training and nine weeks of schooling. I went to "Cook and Baker" School and how to be a first class KP (Kitchen Police) was about all I learned. (MPP: He is a good cook.)

LNG: Where did you ship out from? Camp Shanks, New York?

WSP: Yeah, yeah. Camp Shanks, New York. I left there (cooking school) and went to Meade, Maryland and from Maryland to Camp Shanks.

LNG: What kind of ship did you go over on?

WSP: An **Italian luxury liner, Certania**. I landed at **Liverpool** and from there they put me on one of the PT Boats, you know and they rode me from Liverpool there to **Normandy**, dropped the front end, and you just waded right on out to the bank.

LNG: How long did it take you all to go from New York to Liverpool?

WSP: About eight days.

MJFG: Was that at the time of the Invasion?

WSP: I landed in **Normandy after "D" Day**. "D" Day was June 6th and I landed over there the last of October that year, 1944.

LNG: What division were you a member of?

WSP: Ninety-Fifth Infantry. 379th Regiment. We were part of the Third Army and we went up North to **Bastogne** and we were attached to Hodges, the Ninth Division.

LNG: You were part of Hodge's First Army and Patton's Third Army?

WSP: Yes, we worked back and forth. When we went into **Germany**, we went in with the **Third Army which was with General George Patton**. After we stayed a while and come back out we went up to **Belgium and Holland** and that's when we got in **General Courtney H. Hodges outfit, the First Army**.

LNG: Was the breakthrough the Battle of the Bulge when you transferred to Hedge's?

WSP: Yeah, in December of 1944.

LNG: Did you ever see any cargo planes come over and drop supplies?

WSP: Naw, I didn't see that but I did see the planes come over and drop bombs! They were supplies, too! (Chuckle)

LNG: We flew to Bastogne three days, Christmas Day and the day before and the day after Christmas and we dropped 1500 tons of supplies and stuff in there.

WSP: At Bastogne? I rode through **Bastogne on convoy going to Holland**. We went to Belgium and then Holland. Not a building was left standing in Bastogne! Not a one

LNG: We flew over on Christmas Day, as pretty and clear a day as you want to see. The ground was covered with snow. We could see everybody and before the bundle hit the ground the guys were running out to get them and grabbing them by the time they hit the ground.

WSP: When I went through there, the American Soldiers had taken that town nine times before they kept it. Eight times the German run them back out and the ninth time the Americans stayed in there. That is what an old Belgium told us. We spent the night near by and that old Belgium told us that story about it.

LNG: That is when **General Anthony McAuliffe** told the German Commander "Nuts, he was not going to surrender." The Germans had asked the 101st to surrender but they kept on fighting and then Patton's Third Army was brought up from the South and went in there to relieve them.

WSP: You see, I was in **Saarlotten (Sarrbrucken), Germany** when the Bulge started and they would come around behind us to **Paris** and that would cut us off where we were. So they took us and carried us up into the **Bulge** in there and dug in the third line. The first line had broke, the second line was a temporary line put up to slow them down to give us a chance to build up the third line. I was in the third line which was ten miles behind the second line, the second line stopped them!

MJG: Norman said you did some scouting? Weren't you an Advance Scout?

WSP: Naw, I was **First Scout in my Squad**. When my company was leading or my platoon was leading my company, I was the first one to go forward.

MJFG: What did you do?

WSP: My job was to make a path for the balance of them to follow and then too, I was to draw the fire so the others could find out where the target, where the firing was coming from.

MJFG: You were just supposed to let them shoot at you?

WSP: That's right, and they did it! You see, I went forward and my rifle was loaded with tracer bullets so I could show my other buddies back there where the target was. They could see where my bullets would go. You see, we took the town and then another outfit would move through us and take the country, then we would go through them and take the next town. My outfit was trained to take towns, building to building. We fought some days all day long and probably didn't gain but three houses.

MJFG: Did you ever have hand to hand combat?

WSP: NO, no. (chuckle) That is what made my captain so mad! You know, every time we would come back to rest quarters they would give you a bayonet and expect you to put it on the end of your rifle. Well, my job was to tear down doors or windows or anything to get in the house so the others could come in, you know. Anything that would hinder me from getting in, I did not need it! You know what I mean because I had been left on the street. So I would leave that bayonet where ever they gave it to me. Captain said, "Parker, what are you going to do when your ammunition gives out?" I said, "I am going to run like hell like the rest of you!" (chuckle) And I meant that thing, too.

LNG: Did any of you or the fellows in your outfit ever run into a booby-trap?

WSP: I didn't. The Chadwick man who died in Battleboro recently, Theodore Chadwick, he was in the 377th Regiment. I was in the 379th and one of his platoons in the 377th was blown up like that. Just as soon as you discovered a booby-trap you would ease back out. You were looking for it, you see, and you see some wires laying around in there you would ease back out and leave those wires alone and I did see some wires.

LNG: It got so they had to put a medal bar on the front of the jeeps with a hook on it because the Germans were stringing piano wire across the roads and it would catch the drivers right on the throat and cutting their throats so they put the bar on the bumper of the jeep to catch the wire before it got to them.

MPP: Billy lost his voice while he was over there and could not talk.

WSP: I had a real bad cold. When we went into the city of **Saarlott, Germany** in December 1, 1944. in the territory of the **Saar Valley and the Saar River** ran through there, too. When we got to the river we crossed the river on ice it was so cold and you wouldn't have nothing to lay down on at night except what you had on all day. So you know it was cold weather and I really had a cold all that time.

LNG: In December, that same year, 1944 we flew there going to make a drop in Belgium and could not find out where, we stopped at **Liege** and a guy came running out and said, "You all get the hell out of here the Germans are seven miles down the road." So we moved down to **Dreux France** and spent the night and we had taken the doors off the airplane and we slept in there and we did not bring any blankets either and it was just like sleeping in a tin can.

WSP: We did move into the cellars because it was a little warmer in a cellar than in the other part of the house. Most of them, the artillery or the Air Force, had bombed the town before we would take it and there were no windows and big holes and everything else in the buildings, so it was right drafty. We would sleep in cellars more than anywhere else.

LNG: How far into Germany did you go?

WSP: Well, you see, after they took me out of the **Saar Valley** and come back to the **Belgium Bulge** then I stayed in Belgium for a while and then went to **Holland**. Up there wasn't but one place to walk and that was on the roads, because there was water every where else. Then we left Holland we come back and got into Germany and got the Germans running back so fast to the Rhine River. That is when we pulled up to the river and stopped and just sat there and waited until the Ninth and Third Armies went over and met and then they took us up to the point and come back to the river so I was about eighty miles from **Berlin** when the war ended. I was in the **Ruhr Pocket**.

LNG: The Allies stopped and waited for the Russians to take Berlin but the Germans did not want the Russians to take it they wanted the Americans to take it. So I read.

WSP: I was glad for the Russians to have it at that time.

MJFG: Did you have anything unusual to happen to you?

WSP: No, no more than having to sleep in the bathtub of a house while the Germans were on the other side of the wall (a duplex house). The house was build right on the street and you went in on each end into apartments. The Germans were on one end and we were on the other end with a wall between.

MJG: Did you know they were there?

WSP: Oh yeah, we knew they were there and they knew we were there, too! **Christmas Day of 1944** they (our folks) brought us hot turkey dinner up there and we were in one house and Germans in the next house and all down the street and there was not a bullet fired all day. You **did not hear a gun fire all day** long and we could not figure that thing out and they fed us so good that day and then the next day everything broke loose again. Now why couldn't they behave theirselves all the time just as easy. Nobody didn't tell me not to shoot, but nobody did.

LNG: **Christmas Day 1944 we were dropping K-Rations to those boys in Bastogne.**

WSP: You see, right after then, they took us out of **Saarlott in Germany** and took us up there and built that third line. Which wasn't very far from Bastogne.

MPP: **Didn't they want you to cross Hitlers bridge and you would not do it?**

WSP: We took the **Auto Bahnen** there in Germany and got to the **bridge on the Rhine River**. The Germans had poured chemicals across the river to eat the bridge in half. I was far from here to the Railroad from the bridge (about 50-100 feet) and I was to go across the bridge with the outfit but the Colonel refused to lead us over, said he was not going to lead a suicide mission of that kind and he would not lead us.

MJFG: Did he know the acid had been poured on it?

WSP: Oh yeah, you could see it! It was red hot! You could see it from over 500 feet from the bank. The Combat Scouts, now, went on the bridge and crossed that point and the Germans could see them between the red light and that is when they opened up everything the Germans had right down that road and I was in the road on the other side but I won't in the road long, I was in the curbing. (Chuckle)

LNG: Where were you when the war ended, May 5th or 7th.

WSP: I was in the **Ruhr Pocket**, that was where those Germans, **Elite Guard**, the Germans had raised, **the SS Troops**. They would take those little ten and twelve year old boys and give them a rifle and would dig a fox hole outside of a street and put them little biddy younguns in that thing to shoot at you to slow you down, and then when you would get in a 100 yards here would come these younguns out of the ground like ants. Throwing their hands up and they had been out there shooting at you.

LNG: When did you come home? How long after the war ended?

WSP: I was supposed to go to the **Pacific**. I landed back in the States July 1, 1945. I was about the third outfit to leave Germany, **going to Japan**. We came to the States to take jungle training in Shelby, Mississippi and then we were supposed to go to some of them Islands in the Pacific. While we were taking our jungle training Sept 2nd, that is when they quite fighting. That is when they de-activated the 95th Division and everybody with over 36 points stayed here in the States and everybody with under 36 points had to continue to go. I had 59 points and they sent me to Fort **Hancock, New Jersey**, which was a Coast Guard Station but the Army took it over and made it a receiving center for where the **GIs with ten years to life sentences** could come to be re-tried again and sent out to **Fort Leavenworth and Atlanta, Georgia** and places to pull their sentences.

LNG: What kind of ship did you come back on from overseas?

WSP: I think I come back on **The West Point, A Liberty Ship**. It was about 3300 of us on the ship. It was a little small ship. The **Certanium** we went over on had **18,000 boys** on it. It was an Italian Luxury Liner that happened to be stationed in New York at the time the war broke out and they kept that ship and kept the **Italian crew** operating the ship for us. We were fighting Italians, the crew was operating the ship, talking Italian and we couldn't understand a word said.

LNG: How long did it take to come back? Not as fast as you went over did you?

WSP: Faster! Going over was a convoy, coming back was not, the war was over. We ran into a Hurricane two days in a row in July. We lost 24 hours. We were supposed to dock on Saturday morning and we did not dock in Boston Harbor until Sunday Morning. That little biddy ship would get water on the front and pour it off on the back. You see the water run by on deck.

LNG: I came back on a Liberty Ship and we ran into bad weather two days before we got into New York and that thing would go down into a hole and it would look like you were in a well and the next thing you know you are up on a peak and then down in a well again and the next day it was rolling from side to side and folks were as sick as a dog.

WSP: When we docked on Sunday at **Boston Harbor** on the fifth Aisle, and you were so used to that ship going up and down and you would have to walk with it to keep your balance and when you were walking on the cement harbor you would still be picking your feet up like you did on the rolling ship.

MPP: When Billy came home we were living beside Billie Braswell, in the house with the etched windows. Joyce and Peter did not even know him.

WSP: You know, one thing, **Bastogne** was bad. You know **St. Lowe, France** was torn up very bad. I went through St. Lowe on a train and I saw that city too, There were a few buildings left in St. Lowe, half buildings and things like that but in Bastogne there was no building left, the cemetery and the sign of the church was there and the crucifix was there and there won't a scratch on it where there won't a tree left that big that won't cut down and every tombstone was scarred or broke off or something and that crucifix did not have a scar on it. You could not figure out that.

LNG: That is like the town of **Coventry in England**. (Coventry was the Detroit of England.) The cross was not burned but the church was.

MJFG: Did anything especially bad or good happen that seemed like a miracle?

WSP: Everything happened so fast and you scared to death you could not remember and the guy who said he won't scared there was something wrong with him!

MJFG: You mentioned a Belgium telling you about a town being recaptured.

WSP: **Bastogne**, yeah, he said the Germans run the Americans out eight times. He said you could walk from one end of town to the other on dead Germans and Americans. You see Bastogne was built inside of a mountain in a valley.

LNG: It was a crucial crossroads, the Germans had to go through to get to the coast.

WSP: I don't know about that, we went through there, that's all I remember.

LNG: We had to hold it or the Germans had a straight shot to **Antwerp** where all the oil supplies were and that is what they were trying to get to. I saw that in a film.

WSP: It must have been important to run the Americans out eight time. You see we had a fellow , **Cruise, from Greenbay, Wisconsin**, in our Squad that could speak German, His mama and daddy were from Germany to start with. He talked with the Belgium and that is how we communicated with him.

LNG: Were the Belgians Friendly?

WSP: They were friendly just like **Normandy**. They were friendly to the Germans when the Germans were there and when the Americans were there they were friendly to them. The people in Normandy were friendlier to the Germans because they fared better than they had ever fared. Hitler's Germans would bring livestock and stuff from other farms to satisfy them people up there, so they would be on his side. He fed them and took better care of them than ever before. The fields up there had thorn hedges to keep the livestock. That is where we spent the first few days in those fields. I landed over there in October and they hauled them apples to the road and they would have a pile of apples there bigger than this house on the side of the road and here come a machine to grind them up to make cider out of them. That was a sight in this world. And we boys were getting fed twice a day up there and getting a slice of spam about as thick as your finger in a square to just fit the bread and you get two sandwiches a day, morning and afternoon, and that was all we got.

LNG: Didn't you have **C-Rations**?

WSP: Have no rations, that was all we got. We had to eat apples to live, near about it. We ate those apples up.

LNG: When did you get discharged?

WSP: December 19, 1945, I got out on points. I had 59 points. Every month in service here in the States you got one point. Every month overseas you got two points, every major battle you went through you got five points, I went through three and that gave me 15 points. I had 12 for each child I had when I was drafted and I had two children, Peter and Joyce, that was 24 points right there.

LNG: We were up at Paris when the war ended right outside of Paris at an air base there eighteen miles south of Paris. All the boys said we are going home going to **Camp Lucky Strike at LeHarve** and next thing we knew we were at **Marseille, France**. They said you are not going home you are going to the **South Pacific**. We were down there when the war ended with Japan.

WSP: You see I was at **Camp Old Gold in France** and we were going to fly to the Pacific but our orders were changed the day before we were supposed to go. We came back to the States instead of going to the South Pacific. They sent us to **LeHarve** and we came back to the States.

LNG: Some old boy came back to the company and said, "I've been up to the day room and I've got a hot rumor, we are going to **LeHarve** next week and going home from there". The next thing I knew we were loaded in a convoy and it took us two days to go from Paris down to **Marseille, France**.

WSP: When you are up on the front and you earn a rest period and you come back to get you a bath and change clothes and rest up and get something to eat good for two or three days before you go back to the front.

They would tell you, "you're not going to see any more combat, just relax, you are going to be in the army of occupation," this and that. They'd tell you this just to make you relax and the very next morning, "All right let's load up and back to the front." Every time they done us that way. Did you ever know **John D. Morris, Jr. from Dunbar?** John D. was **Company Commander of Camp Lucky Strike, a staging area at LeHarve, France**, for troops returning to the States. His father had a farm at Dunbar, in Edgecombe Co. and was my uncle.

LNG: We lived on John Morris Sr's farm, in 1928 and 29. My daddy, Norman Gay, Sr., farmed with him at Dunbar. Then in January 1930 we moved to the Henry A. Braswell Farm at Whitakers, where my father, overseered for 45 years. He retired and lived there until he died there in 1980. He lived in that house 50 years. Now it has been moved to Conetoe and restored.

WSP: John D's mama, Blanche Parker Morris and my daddy, Willie Walter Parker, were brother and sister. Jim Parker, at Worrell's Crossroads, was also their brother.

MJFG: Was your daddy or any of his brothers in World War I?

WSP: No.

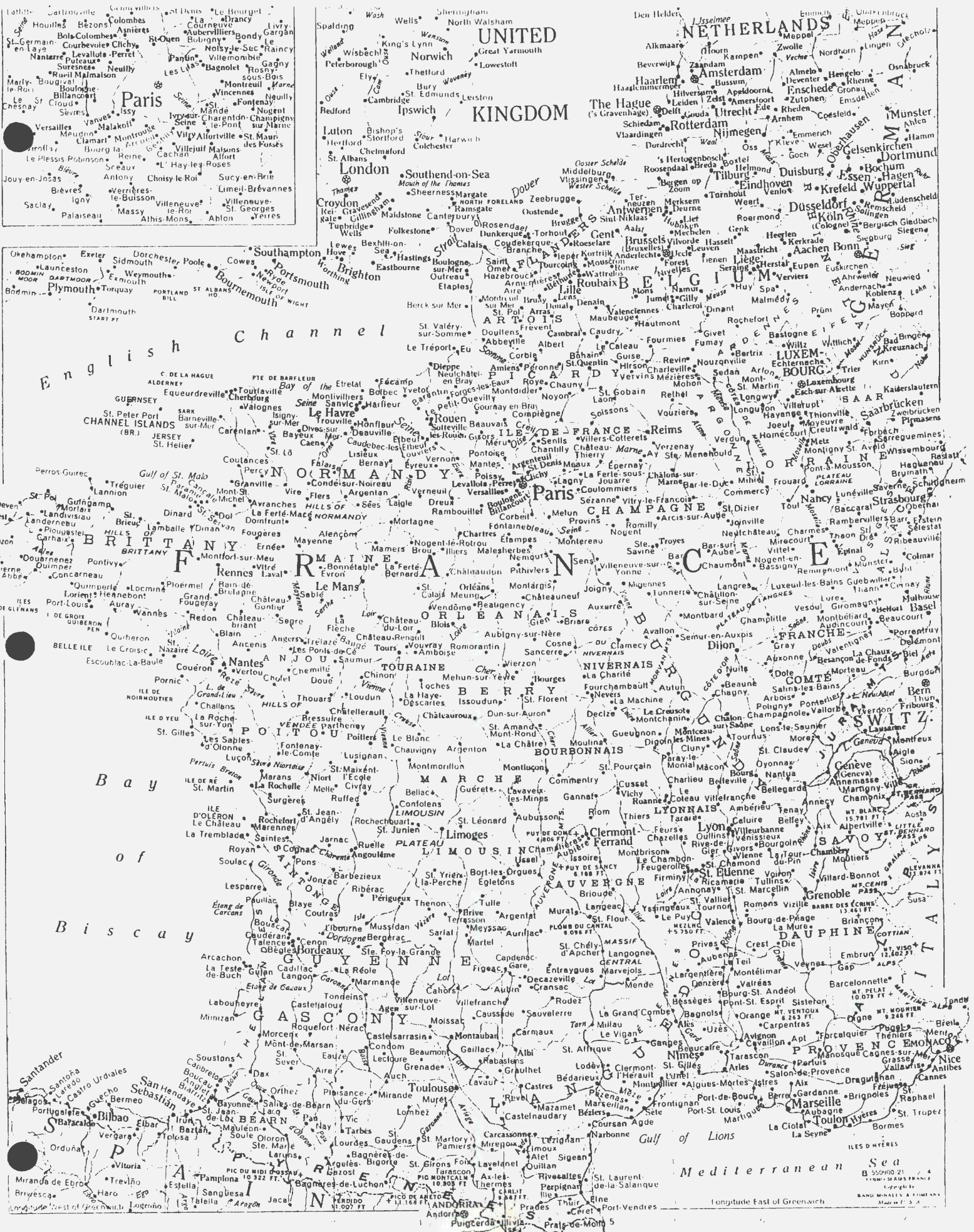
LNG: Did your brother, Brunnel, go into service?

WSP: No, he was working in the Navy Yard in Washington, DC. That's how he got exempted. He had an office job in the Navy Yard and was needed there.

LNG: Your brother, Velma, had 20 years or more didn't he?

WSP: Yeah, he had 23 years. He came out a full Colonel. He won't planning on getting out when he did, but see, he had done pulled two shifts over there in Vietnam as a Helicopter Pilot. It was time for him to re-enlist and he went to Washington, DC to get his orders and wanted to re-enlist, you know, and they told him he would have to go back to Vietnam. He said, "No, I've pulled two shifts over there and I'm not going back over there. I'll just get out." Around that time they were short of Helicopter Pilots. They wanted to send him back. He said, "Naw, I ain't going back."

MPP: That's were he was when Billy's sister, Margaret Parker Doughtie and the grandchildren got killed. They let him come home. He has a son, Walter, who is still in service.



Conic Projection

Statute Miles 25 0 25 50 75
Kilometers 25 0 25 50 100

Longitude East of Greenwich

