

## George Phillips

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**Question:** You saw, you know the interesting thing that I've discovered with a lot of the veterans is that you had probably the best geography lesson.

**Answer:** (laughs) Yeah. That's what you call terrain appreciation (laughs).

**Question:** 'Cause like you said, you saw every major theatre in Europe, so all these villages you that went through, I mean would you have ever known where any of those were?

**Answer:** Wouldn't have cared. No I, we got pretty close. Now you go through a German village and by the way they have what they called autobahns there. They were the leaders, they were the leaders of the world in freeways. And they had beautiful autobahns. Well we had taken care of their use for the Germans for the most part by blowing all the bridges, you know bombing 'em. And ah, the Germans had taken care of the use by us by putting the 88's along the side. So (laughs) we didn't use the autobahns, you know, after the war of course we did, we stayed to the side roads. We made parallel to the autobahn and usually there was a route there, it's just like the secondary roads here, and it got so busy they put in a freeway on the thing. Same thing there and so we would go out on these little villages and ah, you could see why they built the autobahn because there's so many of the little villages and you know, everybody has to slow down and all that. Same problem here.

**Question:** Is it just ah, when you're going along and you have all the tanks and all that, I mean was it kind of like that earthquake yesterday, when you come into town is it a rumbling and a shaking?

**Answer:** No they just make a clattering noise on the thing. They were, we learned a long time ago to have rubber treads on the tanks. Steel on concrete, not too good. I remember I was on OCS at Fort Knox in ah, '42, yeah about November of '42, I was on the second story of the OCS barracks and there was a main post road right underneath me, and I heard the clatter of a tank, they were steel treads, I heard the clatter of the tank down there and then a crash. And ah, I looked out the window and he had run into the curbing and, of course, smashed it flat. And he, the driver panicked, of the tank panicked and immediately backed up. What he didn't know is there was a Jeep that'd been right behind him, you know. And when that thing started to back up the Jeep driver (laughs) just bailed out and I'll tell you, that poor Jeep looked like a beer can ready for recycle (laughs), tank passed over it. Oh man. So we learned a long time ago to use rubber on the roads. They wear better, the steel is just steel against concrete.

**Question:** So was most of your travel in Europe then, just following roadways? I mean was that a lot of it?

**Answer:** Well we went cross country, for example, tanks don't fight too well in towns and the reason is that the Germans had their panzerfaust, the bazookas. But our bazookas about that big around, you know, like this. Their bazooka is about this big around (laughs) and like this and it would take out a tank real easy. Ah...

**Question:** So you're real vulnerable, you come into town and they're waiting for you to come down the main.

**Answer:** You bet.

**Question:** Is it, now the one tank you have this shot where it's got holes on both sides, where it's gone through.

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**Answer:** Where the 88 went clear through it.

**Question:** Is that a bazooka or is that off of one of those...

**Answer:** It's an 88.

**Question:** Oh, 88 ok.

**Answer:** A bazooka is a space charge. In other words, they affectively cone the charge so that it penetrates at one spot and ah, that force then will melt a small hole but it's all molten metal on the inside and it sets the tank on fire. And the ah, the M4 wasn't particularly good for being hit by a panzerfaust. They're, later we came out with some good tanks and of course now we have the world's best with the Abrams but it's still too big to run on our roads (laughs), yeah.

**Question:** Now you had ah, some of, some pictures of a gentleman toasting a little brewsky there, a little German beer...

**Answer:** Hmm, that's me.

**Question:** Now was that during or after the war?

**Answer:** That was after the war. That's after I found that bombed out brewery.

**Question:** So you're, you're after the war and you're in some town and you started hunting around and how did you find this?

**Answer:** Well ah, I was in there, that was Nordhausen, and I was in there with some ah, German telephone engineers trying to re-establish telephone communication within the town of Nordhausen and ah, to everywhere if we could, but things were pretty well battered. And I kept seeing these people walking around with these gallons of something with foam on the top, you know. So ah, I started conjecturing with my sergeant, you know, I wonder what that is. It's precious enough to carefully carry it home so ah, we backtracked 'em and we found a queue of people between two bombed out buildings. The buildings themselves were absolutely leveled on the first floor except the walls about that high and there was a window there and a red rubber hose about an inch and a half coming out of it. And there was a guy there ah, pouring the beer into the jugs with a nozzle and somebody collecting the money. They may not have had anything to do with the brewery but they had a business going (laughs). So I just came back and mentioned it to the staff and so we had beer. We had a bar, you know we got a ration during the war ah, what two champagnes and a cognac or something, it varied. I'd had some of the darndest liquors I've, I don't particularly care for drinking anyway and sweet drinks ick. So ah, they made it available to our bar and I noticed it had foam on it so we must have charged it some way (laughs). I don't know whether it had, their's seemed to have a little head on it, maybe they had some vats down. I ah stepped through that window where the rubber hose came out, we got a flashlight and started down and I went down four flights and there was at least one more flight down below me. There was ah, two older gentlemen on a two man pump, pumping like this, you know (laughs), they never stopped, just kept going slow you know, and puffing on a pipe, the thing.

**Question:** So that's interesting, so you were in the village now we've destroyed their communication, we've gone and blown up their country in the war, and now we're back putting things back together.

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**Answer:** That was the reason that I didn't take a grenade to their communications. I had ah, I had instructions from SHAEF to preserve communications, not tear 'em up. And insofar as possible I did that. Only, only one switch board did I ever cut a wire on it and the reason was I couldn't read enough German to see where the switch was (laughs), to turn it off and it was just a real tiny, tiny village couple of little cables like my finger going into it switchboard. That's where the Germans were that ah, were in the courtyard. Incidentally, we stuck our, after he ran the Germans out of the house, ah, course there's Germans going by the house to our rear ah, all the time and ah, so when we got ours out of there we went into the courtyard and we talked it over, the sergeant and I, and I wonder if we have even more back there. So we ah, hollered something in German and we got about 20 more (laughs).

**Question:** Isn't it, I mean this is where again war's kind of a weird thing, because I've heard stories where Germans are on one side of the river and the Americans were on the other side of the river and they had agreed not to, they could wave at each other, and they agreed in that little village not to shoot at each other, they'd walk out of that village and they'd go back into battle. Was it kind of like the news came, the war's over and all of a sudden ok?

**Answer:** No. No fraternization. No fraternization and ah, the sad part of that was and this happened to this 12-year-old boy at Wittenburg that became a elevator engineer later on and published my pictures and so on. Ah, he didn't know whether he had a mother or dad or any family at all. He was isolated ah, Russians on one side of the river and I don't know which side he was on but anyway, he was where we were in Wittenburg and ah, he survived by ah, swiping grub from us and anywhere else he could get it you know. And ah, he sent me some very interesting stories about his activities, but you got to remember he was German, and in those pictures and I didn't bring these particular ones, but those pictures were printed by this German in Germany, ah, through a third party who was the signal officer for the 5th Armored division ah, now dead, but ah, he had introduced me to this Karl Schwartz figure and ah, he assured me he was a man of integrity and I'd get my films back and so on. So based on that I sent my book of negatives and I had at that time I had 1,200 of 'em in there. Well he was doing this all out of his pocket. Well I had so many he got tired of printing 'em, then he started printing some that he had. For example I got about four or five pages there that shows an English bomber that was knocked down and then at the end of the four or five pages there's a little picture of six or eight people that ah, manned that 88 that shot 'em down and there's a caption underneath it that this is the proud gun crew that shot down the English bomber (laughs). I thought that was cute, you know. So I looked for some of the pictures, I know I got a lot more of them there. But he just got tired of printing 'em.

**Question:** And was that so that was towards the end of the war?

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** He started printing out, did he...

**Answer:** This is just recently.

**Question:** So he's sending them back to you in the states?

**Answer:** Yeah. He sent them back to, yeah I sent 'em over to him, I got, I started corresponding with him and I still correspond with him. But ah, he was forty, he's must be at least my age, got to be, well close to it because he was twelve-years-old when I was about, he's about 10 years younger than I am I guess.

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**Question:** So he, when the war got done then, the Germans are trying to re-establish their lives in these villages and you're told don't fraternize with them?

**Answer:** That's right, no fraternization. That isn't to say that it didn't go on it's just that it wasn't accepted.

**Answer:** Ah, you know, in now in Holland I was sent right after the ah, Battle of the Bulge why I was sent up to ah, through Aachen which had just been taken from the Germans and ah, I went through it and there was still sniping going on. And when I got ah, we got through it all right, right after we got through they took it back. So there was a delay. I was, I was to go ahead to a little town called Heerlerheide, Holland and occupy the town and put my communications out. I was always the billeting officer, which is kind of cute too because I remember one time there was a big long line of houses and ah, you know, they seemed to get progressively better as they went down the line. Of course I gave the colonel the best house and I took number two (laughs).

**Question:** Some power in that position (laughs).

**Answer:** Oh yeah. But ah, I took this ah wire crew up to Heerlerheide, Holland and we drove around and ah, after looking the town over, it wasn't very big, they decided that they would like to live in the upstairs hall room over a tavern (laughs). Ok, so I went in and made arrangements for 'em. And English is the secondary language in Holland and they had only the grandparents didn't speak English. And ah, I drove up the road after dropping the crew off and saw a little gal there and I said, "Do you know where I might find a room here? We're going to be coming in here." And she said, "Just a minute I'll ask my mother." And ah, by golly she came out and said, "Yes, we have a room for you." (laughs) And would you believe it was a double bed, I mean a queen sized bed, first one I ever saw, you know. Beautiful. The ah, young boy, he was probably about 21, 22, worked for the Dutch underground and he'd be away on his little missions. Now I don't know what he was blowing up but ah (laughs), but ah, they were real lovely people and I corresponded with them 'til they either died off or got married and changed names or something. But I corresponded for years with 'em there, nice people.

**Question:** Did you realize, because again I mean names that for me are history book names, Normandy, Battle of the Bulge, did you realize as a young kid going to fight for America when you stepped off that boat on those beaches that you were in something that was a part of history?

**Answer:** I couldn't care less about history, I was scared to death. Ah, you got to remember I had a knob on my head and a throbbing headache you know, from hitting the steel deck. And ah, I dint feel too good and besides that there was an air attack, that's why we had to get off the ship. And ah, you could drive about 30 miles an hour on that beach just by the light of the anti-aircraft. See every one of the ships that were knocked out, that could accommodate an anti-aircraft gun, they put 'em on it and so that was, the whole place was just alive with flak, you know. What goes up comes down, you know, so I kind of pulled it over my head, and hoped.

**Question:** 'Cause we lost people to friendly fire in that way a lot of times, yeah.

**Answer:** Yeah, you bet, you bet. Particularly with large artillery where they got large chunks of razor sharp flak. Yeah.

**Question:** Do you think the history books are leaving things out?

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**Answer:** Well, when you talk about history books I've got quite a library myself of World War II stuff and ah, some do some don't. Some are good some aren't. I will say that Tom Brokaw's "The Greatest Generation," I think that was ah, one of the better ones. I get a little emotional... Ah, this "Finding Private Ryan" showed some of the action shots ah, you can jolly well bet they wouldn't be sending seven or eight people to find somebody in a war zone because of all the mines and ah, the Germans were real, they were real good at putting out mine fields. Ah, I never looked at being the greatest generation, never. Beginning to now, you know, I can see the, we just went to work. I went in two years ahead of everybody else but ah, I learned from it and ah, it gave me enough courage to go to OCS and do a lot of other things, you know. I tell you it wasn't my idea to go into a German town all my myself, you know, without a tank or two behind me. I never would've done that. So I guess we did what we had to do and so did everybody else. My wife worked ah, before we got married she worked at a plywood plant flipping four by eight, three quarter inch sheets of plywood, you know.

**Question:** Everybody did their part, didn't they?

**Answer:** Yeah. It was different.

**Question:** It just sounds like a different time, I mean for what America stood for, what America...

**Answer:** Yeah. Right now everybody'd ask what are we doing there. And it's a pretty good question. At that time if we hadn't been we would've been in deep trouble because it was only a matter of time that they'd get ahold of that nuclear warhead and with the delivery system, and they had a delivery system, so... Yeah they put another booster on that thing they probably could've gone another 5,000 miles, you know.

**Question:** Did you ah, did you lose friends?

**Answer:** Not too many. Ah, I was in a higher headquarters fortunately. And ah, we weren't the first ones in with one exception, that was me (laughs). But I made it, on the thing. I never asked and now I, the fact that all of this staff came from 3rd Armored group and became the balance of the staff for CCR of 5th Armored division meant that they lost those people. And I never had the courage to ask what happened to the communication officers they used to have. I just avoided the subject like that. And ah, I don't know what happened to him but I hope he wasn't doing the thing I was doing. But ah, anyway it worked and it was very effective and the old colonel was ah, so tickled like I say, he gave me a bronze star for doing it, you know. Which isn't any big thing but it's an award and that little award got me home a lot sooner than a lot of other people because I had five points more automatically. They gave points for each battle you were in, like I say I was all five of 'em, and ah number of months in service and the years you put in and so on and all, all came out and I don't remember what the total was now and it don't make a difference but it's, I was five points above everybody else (laughs).

**Question:** Going home.

**Answer:** Yeah, going home.

**Question:** What did you do when you got out of the service?

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**Answer:** Ah, well I went to work for the telephone company as a matter of fact. My mother was the long distance chief operator in Tacoma and ah, she had worked there for years and years and years and they liked telephone families. And ah, so I went through a, I didn't want to be a line man but they said that's where you start, so I took an apprenticeship and climbed them poles. Course I knew how to climb a pole but ah...

**Question:** Likely better when they weren't shooting at you though (laughs).

**Answer:** Ah, yeah. We never had and I never lost a man. I come so close. We had a, we had a, messengers travel in twos that's why the second, the machine gun on the co-pilot's side, and ah, they, if they run across something that calls for a fire fight, they'll give 'em a fire fight. And ah, one time we were at an airport and one of the messengers captured some Germans, they were off to the, not the main run, main buildings but they were off to the side buildings and ah, Barry took the ah prisoners downstairs in the building and the other guy saw some Germans running over there and instead of manning the machine gun ah, he jumped in the Jeep and drove off and left him there. And he don't know how close he come to being court martialed for that one. So ah, as it turned out the next day our tanks over ran the place and there was Barry and he had about a dozen prisoners and there, sitting up all night, wouldn't move (laughs). You know and they're just waiting for him to fall asleep of course.

**Question:** See that'd keep you, that'd keep you awake.

**Answer:** Yeah, puts an edge on things yeah.

**Question:** Do you think there's um, looking ahead to generations to come that you and I will never meet, a message that we need to leave with them from World War II or about World War II?

**Answer:** Well you know, you can't. War is gonna be different. Now during World War II we didn't have any helicopters, would've made a world of difference, pick up of the wounded for example. Um, they're not too sharp for observation because they're relatively slow, you know, and heck a guy can take care of some of 'em, but they pack a punch, holy crying out loud they pack a punch. That Apache well ah, wow, you know. Those things have the ah, a machine gun that is ah, is moved by his sight, yup, and wherever he looks that machine gun is pointing. So all he has to do is look there and kick it off. And it's like a lawn mower, it'll...

**Question:** Are you proud of your service?

**Answer:** Proud. Yeah, I went through, you only heard part of it. I went through ah, the Korean thing too.

**Answer:** But ah, I said in 1949, I went down and took the basic in aircraft and guided missile course, I had to, to stay in aircraft, if I was gonna be an anti-aircraft officer. And ah, then in 1950 I got called up for a two year tour and I immediately applied and received permission to go to the advanced anti-aircraft and guided missile course. And ah, they're the ones that plan and make operational your aircraft defenses. And so ah, while I was there at Fort Lewis they asked me to stay there and write technical manuals and field manuals and I like to write so I was gonna do it. And along came our second lieutenant as advanced attachment and they had sent us down from Fort Lewis to Georgia and now they were sending us back to Fort Lewis. And ah, so when I found out they were going back home why, naw thanks anyway and I graduated from that. Went up to Fort Lewis and they immediately sent me up to ah, Seattle, Fort Lawton.

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**Answer:** And ah, they had already as started and were completing putting ah, million, two million, three million ah dollars and quarters and buildings and things up there for us. Putting the 14 foot cyclone fence around it and guard towers and the whole bit and they gave me the key and ah, I made the place operational. I worked with civilian contractors, I worked with the telephone company directly with 'em and became good friends with a telephone engineer ah, that was in charge of our project and ah, his dad was in charge of all the telephones in Seattle, Bill McKay. And ah, we had direct contact with RadCom that's Army Anti-Aircraft Defense Center. We had indirect contact with the DEW Line, or the, yeah the DEW Line up in the Arctic up there. And ah, I, I became friends with the Captain George Henish who is the communications officer for the GCI Station, Ground Control Intercept at McChord Field. And we set up a mutual arrangement. He was looking for a ah, for a radio channel from Blake Island down to McChord Field to the GCI and ah, I wanted to put some of my men up in the GCI Station to tell to us all the plots that came down from the DEW Line. And I set up a system at my Op center there that ah, from the time the message was received at McChord Field it would be down to the gun units in three seconds, on the think. Can't beat that. For which I got accommodation (laughs).