Gallo, Joseph Interview 9-22-95

[Speaker 2]
With Mr. Joseph A. Gallo, G-A-L-L-O, 20 Upper Drive, Corning, New York. Interview conducted September 22, 1995, by Dr. Charles Johnson, Director and Senator of the Study of War and Society. Interviewed at the Company A, 7th Onward Infantry Battalion, 8th Onward Division reunion in Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

[Speaker 1]
I try to forget that, too.

[Speaker 2]
Yeah, what I normally do when I turn it on is just talk. I usually start out asking what your experience was like before the war, trying to get a kind of foundation. How old were you when it happened to you?

[Speaker 1]
Well, actually, I started, I went into the service as a draftee at the age of 18, and two months. At the time I went in, I wanted to join the Air Force, desperately. And my dad said it had been a victory of the First World War, and of course it was a short war by the time I got in there, you know.

And he was anticipating that by the time that I was drafted and went in, why the war would be over. Well, little did he know, almost three years plus later, I was in the service that long. But as I say, I was drafted at 18 years and two months right out of high school.

Prior to that, I had worked in a butcher shop, grocery store combination. I did, too, for a couple of years. I really enjoyed it, and that experience stood me well after we got out of the service.

But I went in, we went, sent down to Campbell, Louisiana, as part of the enrollment for the 8th Armored Division.

[Speaker 2]
Oh, this was 1940?

[Speaker 1]
1943. 43. Right, March of 43.

And I stayed there, took my basic training with them, and all the time complaining to my dad that I wanted to go into the Air Force. And he kept right back saying, oh, you're going to have to, the war's going to be over pretty soon. And even though I was in the service and was 18 years old, he had to have parental consent because I wasn't 21 to go into the Air Force.

I didn't know that. So I had to keep sending my requests home to my dad. Finally, he had enough of my complaint, and I guess he signed it, and I approved my thing, and I got transferred.

Well, before I got transferred out of there, we had to go down to DeRidder Air Force Base, which was near Campbell, Louisiana, for our physicals. And several of the guys that I went

with, one of them was a guy from my hometown. We went down there, and I got to the point where they called me off the rifle range to go into, I was instructed on the rifle range to have my physical.

And the doctor checked me over, and then he got to my ears, looked in there, and he said, he said, you have a perforated eardrum. We'll have to reject you. Well, I can hear perfectly well.

What's the matter with my ears? He said, well, I'll send you over to my boss. And he said, well, let him check it out.

So he squirted some water and air fluid and squeezed it out and blew it out. He says, oh, no, there's nothing wrong with your eardrum. He said, there's some dirt or something on there.

It looked like a perforation, but he said, obviously it isn't. He says, what have you been doing? I was instructed on the rifle range.

He says, oh, that's where you picked up all the dirt and dust. He said, but you're okay.

[Speaker 2]
Were you an NCO by then, or were you still private?

[Speaker 1]
No, I was still private. So what he didn't do, instead of where the other doctor had marked me out as a reject, he didn't cross that out and say, no, that I was okay. So I went back to my company thinking I was going to be called up to the Air Force before long.

My buddy got his orders to transfer into the Air Force, and he went on to be a navigator bombardier, and I never got my orders. So I went back to him and I said, hey, what's going on? Where are my orders?

Because my buddy had left. He said, oh, you were rejected. I said, no, I wasn't.

I said, the doctor said I was okay. So he said, well, you have to come back down for another physical. So I went back down.

That took time. Finally, I was called in in December of 44, 43. I was sent up to the University of Arkansas for my Air Force cadet training.

[Speaker 2]
When you were in your basic training in your advanced infantry, this is when you were with the 8th Armored Division. And you were part of A Company with these guys?

[Speaker 1]
And Sergeant Crocker's 3rd Platoon. I was in a machine gun squad at that time.

[Speaker 2]
Light machine gun, 30 caliber?

[Speaker 1]

Right. So that's what I did in the training up to the point when I left and went into the Air Force. And up in the Air Force, we went to school up through March.

And then the way they set up the divisions or the scheduling for the squadrons, they had a full squadron in order to go into the flying, take the flying schedule on the Piper Cup, you know. And in order to fill up the schedule, they went back to the squadron behind them. And anybody in the top of the class, they took the top students that went into the next class to go into the flying center.

So I was accepted to go into the squadron ahead of mine to take flying lessons. I had all my 10th Piper Cup all done, just sitting there waiting for instructions or orders to go into flight school. When the orders came down from headquarters saying anybody who had ground force training is automatically released for the convenience of the government, then we were all washed out of cadets at that point in time and sent down to ground forces again.

[Speaker 2]
Did you find that you liked flying as well as you thought you would?

[Speaker 1]
In a way, I did. I think that I never was anticipating being a pilot, but you had to have that whether you were a pilot, navigator, or bombardier, you know. And I didn't do well as a pilot, I mean, as far as the thing.

I think at 18 years old, you had barely learned how to drive a car, and then to be thrown into taking a lesson on an airplane when you'd never even been in an airplane before. I didn't do well as a pilot, but my goal was or what they had assigned me for when I took cadet training was because of my math skills I was going to be a navigator anyhow. So the pilot thing didn't make me feel too badly that I didn't do well in piloting because I wasn't going to be a pilot anyhow.

But it would be that as it may, by the time I got washed out, I was immaterial at that point in time anyhow. But it was an experience, and we really enjoyed it, and I met a lot of nice young guys in there that I'm still friendly with today, you know, that I was in the Air Force with. So that was a good experience too.

And from there then we went down to the 16th Army.

[Speaker 2]
When you were in A Company doing your training, how extensively had you been trained getting ready for armored warfare with them? What kind of training did you have?

[Speaker 1]
Well, we didn't get into too advanced training as far as actual things on the battlefield. We did have basic training, which was familiarity with the weapons and close order drill and things like that, and we did go through the infiltration forces, and we did go out on bivouacs and do maneuvers and force marches and things like that. So I'd gotten that far along, and I don't know what their schedule was exactly after that as far as how much more training they went through after that.

When I transferred out, I didn't really keep in touch with all the guys that I had before so that I don't know where they progressed from the time that I left until they got to go overseas.

[Speaker 2]
I was wondering how ready you were to go into another armored division, whether it was...

[Speaker 1]
Well, at that point in time, I had been in a few gun squad, but I was transferred to the 16th Army. They didn't look at that anyhow. They just took us and put us in places where we wanted.

I went into a headquarters company in an assault gun platoon, and here in the United States, it's attached to an infantry battalion. My assignment was the 51st Armored Infantry Battalion, but we were close support for the infantry. Even though we had a tank per se, it didn't operate as a tank.

They had howitzers on them, and we were just close support for infantry, for machine gun nests, anti-tank guns, mortar emplacements, and things like that. So we'd go up and fire for the support of the infantry to relieve them and then drop back on the hill. We were trained, too, that if we got to a point where they needed artillery barrage, we were trained that we could do artillery barrages in conjunction with artillery, too, if they needed other guns.

[Speaker 2]
This is a 105-millimeter howitzer?

[Speaker 1]
In the States, we had 75. When we went overseas, we had, and they were just mounted on light tanks here in the United States. When we went overseas, and just before we went overseas, we got 105 howitzers mounted on Sherman tanks, and, boy, that was a hell of a different weapon than what the 75 was.

Shoot farther, it was much more accurate and what have you.

[Speaker 2]
A lot more protection, too.

[Speaker 1]
Oh, yes, yeah. Yeah, it had a lot more protection because the light tank, the howitzer, was just an open turret type of thing where these were all closed in just like a regular tank. In fact, I have a picture in my bag of us going into Pilsen, Chuck, on the day that we went in there.

To this day, I do not know who took the picture, how I got a copy of it or what have you, but it shows us going into Pilsen, and my tank commander and I are in the turret and the driver and assistant driver are in it, and flowers are all over the tank and what have you. Now, that was a Sunday, May the 6th. I can remember it was raining, but as I say, my tank commander, when we were over in Prague and I took that along with me, he had never seen that picture, and he wanted a copy of it desperately, and I tried all over Corning to get copies of it made

because you had to have somebody that could photograph the picture, get a negative, and then make the reprint of it, and I couldn't find anybody in Corning that would do it for me.

The cheapest I could get it done was $10 a copy, and he says, that will only be one copy. I said, holy crazy, I didn't want to buy Photoshop, I just want a picture. So my buddy was from Greensboro, North Carolina, and I said, in a place like Greensboro, there must be somebody down there that can do it for you, and he just happened to have a friend of his that owned a Photoshop, and he made it, and then he had an enlargement, an 8x10 made for me from that picture and sent it to me, so it worked out pretty well.

The trip over was pretty good.

[Speaker 2]
I imagine you were pretty disappointed when that program washed out. The Air Cadet.

[Speaker 1]
There were a lot of sad sacks, I'll tell you, Chuck, when that happened, and in fact, after we got down to Camp Oak, or Fort Smith, Camp Chaffee, a lot of the fellows, they were just very disappointed, and they wanted to transfer out. They didn't want to be in any infantry or armored division, but the only place you could go at that point in time was to the paratroopers. It was the only accepted transfer that you could get, and a lot of them did.

The fellows that had been in the Air Force with me went there, and boy, they really got ripped up. They went through paratrooper training at Fort Benning, but then they went overseas, and many of them did not survive. They were caught in the Battle of the Bulge primarily, and they really decimated over there.

I lost track of a lot of them, of course, but I know that in talking to the few fellows that kept in touch with them, it happened to them. But, oh, yeah, that was a sad day, I'll tell you, Chuck, when all of the stuff washed out. It was especially bad for me and a couple of other fellows, you know, that had been advanced to the squadron ahead of us and were just sitting there waiting for our assignment.

That was the sad part about it. I mean, had that problem not happened with my physical, I'd have been in the Air Force. But, you know, the time delay that caused the need for me to go back for a second physical and waiting for their orders and everything is what screwed me up because my other buddy did go in, and he was a bombardier in the Air Force.

He's from my hometown, too.

[Speaker 2]
You can't ever tell, though, you know. You've maybe been in a B-24 that's got flak and a wing route.

[Speaker 1]
That's exactly what I said. Al Metcalf and I were talking about it. I said, you know, as I look back on it now, the disappointment in that.

I guess it must have been medicine's in the mask. I said, I survived this. Had I been in the Air Force, I might have been shot down and not made it anyhow.

You never know what's in store for you.

[Speaker 2]
So you were in the 16th, then, and this was March of 44? April of 44. April of 44.

And how long did you continue to train in the States before you went overseas?

[Speaker 1]
We went overseas in the end of January 1945. Landed in France in early February of 1945.

[Speaker 2]
The training that you got in the States was pretty realistic and helpful?

[Speaker 1]
I would say it was, yeah, from, you know, they did, they've whacked and ran problems and things like that. I say that it can't be as realistic as a battlefield because you don't know what the enemy's going to throw at you, but it does give you experience on maneuvers and cooperation with the ground troops and what you have to do and things like that. I would say it was pretty helpful in that aspect.

[Speaker 2]
Did you have people training you who had been in combat and had come back from your... No. No, we did not.

[Speaker 1]
No, there weren't any of those that had come back yet. I think at that point in time, I don't believe they were redeploying enough of the experienced fighters to come back because I think they needed them over there. No, we didn't have any guys who had had actual combat experience in our group, at least that I knew of, that had come back and said, this is what you're going to face when you get over there.

[Speaker 2]
Where did you land in France?

[Speaker 1]
In Le Havre. Le Havre. Yeah, the D-Day was already over in June, of course, and we landed right in Le Havre.

Although the port facilities weren't good enough, we had to be offloaded off the troop ship and go in by barges into the thing. And then we were stationed in Gournay, which went northwest of Paris until our equipment came in, our tanks came in, and, of course, they all had to be cleaned up and made operational, you know. And then we went into the mines.

I guess it was around the end of March, early. Yeah, the end of March it was. We were down to, headed south up through Luxembourg and then down the southern part of Germany.

And Nuremberg is where we first ran into our first combat problems.

[Speaker 2]

Did you see quite a bit of battle damage as you went through?

[Speaker 1]
Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, an awful lot of that. But as I say, even at that point in time, the war was winding down pretty well, you know.

And in actuality, we never really had to use our 105 howitzers the whole time from the time we started. The only time we really did any use of our armaments was when we were in Pilsen and came under sniper fire. Up until that point, we didn't even have to use our 105 howitzers the whole rest of the war.

[Speaker 2]
Were they mechanically pretty reliable on the road march? Oh, yeah.

[Speaker 1]
Did they break down a lot? No, not at all. We didn't have a single mechanical problem.

And I don't know about other tanks, but in our group, we didn't have anything. I mean, they were real reliable. And of course, we had a good tank driver.

He had been an auto mechanic and a race driver in civilian life.

[Speaker 2]
Couldn't do much better than that.

[Speaker 1]
But you know, the tanks that we got over there, here in the United States, they had rubble treads on them. The ones we got over there had steel treads, steel tracks on them. And, boy, those guys were tricky to handle because you get on those cobblestones in Europe and all the roads are made of cobblestone.

And the wrong touch on that steering mechanism can spin you in and out of control. But we didn't have any problem. I remember when we were going up through Luxembourg to go into Germany.

We went up over through some of those hills, and the tank would be going up that thing, and it would take up most of the highway going up there, you know. The hills, and you look down over the side of the tank, and all you could see was way the hell down the bottom of the valley. And I said to my tank commander, boy, I'm glad we have a good tank driver so that I can feel comfortable, in spirit, you know, because, boy, that was a long drop down there.

First steps along, wasn't it? To the best of my knowledge, we didn't have any problems with anybody going up there.

[Speaker 2]
Was it a four-man crew or five? Five men.

[Speaker 1]

What were their jobs? What jobs? The tank commander was the head in charge of the whole tank.

The gunner was the second in command, and then we had a cannon air loader that loaded the shells into the cannon, and there's a driver and an assistant driver. The assistant driver had a .30-caliber machine gun mounted in front of him, too, for anti-personnel weapon. And we had the 105 howitzer and a coaxial 30-millimeter in the turret also, and that's what we used in Pilsen when we were down there, was the .30-caliber coax in conjunction with the 105 howitzer. But as I say, we never had to use the 105 howitzer when we were down there. All we had was sniper fire when we got into Republic Square in Czechoslovakia, and those guys were wiped out pretty quickly. Some of them were up in a...

We had to fire some rounds at the cathedral steeple. There were snipers up in the cathedral steeple, and then the army...

[Speaker 2]
It wasn't too bad to blow up a cathedral. It didn't blow it up, actually.

[Speaker 1]
It was just 30 millimeters in caliber, and there was some... There's still pot marks in it today. When we were back over, you could still see them, but they didn't damage the cathedral to the point that it was demolished.

I've seen enough pictures of cathedrals that took a lot of damage. Yeah, no, this one wasn't at all. And then the German Wehrmacht headquarters was right across the square from that, and there was sniper fire coming out of that, too.

It didn't take long to wipe them out by, you know, noontime, a little afternoon, while we were outside the tanks and just relaxing and cleaning up equipment and stuff like that. It didn't last very long. The biggest chore that a lot of our guys...

We didn't get involved with that because of our tank situation. The line companies were just infantrymen. Effectively, they were doing the prisoner of war camp because the Germans were running towards the American lines like till hell would have it.

They weren't going to be captured by the Russians come hell or high water, so they were all coming towards our lines, and that was primary. But I didn't get involved with any of that because of our tanks. Somebody had to stay with them, and none of our crew was involved in any of that.

In fact, we were only in... Even though we were in the liberation of Pilsen, we were only in the city about, I'd say maybe 10 days at the most, and then they sent us out to go on perimeter, set up perimeter control villages around the outside of Pilsen, and other ground troops then came in and did the occupying of the city. I think the 2nd Infantry was in there and some of the other infantry divisions came in and took care of the prisoners of the war and stuff that were taken care of in there.

[Speaker 2]
Did you keep the same tank crew or same crew all the time you were there?

[Speaker 1]
Yes. The same 5 guys? All the time we were there until after the end of the war.

At the end of the war then, we were broken up, and the first one to leave was our cannoneer because he was, at that point, he was 35 years old and one of the first people that they started redeploying were the older guys. Whether you had enough points or not, they felt that they had done their duty and they didn't need them anymore. So he was released to come back to the States and he was the first one to leave our tank crew.

[Speaker 2]
Were you the gunner or assistant driver? I was a gunner.

[Speaker 1]
You were the gunner. I was the gunner on our crew. It was quite an experience.

I know one of my friends that I had met when I was in the Air Force and got washed out with me. He was assigned to a line infantry company and lots of times when we'd be on bivouac or even when we got overseas, that he'd see me in the tank when we'd pass on the highway or pass through the staging area or something like that. He'd say, you don't have to walk anywhere.

He says, I have to walk everywhere we go, and you ride everywhere you go. I said, yeah, but you can't hide this son of a bitch behind a tree either, buddy. That's for sure.

He said, yeah, I guess you're right. That isn't right.

[Speaker 2]
Yeah, the old Willie and Joe cartoon where they're looking up and a tank is going by and Willie says to Joe, I'd rather dig a moving foxhole than tracks the eyes. Right.

[Speaker 1]
That's for damn sure. As you drive down the highway over there where there had been combat before that, you see what those 88s could do to an infantry or a tank. It was really frightening, Chuck, I'll tell you, because they were really devastating.

Cannons and stuff. They were very destructive. A hell of a weapon.

You wonder when you see some of the stuff that they had how the hell they could lose a war, but they did.

[Speaker 2]
They fought too many people.

[Speaker 1]
Yeah.

[Speaker 2]
By the Germans, did the Germans have any air force left at all by the time they came in?

[Speaker 1]

I remember when we were coming into La Hague, actually, there was a huge, huge armada of B-17s flying over us from bombarding the Germans. I said to my buddy, we were looking up there and seeing all those planes and all the contrails going on behind them. Thank God they're ours.

That's all I can say because I wouldn't want to be where they're going. It was absolutely abounding to see that this guy was just full of airplanes. It really was.

At that point in time, I'm pretty sure the Luftwaffe was pretty well depleted as far as what they could do to any of their people because that was February of 1945. I think the air force was pretty well decimated at that point.

[Speaker 2]
Did you come close to any concentration camps or slave labor areas when you were going through? Did not.

[Speaker 1]
They were all up in there. I guess the closest we were to were Dachau, which was down near Munich. We didn't see any of that.

[Speaker 2]
Maybe just as well.

[Speaker 1]
Yeah, you're right. When we went back over for our 16th thing to Prague, it was to go to Switzerland via Dachau. They did go in there and they had taken movies.

The American trip organizer that was doing the work took his camcorder with him. He took the camcorder of everything we did as a group over there. He took shots of Dachau while they were there too.

I didn't go with him because having been with Corning International for about 30 years, I had been over. In fact, our company headquarters was in Zurich for about 10 years. I used to go over there frequently.

I've seen all of Switzerland that I needed to see. I wasn't particularly thrilled to go over to Dachau. The other thing too, my wife wasn't with me and I said, 10 days, that's enough.

The other thing, I was lucky that I decided that I didn't want to take that side trip because they did all that by bus. They went from Prague to Switzerland and then they had to go back to Prague to get the airplane. So that they were on the bus for a long, long time, those people.

I haven't talked to any of them since they were on that trip, since they came back, other than that he made copies of all the VCR tapes that he made. Each of us, one of them could buy one of them and they included that in it. I guess from the looks of the shots that they took, they were having a pretty good time, but I didn't go on that.

[Speaker 2]

When the war ended in Europe, did you anticipate then going to the Pacific or you figured the war was over for you?

[Speaker 1]
We had an option that we could volunteer and some of the people in our outfit did volunteer to come back, redeploy the United States for retraining to go to Japan. In fact, my tank commander was one of the guys who volunteered to come back and at that time, he was saying, oh, what the hell, until I get back and get retrained and ready to go to Japan, the war will be over. And sure enough, that's what happened.

He was already back in the United States, so that actually he got let out of the Army quicker than I did, even though I was over there and not doing as much as what the guys here were doing. But he did get discharged quicker than I did. He took a chance and it worked.

He took a chance and it worked, right. He might not have. He might end up on Kyushu.

That's right. But those are chances you take, you don't know.

[Speaker 2]
So how long did you stay in the Army after?

[Speaker 1]
The war ended in May of 1945 and I got out in March of 1946.

[Speaker 2]
Oh, you were there over that winter in 1945-1946. Were you in Czechoslovakia most of that time?

[Speaker 1]
No, we were in Czechoslovakia for just a short period of that time. We went from there to Passau, Germany and we were stationed there and then we were transferred out of the armored division. We were the 4th Army at that point and then they transferred us into the 7th and 9th Infantry and we were just sitting around waiting for our time to come back.

We didn't do any military work. I was going to say, what were you doing? No military work at all.

Just whatever guard duties that had to be done and things like that. For all practical purposes there wasn't anything militarily that had to be done.

[Speaker 2]
Did you do anything to, say, German civilians? No, not at all.

[Speaker 1]
The only contact we had with them, other than the girls that came in and cleaned up the billets and things like that, and in the one town we were in, I think it was Konigswurt, Germany, had an orphanage there for children without parents. And we got to be familiar with them only from the standpoint that in order to have something to do we'd go out and hunt quite a bit out in the woods there and if we'd get a deer or something we'd take it into this orphanage and the first time we went in there there were these little kids who were

with dinner with just a little bowl of black soup and some bread, you know, and when we came in with a deer that was really exciting fun.

So then we'd go deer hunting quite a bit. So we had contact with that orphanage, but that didn't last long. Maybe we were only there maybe six weeks after that before we were redeployed and we came home.

[Speaker 2]
Germany was in pretty bad shape? Or wasn't it too bad where you were?

[Speaker 1]
It wasn't too bad where we were because it was in, you know, out in the country more or less. In big cities like Nuremberg where we went through, you could see all the devastation we had and also up in Berlin and up in those areas where there was an awful lot of devastation. But out there where we were you couldn't see very much of that.

[Speaker 2]
Did you get a leave to travel around? Could you go, say, to Berlin?

[Speaker 1]
I only got one leave, an R&R they called it, and we went down to Salzburg, Austria for a week. They had a recreation area down there in Salzburg. Go skiing?

No, this was down on a lake. I can't even remember the lake now, but we were down for just a week. We were in a hotel there and went to shows and things like that.

That was all we did. Yeah, it was. In one of the periods after the war, I had an uncle that was with an artillery battalion over there and after the war I did get a chance to get together with him while we were stationed in Germany and I can't even remember the town that he was in at that point in time, but they did give me a pass to go see him and I met up with him for just an overnight stay with him before I had to come back.

Other than that, I pretty much traveled. They wanted me to stay in after I was probably one of the senior guys for our assault gun platoon with the tanks, and they wanted me to stay in and take over as platoon sergeant. They said, we'll give you your tech sergeant stripes and all you have to do is sign up for six months.

I said, hey, I've been over here long enough. It's time for me to go home, and I want to get home. Of course, as a 21-year-old, all you want to do is get the hell home after being over there all that time.

In retrospect, as I look back on it now, had I given it a lot more thought and all the ramifications about what it is, and like Metcalfe, for instance, if I'd have stayed in, I could have retired at the ripe old age of 48 with a full 30 years pension, and I'd still be a young man. I could have gotten on and got a job, but I didn't even have any place in my mind at that point in time. I just wanted to go home.

But as I say, Al, I'm sure, is quite well off with his Army retirement pension and what have you. But as I say, at that point in time, I wasn't even thinking of that.

[Speaker 2]
Again, you take a chance. You stay in the Army, Korea comes along, and somebody's trying to kill you again. That's right.

That's exactly right.

[Speaker 1]
Yeah, and any time you're in the service, you run that risk, especially in this changing world. Check today. You don't know what the hell's going to happen next.

[Speaker 2]
When you came home in March of 1946, most of the parades were over by that time. And what was your reception when you came home?

[Speaker 1]
Just family reception. There was nothing big about it.

[Speaker 2]
Did you come back on a troop ship?

[Speaker 1]
Yeah, I came back on a troop ship. I forget the name of it now. I have a picture of it.

[Speaker 2]
Into New York or Boston? Into New York.

[Speaker 1]
Yeah, New York. And then we were sent over to Fort Dix and we were separated at Fort Dix to come home.

[Speaker 2]
To take the train home or bus?

[Speaker 1]
Train.

[Speaker 2]
Yeah, we took the train home at that time. Now, where was home?

[Speaker 1]
Northumberland, Pennsylvania was where I was. In fact, when we went into the service and we were sent to Newcomer, it was the reception area, of course, at that time. I was the acting corporal for the whole group.

And my whole high school class of the guys that were left that didn't volunteer to go into the Army, we all went in together at that time. I forget how many of us.

[Speaker 2]
Quite a few of us. You got in touch with some of those guys when you got back?

[Speaker 1]
Oh, yeah. Yeah, we still see them. We still have our class reunions from our high school, and so we get to see a lot of them.

We had, I think there were ten of our fellows killed in the war.

[Speaker 2]
How big a class was it?

[Speaker 1]
We had 75 in our class as all. That's a lot. A lot of our fellows were killed.

Yeah, we lost quite a few of them who were graduating class.

[Speaker 2]
What did you do once you got home? Did you take a while to settle in?

[Speaker 1]
Well, of course the first thing I wanted to do was get a job and have some money. I didn't want to buy a car and all those things. But I was fortunate in that my father worked on the railroad, and he had some connections.

Not that he was that. He was a foreman on a track crew. But he said that he heard that they were hiring train crewmen.

He said, why don't you go over and sign up and see if you can get a job. So I went over and signed up, and they hired me on the spot to be a fireman on a steam locomotive. So that was my job.

I hired on in June of 1946, and I did that until September of 1947. Then I quit and went to college. GI Bill?

Then the GI Bill, yeah. Went up to Bucknell University, which is in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. It's just about eight miles from our home.

I just commuted from home and back and forth at night. Then I got my degree in 51 chemical engineering from Bucknell. My uncle was very instrumental in kicking my butt to the point where I'd go to school.

When I was firing on the railroad, I was making damn good money out there. It was difficult for me to give that up and go to $108 a month when I was making that sometimes in a day or a week or something like that. He said, nah, you get your degree and get going, Harrison.

He had graduated in civil engineering from Bucknell in 1935, so he was a pusher behind me to get out and get my degree, which in retrospect, I guess, it was the right decision. That's for sure. Even the railroad's gone downhill since those days.

Of course, I didn't have the luxury of firing on a diesel engine either. Mine was hard work. But I enjoyed it.

I really did like it. Of course, as I say, it was good money for those days to make it good money.

[Speaker 2]
If the railroads had stayed as healthy as they were then, you'd have had a good life. Did you get married while you were in college?

[Speaker 1]
Yes, I did, of course. At that point, I'd been in the service for over three years, worked for a year and a half. At that point, I was dating a girl that I had known in school.

We got married between my junior and senior year in college.

[Speaker 2]
Had you written to her during the war?

[Speaker 1]
Oh, yeah.

[Speaker 2]
Did you have a relationship? Yeah, back and forth all the time.

[Speaker 1]
I had a child while I was a senior in college. I went with that responsibility. Hell, I never made my senior year and kept engineering on.

I still want to give up that. That was a tough way to go. I can remember she was only a year older.

We had a daughter that was born in August of 1950. In November, I was taking my final exam in calculus. She decided she was going to develop the croup that night.

At 2 o'clock in the morning, we had to call the doctor down for her. She stayed with her until 4 o'clock and put her croup 10 over. She looked at me and she said, You have to take a final exam tomorrow morning.

I said, Sure, I do. She said, Do you want me to give you something to keep you awake? I said, No, I want to get a couple hours of sleep at least.

I went in and I cracked that test for a 96. Damn it, now I know how to study for a test. Don't study.

If it had only been math, I'd have probably been in trouble, Chuck. But it was in math. I started out as a math major when I went into school.

That's what I really liked was math and science. When they told me I had to take a course called English World Literature, the damn book was about 3 inches thick and an 8 1⁄2 by 11 or something like that. I probably weighed 20 pounds.

I heard people talking about this English World Literature course, how you had to read up and write a theme on what you read. That shit isn't for me. I never did like English and I hate it now.

They told me it was English World Literature. I don't know, the dean of the engineering school said, Do you have any openings? I became an engineer candidate overnight.

That worked out all right, too, I guess.

[Speaker 2]
A question that is hard to get a really good answer to, but I'm interested in it. We historians sort of assume that the war, the experience of being in the war changed people from what they were going in to what they were when they came out. What do you think the impact of being in the service and being in the war was on you, if there were things that you can think about?

[Speaker 1]
I think there's no doubt that it changes your whole mental outlook on life, Chuck. Number one, you have a sense of consideration and cooperation for other people and the fact that there's an interdependence there, that you look after yourself and they look after themselves, but there still is an interplay between the two of them so that you do have to look after each other in a sense. I think in that relationship you do develop friendships and things like that, just like this reunion, for God's sake.

I think that part of it is very definitely a plus for it. The stuff that we had to go through while we were there was a pain in the ass to take. I think in that bottom line that it's an experience that is well worth going through.

It's typical that we always used to say it was worth a million bucks but you wouldn't go through it for another million. I think that's about the way it ought to be. You can really sum up the whole damn situation because it really was something that you want to go through once in a lifetime.

[Speaker 2]
Did it change your thinking politically or didn't you have enough political...

[Speaker 1]
At that point in time, I don't mean at 18 years old, I wasn't politically inclined one way or the other, Chuck, and I don't believe that that had any bearing on the way I feel today.

[Speaker 2]
It didn't make any more likely to vote for Eisenhower in 1952 because he was in the service? No, not at all.

[Speaker 1]
I think I voted for Eisenhower only from the standpoint that I felt that he had done a good job and the job that he was in over there, and he was my boss at one point in time, quite the move, but be that as it may, he was a president and did a hell of a job for this country. I think

the service did a lot for not only me but for a lot of guys. You come out of high school at the age of 17, you turn 18 in January, and you're in your service in March.

You've got a long way to go to grow up. In fact, when I went in, I weighed 145 pounds and did not weigh 185, so I wasn't even completely matured even at 18 yet, Chuck, when I went in. I think in that respect, it makes you grow up in a hell of a big hood.

And then I look back now and all of our tank crew, my tank commander was the same age I was, and here we were, 19- and 20-year-old kids over there with that big piece of machinery being dependent upon to do a job. How we ever did it, I don't know, but we did. And there's a lot of us that were in that same way, I'm sure.

Young guys like that.

[Speaker 2]
Anything finally that you want to be sure that I know while we're talking? Not that I can think of, Chuck.

[Speaker 1]
Not a chance. Covered all the high spots that I can think of. As you say, it was quite an experience for us.

I'm glad that I went through it and I'm glad that I lived through it. Yeah, a lot of people do.

[Speaker 2]
That's right.