Bill Schimm Interview

Lori Giordano
Oral History Methods
The following manuscript is a transcription of two tape recorded interviews conducted by Lori Giordano, a graduate student in history at the University of Illinois at Springfield. The narrator was Bill Schimm, a World War II veteran who lives in Athens, Illinois. The interviews were conducted on October 10\textsuperscript{th} and October 19\textsuperscript{th}, 2006 at the home of Bill Schimm. The first interview lasted approximately 1 hour and the second about 40 minutes. Two tape recorders were used simultaneously, in an effort to avoid technical problems.

Mr. Schimm had been a member of the 4\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division, had landed on Utah Beach, and took part in the Battle of the Bulge. To prepare for the interview, I researched those events of WWII and went armed with a list of dates and questions relating to combat experience. However, Mr. Schimm could not recall much of his combat experience, and what emerged from the interview was a wonderful collection of stories relating to his personal experiences as a soldier.

Transcription was also done by Lori Giordano, using a transcriber. It took approximately 12 hours to transcribe both sessions. Having used two tape recorders came in handy during this part of the process, since if something was unintelligible on one tape, the second tape could be referenced. No attempt at editing was done during this stage, and the first draft was a complete, word for word, transcription of the interviews.
This draft was given to Mr. Schimm for review. He corrected some misspelling and misunderstandings by the interviewer, and added some words for clarity. He also requested a couple of statements be deleted, and the removal of extraneous words, such as “um”, “uh”, “you know”, and repeated statements or unfinished thoughts. The final version has those things removed, making it much more readable, however, it still retains the informal, conversational style of an interview. Deletions are not noted in the transcription, but words that have been added are noted by brackets [word]. Descriptions of the interview, such as laughter, are noted by parenthesis (laughter). A final draft was also given to Mr. Schimm.

During this interview, Mr. Schimm talks about his experiences as a clerk in London and how the citizens dealt with the buzz bombs. He also describes his landing in Normandy and his arrival in Paris. He talks about several incidences in Germany, including the capture of German Officers and the emancipation of a prison camp. But, most of his stories are very personal in nature, describing the experiences and feelings of an 18 year old from Iowa dealing with the horrors of war.

The finished product which includes two audio tapes, a DVD that includes pictures of WWII provided by Mr. Schimm, and the transcription of the tape will be given to the Archives at the University of Illinois at Springfield for the use of future students who are interested in the personal experiences of a veteran of WWII.
Q. This is Lori Giordano, it is October 10, 2006, and I'm here with Bill Schimm of Athens, Illinois. So, I guess why don't we start by having you tell me a little bit about yourself, like where you grew up....

A. Well, I was born in Sioux City, Iowa.

Q. Mhuhm.

A. I lived there 73 years before we moved here about 9 years ago, and I went to school, high school, in fact there's a college called Morning Side College and I went there after the war, you know, we had a G.I. bill...

Q. Right...

A. And I'd been in service long enough to take care of the whole four years of college, so I went, I couldn't have gone otherwise. And I graduated from there and while I was there I started working part time for an insurance investigative company, and how I got the job, Lori, might be kind of interesting. I was in college, and I never had a lot of confidence when I was younger, and so I was walking down the hall and some guy's putting up a sign and it said they wanted to hire somebody, so I saw that sign and it said come and see us on such and such a date, and we are going to hire somebody, well, as I said, I didn't have a lot of confidence, so I tore the sign off and threw it in the garbage.

(Laughter)

So, a couple days later, I go up to the office, they interviewed me and visited a while, and he said, we'll let you know. Well, several days later they called me and said, "no one's contacted us, they must all be rich there or something, so you can have the job".

(Laughter)

So I got the job. I worked part time when I was in college, and then when I graduated, I went in full time. But, I didn't tell them that until about 20 years with the company, and then I said, I've got to tell you something. Well, by that time it was a joke. So that's how I got the job and was an insurance investigator for about 35 years. So, that was a really interesting job, I had so many different experiences because I dealt claims. Most people are honest, but a few of them weren't, it was a business. So that's about that part of it.

Q. Ok. Well, when did you join the service?

A. It was in February of 43. December was the day we were attacked, December 7th. It was a pretty nice day in Sioux City, so a bunch of us guys get together and played sandlot football, and while we were out on the football field, someone came and told us that it had happened. But, I was only 17.
Q. That the Japanese....

A. Yes, attacked Pearl Harbor. I thought, I'm only 17, I won't have to worry. Well, I thought it would be over. Well, you know, it lasted for years.

Q. Right.

A. And, I got my draft notice in February 1943. We were all waiting for it, [but] really, it was kind of a blow, you hate to see that coming. So, I had to report to Des Moines, to Fort.....hmm..it said Des Moines, and then we got orders to go to Louisville, Kentucky, and I thought, man, we're going to go south, but that isn't that far south. Anyway, it took us a long time to get there. And that's a (clears throat) Forth Knox is a tank training [camp], I got into tanks, and took training in the tank. Since I was a little guy, they put me in the bottom to load the guns, cause I could get in there (laughs) And then, we had a notice that they were going to have a...they called it the G 12 program, and I went and interviewed with somebody. My IQ was high, it wasn't real high, it was high enough that I was going to go to college, instead of the service, so a bunch of us were sitting there, going to either engineering college or medical school, and then after that you had to serve in the reserves for a year. We were sitting on our duffle bags, and it was in Ohio someplace, and we got some notice that they cut out the program.

Q. You said that it was the G 12?

A. G 12 – I think it was G 12. I'm not too sure. It was some program at that time they were sending the GI's and then they would serve as reserve for so many years, I think was the way it worked, well anyway, it was such a blow, and we were sitting on our duffle bags, and the next thing I know I'm headed overseas. And my buddy, who was assigned to the medical school, they didn't close that, he became a doctor. So, life has a funny way....

Q. So, you had been assigned to the engineering?

A. Yes, I was going to go to that. Well, so within a few days we got orders to go to Europe. And, [we] landed in Scotland, and then we took the train down to somewhere in England where we trained. I don't remember, it was so long ago, I don't remember the town, but it was a training camp in England somewhere.

Q. Do you remember when that was?

A. See, I don't remember dates....that was so long ago. I probably went over there, I was inducted in February, so probably sometime in the summer of that year I had to run on over to Europe to take over civil government, because we had to pick up basic training at Fort Knox [first]. And I was learning how to load a gun in a tank, and that was a training, and one day somebody came in the camp and said, "can anybody type?". Well, my hand went up.
He said, well, we were forming what they call some kind of a government. When we got into Germany and France, our people had to take over for awhile the seat of government to get organized, so I got assigned to one of those units, and so I got to go to London. And, for probably a few months, I don’t know, our offices on the ....somewhere in London there, Trafalgar Square or someplace.

Q. Uhumm.

A. So, that was quite an experience. But, then the Buzz Bombs started coming. You’re familiar with those, how that worked?

Q. No.

A. OK, the Germany had developed a deal where they would send these buzz bombs, they were probably as long as this house, and they would put so much fuel in them, and then they would send them over London, and then, once the fuel would run out, they would just drop. So, you know, anywhere, you didn’t know where.

Q. Mhuhmm.

A. In fact, we were there the first night they went over, we could see them, we couldn’t figure out what in the world that was, because they weren’t airplanes or anything. So, from then on, the English people had to put up with that, so of course, we did too, and I remember we were living upstairs on the third floor of some house, and of course, you could hear them coming, and so we would run down to the basement. The family lived on the first floor and we were probably on the third floor, or something like that. We’d run down and then when the buzz bomb went over, if it didn’t land on you, that’s nice. Those poor people in London, I admired them so much, because of what they went through. Anyway, it got so where we wouldn’t even go down anymore. We figured that if it was going to get us, it was going to get us.

(Laughter)

A couple instances here I thought you might be interested in. I had a couple of dates in London, you know,

Q. Uuhhh.

A. And, we were in a café in London, in fact, they were serving hotdogs for the Americans, and one of those things were coming over. And everybody just stops, your eyes just go up like that....so I was with this girl, so I grabbed her, laid her on the floor, and laid on top of her. Now, the guys made a big deal out of this, (laughing), but I thought it was very heroic, myself.
(Laughter)

I was protecting her, you know. And another time we were on our way home on the underground, and part of the underground goes above ground, and she lived out in the suburbs someplace. You’re all right underground and as soon as you went up above, everybody just...you know, you were just quiet. You didn’t know what to expect. So, it was kind of a harrowing experience. But, yeah, these people, I’ll never forget them, we would get up in the morning, and they’d go to work on their bikes and so forth, and if that thing came they’d try to run to the underground, if they could, if not ..... and they continued working, through all of that.

Q. Amazing.

A. Amazing....And they, I tell you, I admired these people so much, and they went through that for years. And the underground is where they slept. The train would go along, and people, whole families would be laying there night after night they’d do that. For years. So anyway, so that was my experience in London.

Q. What kind of things were you – you said you were assigned there because you could type...

A. I could type...so I went into the office.

Q. What kinds of stuff - what kind of work were you doing?

A. Oh, I don’t know....you know it’s been so long ago. I just typed memo’s, I suppose, or something like that. I’ve got a picture of me in their office, if you’d like to see it.

Q. Sure, sure.

A. Anyway, we just would organize administrative city government, so all we did was type up things and file things and anyway...I thought I had.. oh here it is...no that isn’t it. That was a parade there, on Armistice Day, and De Gaulle was in that parade at the time. I was up in a balcony on the Champs D'Elysee in Paris, the main drag, and I happened to take a picture of the parade, and De Gaulle was someplace in there. I don’t have the picture of my office...and this is a group, we chummed around together in Paris. Cause I was in Paris for awhile, too, that was kind of interesting. So....cause this will make....am I boring you?

Q. No, no....not at all. Not at all.

A. Then, of course, we were getting ready for the invasion. And, so, I left London and we went down to the southern part England, where we were able to go across. And I was assigned [to] the fourth infantry division. And they landed on Utah beach, the division did. I wasn’t at the landing, thank goodness. But, we were going to be part of the, what
it was, we were going to replace tanks that were knocked out in Germany, so that’s what I was training for. So, after I left London, there I was back to the unit as a loader. And, then at the invasion, we were there for quite a while, and I’ll never forget one time, it was quite deal there. Just a few days before we started, we were going to have to go eventually, I don’t know. You know, it was probably a week to ten days or longer before I actually went. landed in Europe. The beach had already been secured. We went to a dance, a bunch of the gals had a dance for us in the community hall. We had probably, maybe 30 or 40 us there. And they had a little orchestra, and the last song they played was, have you ever heard of, “Good night, till we meet tomorrow”? Have you heard that, that’s an old song?

Q. No.

A. Anyway it goes like this, Lori, “Good night, sweetheart till we meet tomorrow, Good night, sweetheart, parting is such sweet sorrow”. Well, you know, that did it. And we all just kind of broke down. (tears up, clears throat) But, anyway, so that was quite a deal, cause the gals grabbed us, and all that stuff; cause they didn’t know if the guys might not make it, well, some of them didn’t make it. So, anyway, got over there, I remember we got to get off the boat, we had to climb down those ropes, and got on to the beach. And then we just slept there, on the beach.

Q. And the beach was already secured.

A. Yeah, fortunately, yeah. It had been...In fact, I think we had gone 20 or 30 miles inland, already. But, you didn’t know what was on the other...what the Germans had there waiting for us. So we slept on the beach that night, and then we started going inland. And, there was a battle called St. Lo...have you heard of St. Lo? Well, we just couldn’t get through there. They were holding us up. So, what they did, they sent a thousand planes, we did. And, I’ll never forget, Lori, we were right on the field, watching these planes for hours. See, they were bombing everything in front of us, so that when we went forward, we’d probably have a lot better chance.

Q. Right.

A. And obviously, we did, you know. So, that went on for awhile, and I forgot the details, but anyway, then we went on and got through there and we kept going forward. I’m trying to think of a couple of inci...you know everybody has their own little [story to tell] about something [that] happened to them.

Q. Right.

A. So, I’m just trying to think here.....I told you about the buzz bombs, and the café, All the guys say, “sure, Bill, yeah, sure, you know. (laughs). But, anyway, we landed on Utah beach....and a lot of different things happened. Couple of different things, you know, people can be pretty cruel in a war. Even Americans can be cruel. And a couple of things I remember very distinctly. We were walking, going into a town, and a couple
of guys were shot up ahead of us. Well, there was a sniper. See they had snipers up there. Then as soon as they were caught, they surrendered. And, this sergeant, he landed on D-Day, and he said...my name was Schimatowsky then (I changed it), so “Schimatowsky,” he said, “come here a minute. Bring this guy over here.” So, I brought this German over, a couple of us, and he took his rifle, and smashed him across the head, busted his head right open. And, I tell you, at the time, [he was] just so distraught, because of what he had gone through.

Q. Right.

A. So, anyway, that was a scary thing, a 19 year kid, you know. Gosh...and let’s see, we caught the sniper....and then one time...

Q. And was he a prisoner – did you make him a prisoner?

A. I think, I'm sure he was killed. There were two of them, and the other guys, he was just bawling, and yelling, and screaming, because he thought he was next. But, the guy, the sergeant didn’t do anything to this other guy. But, I’m sure he killed him, hitting him on the side of the face.

Q. Uhummm.

A. And then, another time.....

Q. How’d you - how did you feel about that?

A. Well, you know, it was scary. We were just, heck, we were only teenagers, really.

Q. Right.

A. 19 years old. And to see stuff like that, having lived in Sioux City, never been out of town, and all this stuff was going on. And then another time, when we were taking a town, there was a little house on the outskirts, and he said, “Schimatowsky, go and see what’s in that house”. And there was a guy sitting there, and he said, “go see what he’s doing”, wanting me to search it. And so, I found some stuff, swastika flag and stuff, I brought em out, and he looked at it. Never said a word, got his match, and burned his house down. You know, you felt bad, but naturally, it was horrible, terrible to me, but he’d gone through hell, you know. So, anyway, that’s what happens sometimes.

Q. Right....Did you encounter a lot of fighting, as you were going inland?

A. Yeah, yeah. And I fought until we got to Paris, which was August. I think we liberated Paris August 8th, or something like that. We were in combat from the time I landed until August 8th. And the one time, Lori, I’m not very good at handling machines. So, I had this rifle, and it had a shell, we stuck them in and fired, and we would all line up and when you went into a town, you would have a bunch of infantry and you’d have a
tank, and then you’d just shoot. Just go into town just blasting away. Well, my gun jammed, you know me. So, I was going, “BANG, BANG, You Dirty Hun!!” (laughs)

(Laughter)

And I didn’t have a [working] gun. Finally, we got in there and one of the sergeants came over and helped me [fix it], but I tell you what, I was never very handy, anyway.

(Laughter)

One other incident there was, we got into town, and there was a barn with some cows in it. A couple of women ran into get the cows, it was burning. And our GI’s grabbed them, and they went in and got the cows and brought them out for them. So, terrible things happened, and yet you see, how people can really be in time of war, you know.

Q. Good things happened, too.

A. Yeah, right, yeah.

Q. I’m sure the people of France were very happy you were there.

A. What?

Q. I said I’m sure the people of France were very happy you were there.

A. Yeah, my gosh, yes. You know, a lot of them got killed because you had to bomb these towns and a lot of times your bullets would be incendiary bullets, so you could fire [your gun] and start a fire. To get things riled up, so the enemy couldn’t fire. But, we got into Paris, and I had a couple of buddies killed. I remember one time I was going to meet a friend of mine, we were going to play ping pong. When you’re in battle, it might last only a few days, a day, and then there’s nothing going on for a week or two, because you have to regroup, so you try to kill time.

Q. Mhumm.

A. And we were in this town, they had a place to play ping pong. And I was going to meet him that night, and he didn’t show up. And so, the next morning, I found that he’d stepped on a mine. They had mines, and he’d stepped on a mine and got killed, and so, those things happened.

Q. So you got to Paris.....

A. Got to Paris, and then once I got to Paris, and I was going down the road, and the women are kissing us, you know, having a big time, and I thought I was going to go on with my division. And I get a notice that I was going to get to stay in Paris, because I could type. So, man, I thought I was set. This was August, sometime in August. We
lived on the Champs D'Elysee in an apartment of some kind, and we had an office there. That was neat, you know. We worked from 8 to 5 and then we had our evenings and all our time free, and I thought I had it made, see?

A. Uhumm......did you date a lot of French women? (laughing)

Q. Well, a couple there, especially one, was a real sweet thing. She was a ballet dancer, and I remember I went to her parents house, and she had to do a ballet dance for me. I didn't know ballet, but anyway, put on a little show for me, and then we sat down to eat, and all they had was potato soup. Food was scarce, there. I think they had some kind of meat, but it was mostly potato soup. Incidentally, I made a lot of money over there, because they gave us a carton of cigarettes a week – Camels. And, I didn't smoke, and so the sergeant gave me twenty dollars, at that time, for these cigarettes, every week. Of course, he was selling them on the black market, so he probably made a bunch (laughs)

(Laughter)

So, I'd saved enough, Lori, when I got back, I sent it home to my mother, I had 800 dollars when I got back

Q. Wow.

A. And I bought my car with it. So, that was a little side line...

Q. 20 dollars for a carton of cigarettes....

A. Wasn't that something? So, you know what they were getting at the time. Because 20 dollars meant – that was a bit at that time. I just sent it home, because I didn't care to touch it. And so, I'm going to show you something on the wall. The thing I like most, I got an infantry man's badge, that meant you had to be in combat to get it. Wonderful thing about that was you got a 10 dollar raise for being in combat, but you had to be actually in combat. So, anyway, there a few instances in Paris that were kind of interesting. One, I don't know if you want to....

Q. Oh, sure...

A. Well, it's, it's....I don't know if I should tell you or not.

Q. Sure....

A. It wasn't anything bad. We were, Jack, my friend, and I – we were young, you know. And there was a guy named Red,

Q. Mhhmmm.
A. Incidentally, Red, was his name, from Omaha. And he was probably around 30 at the time, so he was an old man (laughs)

(Laughter)

So, anyway, I never drank or anything, and neither did Jack. Finally Red says, “why don’t you guys go and have a glass of wine with us?” I said, well, I don’t know.... (laughs) ..I don’t know....I guess I’m going to tell you this story, and it’s not that bad....but, anyway....so, we start walking, going down this side street.

Q. Mhmmm.

A. And I remember, walked into this place, and there curtains and things, and this gal was sitting there, she says, “Hi Red”. So, we go on in, and there was a room about this size, and there were women dressed in all phases of....gosh, you know this was a house of prostitution. (laughing)

(Laughter)

And I know why he brought us, he just wanted to have a ball, because as soon as we walked in, everybody started laughing. And, gosh, I’m a nervous wreck, you know, 19 [years old]. So we sat down, there was a small bar, and one of the gals came up and sat by us (laughs). We had those caps, we wore like this, you know?

Q. Mhmmm.

A. And they were cloth. Well, I’m sitting there, and this one gal takes my hat off, and she puts it between her legs (laughs).

(Laughter)

Oh, my gosh, what do you do? And Red, they were all laughing, and I don’t remember the full details, but we finally got out of there. Well, then, if you didn’t wear your cap, they could really give you a bad time, but I couldn’t wear the cap.

(Laughter)

So, (laughing) walking back, I’m carrying it, you know. The next day I went to the supply sergeant, and I said, “I need a new cap”. “Why?” Well, when I told him that, he about collapsed (laughs).

(Laughter)

So, he gave me a new cap. So, that was an experience in Paris. But, like I say, I know why he did that. They just had a ball, cause even the gals were laughing, because we were both scared to death. So, anyway, stayed in Paris until [about December 18th].
Then, one time, I might mention this. This Jack, he was my buddy, when we had to go at
the time of the bulge, you remember the bulge?

Q. Mhmmm.

A. Ok, that was December 16th, and I was in Paris, and December 17th I got notice that
we were headed right for the front, because they needed men. And, Jack, he didn't want
to go. He said, if you put kerosene on your hand, or something, and get it all red..." And
I said, "you..." I berated him for that. So all the time we were together, I was scared to
death that he'd die. I don't think he would have done anything, but he was kind of
young, Lori.

Q. Mhmmm.

A. One time we were marching along and he was out, kind of scouting out there, and I
saw a puff of smoke and he hit kind of a deal that at night would have lit up, and he came
back in line and never did go back out. But, I worried about him. One time we were
attacking, and slowed down. So we're on a hill, and the Germans were on the other side.
You could see them walking down there in a trench, and we couldn't figure that out. And
pretty soon, a shell would come over, like over here, and then there would be one short.
And, those were the German 88's, and they would say the third shot, you could zero in
pretty good, and we [couldn't] leave. Well, the sergeant, a real mean, little guy - he was
the one, that [I told you about], and he said, "we're getting out of here, and I don't care"
and we got out of there just when the shells started coming where we were. We ran down
into the town, and I remember Jack and I went into the basement of a house, and then the
next day, I was trying to get into my helmet. I was holding my helmet, trying to get into
it (laughs), but one lone guy got in there, just arrived there, and he was running down the
hill, and he didn't get down to the town, he was laying by the curb, you know how the
curbs are, well he was laying by the curb, and the next morning, he was just a blubbering
idiot. He had completely gone nuts, because he was all by himself. They just took him
away. That was his first day on the front.

Q. You said that the sergeant was the same one that hit...

A. Yes, I think it was.

Q. So, you joined your same division that you had been with....

A. No, you're right. But, he was a lot like the other guy, a real kind of onery guy, in
fact, what he would do, when we would camp or something, he'd drink, and then he'd tell
the GI's to go and bring him a girl to stay with him that night in the tent. So, he was kind
of a mean little guy. But, we listened to him, cause he knew what he was doing.
Anyway, we'd give him coffee and sober him up, every morning (laughs).

(Laughter)
But, he made us go down that hill that time. Then, another time, we were attacking, and we kept moving; you’d dig these foxholes, and Jack and I, you’d dig one about that deep, just low enough, deep enough so your body would be below the surface, so that the mortar would go over you, of course, if it lit on you, you were dead, you know. And so, all night long, we just laid in that trench. That was kind of a scary deal. But, when we got to the front, it must have about the 18th or 19th, I think. You know, it’s so long ago, Lori,

Q. Yeah, yeah. I know it started December 16th.

A. Yeah, so in a few days we were up at the front. And I remember when they gave us a lecture. The general said, “you know what, you’re with the fightinist outfit in the world”. I didn’t want to hear about that.

(Laughter)

I didn’t want to be in the fightinist outfit in the world. So, and then night came, and Jack and I were going to lay on the ground. And Jack and I saw some guys laying, so, let’s go over there, there was grass there, and we went over and then stopped, because the blanket was over their heads, their feet just showing. They’d been killed, you know.

Q. Uhuh.

A. I was just bug-eyed all the time. So, we just left there and went and slept someplace else. And then we continued, and I was with them until the end of the war. I ended up in Hitler’s hideout; they had this beautiful view of the mountains. And we were supposed to take that, as a matter of fact, because there were only a few SS troops there, anyway. But the 101 Airborn, I think, I don’t know if this is true or not, but they were kind of the glory outfit. They got to take it, and we never got up there. They wouldn’t let us go up there and see it. We felt bad about that, we were there, the war about over.

Q. Right.

A. We would have loved to gone up and seen that, but we never got to see it. And, let’s see, what else? Oh, a couple of other things, do you want me to continue?

Q. Oh, yeah, yeah. Definitely.

A. Do you want to ask any questions?

Q. Well, with the battle of the bulge... I had read that more Americans died during that battle, that single battle, then died at Gettysburg.

A. Yeah, several thousand, because it lasted [so long] They weren’t expecting it, and a lot of Germans had dressed in American uniforms, and they just went on through. Oh, yeah, casualties, terrible. The other thing to say was they had to capture Baston, because
that was the road around to where they wanted to go to La Harve, along the border. But, the general wouldn’t surrender. He said, “ah, nuts”, to them, but, yeah, they lost, because it was such a surprise. And, of course, they didn’t know what to expect, that’s why they had every able bodied man there to fight.

Q. Right...Did a lot of people you know die during that battle?

A. Well, that one real good friend of mine, that’s one that died there. But [there were several others during combat]. We were in the Herkin forest. But, our own artilleries fired short, were firing and hitting us, and so I went to a big log about like this, kind of like that. You know I was a little bitty guy, so I went there to lay [next to the log], because I thought it was safe and nothing happened. It didn’t last a long time, because they radioed and said, “hey you guys are screwing up”. But, a couple guys got hit. I’ll never forget one guy I saw there, he had about a part of his foot blown off, and also his lower leg was cut in half, but he was laughing, because he was going home.

Q. Oh.

A. I’ll never forget it. He said a few words to us, “well, you guys are going to be here”, but medics were about a mile away, so it was a long before they could get him, of course, by that time he was really hurting bad. But he went home, he never had to fight again. Isn’t that funny, how things happen? We were all always kind of wanting to get a little wound, nothing serious (laughing)

Q. Just a little one.

A. Just enough to [go home]. One of the greatest things....This sounds stupid, but when you’re out [in the field], well you’ve [still got bodily needs and have] to go to the bathroom.

Q. Mhhmmm.

A. And it’s winter, there’s snow, you just pull your pants down and go, and so forth, and it was several days. See this was December, so was winter just like here.

Q. Right.

A. I remember we got into town, and we went and took over this house. There was people in there, and the sergeant says, “we’re going to go up and sleep up there, and you guys can stay down here in the living room, or whatever it was. So, I remember Jack and I went up there and we saw [a toilet], and we got to sit down [on a stool].

(Laughter)

Now, this sounds stupid, but I tell you, we kind of giggled. It was just so nice to sit and go to the bathroom. (laughs)
Q. Luxury.

A. Because in town, we were in a house and we couldn’t get anywhere, we couldn’t leave, had to stay there. And, anyhow… you want to hear about this stuff?

Q. Yeah.

A. Anyway, so there was no inside plumbing, so we found a beautiful, like maybe a thing you put on a table. So, I went on that, folded it up, and threw it out the window. (laughs) (Laughter)

These are things that, you know, you don’t hear about as often. That’s what happens, because, you had to do, you know, all sorts of stuff. Kind of scary.

Q. No, I think these are definitely things people would be interested – how you guys lived, you know,

A. Yeah, yeah,

Q. And the experiences that you went through.

A. Absolutely, because we did. And then, of course, there are days that you wore the same clothes, same socks, same shoes.

Q. Mhmmmm.

A. Now, we usually carried, or tried to carry socks in a duffle bag, so we’d at least have dry socks, but the shoes are wet. I remember one time, my little toe was just about off, so I went to the medic and I said, “you know, I can’t hardly walk. What am I going to do?” “Take an Aspirin! Get your A up there!” And that’s the way it was, so you had to do it. And uh, but a lot of guys got frost bit and couldn’t get... they were casualties. Wasn’t anything that could be done about it. But, um,

Q. And I heard that trench foot was...

A. Yeah, yeah. And I don’t think I had that, [but] I knew it was really bad. So, I told you, let’s see…...so now, that’s kind of what happened. Do you have questions?

Q. Well, I heard you had a nickname called Bayonet Bill.

A. Oh, oh, I got to tell you about that. How’d you heard that?

Q. My dad told me that.
A. (Laughs) Yeah, we captured a bunch of Germans. And they were marching down the road, and we had our bayonets, and this big guy, he was about 6’3”, and I heard him really swearing in German, and I heard “Americanis”, obviously us. So, I went up and I jabbed in the butt with my bayonet, and I’m telling you, he would of killed me. Well, course, the guys saw that, and they got a bang out of it, so then I was “Bayonet Bill, Terror of the Western Front” (laughs).

(Laughter)

So, it sounds kind of great, when my boy was growing up, I’d say, “Yeah, they called me Bayonet Bill” and he probably thought I fought the Germans with a Bayonet. I didn’t tell him till he was quite older the whole story, but, yep, Bayonet Bill. So, you had some fun things, you had to do something to that would be a little interesting, you know. And that was kind of interesting. But, yeah, and so then I got out. Course then, the war was going on in Japan, yet. And so the war ended in May....was it May in Europe?

Q. Yeah.

A. Yeah, May 7th or 8th.

Q. Yeah. May 8th was V.E. day.

A. Yeah, so that was wonderful. And we were going to go over to Japan. We got home, and I’ll never forget when we got in, I guess it was August, cause it took quite a while to get us out of there. And I’ll never forget when you came in, you went by the statue of liberty. That was....[I don’t think there was a dry eye on the ship]. And when we got in, they gave us chocolate malt and cheeseburgers, and fries. Cause that what we liked, and asked for.

Q. Uhmm, right.

A. That was our treat, when we landed, in the mess hall. But that was a really traumatic experience to see that. And uh, so we got home, and I went home, they were going to have a 30 day leave, and then we’re heading for Japan. So, it was fun to be home, but you knew.... more of this.

Q. Right.

A. Well, then of course, the atomic bomb dropped, and that ended that. So, then I got out of the service, and I got the GI bill, got married, had my family. Anyway, that’s the skinny there, as they say.

Q. Well, I think you had said something about a prisoner of war camp?
A. Oh, yes, yes, that’s right, we did. Yeah, that’s right. I’ll never forget that. I was sitting in a tank. It wasn’t like as bad as some of them. This was just like prisoners, they were all emaciated, you know, they were skinny and hadn’t eaten anything. But, we relieved the camp and they came up and hugged us, and we threw whatever food we had to them, and the thing is, what do you do? We didn’t know what to do with them. And they just started leaving, just started walking out of the camp. And I’ll never forget, we were watching the Germans out there, and the guys, the people were going along, and they came out and gave them bread. Yeah, that was kind of sad.

Q. They were German civilians that were giving them the bread?

A. Yes. They started walking on the road, and we were kind of milling around, and saw a family come out and give them some bread, cause they were starved.

Q. Right, right

A. Yeah, that’s right. I almost forgot that. Anyway, this wasn’t a camp, like what you heard about, where they burned the bodies, this was just mostly, there were a lot of [Prisoners], but I don’t think there were any Americans in that camp. But, they imprisoned everybody, you know.

Q. Right.

A. Yeah, that’s right, I’ll never forget that. They were so happy to see us.

Q. I can only image.

A. These people would come and grab you. Anyway....

Q. So, your experiences.... How do you...I’m sure that they’ve really made you the person that you are.

A. Well, I don’t know. It certainly changed me, because the farthest I’d been was 60 miles to visit an aunt. And, going back to the induction, when I got to Des Moines, I was pretty naïve. I never swore, never did anything. We were kind of religious, and my buddies were that way. I’ll never forget the first night in barracks, there’s a lot of swearing going on, and all that. You know, it was kind of hard for a guy that never said a lot of 4 letter words. And then they had a saying in the morning, but I don’t know if I’ll say it (laughs) it about shocked me.

Q. You can say it.

A. Ok, well, I won’t say the word, but they’d say, “All right, you SOB’s drop your ____ and grab your socks. (laughs)

(Laughter)
That’s the first thing I heard the morning I’m there, and what am I getting into? Gosh (laughs), but, you learned a lot, you grew up fast. And uh, I don’t know how it helped me, as far as uh….it made you grow up pretty fast, and made you appreciate a lot of things, you know, had I not been there.

Q. Right.

A. I might mention, something when we were in London there – Oh yeah, can we keep going?

Q. Yeah, keep going, keep going.

A. When we were in London those buzz bombs would come, and one time one hit a church, and blew it up, and I think there were some soldiers in there at the time. We went over there the next day, day or two later, and they had cleaned up everything, but you had to see it. And, a few years ago, we’d been in London at the time, I always wanted to be there, cause those people, there’s just something about them.

Q. Mhmmm.

A. Anyway, we’re going along, and here I see this church – they left it. Like I say, I don’t know if it was the same one, or not, but it sure looked like it – three sided, so then, my family, we had to go over, Doris, I, and her sisters, had to go and look at that. And here that church was standing, yet. That would have been 10 years ago that we were there.

Q. Wow.

A. I suppose they kept that....see that bomb would just blow you up. Every day you could look at the paper and it had casualties – 120 killed, 89 killed. Every day there were people killed because of the buzz bombs. So that wasn’t too much fun there. And, ah....

Q. Did you go back...when you were in London, did you go to France or Germany?

A. Yeah, we went back to the beaches. I went with my grandson and Doris. I wanted to go for at least a day. Even though I wasn’t in the invasion itself and went through all that, still I landed there and went into France from there. So, we went there about, gosh, 6 -7 years ago, maybe longer than that now. I wanted to go on one of the Anniversaries, but it didn’t work out, but we spent a day there and went and saw some of the hotel boxes where they had the guns. A lot of that stuff they kept.

Q. Mhmmmmm.
A. Went to the cemetery. 9,000 bodies are in the cemetery on a hill overlooking the beaches there. That’s a lot of the guys that died there during, not the first day, but all the days of battle.

Q. Right.

A. So, went through that cemetery, which was quite a deal, and these things kind of haunt you sometimes.

Q. Yeah, I can imagine.

A. Yeah. (clears throat) But, anyway, I’m alive, 83 years later (laughs). And, met my wife, and got married, 56 years now, and 4 children, so got through it.

Q. Good.

A. Oh, one other thing. These things come back, even when I was writing them. If you’re going to stay a few days in a place, you always try to get a foxhole.

Q. Uhuh.

A. This old Mexican guy and I, we were together for some reason, and we’re going to dig in for a few days, so we found this – it was a big hole. It was so long ago, but it was a hole about [4 foot] wide and pretty deep. We said, why do we dig anything? So, we were wandering around, and found an old door, a big, big door, and brought that over, then we put dirt on it, we had a wonderful deal, there. So, then, sometime during the day or evening, we crawled down in there, here was the opening, and the thing caved in. There was a guy, there was somebody there, but there we were, we couldn’t get our hands, and this little Mexican guy, he said, “we’re going to die in this hole”, and I thought, “Jemany Christmas”. Didn’t last very long, they got us out, but that was another experience there. And, you don’t eat much. The food they gave you, [at] the bars, and then we went into a town, and there was a farm house, and so we asked the ladies if they would give us some eggs. We probably ate a dozen eggs. We were so sick for two days – greasy eggs (laughs).

(Laughter)

I’ll never forget that. But, uh…..

Q. And where was that?

A. Somewhere in Germany.

Q. In Germany?
A. Yeah, it was a German family we asked, and they were cooperative. All those people, they’re just people like us, you know. Most of them are just families and we were young kids. Heck, my mother was born in Germany. I wish she had taught me German, cause that would have been a real asset over there. But, she would never talk German around each other, because we were Americans, so she would never speak German in front of me; well, she would with her mother, but I could never learn it.

Q. Right, well I imagine after World War I…

A. Yes, exactly. They didn’t want to take part of it, so that’s where that ended up.

(tape turn over)

I’m certainly trying to think of something else, here.

Q. Definitely sounds like quite an experience.

A. (laughs) yeah.

Q. I just can’t even imagine going through a war like that.

A. Yeah, and it’s so lonely at times. Because the days you weren’t in combat, you’re just laying around, waiting. Well, you’d get pretty depressed at times. And, of course, if you had girlfriends, and I had a girlfriend, but not when I got back, so [there was no one at the station].

Q. Did you get a “dear john” letter?

A. Kind of like that, yeah, a little bit. But…

Q. That would be lonely.

A. Well, it was. Then when you came home, you didn’t have any girl to meet you. A lot of the guys had their girlfriends to meet them, and so forth. I mean a lot of them had their wives, but that was kind hard to come home and not have someone waiting for you. But, like I say, you’d be - there’d be days you’d just be really kind of downcast, because you wondered if this was ever going to end. All you saw was this little bit of area you were in – a big world war, and you were just there. And, is it ever going to end, you know? Then there’d be rumors, always rumors. It’s going to be over or, he’s got a secret weapon, you’ll hear all that stuff, so that was kind of nerve-wracking, too, you know.

Q. Did you have access to any newspapers or?

A. Yeah, they had a Stars and Stripes, they had an army newspaper, and we got to read the paper, the Stars and Stripes. When you could, we got to read that. And that had a lot of good information, then like I say, the rumors were always crazy, you know. (laughs)
Q. And letters from home?

A. Letters from home, yeah.

Q. Well...

A. My mother’d write. I’ve got a bunch of letters yet that I wrote home. I’ve got them someplace. I’m afraid I was – a couple years ago, I started reading them, but she kept all those letters.

Q. That’s good.

A. Yeah, so we go back every few years and kind of look those letters over and see what I said. And I remember this one gal in London. (laughs) We got fairly close, you know, anyway, when I went overseas into France, I wrote her, and she wrote me. And I’ll never forget, she wrote one, and she said that the B1 rockets are the ones that would stop. And then there came another one called the B2’s, and they were just, just so fast. So, I remember her letter told me about those, how terrible that was, because.....she lived through that for years. Yeah...

Q. Did she make it through the war?

A. I have no idea. I kept (laughing) telling Doris I’d look her up when I got there. And then they’d give me bad time, well they’d say, “well, if you see this old guy there with jowls”, and so forth (laughs).

(Laughter)

You know how the guys do, and I enjoy banter back and forth. But, I remember that. I got the letter, still got that letter, telling me that. What she was telling me what she did, she’d been in the office working, and then these things would come over, so she really went through a lot. Very good gal. (laughs) Anyway....that’s all that happened. That’s right....this is all on tape, isn’t it? But, anyway, what else went on there? But, that’s kind of what happened to me. Every GI has their story. I’ve often felt bad, I never kept in contact with my friend, Jack. We came back together. He lived in New York, and I’ve often wondered – I kind of feel bad we didn’t communicate, cause when you go through that, nobody else goes through something like that.

Q. Right.

A. You have the experience that no one else has ever had, you know, like a death. But, I called. I tried to get him here about 10 years ago, and I think I got a nephew, and he said, “Well, my uncle’s Jack, but he died a few years ago” So, I got to thinking that was probably him. Whatever happened to him, I don’t know. But, I should of gotten a hold of that Red in Omaha and given him a hard time (laughs).
(Laughter)

So, that's about it.

Q. Big celebrations when you got back with your family?

A. I had no family, just a mother.

Q. Just your mom?

A. Yeah, she was a single mom when I grew up, and I had no brothers or sisters, or cousins. I had an aunt, but it was just my mother. And I don't think — she was a nurse and she couldn't even get off when [I arrived home], so (Door opens) Well, here comes my wife — I think that's my wife.

W. Hello, how are you?

Q. Hello — fine.

(Tape off —Resumes)

A. An individuals experiences.

Q. I do really appreciate you taking the time....

A. Oh, it's great, Lori, I'm glad you called. Seriously, it's been fun.

Q. And, if you think of anything else, feel free to give me a call.

A. Yeah, like I say, things will come to me, and if you want, we could meet.

Q. Sure, that would be wonderful.

A. Yeah, I think this might be something that you might be interested in. You've seen those, haven't you, the DVD's? It starts when we were little, and plays different songs. Then he's got a whole segment of our romance and marriage, [and one of WWII pictures].

(End of Tape 1)

Q. Let me get this started.

A. Get those rolling.
Q. Get those rolling, and say that it’s October 19\textsuperscript{th}, 2006. Lori Giordano is talking with Bill Schimm. Ok, you said you had a couple of other things that you -

A. Yeah, I kind of remembered, that might be of interest. Did I tell you about going over on the Queen Mary?

Q. No, no.

A. Ok, we landed in Scotland. But, we’re on the Queen Mary, and kind of interesting, cause that ship had been a cruise ship, then made into a troop transport. And it seemed to me that there were probably around 10,000 soldiers on the ship at the time. We had bunks, 3 or 4 layered bunks. Anyway, it took us 7 days to get over there because the U boats were active in that area, and so the ship had to go around them, it took 7 days to get there.

Q. Wow.

A. Cause if they’d have sunk that, it would have been a great victory for them, all those troops.

Q. Right.

A. So, anyway, I remember, I was on a lower bunk. There was probably three bunks. And the guy, the first day, the guy above had got sick – threw up. Well, anyway, I tell you, the next day, it really stunk so bad. And they couldn’t get at it, they couldn’t clean it up right away. I think he laid there for three days. So, I just laid on the deck, slept on the deck (laughs). Found a corner. So, that was kind of interesting.

Q. A lot of seasickness? Were there a lot of people sick?

A. Lot of it, oh, yeah. And I remember they’d feed us bread and stuff, to kind of keep it down. I think I might have got sick once, but oh, yeah, my gosh, of yeah. I can see this guy standing over the rail throwing up, you know.

(Laughter)

It was at times a very stormy sea. It’s interesting, and now the Queen Mary, I think, is docked in California someplace. I think you can go through it now.

Q. I think, yeah, I think…….

A. There was something about that, and that was the one that we went over. So, anyway, you want interesting things that happened to us, right?

Q. Mhummm.
A. Well, as I mentioned, we were in combat during the winter, it was cold and snowing, and stuff....

Q. This was during the Battle of the Bulge?

A. Yeah, I probably arrived at the front in Belgium the 17th, 3 or 4 days later I was in the front again, and I was there until the end of the war. But, it was cold, and one time, if you camped at night, it was kind of quiet. And we found this barn, 3 or 4 of us, and there was straw. And, man, that was just like heaven. So, we went in an laid down and get ready to go sleep, and I put my arm over like this, and all the sudden it started moving. I felt something furry under that straw. I couldn’t even move, I was so scared, and it just kept going, it finally left, and my hand dropped. And I'm terrified, and I said, "this is it", and I slept on the ground. I tell you, it was the funniest feeling, that thing, it was probably a coon or something, I don't know what it was. So, anyway, that was another one of things that happened. And, when we would go into a town, we would have to search the homes, because there could be some [Germans] left, so I remember, we went into one house and there’s nothing on the first level. Upstairs there was a door shut, and we told them to come out in German. And, finally the door opened – it was three officers, fully dressed in their dress best. I mean, we look like a bunch of thugs, and here we were capturing them, so I think that was psychological thing on their part, that they were dressed in their best for their surrender.

Q. Right.

A. But, that was always always something scary, because you didn’t know what was going on.

Q. Whether they were armed, or....

A. Yeah. And I might mention when I got home, for about 10 years, I would have dreams. I don’t know if they were nightmares, but they were bad dreams, and it always I was being inducted again (laughs)

(Laughter)

And I keep saying, "I'm too old, I've been in the war, once". And then I went to camp once, and I kept saying, "I've got a family at home, I can't" and that went on for several years. And only once did I dream that I was actually in combat. The rest was all sweating out because I was inducted and had to go to basic, so I must have really hated that. I guess that's about all I have to give you a little more insight as to how we fought, and what we went through, and the different...

Q. Do you remember where you were when you were talking about the battle of the bulge, do you remember what area you were in?
A. No, I really don’t. You know, at the time, we were just there, and I just don’t. I have a book, and I can’t find it, it might. The 4th infantry, if you probably look that up, I think you can find that out. The 4th infantry would tell exactly where it went, I don’t know how you would do that, through the government, or something. I could find that out, maybe.

Q. And you were in the 4th Infantry?

A. We ended up, I know we ended up at Hitler’s hideout, Lori, I think that’s in the Austrian mountains, or something. That’s where we ended up, so….but, as far as the towns, you know, it’s so long…

Q. Ok.

A. Incidentally, we were in Germany, my daughter and son-in law. He’s a pastor, he’s a director of a Lutheran church, and we went to Germany with them, and we were going through a town called Werms, it was south of Frankfort, I think. Anyway, we went to this church. It was still partly damaged, and we went inside, and I remember we had blasted some of these towns, and here was a little jar, asking for donations to refurbish this church. And fifty years ago, we were blowing it up, so the world’s kind of screwy, isn’t it?

Q. Did you donate?

A. I did donate. I did. First we blew it up, then rebuild it. Crazy world.

Q. Do you - can you tell me anything about being in combat? What it was like?

A. You know something, it’s a funny thing. I told you about going into combat and my gun getting jammed, and that one night we were on a hill, we were there all night long, dug in, we were under mortar fire, and the next day there would be a body that had gotten hit. And we just dug in, in case there’d be a counter attack. So, I remember getting up and there would be 4 or 5 that had been hit. I’ve never seen anybody right beside me, except the guy that, I was in that forest, and he got hit, I told you about that, didn’t I? Our guns fired short. Sometimes that happens.

Q. Yeah.

A. I saw that one guy that was killed. Yeah, I seen a few guys. But, you know, it’s a funny thing how you forget a lot of that.

Q. You probably want to.

A. Yeah, I think so, I think you just can’t remember a lot of it. I remember we were going down the highway once, and uh… I told you how I learned to drive a half-track?
Q. Mmhmm, no.

A. You want to hear that story?

Q. Yeah, sure.

A. (laughs) I never had a car in my life, so I’m in the service, and you had to drive. I had to learn to drive a half track, which is like a truck, but it had tracks on it. And my other buddy had driven a car, so anyway, you have to double-clutch. You had to do it like that, and I could never learn to do that—I’m not too handy, anyway. And I’m driving with this sergeant behind me, had kind of a long stick about like that, and whenever you didn’t do it right, why, he hit you, “you so-and-so” And, I’d say, “Well, I’ve never driven before”. Anyway, I finally learned to drive it, but it was a disaster. I mean, I was going into ditches. But, you’ve never driven, then to get a great big thing like this put in your hands. And there I was, he say, “double clutch”, why I didn’t know what that meant.

Q. And then you’d get beat.

A. Then, yeah, well, not really hard, but it was a snap. He wasn’t too happy (laughs). But, like I say, in the combat, I forgot a lot of it. I think you do, sometimes. And, I think, over the years, there’ve been movies showing what combat was like, and it’s pretty realistic. I don’t know if you saw “Ryan” or not...

Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. That’s awfully realistic. And, obviously, I did not get in on the invasion, I just thank the Lord for that. But, when you were marching through there, you had to … and I remember toward the end of the war, we were fighting kids 15, 14 years old. They were really down in their numbers, they were shooting, and we’d say surrender, and they were barely in high school – well 14 or 15 years old. Really, they were at the bottom of the barrel in their manpower.

Q. Right.

A. So, it was…scary, that’s all I know. (laughs) Yeah, it was pretty bad. Anyway, when you’re 18-19. The reason I mention some of these things that are kind of offbeat is because there were so many temptations there. We were 18, we were teenagers, 18 – 19 years old. And here you go into this environment, and you could do anything you want, nobody around, so a lot of guys started drinking. I have nothing against a drink or two, but some of them became alcoholics, because they just went from one extreme to the other. There were all kinds of temptations there, you know. So, anyway,

Q. You remained firm, though.
A. Well, I think so. I think it was kind of my upbringing. I was an only child, single parent, but we had a good, Christian home at the time, and that's the way it was. So, when I got back, I really didn't change much, I don't think. Grew up, obviously, and a lot of memories.

Q. And, then, of course, able to use the GI bill.

Q. Yes, 75 dollars a month, all books paid, and I lived at home, so 75 bucks was quite a bit. And I was the only one with a car. A lot of the guys were living there didn't have a car, so I had the car. And, I told you I saved that, $300, so I was kind of big shot because I had the car. We'd go on dates and I was always the driver (laughs).

(Laughter)

It was a big, great big old Desota, 1938 Desota. I don't think they make them anymore, but it was kind of a big old car. I remember you couldn't afford two tires, you'd have to put inner tubes inside the tires, try to make it go, and had a flat once on a date, and you, know, life is a mystery. And...I want to show you this. This was the notice I got. It was February 11th, was it?

Q. February, 11th, report for induction.

A. Yeah, report for induction, I think in Des Moines.

Q. And you had to arrive at 5:00 A.M. on the 25th of February.

A. How about that? 5:00 A.M., yeah. That was my first indication that things weren't going to be too great.

Q. February 25th, yeah. That's definitely an ungodly hour.

A. And then to wake up in the morning to hear that sergeant yelling at me, it was not a good picture.

Q. Yeah, the Francis Building. And it ended up that when I returned and started working full time, my office was in Francis Building. I had my office in Francis Building. And this is a thing you receive, Lori, when you're going home, they gave us some information on what we were to do, and this kind of told some of the things. And, I was going through it, yesterday, and here, it said, just so you remember to write your buddies, and two of the guys wrote their names on there. And you know, we never did contact each other. Which I'm sorry we didn't do that, we didn't do that, a lot of us. But, I remember him, Donald Lodle, I don't remember who this is, Martin Zentmeyer, or something like that, he was a sergeant, from Harrisburg, PA. And Donald was from Denmark, Wisconsin, it looks like. But, it's too bad we didn't keep in touch.

Q. Did you contact anybody?
A. You know, I never did. Until about a few years ago, when I tried to get a hold of this buddy of mine, and he had passed away.

Q. Probably wanted to just kind of forget it all.

A. I think you did. You’re on your way to a new life, college and dates, so you didn’t really think too much about it. The only time really guys get together is if you were in a unit by itself for a couple years, you have reunions. And I was never in a unit long enough for a reunion. But, there’s some pictures, I think they showed us pictures of, well, I mentioned the Statue of Liberty, how we saw that going in, and that was a traumatic experience, but it just showed a bunch of GI’s. And I was telling you how we played tennis, and here they are, having their cokes and hamburgers and stuff, and it says, “Welcome soldier, glad to see you”, we got this before we arrived, so we’d have some idea of what we’d be doing. And then, it says, we realize how many of you may be going over to Japan, and that was, uh....

Q. What’s it called?

A. That’s New York, NYPE....

Q. New York something...

A. I know what it is, New York Port of Entry – New York Port of Entry. And that’s where we from the European Theater came, our first stop in the United States was the New York Port of Entry. And then they had their own newsletter that they sent out to you.

Q. I like that – the Statue of Liberty says, “Joe, here’s your pin-up gal”. (laughs)

A. Yeah, Yeah, isn’t that something? Here’s your pin-up gal. Yeah, that’s right. Things like that.....I can’t find the book. I have a book of the division, and it tells you where we went and everything, I can’t find it. I’m still trying to find it. It showed where we went up through Paris, I think, you know you can get the last half. There are more pictures in that, and now I remember, I was in Company K. And also, cause I was a typist and, in combat you still had to get information, and I was what you called the company clerk. And having got that job, I was just a corporal before, then I got this job, and I was a technical corporal. So, I got the two strips with a T. But, what we would have to do at night is to go to where we could find a place and jot down what happened that day, and then we always had to keep track of the casualties lists, so we had to find out who was killed, and who was injured, so keep track. And I did that for a while, until we went to Paris. After that, I didn’t do that. And from December on, I was just with the other troops, but before I was that. That was kind of interesting, you got to keep records of the guys who were killed and who was injured, and so forth.

Q. That was probably a little sobering.
A. Yeah, that was, yeah, and I lost a couple of close buddies, but I never saw anything really grotesque, or anything, that I remember. Then again, I forget a lot of it. (laughs) And I guess that – cause every guy who serves says the same thing, they’ve forgotten the really bad parts of it. I’m always kidding with my family about the funny things, but there’s a lot of bad things, but you try to remember the things that kind of kept you going, you know.

Q. Right, right.

A. Except in Paris, you weren’t so lonely there. But in between…..

Q. It didn’t sound like you were lonely in England, either.

A. No, England was, London was wonderful. Other than the constant bombs coming over, but other than that, it was, we had some good times, there, too.

Q. Did you?

A. So, I had a combination of good and bad. A lot of guys landed on June 6th, and they were in combat till the end of the war. That was June 6th to August 8th of 45. That was over a year. So of these guys were just constant[ly in battle]. You were fighting all the time, but I had a break in Paris, so that helped.

Q. You were lucky.

A. Yeah (laughs). So, you do have some good things and some bad things.

Q. I think you said you went to Scotland, first. Did you spend any time there?

A. No, just long enough to get on the trains and head to our [camp], wherever that was. To our training camp in England, then eventually, at this training camp, they found I could type, so I got to go to London for awhile, before we went into Paris. I don’t remember exactly how it went, but that’s the way it was. I trained in the tanks, every night you had to wash these tanks down. They’d be in the mud and everything, and we have to hose them down, it would be late at night before we’d get done and they had to be sparkling clean, so we could next day go out in the mud. We never could figure that out. (laughs) But, it they always had to be neat and clean, and you knew you were going out in the mud the next day. But, intimidating machine, it was.

Q. And you were down in the bottom, you said?

A. Yeah, I was a loader, most of the time. So, that didn’t last very long, in fact, I trained at that Fort Knox, Kentucky. I mentioned that. Yeah, that’s where I trained, in the tanks. I couldn’t go in the navy – I told you that?
Q. No, no.

A. Well, we had a choice. At the time of induction we had a line; this line went to the navy, this line went to the army, and two of my buddies went in the navy, but I couldn’t swim. I think, “why I can’t swim”, that’s why I went in the army. I could have [gone] either way, you know. Both had their – Navy you had to escape the bombs and everything, it was terrible, too, but anyway, I had my choice. I chose the stupid army, cause I couldn’t swim. (laughs)

Q. They didn’t have the Marines there?

A. I don’t think you had a choice for the Marines. All I remember was the two there. I think Marines you just joined, or something. I’ve forgotten how that was, but I remember it was just a choice of the army or navy at the time.

Q. Yeah, I think I probably would have chose the army, too.

A. Yeah.

Q. I don’t know about being on a big boat.

A. No, that didn’t appeal to me at all. Those two of my buddies were great swimmers, and so that’s why they decided to go, so that’s how your life changes, sometimes, you make choices. But there in my mind....

Q. And did you see your buddies after the war, after you.......

A. Never did see any of the guys that I was in combat with. You know, it’s a funny thing...

Q. No, I meant the guys that you were inducted with.

A. Yes....my name was Schimatowsky, and my buddy’s name was Vlahapanis, Vlahapanis, and we were in high school together, and we went to training camp together, in Des Moines. We rode together on the train, and we were there for two or three months and he got a “Dear John” letter, there, but we went to pick out his ring, he was going to get engaged, and he got a letter that it was all over. We were close at the time. But, anyway, we got separated, we went differen - I don’t know where he went, and I was sitting in Paris at this, at this outdoor place where you sit and have a cup of coffee, and all the sudden I hear a loud, “Schimatowsky!” and I recognized the voice, and here’s Phil was on the back of truck, going along and he spotted me, and he jumped off the truck and came over. And, I said, “Phil, you [better get back on the truck]” But, we was in some kind of intelligence deal, so I was, “I’ll find them”, and so he stayed all night with me. And, what a wonderful feeling that way, to see someone from home, who I even got inducted with. I mean, what were the odds of that?
Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. Man, I said, “Vlahapanis!” “Schimatowsky!” They used to get a bang out of roll call in the morning, they got a bang out of yelling our names, very gently. “Vlahapanis!”, the sergeant would say, “Schimatowsky!” So, they’ve got these two names. He changed his name to Vanos, V-A-N-O-S. The reason I changed mine, cause when I started working for this company that I lied about to get in, that happened. Yeah, I was on the phone a lot and had to leave messages, and I had to leave Schimatowsky, well, you never know what you were getting, they had no idea. So, then that’s when I changed it, because it was a lot easier, cause in my work over the years, I was constantly having to use my name somewhere. So, after that, we were Schimm and Vanos. I saw him in the summer time over the years. He moved to Arizona and we went to Arizona three years ago and saw him. He passed away, and at my age, we’re all kind of, you know, passing away.

Q. Yeah. Sam, my husband’s dad, was a veteran. He was a marine and went to Iwo Jima.

A. Oh, my goodness.

Q. He just recently passed away.

A. Oh, did he really? Yeah, see, he’d of been 80 some odd. Cause us, there were a lot of guys who were 16, 17, we were the young ones in combat, you know. So...

Q. So, it’s important to get these stories.

A. Uh huh, uh huh. Well, so, anyway, that’s ……I was trying to get my, I can’t find my uniform. I know it’s in the garage somewhere, but I couldn’t……we’ve got all this stuff up for an auction, and I can’t even get near it. But, I was going to show my Eisenhower jacket, and the coat, there’s a heavy coat. It had to be, because [of] the temperatures.

Q. Right.

A. But, that Eisenhower jacket comes to about here, now. Obviously, I can’t, I wanted to put it on for you. Well, I weighed 120 pounds, it was all muscle and bone at the time, and there’s a bit of a difference in my waist, now, [after] 50 years. A lot of us did….

Q. It happens.

A. (Laughs) Yeah, it happens, that’s right. I think, that seems to be about it, unless you have some other questions.

Q. No, no.
A. I hope that helped you a little bit.

Q. It does, it really does.

Tape Ends.
Bibliography

