

## David Piles

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**Question:** What is your name?

**Answer:** David Piles.

**Question:** And you grew up in Missouri?

**Answer:** Around Piedmont, in Reynolds County.

**Question:** What year were you born?

**Answer:** May 23, 1923.

**Question:** So you went through the pleasure of the depression and

**Answer:** I drove a team that drove a sleigh on WPA when I was 14 years old. My dad used to float people down the river fishing, well, rather than led his team, because they were hiring his team actually, not me, I drove it for him so he could go float. I made enough money to buy a set of tires for a 1927 Model T ford. Model T pickup is what I learned to drive on. My daughter has the title, the original title for that sucker, how mom sold it without the title I'll never understand but she did because my oldest sister never threw away a piece of paper, never, nothing, and the niece found it and sent it to my daughter so my daughter ended up with it.

**Question:** How many brothers and sisters do you have?

**Answer:** There was twelve altogether. I'm the last one.

**Question:** Your poor mama.

**Answer:** Well, nothing to do. No radio, no television, no electricity. It got dark you went to bed. What are you going to do? There was this couple that sued the railroad for having so many children and the judge asked him, well why are you suing the railroad, well we live by the tracks, the train came by at five o'clock and woke us up, too early to get up too late to go back to sleep, so what are you going to?

**Question:** Now you told me about you and your brother. You bought a guitar if I remember right and your brother a mandolin.

**Answer:** Yeah. My older brother brought down a tater bug mandolin and it was called that because the back was round and striped like a potato bug but he paid fifty cents for it, he found it somewhere in St. Louis. My brother and I had ordered a guitar from I don't remember Sears or Montgomery Ward for 2 to 3 dollars. We didn't tell our mom or dad. We got a hold of enough money and we ordered this thing thinking we'll get in trouble but we'll live through it but we used to play for square dances and make 5 to 6 bucks a night doing this. They'd drop 5 to 10 cents a couple into this thing and sit there and play all night long. My brother was a musician. He could hear a tune and sit there and pick it out on that mandolin and I could make noise in the background. That's it. I've got a hold of the guitar that we bought when I was probably 14 or 15 and he was 16 or 17 called a Dobro. It's all metal except the neck. And I forgot I owned it, about 4 or 5 years ago my brothers says I've got your old guitar and he showed it to me. Well he died. I didn't ask for it then because he'd had it for 50 years but when he died I wrote my niece and nephew and asked him for it and they sent it to me.

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**Question:** Do you remember any of the songs, was it country, blue grass?

**Answer:** Country, well there was no country and blue grass in those days it was all in one big puddle. My brother in law used to play for dances and he'd get drunk and he'd sit there and never move this hand so he just. And Daniel was so good picking on that mandolin people liked to hear his music so we didn't have transportation so we could only play close by so we could walk to where we was going.

**Question:** So that is how you made money during the depression?

**Answer:** Yeah. Anything to make some money in those days you know. We used to cut wood. We'd take a (inaudible) go up to the hollow and cut a wagon load of wood, split it, and haul it down and stack it for this lady and she'd give us a slip of paper and we could go to Dick's Hut and Store and he'd give us a dollar. So we made 50 cents for the wagon, team and the wood, for a full day's work and that was with a cross cut, no chain saws.

**Question:** So did that seem like good money then?

**Answer:** Oh yeah, any money was good money then, there was no money. If you could find a dime, it only took six cents to get into school. 5 cent tables and a penny pencil. That's all. Babe Ruth candy bars now used to be a penny candy bar in those days. They had two sizes, one for a penny and one for a nickel, and I think the ones now are smaller than the nickel ones they are more like the penny ones.

**Question:** They are about 65 cents now. How things change?

**Answer:** Hamburgers was a nickel. My first movies was free in Piedmont. At Christmastime they would give us a bag of popcorn and a free movie if you could get to Piedmont to see it.

**Question:** So you'd have to walk?

**Answer:** Walk, or hitch a ride with somebody or Dad would take us in that old Model-T you know.

**Question:** It was a challenging time but lots of memories.

**Answer:** It was fun times. The all the boys liked to come to our house cause there was things we could figure out to do and we could play in the caves or swim in the river or have corn cob fights. Dad told us he didn't want all those cobs all over his place so we were supposed to quit. Well, we thought we could get by with it. Somebody went down in the pig pen and got a wet one and they hurt and hit this kid right between the eyes and that put a goose egg but good and we thought we'd better clean up and get out of here before dad and mom's home. They met them on the way and they knew right away what we'd been up to. You don't get by your parents they are already ahead of you.

**Question:** I talked to one lady yesterday and she was saying that a big difference of kids of your generation versus today's generation is that you didn't need a lot of external things to have fun, you just like you said corn cob fights, swimming in the river, you guys were busy.

**Answer:** There's nobody providing anything. I can't remember ever getting a small toy just for me. My brothers and sisters that were in St. Louis bought a wagon, a little wagon and brought it down to us, but that is the only thing I can remember along the toy line. I got a

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hold of and don't remember what, a 45 Dick Tracy Gun, you know, and I was proud of that sucker and I lost it. I knew where I lost it and I looked for weeks and never could find that dog gone gun, it was in the tall grass and I just could never come up with it. It's probably still there. I could probably go back now and find it with a metal detector.

**Question:** Now you know it's interesting, because out here with World War II and Pearl Harbor, everybody at the coast was afraid of the Japanese. In Missouri, what was Pearl Harbor, do you remember how you heard about Pearl Harbor.

**Answer:** Yeah, I worked at Independent Packing Company at the time and I went to work at noon and I always got up and went across the street and had a milk shake before I went to sleep which would be around eleven o'clock in the morning or something. And when I walked in the girls in there, that was the main reason I was going there were some pretty girls, they told me they says they bombed Pearl Harbor. I says "so you know" but that's the way I learned about it, the girls in the milksha.. ice-cream parlor told me about it. But we didn't like the Japanese any better than anybody else did. We weren't on the coast but there were a few of them. I was living in St Louis at the time.

**Question:** So there were some Japanese population out there?

**Answer:** There's a lot of Japanese that would never have made it to the Internment Camps if they hadn't been put there. Cause young guys like myself at that time were as crazy as any other kid and we were very upset so they would never have lived long enough to get there.

**Question:** Did you have the faintest idea where Pearl Harbor was?

**Answer:** Not really. I'd never heard of it that I can remember. Strange name to me.

**Question:** I've talked to vets who were shipping there and like where are we going, never heard of it? Now, I'm trying to remember, you ended up in the army?

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** But you started towards the navy originally?

**Answer:** I volunteered for the navy because my brother in law was in, and he talked me into it and I had passed all my tests and was ready to go but I got my draft notice. Once you get your draft notice anything prior to that didn't count. You went where they wanted in the service military wise, because they could pick any branch but I ended up in the army and primarily because of my prior training as a mechanic. I lived on a farm, worked with machinery, but all the men that were in our outfit mostly were professional equipment operators and a little older than most guys, you know they may be 35 years old. But one little guy, Billy Jay Austin, I don't think he was 5'6" or 7" he could get up on a D-8 cat and make it as level as this floor. He was good. Guy named Nathan, I didn't like the man, but I respected him for being able to drive a truck and have an eye for distance. I remember one time I was riding with him and I told him, Nathan, you'd better slow down cause we had a (inaudible) D-8 on the back of us on the flatbed and they stuck over about a foot and a half on either side. We're going to hit those posts or trees or whatever, nah, we'll go through. I don't think there was an inch on either side of that blade when we went through that thing and the truck was going full bore. He could judge distance.

**Question:** Well, when you got in how old were you?

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**Answer:** I was 20 and I trained at Camp McCain, Mississippi, and I took amphibious training at Fort Pierce, Florida, and I went to camp Picket, Virginia, and trained on the Chesapeake Bay where I saw my first LST, and that was an experience. We'd never seen something like that. It was a ship and it opens its front doors and drops its anchor and heads for the beach pushing a wall of water as there is room you know. Our rifles were stacked just off the beach and he flooded them things, but we didn't know so we had rifles so full of sand and salt water. First experience on that. To get there we loaded on an LCM about midnight and rode on that thing, now this is a fairly good sized boat maybe 40 feet long and 20 feet wide, flat bottom. It was rough. We were doing pretty good and somebody got sick and I was going to laugh at him and I heaved all over their backs. I got in trouble with the guys.

**Question:** Was that your first open water experience like that?

**Answer:** No, down at Fort Pierce we trained in the bay. We were on an island at Fort Pierce and we would load boxes of sand in an LCM here and take it around and unload it onto a truck here and then haul it over here to an LCM. Just making a circle but we were strictly training on how to stack, load and handle supplies and that's why after the invasion we went from amphibious engineers back to combat engineers and brought in supplies on the beach.

**Question:** So you would load sand, move it from point A to point B and then move it back to point A again?

**Answer:** They were boxes of sand weighed equivalent to what we would be handling you know like a box of ammunition, they took the ammunition box and filled it with sand just to make the weight. It was interesting, you wondered why. And in England we done the same thing. We were stationed in Payton, England, and we'd go out for a week on maneuvers and then we'd come back for a week. Each time they would tell us to do things a little different, like take this part of your gear, but leave this, and we paid no attention to it. We knew it was coming and they were going to tell us to do all this, they told us to get a real short hair cut, but it didn't ring any bells with us, told us to take all of our gear, still nothing unusual, everything was always different but that was when we made the invasion. My birthday was on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May so my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday and two weeks later I was in France.

**Question:** Wow, so you went in on which day of the invasion, did you go on day one or ?

**Answer:** I went in on the 7<sup>th</sup>. The invasion was the 6<sup>th</sup> and I went on the 7<sup>th</sup>. Took supply trucks and kitchen trucks and these things in there.

**Question:** What were they loaded on?

**Answer:** LST.

**Question:** So you packed all the equipment on the LST and then ?

**Answer:** Yeah, there was a bunch of army trucks on it, which unloaded off shore. It was interesting to watch because they had the tarps tied down on the truck and they backed off. By backing off and having the prop engaged and going full bore it would lift the back end up otherwise it would sink and they had men standing on each side with rifles to make sure those guys had the trucks all the way revved up when they backed off because they were just as scared as anybody else you know they didn't want to do it.

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**Question:** At that point when you finally left on the real mission at a certain point on the journey did they say ok this is where we're going or when did you find out it wasn't just a.

**Answer:** I don't know, it's really quite vague for me. From the time we left Payton, till I landed on the beach I don't remember a whole lot of what went on. I know we landed a mile or so from where we were supposed to. Took a half a day getting it back to where it was supposed to go. First find out and then.. War is organized confusion. You don't know. Nobody knows what is going on. There is just no way to know. There is just too much going on. You know what is going on in a little circle that you can see. What is out here you don't know about it unless somebody tells you. Just about impossible.

**Question:** Now you drove a truck with a compressor behind it, is that right?

**Answer:** I was assigned as an air compressor operator which didn't get used very often so after the invasion I started driving regular (inaudible). My first week or so was just hauling the bodies off the beach, and then after that I started driving a bigger truck and pulling a big trailer and hauling supplies in.

**Question:** When you landed did you have a truck that was assigned to you?

**Answer:** I drove it off, but by that time we were up close to the beach and the ramp was down and we drove off and all our trucks were waterproof so we could drive them through water up to the top of the windshield. Everything on them had a hose running to it that was in. Master cylinder, axle vents, everything. You'd spend a day getting your truck ready to drive off of that thing so if it was into water it wouldn't quit on you because you were sucking all your air from up top above the windshield.

**Question:** So when you came off did you come through water?

**Answer:** I can't remember.

**Question:** You can't remember what the beach material was like?

**Answer:** It was black. I'd say it had to have something like asbestos in it cause it got very hot in some places and just molded around like the carburetor, you have a small hose that runs to the master cylinder, and wherever they fit you just molded that stuff to like crazy putty only it was something that wouldn't burn or wouldn't melt. I remember it being black but what it was composed of I don't know.

**Question:** I just hear everybody talking about driving their trucks on the beach and I can't imagine not getting stuck.

**Answer:** You've got to remember you've got big tires on the truck, you got all wheels are driving and the beach was pretty well packed because there was so much traffic on it. We started out we would take a trailer out and unload it and then we'd come back and get it loaded. Well, we stopped that. We brought an empty trailer to the beach unhook it, hook to a full one, and then say go to the dump and we'd unhook from it, leave the loaded one and pick up an empty so we was just back and forth. Daytime wasn't bad. Nighttime was bad because you couldn't use lights. You drove without headlights and we drove from six in the morning until six the next morning. We drove 24 hours straight.

**Question:** Did you get lost, I mean what did you follow at night?

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**Answer:** Well, if it was real dark they'd give you an extra guy and he'd sit and watch the ditch lines and say go right or left. You didn't drive fast, you know, you couldn't. The English had a terrible time driving down the middle of the road. I had a load of jeeps on one time turned crosswise so they hung over a couple of feet on either side. And you could tell an English truck because the cat eyes were higher. They were completely different than ours and here comes this guy down the middle of the road and I judged him as closely as I could and just giving that big old white all it had, I hit him with those jeeps and knocked him into the ditch. He got out and I got out and he said look what you done to my bloody lorry, that's what they called their trucks, and bloody was the worst swear word you could use to an Englishman. I says I don't care. Stay on your own side of the road and I wouldn't have hit you. I got in my own and left him lay there. We didn't like the English because we were working 24 hours a day and they were sitting there drinking tea. That didn't go over well with us.

**Question:** You did 24/7 basically, so when you first landed most of what you were doing basically was moving bodies?

**Answer:** First 4, 5, 6, 7 days I can't remember how long that's all I done, I don't know what other guys were doing, was picking up bodies and taking them up to the graveyard.

**Question:** To a twenty some year old kid what ?

**Answer:** It wasn't fun.

**Question:** Was that all of a sudden WHAM we realize we're at war?

**Answer:** You get off of a boat and ....

**Question:** Now you talked also about getting from the US to England sounds like it was an experience for you also.

**Answer:** It was a liberty ship which was 350 feet long and the head bathroom was up at the V of the ship. The first toilet was one toilet on one side and that ship is going up 20 feet and dropping 20 feet. That was an experience. But the most fun was the mess hall. It was in the middle of the ship, you'd go in the door and then go around the outside and by the time you got to this side the mess kitchen was up in front, the guys would be getting sick and starting to throw up so you didn't walk from there you slid from there around get your mess and didn't sit down you stood at tables to eat and if you didn't hold onto your mess gear it went sliding down to the end of the table. It wasn't bad until it came back with partially chewed food with yours. And stink. The food didn't smell good to start with and then with all that mixed with it it was the stinkiest place.

**Question:** How did you even bother to eat with that?

**Answer:** Just to survive. You've got to eat something once in awhile. We had one poor guy that never got out of his bunk. He was sick from the time he got on that boat until he got off and we would scrounge crackers and what not for him to eat but he never got up, wasn't able to.

**Question:** I guess it's good you ended up with the army not the navy.

**Answer:** Oh I was Just tickled to death I got drafted. I realized what a mistake I was about to make. My little brother was in the navy, one just younger than me, I had two

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younger than me that was in the navy, one older than me and a brother in law. My mother had five of us in the service at one time. I don't know how she stood it.

**Question:** I was going to say it must have been tough for her to have that many kids and then in the service and worrying about you. So a lot of your job was construction, right, bridges and

**Answer:** After we landed we went from amphibious engineers back to regular combat engineers and we were not attached to any of the big armies like the 5<sup>th</sup> the 1<sup>st</sup> or whatever you know. We were just an outfit that was out there and we went wherever we were needed and that's why how we landed up into four major battles without a break. We never got any R and R time because we were never attached to anybody to give it to us. We were about to get it. I took one load of guys to Paris the day that President Roosevelt died. I was on my way to Paris with guys (inaudible) and they are the only ones that got to go. By the time I got back we had different assignment to go somewhere else so that ended that.

**Question:** So whenever anybody needed something they called you guys.

**Answer:** That's where we went.

**Question:** So how long were you over there?

**Answer:** I left New York in December of '43 and I come back in December of '45.

**Question:** Two years of

**Answer:** We got taken out of the 149<sup>th</sup> after things got calmed down after the war was over out there and put into the 135<sup>th</sup> or something I forgot and we were guarding prisoners and we were doing this but we were isolated from the other groups. And it was all the guys that had any amphibious training that had done this, well after the Japs surrendered, we found out why this had happened, we were going down there.

**Question:** That's right because they were ready for the invasion.

**Answer:** We had the training so they were going to ship us down there.

**Question:** Wow.

**Answer:** So we were (inaudible) ending and didn't know it, you know.

**Question:** I assume because you were building new roads and all that that you were up front most of the time also.

**Answer:** A big part of the time yeah. It wasn't unusual for us to be in the middle with ours behind us and the other side to get a bridge across or whatever. The only resting place was when we were crossing the Rhine and I can't remember the name of it, I wish I would have wrote them down but I didn't. I know we were about twenty miles from the only bridge that they got across the Rhine that later fell down, and I don't even remember up or down, but there was a big dike across this valley and we would go down at night and dig holes in that dike almost through it and then move artillery down into it. The daytime we didn't work because they would know what was going on and the artillery was noisy enough. They couldn't hear us at night, they could see us but they couldn't hear it. But at night time we'd crawl up on top of this old school building or whatever we was living in and watch the

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airplanes going over. All the big bombers going over and those poor guys that was in the end of those V's they invariably come down one after the other. I saw a big four-engine bomber crash on Omaha Beach. For some reason I looked up and there was a whole bunch of guys in parachutes and the wing is off of this bomber, the wings kind of floating around but the bomber is spiraling down and there is no noise. I think now those lying Sob's, you know, they always show you this terrible noise when an airplane is coming down but there was no noise, but it came it just took a little while and it landed (inaudible) 150-200 yards because I realized I was looking straight up at this airplane and which way do I run so I stand there and it landed about 300 yards away, the edge of the beach. It is the only one I saw crash, up close, you know.

**Question:** Yeah, that must have been a pretty awesome sight, I don't know if awesome is the word, but amazing sight to see a squadron of. I can't imagine, did the sky just go dark with planes or was it like a flock of geese way up there or what?

**Answer:** Well, they would just come through groups of them, I'm sure you've seen them in pictures, groups of however many, but they would be in a V, you know, and there'd be one V here and another V there and there'd be, I suppose, a couple hundred planes maybe. I really have no idea now going up to bomb and the Germans were good with that 88. They could hit anything with that sucker and they were just picking them off and they'd shoot at the front one and get the ones on the (inaudible).

**Question:** So when you were up on that school or whatever it was, the planes, were you close enough that you could see where the Americans met, was it kind of like a spectator sport where you were at?

**Answer:** Yeah, we were right at the edge of Germany. We were on the Rhine River, so as soon as you crossed the Rhine we were in Germany. The bombers after they dropped their loads would drop down to get where they didn't have quite as good a chance you know they come back over head you think you could reach overhead and swat them they were so low. But then they were so low that the 88's didn't have a chance to get to them and they were so close to be at the edge of Germany that they could get away by dropping down.

**Question:** Now, the dike you were working on, you were working on blowing the dike out, or what was your goal?

**Answer:** No, we just dug holes in it and then take up artillery 155 or whatever and we wouldn't go all the way through. We'd leave a little dirt so they couldn't look across the river because they were on the other side looking at us and they couldn't tell what we were doing. Well when we got all that we wanted then they'd fire the gun and that made the hole open and they'd stand at the edge and just kept raising it out. We built a bailey bridge then just above the dike and we looked at some the German's on the other side and they hadn't been hit just concussion that had got to them.

**Question:** So you could see, I mean you were close enough to the enemy you could see the whites of their eyes basically.

**Answer:** Practically, we were on one side of the river and they were on the other and then our front line was back a ways. The artillery was the only thing that was actually doing anything.

**Question:** Because what did you have for protection?

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**Answer:** A shovel.

**Question:** That is not real comforting.

**Answer:** Well, when we first went in they took us down to Camp McCain, Mississippi, and they had formation and after they said now stack your rifles over there. Stacked the rifles and they gave us shovels, they say in the infantry that's their best friend, the engineers the shovel is their best friend.

**Question:** I think I would have made two friends.

**Answer:** Well, you get used to it and you don't pay any attention to it.

**Question:** So did you have infantry with you then as you were working they were guarding, or not

**Answer:** I'm sorry, I didn't quite follow.

**Question:** Well, when you were building bridges and all that and the crews were working were the infantry stationed by you?

**Answer:** Behind us.

**Question:** Behind you?

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** That kind of makes you a target doesn't it?

**Answer:** Well, you'll never hear engineers mentioned on any of the programs, they don't talk about them, but I did see one program where they admitted that without the engineers they couldn't of won the war. But we didn't get credit for what we did. They never did, they never do. It was, we had to make things so they could advance. A tank couldn't cross the river you've got to go in there and build a bridge. That was our job.

**Question:** And the bridges you build were they temporary structures?

**Answer:** They were pontoon boats anchored up the river. And then you had two tracks across the bridge and that's what. We crossed the river, and I can't remember the river now, between Holland and Belgium. And we were going to build a permanent bridge. We had a pontoon bridge, and we were building a permanent bridge. The German's were still ahead of us. They wanted that air compressor on the other side of the river because the German's had blowed a dam and the piling we had driven we had two trains on pontoons that were driving the.. they sunk and they got another professional steam operated pile driver and they wanted the air compressor over there because they'd use the steam, I mean the air because they would use the air to help build up the steam situation up and they asked me to take it over. The water was almost over the top of the front of those pontoons and there was a quarter of mile of water on each side of that bridge. You do what you are told and I drove that thing and I didn't realize I was scared but I had dreams for 50 years of driving a truck in a flood. One morning I woke up, realized where I was and that's what I was dreaming about. The bridge was just above the one that had blown out and if pontoons would have sunk that is where I was going.

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**Question:** Boy, that's amazing, after fifty years that still.

**Answer:** About once a week I'd dream about it.

**Question:** Wow.

**Answer:** Of one kind or another not that particular but always driving a truck in a flood somewhere.

**Question:** How do you deal with fear in war, I mean, is there fear or does it become a job, do you check it out?

**Answer:** It is not you that's there. Somebody else is doing that. If you think about it being you, you're not going to do it. You have to disassociate yourself from yourself. It isn't going to happen to me, it is going to happen to you.

**Question:** So does adrenaline take over and all of that too or is it like the movies, you know heroic and you got your guys or is it more I'm going to save my butt out here or it doesn't exist, it is a different reality.

**Answer:** Well sometimes you are going to try to save yourself if you're in a situation where you can and you just get to a point. I remember one time we had what we called bed check Charlie. The German's came over with their planes and check us what we're doing on the beach. They would be so many bullets going up trying to hit that plane from on the beach everybody firing at them, ain't about to hit it but they are trying, and everyone that goes up comes down again. You're hearing splat splat all around you. After I don't know 2-3 weeks or a month it got to me one night and I lay down on the beach and I shook so bad I thought I was going to bury myself. Few minutes I was over it and went about my business and didn't bother me again, but it caught up with me that one time.

**Question:** I never thought about that because again you described war as controlled chaos or something like that. Movies again always show everything perfectly organized and everything like that but I assume in a situation like that if they fly overhead don't shoot at them but you think no I'm going to shoot at that big plane.

**Answer:** You're going to try and there is nobody there to tell you not to you know. You're kind of isolated. If you're a normal guy, them guys trying to get me, I'm going to try to get him.

**Question:** Where did you live? Did you live in foxholes all the time or houses?

**Answer:** No. Lived in a fox hole for about the first week or so and then we cleared a little area of mines and started our motor pool just off the beach. Just on the other side of the hedgerow was a hospital and after I got home I found out my brother was in the hospital. I had no way of knowing it. It took 2-3 weeks to find out who was doing what where. He told me what plane he come in. We had one DC-3 that didn't have a door on it and that is what he flew out on. I could have probably throwed a rock and hit him from where we were but neither one of us had any idea. He was only in combat for a few hours and got shot through both legs. He had to have walked up that beach cause he came on to Omaha and we built a separate trail for them to keep them off the road and walking down the road I looked at faces every day driving but never did see him.

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**Question:** I've never been there, but it's not like 100 miles of Omaha Beach, it was a very confined area where (inaudible).

**Answer:** 3-4-5 miles maybe, not very long. Standing at the edge of the channel, Point Du Hoc was on the right and then a little ways there was one valley that went out. There's a road going out on and then it stretched on down maybe another mile or two miles below that. There was a little hotel on that road leading off the beach. The days we were off if we weren't working in the motor pool we'd try to get some – we went up there 3-4 of us and we could see a bottle of booze back in there. It didn't look too safe. There were a lot of wires dangling and whatnot and thought well maybe it is a booby trap because a bottle of booze looked pretty good about that time so we checked it out and got to a French door where the bottom half was closed and half was open. Looked down there it was a hall maybe 6-8 feet wide the end of it top to bottom with bottles of alcohol of some kind. That had to come out of there, but we had more than we could handle without some backing from the officers so we went down and talked to this one officer that was a pretty square guy. He said alright, I'll help you. So we took a truck up and he stood out on the road and anybody thought of stopping he'd tell them go because the engineers are clearing this out. It was around 100 bottles of alcohol we got, different champagne, cognac, and Calvados. That little air compressor come in real handy because all those compartments were locked. I had a padlock on every one of them. Back when we started there were only a couple of us that had keys. (inaudible) got into it. He had a key and he got a bottle of it and he got drunk and they caught him just as he was going out of our area and he was going into an area hadn't been cleared. They told him you're crazy you'll get blown up in there. I told you not to do that he said typical drunk you know and that officer would not take any of that. He says you guys worked for it, just split it among your men, so we had booze for quite a while. He was a good Joe. There were a few good officers in there.

**Question:** That's nice. It is amazing where there is that average every day aspect. I mean you have the travesty of what happened on the beach but like you said there was that booze in there and it looked like it needed to be removed from there. So it was a hotel and I assume the people that run it had left.

**Answer:** It couldn't be occupied at that time. It was blowed up pretty good. I've often wondered if it had been renewed. There was a small road that went out and a brick road go around and the hotel is over here.

**Question:** You went through a lot of little villages and towns and things of that sort where you just moved through, were they ghost towns, or did towns still exist and people still.

**Answer:** Most of them in that part of France because the fighting was so heavy there was literally nothing left. They'd take the bulldozer and clear the road just enough to drive through and I don't think the people that lived there could have found where they was going because there was nothing left it was just all flattened down. You can't bomb something that heavy or shell it without literally destroying all of it.

**Question:** So as you got further away from the beach and moved on did you get to villages that had been bombed or was that pretty much everywhere you went was.

**Answer:** When we got into Germany we found some that were pretty good. We would walk up to the door and open it and walk in and just "raus" and what they took was the clothes they had on their back and we would live in their house. There would be a block with tunnels where all the houses were hooked together and they all had extra silverware and

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dishes and everything else in the basement so we would use their dishes and we wouldn't bother washing them just throw them out the window.

**Question:** That again is interesting, now it's interesting they had the tunnels because that had to take awhile for them to prepare and to have houses connected so they were used to this life style so to speak it sounds like.

**Answer:** I didn't quite follow your question.

**Question:** I guess because I wondered all over the place on that one. Did you ever, did any of the locals ever stay around, did you have conversations at all.

**Answer:** The German's we weren't allowed to talk to them. Not even the girls. And a lot of the French you didn't trust too much because the German's had been there long enough that the women especially had become attached to them. You didn't trust one of them at all.

**Question:** They could be spying for a German boy friend, I never thought about that.

**Answer:** They had been there a long time so you know I suppose a lot of them got married and what not you know. Went from the enemy to the lover and we were turned out to be the enemy at that time.

**Question:** Are there any smells if you are going through life today you say oh that reminds me of wartime.

**Answer:** Other than dead animals or humans there isn't very many smells. A lot of dead animals you know, the humans were usually picked up but the animals would be taken out in a field somewhere and let them rot. There was some raunchy smells.

**Question:** Now you were in four different campaigns

**Answer:** Four major battles out of five

**Question:** So you were the beach, the bulge,

**Answer:** The river valley, you know I can't name them off now.

**Question:** It's only been a little over fifty years, you know, that's a long time ago. Well do you remember where you liked being the least of your time over there?

**Answer:** You mean where I would like to go back to.

**Question:** No, the place you didn't like.

**Answer:** The Battle of the Bulge. That was the most miserable time of my life. Cold, hungry, it was horrible. Finally got to where we were going to stay for a few days and went into a school I thin. And there was a stove in there and now we'd been cold for a week our clothes are wet and traveling and trying to get to where we are going and thought boy we are going to get warm and we scouted around and we found some pipe. Just pipe to take the smoke away that's all we were asking so we put it on and built a big fire in that stove and it was soldered together not crimped so as soon as it got hot it would ping , open and fall off, so we just broke out the windows around on the top to let the smoke out and kept her going. It was still warm. Smoke was up here and we could get below it. That was horrible.

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**Question:** Now when you say cold, I mean I've talked to a couple of people about the Boles?? and they say there was nothing nice about the Boles, period., but when you say cold your definition of cold has to be totally different than my definition of cold.

**Answer:** Probably is because you can go out and get cold and go in the house and get warm. We couldn't. There was no place to go and get warm. You couldn't build a fire because somebody is going to drop a bomb on your head if you do. You go to bed at night and you have those mummy sacks that we slept in which is canvas. And depending on how cold it is, how many mummy bags you had. If you didn't take your shoes to bed with you, you couldn't get them on the next morning. You didn't want to sleep with them on because if you didn't let them dry out you would have feet trouble. It was miserable. There is one good thing about being a truck driver especially later on in convoy. I drove the two and a half ton Jimmy and there was a gas line that ran along the rocker cover. A can of sea rations, I think about four, would sit there and it kept it warm. You could get a warm meal. K-rations you know is a full meal in a Cracker Jacks box. If you think that is going to last you a half a day working.

**Question:** So you could take and get them in there by the engine, get them in the right place, on a long drive have a hot meal at the end of the day.

**Answer:** Even when you are driving your mess kit was with you all the time. You get out there, get yourself a can of that stuff and eat it while you was going and there was some of the sea rations that was pretty good like pork and beans, wieners and beans, beans and wieners. Hash wasn't bad. Hard to remember all that's in there.

**Question:** Were there any that you just didn't eat because they was so bad ?

**Answer:** You'd eat them, you'd eat them. Once in awhile you'd get a chance, we'd come up with maybe bacon or something. We'd take our steel helmet, wash that sucker, build a fire and set it on top of it and we'd cook up a goulash or whatever in that steel helmet. You'd burn all the paint off of your steel helmet, but then, you'd find another one because someone had lost theirs, but we didn't have any cook pots, so that's what. You wash your hands, your feet and everything else out of that thing, but then you also cooked in it.

**Question:** So you'd get a little bit of water in it, wash up, and wow. I'm curious if food ever tasted so good even though it wasn't gourmet food, but being so hungry.

**Answer:** Everything tastes good when you're hungry. It's not like having a big T-bone steak but its hot and at the time it was first class food.

**Question:** At the time were you constantly moving it sounds like?

**Answer:** No we'd spend maybe a month somewhere building a bridge or building roads or . The bridge we built between Holland and Belgium we got all the piling drove. We just about got it finished and we got orders to move to the front. I think we went to the Rhine, I'm not sure. Company commander says we're not going to work this long without driving across that, so we threw the boards on, they weren't nailed down, and we drove across that bridge, permanent bridge, it would stay there. But I think that is when we moved up to the Rhine but I didn't take nothing to put things in perspective.

**Question:** I assume as soon as you built them the German's were trying to remodel them for you?

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**Answer:** Until they could get pushed back. The river valley was a good case of that. There was two canals, hundred yards apart maybe a couple hundred yards and in between the two canals they had was what we call foot mines. Wooden box, only metal parts was the detonator and you walk along. If you heard that sucker pop, you knew you was out of the army out of the war because you was only going to have one foot left. That is all it would do is just blow the foot off that is on top. They had one called the Bouncing Betty that if you stepped on it wouldn't explode until you moved and then it would bounce up about 3 feet and throw shrapnel everywhere just cut you in two. So that was a Goodbye Charlie. You didn't come out of that one. But foot mines it'd take off your foot.

But we was building bridges across those canals and we couldn't work in the daytime because they was watching us on the high ground and they could see us. They were playing games. They worked all night and built a bridge across the first one the next morning the first thing they done was take an 88 and blow it out of the water and we thought well they couldn't possibly our artillery would have them. So we built another the second night and same thing. So then they brought up some more engineers and we built both of them and the next morning they woke up the German's looking down from a tank so their fun lasted two days. That was the last of my combat. The war ended after that. (inaudible)

**Question:** Did you lose any friends?

**Answer:** We lost about over half of our company on Omaha Beach, our battalion, over half of them. The motor pool was lucky in the fact that something like that we didn't go in on D-Day we come in later on bringing in the supplies, but the poor guys bringing in those obstacles they didn't make it back.

**Question:** Do you ever go through a day you don't think about the war?

**Answer:** Probably do, but it's there a lot. The older you get the more it comes back.

**Question:** Now you also with your truck drove through some areas that were mined. How do you protect yourself from?

**Answer:** I had sandbags in the floorboard of my truck to where there was barely enough room to operate the peddles because that'd give you a little protection. Because usually it's a wheel that is going to set one off so we kept sandbags in the bottom of the truck to keep from.. try to get through it if it comes. At the beach we cleared the outside of a field around a hedgerow of mines but leave the center we didn't bother with that. And that's where we'd stack supplies because that wasn't so easy to see and guys that worked in that field got to where they didn't think anything about anything and got kind of cocky. And I come in one day and. Probably a little tired and out of sorts. They was supposed to have got over here and take this load to whatever and he crawled up on that front fender and said take it over there so that's what I done right across the middle of the field. Last time he ever done that. He was sitting there. He had no protection. If I'd of hit a mine I'd still be in the brig but he'd be in the grave. But we cured him of that. Picked up a load of dynamite off the beach one time. Those guys handle so much ammunition, explosives, they didn't think nothing of it. They throw them boxes around like they was throwing whatever but this dynamite had been sitting in the sun long enough they was sweating. The nitroglycerin is on the outside of the casing which means you can throw it and it can explode just throwing it around. Well, it took me a half day from the beach to where we was going to take it because that big old white didn't ride like a Cadillac. And I got up there and they went up on that thing and I said you wait a minute let me get two hedgerows away and you do whatever you want to. I says its dynamite

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and it's been sitting in the sun, and its sweating nitro. They picked up those boxes, you'd never handle eggs that easy you know. This guy he'd walk over and sit it down.

**Question:** How'd they clear the mines?

**Answer:** You take your bayonet and you go through the ground poking and then when you find, hit that, then you start digging away. The mine detectors work pretty good if you find one but then you might be digging all day because they are metal but either way you have to dig that mine out I think I've forgotten I couldn't do it now but you had to get the pin in it so it could no longer be activated.

**Question:** So it was a group of soldiers, did they walk a line?

**Answer:** You crawled on your belly poking your bayonet in the ground to hit one of those things. And you didn't want to come down on one of those things because you could set it off, you had to come in from the side so you could hit the edge of the mine here, not up here.

**Question:** Boy, that's not a duty I'd want to volunteer for. It seems like you'd be scared the full time of doing that.

**Answer:** Well, you're safe as long as you're careful you know. You don't want to get careless. We had one guy and nobody knows why. I don't know why they were clearing the area in the first place. Some officer was goofing, had the men out there because we didn't need it. It was completely unnecessary. This guy was out there clearing mines and he got up and walked out in the middle of it and he stepped on a Bouncing Betty and he came up and it blew him away and the back of his head was like mush. I wasn't involved, I happened to be on the beach when it happened. The guys didn't dare try to get to him. They couldn't save him anyway. There was a chance they'd trip on one themselves so they worked their way in and he was dead when they got to him.

**Question:** Were there soldiers that couldn't handle the aspects of war?

**Answer:** Yeah there were some. I never met any. I didn't, I don't know of anybody that did. But there had to be, we're all survivors or try to be. To do it you just have to do what you're told and it's not you that's going into the danger and I even got a good conduct medal. I don't know why but I did.

**Question:** Do you remember what you'd talk about to pass the time? I know you didn't have a lot of free time just hanging out but

**Answer:** You didn't have anything to do except talk unless you got a good argument going and we had a guy over here and I'm going to use religion. His belief was one kind and this guys was something else. You and I could start talking arguing about it you know until you got those two and then you'd sit and listen to them argue about it. Worked pretty good until one night we got into an argument about nationalities and we were having a nice argument until somebody mentioned one that the first sergeant was, lights out, everybody go to bed. If we'd left him out we could have argued all night but brought up his nationality and that was it.

**Question:** Was there much downtime or was it pretty much work while you were there?

**Answer:** You would, you was working, there was nothing else to do, you had nowhere else to go, corner pub to go to you know. So.. like from the beach we'd drive from six in the

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morning till six the next morning, you'd get in you'd eat breakfast, sleep a few hours, and in the afternoon work in the motor pool and about six o'clock you'd go to bed and then at six the next morning you'd go again and this was every day. Thought nothing of it. I hear these poor guys say I haven't had a day off for a week, and I know the feeling, but that's war, that's the army and that's the way life is when you are in there. We didn't have all the nice things they have got now days. Just the basics.

**Question:** Did you have contact with home, could mail catch up with you?

**Answer:** Just mail. I think my sister would never throw anything away and mother kept all the letters I wrote home. And when she passed away my older sister got them then. When my older sister passed away her daughter shipped them to my daughter and I got a chance to read all the letters and put them in plastic for her that I had written home.

**Question:** What was that like to go back and?

**Answer:** You find out you didn't say anything. You can't talk about what the weather is, you can't talk about what you're doing, you can't talk about where you are at, hello mom, I'm fine, bye. It was interesting you got a little bit of goodies. When I was in England I met a lady that wrote to my mother so my mother knew when I was in England where I was at and what I was doing and after the war was over I was in Belgium. I met a girl that wrote to my mom. My mother asked about both of them, are you going to bring them home?

**Question:** Bring them all home mom.

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** What kind of stuff did they write to you, do you remember?

**Answer:** Just what is going on with the family. All of my mail was censored. The girl in England I wrote to her after I got in France and I was cussing out the English saying what they done and she wrote she says what did you say? All I got was a sheet of paper full of holes. They had censored it. There was nothing left but I can't remember the mail we got wasn't censored but the mail we got was. They just fill you in on what is going on at home and. Man it's hard to remember those things.

**Question:** Heard a lot of people say that was the best thing to hear who was doing what at home and that vision of normal life. Who got married, who died, who was born.

**Answer:** My sister sent me a package and in it she had a pint of whiskey and I know the guys in the mailroom broke it on purpose cause you could still wring the whiskey out of the paper.

**Question:** I was going to say I was sure that one didn't make it to you.

**Answer:** They didn't open it, they just broke it. Suckers.

**Question:** I interviewed one gentleman and part of his job was to censor the letters from his men. He says I knew more about my men than I really wanted to know you know because he had to read all of them.

**Answer:** That letter I wrote to Olive I guess it must have been a good one she says.

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**Question:** Did you ever hear from any of those people after the war?

**Answer:** No.

**Question:** It was the type of thing that within the war is what brought you together.

**Answer:** I was quite fond of Judy, the one in Belgium, but it never went any farther than that. I even went out and bought her an expensive watch and gave it to her but she was a nice girl. I went down and met her parents and they had me to dinner. Real nice lady.

**Question:** See again this is an interesting aspect of war. See this war is going on but you're meeting new people and families like a tourist.

**Answer:** That was, the war was over at the time I met Judy so it was a different situation then, but in England we were just going in.

**Question:** Now you in your writings talked about I can't remember if it was boot camp where you had the best bed in the barracks. What was that?

**Answer:** That was at Camp Picket, Virginia. We lived in a two story barracks. Right across the street from us was the vac dispensary and it is a long building and they'd come in the middle of the building away from us and they'd go around the building and come back and the doctor was evidentially up here somewhere. Lot of the girls would come through the door and start undressing from the time they got there. I thought my barracks was going to turn over. Everybody is up there looking out the window cause I didn't look I behaved myself.

**Question:** Did they keep the men pretty separate from the women, I mean was that a definite they did everything they could to keep.

**Answer:** Yeah, but it is impossible. A guy got a letter from his wife and she wanted a divorce or something and he asked the first sergeant to go home and get it straightened out and they refused him. He said if you don't give me a pass I'll go AWOL. Well if you tell them you're going to go AWOL for something like that and still don't get a pass then it's their responsibility to make sure you don't go. We're supposed to watch him and he got away from us and got out there in the night. And we didn't know where he went so we thought he might have gone through the WACs barracks, that's where we went at 2 o'clock in the morning, a hundred soldiers going through. I don't remember what went on, but we found him and kept him from trouble going AWOL. I had my eyes closed as I went through.

**Question:** Yeah, you were just using the Braille method. What's one of your fondest memories of the service?

**Answer:** Coming home.

**Question:** Did your job and

**Answer:** I have no bad objection to any of the service, but to pick out one part that I really enjoyed, I don't know what it would be. Just done my job because that is what I was supposed to do and I didn't hate the army and I wasn't in love with it either. I got my discharge at Fort Leonard Wood and I was watching where the names were being answered. They were naming off guys that wasn't going to get their discharge something was holding them up and I watched them go down the line and come up and go down and I knew they

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were into the P's, and they said David, and I thought, oh no, what did I do now, but it was somebody else and I got my discharge. I didn't have to get held over for something.

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

**Answer:** Yes, I'm proud I got to serve. Take nothing for my memories but I wouldn't want to try it again. Combat is hell. Some of it isn't bad and others you can't forget it. On the beach there was one guy laying in the surf in a little pool of water. We left him because he was cool, picked him up later. (inaudible) But that was the worst on the beach.

**Question:** Was that the worst because it was the first?

**Answer:** That was the worst of being in the army. You get off that boat and everywhere you look there's dead people, not one or two, hundreds of them, part of them gone, leg gone, head gone, can't handle that part of it.

**Question:** Is there a purpose?

**Answer:** Pardon.

**Question:** Having been in war, is there a purpose for war?

**Answer:** It is an unnecessary evil. We have to do it Just like what we are going through in Afghanistan now. If we don't stop them they're going to just pick at us and pick at us and kill more than we lose over there. I hope the people can understand that those guys are not going to quit if we don't stop them. They killed all those people, what was it 5000 in New York and that was just a start. They'll get a dozen here and a dozen there. You won't be able to take a drink of water or do nothing. You've got to keep on it. The people got to support the effort to get rid of that bunch of maniacs and that's all they are is maniacs. It's not the same kind of war that I was in but I'm not sure it isn't more important than the one I was in. I feel that we would either have been either speaking German or Japanese if we hadn't of went but these guys you never know what they're going to do. They are not an organized army.

**Question:** Where did you get decommissioned or let out of the army?

**Answer:** Fort Leonardwood, Missouri, just outside of St. Louis.

**Question:** Did they say thank you very much have a good life or did they one day you're army, the next day you're not, is that?

**Answer:** I don't know. I think it is get the heck out of here before. I cheated a little bit. I was supposed to stay in the barracks, well I'd been gone for two years and my brother-in-law came out picked me up and I went home. I went back the next morning but I didn't think they'd prosecute me too hard at that point.

**Question:** Things were a little more relaxed at the end of the war.

**Answer:** Right, of course, when I was in the army I used to get a pass at noon on Saturday, get on a train, go to St. Louis, I'd get there about seven o'clock in the morning I think it was and at one o'clock I had to be on the train going back and I'd get in about midnight but I'd get to see my girl friend, my mother, and you know. Mom couldn't figure out why I went to see my girl friend first but I had my reasons.

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**Question:** Now did that girl friend become anything later in life or was that just a girl friend you left behind?

**Answer:** I broke off with her I was in the service because I didn't want any connections and I saw her twice after I came back just to talk to her but I never went out with her. I met my first wife and we were married in June of '46. I followed mechanic work until I messed up my arm and then went into law enforcement and got tired of that, I actually got tired of the judges, some of them were terrible. They are dead now I shouldn't be talking about them, but.

**Question:** Well, it sounds like you've had an interesting life.

**Answer:** Yeah. My daughter got me to, she kept telling me, dad, I can't remember the things you've done, so I've written all about my life from the time I was on the farm and the time I retired.

**Question:** That is great you've taken the time to, now does she have kids, your daughter?

**Answer:** Two, two boys.

**Question:** So this is information she can share with the boys too.

**Answer:** Yeah. It's all there.