

Henley, Homer E. Interview 1-11-88

[Speaker 1]

The Germans, well during the war, during that time the war was really hot. They were trying to save Berlin. We got so far and they stopped us from going.

We didn't get to Berlin, we got so far from Berlin. And that's when the Russians were really slaughtering the Germans. They didn't take no prisoners, they just slaughtered them.

During that time we had a message. We had a message that was in December 1944. The Germans wouldn't take no black prisoners.

And we, my officers ordered us to destroy all our diary, identification. All we had on us was dog tags. You were supposed to give your name and serial number, that's what we were given.

So I had a diary from day one, I left love. And I had to destroy all that. I had everything, time and dates and everything.

We had to destroy all that. Because they said they weren't taking no prisoners, no black prisoners. And there we were, only a handful of us.

Then we got pinned down in Belgium. Antwerp. The only people who were back there were my company, the head of this Texas Division, I think 36th Division out of Texas.

It was the Signal Corps out in the back there where we were. We stayed out back there together about two weeks. Together.

So we had to share our food together. Because we didn't have no food and we didn't have nothing. We could share what we had together.

And they had a radio outfit and we could find out where the Germans were. So the paratroopers dropped. The Germans went just a few miles from us.

The only thing they say is they dropped us. The 101 dropped their paratroopers in there and cleaned that pocket out. And that's the only thing they can say to us.

Because we were supposed to have been dead. The 36th Division, I got an autograph from this guy. A Texas-like guy.

And he was a very Christian-like guy. He was old at that time, a 36-year-old. You're old then when you're a 36-year-old.

And he showed his children everything. And we got... When you come back on this side, we wrote each other.

Same Christian stories, all like that. Then later, about four or five years later, I got a message from his wife that he passed on too. So often you get that.

We had a good relationship among ourselves, among our white friends. But as a whole, the Army was the cause of the whole thing. The United States government.

It wasn't me. If they'd passed a law that said all men be treated right, alive, it'd be okay. But when we would go on liberty, Eisenhower and Patton, everything...

They made it... We'd all be treated the same among those two men. Because Ike was the Supreme Commander at that time.

So we went to Paris on liberty. Everything was wide open for us. And we dropped back in Germany.

You know, occupied Germany. We didn't have no problem. Sometime, we had...

I back up a little bit. In England, I'll never forget. We...

We were in England. They had a dance one night. They said servicemen would come.

So this... We went down there. Something like the Coliseum.

And they told the British man in charge that no... They called us... No black yanks can come in.

And that big... There we are. About 200 men.

I said, what? We'll go ahead and invade. False run for a long time.

We didn't even go overseas. In his channel there. So this guy from Chicago come back and said, Well...

And I also told him, I'll tell you what. Learn to protect yourself. Don't go nowhere unless it's three or four of you.

Because that's the way it is. So we went down there and we had one of the toughest fights you ever saw. But on the way, they broke it up.

[Speaker 2]

You mean the Coliseum there?

[Speaker 1]

Yes, on the Coliseum. We went in there. And we ran because we didn't get put in the stockade.

So we went on back to charge out. We scattered out. But we got revenge.

That's the outfit I was in. I don't know where they were from. But they didn't do us right.

[Speaker 2]

So there were times when you didn't experience a lot of prejudice and then there were other times when there was a lot of it.

[Speaker 1]

Right. The worst prejudice I ever experienced was in Spartanburg, South Carolina. First it started from when I left here and went to Fort Overthorpe.

We stayed in Fort Overthorpe about 24 hours and we got the train the next day. We headed for Fort Bragg, North Carolina. On the way to Fort Bragg, we stopped in a little town called Florence, South Carolina.

And they had a troop train those days. We had two cars. We were up front next to the engine.

We had two cars for black soldiers. And the rest of them were white. We pulled into a railroad station.

Behind that railroad station they had a big dining area. And the MPs told us we couldn't get off the train. So there we sit, been sworn in the Army.

One of us off the train. And we were hungry. And the white soldier went inside.

Or served when he came out. And they did bring a box lunch. The Army paid for it.

Paid for all our lunch. They came out with boxes and threw it at us like dogs. They threw the box lunches at us.

[Speaker 4]

That's right.

[Speaker 1]

Then we went to Fort Bragg. We stayed in Fort Bragg about three or four days.

[Speaker 2]

You must have had some questions about fighting to defend the country.

[Speaker 1]

Yes, I wondered why. I said, I looked here. I said, here I am.

I left my home. And I said, the Army actually protect us. And this is some of the experience I had in the States.

And we went to Fort Bragg. And that's where I went to soccer. Went to Spartanburg Soccer.

A new camp, just a brand new camp they had built. And we had to go. They had an old saddle where they built duck boards.

To go from barrack to barrack. That's what we had to do. All the whole camp.

That's how I do. And train too. You have to train to do that.

Do that. We had to furnish. Beef.

We had some men going to the refrigerator cars carrying beef to all the companies. 33,000 men on the poles. Carried food and stuff to all the mess halls.

We did that all right. We go to town in Spartanburg. They had one or two black buses.

Just a school bus is all it was. And the government had regular camp buses. But all we could ride was back.

And all them soldiers. We had around 3,000. We had over 3,000.

Ten percent then. About 3,000 servicemen on the buses. On that camp.

We go to town. The police in Spartanburg were brutish. One guy was in my outfit.

He went down to this diner. Got him a hamburger. He's from Pennsylvania.

He thought he had his uniform. He went down and got him a hamburger and a milkshake. The girl, she served him.

There were civilians in there. And when he walked out, they had attacked that boy's young boy. They beat that boy, kicked him, broke his ribs.

They didn't care. And the police came. They carried that boy to jail.

They didn't carry him to the hospital. The only time he got in the hospital, when he came back, when they came out of the camp, they brought him out there and turned him over to his officer and so they carried him to the hospital. When he got well, they court-martialed him, said he was disturbing the peace.

Can you imagine?

[Speaker 2]

It's hard to believe, but I believe it. Yes.

[Speaker 1]

So, we had it rough, but we survived. I don't know how we done it, but we survived. And it wasn't hurting me so bad.

Before I left Spartanburg, the L.I. German Prison Wars came to our camp. They worked in the kitchen. They worked in the only thing they wanted to do.

The German Prison War would go to the main post exchange. They would serve them food. We couldn't sit down.

They had to MP at the door to keep us out. We'd go up there and say, you got one down there. That's the way it was.

And the way we were surrogated by companies, they gave us quartermaster number one, quartermaster number two. That's the way it was.

[Speaker 2]

Did that continue through the years that you were in the service? In England and in Europe, too?

[Speaker 1]

Yes, it did. I always meet that. I was in Paris on liberty.

And we was in this hotel. The army had a whole hotel for all the servicemen. So we were on liberty with that.

This officer, he's a lieutenant, woke up and cussed at us. You wouldn't be over here with these white girls, thanking these white girls. You was in Alabama, Mississippi.

I said, what's the point of bringing that up? I said, we're trying to save this country. It's no issue.

I got a family back home trying to protect. He just kept on saying it. He said, don't you get smart.

I'm a lieutenant. I said, I'm a sergeant. I know my rights.

Oh, he tried to say something, and that captain finally took him on off. He was just flying drunk and ignorant. That's what we had to do.

A lieutenant. They say he was field commissioned. He didn't have so much of a service.

So that's what happened in Paris, France.

[Speaker 2]

Did you see very many black officers?

[Speaker 1]

Yes. Well, I never did serve on a black officer. They had black division.

In Italy, they had 92nd Pursuit Squadron. One of the best air force over there. The Germans feared them more than anybody.

They fought all over North Africa. Then they had the 92nd Infantry Division. They fought in North Africa.

Then they had the 93rd Division. They fought in South Pacific. And Lieutenant Binder, you probably saw his picture.

[Speaker 2]

He died yesterday.

[Speaker 1]

He used to be a hero. So those guys had the education. A lot of times, I went to the OCS school.

We had one guy. He finished Miles College. And he put up OCS.

This guy said, Captain, I got a boy here. He said, you got a boy here? He said, he's smart for the colors, man.

That's what he said. He said, I'll be damned. He's a liar.

And this lieutenant, he didn't have too much education himself. But this is what you had to face. I don't care how qualified you were.

We had another guy working in the headquarters. He could do over 100 words a minute in typing. Two of them could.

He could sit here and just type like that and hold a conversation with you. And make a mistake, he'd back up and never look at his hand. They were genius.

And they worked in, and he went to OCS. And we used to, his name was Akram, he was from New York. That boy was smart.

He finished Columbia University. Anyway, he was a good person. Married.

Quiet. He just wanted to be an officer. He went to OCS.

And when he graduated, he came by to see me. I trained him. And he left and went to Fort Huachico, Arizona.

That's where I made up the 93rd Division out there. And he went overseas. And he wrote me a letter.

And we used to write each other. And the last letter I wrote, he came back. Later on, I didn't know he died until I got on the side that he got killed in Italy.

Then I had another guy that I worked in the office with, Hunter. I was the best man at his wedding. And I didn't know he died until I got back on this side.

And the only way I found out, a lot of these men, I wrote to St. Louis. And they had a place where you write and find out all you need is a serial number. You pay, I think, \$3.

And they put you on the computer and they tell you who's dead and where they are. So I found out where Spruill was. My first sermon was in Washington.

Hunter got killed in Korea. He reenlisted and he was gone for 20 years. He got killed in Korea.

He was smart. He finished at Atlanta University. But we had men who could do anything.

We had one guy who was an ordnance. He finished A&T College out of North Carolina. His name was Flay.

F-L-A-G-G, yeah. And he was an ordnance man. He'd do anything in ordnance.

We got separated. I didn't find out what happened to him either. We got separated and I went to Illinois.

We've always run into a lot of problems. But the worst problem I ever had was before I went overseas, I went to Camp Shanks, New York. They gave me liberty.

Did I run out?

[Speaker 5]

No.

[Speaker 1]

They gave me liberty to a place to come home. So I got on the bus there. At the bus station.

We didn't ride the bus in those days. I caught the bus in New York. So I ate breakfast in New York at the station.

I got to Wilmington, Delaware. This big old guy came in there. I don't know what he was.

I was on the bus. He said, you don't get off this bus here. That's Wilmington, Delaware.

Delaware, I had to go to the bathroom. In those days, they didn't have no bathroom on the bus. I had to go to the bathroom.

I said, I just want to go to the bathroom. He said, you don't get off this bus. Threatened.

I sat on the bus there. This white guy was sitting up there. He came back.

When he came back, he had drank my Coke. I said, will you do me a favor? They wanted me off the bus.

I said, will you let me use that cup? I wanted to use it. When the bus got rolling, I got on my knees, got on the floor, and used the bed to relieve myself.

I threw out the window. I got the bus. What could I do?

There I was, coming home to see my dad and mother. My mother's dead. Coming home to see my dad.

I got to Washington, D.C. at the Greyhound bus station in Washington. I went in there. I said, well, I'm a nation captain there.

I'm okay. I went in there. I sat on the stool.

Got an order of hamburgers. I know the girl kept passing by and ordered me to see everybody else. Sailors and all in there were service men.

This bus boy, this black guy behind me, he said, hey, sir, can I see you a minute? I said, yeah. He said, don't serve courage here.

See, you got to go across the street over there. They don't serve courage here. I said, a nation captain don't serve courage?

No. He said, you go back in there and sit. They had surrogacy in the waiting room.

I said, I'm afraid to go over there. He goes, come here. They don't like it here.

It's a rough place. I sat there. I didn't have nothing to eat.

I sat there and tears came out of my eyes. I'm a grown man. I'm a grown man.

The bus started rolling. The only way I got anything to eat, I stopped down in Virginia. The bus stopped at some place and we got some fresh fruit.

I ate some fruit. So I got to Knoxville. When I got to Knoxville, they had a place you could just get food.

You could stick it through the window. You couldn't go and sit down. You had to sit and eat in your hand.

Then I called my dad to come over home. I said, I can't get the bus anymore. So I went to my cousin for the night.

Caught the bus the next morning. Came home. He died.

I didn't tell him what happened to him. Because he wouldn't work. I just couldn't believe it.

[Speaker 2]

He's humiliated like that. In uniform.

[Speaker 1]

He was a soldier. I'm a staff sergeant. It didn't mean nothing to him.

Threatened to go. They had everything. I don't know what happened to that guy.

The guy just jumped on me for nothing. I didn't do anything. I wasn't drinking.

And this white guy said, Mac, he called Mac. Didn't you hear what they did to you? Let's go and drink.

I said, no. Don't get in no trouble. Don't do that.

He couldn't believe it. He said, I can't believe it. For what?

I said, I don't know. You know how long it takes to go from Delaware to Washington? I don't know.

About three or four hours. I was still hungry. Couldn't get a thing.

That's it.

[Speaker 2]

Now your son's in the Air Force?

[Speaker 1]

He said he was in Alaska? He's in the Air Force. He's in Alaska.

[Speaker 2]

Things have changed for him in the military.

[Speaker 1]

It's just changed a lot. My son went to... He didn't want to go to college, but we sent him to school in Florida.

Bell and Howell had a school there. Learned how to deal. On computers, something like that.

You know, like picking air controllers. Something like that. Because he took that course.

Then if he got back, he couldn't find a job. The problem with the job, that's a rip-off. He come back, then he went to John's college up there.

Lucky enough, you are getting a degree in that. Then he's on the Air Force. He's in missiles now.

He's doing all right.

[Speaker 2]

Now he's got his dad. Did you have any feeling when you came back that there needed to be a civil rights movement?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yes. I thought it would be better. You'd be surprised how many white people were on our side.

They'd see things as wrong as they were not right.

[Speaker 2]

In the Army, you mean? No, here in this town.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, he said, you know, like, when they asked me to come join the legion, the American legion, the WFW. He said, Homer, all those people that did that to you, most of them are dead and in hell, he said. But the thing about it, give them a chance.

And I then made up, we're just like brothers right here now. So, if they need me, if I need them, they'll do anything we're up for them. Of all faiths, we got, we got, Ivo Sanders, he used to be the commander over the whole state when he was, see, he's a lawyer, attorney general.

And he belongs to it. All faiths, there's people here that, you know, as long as they're getting older now, they don't attend like they used to.

[Speaker 2]

You didn't, from the sound of it, you wouldn't have even thought about making the military a career?

[Speaker 1]

I wanted to, yes. I'm glad you brought that up. When I got out, see, I was a, when the staff started, well, it was a T, the staff started with a T in those days, technician.

And I got out, well, they gave me an offer when I landed in, in Annapolis, Indiana, this, Camp Atterbury, Indiana. They said, well, you got 90 days, if you want to come in there, you make a career out of it. And I came back, and I said, well, I came home, my daddy was in poor health.

I said, I better not do that. So, that's the only reason. Then I said, I better go join the National Guard.

Well, apparently, they ruled me out. They didn't pick niggas in the National Guard. They wanted me to join them.

Sure didn't, so. I couldn't join them. If I joined the National Guard, see, and I got 62, I could draw the pension.

See, a lot of these guys, they joined the National Guard, they draw the pension, they're drawing the pension right now. So, I couldn't do that, so.

[Speaker 2]

They wouldn't let any black people in there? No.

[Speaker 1]

The only time they got in there was in 1964. 1965, when that movement came. And my son joined the National Guard.

He stayed there about four years, and he's in the Air Force now, and he's got about six or seven years in there altogether. But I didn't teach him, I don't believe it, I didn't teach him to say no. This is your country, defend it.

Because God's got a time for all this to come to a head, so there's only one way to do it. So, I feel great about it. I feel like I've done something.

I walk the street and I say, well, I serve my country. I'm a man. Proud of my man.

I don't think I fault, I don't fault the people, I fault the United States government. They can stop it all. So, this was, we were a service for the country, and we should be treated as one.

And they wouldn't put that division in there. We had a guy from New Orleans. They were brothers.

See, in New Orleans, they've got a cross over all races of people. He's named Fernandez. They looked just alike.

One was black and one was white. They were full, too, but that's that little genes, you know. That's what it was.

And a lot of people don't know nothing about that. Well, they say, well, he was a yellow jimmy. No, he wasn't a yellow jimmy.

That's the way it was in those days. And they put him in a white company, put him in a black company. And the only time they got a chance to meet is at the canteen.

They sit there and talk and cry. Say, they want to be together. They were, one's in the elf company, one's in the service company.

Put the black one in the service company. And they sit there and talk. And they would cry.

[Speaker 2]

There's no way out of that. Not in 1943.

[Speaker 1]

That's right. It's in 1942 and 43. That's the way it was.

[Speaker 2]

I was talking to a black guy a while ago, a fellow in Knoxville named Valentine, who was in the tank battalion.

[Speaker 1]

Well, we used to go in the club together.

[Speaker 2]

Oh.

[Speaker 1]

Melvin.

[Speaker 2]

Yes, Melvin. Yes. And we were talking about the, for the black soldier, there were two battles that you had to fight all the time.

All the time. One against the enemy and one against prejudice and racism. It was.

And it is.

[Speaker 1]

I have to go to the bathroom real quick.

[Speaker 4]

You have to go to the bathroom? The warfare in the Pacific was something to figure out. I didn't go out to European theaters.

[Speaker 3]

This is taking us right now into 45. The landings on Meiji were successful. We're trying to move up into Luzon in a month or so.

[Speaker 2]

But if we're going to continue the advance on Japan, and the, you know, what I usually do to start off is just try to, to learn something about the person's background before they went in service. You said you were born here.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, I was born in Loudon, Tennessee. I was born on the 11th, 1917.

[Speaker 2]

That's a big year, too.

[Speaker 1]

It was. I used to get my daddy out of the army.

[Speaker 2]

And born in Loudon?

[Speaker 1]

And, uh, we had no high school in Loudon, so we did not finish high school late because I had to lay out of high school three years before I could go back to school. I went to school in Athens, Tennessee. We had no buses, so we had to go down there and stay in a private home and do our own cooking to finish high school.

We paid two inches. The county didn't give us one dime, so I determined to get my education, so I went down there. I stayed there before I finished in four years.

Professor Nash, the principal of the high school, which is still living, he's 100 years old, was passed July 11th. We had celebrated his birthday July 11th this year. He took me in his arms, his son, and he said, Well, I'll get you a job.

So I got a job with some good white friends. I stayed with them for about three years. And, uh, they took me in like I was their son.

He stressed education and saving you money. That's why he was an engineer of his age. So, I had a man named Mr. Paul. So after I finished high school, I went to New Jersey and worked at a place called Green Pond, New Jersey. They get the black kids to go up there and work, serve tables and do the stuff. You know, just work like that around the house.

[Speaker 2]

Is it a kind of resort?

[Speaker 1]

It's a resort. It's a resort. People there are from New York, and all the millionaires go there, and we go there and work all summer to save enough money to go to college.

So I couldn't go to college, so I went ahead and joined the Army at night. I got drafted in 1940. I signed up for the Army in New Jersey.

Then I told the person at the draft board, I want to go home and see my dad. He was there at that time. I came home in November 1940.

In April 21, 1941, I joined the Army. They drafted me in the Army, took me in the Army. I stayed in the Army.

I was in the Army nine months when they bombed Pearl Harbor.

[Speaker 2]

Do you remember where you were when you heard that?

[Speaker 1]

Yes, I was in Greenville, South Carolina when the news came out. We were on Liberty. We went to Greenville, which is a movie in Greenville.

And we went by bus. And in those days, we had to ride the last seat in the bus. When they bombed Pearl Harbor, we were in a theater and it came out.

They said, will you come to all servicemen report back to the base. So we had to drop what we were doing and go back to the base. And if you were late or anything like that, you'd get court-martialed.

There we were, 30 miles from camp. By the time the bus came in there, we only had that seat was about like this. It would hold about five, six people.

We weren't allowed to stand up. Then it was down the way for about I'd say ever since three or four hours every time a bus came in there. A bus came in there every 30 minutes, a camp bus.

Finally, we got to the camp late. But lucky we didn't get court-martialed.

[Speaker 2]

But you couldn't even ride a full bus out there?

[Speaker 1]

No. We had the camp buses don't care how many soldiers there were. We had just five places to ride.

And on the base, you could ride standing up going from place to place. But going to Greenville, they wanted you to stand up. So that's how it was.

So we made it back. We had ordered the night we got back that we would go into our basic training. We had to go in 13 more weeks of basic training.

Canceled all leaves. I couldn't come home. First time I've been away from home on Christmas was in 1941.

I couldn't come. They canceled all leaves. We had to start doing training.

13 more weeks of hard training, night and day. After we trained we started letting so many go home. I got home I think it was in February after Christmas and stayed a week's furlough.

Went back and we trained. I was on the cadre. I trained new recruits up until I'd say about a year.

[Speaker 2]

You were training black recruits?

[Speaker 1]

Yes. Everything was black then. After we trained them this first sergeant he said, you finished high school?

I said, yeah. So he said, I want to see you. He said, I went to the office.

He said, I want you to be in charge of quarters. He said, I want you to make up the sick report and the mourn report and answer the telephone and give out passes to the men going on passes, sick passes. He showed me what to do and then we had one officer he was West Pointer in Washington, D.C. He hated everything one military. I mean he was strictly a GI. He was a West Pointer. He tried to make us do like West Pointers, you know.

Stand up and talk to you like a dog and make you entertained, you know. So we just couldn't hardly understand that man. That man just made our lives miserable.

Lieutenant Corley and he was in reserve and he hated to be back in the Army. He said he hated to be back in the hell of the Army. He made it hard on us.

But he stayed with us about I guess he stayed about six months and those days they trained us and other men and I. Then we got another lieutenant he was a lawyer in South Carolina. He was a state solicitor in the state of South Carolina.

And he came in there and all that time nobody got promoted during that time. We had the promotion table there but this man wouldn't promote nobody. Nobody.

I just first saw him the cadres came there from Fort Benning, Georgia. The 24th Infantry Division. That's the only men that would head rank.

We had been there almost a year. Over a year. And we hadn't had no rank.

Lieutenant Hines came there. He was commissioned as second lieutenant. I mean he went in service.

He said, fellas I don't know a thing about the military so I'm drafted in here. I tell you you'll help me I'll help you guys. He was well educated man but he didn't know much about the military.

He had a little bit but not much. He put us over there and he watched everything we did. He watched us and the first sergeant led him on.

The first sergeant was in the regular army. And we taught him everything. And he called he said I want to promote every one of you guys.

He called everybody individually and said what do you like to do? And some of the guys would be wire housemen or if you want to be a truck driver or anything like that then he'd give you promotion. He interviewed everybody.

He got your car how much you made how much you made. Some guy made real low where they couldn't make too much. But the guy had a high IQ he tried to send him into OCS.

He wanted progress. This man he stayed with us until I went overseas. And he had a son and a daughter.

And he had it on the big farm out in Spartanburg and he invited the whole company to come out there for a barbecue. That's the kind of guy he was. That's real unusual.

Yes, that was in South Carolina too. He brought his son and his daughter they were just about 7 or 8 year old out there. And we had just adopted them as our little mascot.

They thought the world was. And he had a picture made with us. His only officer had a picture made with us.

The rest of them refused to have a company picture made. So I got in there and I filed somewhere in there. And when I finished that school in Georgia Quarters he told me Henley how do you like to go to a clerk school?

I said I'd like to. I never said I'd try to do the best I can. He said well I said it's a 6 week course.

They've got a short procedure I've got to learn how to type how to report officer's vouchers payroll and all that. And if you finish it I'll give you a job in the headquarters. I went to Atlanta University for 6 weeks.

I took that course I made a good grade. I came back and he sent me to the headquarters. In that headquarters I had my company we had two companies we had the service department and the quartermaster department.

And I had a white company and two white companies. We had the quartermaster and I had an Italian boy he was over his department but we were in the same area there. We had about 8 or 10.

I was over all of them in that personnel department. This Italian boy was mixed under me. We stayed in that I stayed in the headquarters there about 1941 until 1943 I shipped out overseas.

I shipped out from South Carolina to go to Illinois to prepare to go overseas. And I made T3 that was a staff sermon with a T in it that was a specialist. And only two on the polls.

There was a white guy in finance in Illinois. That's how white he is. Everything that they had he wanted to have too if he qualified for it.

And we loved him for it. And when I shipped out he'd come to me and all the men the sugar hand person would just look I'd never seen him he was a leader. I left there went to Ellis, Illinois and I met another guy this officer I met he was a he was a captain.

He got promoted to captain he wasn't the first person to get promoted to captain. And I went there with four other men and I worked in the office there in in his office. He was was a German he was from Minnesota.

John L. Strucke. And I worked with there I went overseas we went through this training then when we went overseas the whites took over all the administrative work so we had to go to the field you see what I mean?

They'd done all the administrative work. And all we did sometimes we'd make a payroll or something like that just in the company. As far as the other stuff we always was in the field it was different we held on with 3122nd quartermaster service company.

And we were attached to the 7th Army the 3rd Army the 9th Army and anywhere they needed us we had to go. What we did we landed Omaha Beach 6 miles 20 you know when they the 6th was was invaded we got there on the 20th of June of 1911 the invasion. We went from there Had you been in England first?

Yes yes we left here went to Scotland yep we went to Queen Mary Queen Mary took us five and a half days to cross give us five and a half days.

[Speaker 2]
Was it fast crossing?

[Speaker 1]
Yes it was. And we landed in Glasgow Scotland We stayed in Glasgow about I think about 4 or 5 days. Then we went to Dorchester then went to Wales Wales we left Wales and went to Dorchester England Then we they had a a billet area outside of London I forget the name of that place we stayed in German I mean British Huts Brown Huts We stayed there about we got there in March we stayed there from March until June I didn't know America had as much stuff in my life when I looked in that Martian area there they had at least 100 miles square of equipment I forget the reason from Chattanooga nothing just army stuff anything you can imagine they had

[Speaker 2]
It really is amazing I try to tell my kids about it in the World War II course about the incredible amount of stuff that we had

[Speaker 1]
they had stuff that you wouldn't believe and

[Speaker 2]
somebody had to handle it all somebody had to account for it and move it and store it

[Speaker 1]
we had we had done the moving stored we the first bad place we went was near St. Lou America got to St. Lou they had a lot of resistance there and that's where they a lot of men got killed and those men would drive a truck from the Cherbourg from the boat Cherbourg to St. Lou and back they would carry food, ammunition whatever they had to carry for the men and they had this other platoon was was bringing dead bodies back from the front line they used it for great restoration you can imagine what that do to you you see dead men you know we done that night and day we had one platoon that would carry gasoline that's a 100 gas 100 proof gasoline you carry for airplanes they were carrying that to the to the front line and they laid pipeline and the engineer laid pipeline on top of the ground from Cherbourg

from the ship all the way through Germany and we had to and we had men going in that pipeline to keep the German above that line we couldn't move like we did that's what we had to do we did that we lost a lot of men through air raids because you had no protection in December we stayed in an apple orchard there in Cherbourg that place is called Apple Orchard it's in Cherbourg Peninsula it rained that mud smelled just like it was rotten because it was so many people had died there something through the years where the the ground was still contaminated and we didn't know what we drank the water looked clear at the branches and we drank that water a lot of men come down with hepatitis which I did I came down with hepatitis and I got back on the side it took a long time and we drank that water and I came down with hepatitis had to go to the hospital I stayed a long time but I didn't expect it until I got here we furnished the 7th Army it was a it was a combat engineer group that was a white group but we we were first in them you know material 216 men we had and they were just anywhere they wanted to that's where they couldn't the 7th Army woman they could send for us the 3rd Army Patton group Bradley had the 9th Army and we served we didn't we couldn't refuse we did what we were told to do

[Speaker 2]

Were most of the people in the company truck drivers or

[Speaker 1]

we had truck drivers we had mechanics we had some of the guys were experts in laying bailey bridges and they laid bridges across the Neckar the Blue Danube and the Rhine River we crossed the Rhine River about 3 times and I'll never forget this company black company because we worked along with them we weren't with them we just they were up near the northern port of Germany that's when the push going towards near let's see going near St. Louis it's been so long

[Speaker 2]

40 years

[Speaker 1]

oh yeah anyway what it was where it was it's a lot big hill on this side and a hill on this side the German let the American build that bridge took them 2 days to build that bridge because that's when they got that bridge built the tanks went down the center and the trucks and supplies troops are on this side and that side walking ready to go into combat they cut that bridge half in two with the 88 tanks and everything went down buttoned up went down that river

[Speaker 5]

couldn't do it

[Speaker 1]

no telling how many men went down in that time

[Speaker 2]

what was the number of your company again?

[Speaker 1]

31 22nd quarterback service

[Speaker 2]

31 22nd

[Speaker 1]

and recently me and this Strucke after he got we used to write one about 2 or 3 years so the other day this summer I said I'll be out I'll call I'll call out from Minnesota his wife answered I told her I was I said he passed 2 years ago and his son called me just before Christmas and told me dad always told us the experience we had over there he was a German he was American American born he could speak German fluently and I know he saw you know he told me he lived in a place near near Mannheim Germany where he was born this is where we stayed for about 2 weeks

[Speaker 2]

it must have felt kind of odd for him to be coming home and fighting in an area

[Speaker 1]

of his own cousin you don't know in the war I thought about that you know he was a person he was a close person and during the last phase of the war the Germans they wouldn't surrender to the the whites they thought they best get the black because those part of the people would kill them they wouldn't take no prisoners they'd shoot them when they were surrendering they'd shoot them in the head and they came to us you know and we took them took them to prison so they carried about 4 he was a lieutenant they were all they were all one of them was an officer an enlisted man and they went in a tent and they were talking in there in German and two of my officers a lot of guys said well what are you talking about he said well he couldn't be talking about that because they can't do I don't know how big but they got no arms or anything like that but it's kind of sad I think he's asking about certain people something like he knew but I don't know then after he stayed there then they took they had a great big compound down in where Hitler kept his prisoners that's where they kept the German prisoners war it was dug out like that and they had those guards where you see in the movie that's the way it was and that's where they put the prisoners war

[Speaker 5]

I don't know

[Speaker 2]

You said you spent some time in the hospital with the hepatitis or was that after you got back

[Speaker 1]

to the states I was lucky I didn't when I was overseas I got frostbitten but I went to a little field hospital and had my feet treated but I never was when I got back to duty I was young and tough then I didn't didn't vomit then but when I got back on the side that's when I I had problems with I started drinking you know and it wasn't it wasn't good in that liver condition

[Speaker 2]

oh yeah that was yeah

[Speaker 1]

that's what happened I tell you it's a good experience you know

[Speaker 2]

how long were you over in Europe when did you when did you come back to the states

[Speaker 1]

we came back in 45 we stayed over there 43 to 45 I thought I think it was almost I'd say we were just about a little over two years and the sad part of it when we left Luneville, France this is the place where we we came back to get ready to process to come back overseas and we had this officer came and said now all your men made it through said they got a lot of benefits you got the GI Bill you can get your education you can get get your college education and get paid while you go to school that sounded good to me so I said yeah so I came back so I went to Morristown College and

[Speaker 2]

GI Bill

[Speaker 1]

GI Bill and I finished Morristown College and I put in for a GI loan to build me a house I met my wife and I I didn't I thought finish school finish finish two year college I said well I met her and I told her well I got married and I thought I'd go back to school I didn't go back so I put in for a GI loan so this officer here he's a lawyer he goes to take care of GI loans so I went to him his name was Arthur Fowler I said I put in for a GI G.I. loan. They don't have no G.I. loan for colored soldiers. I said, no. I served in the United States Army.

I said, don't look at me as that. It took from 1950, I got married in 1950, 1950 to 19, I didn't get my G.I. loan until 1968 when my kids were getting ready to finish high school. That's a real struggle.

It was, and you couldn't go to the bank and borrow no money. You couldn't borrow money from the bank until 1964. We had a loan company, you know how they repeal.

Before 50, you pay \$75 or \$100 back. So, we went through that. I said, well, I must've been tough to go through all that.

I kept praying, you know, there'd be better days sometime. Then after I got out of Morristown, I went to Oak Ridge. I worked for a hospital.

I worked in this man, Mr. Simpson. I first got out of the Army, I started working in the hospital as a janitor. He came to me and said, how much education do you have?

I said, well, I finished high school. He said, you go to G.I., you'll be able to go to college. And he made me quit and go back to Morristown.

And I got my associate degree. He said, if you come back, I'll give you a job. And he did, and I got back, and I finished in two years.

I came back, and he gave me a job working there in the storeroom. I was a storeroom clerk until I went to biology. I worked there.

I drove trucks, picked up supplies for the hospital. I went to every wholesale house in Knoxville to get hospital supplies. I went forward to Chattanooga to get supplies, you know, like they have here.

Fill our pharmaceutical company in Chattanooga. I don't think it's up there anymore. I mean, one time we had a baby.

I had another job at something. They didn't have the right type of bed for this baby. I had to go all the way to Chattanooga to get that bed and bring it back.

I left that morning early, so I got back. And it's incubators. It's incubators, that's what it was.

So that's what I did. And the guy who had the job before I had it, he's a white guy. They paid him \$75 a week.

That's from 1948. 1949. I took the job, they gave me \$50 a week.

And he listed me as assistant storeroom keeper and only one person back there. I said, Mr. Simpson, I want to ask you. When you have an assistant, do you have to have somebody over you?

Yeah, why? You got me classified as assistant storeroom keeper. And if I was, let's just say, a storeroom keeper, I'd get more money.

He never changed that. He sure would. After seven years, he gave me \$5 a week raise.

Well, I went down and a doctor at the plant came in the hospital. He was over and worked in biology. And he was in there, and I delivered supplies on the floor.

And he saw me, he said, so I carried the paper and newspaper to him. He said, how you doing? I said, fine.

How you doing, doctor? He said, I feel better. He had operated.

He said, what kind of work do you do? I told him. He said, why don't you come in and get these.

I went to his kitchen. I told him I went to his kitchen. He said, why don't you get the application for the plant?

I said, I tried, but I can't get in. He said, you put that in there. And sure enough, he did.

And my brother worked in biology down there, so he got me too. So I put my application in. So the only way I got off my job, I had to sit down at my lunch break.

I told the man at the person house, I said, I'm going to go down for an interview. If I throw my lunch break, he'll let me off. So I went down to my lunch period, did the interview, and I came back.

So about a month later, the FBI came and interviewed him. Me. At the home of him that worked for him?

Yeah. Then I went back in the storeroom. He said, this may not see it.

I went back there. He said, why don't you tell me you quit leaving me? I said, well, I asked for a raise.

He said he couldn't get me a raise. I said, well, I've got a better body condition. I'm married.

Then he raised me. He said, you've got to work out two weeks. I said, I know that.

Oh, he was mad. So he told me, he said, well, if he gets the job, it'll be at least six weeks. Something like that.

The job was about six weeks. It was the hardest six weeks I worked in my life. He tried to make it too hard on me.

Then I trained another guy. I trained another guy. It got nearer the time.

He's a homicidist. He's a cat. He has some real hard curse facts and all like that.

Four days ago, he came out and he said he can't apologize for it. I give him credit. He raised Sam.

He cursed every breath he used to take. He went to mass every morning. So it's just his way.

He didn't have any excuse. He and his wife. And I liked him.

After all that, I just overlooked him. Then I got ready to go down to Bollard. I worked down in Bollard about a year.

So one Christmas, I was in downtown. I saw him. He shook my hand.

I said, how are you holding up? He said, I'm just fine. Then up until he died, we were friends.

He didn't have no money. So I worked in Bollard until 1976. I had an operation on my feet.

My circulation from here down. I got frostbitten.

[Speaker 2]

I was going to say, was it the frostbite?

[Speaker 1]

Frostbite. It got worse. So they took my little toes off.

I got no little toes left. They took it off. And after the operation, Dr. Lincoln, I was off six weeks. They operated on both my feet at the same time. I went back 26 weeks later. And I didn't pass the test.

And he said, let me see. You've been here 21 and a half years. He said, what do you think about me being a medical?

I said, I hate to leave. Leave that way. I'm 55.

I said, I hate to leave. I've been working these fellows all these many years. You can't be too hasty saying that because they think you're going to be out here no longer.

I won't give it to you. So I went ahead and I said, OK, I'll think about it. Then Dr. Garrett came in. He said, you won't be able to work on that. Why those steel toes? She was in there a mile ago.

He said, you go and find out how much. Go to the personnel and see how much money you'll draw. And come back and see what you get.

So I went to personnel. The man told me how much money I'd draw. In fact, I'd draw more off than I would on.

Because I had a disability. They'd pay you more. So they gave it to me.

So I've been gone since 1977.

[Speaker 2]

Ten years now.

[Speaker 1]

That's right.

[Speaker 2]

Better than ten.

[Speaker 1]

So I had a friend. He was there. He didn't go to the Army.

He was one of the oldest employees in biology. Biology. They started biology in 1946 if he was.

He was one of the first employees. He worked there 35 or 36 years. And he wasn't paying anybody.

He took care of his money and everything like that. Then after he worked at the plant, he'd go to the country club there in Oak Ridge. And he worked at the bar.

He was a bartender. He had two sons. When they were in high school, one of them got in a lot of trouble.

Well, he finally finished high school. So they went to Atlanta. Last time we talked, they were both doing good in Atlanta.

His wife died of cancer. Then the boys went to Atlanta after they got out of high school. And they still are.

So he retired about seven years ago. He retired like in August. In two years' time, it would be a year next month, he died.

I went to see him over there. And he said, oh, my God, he ought to ride more. He said, when I retire, I'm not going to do a thing.

Just take it easy. So they were riding more. I hardly was able to cut my grass.

One thing, he drank heavy. His stomach got that big. He laid on that couch.

I said, man, you ought to get out of here and get active. I worked all my life. I'm not going to do nothing.

He did. Two years' time. They took care of him in the hospital.

They cut him open. Gone. Liver ate up.

Cancer was a burden. Another guy I worked with during this period. Phillip was still working.

He was 57, I believe it was. He tried to make it to 62. And he couldn't make it no how.

He didn't make it. He died. If I could get cancer.

Then after he died, it was in July. His wife left the funeral and went home. Went to the hospital.

And she died at the hospital. In shock. And most everybody working in that lab there.

Like in what? They wouldn't have died if they had cancer or leukemia. It's a strange thing.

[Speaker 2]

Maybe coincidence or maybe something else.

[Speaker 1]

It's something else. The doctor, Dr. Carson was one of the dead men out there. And he died about three years ago.

He used to be a nice, tall, handsome man. He wore a tie. When he first came out, he came out from the University of California, Berkeley.

He had cool black hair and he had curls like that, you know. And Dr. Carson came out and everybody liked him. He was such a nice person.

Dr. Carson got sick. He didn't last no time. He died.

And when it got so bad, he didn't want nobody to come see him. He was the same person.

[Speaker 2]

Did you keep in touch at all with any of the guys you were in the company with?

[Speaker 1]

Only one. And the rest of them, I don't know if we left. This company I went overseas with was just a new company.

But the old company I trained with, they, most of them got wiped out in the Pacific. They went over on the first company next to us. They had more experience than we had, so they shipped them out as in December of 1941, about two weeks after Pearl Harbor.

And their ship went down before they got to over there. They sunk that ship. This other company, the company and service company there in Spartanburg, Camp Cross, I left there, and they shipped out, but I never heard nothing about them.

I think they all got what they said. They most got wiped out.

[Speaker 2]

Do you remember the number of that company?

[Speaker 1]

This was called the Station Complement and the Quartermaster. We had two companies, one service company and Station Complement. Sometimes they called it Quartermaster or we would service the whole area.

My first sergeant, he's in Washington, D.C. He retired. He's still in Washington, D.C. He works in the Pentagon after he retired. I called him about two years ago, and he runs a concession stand in the Pentagon as a civilian now.

He retired from that, and he's doing that now. He was self-educated. He went in the Army when he finished eighth grade.

So every school they had in there, he went to a type of school. He went to machine gun school. Any school they had, he went and got certificates for, you know, certified.

He's a self-made man, and he was smart. The rest of the guys, I don't know what happened to them. They were left.

We don't have no communication at all.

[Speaker 2]

Is there anything that particularly sticks out in your mind from your time in Europe?

[Speaker 1]

Yes. I remember I never get—we landed on Omaha Beach that night. We got there about 1,500.

And I saw a first casualty. As you walk on the beach, even though it's been a long time, they had chances to bury the dead. I've seen American GIs laying there and then buried.

Then they had a compound that men that cracked up during the attack. They had a young white boy there. They said his hair was plum black.

When he went through that bumming and strafing and everything, his hair was plum white. His mind was gone. Not only him, it's lots of men that way.

It's horrible. I've seen a lot of suffering. I saw a lot of children.

I often think about it. I saw a picture last night. And that's true what they did to those people over there in Europe, in Germany.

A woman, a child, didn't have no rights over there. They just didn't like them. If the Russians see them, the Americans see them, they just blow them away.

I'll never forget, we got near Aachen, Germany. We were up on the Russian soldiers. And they were real friendly.

And they had on American uniforms, they had American jeeps, everything. See, that's when that land lease was on. And they didn't have the facility we had.

They didn't have soap. They would pay you a big price for a bar of soap. And they ate it.

It was good. A lot of soap. And candy bars.

We had that chocolate candy bar. They paid good money for that because, you know, they didn't have nothing like that. The only thing I knew what they did have, where we had carbine rifles, they had Burt guns.

Privates had Burt guns.

[Speaker 2]

What, a firepower gun?

[Speaker 1]

Yes, they did. We were in this, unloading a truck, the Baylor Bridges, for this engineering outfit. A German girl was coming up the road on a bicycle.

This Russian citizen. No, young. That girl, she's a teenage girl, a German girl.

He said, why don't you shoot that crowd? And this another citizen, he said in his language. He took out a gun and shot that girl off that thing.