

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Veterans Project

World War II

O. H. 487

PAUL WALLACE

Interviewed

by

Dale Voitus

on

November 18, 1982

PAUL D. WALLACE

Paul Daniel Wallace, born December 10, 1910, is the son of John A. and Theresa Wallace. He attended and graduated from Youngstown East High School. After graduation he started to work for the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company. He was employed there when World War II broke out. He joined the Army on June 1, 1942 and was used as part of an antiaircraft unit stationed around Washington D. C. After this unit had served its purpose, he was reassigned to an Army Corps of Engineers bridge-building unit. This assignment took him to Europe to be used as needed by the American Army. Near the end of the war, his unit ran a saw mill in the French town of Nancy for the local population. The labor force was German prisoners of war. This enabled him to meet and talk to a number of them.

After his discharge, Paul returned to Youngstown Sheet and Tube until November of 1970. He married in 1947 and had five children. He worked for a number of years in a local auto parts store after his retirement.

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INTERVIEWEE: PAUL WALLACE

INTERVIEWER: Dale Voitus

SUBJECT: Pontoon Bridges, German POW's, US Army Corps of Engineers

DATE: November 18, 1982

V: This is an interview with Paul D. Wallace for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Dale John Voitus, at 536 Sixth Street, on November 18, 1982, at 7:20 p.m.

To begin with Mr. Wallace, I would like you to tell me something about your childhood and your family background.

W: I was born and brought up here in Youngstown, right here on the east side. I attended East High School, and graduated at seventeen. I went on to work at Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company in the general office, which was in the Stambaugh Building on the Public Square in Youngstown. Actually it was my last work. I spent 42 years with Sheet & Tube, except the four years that I spent in the United States Army. The reason I went in the Army was we had so many people there who had been in World War I and they all contended that no draftee ever spent more than eighteen months in the Army. I was afraid to death that I was going to miss something, so I dashed down. I had a low draft number. The way it figured I would have been drafted in December. I didn't want that. I didn't want to go into the Army in December, because I figured taking basic training and that sort of thing in cold weather would be bad. I had better do it in the summertime. So I went down and volunteered to be drafted early. I was drafted. You couldn't just out and out volunteer, you had to be volunteered to be drafted early, so I did. I went in the Army on June 1, 1942. They took us from Youngstown to Akron, where we took our physicals. Then they put us on the train that took us to Columbus, to Fort Hayes. They ran a lot of tests. They ran us around for four or five days. They called us out at 6:00 in the morning with all our gear and all, and lined us up out there in the sun. We were there

from about 7:00 in the morning till 7:30, 8:00 that night before they put us on a train and took us to Washington of all places, Washington D.C.

We got off the train at the Union Station. They lined us up and marched us out, put us in trucks, and broke us down into various details. There were 700 of us. They divided us into several groups. What they were putting us in was antiaircraft units, searchlight and gun battalions, and radar which was responsible for East Coast Defense. I went into A Battery. They took us out. The first place I went was a place called Sutland, Maryland. We had this gun and searchlight position out there. We got our basic training there. They broke us down to about 40 or 50 fellows in an outfit. Then they gave us about two or three weeks of basic training and turned us to duty.

V: You said you graduated from East High School, what year did you graduate?

W: 1928. I started at Sheet & Tube in November of the same year.

V: You came from a family on the east side, was it a large family?

W: Well, I had one older brother, a younger brother and a younger sister.

V: We went into the circumstances on how you entered the Army. You said you wanted to go in . . .

W: I was afraid to death I would miss something, believe it or not. Afraid I would miss something! I didn't! I stayed a lot longer than I expected.

V: When you volunteered that was for the duration, right?

W: The duration and six months. However they did tell us, if you would volunteer early you would get to choose your branch of service. I was already flying and I volunteered to go in to the Air Corps. They got this emergency call when we were down there in Fort Hayes, from the East Coast defense for 700 men. Everyone of those boys was earmarked for the Air Corps and they all went into East Coast Defense.

V: Is that right?

W: We used to laugh about it. We would say that rather than being for them, we were against them.

V: You said you had just a couple weeks of basic training. What was it like? Did sergeants come in and handle that for you?

- W: They had boys in these positions that were good soldiers. They always picked a boy who was a real G.I. We got everything else that everybody else got in basic training, only I do think that we got it faster. We got a lot of book work, and a lot of examinations, and that sort of thing.
- V: It was a little quicker than . . .
- W: A lot of them got six weeks of it, we didn't. We got about three or four. Then they turned us to duty. They split us up and sent us out to the various positions. They would gather us up and take us to the firing range and have us fire our rifles, and machine guns, and that sort of thing.
- V: Tell me a little bit about the background with the soldiers that you worked with?
- W: They were easy to remember, there were quite a few boys there from Ohio, but they were mostly from southern Ohio. They were mostly steelworkers or coal miners. Then later on we got an influx of boys from Iowa and Kansas who were all farm boys. They are excellent soldiers because they are used to a rough life. They are good soldiers and they are all good shots because they hunt all their life. They are excellent shots and they know their guns. These boys from southern Ohio were all nice boys too. I made a lot of good friends.
- V: On another interview I was told that if you volunteered, normally your unit was just made up with volunteers. Was that the same with your unit? Was it mostly volunteers, or did you have some draftees in with your unit?
- W: Oh no, there were quite a few draftees.
- V: I thought maybe that was something they tried to do, keep volunteers with volunteers, and draftees with draftees.
- W: They could have earlier in the war, but once it really got going, and they were taking them in the Army, they classified everyone as a draftee.
- V: Explain a little about your position on the East Coast, was it an anti-aircraft position?
- W: An anti-aircraft position.
- V: What type of weapons did you have or . . .
- W: We had 50 caliber machine guns, and we had these gigantic searchlights, and we had radar. The first radar I ever saw was on a position. These positions were scattered all

around Washington. I started out on one in Rock Creek Park. Then later on I was taken into downtown Washington. I didn't know it until I got down there, that they had an anti-aircraft warning board on the roof of the Government Printing Office Building, at Capital and H Street. I was there for about six or eight months. We had a squad room there and 23 men and the officers. That was their headquarters too, all the officers were in there. They had a squad room, and they had this big plotting board. We used to plot all those aircraft coming in and out and coming down the East Coast and all. It was pretty interesting. We worked eight hour shifts, just like you would a job. Eight hours on, sixteen off.

V: Where did you stay when you were in Washington, did you have barracks or . . .

W: We had a squad room right up in the penthouse. We had it made; we had a beautiful place. That's all that was up there.

We used to eat in the Government Printing Office employee's cafeteria. We had a racket going there too. The Army allowed us 90¢ a day to eat on. It wasn't very long that we had made good friends with the cashiers down there and we would go through the line and instead of punching out 90¢, they would punch out 15¢ or 20¢. We would go through it at lunch time, and they would punch out a little bit more. We would go through it for dinner in the evening and they would punch out a little bit more. If we went out that night, or even if we worked, we would go down and have something to eat after work and we had to get it all in there for 90¢. We used to get it in there. Those girls took care of us. Everyone of them was patriotic. Everyone of them had a brother, or a brother-in-law or someone in the service, so they looked after you.

That beautiful thing broke up. They took that board out of there and moved us down to Haines Point, down on the Potomac River, which was a big tourist park. There were a lot of little shacks, that we used for barracks. It was just down off of the way to Alexandria, right on the river. It was one of the coldest places that I have ever been in my life. You would think of Washington as being warm, and in the summertime it is. During the winter time, often in the day time, we would go out in our OD shirts. But I mean at night, we enjoyed out big heavy-duty overcoats. You needed it.

V: How long were you at Haines Point and afterwards where did that take you?

W: I was in that district all together about 26 months. They gathered us up and by that time they decided they didn't need

all that defense on the East Coast. They took us down to Camp Shelby, Mississippi and reassigned us to engineers. That was sort of a social comedown for us. They split us up there. They gave us a lot more basic training. You get basic training every so often, but a lot of guys only got it once. I got it like six times. Anyhow there at Shelby they had a saying, "Anybody that volunteers for overseas to get out of Shelby is a coward." It was that bad--Shelby, Mississippi.

They broke us up and sent us up to Camp Campbell, Kentucky, right there by Cincinnati, right across the river. I was only there about three days. I was on a train going to Atlanta, Georgia, to go to school down there. I got down there and they broke us up and sent us to all kinds of schools.

I went to auto mechanics school. I was always more or less mechanically inclined although I never had worked at it. But when they gave you these I.Q. tests they determined that I had a hell of a high I.Q., so they sent me to a school. That was a twelve week deal. I went home for Christmas and then went back to Shelby. We were in Shelby awhile and they gathered us up and we were getting all of our engineer training. I went into a pontoon bridge outfit. I was in Shelby quite a while, close to a year. They had us in these pontoon bridges and they were cumbersome things. They would get us all ready to go overseas in combat. We were considered combat troops and we did go over. I sailed out of Boston, in the wintertime.

V: What year would this have been?

W: 1944. I was out of there in, I think, March of 1944. It was the coldest ride that I ever had out on that Atlantic Ocean. We were in a very large convoy and I'll tell you until you see something like that you can't believe it. They had ships as far as you could see in any direction. They had the troops in the center to try to keep the submarines away from them. That submarine pack was running wild then. We were on the water sixteen days. They pulled us in the night before we went to France; they pulled us in Plymouth Harbor. We saw the white cliffs of Dover, but they wouldn't let us off of the boat. So we went in the next day to Le Havre. They had just taken Le Havre. That harbor was a mess, there were boats sunk all over the place.

They took us in on these landing barges and it was a funny thing. We had a First Lieutenant by the name of Clifton and I'll never forget him. I hope he never hears this, but the poor bugger was the clumsiest guy and he was very terribly nearsighted. We hit the shore and this Clifton--he was a First Lieutenant and probably was senior officer next to the captain--had to be right up there in front. He was

determined that he was going to be the first one off this boat. You would think he was going to take Europe single handed. They let down the big gate on the front and he tripped on the hinge. He triple flipped and the man landed in France on his back with his feet facing out into the water.

V: He filled his promise didn't he?

W: He did. He really took France. We came up through the city of Le Havre and we had everything we owned with us you know. We carried everything in our duffle bags. I only weighed 124 pounds so I wasn't the biggest, huskiest guy either. Garand rifle, bayonet, the gas mask, and the whole works . . . They took us into one of these depots and we got equipped there. They monkeyed around and they started us up into Southern France. We got over into there about the time that the Heinies hit "the Bulge." When they started that bulge, they disarmed us and took our ammunition and weapons and took them up North. They were supposed to take us up North too, but they didn't. In the meantime, they decided they weren't going to use anymore of these pontoon bridges. They were going to use these newer things called a Bailey bridge. Maybe you heard of them, a complete bridge that comes on one big truck, a gigantic thing. If we had been trained in Bailey bridges, we probably would have been in the thick of the bulge, but there we were sitting down in part of France well out of the way.

They started to train us. We ended up in an engineering company, 212 men, I think, and four or five, six officers. They broke us down into three platoons. I was in headquarters platoon, which was the office of the cooks, the MP's, the mechanics, and the truck drivers. The second platoon were the riflemen. The third platoon built the bridges. They broke us in and held us up there quite a while. Of course, in the meantime, they had disarmed us. They sent some of the boys back down to the coast for a Bailey bridge. They came up with it and they came up with quite a bit of equipment. We fooled around there. Then we got farther over into France. I spent quite a bit of time at a military school near Toule, the city of Toule. I never heard of the City of Nancy, thought it is a big city. It's about the size of Cleveland. I was astounded when I saw this place. We were there through the summer and the hostilities slowed down; actually they hit the armistice. We were not scheduled for occupation troops, so they were going to send us from there to the South Pacific without any stops or anything. That was the story anyhow.

In the meantime, they put some of our boys in charge of a sawmill and we got a big building. They gave us a motor pull. I always loved this thing, it had a water fountain in one corner and it said Packard Electric Company, Warren, Ohio.



Everytime I took a drink, I looked at that. We had quite a time there. As soon as hostilities stopped, discipline got pretty lax. We did a lot of work. They had one or two of our boys running the sawmill and they worked with a lot of German help. We had German help. We had some interesting Heinies too.

V: We'll get into that a little bit later on when you talk about your specific incidents. The Germans had surrendered then?

W: Yes.

V: You were scheduled for South Pacific and that didn't work out?

W: They never got to us.

V: When did you actually come home?

W: In January of 1946.

V: What was your job assignment in your headquarter's company? Did you have any particular job that was assigned to you?

W: Yes. I was listed as a mechanic, and I dispatched transportation. I also drove big trucks. Some of these small vehicles were all that anybody could drive, but they had some big stuff. For some reason they got the idea that I was good on them. So I drove a lot of the big 5-ton diamond T's, maybe pulling an eight or ten ton tractor on the back or something like that. I was supposedly a mechanic. I did a lot of mechanical work.

V: What was a typical day like, did you have any set routine, get up at a certain time, do certain thing you had to do? Give me a typical day.

W: Some of our boys did all the guard duty. We boys who were in the motor pool and mechanics and drivers, would up at the motor pool.

The day the armistice was signed, I was up near Brussels. We had gone up there after a bunch of new trucks. That was one of the most interesting things that I ever saw. To begin with we went through Brussels twice. That is a town, that is a city. It was re-built after world War I. It had the widest, most beautiful boulevards that you ever saw. We went over to this ordnance outfit and they had two and a half ton GMC trucks that you couldn't see the end of the rows. They had fields full of them. Probably some of them are still sitting there. We drew like 70 trucks and six or eight jeeps. We were coming back with those vehicles, there was another kid and I riding in a jeep, and all of a sudden people started coming out waving at us and throwing flowers. He said, "What in

the hell is going on?" I said, "I bet you the Germans surrendered," and they had. We stopped for our next meal and we got our heads together and we said, "Okay, let's get these trucks back into that camp and get out." This is going to be good. The French are going to really treat us royally. We beat it back. We broke our back getting back in to get rid of all of this equipment. They restricted us. They didn't let us out for three days. We were all going to go to Paris. That would be where all the action was. We got restricted, like I say, for three days. The only thing that we did get, General Eisenhower sent down orders that we all were supposed to get a good steak dinner. They must have been prepared for it because they had the steaks. We did have a beautiful steak dinner. Then back to running our sawmill and our motor pool.

We had been at the motor pool and ran into interesting people. One first lieutenant pulled in there from the American government, and he had one of these big Mercedes, touring cars that Hitler used to have. He told us something most people didn't know. Hitler actually had either four or six of those things, all identical, because there are a couple of them around this country, people advertising them as being Hitler's personal car. He told us that one of these was Hitler's car too. They had doors all armor plated. Also, you could not open the door of the car from the outside. You opened from the inside. So I said to the driver, "What do you do when you park it?" He said, "I leave the window open." He left the window open and reached in and opened one door and that's how they got into them. They were really something. The reason they happened to pull in, they pulled in on a Saturday afternoon, some of us were just fooling around down there, and they told us the engine was missing. What he needed was a spark plus. So we got a spark plug and put it in. But it was pretty interesting to see that car. It was some automobile. But there are several of them in museums around the country.

- V: Yes, I have seen those advertised.
- W: Nobody has the exclusive of one, because there is one up at Niagara Falls in the museum. There is one in a museum out West somewhere, and there used to be a Jewish fellow who went around selling bonds for Israel, who had one. So there are three of them right there that we know of.
- V: Did you ever in your experiences get to listen to or meet anybody who the war had made famous as far as either American officers or . . .
- W: We didn't get to meet him but I saw General Eisenhower.
- V: You saw General Eisenhower?

- W: I sure did, right in his little office. It was funny how it happened. They used to always talk about this office of his in a little red schoolhouse. Well, actually it wasn't so little. It was a red schoolhouse. There were a lot of offices in there. One day one of our supply sergeants came down to the motor pool and said, "I need a jeep." I have to go into Rheims and get some forms signed. He said, "Come on, go along." So I went up and asked the motor sergeant if I could go along and he said, "Sure, go ahead." We went to the schoolhouse, which he used as an office building, and we went in. I forget whether the General's office was on the second or third floor. The MP said, "Did you ever see General Eisenhower?" I said, "No." He said, "Do you want to see him?" I said, "Sure," so he took us up and I saw Eisenhower sitting in there writing at his desk. The he was, old Ike, calm as hell. He was working away there and he never even looked up. We both took a good look at him and walked away. We did see the General.
- V: We talked a little bit about this earlier, you said that you had a certain officer that was kind of a klutz.
- W: We called him Yo-Yo. Yes, he was a klutz.
- V: How did you feel about your officers in general?
- W: Most of them were good qualified men. Our captain, the one that we went overseas with, was out of MIT. The captain we got overseas was a National Guard officer. He had been pulled into the Army as a first lieutenant, then he went to captain, and I think he later made major after we left. Then we had another lieutenant, who was an old regular Army man, who had gotten a battlefield commission. He had a permanent rate as a master sergeant. They gave him a battlefield commission as a first lieutenant and he was a good capable man, most of them weren't. We had one young kid that we got a kick out of, a kid by the name of "Peach" so we called him "Peaches"; a big handsome kid. Boy, these French girls used to swoon when they saw this kid. A big blonde haired kid like somebody out of the movies. He was a good kid. It was funny, one time Peach wanted a bicycle so bad. He met a French girl that had a bicycle and she asked him if he would go bicycle riding with her and he said, "Yes." He made the date for the next evening. He's telling us this sad story that he has this date with this girl to go bicycle riding, and he doesn't have a bicycle. "That's no trouble lieutenant. I'll have a bicycle tomorrow morning," said one of the boys. He said, "Where are you going to get one?" The kid said, "Never mind Lieutenant. Never look a gift horse in the mouth. If you need a bicycle, then you will have a bicycle." The next morning he had one. These two clowns had stolen it out of a Frenchman's barn. All these

farmers leave their barn doors open, a big double door like, so they can drive wagons in and some of them had cars, and these kids took his bicycle. They got a motorcycle the same way. So he gets his bicycle. He kept it too. The kids wouldn't tell him where they got it. He was better off not knowing. Most of them were good capable fellows. There were problems. They used to laugh at ninety day wonders, but most of them were pretty capable and they were sincere.

V: It seems like you spend a lot of time being exposed to French people. What are your impressions of your feelings about them overall? How did they look at you as Americans? Did they resent your being there or were they really grateful? There are different opinions on that?

W: Well, yes. There was a dividing point. When we first got there they loved us. They were so friendly and nice. They couldn't have been nicer, until the war finished. Then they couldn't understand why we didn't go home the next day. It was terribly hard to explain to them that it took a lot of time to take them back boatload by boatload. A lot of them were hostile after the war had finished for awhile. But like I say, while the war was on they loved us; they loved us dearly. It was just like them drawing a curtain, they all just changed. Not all, some of them were friendly; some of them we made friends with. A lot of them did get hostile. They put signs all over, "Yankee, go home." I've seen a thousand of them.

V: A little ingratitude there maybe.

W: Yes, there wasn't much gratitude.

V: I tried to stop you when you were mentioning this before because I wanted to go into it on its own. You said you were exposed too, and you had a lot of German soldiers who were working with you. Explain how those people came to you and what they . . .

W: On the one depot we were in in France, especially this one that had been a military school, we had a big stockade of German prisoners. We would take about fifty of them down to the motor pool every day; there were about thirty of us. We had them in charge. They had their own noncoms. We had a very interesting boy who used to be in charge of the group that we had at the motor pool. They were mostly young boys, they weren't hard to handle. They were very nice. But this particular kid was a very interesting boy. He was about twenty-three. He was a college graduate and a Luftwaffe pilot. He had three victories. He spoke English perfectly; he had eight years of English in school. He spoke it right from the book. If you talked slang, you had

him; he didn't know what you were talking about. We used to put him in charge and he used to line them up and march them down. He was a very nice well-educated young man and he knew the world, that kid. He said one day to me, "Where are you from?" I said, "Youngstown, Ohio" He thought for a minute and said, "Is that near Cleveland?" That's how well he knew the map.

V: He knew his geography.

W: Yes, he was from Vienna, Austria. He would always let you know that he wasn't a German, he was from Austria. He didn't want to be classified as a German.

V: Really?

W: Oh yes. He came from quite a well-to-do family. He showed us some pictures of his home. He had a younger sister about sixteen, a nice looking thing. There were only the two children. His father was an engineer. He was a heavy equipment designer. He designed tractors and road equipment and things like that. That's what the man did before the war. He got drafted into the German Army as an engineer working on tanks. He was designing tanks and improving pieces of tanks. That's what that man did. We had some very interesting kids though, most of them were good kids. Like I said you only had to lick them once. None of us were ever armed, many times I had gone out with them. We had these three-fourth ton Dodge trucks with seats on both sides. I had gone out with a detail of eight or ten Heinies and I wasn't carrying a gun. I wasn't armed. They could've run away very easily, because I was probably the smallest one of the bunch. The only difference between me and them was that I drove.

I laughed one day. We were coming back from a detail--it was in November or December--and it was so cold. I didn't have any gloves so one of the prisoners took his gloves off, handed them to me, and put his hands in his pockets because he felt sorry for me because I was driving and he could keep his hands in his pockets. Most of them like I said were pretty decent. They little or no use for Army life or for Hitler or for anybody else. I never did find any of them that were gung ho.

V: How did they feel about the war once they were over . . .

W: That's why you never had any trouble after they were captured. I swear, a lot of them tried to be captured. This Luftwaffe pilot told me that they were getting short on gasoline, so he figured that he wasn't going to make too many more flights. He flew over into Holland and set down in a farm field, and let the airplane set there. He went to the farmhouse and they

fed him, and they kept him for three days before the allies came and picked him up. He said, "I would have sat there all winter." He didn't care. It was survival until somebody would come and get him. We had very little trouble.

V: What would you really contribute our victory to then as far as they were just running out of supplies or . . .

W: They ran out of everything. They had some of the most beautiful equipment that you ever saw in your life, but they couldn't move it because they didn't have gasoline for it. I saw one particular spot where they had about six brand new Focke-Wolfe fighter planes. They were top of the line; they were dandies. They were hidden in the woods, right off of a field that they thought that they were going to use for a runway. Those airplanes had all been flown there and backed into there and they were all out of gas. They never got gas enough even to move them. It was that way with a lot of their equipment. A lot of their equipment was good, but they didn't have gasoline. It was lack of gasoline, lack of ammunition, lack of food, and clothing. They had one good thing though. They had an overcoat. Their Army overcoat came clear down to almost their ankles. That was also their blanket. It was a good garment. I think it was a lot better than we had because a lot of us had mackinaws. You know mackinaws were only down to our waist. Another thing, a lot of people figured that they were on their last legs as far as airplanes were concerned. Every one of these Focke-Wolfe fighters had twin instruments. We didn't even have twin instruments in ours I don't think. I never heard of our fighter planes having twin instruments but theirs did, twin-navigational instruments.

V: Every gauge was duplicated then?

W: Yes. I guess they just ran out of everything. They were scraping the bottom of the barrel. We had prisoners there; we had kids who were like thirteen, fourteen years old. We also had men who had to be in their fifties. They were the poorest excuse of the soldier you ever saw, but they were good workers. Some of them were blacksmiths and welders and that sort of thing. We all had them in the shop and the motor pool and you never had any trouble with them.

V: Did they give you an honest eight hours work?

W: Yes, they did a lot. Those fellows like to work. They would have stayed and worked overtime rather than go back to the stockade. They maintained that they were eating a lot better. What the allies were feeding them was a lot better than what

they had been getting. Some of them hadn't seen white bread in a couple of years. They were tickled to death to get some white bread. Things like that we don't think anything of, but they did.

V: Did you get a chance to talk to them about their home life?

W: Some of them, yes.

V: Did they ever talk about why . . .

W: Everyone of them claimed that they were drafted.

V: Oh really?

W: I never found one that said he went into the Army on his own.

V: They didn't really talk about how Hitler came about or what caused it?

W: No. They wanted to forget him. They didn't want to talk about him at all. They had no use for him. It could be different if maybe you had some SS troops probably or gung ho kids. That's why actually you didn't have to guard a lot of them. They would never have left. They didn't intend to leave. They were funny sometimes. They were jumping for joy when Germany surrendered and I said, "What are you so happy for?" He said, "Sergeant, I will be home before you are." And do you know he was.

He went home in October or November; I didn't go until January. He was right. They figured it was like a football game: When the last whistle blows pick up your stuff and go home. That's all.

V: No hard feelings?

W: No. They didn't think they should have any hard feelings toward us.

V: How did you and your people feel? Was there any animosity?

W: Yes, we did feel that way some. Some of our boys were too good-hearted. They would give them cigarettes and cigars and sandwiches, fruit, and that sort of thing. More than once we would say to them if it wasn't for them we wouldn't be here, we would be at home. So, let's not be so generous. Let's not overdo it.

V: You didn't see any instance of problems between the overall . . .

W: I never did. I heard of a few. I guess that some of the prisoners would find out that one of our boys was Jewish and

they would give him a hard time. That wasn't the thing to do. After all they were prisoners. The Jews would make sure that they remembered it when they got done with them. I don't know why, but they really had it in for the Jews. I couldn't understand why, because what they did to the Jews was awful. They should have been extra nice to them rather than to be down on them.

V: Your unit actually, through circumstances that you would have no control of, was kind of just following the pattern of the war and never really got . . .

W: Never really got into it. A couple of times we would throw equipment up close enough that you could hear artillery. I would say to somebody how far away is that and they would say six miles. I really didn't have to worry. By the time we got over the Luftwaffe was pretty well whipped. The most impressive thing, I think, during the whole war was to stand on the ground and watch the flocks of our bombers. You would think they cost ten dollars a piece. Those B-24's and B-17's were expensive airplanes. At first, it was all B-17's, but then it was all B-24's. They sent them over there in droves. I would have to say how many would be in these flights. I suppose they would go over and then, when they got over away they would break up and go to different targets.

Another thing that was inconceivable was all the equipment that we had. Fields full of trucks, brand new. They were two and a half ton, most of them were GMC, although they weren't all manufactured by GMC. They were manufactured by their license and they were all identical, and all the parts on them were interchangeable. They talk about America being the arsenal of democracy--it was and we produced it all.

We had quite a few contacts with the Russians. The Russians said they were taking a terrible licking, until we started supplying them and they started getting equipment from us. They said things sure turned around when they started getting some American equipment. At that time the Russian boys were very friendly.

V: When did you come into contact with them?

W: As soon as the armistice was signed. They had them guard most of the prisoners. We didn't guard any German prisoners, they did. They guarded all the stockades and all. They would shoot a prisoner for just looking crossways. They were terrible. They would kill them for nothing. Those Russians really hated them. Another thing we ran into was, we got a bunch of kids on the depot that were Polish internees who had been in prison for five or six years. The American government paid those kids Army privates' pay. Those kids had never had over ten dollars. They had money coming out



their ears. They just couldn't buy things fast enough. It had no value to them. They paid them in French money. They would buy anything. I sold one pair of Floursheim shoes, that I had bought at Lustig's right there on Federal Street, for eighty bucks. Then my conscious bothered me. So I gave him an extra pair of shoelaces and a can of Kiwi polish. That saved my conscious.

V: The people that you met, you mentioned the one pilot that was well educated but overall did you feel they were?

W: No.

V: Compared to the Americans, no?

W: Not near as well educated. Most of them had either worked in factories, or were farm boys. They seemed to be mostly farm boys. This one particular one, is the only one that I remember. No, there was a German officer. He was the communications man and they used to send him in his own truck. He used to string wires and prepare phones, and all that sort of thing and that was what he had done in civilian life. He was an expert phone man and he used to work out of our depot and he would be gone for two and three days at a time. I think he just slept in the truck. They always gave him C-ration to take with him. In and out, in and out, he could have ran off and gone to Germany with that truck and no one would have stopped him. We had no trouble with him, he always came back, but he was doing what he liked to do. Now, for some reason he hated the Polish and the Jews. He would rant and rave about them. He hated them, how no good they were. I never could understand why.

V: Did he speak English?

W: He spoke English well, quite well. We got on to quite a few of them who knew some English. They used to tell us that they studied some English in school. This one kid had eight years of it. He spoke English quite well. He even had a slight English accent. We ran into one or two every once in awhile with a definite English accent. They had lived in Great Britain and were home in Germany on visits and got drafted into the German Army. They would have liked to have gotten back to Great Britain, but they didn't. Some of them lived in the United States and had gone home when the war started here. They were called to Germany and they were foolish enough to go.

V: How long did you work with that pilot?

W: We had him for about six or eight months. He went home ahead of us. A lot of our boys went home, a lot of boys

with points. They had been drafted among the first. We had draftees with nearly six years. They were kids who were supposed to get out. If the Japs had hit a week later these kids would have been out of the Army. They had been drafted for a year, did their year, and were to get mustered out and the Japs hit. One guy could have gotten out Saturday [December 6, 1941], but they told him to wait until Monday, because they didn't get his papers processed. On Saturday they do little or nothing. It used to be like here: You worked until noon on Saturday. So they just didn't get the papers processed. The Japs hit on Sunday and he returned back to duty on Monday. What was funny was, one of the boys that was staying . . . he gave him his travel iron and once he had to stay he tried to get it back and he wouldn't give it back to him. (Laughter) He said you gave it to me, so I'm going to keep it and he kept it and probably never forgot it. He did more woofing about that travel iron.

V: He was still in with you unit?

W: Somewhere along the line he volunteered to go to Alaska. We had a gang up there on the Alaskan highway. He decided he would make a lot of rank if he went up there. He went up there and he didn't make it. He went up as a PFC and I think he came back as a PFC. So I guess he got there too late.

V: After January you came home and it was just a matter of getting mustered out.

W: Yes. They brought us into New York Harbor.

V: Tell us a little bit about your trip back.

W: Well, it was awfully rough. We came back in January. Funny thing, I went over and came back on the same boat, which is very unusual. The boat had been the German Luxury Liner Empress Eugeni. In World War I it was in Boston Harbor when we declared war on Germany and interned the boat. They took it and turned it into an Army transport. It was renamed the U.S. Army Transport, George Washington. They used it during World War I to transport troops and then they put it in mothballs. When World War II broke out they took the engines out of it and put diesels in it and equipped it again to carry troops. They put it back in service carrying troops and I read in the paper several years later that that boat burned in Baltimore. It was in mothballs down around Baltimore and some how it caught fire and burned. It was unusual to go one way and back on the same boat.

The trip back was awful. As a matter of fact, I say it was January, and we started out and we got through the English Channel.

We passed a lot of smaller boats going back. We pulled in to New York Harbor about 6:00 or 7:00 on a Saturday night and they pulled us in around Hoboken. You could see the lights of the cities and the cars and all. It was eight below zero. We're standing out on the deck like fools looking. We stood out there and we were almost frozen. We just looked at those cars going up and down those causeways around the harbor, and the lights of the cities. Boy it was good to see New York. We got in there Saturday night and they didn't get us off the boat until about noon Sunday or 1:00. They marched us up and put us on trains and took us to this camp, Indian Town Gap. We went there on a Sunday night and they started processing us the next day. I don't think we got out of there until Thursday or Friday. When we left they were running Greyhound buses right into the camp. Anyhow, I got a bus out of there for Pittsburgh. There were about six or eight of us that came to Pittsburgh together. They were all from around Ohio, or somewhere, so on the way we decided that tonight there was going to be a big party in Pittsburgh and then we would catch the last bus home. We got in the Greyhound Station in Pittsburgh and found out that the next bus for Youngstown which was the last bus left in thirty minutes. So I had to drop out. The rest of them went. I never saw them again, none of them. A few of the boys I did soldier with I have seen once or twice, but most of them you never saw again. Some of the good friends that I made, I looked up. But it's funny, once they go back to the civilian life they get married and have families of their own and they aren't interested anymore.

V: They want to forget that time.

W: Yes, I guess.

V: Did your family know you were coming? Did you call them when you came back and let them know you were on the way?

W: I let them know I was in the States, and that was all. I marched in on them, I think, on a Friday night.

V: Tell us a little bit about that experience.

W: It was funny. The bus came up from Pittsburgh from the south of the city to Market Street. Of course, nobody knew Market Street better than I did. So I told the driver I was going to stop at my brother's house on Warren Avenue. He lived on Warren Avenue just off Market, up the street from South High School. I asked the driver if he would let me off at South High School. He said, "Sure, if you tell me where it is." I had thrown away most of my equipment when we were mustering out. I didn't take any of it home. I threw the duffle bag and all of it away. I only had a

very small bag with underwear and some socks in it. I got to South High School and I said, "Here it is, let me out." So he let me out and I walked up to my brother's and I thumped on the door. They came to the door and there I was. My sister-in-law proceeded to fix me some dinner, but they had already eaten. Then my brother got the bottle out and we had quite a time. Of course I had a job to go back to because, like I said, I was with Sheet & Tube. I think somebody was on strike, railroads or steelworkers or something, and there was little or no production. When I did get around to going to the office they told me they were laying off and would call me back in about a month, and they did. I wanted to loaf for awhile, I had money and I wasn't in any big hurry to go to work and back to the same old job, the same old department. I carried on from there and with so many of us coming back, it was like old home week. The boys were coming back in droves.

V: It didn't take long to get back into the old routine then?

W: No. That's all I have ever done is office work.

V: We talked about your experiences. I'm going to ask you now if you would like to take a couple of minutes to pause and reflect and give me some final comments about how you feel about that total experience?

W: Well, I would have hated to miss it, but it got to be long. I didn't expect to stay that long. The first two years I didn't mind it too much, but then it got boring. After all, when your in the service and you have a uniform on at all times you are going to have somebody telling you what to do and you get kind of sick of it. In civilian life you have so much freedom. Like I said, I would have hated to miss it. But I sure didn't want to stay as long as I did. I was glad to get home. I made up my mind once was enough. I'm never going back. When we were mustering out a lot of them wanted us to stay in the Reserves. I said, "No way! Not me." It's a good thing that I didn't or I would have been back in. But I didn't. I had had enough.

I was 31 when I went in and I was 35 when I came out. I was kind of too old to be in. I wanted to go; I was gung ho to go, patriotism and all that sort of thing. It used to hurt sometimes to see how much some of the people were making here around on the outside, especially when we were down in there around Washington, and Alexandria and those places. There was a torpedo plant down there somewhere where those fellows were making \$95, \$100, or \$105 a week, which in 1941 was a lot of money. It was fantastic money. We were making all of \$50 a month, less insurance and buying bonds, battery fund and all of that. They always insist on telling you how much they were making. You couldn't talk to one of them for two

minutes without them telling you how much they made. They liked to rub it in. A lot of them were even old enough to be drafted, and then they became draft exempt, because of the fact that they were working on these various jobs vital to the war.

V: Overall you consider it something . . .

W: It was an experience. I would have hated to have missed it. But once was enough. You can quote me as saying, "Once was enough!"

V: Alright, thank you Mr. Wallace.

END OF INTERVIEW