

Catherine VyVerberg nee Cresto

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Question: Now you -- even though you weren't on the front, front line, you were still nearby a lot of activity that was --

Answer: Well, the closest we -- we came was the Battle of the Bulge part where they were coming over. Oh, there's one -- I forgot to tell you this one. I was so stupid. When we were in Chartres, oh, about two miles away, I guess, there was a prison camp, there were -- they told us there were 5000 prisoners there. But they were all women who had collaborated with the Germans and the French had taken them and shaved them bald -- when they imprisoned them. They shaved them all bald. So we thought that would be funny to -- oh, hundreds of bald-headed women. We wanted to go -- my daughter, Lisa, the one that was contacted, she thinks that's the funniest story because we wanted to see these bald headed women. So we took out across the field and went over to see them. But the thing was, this was -- this was early on when we had just -- the Germans had just moved back. And all along the roads, there were signs that said "Mines Cleared to Hedges". That meant the fields had not been cleared. And we go tramping across these mine fields, to where -- without a thought -- to see the bald-headed women. (laughs) And Lisa said, "Gee, I might not have been born." We could have been blown up.

Question: So what were you thinking -- that you would be able to see the mine or --

Answer: Oh, no, they were buried.

Question: So you didn't even think anything --

Answer: They buried them. We didn't even think about it. We just went across. (laughs) But I remember -- I guess we remembered it later, I don't know. I remember my boyfriend -- that evening. I told him what we did and boy, he bawled me out. You fools, you could have been blown up out there. Oh, well, we didn't think about that. We just thought it was a funny thing and we went hiking across the fields. Then we, oh, yeah, they do have those signs up, all along the roads. They had just cleared the roads so the troops could come forward. But the -- but they hadn't had time to clear all the fields yet. But nothing happened, so I guess either they weren't mined or we missed the mines. I don't know. There were about, oh, I don't know, five or six of us, we went across. But oh, that was a sight. Can you imagine hundreds of bald-headed women? (laughs) It just was a ridiculous sight. But the French were very, very mad at them. You know, they had collaborated with the German officers and been mistresses of them and like that, so I guess they -- we didn't have much sympathy for them because we figured they were traitors to their country. You know. So we really -- we just thought it was funny. (laughs)

Question: So was it the type of camp where you just walk up and it was just like a -- fenced --

Answer: Well, it was just a -- an open fence, yeah. We didn't get too close, you know, but close enough to see them. It was --- was just a high fence with barbed wire along the top. They had a riot there while we were stationed there and we were -- we were not allowed to go into town. We were a little ways out of town. We used to be able to go into town to go shopping and like. But we couldn't go in without an armed escort when they had the riot there. And that was -- we -- well, I guess we weren't very nice to the guys. They were not fighting men, they were -- they were support troops like we were. But of course, when they went through basic, they had been taught to shoot and all that and they had been issued rifles. But they were not really fighting soldiers. The guy I dated was a weather observer, and you know, in an -- in an office. He was not a front line fighter. So we were kidding about that. We said, geez, just give us the guns, we could take care of ourselves just as well.

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(laughs) I don't know if they had -- if they ever had to shoot anybody, if they could have done it even, but -- they weren't, you know, they weren't sissies or cowards or anything, but they - - they were just not trained soldiers. They weren't fighting men. Hadn't been trained. You have to train for that, whatever you're doing, you know.

Question: Now you mentioned going into town to go shopping.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Shopping -- I mean -- clothes shopping? What are you shopping for?

Answer: Oh, whatever you wanted. Oh, don't ask me. None of us could really speak French, you know. And we went into one -- we thought we'd like to have some bullion cubes, you know, that's the way Americans say it, bullion, right? Okay. So we go around these stores looking for bullion cubes, and they -- well, no, I don't think, you know, no, no, no comprehend, I don't understand, you know. And finally we came to one store, asked for bullion cubes and the guy says, he thinks a minute and he says, ah, qui, bullion. (laughs) We couldn't even pronounce it, but he caught on to what we were trying to say.

Question: So the city was -- was operating back to --

Answer: Oh, yeah, by that time, the Germans had been moved back. But by the time we got to Chartres -- there's a beautiful cathedral there. It's one of the cathedral towns, you know. France is noted for its gorgeous cathedrals, and they are, just beautiful. We went and visited that one. When we went to Reims, that has another beautiful cathedral. That one was closer to the front, it was all sandbagged when we were there and you couldn't go inside. But the Chartres one had been opened and we did go inside to see that. Oh, it was magnificent. Just beautiful. And later, after the war, I went on to Paris on a three day pass, and we only had three days so we thought, well, we might as well go on a tour to see the high -- high spots, you know. So we came to the Notre Dame, it was just a very famous cathedral. I thought, oh, I wanted to see this beautiful thing. As we stepped through the door, that magnificent pipe organ started to play and I was just spell-bound. I just stopped dead in my tracks. I couldn't move. It sounded just like music from heaven. You know, it was beautiful. The rest of them went on tour and I was still standing there when they came back. I couldn't move. That organ -- pipe organ played the whole time. The rest of them just kind of ignored it but it just got me. I was still standing in the door. I never did see the Notre Dame. Only the front section there. But they had these great big pipes on the wall, oh, huge, I'd never seen anything like them. And you can imagine the sound in the cathedral. Oh, just -- I couldn't describe it. It was just magnificent. And I -- that's what I remember of the Notre Dame.

Question: Wow. See, that's what -- what I think is interesting. I mean, that was the tail end of the war but --

Answer: Yeah, that was -- well, it was still going on in -- in Japan, you know, the Pacific. But it ended -- as you know, it ended in Europe in May. May 8th. Then it went on till what, August 14th or something like that in the Pacific, yeah.

Question: See and that's the interesting thing is that the history books kind of leave out, because the history books talk about war and all you think is military people when shooting and all that going on.

Answer: Hm-hmm.

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Question: But yet there are these troops that are coming up, behind or around and they're still kind of this average, every-day like -- I mean you were almost a tourist of Europe, to a certain extent.

Answer: That's right. Hm-hmm. Yeah, they always emphasize, well, they emphasize the fighting part of a war and they leave out a lot of the human part. Because we didn't change -- we were human beings and we were living, yes, you know, as well as we could, we'd have fun in between. Well, the infantry, too, they'd pull them back on a rest and then they'd go into town and they'd have fun and like that, you know. It was quite a relief for them more than for us, I guess, but -- but they do leave out the human side of it when they talk about war. They'll emphasize some big battle -- or something -- or the casualties or something like that. But you're right, they don't deal with the actual people, the human part of it, do they? They kind of skip that. Even though they're talking about human beings, but they -- they leave out that part of it, yeah.

Question: The little shop owner, the baker, the -- I mean what happens -- I mean we know -- we heard about the Germans coming through town, or the Americans coming through a town, but they never talk about -- and I mean, we hear about bombed out towns. But what happens afterwards?

Answer: Yeah, what happened to the people.

Question: Yeah.

Answer: Well, I'll tell you about one. When we lived -- when we were in Le Moure, out back of the building was a whole row of houses and people, you know, the Belgium people. Well, one old lady there, I guess, oh, she wasn't all that old, I guess she was in her 50's, but heavy set old lady. She took in washing, and we used to take our laundry out there. And we got acquainted with her. She was such a nice lady. Her husband had been killed in a bomb raid with the -- the Germans had bombed the town and her husband had been killed. And she had one son, Amay, who was 16 years old. He was so cute. He was learning to speak English, and he'd come out with his little book and practice with us. And she was so dear, whenever we'd go over with our laundry, she'd invite us to -- she'd always have a big pot of soup there and she'd invite us -- and we got to be very friendly with them. I have pictures of them somewhere. And that Amay was so cute. He -- he was just 16 and nice looking boy and kind of big for his age. And he would always come and talk to us to practice his English. And he'd get his words wrong. And finally -- finally when we were leaving, he gave me a picture of -- of him and he wrote on the back, in memory of our intimate friendship. (laughs) And the girls teased me to death about that. He didn't realize what he was saying, you know. He got his words -- he couldn't quite get the English, and the girls just teased me, said, oh, boy a 16-year-old, fine, you know. I still have that picture somewhere, and a picture of his mother. And when I got back home, they had not seen leather shoes since the war had started and I sent them each a pair of real leather shoes, and oh, they were so thrilled -- they just -- oh, leather shoes. They -- they wore wooden clogs and that's all they had all during the war. So they were very friendly people. The Belgium people were more friendly than the Frenchmen were, I think. They -- they really seemed to appreciate us more.

Question: So that's usually where you would end up would be in a village like that or a city --

Answer: With what?

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Question: You usually ended up setting up quarters in a -- in a city or a village -- as the Germans got pushed out --

Answer: Yeah, then we moved up. We had to move up because the planes had to -- you know, they couldn't fly the distance, so that's -- we kept moving up. And the 8th stayed in England because they had the distance with the big bombers. Yeah, we -- we first went to Chartres, which I think that's south of Paris. But when we went through, we went -- when we moved up to Reims which is above Paris, I'm trying to think, the map -- we went in a truck convoy, it was a big, long convoy. The whole headquarters moved at once. And as we went through Paris, the people were lined on both sides of the street. They were cheering us as we went through. And, you know, really big thing. The Americans had -- Paris had been liberated when, in I think in July, wasn't it, that year? I think. It had been liberated. We didn't liberate it, but we were coming along. When did we move up, in October. And, oh, they just cheering us along the way. And from way off, the first thing we saw was that Eiffel Tower against the sky. You've probably seen pictures of that if -- maybe you've been there, I don't know. But that was the first thing we saw -- we said, oh, there's Paris up there, you know, the Eiffel Tower. But we just drove through it and on -- on to Reims, and set up there. But, yeah, we kept moving up. And then when the Germans got pushed farther back, we moved up to Belgium and that's where we were when the war ended. Boy, that was a great day. You should have seen those people. Oh, man. They got out in the streets there and I say for three days and nights without stopping, we had bands playing, people yelling, hugging each other, just -- without any let-up for three solid days and nights they kept that up, they were so happy. But then a funny thing -- soon after, when they got a little settled down, they said well, you can go home now, we want to have our buildings back. (laughs) Thanks, you did your job, we want our buildings back now. That was the attitude. But we were moving out, you know, and they started sending us back on points, like -- like that article I brought. You went on -- you got a -- let's see. You got one point for each month of service. This was the WACs. I don't know what they did with the guys. You got one point for each month of service, another point for each month overseas, then you got five points for each battle star you had on your ETO ribbon, and then they added that all up. And you had to have 44 points to be eligible to go home. Well, when I added mine up, I had 66, so I was ready to go, you know. By that time, you know, we were ready to go home. Then, you know, that was a big deal, and so I got home in September.

Oh, but that was -- that was funny, too. In August, well, they didn't know what to do with us, you know. When the war ended, we -- our jobs were gone. Bombardment Division, we had nothing to do. And they changed it to the 9th Air Division then. So we were the 9th -- and that's on my discharge, and that irked me. Cause Bombardment Division sounded much more, you know -- 9th Air Division, what, that sounded like nothing. But that's what's on my discharge anyway. They changed it because there was no bombardment, there was nothing to do. So we were out of jobs and then -- then they had trouble, they just sent us here, there and the other place. I finally had to serve as a secretary to some captain and he went scrounging around. I got -- I don't know what -- he was scrounging around. He'd go places and -- I don't know, collect all kinds of stuff that was left -- was left behind. I don't know what his job -- really nice guy, though. I didn't have much to do there, and he'd bring me back things. I have little things, like I have a letter opener from Germany that I still have that he gave me, like that. But -- but they just found work for us because our jobs were really over. So then we got to go -- they set up leave down in -- Nice, in France. Let's see, Nice was for the enlisted, and Cans was for the officers. We were separated always. (laughs) And that was kind of funny because both my brothers were officers, and I also had a cousin and an uncle in that were officers, but I couldn't -- I wasn't good enough to associate with them, you know. I didn't care, we just laughed about it. But they -- but they separated us. So I went -- I had a leave in August -- I had a leave down -- a week's leave in Nice. And oh, that was nice. They put us up at nice hotels and -- and they had trips around where you could go. We went

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up to, what, Gras, where they made all the perfumes, and stuff like that. It was really fun, and then there were GIs and girls and -- and you'd meet people and go dancing and we had a grand time. So then it came time to go home, and this pilot had us all out there, he was checking names off -- off of his thing, and he says which one is Cresto? And he's looking there. You know, what? Me. And he says I have orders to bring you back, if I have to leave all the rest, you're going home. And the rest of them, all (gestures) -- they hollered. So me and my buddy, then, we went on a plane load -- oh, this was disgusting. We went on a plane load of medical personnel, they were doctors and nurses and of course they were all officers, and they just ignored us. They treated us like we weren't there, except one couple, they were a married couple, a nurse and a doctor, and they were the only ones that were nice to us. And I thought, why do medical -- you know, we didn't care, but I thought why would medical people take that attitude. But they did. And then when -- oh, we -- we had to come down. There was something wrong with the plane. We had to come down at Leon and stay overnight. So they had to put us up in the hotel with the officers. We were just kind of getting a kick out of it, you know, but they were very -- actually nasty. They-- they wouldn't have anything to do with us, they wouldn't even speak to us. Except that one couple. And we went -- oh, this was really bad. We went down that night for dinner to the cafe that they had -- the restaurant downstairs. And we were stopped at the door and told we were not -- we couldn't eat with the officers, we -- and they led us back to the kitchen. We had to sit in the kitchen and have our dinner -- we're not allowed to eat with the officers. Now wasn't that ridiculous. I thought that was -- and then the next day when we were all down in the lobby waiting to leave for the plane, that nice couple came up to us and they said where were you, we looked for you at dinner, we saved places for you. They were so nice. And we told them, well, they wouldn't let us eat in there. And they just looked at each other -- oh, they were just -- oh -- you could see. They felt -- they just looked at each other and shook their -- oh. But that was pretty raw, we thought, you know, but that's the way they were. You were not to associate with the officers, you just weren't good enough. And that -- that's ridiculous.

Question: Everybody fought in the same war, though -- I mean it was --

Answer: Yeah, fought in the same war. And those officers couldn't function without us enlisted underneath them doing the job, you know. It was ridiculous, but it was the attitude at the time. I don't know what exists now, maybe it's different, I don't know. I doubt it. I doubt it. (laughs)

Question: Now you talked a lot about a buddy that -- did you -- a woman friend that worked with you all along? Did you stay in the same group or --

Answer: Oh, I had a -- when I went up -- I didn't, in basic training, we were all new. I didn't have a buddy there. Well, I had one little girl that I kind of liked, she was from Texas. You get acquainted with people, you know. But she -- she got out. They'd let you get out if you really wanted to go home, you know, if you couldn't take it. And she wanted -- she got homesick for Texas and she went back to Texas. And I thought oh. She was in the hospital -- they'd send them to the hospital for a few days and check them out. And there were -- there were, oh, three or four of them there with her that were going home. So the night before she was to leave, I went over to see her. I snuck out of the barracks to go and see her. I was always doing stuff like that. It was a Friday night, and you're supposed to stay home and GI the barracks on Friday for the Saturday morning inspection. And you couldn't go out -- you had to wear your, what they called Class A uniform, with your tie and everything. So I snuck - - I put on my Class A uniform and -- you're laughing -- and I snuck out the back door. And I didn't have a pass. You had to have a pass when you left the are

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Answer: So I went over to the hospital. Nobody stopped me. I just walked along like I owned the place, you know, nobody stopped me. And I went over to the hospital and I was having such -- I was having a great time over there. And I was kidding with the girls and one of them said gee, you make it sound like such fun, I wish I wasn't getting out. (laughs) I thought, well, your choice, kid. You know. And then when I went -- I went back, I came -- I snuck in the back door. And one of the girls grabbed me and says get down, fool, get in line. They were giving out -- it was payday and they were -- you had to get in line by alphabet and I was a "C". She says -- but I don't know, they were all in their fatigues cause they'd been working, and I wasn't, but nobody questioned it. They didn't notice. So she says give me your hat and get in line. We always kind of took care of each other like that. But it was -- that was funny.

But no, I didn't really have a buddy. You didn't have time. You were very busy all the time, you know, they really worked you a lot and breaking you in, and it was only a month training at that time. I don't know if it's -- and then we got our orders for different schools that we were going to, and so I got radio school, then I was tickled. Well then on the way up, we traveled by train in those days, and on the way up to Kansas City, I met the girl that became my buddy. We were just inseparable all -- all through the school. And we had a grand time. And we picked up a little group from the GIs next door and we just -- oh, we were always doing things in a -- in a group. And finally I -- I started dating one guy and she started dating one. And we'd sneak out -- you weren't allowed to leave the city, you know, so we'd sneak out and go across the river to Kansas City, Kansas. There was a nice park there where you could go swimming and all like that. We'd sneak out every Sunday. And go -- we always did things like that. I don't know why I always got away with it -- I never got caught.

Question: Did you stay in touch with your buddy after the service?

Answer: Well, we -- then when we got done, that was a five month course and we both passed, there was no problem with that. And then we were all sitting in this big room waiting for our orders. Well, the whole class knew that we were inseparable buddies so they were rooting for us to go together and we -- we're all sitting there and they were reading out various -- they would send a group here and a group there -- there were 50 in a class so they were sorting it out. There was a row of officers up there, women officers, and they were reading out the list. So they came to this Truax Field in Madison, Wisconsin, and they started reading and Cresto came up on the list. And then we were sitting there holding on to each other, oh, her name was Polandis with a "P", so we're going through this whole big list and the whole class is kind of breathless there, and finally they came down and they called Polandis, and the whole class went ahh (gestures). And those officers looked up -- says what is that all about? And somebody told them, well those two are buddies, they wanted to go together. And the officers just -- they kind of smiled -- they didn't say anything. So we got to go there. But then we got up there and I thought we were going to be radio operators, oh, boy, we're out of school, we're going to be radio operators. We get up there, and they told us we're supposed to be instructors. And that's something I cannot do. I could not -- even in school I couldn't stand up and give a report in class. I just didn't. So I said no, I can't do that. I just can't do it. So I went to the captain, the CO. And I told -- I told her that this is something I can't do, ma'am, I just can't. And she -- she understood, she was nice. So then she found me a job on the other side of the field in a mess personnel office -- just an office job. Well I was the only girl on that side of the field. I was the only girl in the office, and I was the only girl on that side of the field. I always got into these situations. And so I had a ball over there. There was an office full of GIs. And the captain was a young lieutenant. If it weren't for that guy, I wouldn't be here talking to you now. All these years later. Because he was -- he was so nice. He wasn't flirty. It wasn't that. He just -- I was the only girl there and he was being very nice to me. And I -- I was writing to this boy back home that I had known, and wartime, I imagined I was in love with Johnny back home. So all the time I'd be writing, I

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didn't have much to do, it was just a make-work job, really. I was always raving about my Johnny back home. Okay, so, so I was always writing letters to Johnny and talking about Johnny. And this lieutenant would hear and he was -- he was the neatest guy. One time when we were all at work -- it was the sort of thing he would do. He had a sense of humor. And we were all just working there quietly for once, nobody was talking. So he comes stalking out of his office, slams a book down on the desk, and says "it's too damn quiet in here". Then he turns around and goes back in his office. He was kind of a screwball but he was the nicest guy. And he ran a tight ship, you did your work. But he had a sense of humor and he made it kind of fun, you know. So then one day he calls me in. And Johnny had been trying -- he was in the Army. He'd been transferred down to Florida, he was at Tampa, some field in Tampa, there. So the lieutenant calls me in the office and tells me he got me a transfer down to Florida so I could be near Johnny. And nobody -- the word on the field was it was impossible to get a transfer off that field. He had gone clear to St. Louis to the headquarters to get me a transfer down to Florid

Answer: And I didn't want to go. I didn't want to leave my buddy. But I couldn't tell him that. He'd gone to all that trouble, and he had, you know, a big smile, and I had to, well, thank you, gee, that's wonderful, you know. And that night I went home and I thought, gee, I have to leave Marie. I don't want to go. But I had no choice, I couldn't tell him that after that. So that -- we got separated then and we were never together again. And she just stayed there and then she went to Scott Field in Illinois and she didn't have any adventure. I had all the adventure. But if he hadn't sent me down to Florida, I would have just gone to Scott Field and stayed up there. I wouldn't have gone if he hadn't done that.

Question: What happened to Johnny?

Answer: Oh, well, we got together and decided it wasn't -- I decided that I didn't really love him. And I, of course met another dashing guy. He was a returned tail gunner from Europe, big hero on the base. He'd been shot down and captured in France and the French people had smuggled him out of France and he got back. He was a big hero and I met him at the pool one night, started going with him, and then I thought oh, I like Jimmy better than Johnny. (laughs) You know, it was just -- just wartime nonsense. So then -- then they sent Jimmy out on a bond selling tour and he was supposed to be gone for a couple of weeks. So I thought well, I can't keep this up, I'll have to tell Johnny that it's all over, you know. Cause we had kind of gotten engaged. He'd come up to see me at Christmas and we'd gotten engaged. So I thought no, the kindest thing is just to break it off. I didn't tell him about Jimmy, though, I thought that would really make him feel too bad. I just told him that I -- I had -- my feelings had changed, you know. I did it as nice as I could, but you can't stop from hurting somebody like that. Well, he took off and I didn't see him again, but he kept writing to me for about a year and I'd write back a nice letter, I'd answer him. But then I didn't hear from him anymore so I figured, well I guess he got over it by now.

So then the office -- as soon as -- Jimmy had left, my captain called me in. She had overseas orders. She says -- now you volunteered -- I had volunteered for overseas. She says, now you volunteered for overseas, do you still want to go? And I thought, hell, no, I don't want to go, Jimmy's going to come back in two weeks. And the timing was all off. And so I told her some story that I had promised my mother I wouldn't go overseas. And she let me off the hook. So a week later, Jimmy's still gone. She calls me back in. And she says I have more overseas orders, she says, now you volunteered and this time you're going, and don't give me any more cock and bull stories. So I -- I couldn't say -- what do you say to a captain, yes ma'am. (laughs) She knew I was just telling her stories. But she let me off -- so then -- then that's when I went overseas. There were about -- oh, about six of us -- well, I told you she called back Anita from New York. That was the same time. We all got a big kick out of that because everybody knew that they were rivals for that lifeguard. Oh, he was a big, handsome

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guy, you know. They were fighting over him. But you're going to lose if you're fightin' with a captain.

Question: When they get that rank.

Answer: A lowly corporal can't win a battle with a captain. So we all went -- that's when we went -- then we sailed on the Queen Elizabeth. That was neat. Oh, I had a -- we got our leave. We were at Camp Shanks, New York. It was just a little ways out of New York City. Well, all my high school days, my buddy in high school, my buddy and I -- we wanted to go to New York. We didn't want to be actresses or anything like that. It was just New York was the glamour place. Hollywood and New York were the big glamour places, and we already knew Hollywood upside down. We were autograph hounds in high school, so we knew Hollywood. And we -- our dream was to go to New York, just to see the boulevard, you know, Broadway and all that. Glamour spot. So here we were at Camp Shanks and we'd each get a last leave before we went to the P-O-E and embarked. So I got a -- a leave, for 6 o'clock Sunday night to 6 o'clock Sunday morning, Monday morning. A 12-hour leave now to go to New York. And then the only girl that got a leave with me, well we knew each other, but she was an older woman. She was about -- I think the age limit was 38, she was about 35. She had a 14-year-old daughter back home with her mother. And she was just a sour puss and this was who I went to New York with. And we're on the train, it took about an hour from where we were. We're on the train, going in, and I was getting real excited. I could see the big buildings, you know, up ahead. And I'm, oh, New York, New York, and I'm jumping up and down and she says, oh, you act just like my 14-year-old daughter. Squelch. And so I wandered around New York with her. We were -- we got to Broadway and we did go -- we saw -- remember Cap Calloway? We got to see him in person. We finally went in one of the shows there and saw him. But that was the only fun we had. There was nothing to do. We saw Times Square. You've seen all those pictures of Times Square. And so I saw the famous Times Square -- we just wandered around there. We went to that and then it was about midnight by that time. We thought, well, what can we do -- we can't wander around New York after midnight. Cause we'll just get in trouble or something. Well, in the big city, you know. So then we went back to the base and that was my leave in New York. (laughs) Oh, that was funny.

But would you -- would you believe -- this is funny. When we boarded the ship, it was just like the movie. You wouldn't believe. We boarded at midnight, we were going up the gangplank at midnight, and on the dock was a full dress band playing Over There. Would you believe.

Question: Wow.

Answer: Just like a movie. With a full dress band and they were playing Over There as we went up the gangplank at midnight. I never forgot that. I thought that was so funny. We're going up there with our barracks bags over our shoulders, you know, trudging, and they're playing Over There. (laughs) Full dress. A whole -- whole band. That was funny. That was a beautiful ship, and they housed us in the first class cabin cause -- and they had all the stewards and everything that had served on the ship. It was a British ship but it was -- well, the Queen Mary, too. The two Queens -- they were famous, I don't know if -- in your time I guess you've heard of them but you -- you weren't young enough for World War II, I'm sure. But the two Queens -- I sailed over on the Queen Elizabeth and back on the Queen Mary. But that steward was telling us, those were the first class, and they cost, which was big money in those days, he said they cost about \$2000 a trip, which in those days was real money. And we -- we -- of course we didn't have them to ourselves, I think there were eight to a cabin. Double deck bunks, but -- but it was nice. It was better than -- the guys were sleeping on the deck. Down below. Well, the ship was just packed with troops, you know. I

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guess some of them had -- had cabins or whatever they had. In steerage class. We got to go first class. But we were confined to our cabin. We couldn't wander around the boat. So we didn't get -- and we were so jealous of the nurses cause they were just down the hall from us, a bunch of nurses, and of course, they were all officers, so they had the run of the boat. And we'd see them going by, you know, and we couldn't go out. We were so jealous of them.

Question: Did you face -- I mean, because even being behind the front line, people come and go --

Answer: Pardon?

Question: Even being behind the front line, there were people coming and going, did you face much of the travesty of war, or were you kind of isolated from the travesty --

Answer: Well, you mean the tragic part? Well, what I told you about that plane, that was about the worst of it. We saw the dead gunners carried off, like that. But no, we were behind -- far enough back of the lines that you didn't really see much of that. One time they sent me out with a couple of guys to get -- to get mattresses from some place. It was when we're in -- in Reims, which wasn't too far back, I mean, because they were strafing the city, but it was back, it wasn't in -- oh, I don't know, maybe 80 miles back from the front, something like that. So you weren't -- you couldn't hear the firing or anything like that. But they sent us out -- pretty far out to get some mattresses -- pick up some mattresses. And we came to this little town, I don't know how far we went. But I made a fool of myself as usual. I saw this -- this sign across the street and down a little ways. It was a building, and it had a big red cross on it. Well, the Red Cross meant to me, all I had seen of it was -- was where they had the little canteen where they'd give you coffee and donuts, you know. So I said oh, look, donuts, let's go. And those guys looked so disgusted, they said that's an aid station. We were close enough to the front then that it was an aid station where they were treating the wounded soldiers, and I made a total fool of myself. (laughs) All it meant to me was donuts.

Question: Exactly. I mean that's --

Answer: Yeah, so we were -- no, we really didn't -- you know, we didn't see any wounded soldiers or anything like that. We weren't that close. Cause the headquarters had to be back fairly safe. Oh we were open to -- well, like in England when the buzz bombs came over and like that. But nobody bombed -- we were far enough from London. You know, London got the heck bombed out of it. But I guess that's why we were up there. It was called Marks Hall. It had been a gentleman's country estate that was taken over by the -- the Air Force. And no, we were not that close. The worst of it that we saw was that plane that came in. And that was only cause it couldn't make it to its own base. Ordinarily they didn't land there. We had an airstrip but it wasn't, you know, there weren't any planes stationed there that went on raids. It was just probably for the officers, like that.

Question: Have you ever gone back?

Answer: Oh, I went to Germany once, I'm talking too much I should have brought a cough drop or something.

Question: We're about done here.

Answer: No, we were not that close because the headquarters had to, of necessity be back where it wouldn't get bombed out. And the -- I guess the worst was -- well, during the Battle of the Bulge when all those little things were happening around Reims. Like I told you,

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they shot the guard on our gate. And they machined that one in the alley. And the planes came over. That was the worst of it. But that -- how long did that last? A few weeks. Battle of the Bulge. It lasted -- it started just before Christmas. I remember that. I don't remember when it ended, but it lasted a little while, and then we moved on up to Belgium and it was almost over by that time. We moved up there in April, yeah, April -- April 12th. I remember that because it was the day that Roosevelt died. And we were just loading on the plane for Belgium when we got the word that Roosevelt had died. And he was one of our heroes, too, we always thought he was great. Him and Eisenhower and Patton, I guess were our -- our heroes. So that kind of depressed us all then. He was -- he was certainly a -- a person, wasn't he. He was, I don't know, he was a very dynamic individual in spite of -- he was a cripple -- but it didn't bother him. He just didn't let it stop him. And I always admired that. And he was, I guess, the only president we -- president we had that was serving four terms. He died in the -- just the beginning of the fourth term. But he was president from the time I was 12 years old and I was 25 when he died. That was amazing. But I always liked him. I don't care Democrats or Republicans, I'm not much for that. I usually register Republican but I vote for whoever I think is the best one. Well, lucky, I voted for Governor Locke, and he's the one that I have -- you know that ceremony I'm supposed --

Question: That's right, you're coming over -- yeah.

Answer: -- that I'm supposed to go to. Well, I don't know why they chose me. I might have been the only WAC she heard from, that lady. Because there aren't that many of us around, and it's hard to find one that served overseas. There is another girl in our -- at Claire House that did serve overseas, but she didn't serve in France, she served in North Africa and Italy.

Question: Oh really?

Answer: Yeah, she might be interesting to talk to. I don't know -- she called me over one time when I was first there and somebody had told her I was a veteran. And -- but she didn't -- I tried to get her to tell me her story, and she -- she wouldn't much talk about it. She must have had interesting adventures, you know, she moved up through Italy when the troops took Italy and went on up. And she was in North Africa

Answer: But she never -- she never talked to me since. She always sits -- there's a bunch of them -- there's a lounge downstairs, and there's a whole bunch of them that sit around in that lounge. I call it the gossip circle. (laughs) But -- but you know, they like to sit and talk, they'll be sitting there all afternoon. And she's always down there but she's never talked to me since and I kind of wanted to trade stories with her but she seems to kind of withdrawn like, and so, I don't know -- maybe -- maybe she wouldn't want to talk.

Question: She wasn't an officer, was she? (laughs)

Answer: I don't know -- she -- well, she couldn't have had it too bad. You know the veterans that don't talk about it are the ones that were really in it. Like you meet -- well, a lot of them from Viet Nam.

Question: Well, and that's -- with this project, that's a lot of what we've really kind of sought out -- we're to find a lot of the people who have quietly, for 50 years, sat and never discussed World War II, because again, like you said, those were a lot of the people that were over there doing their job -- and -- and

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Answer: Well, I know a lot of them who were really in it, especially I'm aware of the Viet Nam ones, because that was so terrible. I don't think -- we should never have been in that one. That was awful. And they took an awful beating, our troops did. And I've met a lot of them over the years and they just won't talk about it because it was so bad. The ones that will talk, like me, were not really into all that. There's World War II vets who won't talk about it because it was so bad. Especially the Pacific, I think. That was much worse than Europe. I think they had it a lot worse over there. Cause they had to fight and take those islands, one after another and the Japs were dug in and the Japs were just horrid.

Question: Lacey and I have talked to a couple of Merrill's Marauders and some people that were in Europe, and they said it was just apples and oranges, trying to compare Europe and -- and South Pacific. It was just two different wars.

Answer: Yeah, yeah, I think it was.

Question: Type of warfare and --

Answer: That was a -- well, the Navy had a lot to do in -- in the Pacific and they did very little in Europe. I mean, they weren't needed there. But they suffered a lot of casualties, too, in the Pacific. Oh, war -- you know, war is hell, at best. But those, like me who serve in it -- a -- I think the majority are support troops. Well, I know they are, cause they used to tell us it takes eight support troop for one who is serving up front. So figure that out over the whole thousands of them, most of them are in the rear.

Question: That's the thing that history books kind of left out.

Answer: They do, yes, and people don't realize that. They don't realize. I'm sure that everybody who had a son over there that served in our headquarters thought he -- oh, my son's in France, you know. And they just visualized him fighting and everything. And they weren't in any danger, no more than we were.

Question: And that's interesting, because Andy Rooney, in his book, talks about that. That some of the people that came back that were in positions like that felt ashamed because they had seen all the news reels about the "heroes" you know --

Answer: Yeah.

Question: -- and so they'd come back and people would say were you up fighting, and they'd say, well, no, I -- and then eventually they would just quiet down and the people didn't realize that it took all of those people.

Answer: Well, I think that's the wrong attitude, because the fighting men could not function without the support troops. Okay, you're not a hero if you're in the support -- in the rear. You're certainly not a hero. But you're not a coward, either. You know, you're serving your country and you deserve credit for that. But the heroes were the ones that were doing the actual fighting. I consider my brother was a hero -- he was shot down over Germany, he went down, and through all that danger. Those guys were heroes. The ones -- well, even -- even the mechanics on the ground that serviced the planes. They weren't the heroes -- it was the crews that went out with the planes. And in the infantry, it wasn't the guys in the rear. There were guys in the rear, too. But the ones in the front were the heroes -- they were risking their lives. If you're risking your life, you're a hero. That's the way I figure. But those who came back like that, they shouldn't have let people shame them. What were those people that shamed them. What were they doing? They weren't even over there.

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Question: Well, see, that's -- yeah.

Answer: You know, that's the way I feel.

Question: We interviewed, and it's real interesting. A Merchant Marine, in fact the guy's name is Harold Schmidt up in --

Answer: Oh, I knew a Merchant Marine, too. Now those guys went through a lot of danger.

Question: And you see they weren't recognized --

Answer: No, they weren't --

Question: And they're still not getting full credit, and they had a higher chance -- they had a higher rate of mortality than the Marines did, percentage wise.

Answer: I wouldn't doubt it because they were not a fighting ship -- they were not a fighting crew. Oh, I suppose -- no doubt they had guns, but they were not an armed battle ship, you know.

Question: And that's what -- what -- just like we wanted a break -- well, that's what we were doing at Burma -- we were trying to break the supply line, and so we -- we didn't have to fly over the Hump, we could get our supply line in. The same thing with those Merchant Marines. They were our supply line. And that's what Harold said. He said, you know those tanks they got over there, you know those Marines that got over there, you know those -- the food that got over there, it had to get there somehow, and there you go.

Answer: That's right. Yes, I knew a Merchant Marine, a guy that I had known before and I met him again after the war, just accidentally. And he'd been through -- he had sailed cross the Atlantic all through the war. But they didn't get any recognition and that -- that's not right. They just -- they build up - oh, the more dashing heroics, and the stories are more -- you know, it's kind of dull just to tell about sailing across the se

Answer: Although it was dangerous for them, we had -- as we crossed, we had a submarine drill every morning. Nothing attacked us, but we had the drill because there were submarines out there.

Question: I was going to say --

Answer: Well, you know, the Queens traveled alone. And do you know why they traveled alone? Because if they were in convoy they would be slowed down and they would be the target. The Queen would be the target. So they sent them off alone and they zig-zagged. That steward told us they zig-zagged all the way across and they would change course in the time it would take to aim a torpedo so that they couldn't be hit direct. A direct hit would probably sink them, but if they got a glancing blow, they could maybe survive. That was the theory, anyway. As far as I know, neither one was ever hit. I don't know why. Because they were quite a target, you know. And going alone, they had no protection, really. Unless maybe there were submarines down there but we weren't told that. There could have been, I guess. But they -- they took six days to cross from New York and we landed in Gourrock Scotland. And coming home it only took four days because they didn't zig-zag. They came straight across, from South Hampton to New York.

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Oh, you should have seen that welcome. Maybe you've seen it, in movies. Oh, when we sailed into New York Harbor and the Queen came -- I can't talk, I start to cry. I get emotional when I think of it. But the -- the whole -- everything was lined with people, flags flying, signs all over that said welcome home, well done, as we came into the harbor. Boats coming -- little boats coming out to meet us. Horns blowing, whistles blowing, everybody screaming and yelling, the Queen came in. Oh, that was -- that was a day. And we were home from the war. The war was over on both sides, we were coming home. It was great. There was a young GI right in front of me. Now you've heard of this but it actually happened. As we were going down the gangplank, this little -- he was a real young guy, couldn't have been more than 20 or so. And he got to the bottom of the gangplank, he actually dropped on his knees and kissed the ground. That actually happened. I've heard people -- they tell that, but it actually happened. He was so grateful to be back home alive.

Question: Boy that had to be just -- probably one of the most memorable events, coming into the harbor there with all the --

Answer: And there was a whole row of -- what was it Red Cross ladies? I don't know if they were Red Cross. I guess they were Red Cross. Anyway, there was ladies all lined up, handing us little cartons of milk, cause we hadn't had any milk overseas. Just powdered -- powdered stuff. And they were handing us cartons of real milk as we came off the ship. Ah, that was a day. But that harbor, I can still -- still see it. It was just -- oh, everybody in New York must have been out there. It just looked like it. Just mobs of people, all the way around the harbor. We came in. All the whistles blowing and people yelling, bands playing, it was a great day. Well, that was a long war and when it was over, just a big relief, you know. Oh, it was a tough war.

But, you know, that was one I felt that had to be fought. Hitler had to be stopped. That man had to be crushed. He was just -- oh, he was just destroying every -- and I never could understand how one man can have such power. You know? Nobody dared to defy him. Why -- how could one man gain that kind of power where he could murder people, imprison them, do anything he wanted. And he must have been crazy, he must have been insane to carry on like he did. But I felt like he had to be stopped. I felt that was a just war. Some of them -- well, Viet Nam, that was -- that was just a mess. I don't think we belonged in that at all. But -- but World War II, they had to stop him. And I suppose World War I, although Kaiser Wilhelm wasn't as bad as Hitler, from what I've ever read of him. That was slightly before my time but --. But don't you think that war had to be fought? World War II?

Question: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. There's no question.

Answer: He had -- they had to stop him. Boy that was a great day when his death was made known. Wow, I think -- I think several million people must have cheered that. You know, how can one man have such an affect on the world?

Question: Well, it's -- it's charisma in reverse.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: You know Kennedy had a charisma about him, but it was a positive charisma

Answer:

Answer: Yeah

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Question: My father was, as a child, was over in Germany and he was there on May Day and I forget what city he was in, and he didn't see Hitler speak, but they pumped Hitler in over the speakers. And he said it was the scariest and most powerful thing that he ever saw, because this whole city stopped when the man spoke. And he -- he just was too powerful, dynamic --

Answer: When Hitler was --

Question: Yeah.

Answer: Hitler -- yeah, but he -- he -- to look at him, he didn't look like anything --

Question: Just a little, average, little Kraut like me, you know? So --

Answer: No, well, actually, yeah -- just -- just a person. You know, he wasn't -- he wasn't tall and great looking, and -- and, oh, I guess he wasn't exactly ugly but he was just an ordinary -- ordinary-looking person. Ordinary size, he wasn't very big, and he just -- so how could -- but he must have had a dynamic personality face to face, you know. Well some people do, they just kind of carry everybody along with them. But to that extent, I don't know -- I always -- I used to -- I could see the pictures of him, you know, and I would say how can one man have that kind of power? And the movies that they make, you know, and they show, they're afraid to tell. Oh, I remember in The Longest Day, when that -- that German general wants to have the tanks sent forward and they won't -- they can't wake Hitler, he's asleep. They can't wake him up. And they lose the battle because they -- they can't wake Hitler. I thought that -- but that's the way it was, I'm sure.

Question: Oh, yeah.

Answer: But -- but I thought, now that's ridiculous. That guy can't get his tanks up there, and if the tanks had been there, it was D-Day, he could have beat them down before they could get all their tanks and things ashore. But they wouldn't -- they couldn't wake Hitler and have his permission.

Question: Thank goodness.

Answer: Yeah, like that, and I guess -- guess that was true, from what -- everything you heard. Nobody could do anything without Hitler's permission. So he -- he had to go. He just had to go, and it was hard enough to get him, too, wasn't it? Took quite a fight. But yeah, I don't think, what you were saying about those guys that came back and felt ashamed, they shouldn't feel that way, I don't think. Well, people shouldn't make them feel that way, but they shouldn't let the people make them feel that way. They did their job and the job was not on the front line, so what? My job wasn't on the front line, I'm proud of it. I've always been proud that I served. And my whole family served. Even our dog. Our dog was in the Canine Corps. (laughs) It was. We had this big, tough dog. He was half German Shepherd and half Doberman. And that was the toughest, meanest dog. The neighbors used to tell Momma she should get rid of him. And she just -- she -- they had to be a year old to go in the Canine Corps. So Momma said no, he's just not a family pet. But she kept him in a fenced yard, you know, but, oh, he was a mean dog. He was even mean to the -- mean to the family. My brother was the only one who -- John, the one that lived at home. He was the only one that could really manage that dog. But Momma told the neighbor, no, he -- he's just not a family pet. But he'll do a good job. She said, he's going to go in the Canine Corps. She kept him, and then when John went he still had a month before he'd be a year old and they'd take him, so she actually paid board for him, she put him in a kennel and paid board for him

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for a whole month, which she could ill afford, but, but she was going to give him his chance. And he served -- he went in the Canine Corps and oh, they rated him top dog, you know. And she used to get letters from his trainer. They assigned them to one person so they could work together with that one person. And his trainer wrote her letters and one she got a kick out of. He sent her a little flag. You know the flags they used to put in the window with the stars on. She had one with three stars, and then underneath, the little dog one with one star on it. And people would tell her, oh, you've got four sons in. And she says, no, no, one of them's a daughter and one's a dog. (laughs) And they -- her -- the trainer sent her a letter and he says he's a credit to his country. (laughs) She got a kick out of that. He was -- he was guard duty at, where was it, Alamogordo, New Mexico where they tested the A-bomb. And he was on guard duty there. (laughs)

Question: Wow.

Answer: And then after the war, they sent a letter, they said if you wanted the dog back, and if not they would, just, you know. And we looked at each other -- they said, oh, they said they would try to train them back like they were and we looked at each other, oh, God forbid, they'd train him back like he was. And I don't think they could anyway, they were so trained, but then they'd -- they'd sell them for guard dogs and like that, what they were trained to do. So my brother, by that time was married and had a little baby so he couldn't take the dog, like that dog with a little kid. And by that time you know it was even tougher, it had been trained. But that was funny. I still -- I used to have a picture of that window, I thought it was so cute, with the little dog flag on it. It's only one I ever saw. Momma was like that, she -- she did everything. If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't have made it. I couldn't go and leave them, you know. They didn't have enough. My dad was just -- he worked all the time but he was an alcoholic and he just -- they needed the money. And then when my brother was going, so, just me. But she went and did that. She hadn't worked in 30 years. And she -- she was riding -- oh, people, people are so awful. She had a ride -- she didn't drive, she didn't have a car, she had to ride with some guy. And she had to walk about two miles down to La Brea Avenue where he came through. He wouldn't pick her up at their house, cause there was gas rationing. But -- but he got extra gas for having a passenger. But he wouldn't pick her up, she had to walk down there. And after working 10 hours on her feet, she had to walk home, two miles. And that guy -- everybody knew when her son went down missing in action, and one day they were going -- they were driving to work, and he had the gall to say to her I wish the war would last another year so I could get my house paid for. And she -- I said what did you say to him? She said, oh, I didn't say anything to him, she says. I just never rode with him again. She just went on to work and then she wouldn't even ride home with him. She got a ride with somebody. And every -- every day she'd walk -- she wasn't a Catholic, but she'd come past a Catholic church on her way home and she'd go in and light three candles for her kids. (crying) Here I'm going to weep again. She did that every day on her way home. She'd go in and light three candles for her babies.

Question: Wow.

Answer: We all came back, so -- I guess it worked.

Question: She sounds like quite a woman.

Answer: She was a dear soul. Not many mothers would do the things she did. In the first place, they wouldn't have let me go to war. But she knew I wanted to so bad. Course she didn't want me to. But -- but she wouldn't stand in my way. She was a dear. Well, I think I've about told you all of my stories. I don't know, I could probably think of some more. Have you got any questions?

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Question: No, that I -- you -- it's been wonderful to talk with you.

Answer: Oh, well thank you. You know, it's a pleasure to have someone really interested. My kids have all heard my stories, they're bored stiff with them.

Question: You know, they're not though. And I've heard a lot of veterans say that. And talking to your daughter, Lisa -- Lisa -- is that right?

Answer: Hm-hmm.

Question: Yeah, talking to Lisa, no, she --

Answer: Oh, were you the one she talked to?

Question: Yeah.

Answer: Yeah. Oh, she -- she's quite a gal.

Question: And you know, they -- they are much more. Sure, there's a certain point where, you know, like anything, if you hear it over and over again, eventually there's a part that we say, okay, we've heard. But to know, and to know what it was and understand it --

Answer: Well, they're all proud of me. They're all coming to the ceremony with me. I'm supposed to be the governor's date. Oh, I'm supposed to sit -- I have to sit with the governor, through the whole ceremony.

Question: And Lisa said you have to behave.

Answer: I have to behave, (laughs) yeah, yeah, they like to tease me. But they're all coming, These two are coming and Lisa and her husband and my two grandsons over on the Coast. And I have a son in Florida, he's a weather forecaster down there. And I didn't think he could make it because he had already put in for leave in June before this came up. And he tried to change it but somebody had already taken that week and he couldn't -- they wouldn't trade, they --