



## **David “Bud” Besser**

**World War II  
U.S. Army  
Europe**

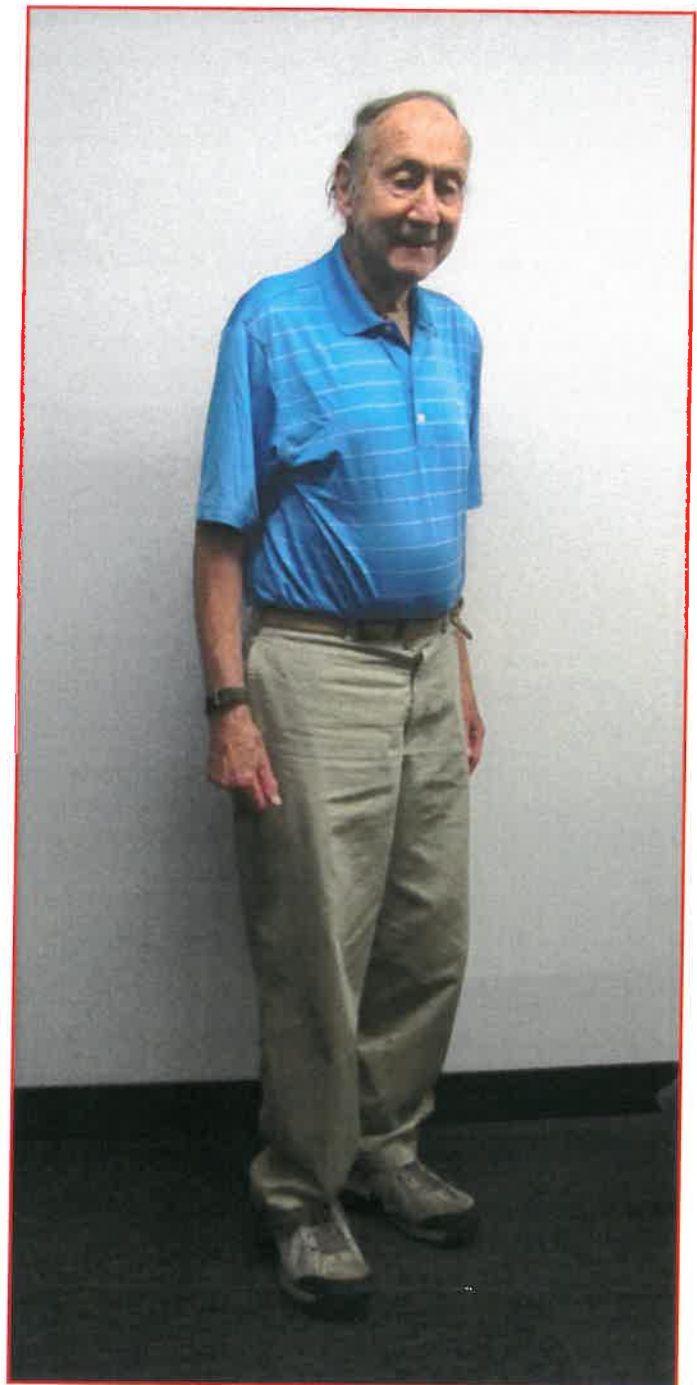
**341st Harbor Craft  
Infantry (Amphibious)  
Private First Class**

## **David Besser**

**Veterans  
History  
Project  
Transcript**

**Interview conducted  
September 14 and 21, 2016**

**Niles Public Library  
Niles Public Library District  
Niles, Illinois**



Niles-Maine District Library

Veterans History Project Transcript

Veteran:        **David “Bud” Besser**   Rank:    **Private First Class**

Branch of Service:   **U.S. Army**        Theater:   **World War II, Europe**

Unit:   **341<sup>st</sup> Harbor Craft, Infantry (Amphibian)**

Interview Date: September 14, 2016  
                         September 21, 2016

Place: Niles Public Library  
Library Lower Level Meeting Room

Equipment: Philips Digital Pocket Memo Recorder  
                 Canon Power Shot 400 Camcorder

Interviewer: Anonymous by request  
Transcribers: Neil O’Shea

*Thank you for coming in. (Interviewer’s words)*

Thank you; this is a rarity for me (Veteran’s words).

*This Veterans History Project interview is being conducted on September 14th, 2016 at the Niles Public Library. I am speaking with David “Bud” Besser. Mr. Besser was born on January 30, 1925 in Chicago and you now live in Glenview, Illinois and Mr. Besser learned of the Veteran’s History Project through, was it through Neil?*

Yes, through Neil, I had never heard about it.

*And he has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project and here is his story. And so Mr. Besser how would like to be addressed during the interview?*

Anything you want, “Bud, Hey you.”

*Starting with the questions here, when did you enter the service?*

May 20, 1943.

*Where were you living at the time?*

in Chicago, on the border of South Shore.

*What were you doing before; were you in high school?*

I graduated in January and entered the Army in May.

*Was that Hyde Park High School?*

Yes.

*Were you drafted or did you enlist?*

I was drafted. I went to a junior college during that period for about 10 weeks. Don't know if that is significant. I went to OC Wilson on the South Side. I was going in to the service in May and I graduated in January. But I didn't want to stay home so I went to Wilson Junior College for about three months.

*When did you graduate high school?*

I graduated in January, 1943. And I left junior college on May 1, 1943.

*That was in South Shore?*

No, that was in Englewood.

*And how long were you there?*

About 3 months.

*And then you were drafted? Did you go in the Army?*

Yes.

*Did you pick the service branch you joined?*

No, I was drafted. They wanted me to go into the Navy. The day I was drafted I think they had about a 80 % draft for the Navy, and I had a problem, I couldn't swim. I told them "no way." That's how I went into the Army.

*Where were you inducted?*

In Chicago really, Camp Grant was the first place we went to.

*How long did you spend there?*

Just a few days.

*What were your first few days like there?*

Nothing significant, I don't even remember.

*And where did you go from there?*

From there, I went to Pennsylvania, about 40 miles from Harrisburg.

*How long did you spend there?*

About 13 weeks.

And then I enlisted in the Air Corps. I was in the Air Cadet Program.

*Oh, really. And then those 13 weeks what was that like?*

It was just Basic Training. It was really a pretty good program. The old people in the outfit were about 24 years old. I was 18; most of us were 18. And the 24 year olds were running it. They were quite well-disciplined, and they were very good military people.

*Did you know the people when you went to...?*

No. I met two or three that I went to Camp Grant with.

*Then you enlisted in the Air Corps. How long was that for?*

About nine or ten months. Because it was near the end of the war, they eliminated just about all of us. I think there were about 120 in our outfit, and about 105 of us went back to the Army because it was near the end of the war. We only had about a year to go and they probably figured they didn't need any more pilots. They had enough.

*So that was nine or ten months, and where did you go from there?*

We went to Santa Ana, California, which is an air base. From Santa Ana we went to Monterrey for four weeks. And then we went to Carrabelle, Florida. It's about 60 miles south of Tallahassee. We were there for about three months. We trained with an amphibious group -an amphibious boat outfit.

*What were your duties as part of the Air Corps?*

I was training as an Air Cadet. We were learning to fly.

*Really, so you flew a plane?*

We flew briefly, not very long.

*What kinds of planes did you fly?*

They were Piper Cubs.

*I don't know much about Piper Cubs. What was the purpose of the flight and how many people could fit in the plane?*

It wasn't very mechanical. It was a very basic plane. It seated two people, one behind the other. The instructor sat in the front seat; I sat in the back -one cadet and one instructor to a plane.

*So when training was done, you had learned to fly.*

Our next step was to go to a primary plane. I forget what it is called. And then from a primary, you went to a secondary plane. And from there you went to the last plane for training. We went overseas in August, 1944.

*Did you fly then?*

No, when we went to Santa Ana, California, they eliminated most of us from the cadet program, and we just went back into the Army which we had been in before. We went overseas in the Army. We were stationed in England when we first went there. We were stationed in England for about four months. From England we went over by boat to the continent. We landed in Le Havre, France, close to Normandy. The invasion was June 6, 1944. We didn't get over there until about six months later.

*So then perhaps around August, 1944?*

Yes.

*Did you land on a beach?*

No, by that time, the advance troops went all the way to Paris. I don't remember the name of the outfits. I was in so many. We walked half way to the Rhine River, which is on the Belgian-German border. We were briefly in Patton's Army, and we went through Luxembourg on the way to Germany and we went to the Rhine River just before the end of the war. I was 19 years old, I think, at the time. The teenagers were sent back to Paris, France. We went back to France and retrained because we were heading for Japan. Because it was the end of the European War, they took the guys who hadn't been overseas too long and that included me because I had only been over eight months at the time; they were intending we go to Japan. At the time the United States dropped the two nuclear bombs. The war was over.

In Basic Training I did some bookkeeping training and instead of sending me to Japan I was sent to Berlin. I was among the first American troops in Berlin. It was sheer anarchy. We went there. It was the first time in six years they had ever been at peace and the Generals didn't know what to do.

Berlin was divided into four areas run by the British, the Russians, the French and the United States. And Germany was also divided into four sections.

After being in a while, I was thoroughly bored. They sent us out for reveille at six o'clock in the morning and that was the end of our day. There was nothing to do because they weren't organized very well. And I did it for about four weeks and decided I wanted to find something to do so I volunteered. I went up to General Clay's office. I was in his Public Relations Department and I was there only three or four months. And then I came back to the United States. In between I was in Berlin and I was in General Clay's office but I still was not very active so I volunteered to go to school and I went back to London for three or four weeks. And then I came back to Berlin again. I came home in February, 1946

*You traveled a lot and had a lot of experiences.*

Oh, yes.

*You mentioned to London, to get training in London*

It was a school of no consequence. It was supposed to be business training, civilian business training for our future. And I got there two weeks late because I decided I wanted to go to Paris instead of London. I had a friend of mine in Tempelhof Airport in Berlin I called him up and I said, "I don't have the right tickets. But can you get me on a plane to go to Paris?" He said, "Sure." And because by this time I had been overseas about a year. And we didn't get paid because we were on the move all the time. There was no point in it, we didn't have any money to use but we didn't need it. Finally, after a year we got paid for the whole year. So I had quite a bit of money in my pocket. I was 19 years old and I wanted to go to Paris where I had one heck of a good time.

*What did you do while you were there?*

Pursued girls.

What did I do there? Talking about jazz, there was a famous musician covered in a book I had back when I was about 17,18 years old. And I found out that he was in Paris at the time so I looked him up and I went up to his apartment to see him and I told him that I was a writer for a jazz magazine in the United States, which I wasn't. And he said, "Come in and watch what we're doing." And he was teaching piano, to about a half a dozen kids, jazz piano. This was just after the war. The European War was over August 8 and this might have been the end of the August when I was in France for the first time.

The second time when I went to Paris, I went up to see him he was teaching the kids piano and I was amazed. I went to quite a few night clubs that had jazz programs, including a couple of very famous jazz musicians whom I don't remember either. There was one that came from Belgium. He had a strange background, but he was a very famous guitar player. And if you ask jazz fans to this day, they talk about this musician, "Django" Reinhardt. So I went to see him and when I went in to the jazz club, it said "No GI's Allowed." They didn't want any American GIs there. There were a lot of problems in this club, fights and so forth. But I wanted to go see him. So I went in and I was told that the MPs came in and they came in everyday and they would pull you out if you were in there. Now this guitar player was playing with a small band of four members. And I went behind the band and sat in back of them. So if anyone came in, they wouldn't see me. And sure enough an MP came in, looked around and didn't see me and went back out and I stayed and heard the jazz program. I liked the music very much.

*It must have been a vibrant atmosphere, the end of the war...*

It was quite different. Some of the French were hostile to us. Many of the French had allied with the Germans. And the streets were free to wander around and I went to one club once and they were very hostile to me. They wouldn't talk to me. And I was in uniform. It was because the French, I think, were not too happy with the fact that the Americans were there. Now that doesn't apply to all the French but there was a large core who felt that way.

*And at that time, what did the city look like?*

Paris wasn't bombed. I think it was because, Hitler wanted to bomb it like he bombed other cities, but someone in the German High Staff said, "No." They have so many museums, so many outstanding things through history that "We are not going to bomb Paris." So they didn't with the result that Paris recovered civilian life quite rapidly although they didn't have a lot of food to eat.

*I was going to ask about that. I wondered if they had lines to get food.*

We had a military camp that I was in for a short time and we were eating outdoors. And as all the GIs would do we'd often throw out half our food in the garbage can. There was a line of French people waiting, so we left, so they could go in the garbage cans and get the food for their meals. You really felt sorry for them.

When I was in Berlin, and even though the Germans suffered probably worse than most people, the people that were in the upper classes probably didn't feel too badly when the war ended. I remember the subway was still in existence in Berlin and often while we were waiting for the train to come, you'd be standing in the subway and here would be a man wearing a beautiful coat with a velvet neckline and fur on it and all and a fur hat and he dressed like somebody who was quite substantial. He had a long stick with a nail on the end of it and what he did, he walked around the station, and I believe he would have been a wealthy man. When he saw cigarettes the American had thrown on the ground without finishing, there would still be tobacco inside the paper. He would stick it with the nail, stick in the cigarettes and open up the paper and throw the tobacco in a little package they acquired so they could get cigarettes to smoke –but that's the way it was.

*We learn to save what you can.*

That's right.

*Talking about Berlin, could you move among the four sections when it was divided up?*

No, but because I was a private and I went in the Public Relations Department and I was the only one who wasn't an officer. As a result, I had a really high position. I was a "go-fer" who would go from France to Russia to England, the Zones, to pick up papers for the officers in our organization and return.

*You said your job was essentially as a "go-for." Were you doing that that every day?*

No, I was in a public relations department and wrote home public relations releases about the soldiers who were in Berlin. If somebody was from Chicago, they would ask me to write a news release and then send it to the press in Chicago.

It was the first time I really did much writing. The first time I did any writing in the service, which wasn't very much, on the ship I was going overseas with. It was called the Mariposa, I believe, and it was a sister ship of a very famous ship, a civilian ship before World War II, the Mauritania. There were 5,000 of us who went over on the ship and we didn't have an escort because the ship could go faster than a submarine. The submarines were underwater so it slowed them down. They figured we didn't need an escort. There was a good chance we would be able to get across to Europe without getting hurt by submarines. And so we slept on the deck, all of us slept on the deck, there were 5,000 of us on the ship; it was a huge ship and the second day I was on the deck, there was a call that said that we were going to have a newsletter aboard the ship and anybody who has any background in news writing should come downstairs and you can be on the paper so I ran downstairs and they gave me one page to myself and I could write down anything I wanted.

*What did you write?*

About what goes on aboard, on deck, I wrote about a crap game. Most of the guys played it aboard ship. It was a silly thing for me to do but I didn't have anything else to write about.

*That's what happens, these things, the in-between stuff.*

So here I was again on the deck, again one of the lowest ranking men, most of the fellows were non-commissioned. They weren't officers. There were sergeants and corporals. My First Sergeant was probably the most important man in the company and he was aboard and he had to lie on the deck too for the seven days it took to go overseas. And after I worked on the paper for the day, they gave me a suite all by myself. I ate with the officers for seven days. I lived like a king. The First Sergeant was angry that I didn't have any rank and hadn't been in the service that long and here I was eating with the officers and living in a suite by myself while he was sleeping on board the deck for the whole seven days.

*Had you worked on a newspaper in high school?*

I had worked in junior college for a short time. I think I was sports editor of the paper for a very short time.

The first time I wrote for a small community paper. In the summertime they used to have a little newspaper which came out every week. And they asked me to write a teenage column. It was the first time I ever wrote for a paper. I was about 15 or 16 at the time. I wrote for the paper every week and that was my only newspaper background. I didn't write in high school. I played quite a few sports. And I really didn't have time for more than that.

*But you knew the stories, you knew when a story is a story, from talking to people, being in the midst of things.*

I was the sports editor. I used to watch the competitive swimming. I had never seen it before. And track, I covered track for the sports column and I covered basketball in junior college too, but it was not particularly significant.

*Right, but you're interacting with people.*

Right I just had three months of it. That was the first time I really wrote for a school paper.

*You talked about when they asked if anyone had experience, and then you did this one page. Do you still have a copy of what you wrote?*

I don't think so. The teenage paper, I think I do.

*In Berlin, you were writing these press releases. Did you cover a certain area? Were they about Chicago? Or was it just general?*

What "Joe Smith" was doing in Berlin at that time or if he had been in combat, then he wound up coming to Berlin. Many of the towns they were from were just small towns so everybody knew everybody else. It was interesting for them to find out what was going on.

*How were the press releases relayed to the hometown papers? How were they sent over?*

I don't know. I don't recall. We sent our releases to whomever was in charge. And I don't know how they sent them. They might have done by telephone or telegraph. I really don't know.

*How many of these press releases would you have written a day? I mean were people coming in?*



You'll have to forgive me as it has been 70 years. It might have been one a day. I did two or three or another day a half-dozen

*It sounds like whatever they needed done in the office you used your writing skills.*

Right.

*Had you meet your wife before you went into the service?*

No, after the war, I was only about 20, 21 when I went to the University of Illinois in Champaign.

*What did you major in?*

Some kind of division for War Veterans.

I just took classes. I could take any class that I wanted. In my freshman year I took a senior class and in my senior year I took a freshman class. I didn't have to have any prerequisites. The only thing I had to do was to accumulate hours. And to graduate I had to accumulate 128 hours. So when I started college I took tests and I got 18 hours not because I was smart but the reason was that they wanted to get us through school quickly. I went down to Illinois in 1946. There were 20,000 students down there and the year before the war started there was only 7,000 at Illinois so suddenly they had 13,000 more students down there. They didn't have dormitories for them. I slept in the ice rink for one semester because there was no place to sleep.

*Was it on a cot?*

in a four-bed deck. They had four different beds all through the ice rink and I slept down there.

*Was it less than four years then to complete?*

I was only there for about two and a half years, but I went to summer school for three years and I started with 34 hours. They had credited me some because I went to Gettysburg College during the war when I was in the cadet program. We were flying part-time.

*In Pennsylvania?*

In Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. And I was there for only one semester but I must have gotten credit for that because I wound up with 34 hours. I received about 30 hours the first year, so 34 then 64. I went to summer school for 18 hours. 64 and 18 was 82 hours, at the end of the first year, it was silly, really. They were really anxious to push us through because they couldn't handle 20,000 students, and what we had in those days was lecture halls with 200 students. That was all. We never met the professor who was lecturing and it's all we did. We had a discussion group maybe once a week. And they lectured twice a week. But we never met any of the faculty. At Gettysburg, we had a small school, 1500 students and at night time we'd go over to the professor's house so it was very social and scholastic. It was a very nice way to go to school.

*Yes, you've got a range of experiences there larger, smaller. So after your college, you graduated ...*

I went to college in 1943 and 1946 to 1949. I got married before I got out of school. I still had about 8 hours to go. I took quite a few advertising courses. I went around to the advertising agencies on south Michigan Avenue in Chicago. And every day I would go out and go in to see people that were running the agency. I was trying to get a job. And I did it about for 12 weeks. Finally, I got one job.

And I went down there. I have to be honest as to what happened. I went down there and when I was interviewed, I walked in and it was winter time and the man that interviewed me and hired me, was impressed with me. He said, "I've had 25 or 30 other people here, but you get the job." I couldn't understand it because I wasn't that impressive, but I went in and when I went in, instead of being intimidated by the interview I just took my coat and flung on the sofa and I didn't do it on purpose; I just did it but I didn't do it be a wise-guy; I just tossed it down. And that impressed him - the fact that I was not intimidated by him. So he said, "I'm hiring you over the other people. Come in Monday morning" so I came in on Monday morning, and he said, "Before we start I want to interview you a little more." So he said, "You were in the Army. You're how old? Were you in a fraternity down in school? What kind of social activities did you have? He said, "Are you Protestant or Catholic?" "I said, "I'm Jewish." So after a few more questions he said, "I've got to interview a few more people." He says, "Come back at one o'clock." And I came back at 1 o'clock and the girl said, "He's hired somebody else." And the reason for it was when he asked me "Are you Jewish?" -- that was the reason I didn't get the job -- after 14 or 15 weeks.

My wife's father had a store in Chicago and the first four or five years of our marriage I worked in the store. And I didn't like it one bit and that's when I started the newspaper.

*I wanted to talk about your work in starting the newspaper. But since you are Jewish, how was it being in the war in Europe? How much did you know?*

Only one time did I ever have a problem. It wasn't much of a problem. I never had any problem with anti-Semitism, but one day in the barracks, this guy started popping off. He said "The Jews run everything, absolutely everything." And I have heard this ten times and every Jewish person has heard it. So I was sitting a couple of beds away from him and I said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "I'm a private. I do the worst things that there are in this outfit. I do everything. When I go out to shoot a machine gun, I'm at the bottom of the rank. When we throw grenades, I'm at the very bottom of the rank. And I said "so I'm Jewish so what's the big deal whether you're Jewish or not?" And he says, "Well I'll ask you something?" I said, "What?" He said, "We have three enlisted men." The 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant I told you about before was the major man in the Army at that level. And he said, "What religion is the guy who's 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant? And I said, "Well, he's Jewish." And he says, "Right." And how about the guy who is the head of the PX?" --- which is where we got all our clothes and that was an important job in our outfit. He was Jewish too. And then there was another position. Oh, it was the food department and that was an important part of the department, feeding 300 men. "And he says, how about the guy that's in charge of that department. I said, "You're right, he was Jewish." He says "Then I'm right! Look at all the Jews that are running the outfit." And I just laughed because Jews are just a little more than one per-cent of the United States population so it wasn't very often that I even met anybody

who was Jewish.

*How much did you know, about ...? You went in 1943? You landed in France in 1944. How much did you know about concentration camps?*

Very little, very little and most of us didn't find out about them until later on. I was at the Rhine River when the war ended for me. They sent us younger people back about a month before the war ended. I might have heard about them but I never saw a camp. And I wasn't that far from either. I might have been 100 miles away.

Had I known about them, I hopefully would've volunteered to do something about it, at least go in there to help them out. But I really didn't hear much about them until I got back to Paris. We were camping out in Paris for about a month, a month and a half before we all went to Berlin and at the time, I don't think I heard anything about it until I got to Berlin.

*So going through the timeline here, it says "which outfit were you in in infantry". You wrote here "341st Harbor Craft"*

It was called a harbor craft outfit, and we were affiliated with an amphibious outfit, and the crazy thing about it is we were trying to make amphibious landings. When we got to France, the war had gone all the way to Paris. And all the amphibious work that went down to get to Normandy, it was two months later and by that time, the troops got as far as Paris. When we got to the Rhine River, there was a famous area called Remagen, Belgium, which is right on the Belgian-German border, and when the Americans crossed into Germany, they came to the Rhine River and the Remagen Bridge was over the river, and immediately, the Germans bombed the bridge, so we had a hard time getting across and when they couldn't get across it, they built a pontoon to get across the bridge, so we were able to get across the bridge. Now what I wanted to say was we still had this amphibious background, and we figured we were at the river and we would help get the troops across the river. Instead, they said "because the Navy had so much experience at Normandy, we are bringing the navy to the Rhine River and they're going to bring troops across." So here we were trained to do that and they never even let us do it, because we were young, and we were sent back to France and we never did any of the amphibious work and everybody was doing combat service, ten percent of them only; and we didn't see any real combat, but at the Rhine River, there was a machine-gun that went off, we really don't count that, but those things did happen occasionally.

*What was the scene as you were serving, and looking up at the land up there in France and what were you seeing from Normandy as you moved towards Paris?*

Nothing, Normandy was only probably 120 miles to Paris and Normandy was June 6 of 1944 and a lot of our troops landed in Paris in the beginning of August, so they were there on land the whole time and as far as we were concerned, we were behind the troops actually, the ones that went to Paris. We weren't first in Paris, but when the war was over, I was sent back to Paris to train again and I went into Paris on VE-Day, which was the day when they were celebrating VE-Day and the only thing I remember about it was in Paris, they had bonfires all over the city.

*Just on the streets?*

Yes.

*Wow.*

They were celebrating, big bonfires all over. I went in for that day and the other day I went in too. The French celebrate their freedom from the 1890's when Napoleon's brother I think was in charge of France in those days, and they fought for their democracy back in those days and they would celebrate it also in Paris for one day. I remember I went in on that day also, the same. It wasn't significant as far as the war went, but I always picture that.

*Sure, talking about VE-Day, you saw these bonfires. Were people around the bonfires? Were people throwing wood or just celebrating?*

I suppose so, they were drinking and they were just having a good time.

*Do you remember which neighborhood of Paris you might've been in or which area?*

No, I really don't.

*How did you get from Berlin to Paris, did you just take the train or did you fly?*

No, I think we went by truck.

*Oh, by truck*

I'll tell you something that was interesting, the day we went back was April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1945. What was significant about April 12<sup>th</sup> is that President Roosevelt died that day, and because he died that day, it had nothing to do with us coming back, but by coincidence, we were in trucks and they drove us back toward France and Belgium and France are right next to each other, so was Luxembourg right next to France. And then one day, we went by truck from the Rhine River in Germany to Belgium, crossed over into Luxembourg, and wound up in France. They were all close together, and what was interesting to me was here we went to Belgium who, well they were our allies of ours, and also Luxembourg too, they weren't allied until just about the end of the war, but they all had flags at half-mast for Roosevelt on the day he died. Everybody had their flags up. Unlike most presidents, there was a war, and Roosevelt was very significant in his position as far as the rest of the world.

*Did you listen to a lot of jazz?*

Yes, made me homesick too. In those days, Frank Sinatra was becoming popular, and I remember I heard him a lot of times singing, and that was the first time I really felt homesick.

*So you felt homesick? How did you communicate with your family back home?*

By what they called V-mail letters. There were letters that were censored and it was just a small letter then you sealed it, then when it went to the officers in your department, outfit, they would unseal them and read it first and if there was something they didn't like in it, they'd cross it out.

*So how did they cross it out? Did they "x" it out?*

They'd scratch it out. We might be angry at an officer or something, and we say "Captain so-and-so was a son of a gun," or stronger language, so when they heard that and they scratched it all out. They didn't want this to be known about the captain or anything else and they didn't even want the officers above them, the officer might have been the second lieutenant who would be censoring it, and the letter would go to some officer higher up and we might've said "the Germans were three miles away from us or three yards away from us", and they didn't want, especially during the war, they didn't want that to be known to the enemy that; what we were writing about was about them.

*I understand the reasons during wartime. Did you receive letters?*

Yes, we got regular letters from our families, and they censored the letters also.

*They censored the letters that you received?*

Both the letters we received and sent out. I can't quite give you an example of what they would have said. But again I suppose if a person, a civilian, said something nasty about the military or the army, then they scratched it off, and we were getting letters from other soldiers, around the world, friends that we knew. and they might have written something that they shouldn't have written about, they might have invaded some place over in the Pacific and had it scratched out.

*Did you get some letters from friends?*

Oh, sure.

*What were some of the places they were writing from or writing about?*

Let's see. I had a friend that was in the submarines and he wrote about submarines, and as I told you; I didn't like to go into the navy because I am not swimming. I went up to see him, he was in Washington one time and when I was at Gettysburg, it was only 50, 100 miles away and I went to see him one weekend and I ask him "What branch of the navy you are in", and he says "in the submarine branch" and I said to him "are you are out of your mind, why would you get into the submarine, it's horrible, it is so dangerous." And he says what branch are you in?" and I say "I'm in the Air Corps" and he says "Air Corps? He says "I wouldn't dare fly! "His journalism back home was terrific and he went to work for Walter Cronkite. He went to CBS and he proofread all the copy that went to Walter Cronkite and he said, as I said that, he was in submarines, and because I was afraid of the water, I thought it was awfully dangerous and I was willing to fly because I didn't see anything wrong with it and when Walter Cronkite came in from New York to Chicago he brought him along with him and my friend went in the train to come in, and Cronkite flew in. My friend refused to get on the plane.

*How did you meet him? Did you meet him through the army?*

When we were kids, I was ten-years old.

*So you were both in the news business and after the war, you get your Bachelor's degree and you work full time for your wife's father and then you decided to go into newspapers?*

I was in my wife's father's business for about five years, and it is the liquor business. And then I told my wife that I've got to do something else. And so, in our community, I lived in Niles at the time, and I noticed that the news we got was from other suburbs: Park Ridge, Skokie, Glenview, and Des Plaines, and all the papers from these other communities came to Niles, and they cover Niles too primarily for the advertising, and we weren't getting any news from any of these the papers about Niles, and you know what, there is an opportunity here, and I thought that if we could really work at covering the town, why people would react to the paper. So I named the paper "The Bugle," which was a corny name and the reason for it was because, before I started the paper, I went to the library, and I went through all the newspapers in America and read their names, and most papers' names at the time; "the Times", "the News" and so forth, and I thought, "That's awfully common, how can I name the paper something so people will recognize it right away?" so when I came across the name Bugle, I thought they would start laughing at it, I thought what a joke to have the name Bugle for your paper, and I decided maybe not. It might be significant enough for people out there to pay attention to it. So that's how I named it "The Bugle."

*So you founded the paper? Were you the publisher and editor?*

I was the publisher, I did everything. In the beginning, I would write the news during the daytime most of the time, and I would cover meetings mostly at nighttime; the village board, the park board, the zoning board, and three or four other boards were meeting at nighttime, so I'd cover them and then in the daytime I'd type out what I had written, and in the afternoon, I would get advertising.

*That's a lot of work.*

And then I hired my first employee and I bought one of the first computerized machines and she was able to type out on the machine, and subsequently would paste this copy down on paper. And we created a dark room and I worked the dark room and I shopped for negatives like this. And then what we did was we'd burn the negative on a metal plate, an aluminum plate and it was the beginning of offset printing

And that's how we started. From that I got a couple of girls to work in the office and as the paper got bigger, we started at eight-page tabloid but when we finished, we were about 40 pages.

*Is the paper still around?*

I sold it.

*So did you own the paper?*

I owned the paper, sold it to a fella who worked for the "Chicago Tribune;" he did a terrific job. He was the representative of the Tribune and anybody who wrote a comic in the Tribune paper or news column or an editorial, they sold them to papers all over the country and selling them all over the country this fellow was in charge to decide which papers they wanted to use, and I thought he had a terrific job and then he came to me and said, "I always wanted to own my papers, and he says "I married a girl who happens to own 90 acres of property just outside of

Chicago.” So he had money, and he said he wanted to buy a paper. So I told him I was interested in selling the paper, and he paid enough for me to get out. So we started out with one person, we wound up with about 15 people, we had as many as five classifieds salesmen and five display salesmen and the rest of the people worked in the office, and we had two bookkeepers, and we had a girl that did editorial work, and we would have a couple of news reporters that were just freelance and would just cover meetings for us, and that’s what we had; so from one person we went to about 15.

*That’s great. So when would be the years then you started reporting?*

I started in 1957 and we only had one employee until about 1963, then I had my first salesman and by 1970 we had three or four salesmen plus two classifieds girls that sold classified advertising, and that’s what we had up until the 1970’s and by the time we sold the paper, we wound up with 15-20 employees, we had a truck and a truck driver.

*How many subscribers did you have?*

We might’ve had, I don’t want to exaggerate, maybe about 500-1000 subscribers, but we distributed 9,000 papers and because the other papers had subscribers too, they delivered 300, 400, 500 papers and when the advertising people went out to sell advertising, space for their advertising, they said they had 100% coverage in the towns, which they didn’t have. The reason why we did well was because we told them we had a 100% coverage almost, and most of it was free, and we could never have gotten more than maybe 500-1000 subscribers and we worked at it for a while, so we saw that we weren’t getting very much and all our competition had 300-500 subscribers, that’s all the papers they had. When we sold advertising and I couldn’t get an advertiser, I would tell the advertiser, I said “Tell you what. I’ll be willing to give you a free ad in the paper if you run it in the paper and put a coupon in the paper such as “We sell eggs for 50 cents” for this one week, so put the coupon in the paper and also put the ad in all other papers and put the coupon in and he did. And the first time we did that, we did that with an appliance dealer, and he got 50 coupons from one of the papers, 75 from another, and 800 from us, and when he saw what the paper would pull with 800 coupons, we got the advertising, and we did that with a vegetable store in town, we did that with a grocery store downtown, and that’s how we got a lot of advertising.

*I know you had experience in junior college or in the war, on a ship? How did you learn the business side of journalism and the production side? How did you learn that? Did you tour other newspapers; did you talk to people?*

Yes, initially the Des Plaines paper printed our paper. We brought the plates to them and then the plates would go on a press and then we would print newspaper on the press, and I watched what he did. He had a printing press and he had everything, and I watched what he did for a few months, and bit-by-bit, I just learned more. I didn’t have much background at all in journalism, but I liked what I was doing very much.

I had the paper in the town, Niles, which had a man by the name of Stankowicz and there was a book written about a Stankowicz in 1900; he was a trustee. In 1957, when I started the paper, his

grandson Stankowicz was the mayor of the town, so the Stankowicz family was running the town from 1900 to 1957, that was about 57 years, and I realized and the fellas on the village board were all quite a bit older than me, none of them went to college, oh yes, one man did, he was a bright guy, and none of the others had any educational background, and I didn't like what I saw.

When the trustees had a village bid, say they were doing some sewer work in town, they had to get business from sewer people, and the lowest bid would get the job. What happened when I was first starting the paper, one of the trustees would bring in the bids, and that was okay, and open up the bids, and that was okay, and open up the whole bids at the meeting and the low bid would get it. One time when they were out to do sewer work they had a bid, and A, B, C, D, E, and F, all bid and F was the lowest bidder, and when they said "F will do the job for \$5,000". one of the Trustees raised his hand and said "I forgot to hand in this bid". And he handed in an open envelope bid, and naturally if they said the bid was \$5,000 and they read the bid, and who knows what it said on the paper, it might have been a blank piece of paper. And they said "This guy bid \$4,500," and they said, "He gets the bid then," so I realized what was going on, and then I realized also is that each one of the trustees had a relationship with some kind of company that was working in town and so accordingly they never got any money directly but who knows what they got.

My big thing in the paper was they had gambling in town, and gambling was illegal in most of the towns. I took a look at all of our village ordinances and so forth and it was illegal in our town to have it also. But meanwhile we had one-armed bandits, a gambling machine where you pull the handle. They had slot machines all over town; they had Cicero which was a major suburb of the Chicago Outfit. Cicero always had hoodlums in town and they had the most gambling of any town in the state of Illinois, but mostly in the Chicago area. There were only one or two towns that had any gambling at all. So I went to the police chief and I said "Police Chief," I said, "how can you have gambling when you have a law which states that no gambling is allowed" and he said "Don't talk to me, go talk to the mayor" So I said "Okay." So I went to talk to the mayor, it was Stankowicz, very nice guy, lovely guy, and I said "Frank, why is it we have gambling in this town?" and he says "Bud, I can't tell you about it, go to the police chief" and I say "I just went to the police chief" and he said "Well, go back to him". So that's the way they handled it.

So gambling was my big issue, for three years, there wasn't a week that went by that I didn't write about gambling. I said "If can they do so many things illegally so easily, what else do they do that's illegal?" and as a result of it, in 1961, there were four groups that ran for office, one was the Democrats from Niles Township, backing up one group, one from Maine Township had another group, and the Village of Niles was divided between Maine Township and Niles Township. So as a result, Democrats represented one group, the Democrats represented another one, a third group was represented by the Republicans in one of the townships, and the fourth group were a bunch of independents, had no political background, all college boys. We were all my age, about 31 years-old then or not much older than that. The week before that they ran for office, I endorsed them, and I was the only paper to endorse anybody; and I endorsed these four fellas, and one of the other groups were the incumbents, and they were Democrats, I believe, I am not sure. They were all running and because they have been in office for office for so many



years, they were absolutely sure they were going to be elected, and I endorsed all these new boys only. They had no political background, some of them were quite bright. The people that were running for office were for Mayor, that's Stankowicz, and he was rerunning for about the 10th time, there were three or four Trustees and there was the Village Clerk. The Village Clerk was one of the old timers, an old fella, and he was with the incumbents when he ran for office, but he was straight as an arrow. He was very conscientious, worked very hard, everybody thought he was a terrific candidate, so we endorsed him also, and we endorsed all the young people otherwise. So there were 21 people running for office, and every one of the people that we endorsed won, substantially, they didn't just win. The old part of town which had run the town for many years, they had been so sure of winning the election because they had been winning them for ten years. I stopped off at the police chief, who was involved in the gambling, that night, and he was very friendly to me, and he says "Well, we're counting votes at our end of town, and we're way ahead." And I said "Yes, I guess you are" and then I went to the newer part of town and the newer part of town had three quarters of the vote, and the newer people all voted for these young new people. So, we endorsed them and they got elected and it was very good for the newspaper because everybody noticed the endorsement and they won, and it helped us in advertising tremendously.

*I was going to ask you; newspapers, I know the industry has changed quite a bit, but during the war and after the war, newspapers, peoples' awareness of current events, the war had just ended so much had changed and was in the process of developing after the war; what was the environment at the time? Were people talking about the war constantly, of course, there must have been soldiers who had been injured or killed, were those who luckily maybe didn't see combat were able to make it home. Everyone had been affected from the war, so what were people talking about at the time around the time that you got out of the service and around the time you were leaning to starting the paper?*

That's a good question, quite honestly, I would be fibbing if I told you I knew, I worked, well, trying to get back to civilian life. There were some people; friends of ours who were killed. I played basketball on a high school team, we had ten fellows on the team, two of them were killed, and it was quite common. I went into service with a friend of mine at Camp Grant, and they drew a line between his name and my name, gave us a number, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten; and everybody from five to ten went to Texas and everybody from one to five went to Pennsylvania. I went to Pennsylvania; he went to Texas; eight months later he was killed. That's the way it works, and he went overseas. I was told, I'm not sure it is the truth, but the second day he went out, the guy was killed.

*Did you join any veterans organizations like the American Legion?*

American Legion was working for a bunch of sick people, and I didn't like the idea they were making money by having people join the American Legion with them. So I never joined any veterans organization, and there was one that was very good and I never joined it and I was sorry I never did.

*Which one was that?*

I cannot remember, American something or other.

(Part 1 ends)

*So, the second half of this interview is being conducted on September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016 at Niles Public Library. I am speaking with David "Bud" Besser, and I just wanted to continue from last week. (Interviewer's words)*

Okay, thank you. (Veteran's Words)

*I know you gave a really great overview of your experiences during the war, the last time we spoke. I was hoping to talk a bit, answer some of these other questions that are part of it.*

Okay.

*Could you tell me about your boot camp and training experience, being away from home, drill instructors, living conditions, lifestyle adjustments?*

Alright, my first camp was in Pennsylvania near Harrisburg, and forgive me; I can't remember the name of it, but I was there. I was 18 years old at the time and it was basic training which was for 13 weeks. It was quite severe because the name, the kind of company was called the Support Battalion and I can't recall exactly what it was. Their job was putting merchandise on and off the ships, and they worked on the cargo on the ships and it was an awful job. But what we did was we trained from the morning to late in the afternoon and then in the evening, we went down to a - we didn't have a real dock there in the middle of the country, but we went down to a ship, a ship they had in the middle of the country went down to the ship, taking boxes of cargo and putting them in the corner of the holds down below, and it was just to show you what kind of work you were going to do. Now this went on for 13 weeks and considering your basic training was seven or eight weeks and it was 13 weeks from 8:00 o'clock to 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon, and then you would have dinner and then go and do this training for another two or three hours.

*Oh really?*

As far as the training went, the training was exceedingly good. Our officer was a 23-year-old lieutenant who had been in a military school, and he was very, very good at what he did. We had a company which is 120 men and we had three other officers, the company was divided into three groups of forty men each, and each 40-group had one lieutenant to lead it. It was interesting because we were all quite young in those days, then maybe the officers were in their middle 20's, and we had one officer who, it was interesting, he was a very pleasant guy, and I remembered more, naturally, when I first got out, but I thought that the commanding officer, we all kinda griped a lot and moaned about him because he was so rough and so tough, and the officer we had was so gentle, we thought what a nice guy this gentle officer was. Three months later, when camp was over, and we moved on to another base, the officer that was the rough, tough guy; he was in the barracks every day, talking to us just joking around, and the really sweet guy never showed up, never saw him again. Never saw him during the time, and it was just interesting, an

observation of an 18-year-old that was under this military command for the first time. Now we were in Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. It was in the hills of Indiantown Gap and two or three times a week, we would go out in the mountains and just march in the mountains, which was quite a rough time, and we would go for maybe five hours, six hours. Sometimes we stayed overnight and we had small pup tents that we would put up, pup-tents could serve two people, and we would sleep in the pup-tents for the time that we were out away from camp.

*Sure*

Now Indiantown Gap, I don't remember much, the location was near Harrisburg, which is the capital of Pennsylvania, and we were only about 100 miles from Philadelphia and 100 miles from Washington. We were always looking forward to the weekend where we get away and maybe go to one of these towns, but what was interesting was for the first couple of weeks, we could not go because they thought we might have something contagious. And as a result we might catch something contagious so we were on our medical care for those first two weeks to make sure we wouldn't give anything to anybody, so we had to stay in camp. So the first week, we missed going outside and because it took the group of men, by the alphabet, my name is Besser, so we did kitchen police most of the weekend and because I was a B; the A, B, Cs were doing the kitchen police and then other men were doing other activities in the camp. So we looked forward to the second week, and only the army would have it by that time but alphabet letter "B" came up again, and while we did KP (Kitchen Police) every single day, by the time they came around Besser again, Besser was scheduled to do KP again on the next Sunday, and it was really disappointing, and it went on for two or three more weeks. We didn't get out of camp for about the first month.

A typical example of the camp, we had a corporal who had been in the old army, which was the army that had served before World War II. He was experienced in the military, and knew his way around, and was also a con man. He used to sleep in our barracks upstairs where we were sleeping. When we finally got a chance to go out for the weekend, just as we were about to leave, he said "Hold on fellas," he says "The money has been taken from my wallet and I've lost \$35 and you guys are not going out until you give me back the \$35".

*Oh no.*

Well, this is typical of the old army. It never did happen but he wanted to get \$35 and figured it was worth it for us to chip in. a dollar or two a-piece and he would get his \$35 and he let us go. We were infuriated and we knew that he was conniving or fooling around, and finally after an hour or so, he finally let us go out, and there was no theft, there was no money taken at all.

*So you basically kind of refused.*

Oh yes and this was the way it was.

*So, did you go to Philadelphia, did you go to Washington D.C.?*

I did, I used to hitch hike to Philadelphia. But it was very easy getting a lift because I was in a military uniform and people picked us up and take us.

*So, you basically hitch-hiked there? You stood on the side of the road and-*

Right. The same thing going to Washington.

*Do you remember some of the rides people picked you up in? The rides, talking with you, the people asking questions?*

No, it's interesting, though, but a good question. I remember one woman, she said "Where did you go to school?" and I said "Chicago," and she said "How far did you get in school" and I said "I was going to college", and she said "Well, I thought you did because I noticed by the way you speak". Yes, that really was a lot of baloney, but I was impressed by the fact that the woman knew I had gone on to school, and it is surprising I would remember this to tell you.

*Was she by herself when she told this to you?*

Yes, she picked me up just like everybody else did.

*Okay. So how often did you go? I know in the beginning you weren't really able to leave the camp in the beginning*

No, but after the first few weeks, we tried to get away as much as we could.

*When you got to Philly, would you stick together, would you meet up, or did you do your own thing?*

I don't remember. I would say for the most part; I was on my own.

*Did you have friends in Philly or D.C.?*

Yes, I came down from Camp Grant with a couple fellows that I had met there, we were quite friendly.

*What was the scene in the cities? Of course everyone knew the war was going on, can you describe?*

In Philadelphia, you go see the Liberty Bell, and there were some nightclubs they had that were quite famous, and you went down to the basement of the building, and that's where the club was. I remember a couple times in Philadelphia.

*You like jazz if I remember.*

That's right, you have good memory.

*Did you see some jazz clubs there?*

Not necessarily. I was just looking for entertainment, you know.

*Did they have soldiers protecting the landmarks at that time when you were there?*

I don't think so, not in the United States very much; though I had quite honestly about a year later, I was in Florida. I was in Tallahassee and I came up for the weekend, and I was walking

down the street, and all of a sudden, there were three soldiers coming the opposite direction and passing me by, and they were in German uniforms.

*Really?*

I started laughing and there were a couple MPs behind them. The MP said "What's so funny and why did you stop to tell us about these men?" and I said "Because it is kind of hokey here that there's 5,000 soldiers in Tallahassee today and there's three German soldiers walking down the street, with two MPs behind them." Obviously they didn't escape. They were prisoners of war and they were stationed down in Florida at the time

*Do you remember these guys, the condition of their uniforms or their physique or anything like that?*

No, they might have had prisoner of war uniforms, but I don't remember what they were. They were always testing people, testing us all through the war. They were just testing to see what our reaction would be; see these German soldiers walking down the street. Now there were some pretty bad things that went on down in the south. There were a lot of prisoners of war, a lot of Italians I think who were down south because the Italians came from a warm climate, and subsequently Florida has been warm, they sent them down to prisoner of war camps down there. Now what was interesting about it was - I didn't have the experience but I read about it, the American soldiers were segregated in those days. There were no integrated organizations at the time, and the soldiers that were African Americans, Black in those days as we called them, they would get on the bus like everybody else, and they made them go to the back of the bus. So even though they were in uniform, they made them go to the back of the bus just like they did in civilian life. Not only were the white soldiers in front of them, but if there were German prisoners of war that were on the bus, they, too, were in front of them, and that's the way it was in those days, and we were segregated in camp to our own barracks. There were only African Americans in their barracks and whites in our barracks and the integrating of the troops wasn't until after the war, and President Truman did it in 1946, 1947.

*So I know you were segregated and had a very controlled life there in the military, but were you able to talk to with any of the African American soldiers? Were you able to socialize at all?*

Oh, sure. There was no problem there. But when I was in Belgium, when I got overseas, a lot of these soldiers had seen combat, and most of them were not in combat, but they drove trucks and went down into the combat areas and many of them were killed during the war. When they came back home, they were treated just like what they had been before. There was a famous Air Force group that was the first African Americans to fly.

*The Tuskegee Airmen?*

The Tuskegee, I think in Alabama they were. They had the best record of any Air Force group in World War II, in bombings and in accidents and in being killed, I don't think one was killed. They were sent into combat many, many times when we were flying.

*Yes, it's really impressive.*

Let's see, in the basic camp, I really can't tell you much more about it. I had one fellow who came down with me from Camp Grant, and this was difficult. We were in the barracks together one time and I was teasing him and nailing him. He went after me, and put his hands around my throat, and he said "I never told you but I killed someone in civilian life." People you've never met before and they came from all different kind of groups.

*What happened to that?*

Nothing. He jumped on top of me and I pushed him off.

*That's actually one question; so many people you have never met before and you were all coming together and working together.*

Absolutely, I like, most 18 year-olds, didn't have much experience, because we met people from everywhere, Southerners, but as I said, we didn't meet anybody whose skin was of different color.

*You haven't talked very much about growing up on the south side of Chicago; you haven't talked too much about your family life. Do you have siblings?*

I had a sister, and my dad was in his late 40s at the time I went away. But in our family, my brother-in-law, my sister's husband was over in Europe for three years, and I had an uncle who's about 15 years older than me, and he went into the Pacific. We lived together in the same building, so we were quite close.

*Did your brother-in-law, your uncle, did they survive? Did they come back?*

Yes, fortunately none of us were hurt.

*Did you keep in touch with some of the people you met?*

Yes, but we had what was called V-Mail, and it was an envelope which opens up and you would write in it on the inside and then you would fold it and close it. But the censors would have to read it before they would send it out, so if you wrote about something that was secretive, they would scratch it out. You might've said something about the officers, that you didn't like and they would scratch it out, and same thing with the mail that came in. The letters that came in were also censored before we got them.

*Did you keep in touch after you got out of the service? Did you keep in touch with some of the men that you met?*

One of the fellas I came back; I was out in California, I was out with him a couple of times, that was about it. No, there was nobody I retained a relationship with.

*Sure, I know you talked about, towards the end of the last interview, about joining a veterans organization, there was one you chose not to be a part of.*

I had an uncle who was a professional joiner, I think. He was in WWI and he belonged to the American Legion. He was very active in the legion, so I used to joke and say when we got off the boat, as we jumped off the boat, the American Legion was there waiting for you right off the

boat! He tried to get me to join and I wouldn't do it, and I didn't join any group. There was a Jewish war veterans, a Catholic war veterans, Protestant war veterans, and I didn't like that idea because we weren't segregated in the army that way. So I didn't see why we should do it in the civilian life either.

*Let me go through some of the other questions here, you talked about V-Mail and I asked you about communicating with other soldiers that you had met, were your parents sending you letters?*

Sure, a lot of people who I grew up with too.

*Do you still have some of those letters?*

No, I don't think so.

*When you were first drafted, I know there was the context of the war, from what you were hearing other people say and reading in the newspapers, hearing on the radio. Did you feel some pressure or stress? I know there was an expectation, a requirement you were drafted, but what was it like knowing, you most likely heard of other people being killed there were people getting killed. Do you remember how you felt at the time? You most likely heard of other people being killed.*

After 13 weeks, I went to the Air Cadets in the Air Cadet program, and we lived in a dormitory at Gettysburg College, and I remember one time, one of the fellas was crying, and I asked "What was his problem?" and he said "He just found that his brother was missing in World War II." I am sure those things happen once in a while, but there was no particular pressure that I recall.

But again, this was the way the war was. I grew up with a fella named Bobby Fellman, and we were in grammar school and high school together, and we went in the army the same day, and we were at camp which was just outside Chicago on the North Side. While we were there, we lined up to get our Army serial number, and the end of my number was 94 and his number was 97. What they did then was they drew a line between our names. I went to Pennsylvania, and Bobby went to Texas. He went in the 36<sup>th</sup> Texas Division and we went in on May 20<sup>th</sup>, and I got a letter in January from one of my friends that said he was killed in action. His entire outfit was washed out, was eliminated.

They had a terrible war in Italy at the time, and at the time the Americans were invading Anzio Beach in Italy. They were coming off the water and Anzio was right alongside, might have been the Mediterranean; because of that, General Mark Clark who was the head of the troops in Italy was leading the 36<sup>th</sup> Division, which my friend was in, and they were coming down the middle of Italy. What General Clark wanted them to do was to continue to come down Italy, closer to Anzio beach to pull some of the German soldiers off of the beach so they couldn't fight against the boys that were coming off the water, so they came into the middle of Italy where the 36<sup>th</sup> Division was, and the Germans were up on a hill, just waiting for the Americans to come over the bridge one time, and they were at the Rapido River and my friend along with everybody in the regiment, which I am talking about maybe 5,000 soldiers were, as far as I know, eliminated when they crossed the river because the Germans were just waiting for them and they completely

wiped out the outfit, and my friend was one of them. I've read about it several times. It must've been anarchy because the soldiers were going over the water, they were just going over a small river or lake, and as they were going over, the Germans were just waiting for them, picking them off in the little rowboats that were going across. The boats had bullet holes in them and boats kept on coming across and picking up the soldiers that had to go across the water; and they did it over and over and over again and finally some of the soldiers realized that they weren't coming back and they refused to cross. As a result, the terrible anarchy, because here they were in a war it was nighttime, and they were trying to get them into the boats to cross, and the boys wouldn't go. The reason they didn't go was because they were told the guys on other side were killed. Those things happened throughout the war and it's horrible. The reason I tell you about my friend is because he was 97 and I was 94. 94 went to Pennsylvania, 97 went to Texas, and because they were all eliminated, I was lucky that I wasn't one of them. I suppose if I was standing where he was, and he was standing where I was, and that happened more than once.

*I'm sorry about your friend, you know that-*

Well, it was shocking, you know and we met lots of people when we were kids, and I never met anybody from Chicago while I was there until right after the war, I went back to London, and while I was there, I met one of the fellows that I grew up with. At 5:00 am at a square in London. Have you heard of Trafalgar?

*Sure.*

You heard of Trafalgar.

*Did you run into him by accident?*

I ran into him, and five minutes later, we ran into another one.

*Really.*

Yes really, he had only been in the Army for 18 months.

*Do you remember when was this?*

Well, it would be in 1945; right after the war. The war in Europe ended in April or May of 1945 and the war ended in August of 1945 when the nuclear bombs were dropped on Japan.

*Was this in- I know you went to London for training school.*

Yes. I was in France and what we were in training for was they were training us to go to Japan. We were at the Rhine River on April 12<sup>th</sup> of 1945, we were in the Rhine River, right by the Rhine River, waiting to cross it, and we did cross it. They knocked the bridge out at Remagen in Belgium I think it was and they built a pontoon bridge to replace it and we went across it on the pontoon bridge, and really was the first time I was in action except a machine gun went off over there. So I supposed this is what action was all about. We really hadn't seen much.

*How close was it do you mean?*

Maybe 100 yards.



*And that was from the*

Yes. But then what we did was we came back from the Rhine River, and they took the 18 and 19 year-olds out of the action at the Rhine River and returned us to France, right near Paris where there were camps just giving you basic training again and they were going to send us to Japan. Because they figured we were gonna invade Japan, and if there is an invasion of Japan, like there was in Europe, they said there could be a million boys that are going to be killed here because it was a difficult job of invading Japan because American soldiers had to cross the ocean, maybe 100 miles before they got to Japan from the nearest base they were at, opposed to Europe; we were only 40 miles from France, so it was very easy to cross from England to France. But because they had anticipated, a tremendous number of people that were going to be injured or killed. They were preparing us to go to Japan.

*Do you remember how long you took to redo the main training?*

Well, I was there about in May and I was there until September, then I went up to Berlin.

*Okay, so it was until September of 1945, so then to Berlin.*

What was interesting about it was the reason I remember April 12<sup>th</sup> is because Franklin Roosevelt died on April 12<sup>th</sup> and we got on the trucks to go back to France. And in one day, we drove because they were all close together; we drove through Belgium, Luxemburg and got into France all that same day, April 12<sup>th</sup>. What interested me was the fact that there were flags at half-mast for Roosevelt in all those foreign countries.

*That is impressive.*

And I was very, very impressed about that. But Roosevelt was really more than just the President of the United States.

*You talked about getting a radio and I know.*

Oh, it just... When I went up to Berlin, we took over the Germans', the SS troopers had individual homes that they stayed in when they were in Berlin. When we got to Berlin, the war was over, but when we got there, we were put in these homes. Here I was just a private and I was living in a three-bedroom home.

*Was it just you?*

There were three of us, two of the fellas went home after we got there and I was by myself.

*Do you remember what the town was like? You said it was a three-bedroom home. Was it part of the American section of-?*

Yes, there was barbed wire around the section, it was four, five, more than that; maybe a mile square.

*Would you take a truck to and from the home to the office?*

No, on the base there would be several armed buildings. And I wound up, it was strange. We used to wake up at 6:00 o'clock in the morning when we got there and at 6:30, my day was over. It was crazy, and so the fellow who was the first sergeant and I would leave about 9, 10 o'clock and we'd go around town and there were a few restaurants in Berlin that were still alive so we would go and get breakfast or something, and this 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant, he was a rather shy man. We were walking down the street and what you would do over in Europe you wouldn't do in the United States, but I saw this German girl across the street, and I says, "Fräulein, Kommen Sie here" so she crossed the street and I says "Fräulein" I said, "I'd like you to meet my friend Sergeant Jones, Sergeant, this is, what's your name" "Fräulein Smith?" with a smile", and I say "Sergeant Jones, this is Fräulein Smith" a little while later, he was about ten years older than me and he went home before I did, and after he left, I hadn't seen him anymore, and I didn't even think about it anymore and I went to Champaign to go to school at Illinois, and I'm walking down the street one day and who should be walking down the street but the Sergeant, and there were quite a few soldiers that were older and going to school, he was about 30, 35 years old, so he says "We gotta have you over for dinner", and I say "We? Are you married?" and he says "Yes", and I says "Well, I'd be glad to come" and he said "Do you know who I married?" and I say "No", he said "that Fräulein you introduced me to".

*You're kidding, so you're a matchmaker. Yes, that's great.*

Yes, isn't that a funny story (laughing).

*So they had never met before? You just saw he thought she seemed attractive and you ...*

A lot of German girls and a lot of European girls that wanted to come to the United States. They would marry anybody just to come over to the United States.

*Are they still married? Are they still together?*

It was in 1946. When we were overseas, we were quite different than in the states. In the states, it was much more militarized and over there, just about anything went.

*I had asked you about the three-bedroom home you were living in. The section of Berlin, the American section, and I asked how you got from your home where you living to get to the office.*

What I did anyway was when I was in Berlin, and we didn't do anything after going into the town for about a couple weeks like that, I was just bored. A military term that I have always given to the various people I met during the years and members of my family, I say "Never volunteer, ever". But I thought, to heck with it, I am going to volunteer and try to get myself a job because I can't sit around all day long like this. So I went up to Berlin where the head of the troops in all of Europe, like where Eisenhower was before the war ended. General Lucius Clay was in this building and I went up to his office. He was head of all of the American troops in Europe. I told him about my background, and "I can write fairly, quite well and I'd maybe like to get into the public relations department" and they said "Sure" and they put me in right away and I think I might've told you last week and we wrote news releases for soldiers in who were in Berlin and sent them to their home newspapers. In my case, I had a very important job. Everybody in the public relations department was an officer except me, and I was a private or, a

PFC ([Private First Class) and if I lost my PFC if I did something wrong and then I'd get it back six months later. But when I was in Berlin, they gave me a very important job. They said take these messages. Berlin was divided into four sections and maybe I didn't tell you the story.

*That's okay.*

But anyways, they said go get an automobile and get a chauffeur and go down into the English part, or the Russian part or the French part of Berlin with this package of papers, so I says "Okay, thank you", so I got in a car, and at the time, it was the General's car and on the side of the General's car was a big star. So here I am, the private sitting in the back seat and a chauffeur, a German civilian is driving and he'd drive me in his truck, and as I went out of the base where the offices were, all the soldiers would come to attention because my car had a big star on it. So I would open up the one door as we go by and they probably thought "Who the hell is this guy in the back of the car?" And I thought it was so funny, they probably thought I was just plain stupid. But I did it many times in one place, the Russians, and it was a lot better than just sitting around.

*When you were interacting with military personnel from these other sections, what was it like?*

I quite honestly don't remember that it was anything special. We had, seems to me, and there were so many stories from the war I am not sure that it happened to me, but we went over the river that I was telling you about and after going another 25, 30 miles, we bumped into the Russians coming the other way. And what the Russians used to do, they'd see a watch on your hand and they said "Chouls, chouls". Chouls meant jewels and they wanted to see the inside of the watch and if they found any kind of a jewel inside, or a colored stone, they wanted to buy it. So the American soldiers were going over with three or four watches and the Russians hadn't gotten paid for five years probably, they finally had some money. So they were buying watches all the time and that's how we got to talking to them anyway, they couldn't speak too much English, good enough to get by.

*Were there interpreters? Did you interact?*

I'm sure, I don't recall and I don't remember.

*Speaking of making money off of items that were bought and sold, you talked about the cigarette cases. The cigarettes, the cartons of cigarettes that you'd buy. What else do you remember of the Black Market that was going on at the time?*

I was interested in the cigarettes because I made a lot of money doing it. I imagine it was a lot of different things. They'd sell anything at all. You know what was interesting about it was the Germans, as badly as the other troops from the other countries got, many, many casualties, I think America lost over 400,000 people. It was some huge figure like for those killed in World War II, 400,000; that sounds like an awful lot. But we had 15 million people in service and out of the 15 million; I guess 400,000 it might have been. 400,000 soldiers were killed. And this happened to the United States. There were millions of Germans that were killed because they were Germans. They were fighting the British and the French and the Americans, and they're doing the same thing down in Italy, and we were in France. In fact, I think the Germans probably

lost a generation at that time because they were selling everything they had. Those who came back and those who were even civilians, they would be selling everything. They were hungry, they couldn't get food, when we were in one of the camps in France even, we would eat outdoors buffet style and bringing our canteens around and our trays and they put the food in it and then as only Americans would do, we wasted half of it, throw it in the garbage can, and there would be dozens of Frenchmen waiting for us to throw it in the garbage can and then they would run over to the garbage can and take it out. The same thing with the Germans, it was just as bad for them, I had no sympathy for them, but it still was terrible.

*Talking about malnutrition, I know after the war, it took quite some time.*

I remember the Germans that lived well through the war and I remember there used to be Germans, they would have beautiful old overcoats with velvet necks or fur around the necks and dressed just beautifully, and here they were in the black market, selling their personal belongings.

*You were talking about the SS soldiers had taken over these homes in Berlin and then you moved into one of those homes. Could you talk about the condition of that home, or were there other homes that you might have gone into. Were they in good shape?*

Yes, they were. They were in excellent shape. We had a woman come in every day and clean the place, and we were really treated quite well. But that is because we were in Berlin and that was really the headquarters for all of Europe at the time right after the war. So we were treated quite well.

*Was that considered part of the base the home that you were in, or did they have to build the housing to establish the base?*

It would be like downtown or right near downtown with some large buildings and offices, there were dozens of offices. Soldiers would be funneling from all over the country, and all over Europe as a matter of fact, asking questions and so forth and what they should do. So but as far as the houses went, it was maybe a mile square and down the block, a couple blocks, were these buildings that are maybe three, four stories high and there were all offices in them.

*You talked about some of the money you made from selling cigarettes; you'd go out to eat some nice meals.*

Yes. \$100 per meal because I couldn't get the money home and what they said to me was the only money you can get home was the money you have paid while you were in Europe. So we had gotten paid before the time the war was over. So as a result, we went overseas for 16 months, got paid x amount of dollars, so 16 times x is how much money we got paid. But they only allow us to take that much home and I think I sent home about \$2,000. And there would be officers that wouldn't be selling the cigarettes but when they heard that you had money, they said "If you give me so much money, I'll make sure that you can send more than that home." I was too proud to give them money in order for them to do that and I was foolish because I grossed about \$10,000 and I sent home two, so \$8,000 I just wasted.

*You told me that when you came home, you used some of that money to support yourself while you were in college finishing your degree.*

It took me to college, but I had the GI bill too. They paid me \$65 a month for board and room and then I had this \$2,000 that I kept all the way through service until I got through school.

*Did you keep that money with you at all times?*

Mmm, I don't know. Maybe, I would think that I know one time that I got \$400 for something and we were in basic training in France as I said. The officer in charge, our Captain, poor guy, he had a terrible time, he couldn't hear because he was in areas that were bombed, that had taken so much ammunition, that were bombed to near, as a result, he couldn't hear and when we would stand at attention at 5 o'clock, with all the other troops around. After reveille, we would still be standing at attention or holding our guns up like this there because he couldn't hear the trumpet that was blowing at the time until one of us would tell him.

He told us when we first got to camp, he says "There are soldiers coming in and out of this camp every day and let me tell you ahead of time, if you should lose anything, if you lose anything at all, don't come to me and start crying," he says "I'm warning you ahead of time." Well we went out for basic training those days, we were doing it over again. We were going out in the field and I remember I had \$400 that I had put in the bottom of my barracks bag. When we got back from training, we go back into the barracks. There was my barracks bag, upside-down, and everybody else's barrack bags were upside-down and somebody snuck around and stole whatever was there. So I went over to the Captain and I thought "to hell with it" I am going to let him know what he did and I said "You did something terrible" I said, "You gave these guys an opportunity to do this because if you said for us not to come to you, and they got the money, nobody is going to do anything about it. So I went over and told him. I thought here was this Private talking to a Captain like this but he came out and he apologized. That was surprising.

*But I mean, you are right. If no one's going to be held accountable.*

Except you weren't supposed to do this to an officer, no matter what they did, tell them they screwed up.

*It was a hectic time, obviously. A lot going on. You probably weren't the only one.*

Oh yes. There were dozens of us, in fact we all did it. You had nowhere to put the money so you couldn't put it in your pockets because you would be running around, going in barbed wire, and so forth and the money falls out.

*A question I always had was these uniforms, and I know you had different uniforms. If you're in basic training, it's going to be a different uniform. Did you have pockets? Buttons?*

Big pockets.

*But did they have buttons or could you close the pockets?*

We would close them for running around in the mud and so forth. They weren't clothes you wore when you went out. They might dress as you did, but the bars on their shoulders' stars, if they

were you know a general, colonels even. The officers and the men, though, they pretty much dressed alike them in the war.

*But for places where they could put a letter, or something of value to them.*

I don't remember that at all. Good question.

*When you were off duty, I know you talked a lot about you went to London, you were in Paris, were there any USO shows?*

In the States there was a USO show, and there was a famous movie star named Orson Welles, and he was there and a woman, I think was his wife. I think Rita Hayworth her name was, they were very famous movie stars and I saw them at the USO, Los Angeles. Overseas, I don't think I saw it, but there were a lot of people overseas. Now Frank Sinatra was very popular in those days. He was a very likable guy and he was also a very nasty guy, and for some reason or another, he was angry at the Army and wouldn't go overseas and he was a civilian, and he went to the Army and they wanted him to go overseas and sing for the troops, and he refused to go because he was angry at something or other. But we had lots of people who were overseas. There was a woman who was a German back in the 1920's and she came over to the United States and became a famous movie star. She was one, I was at some kind of show, entertainment medium that she was there and I don't know if she sang or not but she was the main feature in the show. If I told you the name, you probably wouldn't know her but your family probably would. Very famous woman, but I couldn't quite remember what her name was-

*Marlene Dietrich?*

Very good.

*You listened to the radio, you loved jazz.*

Yes.

*What was on the radio at the time you were in Europe?*

Well, during the war, there were a lot of comedians that were on. There was no television, so people like Bob Hope and Bing Crosby, who was a singer. A lot of comedians that were on in those days. I don't know if the names mean anything to you. There was a man named Edward Wynn and Eddie Cantor. In the 1930's and 1940's, there were big bands, big 20-piece bands, orchestras that were in the United States and then they created big bands overseas for a lot of these fellows that went in service. One of the most famous orchestra leaders was a man named Glenn Miller. I was a Glenn Miller fan and I found out they were in Paris and I went into Paris and I was with the band while I went to one place, and then they jumped on a bus to go somewhere else and I jumped on the bus with him and went to another base.

*You were with the Glenn Miller band? Really?*

Just going around with them. I was just crazy about them.

*Did you talk to him?*

I don't remember doing that. But what happened to him, was, this was in England at the time and he went on a small plane, his band went over to France, and he was going over there, he got lost, and you never heard from him again.

*Oh, I didn't know that. Wow.*

*Can you describe the day your service ended? Do you remember that?*

The day our service ended, the day I came home you mean?

Yes.

*Your particular service ended, I know you talked about VE-Day in Paris, what was it like.*

We went home from Germany, I can't remember the name of the town up in Northern Germany, we went home from there.

*Did you fly home?*

No, we took a ship home and it was February, a terrible time. Everybody on the ship was sick at one time or another because the ship was bouncing all over.

*It was February, 1946*

Before I went home, I thought I'd been to Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, but I've never been to New York, the one city I have never been to. I had been to London, Paris, Berlin, but never New York, so I decided "Gee I'd like to go to New York for a couple of days" so I went in to the Sergeant who was this clerk in the company and I told him "Sergeant, my family's moving to New York, so I'd like a discharge at New York," so he says "Okay, they put it down", so when I took the boat home, they saw where I lived; they shipped me out to Fort Dix in New Jersey because I lived in New York. So my family was still in Chicago, but I was told that since my family wasn't in New York, then I told them "There must have been a mistake," I say "My family's always been in Chicago," Well", he says, "Looks like we have to give you a per diem," they had to pay us by the day. So I said, "It will be about a week. He says "We'll pay you so much per day."

*To stay in New York?*

Yes. So I went back to Fort Dix at night time but then I was paid so much per day that I made a few hundred dollars doing that. There were two musicians, a Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. Ever hear of either them?

*Yes, I've heard of them*

Dizzy Gillespie created some new kind of music called Bebop and I never liked it but I still wanted to hear about it and he and Charlie Parker, he was a saxophone player who happened to be in New York while I was there. So I went down to 52<sup>nd</sup> street where all the jazz places were and I went down to see Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, and while I was in New York, I called my folks up and my dad said "Your Mother's birthday is a couple of days from now. Can you come home?" and I says "Absolutely, I'll come home!" so I left after a couple of days but

they paid me for going home to Chicago and I was laughing that I was able to do something like that. I was able to do something like that because while I was in New York, I saw a musical called *Oklahoma*; that was the first Rogers and Hammerstein musical. I saw a play, a very famous play, and I went to about three or four other jazz places and I saw some jazz artists as well while I was there in New York.

*Sounds like you had a fantastic time. How long did it take you from the boat when you were in Germany to*

About seven days.

*Some of the stories, did you do a newsletter on the way back?*

No, that was going.

*What was it like coming back?*

Coming back, nothing special. People were just sick because it was February, and it was a small ship.

*I'd imagine, was the water pretty choppy?*

Oh, it was terrible and just about everybody got sick. I remember I was goofing around once and they put me in KP.

*That's kitchen police?*

Yes, and I went in and I could smell the chickens and because the ship was bouncing back and forth, I suddenly felt very funny and just I got out of the kitchen and I said "I can't take this" and I went back out and I went out to the outside of the ship, and that was the closest I got to being sick but everybody else on the ship was, just terrible how they were.

*I bet. It takes a while to get your sea legs.*

Oh, yes, it was just terrible.

*Did you just have a bag of your clothes?*

A barracks bag, it was a canvas bag and you just threw everything in it.

*How big was that?*

It would stand this high, you could stand it on its bottom. This much around..

*And you would just lug it over your shoulder?*

Yes.

All soldiers were allowed to have one canvas bag or were you allowed to have more than one?

That's all you had, just one.

*I wasn't sure, because you talked about how you had purchased a radio.*



I left it there. I didn't take it home

*So you went back to New York and got back to Chicago in time for your Mom's birthday?*

Yes.

*How was that seeing your parents in quite some time?*

About a year and half.

*How was that?*

It was wonderful. They were waiting for me on 63<sup>rd</sup> Street, the Elevated had a station there and the Illinois Central train came in to that elevated station and my brother-in-law who got out before me because he went in before me, my sister, my dad, and my mom were there, and they took me to a local restaurant for a bite to eat. While I was there, there was a couple of fellas I grew up with, and one of the fellas came over to say hello to me and he was limping badly and he almost got his leg knocked off. This is the way it was, people were injured, hurt and so forth, this fellow became an accountant, was a very successful businessman, went to Northwestern, but at the time that I saw him, he was beat up pretty badly. He stepped on a mine.

*So a pretty bittersweet homecoming then?*

Well, yes. I was so excited to be at home; it was just terrific.

*Was it difficult to adjust then?*

Yes, I think so. I always had a lot of people around me in the Army and so forth, but even in the Army, in December before I came home, I was kind of lonely. I was listening to this music that I heard all the time at home. I felt lonely. I felt it was time to go home. Then, when I got home, some of our friends had come home, some had not come home yet and I really didn't know a lot of people when I first got home. The boys and girls I grew up with, they just weren't around at that time and the girls. I was 18 when we went in, by the time I was 21, the girls were about 21 in our class, and that's the time they got married and a lot of the girls, which surprised me, they were engaged, they were married, and I suppose even some of the fellows were. Most of them hadn't that came back from service, they were just. A lot of the girls married a lot of the boys that first came back and the girls, you know, my sister was 22, and she would have had a chance to get married had she not got married during the war and then she wouldn't be married until she was 25 or 26. So for the girls it was pretty tough.

*But yes, at that distance overseas, letters were so important, not knowing really what was happening.*

Absolutely, And initially when you first start writing letters, I would write maybe 20, 25 letters. Sounds crazy but you would do it and gradually they would dwindle. You would get an answer from some of them and you wouldn't get an answer from others. So the next time I wrote 15, next time maybe I wrote eight and then I got down to three or four, and that was just about what I would write. But you wrote your family also and I had a fairly large family.

One of my aunts, I remember, around Christmastime sent me a Christmas pudding and at the time I was in the Air Cadet program, living in the dormitory, and we had breakfast in the morning we used to have bottles of cream on the table. My Aunt sent me this Christmas pudding and I said "Gee, you cannot eat pudding without getting some cream." So when there was nobody around I went into the kitchen, and I opened up the refrigerator and there were all these bowls of cream. I put them in a bowl and I took them all over and the following morning everybody had to drink their coffee black, and we had cream for our Christmas pudding. (Both burst into laughter).

*That's something that needed to be done*

*If your parents wrote you letters, I'm sure they were very concerned, especially when you said there were sections that were basically blacked out in letters, so that might have caused more worry.*

Oh yes. People seem to it adjust to it pretty well. You know, they would adjust to it pretty well because just about everybody was going there. There are very few people whose family didn't send somebody into service. I knew very few fellas that didn't go in service. Very, very few.

*Did you talk? I know you didn't join any veterans '-*

Oh yes. The reason I didn't join is because what I understood is the wealthy people were taking over these outfits and the American Legion, which was the biggest one of them all, the people who were making an awful lot of money after the war were the real estate people because people came back from the service so they were building a lot of small homes in Chicago and all over the country and these real estate people sort of took over the American Legion and what they were doing was selling homes to the people my age or people a little bit older who just got married.

*So they saw an opportunity that these guys are gathered in one place.*

Right, they were exploiting the Legion and I didn't like it. Someone called me up who was Jewish and said "We're the Jewish Veterans thing," like "why don't you come over Besser" and I says "Hey, that's terrific, I'll mingle with a lot of the people I knew before the war." So I went there, and there were a bunch of guys that were there and they were passing around a petition to start this association and I said "Boy, this is terrific." So I got the petition and I said "Hey, can you sign this" so he signed it and I handed it to the next guy. I wouldn't sign it because I felt that after I told you, I was in service for three years, and we didn't say we were one religion or another religion, so why should we do it after the war. So I didn't join. There was one outfit called the American Veterans group. They were very idealistic people and they were the one group I said I was going to join but I never did.

*Why didn't you join them?*

I never joined any veterans group, I just didn't think it was the right idea. But the American Veterans were different. They were a bunch of young people and they were interested in the GI Bill and making sure the fellas who were going to college were able to get the GI bill.

*So, there was a Jewish Veterans group, there was a Catholic Veterans group, I wonder if any of those groups, even if they were joined together or communicated with each other. If one would speak to the other group.*

Sure. There was nothing discriminatory about it, it was like going to church. You belonged to a church group and you just joined a church group. There was no other reason than the fact that the fellas wanted to get together with the people they grew up with.

*There were these established veterans groups depending what your interest was.*

There's the disabled veterans group, and that if you were disabled, you'd quite likely join because you would need help. It was important that you joined them.

*Did you know anyone who was disabled? You mentioned the gentleman who became an accountant. He actually wasn't on disability. But to those who were so disabled, injured from the war. Do you have an idea of the care they received from the government? How much they might've been helped at the time after the war?*

No, because fortunately I wasn't hurt and I really was not around people who were disabled. Even down at school I don't remember hardly any of the fellas who were injured.

*There's a question here, do you have any photographs, a diary, or other memorabilia from your days in the service? Anything that you recall. I know it was a long time ago, anything that you have left over?*

Yes, I had a picture of a fella, but I met him when he was a civilian and my wife and I went out of town and there was a group of people our age and we were friendly with these people for about a week there and I asked him before I left "Do you have a picture?" and he gave me a picture of himself as a soldier, I used to have it on my wall. That's about the only picture I have.

I have a friend to this day. We were friends since we were ten years old and I don't see him much. In fact I'm going to see him, I'm going to see him this Friday and I have a picture of him up on the wall. I've got loads of pictures of my family, kids, all the grandkids and all, and I got a picture of him. He got an award from Northwestern and he became a correspondent for Walter Cronkite. Did you ever hear of Walter Cronkite?

*Yes, you talked briefly about him in the last time.*

He lives in New York and he comes in once a year to Chicago to go out for dinner with my wife, my daughter, and I have his picture.

*That's great*

He got an award from Northwestern for being very scholarly. He was working on a newspaper in Chicago, the "Herald-American," which is a Hearst newspaper. He went to night school. It took him about seven years to graduate and he got a master's degree at nighttime. While he was in Chicago, he saw an advertisement. Cronkite was looking for somebody so he went to New York and he became the proofreader for all the copy on television. Northwestern gave him an award

for doing so well in college and doing it at night time. His family needed help so he worked in the daytime so he could contribute to the family.

*Working around the clock, I know you did that when you started the newspaper and the Niles Bugle.*

It was a seven-day job and I often worked from morning until 10, 11 o'clock in the evening.

*Was it difficult to figure out? I know there was a business. You saw an opportunity there, but was it difficult to focus what your interest was going to be? You know, reporting on?*

I had no idea when I started. I just used to go village board meetings, zoning boards, school boards.

*Well, that was important, reporting about community news.*

I began writing a column, a personal column and then the first week I wrote a column that some famous journalists had written about being in the newspaper business, and I just told them, we were getting newspapers delivered to every home, we had about 9,000 homes then and you'd give them the reasons why we were starting the paper, and I thought it was important for the community to have a newspaper. That was the first column, then a couple of weeks later, I wrote another column. Then I began writing one every week and the column was very good. I wrote about what I saw. If any of the trustees, or the mayor, or the police chief did something I didn't think he should have done, I wrote about in the column. In that column and I mentioned his name and all.

*You mean the elected officials?*

Yes.

*The pushback I wonder, it must've continued. You sold the paper in the late 1980's?*

No, I think it was 2003.

My son was in the business.

*Oh, so your son took over the paper.*

He's a journalist overseas now.

*Oh really, where is he now?*

He works in the Middle East and the Far East. What he does is he hires people mostly from India because they can write English and they would write things for computers. They would have computer news. The computer copy went all over the Middle East and the Far East. He's got about seven or eight countries that buy the news copy from him.

*So he learned a lot about the newspaper business and I know it has changed over the years but he learned a lot from being at the Bugle.*

Yes.

I wrote about the gambling in the community as I told you for about three or four years.

*You told me a little bit*

Did I tell you about that fellow, Joey Aiello?

*No, you didn't.*

Al Capone was the Number One criminal in the United States, back in the 1930s and 1940s. I happened to, not too long ago, a few years ago, I didn't even know who it was. There was a guy named Joey Aiello that was his right-hand man and when he needed somebody to be pressured in some way, Joey Aiello would be the one to intimidate him and he showed up in Niles at the time when gambling was being discussed.

He wound up in Federal Prison for killing somebody. I wrote about all the gambling and sent it down to the Illinois Press Association and we got the highest award. Now there are 700 newspapers but there not all community papers, maybe 500 of them are. We got the highest community service award.

*Do you remember when that was what year*

Yes, in nineteen sixty- let's see, those fellows were elected in the early 1960s, so probably '61, '62. That helped us get advertising in the community.

*What day was it? Once a week?*

Thursday, every Thursday.

*You started out with I know eight pages.*

We started out with tabloid, four or eight pages, and we finished with about 40. I worked for myself down in the basement and started and when we finally sold the paper, we got 15-20 people working for us. Some part time, it's not that big of a deal. Some were part time, we had a truck driver. We had two classifieds girls, we had five people in the layout department and we had a display in the advertising department; we had three or four people, so we had a pretty good group.

*Still, starting from just you, working really long hours.*

And I was lucky too, because I really didn't really know much about what I was doing and as I really look back, I really should've gone back to the paper for a while. Before I got married, I had a hard time finding a job. I went around at different advertising industries, looking around for a job and I really wasn't interested in advertising but I just wanted to get into some kind of publishing business. The City News Bureau in Chicago was a major news bureau, and I went there and they told me it would be four months, if you can wait four months, then you can have the job. I says "I can't," "I'm getting married and that's why I went with my wife's business and it was too bad because I could have used that background because really it takes people to run a business, any kind of business, and it takes people to do good editorial work, and I mean, it takes a lot of people to do advertising.

*Obviously seeing from the successes you had the amount of readers that grew and the staff grew and the pages. You were obviously doing something right. Yes, but as I was saying, focusing on those zoning board meetings, the school board meetings, those were the things people really cared about.*

Sure, something's going down on the next block, and you had a police report in the paper too and we concentrated on that because we know people love to read that stuff, you know. There were a couple things I wouldn't do though, if there was somebody that got caught for speeding, especially if they were drinking or something, I don't think I'd put in the paper because I didn't want to write that anybody was drunk; I didn't want to write that in the paper, have their kids read that and surprisingly I was not restrictive. I really wanted as much inner news as possible and some of the other papers, if it was a drunk driver, I just didn't want to. I was a little soft that way but what I wrote about, people probably thought that the guys I covered in village hall were a bunch of crooks. I think I gave you the example when they took a bid and opened it up and I mentioned the trustee that did that, but something like speeding or drunken driving, I hesitated doing it.

*In some ways, you have to draw the line, in different publications differently.*

But I never knew whether I was right or not to be honest with you. But I decided it was my paper so I did what I wanted.

*I know you focused mainly on Niles and but I know you covered some other communities.*

The neighboring town is Morton Grove and I lived there for a while and other towns. Skokie is another one next to Niles, Des Plaines is next to Niles, and Park Ridge is next to Niles and there were community newspapers in all of them.

*Did you pull from other papers or did you do your own news and reporting?*

No, we did our own news

*That's one question, I've always wondered about.*

If we missed a story, then they got a story. I'd write it next week.

*There were subsequent wars after you came home from World War II. I know you focused on community news, but there were people in the PR departments in the war who were sending press releases probably to your newspaper; how did you handle that or war coverage?*

Would I run it in the newspaper? absolutely.

*Having been in the military and having seen what the parts of France and Belgium and Luxembourg and Germany looked like, I'd imagine when you saw what war is would have been impacted by what you saw and you heard about skirmishes, combat: whether it was in Korea or Vietnam; how did that impact your coverage?*

Let's see. I get the wars mixed up. What was the war after Korea? It might've been the Vietnamese conflict, but I had a young man working for me who was the first soldier from Niles.

That doesn't mean anything but we used to write about him quite a bit. He didn't do much for the newspaper; in fact, I think he might have been addressing the paper or something like that.

Well, I knew a few people who weren't in service. They weren't in service. We had a friend of ours who didn't go in and he was down in Illinois during the war, nice guy,

But those were the kind of war stories you told. You know the best story of all was the Sergeant that married the German girl.

That's fantastic, that's a great story.

That's a classic really

*So you had introduced the sergeant to this woman. And then you didn't see him again until four or five years later.*

*Okay, in Champaign, wow, you saw him there.*

He wasn't a typical college student either

*I wonder is there anything else that you'd like to add. I know there's a lot we haven't addressed but I wonder if there's anything that we have touched on that you'd like to...*

What else, let's see.

*Did you talk with General Lucius Clay? Did you meet him or did you see him at any point?*

No.

I got in trouble once though, oh, forgot to tell you this; I had a lady friend I told her I'd take her to where the subway station is. So I walked over to the subway station but I had on moccasins and sweat socks and I wasn't dressed properly. And in Berlin the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne was the major group all during the war, matter fact, and they dressed with white scarves and their clothes were just immaculate and their helmets would be shining; and as a result, we had to dress better than normally. So they were very careful that we dressed properly also. But here I took this young lady to the subway and on the way back as I was walking, I saw coming at me, three officers that were Generals, one of whom I later learned was General Lucius Clay, the European Commander. Now because I told you it was like anarchy there, because they didn't know what they were doing, nobody knew what they were doing, nobody had worked in an office before, but when I was there in the morning, sometimes we would get out but we just stand at attention for about five minutes and we would leave for the day. But this time there were about 25,000 American soldiers in Berlin at the time, and somebody read to me that as of Monday morning, all soldiers in Berlin will get up at 6:30 in the morning and march for 30 minutes so because of this soldier that you are looking at, every soldier in Berlin had to march for 30 minutes because of me They mentioned some goofy guy goofed up and didn't do what he was supposed to do. So all of the soldiers there, I never said a word to anybody, the fact, if they knew it was me. I might not have lived.

Those were the kind of stories, silly stories, the stories that were much more serious, you didn't mention them, really not too much.

*Trying to make light, bring some humor into a situation, you know, it's very difficult.*

I told you, I really was not a combat soldier, though I saw when I was down at the Rhine River, I'm sure that was combat. There was only ten percent of the people that were in a war that actually saw combat. As I said, there were 16 million people in World War II.

Yes, 10%, would be 1 million, six hundred-thousand. So there sure were a lot of people that did see combat, but we were in dangerous places, you know, we were in a hotel in Luxembourg for a couple of days and there was a gun shooting, going off under my window.

*So what did you do about that? Did you stay inside?*

I stayed inside. I didn't even try to go out.

*Did you look and see outside? Was it at night or during the day?*

Yes, it was nighttime. I just stayed away, so it might've been our own soldiers that were shooting, I don't know.

*So was this before the war had officially ended?*

It was during the war.

*The war ended in August of 1945, did things really just cease at the time or were there little skirmishes that continued afterwards.*

We were not in any skirmishes with the Germans, the outfit I was with.

*Did you have any interactions with any individual Germans outside the military, maybe going into a shop and purchasing something.*

No, no. We really didn't have much to do with the German civilians. Berlin was all beat up, it's hard to believe but a big city like Chicago and every building's been knocked down. There just wasn't any civilian activity like there is today. You know, there were a few stores that were open, but very few stores.

Sorry I can't give you anything more accurate.

*You answered a lot of questions.*

Well, you asked all the questions.

*For me, this is a wonderful opportunity and I appreciate and you coming in.*

Oh, you were very good, very good.

*Thanks Mr. Besser.*



# Class of 1948

CARL BELTZ, JR. .... St. Louis, Mo.  
Division of Special Services  
*Economics*  
Kappa Sigma  
University of Missouri



EDWIN ARTHUR BERNARDONI .... Woodstock  
Agriculture  
*Dairy Technology*  
Tribe of Illini; Major I; Freshman Varsity  
Wrestling Squad; Varsity Wrestling Squad  
(3), Letter (2)  
Honors Day (1)

MAURICE ALBERT BENDES .... Rockford  
Division of Special Services  
*Marketing*  
Men's Residence Halls  
Marketing Club; Accountancy Club  
Honors Day (1)



DONALD LEF BERNING .... Evansville, Ind.  
Division of Special Services  
*Commerce*  
Indiana State Teachers College

JANET BENHAM .... Florida  
Liberal Arts and Sciences  
*Bacteriology*  
Alpha Chi Omega  
Illio (2); Illini Union Committee (3)  
Bradley University



DAVID BESSER .... Chicago  
Division of Special Services  
*Advertising*  
The Daily Illini (2)  
Wilson Junior College; Gettysburg College

LAURA HESTER BENNER .... Urbana  
Liberal Arts and Sciences  
*Division of General Studies*  
Pi Beta Phi  
Alpha Lambda Delta  
Honors Day (1, 2, 3)



CHARLOTTE MARIE BIDDLE .... Zion  
Liberal Arts and Sciences  
*Bacteriology*  
Palamar  
Home Economics Club  
Honors Day (1)

RUTH LOUISE BENZ .... Melvin  
Commerce  
*Accountancy*  
Harney Manor  
Alpha Lambda Delta; Accountancy Club  
Honors Day (1, 2, 3); University of Illinois  
Scholarship Key



BARBARA JUNE BIENNEMANN .... Bloomington  
Commerce  
*Personnel Management*  
Alpha Phi  
Phi Chi Theta; The Illio (2); The Daily  
Illini (2, 3, 4); W.A.A.; Illini Union Com-  
mittee (2)  
Illinois State Normal University

FRED HENRY BERGHORN .... Lake Forest  
Engineering  
*General Engineering*  
Northwestern University



JOHN PETER BILANZIC .... Chicago  
Commerce  
*Accountancy*  
Men's Residence Hall  
Accountancy Club  
Wilson Junior College; DePaul University

WILLIAM WISLEY BEELEY .... Hoopston  
Engineering  
*Metallurgical Engineering*  
Fireside  
M.E.S.; A.S.M.; A.I.M.E.; The Daily Illini  
(1); House President (2, 3)



VERLEE BILLINGS .... Chicago  
Liberal Arts and Sciences  
*Geology*  
Evans Hall  
Spanish Club; Cyclothem Club

VIRGINIA LOIS BERNARD .... Homewood  
Journalism  
*Publication Management*  
Busey Hall  
Torch; Alpha Lambda Delta; Kappa Tau  
Alpha; Journalism Council (3); The Daily  
Illini (1, 2, 3); Assistant Business Manager  
(4); Illini Union Council (3); Illini Union  
Committee (2, 3)  
Honors Day (1, 2, 3); University of Illinois  
Scholarship Key



ARLENE HARRIET BILLOW .... Chicago  
Journalism  
*Advertising*  
Phi Sigma Sigma  
Spanish Club; Marketing Club; The Illio  
(1, 3); House President (3, 4); Production  
Staff, "Three Men on a Horse", "Beggars on  
Horseback"  
Honors Day (1)