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Serial No. 14117390

World War II Memoirs

I had no idea that the time would come when I would be asked to write about my life. The way my autobiography got started originally was when my granddaughter Taylor Saleeby told me that she would be studying American History in her senior year in high school. The teacher had visited their class and told them that they would be studying about World War II. Her comment to me was, "Pop, you have never told us anything about your experiences in World War II, and my teacher wants us to ask our grandparents about that time in their lives." She wanted to know something about my experiences during my military service and Taylor asked me if I would compile my recollection and memories of my experiences that I could recall of World War II (WW II). Her sister Erin saw me later and told me that she had heard about the request that Taylor had made, and she would like to have a copy also. In 1998 I wrote my "WW II Memoirs" that I could remember and finished in time to send Taylor her copy on her birthday, and, at the same time, I sent copies to all the other family members.

Here I am more than 55 years after WWII trying to describe what happened where and when. There are going to be some spaces of time that I know are too fuzzy, but I will try my best. I am sure that my grandchildren will have some questions about my life that they might want the answers to. Hopefully this will answer some of them. I will list my recollections of the experiences that I remember the most vividly at this late stage of my life. The first question to answer is, "Where do you start in a situation like this?" I am going to try to recall as many things in as much detail as I can.

In September 1941, I had enrolled at NC State University to start my studies in Ceramic Engineering. Since I was physically capable, I was required to take ROTC training for two years as a part of our standard curriculum. Since I was almost 20 years of age, I had already dutifully registered for the draft when I was 18. On Sunday, December 7, 1941 the Japanese Naval Forces attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. One of the students in our dormitory had been sent to school at N. C. State by the U. S. Navy to study Electrical Engineering, since he was a radio operator. He was listening on his short wave radio to navy frequencies when the clear message came either to or from the naval base about the Japanese fleet attacking Pearl Harbor. He yelled out down the hall, and we all rushed to his room to listen. We didn't know it then, but this message, unfortunately, was delayed in transmission to the commander of the base. The rest is history.

The very next day, the entire student body at NC State started collecting scrap metal and anything else in and around Raleigh in Wake County that could be used by our country. They told us later, but I don't recall exactly how many, but vaguely remember that during the next two weeks we filled about 25, railroad gondola cars with scrap metal. On December 19, 1941, along with 2500 other students, I enlisted in the active reserves instead of waiting to be drafted. I was given Serial Number 14117390. We were told that the country needed Engineers, and, if we attended school all year round that we would not be called until we were needed to fight. In the meantime, we were required to attend classes full time 12 months of the year until called. They wanted us to get all the education we could. At this point all our courses became more important for all of us to get as much as we could out of them. In addition, our military training course received more emphasis in our lives. None of us knew how long we would be allowed to keep studying before we would be called to active duty. All we knew was that we would be going to class year round until we were needed. In my case, I was learning as much as I could every day. Our curriculum did not change because of the war effort.

During one of my chemistry courses that I took, our professor - Dr. P. P. Sutton - had one corner of the Laboratory closed off with a locked door. One day after class, he asked me to stay for a discussion about the course. He complemented me on my work and said that he had some special experiments to perform. He then asked me if I would teach the lab as his assistant, to give him enough time to perform some special experiments that needed to be done at our school. He explained that our school was chosen for this project because we had the facilities to do them better than other schools in the country. (I learned later that he was performing some special preliminary work associated with the development of the atomic bomb). Little did I know at that time what was happening in the world? The school kept us pretty busy, because they realized that we would need to apply all the things we were learning when we were called up to active duty in the military services. I would go to Danville to see Elva when I thought I could leave the campus for the weekend. I would call at the last minute on Friday to say I was coming. Naturally this did not always sit well with her, because there were times when she had plans to see someone else.

The last time Elva and I were together, before I reported for active duty, I told Elva that after the war and after I finished college, "I would come to Danville to get my wife." I didn't want to tie her down to me in case I was seriously injured or something else bad happened to me while I was on active duty wherever I would be sent. I had the definite opinion that her family had wanted me to propose to her while I was in College and before I left to go on active duty. I could not do that until I had finished college and had a job to support a wife. I realized that people got hurt and killed in wars and I didn't want to have that on my conscience if I got seriously injured or killed.

In my family, when you got married, you were expected to support your wife, and you didn't expect your parents to do it for you. I understood that, but apparently at that time, she and her family didn't understand what I was trying to say. In addition, I still had two more years of college to finish before I could go to work and earn a livelihood for me and my wife and any family that I would have.

We were allowed to remain in school until March 1943, when the entire student body was told to report for active duty to Fort Bragg, NC. We went through the introduction to Army life and were issued uniforms, shots, and all the usual medical tests. At the end of one week there, we were put on a troop train and sent to our assigned training facility. Since my R.O.T.C. training at N. C. State was in infantry tactics, I was sent from Fort Bragg, N.C. to Camp Wheeler near Macon, GA, for infantry basic training.

I was very fortunate because my Company Commander was Alexander Kahapea. He was rated a Black Belt in Judo, and he used that background and training to teach us survival tactics. We learned all kinds of hand-to-hand combat tactics, and learned how to jump over obstacles and how to roll out afterwards. We were taught to take the force of the impact on our shoulder, arms, and rumps as we landed. He showed us how to defend ourselves if an attacker approached us from behind, and how we were to deal with an attacker that was larger than we were. I can remember using some of the things that I learned from him in my civilian life.

I also wrote to Elva trying to tell her what we were learning, and other things that were permitted in letters. We went on many 20-mile marches, and we took part in night patrols. I had been made a squad leader, and on one occasion I had to lead my squad on a night patrol across a hilly terrain. The route assigned to us was across an area with valleys at an angle, but not 90 degrees, to our assigned route. To make sure that we did not stray from the correct line, I asked my assistant squad leader to help by watching my direction. He did this because I chose a star in the sky that was in the direction we need to travel. Once in a while he told me to go right a little or left a little to correct our route direction. Our squad arrived at the checkpoint 30 minutes before another squad arrived. The major who was in charge of the night test took us to the battalion office and questioned us as to how we got there so far ahead of all the other squads. We finally told him that we used the starry night, and he was very pleased that we had used what is now termed and referred to as "astral navigation".

We were trained how to identify objects from their shape while we were blindfolded. This was done so that we would learn how to do things without exposing our position by showing a light. One of the principal items we learned to do was how to take our rifles apart, clean them and put them back together while blindfolded. This was so we could do it at night if necessary and without any light to see by, and more importantly so that we would not be giving our location away to an enemy if we used a light to see by. This was demonstrated to by having another soldier light a match one-mile away from us. We could see it very clearly. In addition, all of us were tested for leadership qualifications, and I was asked to apply for Officer's Candidate School, and, afterwards, I was selected.

On my application, I indicated and stated that I wanted to be in the Corps of Engineers or another branch of service, but they said they wanted me to continue in the Infantry, because of my previous infantry training. They said Infantry or nothing, and I chose nothing and remained an enlisted man. I declined the opportunity to become an Infantry Officer. I was told to report to the camp headquarters. Then I was sent in to see the Intelligence Officer who asked me if I would be willing to become a member of the O.S.S. - later it was re-named the CIA - and I was to let no one know about my involvement in that activity. Those instructions meant that not even my company commander at the post was to know. I was told that I couldn't tell my family either. My duty would be to detect and report any service men or women of German or Italian ancestry who showed any signs of sympathy for Germany or Italy. None of the soldiers that I came in contact with during my entire tour of duty ever showed any tendencies in that respect. In fact I soon learned that the soldiers of German and Italian descent that I came in contact with, hated the enemy more than the rest of us. I wrote reports and mailed them to my "Uncle Charlie" addressed to a Post Office Box number every week. I was detached and sent to Stetson University for more testing. From there I was sent to Rollins College in Florida and was enrolled in the Army Specialized Training Program to study Electrical Engineering and Electronics. After taking some preliminary courses at Rollins College in Florida, I was sent to the University of New Hampshire to study more advanced courses in Electrical Engineering. We were sent from Florida to New Hampshire in the cold weather wearing our summer uniforms that were used all the time in Florida. When we arrived there, we felt like we had been put in a deep freeze.

We were issued woolen winter uniforms on arrival, including underwear, and socks, which immediately gave me contact dermatitis. At the infirmary, the doctor had the nurses paint me with Calamine Lotion using a wallpaper brush, and I was given cotton underwear, cotton sheets, and cotton blankets to use. Most of my body was as red as a beet. Up to that point in my life, I had no idea that I was allergic to wool in that degree. I had already learned previously that I was allergic to Poison Ivy. At the University of New Hampshire in Durham, New Hampshire, we took all the normal electrical engineering courses given along with the regular students. We made many good friends with students we met there, and some of us were invited to some homes of regular students for some of the weekends when we were given time off. It was almost like being back in school again. The only difference was that those of who were soldiers took classes 6 days a week. We were there through the winter, and had many opportunities to go ice-skating, and we also took part in other winter sports.

Since the University of New Hampshire closed classes for the Christmas season, we were given leaves to visit our families. Otis Clark, another soldier in our group, was from Topeka, Kansas, and did not want to spend the money to go all the way home, and so, I invited him to go to Wilson, NC with me to spend Christmas with my family. He accepted, and we bought train tickets and headed south. Otis and I were the only two passengers in our railroad car during the first part of the trip. When we were stopped in the station at Baltimore, MD, a young lady got on the train and came into our car. She took a seat about three seats away from us but on the other side of the car. At the same time two black men got on and came in from the opposite end of our car also. The two black men first sat down at the other end of the car.

After the train started to move, and after the conductor took the tickets, the two black men got up and came down toward our end and flipped the seat in front of the young lady and sat down facing her. Otis said to me, "I think we've got some trouble", and nodded toward the young lady.

I turned and looked. He said, "Back me up", and he walked down to the young lady and asked her, "Are these men traveling with you?" She answered, "No". Otis looked at the two men and said, "I think you gentlemen should go back to the seats you were in before." They looked as though they were not going to move, and he nodded to me, and I came and stood beside him. I then asked them, "Are you moving, or do we move you?" We were both in uniform, and they saw we meant business. They then looked at each other, and one of them said to the lady, "We are sorry if we troubled you." They got up and went back to their original seats. The young lady looked up and said, "I don't know what I would have done without you two. I thank you from the bottom of my heart." The two black men got off in Washington, DC, and she went to the next stop where she got off.

After finishing the required courses in electrical engineering, I was transferred to Camp Edison, NJ, to be trained in Long Lines Telephone Communication at Fort Monmouth, NJ, which was nearby. God must have been looking after me or wanting me to do something else before I died. I learned later that the group that I had been in training with in the Infantry basic training at Camp Wheeler had been sent to Anzio Beachhead in Italy where they suffered 98% casualties in that battle. We were extensively trained at Fort Monmouth in long distance surface communications using the latest technology available at that time. We used 4-wire cables and open wires on poles. We were sending four conversations over one cable using the basic Army 4-wire system along with Teletype messages. Later we were using FM radio frequencies to put even more calls on coaxial cable using both the "C" and "J" Carrier systems. Some of these techniques were not in use yet in the public sector. Some were in the development stages, and we helped perfect them to be used in civilian work later.

Near the end of our training, we were put into teams to work together on problems. We were classified as Telephone Repeatermen in the Signal Corps. A few weeks later, when the hurricane that broke the Atlantic City Steel Pier in two came through our area, we were all asked if we had previous experience driving trucks. Those of us who had driving experiences with trucks were asked to drive the big two and a half ton six wheel trucks, called 6 x 6's, to open up the coastal highway and keep it open. It was needed because of the military installations up and down the coast. We stayed in our pyramidal tents with four trucks parked around them to protect us from the wind when we were not on duty to drive our turn to patrol the highway. We used the trucks to help rescue people and clear the highway for emergency vehicles.

On one of my trips I came to a house that had been washed partially across the highway. I got out and knocked on the door. A lady came out and I told her that I had to clear the road. She told me that she was staying in the house trying to protect it. To clear the roadway, I needed to break off a section of her house. I didn't have any choice, because my orders were to clear the roadway for emergency vehicles that needed it. She asked if I could leave her house where it was and as it was, and I had to tell her my orders were to clear the road for ambulances and fire trucks, in addition to the military needs that might arise for the highway. She understood, but she asked me to help her get some of the items in the room that was on the roadway out of it and into another part of the house. We did that and I put her in the truck with me while I put the truck in low-low transfer and eased the truck bumper against that corner of the house. As I broke the room off the house, she covered her eyes so she would not see the damage.

I did not feel it was safe to leave her in the house, and so I took her along on the rest of my run. She watched as I pushed a big yacht that was on the road back into the water by getting into that low-low transfer again and pushing against the bow of the yacht. I aligned the truck with the centerline of the yacht so as to minimize any more damage to the boat. We pushed it just far enough to get it clear of the roadway, and I hope it was without any extra damage to the hull. After completing my run to the end of our assigned area, I took her to a safe place and dropped her off with some of her friends. So that you can visualize the strength of a hurricane, I will give you an example that you can understand.

We did our target practice with rifles at the firing range at Camp Edison. The solid concrete backstops behind the rifle range were at least 7 feet thick 30 feet high and 100 feet long. The force of the water being pushed by the hurricane washed those concrete backstops into the ocean, and I don't mean just in the edge of the surf. The concrete blocks were washed 500 feet off shore during the storm. That is where the Coast Guard found them later. That gives you an idea of the force of water in a hurricane. If anyone ever asks you to go to the beach to save a house, refuse to go. It is not worth the risk to your life, and is definitely not a safe thing to be involved in.

On one of our night training projects, we were practicing laying some communication cables and picking others up. During one of the loading operations, someone pushed a 200-pound reel of cable into another one that I was positioning in the bed of the truck. I had my hand almost out of the way when the two reels came together. The end of my ring finger on my right hand got caught between them and it almost severed the end of my finger. I was rushed to the field hospital unit taking part in the project. The doctor wanted to cut the end that was holding the little piece that was hanging down. I told him that blood was coming out of it and I wanted to keep it. When he asked how, I asked for a bandage pad and a strip of tape. When I folded it over the end, he agreed to try to save it that way. He put sulfanilamide antiseptic powder on it and gave me a bottle of peroxide to bathe it in every day. He also gave me a metal guard to protect the end of my finger while it healed. As instructed, we changed bandages and bathed it daily, and the only problem I have had connected with it until today is that there are seven bone chips still inside, but I have been told that they are covered by scar tissue now. Any x-rays taken now still show the bone pieces still in there. The doctor should have removed the bone chips and used stitches to put it back together. It was ugly, but it never got infected. Our teams were formed into companies and battalions and we were assigned to the 3160th Signal Service Battalion.

THE 3160TH SIGNAL SERVICE BATTALION
COMPANY B, 10TH PLATOON

Lt. Paul W. Biehler

Otis L. Clark, Louis H. Goddard, Lester S. Johnson, Walter F. Kugel, John R. LeGrys, M. Keith Millhollen, Edward C. Saleeby, Albert B. Siegel, Albert L. Seigel, Fred M. Simons, Kenneth M. Smith, Thomas F. Sweeney, Robert L. Terry, Clarence J. Theilmann, Walter F. Thomson, and John Whitmore.

We received intensive training at Fort Monmouth with instructors from AT&T as well as military people. We were taught and trained in the latest techniques to use in our work. Our training continued in target practice and other military training, as well as our communication skills. We were taught to be Wire Chiefs for a communications center. We were taught about circuits, the sequence of color-coding of wires in cables, terminal assignments, vacuum tubes, transformers, and all the complicated testing procedures that we would need to use. We learned to determine how far a problem was from the test point by using an instrument called a Wheatstone Bridge. In that way, we could tell repair units where to find the problems.

They must have finally considered that our training was adequate, because on October 12, 1944, our orders came to be moved to Camp Myles Standish in Massachusetts. This was our Port of Embarkation where we would be shipped out through Boston Harbor where we would board ship to go to Europe. Some of the other teams went to California to be sent to the Pacific.

We were told that we would be near the front lines at times, and that our function was to maintain communications between Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces – called SHAEF – and the various Division headquarters and Army and Corps headquarters. At times we would go into an area on the back of a tank that was in the first wave so that we could get communication systems in operation as quickly as possible. Our instructions were that if there was a counter-attack that would over-run our position, we were instructed to join the infantry unit nearest us until we could get transportation back to our headquarters unit. I tried to write Elva some of this information without spelling out details, and she misunderstood the mission of my letter.

We were going to be in harm's way and I wanted to let her know that I could get killed and may not get back. How do you let someone know you might get killed and never see them again without shocking their senses? To this day, she still calls my letter to her a "Dear Jane Letter", which (she thought) in effect says, "we're through". After a couple of weeks getting all our gear in proper order and training in drills on how to abandon ship, we boarded the "USS West Point," which was originally the luxury passenger liner "SS America." They had stripped all the trimmings to use it as a troop transport. It had set transatlantic speed records, and, as it turned out, we were scheduled to cross the Atlantic Ocean as a single ship without escort. We made the crossing in less than six days instead of the longer time a convoy required. No German submarine or warship could have kept up with us if we were attacked. Our captain utilized a zigzag course at all times.

Two or three times during the crossing, the Captain diverted our course when anything suspicious was sighted or suspected. Our ship was the fastest ship afloat and too fast for any convoy, and so it was not unusual for our ship to take its chances solo crossing. We were not the first troops that had used it. It had made many trips before. Of course, we were blacked out all the way across, and no smoking was allowed on deck at night. Apparently our captain decided to take us on a course through the South Atlantic to avoid any German Wolf Pack Submarines known to be operating in the North Atlantic. As I see it now, the southern route chosen by the captain is why we were able to bask in the sunshine on deck. It was almost like a luxury cruises, but definitely cheaper, and maybe a little more crowded. There must have been about 10,000 soldiers aboard. In some areas the bunks were stacked eight high to get as many aboard as possible.

The warm weather was a welcome change for us from the Massachusetts weather we left in October. Our team's compartment was right next to the forecabin on the main deck. We found out later that our good fortune was to be paid for by being on KP (Kitchen Police as cooks, servers, and clean up crew) for the entire trip. Apparently our battalion commander had felt he should "volunteer" us for that job. We were sharing the ship with a fresh infantry division, and our commander felt that we should serve those soldiers who were on their way to combat on the front lines. I have to agree with his decision now that I know why he did it.

However, like all military soldiers, we griped about it every day. But, the good side of it is that we ate good food and plenty of it. I can't complain, I was in the Signal Corps and they were in the Infantry. If it was not for my good fortune of being sent to electronics training, I may have been with them, because my ROTC training in college at NC State was in the Infantry. As always, all good things must come to an end. We arrived in the Irish Sea without incident. Unfortunately, (I'll never understand why), most of the tugboat captains were on strike, but our captain was not going to sit out there as a target for the Germans. On November 8, 1944, with the pilot boat leading the way, the captain decided to take the ship in to the dock under steam without any tugboat assistance.

We docked at Liverpool, England. In my civilian life, I had the opportunity to operate a boat before getting in the army; I could appreciate and admired the captain's skill in maneuvering that large ship in the close quarters that we had to deal with in coming in to the dock. Our captain had to dock our ship parallel to the dock between two warships already parked there. The space allocated for our ship was almost too limited to get in without tugs to push us in sideways. We parallel park cars and have problems. Can you visualize the captain parallel parking an ocean liner? The Captain literally "walked" the ship sideways into the space allocated for us to use. He used one propeller forward with the other one in reverse at the same time to move it into place. I think that every soldier on that ship was on the rail watching the performance. We all cheered to show how much we appreciated and marveled at his performance and the captain smiled and waved back to us.

Since our space was to be parallel parked between two warships, in the process of putting the ship against the dock on the starboard "right hand" side, we ended up too close to one of the warehouses. It was built out too close to the edge of the water and as a result damaged a section of the flying bridge of our ship on that side. The International Red Cross had a stand on the dock, but we were told that it was not for Americans on guard duty to use and we didn't like it. One of our soldiers told his family about it, and I learned later that they cancelled a check to the Red Cross because of that incident. I learned later from one of our team members that were stationed in Bastogne, that when the infantry division that we shared the ship with reached the shores of France they were sent to a "quiet" section of the front. They were sent there to get acclimated to military life at the front without being involved in too much action too soon or in too much danger until they were "ready". It turned out that they were sent to a place called Bastonge, Belgium, where the "Battle of the Bulge" took place that December. (You may have seen the movie that was made later with that title). The 101st Airborne Division came in to help defend the area from the German counter-attack. Our team members joined their outfit until they could get back with us. They told us all about it later.

After disembarking, we were taken by train to the little town of Hereford near the border of Wales. It means a great deal to me but it won't mean anything to you, but when they let us out of the trucks that night about midnight, we had to walk some to get to our sleeping quarters. We took our gear and walked between these brick structures. After riding in the back of those trucks, it was a pleasure to be able to do some walking. Some of the soldiers were commenting on how nice it was to get to sleep in brick buildings. When I looked and saw what they were talking about, I immediately realized that the "brick buildings" were ROUND DOWN DRAFT KILNS, where bricks were fired. I knew what they were and I smiled and agreed. You must remember that I had been studying Ceramic Engineering in college about how to make bricks, sewer pipe and other clay products. Bricks are fired in these kilns to 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit. The walls are about two feet thick and they have a small vent hole in the peak of the crown to let the smoke, vapor, and other volatile products of combustion out. So, my first experience at sleeping in Great Britain was in a brick kiln with straw as a mattress. Apparently other soldiers had been there before us because "Kilroy was here" was painted all over the place with the caricature of Kilroy included. I don't know anybody that ever met Kilroy in the flesh, but he sure got around all over Europe. Our stay in Hereford was about 12 days, which ended up being our total time in England. A local pub near the brickyard was our place of learning about English money, culture, and slang. The bartender taught us about pence, shillings, pounds, and crowns. We found out that they used no ice in drinks, beer was never chilled, and when you wanted a beer it was either a "pint" or "half and half", but pronounced "arf and arf".

A couple of soldiers wanted to call some girls they met. The girls had told them to, "Knock me up", if they wanted to see them some more that really said "call me on the telephone". Most of us walked around the town enjoying the sights and meeting people. I met some of the people that had worked at the brickyard. The soldiers were all interested in my explanation of how bricks were made. All the British kilns were fired using coal that was plentiful there. A coating of soot prevailed everywhere. Soon our orders came to move out.

These were our orders to be sent to France. From Hereford we went to Southampton, England to be put aboard the British ship "Pearl of India". The crew was from India, and the ship was what you would call a "Rust Bucket". The condition of the ship was terrible. After being on that tub, I wanted to kiss the American seamen that kept our ships spick and span. The decks were so slimy and dirty, that it was dangerous to try to walk on them without using a safety rope to hang on to. Rusty metal abounded all over the ship. The food they prepared was so bad that we finally sent all of it back to the Galley. A few of us went to the galley to see the food prepared, and when we returned and told the others what we saw, no one would eat any of it. The kitchen help wore no shirts and leaned over the vats to stir the food and their sweat dripped into the food. One soldier told us that when he went by the galley, he saw some of the Indian crew washing their clothes in the cooking vats. We asked to have our "C" rations and "K" rations opened so we could eat them instead of doing without. We lived for the most part on bread, water, and coffee. Our British allies under the command of a British general were supposed to have cleared the city and port of Le Havre, France so we could land there. Apparently the British general had been involved in the attack at Dunkirk and didn't want to expose his troops to heavy enemy fire, and he sat in Le Havre without attacking the Germans with a strong force. This was causing us to lay around on the harbor on our "Rust Bucket" with the inedible food. The British were not advancing far enough out of the city, and we had to spend two weeks on the "Pearl of India" waiting to go ashore. I'll have to be honest and tell you, my impression of the English went not just down, but way down. It took us less than a week to cross the Atlantic on the "USS West Point", but it took us two weeks to cross the English Channel. When our ship was to move us to the point where we would board landing craft, the anchor was drawn up and it had snagged a mine. They let the mine back down in the water so that it would not hit the side of the ship, and they moved the ship very slowly to where we could get off. We all went to our assigned embarking stations.

We got off the ship into landing craft that came alongside, but some of our belongings didn't make it. We had to climb down netting to step over into the landing craft. One of our men missed his footing and fell into the ocean between the ship and the landing craft. Fortunately, one of the officers on board caught him by his collar when he came up for air and hauled him safely aboard before he was crushed between the landing craft and the ship. The Corps of Engineers had cleared a strip of the beach from mines so we could walk off the landing craft safely. The safe path was marked with flags to indicate the area had been cleared of mines. They showed us where a soldier had gone outside the line of flags to see something that caught his eye. He stepped on a mine and was killed. The hole in the ground was still there when we came by. On shore, we marched off to bivouac in a field outside of Le Havre. We had to march about two miles into the countryside. The location was on a hillside overlooking the harbor. On a clear day, we could see the smokestacks in the city and ships on the water.

Between the time we were camped there in 1944 and the end of the war, it was given the name "Lucky Strike", and that name is one many of us will remember. Our rations while we were camped there consisted of Spam, Jam, and Bread. Three meals a day! To this day, I cannot tolerate Spam. Our water was purified using chlorinated pills in Lister Bags hung on tripods throughout the camp area. Our "bathroom" was a series of slit trenches dug each day in a different spot. We were issued a canteen of water each morning. It rained off and on every day during our stay there, and everything was muddy as could be. That muddy field had been someone's beet field. Beets were still in the ground, and I found some of them to eat as a supplement to our meals. I still like beets and eat them often.

I don't want to sound like I am complaining, because if I were in the Infantry, we would have been where we would be shot at and shelled by German artillery. My lot in life was a hundred percent better than life in the Infantry. Apparently, since we had just come ashore, we were not assigned to any specific Army Group, and this created a problem for drawing rations. Maybe that's why we ended up on a diet of Spam, jam, and bread.

After two weeks the war front had moved enough, and our orders came to move out to make room for others coming in. When we left camp Lucky Strike, our team was sent to the little coastal town of Cartaret, France, to live in what may have been an unfinished hotel or a group of condos or apartments. At least in Cartaret, we were out of the mud and under roof. We had no electricity, no running water, and no modern conveniences, but we were dry and out of pup tents. I have to wonder after all these years if it was completed. If it was, I probably could not afford to stay there today. At this point we were assigned to an Army Group, probably Third Army, and once that took place, we could draw rations. That meant that we could depend on receiving regular rations instead of boxed and dehydrated food. We washed our clothes, strung lines to hang our clothes on to dry, and made lamps out of empty tins filled with sand, and we used gasoline, diesel fuel, or any other liquid that would burn as fuel to give light at night. The only problem was the soot that got on everything from the open flames.

In our job, as I explained earlier our primary assignment was that we were required to maintain lines from Division and Army Corps headquarters back to Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF), and to the Pentagon outside Washington, DC. We offered no services to battalions or companies. That was the responsibility of each division. As I said earlier our training at Fort Monmouth was in "C Carriers" and "J Carriers" that were able to carry several conversations on one pair of wires. I cannot emphasize too strongly how my ROTC training at NC State helped a great deal in handling military life. We had no responsibilities until 30 miles of territory had been gained. The Companies of 3160th Signal Service Battalion were dispersed and the teams were assigned to locations in France and Belgium. Our Team was sent to St. Lo, France, after General Patton's forces cleared it of Germans. One of our teams was assigned to – you may have guessed it – Bastogne, Belgium. Again, that could have been me.

As I mentioned earlier, during the Battle of the Bulge, they had to abandon the Communications center and join the Infantry unit to help defend the area from the German counterattack. That is how we found out where the Infantry Unit that came over with us ended up after they came ashore. Some of our team members ended up with them until after Christmas that winter. Those soldiers that were sent to Bastogne really took it on the chin from the German counter-attack that was mounted just before Christmas in the snow, cold, and miserable weather with overcast cloudy skies that prevented our Air Force from helping them most of the time. I think that it was our Fourth Armored Division changed direction and came there and did get in to rescue them later, but it was a terrible time for them until the relief came. I have always thanked God for my lot in life. The city of St. Lo was in a strategic position, and had been fought over very fiercely several times, because of its location. The German high command recognized this fact as well as we did. The communication center was a reinforced concrete blockhouse with walls and ceiling about five or six feet thick. You could see the places where artillery shells and bombs had hit the structure. The impact points were pockmarks without apparent structural damage to the building. The entire city was one large pile of rubble, and the blockhouse was about the only safe structure still standing. Some of our men went into partially standing buildings and camped out there. The area around St. Lo was littered with abandoned and damaged war materiel both German and American equipment. The repeater and carrier equipment in the blockhouse was a combination of French, and German, and we added some American equipment. I did not stay in St. Lo more than two days.

We were split up into small groups of four and assigned to various locations. I was assigned with three other team members to the communications center in Averanches, France. Averanches is on a bluff on the coast near the famous "Cathedral at Mont San Michel", France. In fact, we could look out our windows of the communication center and see the Cathedral on any clear day. When the tide rose at the same time that the moon was near a full moon, the area around the cathedral became an island, because the water at times covered the causeway leading out to it. Thank God that the Germans had enough faith left in them to leave the Cathedral as it was and not involve it in the war effort, because it was intact.

The German Army had used the Cathedral in downtown Averanches as an observation post, and as a result, our field artillery unit had to use artillery shells in the attack to get them out. The French people in the city understood and did not hold any animosity against America for the damage to the Cathedral. The seaport of Granville, France was nearby, and the port was used to bring in supplies for our forces. We were able as a team to draw rations from the Military Police (MP) unit in Granville. They were assigned to provide us with our requirement for MP guards on the door to our communications center. We needed the guards on the door, because we were very near the front lines. In addition, the Germans still had soldiers on the Channel Islands of Guernsey and Jersey, which were nearby. Those soldiers were left behind when the Germans retreated in the face of the American breakthrough at Averanches and St Lo. We were getting information that led us to believe that they would attempt to come ashore and try to re-take Averanches where we were.

We got in touch with some of the members of the French Resistance, and we found the man who had worked in the telephone office before the war. His name was Roland Thomas, and he also helped us understand and repair the German equipment that we decided to put back in service. Using their equipment reduced the work we needed to do, because this put us in communication with St Lo immediately with the lines that had not been damaged. We hired him to assist us in the major repairs we needed to do. We kept him on during my entire tour of duty in Avaranches, France. As a matter of fact, we had no trouble working out an arrangement with local people to wash our uniforms for us. We hired a lady after checking her out to be our cook and clean house for us. Our living quarters had enough sleeping space for the assigned MP guards and us.

The German Army had installed the communication center in an excavation that had three levels underground, and they had built a house on top to have it appear as a residence on the edge of town. That is why there was enough sleeping space for us and the MP's. After we had been stationed there for a while, we were able to buy eggs and butter from some of the farmers nearby. These were a delicacy to us as army troops, because our rations had no butter, and the eggs we could get were made from powdered eggs. We were living in high cotton with a cook, house cleaner, and someone to help with the communications equipment. We made it a point to make friends with all the townspeople. French language, we had to learn.

Fortunately, Roland Thomas spoke English very well, because he was one of the contacts the allies had used in communicating with the underground. He taught us enough French to help us to communicate with the people in town. Our responsibility was to maintain telephone communications day and night 24 hours a day. Some of our circuits had a requirement that they must be repaired or replaced within 20 minutes. As a group of four men, we arranged our work schedule with one man on for each 8-hour shift. In this way, the time we worked each day shifted forward one segment. In that way we all were able to use the day light hours to enjoy the environs of the community all day long once every four days. In this way, we were able to make friends with the citizens and shopkeepers in the community. We learned a great deal about French people by sitting in our upstairs window when everything was going well. We could see couples walking toward town holding hands. It was not unusual to see the couple stop and the young man turn his back toward the girl walking with him to urinate beside the road. If the young lady needed to, she would walk off to the side of the road and squat behind a tree. It wasn't a case of deliberately looking; it was there to see. Having lived under German Occupation, they apparently had come to accept the normal bodily functions, as they needed to. During my entire stay in Europe, I never was stationed near or with anyone from North Carolina. Only on one occasion I saw a second Lieutenant from Newbern, N. C. who was stationed where we got our food rations. He came to the Averanches station while I was in France to inquire why 4 men needed so much food. We explained that we had the MP's that guarded the entrance to the Repeater Station living and eating with us. That satisfied the Quartermaster Corps.

Wurzburg was to be our Battalion Headquarters. I only stayed in Wurzburg a few days before being assigned and sent to Hallenburg, Germany, which is north of Frankfurt on the Main and north of Marburg on the way to Hamburg. Our little group of four apparently relieved a U. S. Army Infantry Company. I immediately put up my large 48 star American Garrison Flag, and I have used it here and still have it in the closet at the end of the hall.

Remembering the things we had learned in Averanches, we found out about Herr Westermann. He had worked in the long distance telephone installation during the war. We found out very quickly that he did not like Hitler. He and his wife and children were good people. He was not a Nazi, but was a communications expert. He quickly told us that he would be glad to help us operate "his" repeater station. He told us who were the Nazis and who could be trusted. He and I spoke the same engineering language. I evaluated his knowledge as excellent. We hired him to help us work in the repeater station, because he knew all about all the equipment. He could do anything that needed to be done from starting the Diesel generator to repairing repeater circuits. Here in Hallenburg as they had everywhere else, the Germans had dug a hole in the ground that was three stories deep and built a house on top of the ground to make it appear as only a residence. The installation had its own diesel generator power plant in case it was needed. In addition there was a complete filtration system to purify the air in case of a gas attack. All the communication lines came in and went out underground. Here again, we were a four-man team, and again we worked 8-hour shifts. In this way, every four days, each of us had the all the daylight hours off. Each of us could do all the jobs, and with Herr Westermann available we had more freedom and the ability to enjoy the surroundings.

I decided to learn to speak German, and used every opportunity to learn how to use their language. Herr Westermann knew enough English to be understood, and he taught me how to speak German very well. In teaching me to speak German, he learned more English. I could carry on a conversation with most of the people. Since then I have used my knowledge of the German language on my trips to Germany, Denmark, and Russia. In addition, I have used it with the Germans who came to Statesville to see brick making equipment and do business with J. C. Steele & Sons, Inc. during the 34 years I worked there before retirement.

As I mentioned before, Hallenburg is in the northern section of Germany with hills nearby. Right after we arrived, we had found a large crock and filled it with grapes and other fruit to produce wine. We had bottled it in preparation to celebrate the Fourth. On July 4, 1945 after the Germans had surrendered we were celebrating by inviting any American soldiers that came through town to join us. Quite a few trucks with American soldiers in them came through, and we invited each one and all to come in to help celebrate the Fourth. We had made some good friends in Hallenburg. Since the German civilian population was not allowed to have firearms, we took some of the townspeople out into the hills around town to go hunting. We killed deer and boars and had them brought to the town-square. They were hung for two weeks to age. The town butcher cut them up and gave all the people some to take to their families. We told them all we wanted was one meal out of each animal. Needless to say, when we wanted to buy fresh eggs and butter, we had no trouble to get some from them. We paid for anything we got. We had no trouble getting laundry washed and ironed. We found the German people easy to get along with in that town. On one of the hunting trips, I found some equipment a German soldier had abandoned. A pair of field glasses and some other military hardware that I tried to bring home.

Our team was the only American presence in Hallenburg, and we were supplied with a Very pistol to fire in case we needed help. As I described earlier, Hallenburg is near Hamburg, Germany. When the division of the country was made in the agreement between the Russians, British, French, and Americans, Hallenburg ended up in the British Zone. After the areas of responsibilities were established, an entire Company of British soldiers came to relieve us.

We still had some of our Very Shells, and decided we would have a royal transition to British rule by firing almost all our shells into the air as part of the transition of power celebration. This immediately brought our nearby assigned American soldiers that were to help us in time of trouble. Our Very pistol was to be used if we needed help, and they thought we were in need. We invited them to help celebrate the transition.

After reporting back to Wurzburg, I was given some time off, and I used it to make a one-week trip to Switzerland. We entered Switzerland at Basel and were sent by train to Berne, Zurich, Lucerne, and Interlaken and on to a mountain top town named Murren. We spent a day or two in each city. One part of the trip was by cable car to get up the side of the mountain to the level of the next set of train tracks to get to Murren. Murren was near the top of a snow-covered mountain. The famous peak of Jungfrau was across the valley. It was very impressive.

We went snow skiing and were taught by a young lady who had competed in the Olympics. It was fun having that young girl as our instructor. Not only was she a good skier, but also she was good looking to go with it. We saw several people on crutches with casts on legs or arms. When we asked about them, our instructor told us that all the people on crutches were skiers that thought they were experts. She said that very seldom were any of the beginners hurt. Naturally, we believed every word of it, with tongue in cheek, but she was a great teacher. Our instructor started us on the beginner slope, and by the third morning we went all the way to the top of the ski lift. Our first trip down the mountain was down a bobsled run. When we asked why we would be going to ski down the bobsled run. She said we would be stopped at various points on the way down to see if we were all there. While we were doing our thing, she cut across country and waited at different places. She waited where there was no side to the bobsled run. It was exciting, and we all made it without any problems. We went up on the lift again and again, and those who wanted to ski cross-country went down the mountain with her while some of the others did the bobsled run again. After that, we were pretty much on our own with the privilege of getting more instruction if we wanted it.

We visited cities where Swiss cheese was made. We were allowed to go through the Cheese factories, where they explained how they aged Swiss cheese. The building is seven stories high, and the cheese is moved up one floor each year. They core the cheese to see the size of the holes. We buy Swiss cheese with large holes in it. They keep the cheese until the holes get very small – less than the size of the hole punched in our three-hole notebooks. That tells me that Swiss cheese sold here cheese is very young, because all of it has large holes inside.

At Lucerne, we could see the Matterhorn across the lake, but were not taken up to the top. The restaurants served very delicious food. In Berne, which is the capital, we had a good opportunity to shop for watches and other items that Switzerland is famous for. We went into the Government buildings and watched their legislators in action. We were told about the agricultural methods and manufacturing systems of their nation's largest industries. All of our travel in Switzerland was by train, but in the large cities, we were able to ride in Taxis and Horse Drawn carriages. A few of the cities had trolley cars on the streets. It was fun to do all these things after the war we had been through. On my return to Wurzburg, I was sent to be part of the team at Giessen, Germany. Giessen was in a hilly area much like the area around Hallenberg-, and I thought that game should be available there. Remembering the eggs and butter we were able to get in the other towns, I adopted the same tactics there that had worked before. Get the people meat, and they will get you whatever you need in the surrounding area. I organized hunting parties several times. I would furnish the gun, and they would furnish the people to flush the deer or boar. We would field dress the animals, and they would take them down to the center of the town to finish cleaning them, hung, and later divided up with the citizens. As always, all we wanted was one good meal of venison. That's the time we started thinking of how soon we could get to go home. I hired the smartest German technician that I could find to work for us here the same as I had done everywhere else before.

One day, I was on duty and the primary circuit for General Patton's Army Tank Unit was out of service, and I was working with our open wire line crew to get it repaired. We notified the switchboard operator that it was out of service and worked toward locating the break. All of a sudden General Patton was on the line demanding that I open it up right then. We had our orders from ComZ, and I told him we were working to get it back in service. I told him that if he would get off the line, we could get it done. He asked, "Soldier, do you know who you are talking to?" I responded, "Sir, I don't care who you are. I'm trying to fix our problem, and I can't do it if you don't shut up." He told me who he was and then he asked for my name, rank, and serial number. I gave it to him and told him to get in touch with General Bradley, because he was my big boss. Naturally, I expected to be court-marshaled, but at the moment I was concerned with getting the circuit back in service. He did file the complaint report about me failing to obey an order from an officer, and the paper work came through later with statements from SHAEF and my company commander and team leader, Lt. Biehler, that I was performing my duties as assigned. General Bradley, our Battalion commander, our Company Commander, and Lt. Biehler had signed it. I signed it as I was told, and I sent it back through. I never heard anything more about it.

The Germans were re-supplying their troops on the Channel Islands of Jersey and Guernsey by air. The word came that the Germans on the Islands were really planning an attack to recapture Averanches, and I sent word with the MP's to get in touch with the Infantry Commander in Granville. I am sure that some of our army ground forces were sent out on the peninsula toward Brest, France, to keep them from coming ashore. As for the defensive positions for Averanches, we planned a defense that included a machine gun emplacement on the only road coming up from the beach. From there, our field of fire covered the ways they would try to come up to attack us. Other units were positioned along the crest of the hillside next to the beach coming up to the city. Despite any reports to the contrary, the Germans never made it up the hill to the city. With our defensive position planned as it was, we kept them from accomplishing their mission. As a result of that incident, I think the high command decided that we didn't need to have the German soldiers in our back yard. An air attack was planned and carried out to keep them from threatening us any longer. The most impressive sight I ever witnessed was when the Air Force sent 2400 bombers down to the Channel Islands. Wave after wave of bombers came over our area all day long. The German soldiers there didn't have a chance, and they finally surrendered.

On our day off, we could go anywhere in the area we wanted to. As a result most of us took advantage of the opportunity to visit the Mont St. Michel Cathedral. I was stationed there until after V E Day. The whole city had a great celebration, and we were the center of attention by the townspeople. We were friends from before, but now we were heroes in their eyes. They had a parade with all the trimmings, and they asked us to be a big part of it.

They treated us like we were the Grand Marshals of their parade. I felt proud to be a part of it. Around the end of May, a new outfit just in from the U.S.A. relieved us and we started to speculate if we were to be sent home, or if we were to be sent to the Pacific Theater to help end that section of the conflict. Would we go home, or would we go toward Japan? That was the question. We found out very soon that we were not going home. We were sent to a military base outside Versailles near Paris for a few days. I was able to get quite a few pictures of some of the famous Paris landmarks. I still have the photos and negatives in black and white of Napoleon's Tomb, the Eiffel Tower, Place de Concorde, the Louvre, Rue de Montmartre, Place Pigalle, and other notable sights. The guillotine was still there in the middle of the square.

Then on May 30, 1945, we were loaded on a train and started east toward Germany. That train ride was memorable only in the fact that several times as we were climbing hills, we had to get out and literally push and help the engine get to the top of the hill. Many times, we were able to get off and walk as fast as the train was moving. Maybe that was why it was able to make it to the top. We went through Metz and Kaiserslautern on the way to Wurzburg, Germany, which was our destination.

One of the most moving experiences of my life took place in Geissen, Germany on Christmas Eve in 1945. The German people there asked if they could do something different, and they decided to have an international and Interdenominational Christmas Eve service. American Soldiers and German civilians with Chaplains from the Army and civilian priests, and pastors and preachers from the churches in town got together in a local movie theater. We had Bible readings, and we sang Christmas Carols. They taught us the German words for "Silent Night" and we taught them the English words. We sang together in German, and then we sang the words together in English. The words fit, the music was just like at home, because, apparently, they sang the same songs that we did. The tunes were the same, only the words changed languages. Oddly enough when we sang English and German words together they fit nicely. Believe it or not, it was wonderful and moving.

I don't remember why I was in Fulda, Germany a little later, but I assume it was to fill in for someone who had been sent back to the States. While I was helping out there, I came closest to being killed than any other place in Europe. The occasion was in the office area where we were having a discussion. Someone, maybe it was a driver, was showing another person his 45-caliber handgun. It's amazing what can happen if people don't know what to do. I remember watching him remove the magazine out of the butt of the 45. I remember him handing the gun to his friend. As he raised it to shoulder height to act like he would shoot, it was aimed toward another soldier (who I don't remember) and me.

When I saw his finger tighten my infantry training made me push the other person sitting on the desk with me off the desk to the floor while I fell off the other side. The crack of the bullet made everyone gasp. My automatic reaction came from my previous infantry training, because my involuntary mental picture realized that they had removed the magazine, but that they did not pull the barrel slide back to be sure that no bullet was in the chamber. At Camp Wheeler in Infantry Basic Training, this was one of the things that we were drilled over and over to remember. Rule Number One, after you remove the magazine of bullets, always pull the slide back and release it to be sure that no bullet is left in the chamber. We were trained to do this with both rifles and pistols. If I had not reacted, I may not have been here today to write all this.

I learned that my cousin Albert Saleeby was stationed about 50 miles from Fulda. I asked for and checked a vehicle out of the motor pool on my day off and drove down and spent the day with him. He was amazed that I could get a vehicle to come to see him. I explained that I told them I didn't care what size vehicle it was, and that was all it took, because they gave me a 3/4 ton 4 x 4 truck to drive. When Sgt. Kugel got his orders to be sent home from Limburg, Germany, I was sent there to fill in for his absence. He left his "Haus Frau" that did the cooking and cleaning in Limburg, and as a result, I had to get a vehicle to return her to her town that she came from. Once he was gone, she did not want to stay in Limburg to cook for us. Many times after that I wished he had taken her back before he left. I placed her in the rear of a 3/4 ton 4 x 4 with the canvas cover in place to hide her while I took her back to her original home. Fortunately, no one challenged me on the trip. Outside of that, our life in Limburg was similar to the other places I had been. The difference here was that this was a large city, and we had no hills or forests to hunt in. All our rations came from the local Infantry Company located there. Limburg, Germany is on the Lahn River, and it was one of the cities that the Germans used for execution of Jews.

The people of the city had not been aware of the atrocities that the Germans were committing, and when they found out later, they were fearful of soldiers in general. I spent some of my time trying to reassure the locals that we were not like the Gestapo. They soon began to believe, and that made our lives more pleasant after that. Limburg is an urban city, and so, we were not able to hunt game to furnish them with meat like we had in the other towns. These people liked to work and make money. Cleaning our uniforms and general cleaning up and cooking were the most needed items in Limburg. We had no trouble finding those services. I missed the ability to hunt and trade for fresh eggs and butter like we had done with the farmers in the other locations.

The most embarrassing incident I had to deal with while I was in Giessen was when Fred Simons, one of our team members, was arrested by the MP's and brought in. I had to put him under house arrest, guard him, and keep him there until his situation was disposed of. The MP's that brought him in told me that he had posed as a Military Policeman someplace nearby. Apparently he had found a motorcycle and used it during his outings. I guess they naturally didn't appreciate it. I never did find out what they did with him after I sent him back to Wurzburg. I assumed that Lt. Biehler did what was required under military law and handled it for him.

It didn't take the War Department long to come up with a system for bringing the troops home. Our discharge date was to be based on "points" which were awarded on the basis of length of service, length of overseas duty, wounds, awards, and probably some other items that I didn't know about. Most or all of us had more than enough points necessary to be discharged. I certainly had more than enough points to go home, but they told us that as "Telephone Repeatermen" we were classified "Essential". The reason was given that we couldn't go home now was that we were charged with the responsibility to maintain communications between the Potsdam Conference and the Pentagon in Washington. As a result, we could not be discharged until "replacements" were available. After quite a while of this, my response to that was that I sent in a request for 12 men to be sent to our installation so we could train them. Apparently the training program at Fort Monmouth had been curtailed when the war was over. They asked why did we need twelve, and I responded that I was setting up a school as a training program for replacements. I was planning for the twelve to take the place of the four of us by teaching them how to operate the repeater station as a group if necessary. As I have mentioned earlier we had circuits that could not be out more than 20 minutes. This required people who knew what they were doing. We started off teaching some simple lessons about the difference between AC and DC. From there we progressed as they learned. I used blackboards, equipment from the repeater station, and anything that pertained to the operation of the repeater station.

We taught classes just like regular school, except this was complete hands-on teaching some of the soldiers that had requested this new service had no idea of the complexity of their task. Some of them had thought this was a piece of cake. After the first week, some of them wanted out, and we said, "You asked for an inside job, and you've got it." Two more weeks and they got into it with both feet and applied themselves when they learned this would help them get jobs after discharge. With some tutoring, all of them learned how to run the station, especially with the German technician being on hand. In the meantime, our life was changing. With the German surrender, the Army issued orders that there was to be no fraternization with the German girls. With all those American soldiers in Germany who had no female companionship for years, it was inevitable for the natural desire for companionship to raise its head. In our group Otis Clark was the first to begin to get involved with a German girl. He told me that he would stay there until they let him marry her. Well, why not? German girls were just as appealing to men as American girls. Nature took its course, and eventually Otis did all the necessary paper work to get married. As far as I know he still lives in Topeka, Kansas, with his German wife. I had met her and she was a nice person and pretty. I had an opportunity to take seven days leave to go to one of Hitler's vacation spots in the German Alps. The name of the area was Garmish Partinkirken, Germany, and the snow and the scenery was beautiful. In order that I could go there, I was put on temporary assignment to the Seventh Army so I could go to that place. I had a good time skiing every day that week. The winter Olympics have been held there in recent years. I never did go to the top of the highest ski run, because I knew I was not proficient enough to come down the mountain from that level and do it safely. They had beginner slopes and intermediate slopes all the way up in difficulty to the ones they used in the Olympics.

Apparently my suggestions for training our replacements were beginning to bear fruit. The training of long line telephone repeatermen at Fort Monmouth had been definitely curtailed since the war was over. I had suggested that we all start teaching our potential replacements at all the stations. It must have worked for me, because my orders to be discharged came while I was in Limburg, Germany. I was surprised and pleased that this turned out to be the best solution to our problem of going home. On my way back to France, I went through Belgium and Holland. The people there must have really suffered. They begged for scraps and bits of food. Any rations that we did not eat completely, they wanted the scraps. Candy was like gold to them. It was heart-rending to see them in that state. You almost felt like giving them the shirt off your back.

Some of the stories they told made you wonder if the German soldiers were human. The primary goal that all of us had was to get home. Finally, the group I was with ended up back in Le Havre, France, at good old Camp Lucky Strike – this was where we had come ashore and stayed in the beet field. The camp had barrack buildings now with paved walkways and a little grass. But it was still on that famous beet field we had camped in on our way to the fray. We could still see the harbor and smoke stacks from the area. They processed us for the return trip, and gave us our orders for returning to the United States. My return trip to the good old U. S. A. was not to be aboard the USS West Point. We were loaded on a converted Liberty Ship that had been used to carry munitions equipment, supplies, and troops to Europe. Again, we had bunks, but we had an American crew instead of that crew from India. The ship was obviously on its last legs, but it was painted and had clean decks that you could walk on without sliding. We didn't need any safety ropes to hang on to either. I was surprised to learn that I was the only one of our communications team in this repatriation group. I think that this ship could get up to 6 knots at full speed. I didn't complain, because I was on my way home!

As we were leaving the harbor, the captain came on the loudspeaker system with the announcement that storms were predicted over the Atlantic for the next two weeks. He had asked for and received permission to use an alternate route to avoid rough seas. We all were glad that he did, because we were only two days out of port when the captain announced that we were altering our course. He needed to take a more northerly course so that we could be in position to go to the aid of another ship taking soldiers home if it became necessary.

The captain told us that we needed to be in position if they had trouble and if it became necessary to rescue the soldiers on the other ship in the eye of the storm. They had radioed that their ship was taking on water, and may need help. They also were on a converted Liberty that had seen heavy service during the war. Here we were trying to get home and the last thing we needed was to go into a stormy sea and delay our return. I wondered at the time if we were actually in the storm itself, but after the years in the war, this was like fun when we were kids. We laughed and joked about the ride we were on. All the creaking and groaning the ship was doing was like some of the shows we had gone to at the fairgrounds back home. The only difference was that by now we were a thousand miles from land. Every heave of the bow meant we were that much closer to home. The wind was howling and the salt-water spray was blowing all over everything. The closer we got to the storm, can you picture the heaving deck with soldiers lined up scanning the sea for the other ship?

Some of the soldiers got seasick, and nobody wanted to be standing near them. I got as far forward as I could and enjoyed the ride. There were times when the ship would crest a wave, and as it passed underneath the ship would drop about twenty or thirty feet and splash water in all directions. The feeling you had was like falling through space. There was very little weight on your feet. The sensation was like being on the Ferris Wheel at the Fair and if the wheel speeded up to twice the normal speed. Breathtaking is what it was. We got a bath whether we wanted it or not. But it was exhilarating to all of us who were used to boating. This went on for two days and nights.

Army in the

" I was drafted in the fall of 1942,
and went to Texas for basic
training. The war was in full force
when we shipped out at Fort Dix, N. J. ^{SIX weeks} later ^{on}
~~we boarded~~ the "Argentinea" and I
later found out there were about 8,000 to
10,000 men on the ship. I was 24 years old.
German subs were all over the Atlantic
and at night you could see ships
burning at the distance. I landed at
the Christmas day, 1942, at Casablanca,
in Africa. It had been
a terrible, undeductive voyage -
Everyone were sick, we were a happy
group just to get on shore.

Rommel was giving the allies a fit.
I went in as the replacement to the
front lines. Only a few days went by
before the Lt. called my name "Walston"
you and Billy Joe go up that mountain &
see if the Germans are still there.
We crawled on our bellies all the way
to the top, and Billy Joe said I'm tired
of this, and stood up to look - He was shot
right between the eyes. I came down ^{very}
fast, zigzagging all the way.

These nights were frightening, and they
called on me to go back several times.
On many other nights, I finally asked
why they were calling me to go and where was
the ones that did it before I got here -
Their answer was "they are dead."

" I don't recall exactly, but it was 1943 and the Germans were
shelling us continually, mortars were
falling all over the place. I dived into
a fox hole, and landed on top of a Lt.
I yelled at the top of my voice -
"Excuse me, SIR, and he yelled back
even louder, don't move, stay where
you are!"
One of these occasions I couldn't
fast enough and got hit with a strap.
I was bleeding profusely and
then became quiet, they stopped my
bleeding & I was returned to the rear
to the hospital. That was my first
Purple Heart! How lucky I was, for
I had a bandana of bullets from my
shoulder as to my wound & the strap just
missed it. My wound wasn't as bad as the
blood that made it look terrible.
I had been back only a short time, for
now we were in Tunisia, and I got
hit in my hand & wrist, again bleeding
so bad you would have thought my arm
was gone. Back to the hospital; I didn't
go to the front anymore! I got my
second Purple Heart! I then went
into Sicily and Italy. I can tell you
this - PRIVATE'S WON THE WAR!"

PRIVATE H. H. WALSTON, III
U.S. ARMY

AS TOLD TO A FRIEND OVER MANY YEARS

I can tell you, as enticing as it was, that was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. I could have gone to work for AT&T the next day as a Central Office Wire Chief because of all the work I did in the Signal Corps. That was enticing enough for several of them to do just that, and as it turns out I could have had a great retirement today if I had done it. I realized that an education is more valuable than a quick good paycheck in your pocket right away. That has been borne out many times over in the succeeding years. I wouldn't change it if I could. That is truer today than it was then. So often, workers only look at how much money can they can make instead of what they can accomplish. Best of all, hard as it was to make that decision, I came home and finished school at NC State University and graduated in Ceramic Engineering.

I may have left out some details, but they are probably insignificant. As I said in the beginning, trying to remember things that happened over 50 years ago is not easy. The important items are easy; the details are a bit fuzzy. I am proud that I was able to take part in World War II, and I am glad that I came home with only minor injuries. Many others were not so lucky, and some did not come home at all. The memories are all we have of them. World War II was a time in history that we had to do something good for mankind and we did it. One of the things I have observed in life is that when you enjoy doing something it is much easier to be successful. The things a person does to get rich always seem to end up being hard work, while the things we do that we like and enjoy are fun and give us a sense of accomplishment. I do not and cannot really complain about any of my choices that I have taken in my studies and work. My parents taught me these things, and they have been the guiding lights of my life. My Father and Mother loved this country of ours, and they taught me to love and appreciate it also. I often tell people today that the greatest blessing that I ever had in my life was the fact that my Mother and Father were living in the United States of America when I was born. The more I have traveled over the rest of the world, the more I was convinced of that fact. Even until today, peoples from all over the world continue to strive to come here.

I hope that you can learn to come to know the warm feelings and the pride I get from seeing the wonderful accomplishments of my children and grandchildren. One of these days when you get to my place and age in life, you will understand what I am telling you now. It is my fervent hope and prayer that God will bless each of you in your lives, and that God will continue to Bless America.