



## Fort Smith Historical Society Oral History Center World War II Project Interview with John Holland

JW: I'd like for you to tell us your full name, please.

JH: John, J-o-h-n, Gray, G-r-a-y, and Holland, just like the little country in Europe.

JW: And what is your birthday?

JH: (DELETED CONTENT)

JW: And where were you born?

JH: In Sparks Hospital in Fort Smith, Sebastian County, Arkansas.

JW: And what was your parents' names?

JH: My father's name was Cleve, C-l-e-v-e, Holland, and my mother was Bertha, B-e-r-t-h-a, Holland.

JW: And what was her maiden name?

JH: Gray, that's where I got my middle name.

JW: Did you have sisters and brothers?

JH: I had one sister named Ann Louise and she died last November.

JW: What did your father do for a living?

JH: He was an attorney.

JW: So you spent your whole life in Fort Smith?

JH: Well, not exactly. There's a little period there that I lived in Little Rock. I might as well bring it up now that my father became an Assistant Attorney General in Little Rock, beginning January

JW: What schools did you go to in Fort Smith?

JH: Elementary school was Peabody School, which is now the Adult Education Center, and that's elementary. Junior high was Fort Smith Junior High, which is now Darby Junior High. High school is Fort Sm

JW: What year did you graduate?

JH: 1943.

JW: Is there anything else about your childhood that you think might be interesting?

JH: Well, I don't know. I had a great childhood with my parents and they were strict, but yet we had a lot of freedom. I used to like to climb up on our garage and jump off of it, I don't know why. An 2 them off and you'd have a little pistol made of wood and had a clothes pin as the trigger. You'd stretch that thing and then you'd go hunt each other and shoot those things. Even made a machine gun wi

JW: So you terrorized the neighborhood?

JH: Yeah, yeah, and each other.

JW: Where did you live?

JH: 711 North 19th Street.

JW: After you graduated from high school, what did you do?

JH: Well, we moved to Little Rock to be with my father and went down there. And sometime during the summer I enrolled in what was then Little Rock Junior College, and I did that to have something to do

JW: Did you join or were you drafted?

JH: I joined. There's a little background to that. My senior year in high school, and I think it was spring semester, they gave us, the high school gave us an ASTP test, which is Army Specialized Training. Well, it was just kind of out of the blue. And then we went to see the Director of Selective Service there in Little Rock, his name was General Comper, he'd never heard of the program. So we thought about it

JW: Imagine your mother didn't think that was very good.

JH: No, no, I didn't either.

JW: So you had six weeks or so at Camp Robinson?

JH: No. Let's see, December, no, it was probably the first part of January that we went to Fort Benning for basic training, Fort Benning, Georgia, and it was supposed to be a twelve week program. And 3 program, so we were in the Infantry.

JW: From Fort Benning, where did they invite you to go?

JH: We went to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Incidentally, Fort Benning there was couple of little things you might be interested in. Everybody was interested in mail call, and they did it about five, six

One day they sent a handful of us off to a detail somewhere off of our barracks area and we stayed all day and there wasn't anything particular about that detail that I remember; but when we came back Well, the next Saturday, we had inspection. And those of us on the detail, our rifles, they weren't cleaned at all except on the outside. We didn't even know how to get them all cleaned, we missed all And then one of the non-coms when I was at Fort Benning, non-coms were almost God in basic training. And so we lived in twenty man hutlets, which were long huts. We didn't have windows, but they had w

JW: Was this guy, did you figure out this guy was kind of a jerk before it was all over with?

JH: He wasn't the biggest one. He was kind of, but they had one that was really, I mean he was really a jerk. I meant to tell you that at 4 Camp Robinson, too, I went to eat and I'd eaten almost everything on the tray and I started to go and dump it in the trash. And you know they had stuff about there eat all you take and all that sort o

JW: Oh, I think I asked you if that guy was a jerk and you said there was a bigger one.

JH: Yeah, it was.

JW: Well, what happened? You were there for awhile?

JH: Yeah, about eight weeks.

JW: And then that's right, they shortened your stay. And then where did you go?

JH: Well, let me tell you one other thing if you don't mind.

JH: Sure, don't mind.

JH: We went on the rifle range, and they had a long trench and the targets were on a pulley and you could pull them up and down. And they were pretty good size targets and they were lined up all over, And so first one I shot, it was high and to the right; so I adjusted down to the left, and it was even higher to the right. And I never could figure out what was going on on that target, which kept me

JW: He could have put it right in the middle, help you out a little bit.

JH: That's right. But that was Fort Benning, that's at Fayetteville, North Carolina. And for awhile after I got there, everytime somebody said Fayetteville, I jumped, until I realized what it was. But So I reported to the company commander and he said something, and I don't know if I showed my surprise or not, he said, "Well, which one would you rather be, mortars or machine gun?" I didn't know you 5 mortar, and theoretically, they work in twos, squad one and two, and three and four, and they are called sections. And so I was in squad two and I was the number one gunner, which means that I had to

JW: Now, let me get this straight to be sure. A mortar is the thing we've seen in movies that kind of sits on the ground, points up in the air, and one guy puts something in the end of it, puts the sh

JH: You got it. They're different sizes. One of them, 60 millimeter mortar, usually travels with a rifle company; but this was 81, which was a little bit larger.

JW: And you would shoot mortars at--

JH: Well, you would have a forward observer which would give you the coordinates to shoot on and then I had to adjust it to where he was telling me to shoot.

JW: Was that done mechanically, did you adjust things to a certain compass point?

JH: They had a sight and it had two bubbles on it, they went at right angles. One of them indicated the right height. So you would, with one hand, you would adjust the bubble for the height. And then We'll probably get to it later, but there was one time when I mean we really used those OC's. But it's in three parts, they have a bipod with a clamp on it, and then they have a barrel which fits in and clamps around it and you put the end of the tube, there's a

JW: Would lock?

JH: Now, the worst thing to me, the worst thing about a mortar was when you had a misfire, and that meant that the shell didn't go all the way down. So there you're stuck with a mortar with a shell in

Now, you're moving this tube a little bit and you got that shell still in there. I often wondered what would happen if that thing slid down while we were fooling around. Thank goodness I never did get 6

JW: Right.

JH: And part of it was because we were having to move that thing and it didn't have any brace, you know, just no telling what'd happened. I don't know.

JW: It's fortunate you don't.

JH: You can say that again.

JW: Okay. Well, I would assume that when it reached its destination, it would make a big hole in the ground?

JH: Pretty good, it could. They had some larger shells that we could shoot which was white phosphorous, and they were heavier than the regular 81 millimeter. And when it broke open, when that exploded

JW: And your forward observer would call back and tell you a little farther, a little this and that, and you'd know what to do?

JH: Right, correct. And one thing I'm so glad of, I've always, in the back of my mind, I was afraid we might have a mistake or bad shell or something and we would cause damage to our own troops; but n

JW: I've heard a lot of stories of friendly fire that was on today.

JH: Yeah, and it can happen. I mean sometimes things get so chaotic, but it can sure happen; but didn't happen with us, thank goodne

JW: Dr. Moulton told me a few weeks that the Battle of the Bulge, the Allies, I don't recall if he said it was American troops or I mean American fliers or not, but they dropped a load of bombs a mile

JH: I'm not surprised.

JW: Just part of war.

JH: Well, yeah, and everything is so chaotic; but thank goodness we didn't do that.

JW: Right. But this mortar training was at Fort Benning?

JH: It started at Fort Benning, that's correct, in basic training. And we got training in machine guns and mortars and rifles and grenades, and you got all that first at Fort Benning. And then when we

JW: And that was all within that eight week period?

JH: At Fort Benning, it was within eight weeks.

JW: And then when you went to Fort Bragg, it was after that? 7

JH: Right.

JW: And how long were you at Fort Bragg?

JH: Well, it was from sometime in March of '44, to last part of September of '44, where we were then sent to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, and it was from there, we went overseas.

JW: Camp Kilmer was just a staging?

JH: Yeah, yeah, that's right. We just passed through there.

JW: How did you get to Europe?

JH: I'm laughing because I had such a terrible experience with seasickness on that. Incidentally, when I was at Fort Bragg, I got one furlough and we came on a train, and I was going back and they had Well, we got on this bus and we got into New York and I was looking at all those buildings right up to the sidewalk and looked dirty as everything, and I was thinking, man, I sure would hate to live h

JW: Passed the snails by?

JH: Yeah, yeah.

JW: What else did you see in New York, do you remember?

JH: We went to a Broadway play, and I can't remember the name of it, we got tickets. And I said are we going to need binoculars for this and lady said no. I guess she thought I was really stupid becau

JW: That was just a day pass?

JH: Yeah, right, that's what it was.

JW: And then I suppose it was time to leave?

JH: Yeah.

JW: And you went by ship?

JH: Went by ship.

JW: Do you remember the name of the ship?

JH: I sure do, USS George Washington. We boarded that ship at New York and there was a band playing patriotic songs, there are people out there cheering, we were feeling all pumped up here. And we got 8 the USS Washington, which was a big ship, it carried seven or eight thousand troops. And I was reading Harry Truman's biography not too long ago, and he went overseas, we knew this was a World War I s

JW: How long did it take you to get to Europe?

JH: Two weeks.

JW: So it was a slow ship?

JH: Yeah. Well, it was, and we were landing at Marseille, so that meant we went a little bit further. And it was in a convoy, I guess that slows them down a little bit. But I didn't know it had that h Well, for me, having to stand there for thirty or forty minutes, whatever it was, with those fumes coming up, that was almost more than I could take. And then you'd get down there and you didn't have

JW: So you never got over the seasickness in that whole two weeks?

JH: Well, everything seems a little bit complicated. I ran into a friend by the name of Robert Shultz, who was in that same group wit So in the Service, as are a lot of places, if anything comes up, there's always somebody thinks they know the answer. And some guy told me, said look, when we get to the Strait of Gibraltar, and that '9 could have affected a big ship like that, but it was really close.

JW: And what month was this?

JH: Well, this was October. And we arrived at Marseille on guess when, October the 20th, which is my 19th birthday. And we got there and you couldn't get in the dock with a big ship because there's so And so we got on those ships and went in and landed at Marseille, and I can't tell you how happy I was. And we had to march eleven miles to get to our bivouac area, but I'd have marched twenty. I real

JW: Right, make yourself very small. Well, I've heard lots of seasick stories, but I'm sure you had lots of company.

JH: Yeah, it was really a mess.

JW: So was Marseille, France, in good shape or was it torn up?

JH: Well, you know, I'm not sure I can, it had some problems. I'm not sure I can tell you enough about the whole city because I just saw small parts of it. And one part I saw when we were at this stag

JW: War?

JH: Thank goodness it was cold.

JW: Was the weather different in France that time of the year, than it is in Arkansas?

JH: Well, it seemed like. Maybe part of it is because of the situation of being outside and sleeping on the ground and in the ground, and sometimes we would get in houses and we'd have sixteen people Which was kind of strange to me, we got over there, and I'm skipping a little bit here probably, but we started to move up and our Sergeant, you know these big old Army bulky brown overcoats 10 you've see people wearing? Well, we had been issued that and they said turn those in. We thought turn them in here? Here we are in winter and it's going to get worse, and so we turned them in and then

JW: Wonder what the reasoning was for that?

JH: I don't know unless they figured that all that other stuff they gave us would make up for it, wouldn't be so bulky. What happened was we had on three to five layers of clothes. And one of my good And we had been issued what they call snow pack boots, which it was kind of a new thing instead of combat boots which got so wet and all that, it was kind of like a loose fitting boot that kept the sn

JW: Okay. Well, when they moved you from Marseille, France, where did you go next?

JH: Okay. We started kind of going up north and it took us about three days to get to the front, we were moving basically north.

JW: On foot?

JH: Well, both. I mean during that time, we were able to ride a lot; but when you say we ride, we were riding in trailers. Jeeps were pulling trailers and they had ammo in there, and we'd be sitting on. And then one night on our way up, course we were all a little bit nervous not knowing what we were doing and all that stuff, and we had guard. And in those mountains, they didn't have street lights or anything. So this guy came and got me and I relieved him from guard duty. And I got to thinking is my pistol loaded or not? And you know how your mind keeps thinking, well, I don't believe it is, I don't remember. "Holland, Holland, you all right?" I said, "Yeah, I'm just checking my pistol, seeing if it's loaded." And that's another cussing out I got. But one of the strange things about that was that nobody, e

JW: That's good and that's bad at the same time.

JH: Well, yeah. I don't know what it was. But what was really scary, the next day I realized I had always made a practice of when I would test my pistol like that, I'd turn it to the side so I wouldn't

JW: Well, course accidents like that happened all the time.

JH: Oh, yeah, absolutely.

JW: But having to live with it for the rest of your life, if you'd have shot some sleeping guy, be rough.

JH: That would have really been bad. And so we finally got up, I guess, to what you'd say the front lines. And very early, we got up there about the first of November. It was about the first few days

JW: And this was in the mountains?

JH: Yes, it was in the mountains, Vosges Mountains, sure was.

JW: And were there Germans in there?

JH: Yeah, yeah, afraid there were.

JW: So ya'll were advancing?

JH: Right.

JW: Pushing them back?

JH: Right. Then no, we didn't have holes to sleep in, and we didn't have any blankets or anything. You really in a way didn't want to lie down in all that wet and cold.

JW: Do you remember being extremely cold?

JH: Yeah, I don't mean hundred percent of the time, but there were times, yeah.

JW: I just wondered if all those layers protected you enough to make it liveable?

JH: Yeah, that's what they did. They made it liveable, but there were times it got pretty cold.

JW: So how long were you in the mountains?

JH: Well, let's see. We were in the mountains Christmas, probably to about between Christmas and New Year's probably. 12

JW: Just steadily advancing?

JH: Right. And there were times when it seemed like we just walked all day, going up and down those mountains. And we had to carry those mortars, and each piece weighed between thirty-five and forty p But we did that one time, we were doing that one time, at the end of the day we had to stop, there was a little bit of a fire-fight ahead and we spent the night there. It was just a few seconds of feu First time, first time I saw an American dead was a little bit disturbing. We were marching, going somewhere, I don't know. And out there in a green field, there was a guy just lying there with his ra

JW: You'd think they would have done something with the body.

JH: And unless it just happened so recently that they couldn't get to him, I don't know, seemed kind of strange.

JW: Maybe a sniper got him?

JH: Might have, have no idea. I don't think he was one of ours.

JW: Oh, I thought you meant he was an American soldier.

JH: He was. I mean not of our company, not of our platoon, yeah. He was an American, yeah, sure was.

JW: Well, what happened to you next?

JH: Well, I guess, there's no guessing about it, it was New Year's Eve and we had our company, our division or battalion, had more or less taken a town called B-i-t-c-h-e, so you know how everybody wa

JW: Yeah, who told that story?

JH: That's common throughout the service, I think. And then something came across that sounded like a train going sideways or something, it was going whoo, whoo, and screaming. I'm talking about a wea 13 one of those things before. And man, I'm kind of surprised I didn't hurt myself hitting the ground when I heard those things.

JW: Was it a missile?

JH: It's an artillery type thing and it's supposed to break off in big pieces, so it really caused a lot of damage if it hit anybody. And I don't know where the Germans got all those people, but Janua

JW: Out of this town?

JH: Out of this, we were in a farm area, we'd moved to another area. And we were not in this town I was telling you about at this time, we were on the outskirts. And so they told us, I don't know, I g So we moved sideways. And one thing about a mortar, you don't think about it, but if you're in the forest, you're lucky if you don't have to cut down some trees. So we got to this place and my number And so we'd work a little more and work a little more, and we'd get down on the end of that barrel and look up it, and we kind of thought maybe it would clear it. So when you're nineteen, you do things you probably shouldn't do. So we said, well, let's see if It was about a day after that, probably, that our Section Sergeant came back, said "I've just been back to headquarters and they say that we're surrounded except for one road and it's under fire. And

JW: And at the Battle of the Bulge, Patton turned up to go help them, right?

JH: Right. Now, he had the 3rd Army. Our 7th Army was on his right, but he was turning left and going up. So that space that he was having to empty had to be covered by somebody, so they spread us out 14 cover and the riflemen weren't up to as many people as they were supposed to have because of casualties. And then we didn't know that they had taken all the reserves for the 7th Army and sent them up So like I say, I don't know where they got the people. But if they had ever broken through us and the other 7th Army, there wasn't anything to stop them. So we wound up having a little bulge ourselves

JW: Would your forward observer, would he tell you what effect you were having?

JH: Sometimes, yeah, sometimes he would. One time, I guess this is bragging a little bit. We just had one of our guns firing, it was just our gun. And one of the Captains up there with him said, "How

JW: You were lobbing them out pretty good?

JH: We were lobbing them out pretty good. And we were told again, and you know how it is, military, there were a lot of rumors, but we were supposed to have had preference of 81 millimeter shells of a

JW: And this was on the edge of the Battle of the Bulge, on one side?

JH: Well, wasn't exactly on the edge, but it was, you know--

JW: It was in support of--

JH: Yeah, right. And the Bulge affected us, whether we were up there in the middle of the Bulge or not. It didn't last as long as the Battle of the Bulge did. And there was one time right before this And two Germans soldiers walked in this house. And you talk about people scrambling, trying to act like they knew what they were doing, and trying to find their weapons and everything else. And they c

JW: I've heard of that happening.

JH: Have you? 15

JW: Yeah, in the latter part of the war, stories like that are pretty common; but that doesn't take anything away from how scary it must be when you're setting there scratching yourself when a German

JH: Boy, that was weird. Another strange thing that happened between the time we left our staging area up until the time I was just talking about, some time in there, I don't know exactly what, we wer

JW: What on Earth do you reckon that was?

JH: He'd just gotten an appointment from a Senator of Texas to go to West Point.

JW: Do you think that was a rich daddy getting his son out of the war?

JH: Well, it's hard to tell. You know somebody had, I guess, had influence someplace. But it was kind of like a dream or something, I can still kind of see him just going out into the woods and disapp

JW: That's fine.

JH: The town that they pronounced Bitch, or at least the Americans did, so you know what we got called. As part of the Maginot Line, this fortress is part of the Maginot Line that the French had set u But it's kind of kind of a slow time there during the winter, which is good. We found some German mortar shells, and we thought I wonder if we can shoot those things. They weren't exactly the same siz And then on March the 15th, I'm probably skipping something in here, but maybe I'll think of it, March 15th, I remember that because at that time that was income tax day. I wasn't old enough to pay in And we didn't hear back from him and didn't hear back from him, which we thought was highly unusual because usually when he was out there, I mean things were really popping. They had been held up 16 by machine guns and they couldn't get through. And he took a bunch of grenades and weapons and just went out there, on his own, and he got rid of enough of the opposition that we could go ahead and mo And so then we pushed on and we'd been in the mountains and the hills and we started getting in the Rhine Valley and there's just, on either side of the Rhine, it's just flat for a long period of time

JW: Did you cross on a pontoon bridge?

JH: You know, I'm not sure I can remember that. I think we must have, though, I think we must have. So we started towards Stuttgart and, course, we didn't know it but it was really, I guess, maybe the

JW: This was in March?

JH: Right, yeah. Yeah, that's when it started, started in March 15th. And then we wound up, you know there were a bunch of little towns and it's kind of lot like a lawsuit. A five hundred dollar lawsu

JW: But you all were meeting some resistance?

JH: Yeah, we met resistance. After we got to Heilbronn, which was a bitter battle, I'm not sure exactly when that happened, but it was a little bit north and west of Stuttgart. After we got through we And the reaction I remember of that news was that everybody, course, was sad and unhappy; but they thought because the thing been together so long and going so well and all that, that probably strateg

JW: The French?

JH: At Bitche, I'm talking about that time. And every year, our 100th 17 Division had an Army reunion. I only went to one. Friend of mine's from Minnesota and we went together. That was 1984 which makes it almost forty years when we'd liberated Bitche. That town had a repr

JW: The reunion was held in the States?

JH: It was held in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and they came over for that, and I thought that was pretty impressive.

JW: They take it pretty seriously?

JH: Well, they did. I don't know about the rest of them. I don't know if they even still feel that way, that was twenty years ago; but I was really impressed with that.

JW: Well, Fort Smith is still connected to Cisterna.

JH: Yeah, that's true.

JW: General Darby. Back to the day that Roosevelt died, did that create a lot of sadness in this bombed out soup factory or was it just another fact of the day?

JH: I would say it was kind of in between. I mean everybody still felt like they had to do their business and would, and yet they were sorry at the same time; but I guess you didn't have time to griev

JW: Right. Well, which is kind of strange looking back because nobody knew who Harry Truman was at that point.

JH: That's right. But I think we felt regardless who was president, that we would--

JW: Still had them on the run?

JH: Still had them on the run, yeah.

JW: So that's April of 1945.

JH: Yeah, that's right.

JW: And the soup factory was in what town?

JH: Heilbronn.

JW: Heilbronn. Do you find that these little German towns that you were going through, were they torn up?

JH: Some were very torn up, some of the bigger cities were really torn up, some weren't torn up too bad. Now, you take Heidelberg, Germany, where I wound up for awhile, I guess we'll get to in a minut

JW: I've been told of going into some cities where it was just rubble far as you could see.

JH: That's right. It was in a valley surrounded by hills. The 18 buildings on the hills, hardly any of them were touched. And that city, I mean it was really rubble. We may get to that some more. That was after the war was over.

JW: So Roosevelt is dead and then what happened to you?

JH: Well, we got through at Heilbronn and we didn't go too far. We were in some village and I can't remember the name, I can't remember the name of those little villages, when they announced the war w

JW: May 8th?

JH: Yeah, I guess that's right. And sometimes it's a little bit hard to absorb that it was over. Course, we still had a lot of work to do. But without being too sanctimonious or anything, I will say t

JW: A mighty big day.

JH: Oh, yeah.

JW: And a long way to get to.

JH: And you know there were some people that ordinarily, you were over there unless you got shot up real bad or the war ended. And you had people over there that had been over there, overseas, for a l

JW: Especially when you're nineteen.

JH: Yeah. Let's see, October, about twenty months I guess we were over, something like that. And you had people been over there for years. My brother-in-law in the South Pacific, he was over there alm

JW: Well, when news came, did everybody jump up and down and holler and carry on?

JH: Not so much as you think where we were, and even less on the Japan thing, which we'll get to here in just a little.

JW: They're not done yet.

JH: But I'm sure a lot of people did. Now, I will tell you this, and I can't for the life of me remember the town, which is probably good. The first night we got into Germany and spent the night, ever And I thought, boy, if they attack now, we've had it. You almost wanted to get drunk so you wouldn't see what's going on. But boy, we lucked out on that, I guess. But anyhow, the war ended and there w

JW: Well, I guess you knew, even though the war was over, that you 19 probably weren't going to go home the next week?

JH: Absolutely.

JW: And so what did you do after that?

JH: Well, they put us in a small town south of Stuttgart for awhile and I'm not sure that we stayed there that long. But while we were in the Stuttgart area, Bob Hope came and entertained outside, and

JW: Just blown apart?

JH: They supposedly had some sort of navigation device or bomb directional instruments that were being made there. And the story was, which we don't know is true or not, that they'd heard the air alar

JW: Were there people, were there German people?

JH: Yes.

JW: In this bombed out town?

JH: Yeah, there were.

JW: Were they friendly? Did you have to worry about snipers?

JH: Every once in a while you did, and every once in a while they'd say now this is going to be an anniversary or something and be careful because they may have uprisings. Most of the time, didn't hap

JW: Well, I was just assuming that while you were in that town, that there was not fighting going on, for the most part.

JH: This last time I'm telling you about. Oh, the war was over. No, there was no fighting, no.

JW: The people accepted that?

JH: Yeah, yeah. And the barracks, they were very nice, had a gym and everything, and we stayed there until October of '45. During that time, friend of mine, Phil Frampton, from California, and I, we g 20 were you in the Scottish Army? Oh, no, no, it was just one of those things.

JW: Were those cities damaged a great deal, that you remember?

JH: Well, I don't remember seeing very much. I don't know if it was because I guess we were in the right place or wrong place, whichever way you want to put it, but I don't remember seeing a lot of da

JW: Well, there's some of those English accents that I can't understand.

JH: Well, I have an English daughter-in-law, so she has one of those beautiful accents.

JW: So it was just an enjoyable time in Scotland and England?

JH: It was. I've got a little story, I don't know how much time we have.

JW: We're doing just fine.

JH: While we were in Scotland, we heard about the University of Edinburgh that was offering scholarships to GIs who would apply. We got all excited about that. We thought, man, if we're going to be ov Well, the deal was that you stayed there until somebody from the company came and got you, but we were in a hurry. Every time you try to outsmart the Army, you can't do it. And so we thought, well, we When my friend and I had received these passes to England, we decided instead of each one taking a half filled duffle bag or maybe a little more, we'd put all our stuff in one duffle bag and we'd take Well, I was carrying the bag and I had it on the floor, of course. And this subway had two doors on it, one was in the middle and one was at the far end, where I was. From where I was, I was back 21 in the corner with no door. My friend had gotten separated, he was up by the far door. But I didn't worry about it because everytime we had a stop, people were coming and going and there wouldn't be a Well, the door started to close. Oh, man. Well, my friend was up at the other end and he got out, and the door started to close and I thought we'll never make it if we get separated here. Will I wait Finally got to the door where there was just two people in front of me, a man and a woman. And I picked up the bag as much as I could and with all the strength I had, I just pushed as hard as I could. So the subway started off. And the woman had a collapsible baby carriage. And she stepped on and was pulling the carriage after and the door shut on the handle of this baby carriage. And the last thin And we finally found a hotel and we checked in and said we're so and so, we got reservations for the U.S.O. And I guess this girl had talked to so many Americans, she thought it was best thing to say, Train just came in, and one of our Lieutenants with some of the guys from our platoon had been to Switzerland, and they were coming back from Switzerland, going back to our company. So we got on with 22 time ago, so we were out. We went to all that trouble for nothing. And so we weren't there very long. In October, they sent us to Heidelberg where an engineer outfit was and we stayed there to the end of the war, I mean until we went home. And Heidelberg was a beautiful place, Heidelberg was a beautiful place. And even took a

JW: Did you stay in a house there?

JH: We stayed in a hotel.

JW: That's a lot better than sleeping on the ground in the wintertime.

JH: Lot better, lot better. They didn't quite know what to do with us infantry folks and we didn't know what to do with them, either. And I was working with one guy, most of these people were from Ohio

JW: And this is the American government making asphalt to patch the roads?

JH: I guess so, I guess that's what it was. Oh, the Germans were operating it, we were just supervising and I didn't know anything about supervising a plant like that but we did it, got it done.

JW: Long as you got by with it?

JH: That's right. We were in Heidelberg when General Patton was killed in the car wreck and his funeral procession came through Heidelberg at that time, which I saw.

JW: Well, where were you on VJ-Day?

JH: I meant to tell you, I knew there was--

JW: And the bombs, yeah, we didn't cover that.

JH: I knew there was something I was skipping there. We were in Pforzheim, this city I was telling you about, in the German barracks. And we were going to go to the South Pacific in September. I'm glad

JW: Because you've pretty much figured right then you weren't going to have to go to the Pacific?

JH: Right, right. I'm glad you brought that up, I meant to talk about that and forgot about it. But we were supposed to go there along with a lot of others. I think some had already started.

JW: Well, that was just a good feeling on top of a good feeling.

JH: That's right, it was, yeah. And everybody was just seemed to be the deeper type of appreciation and relief. 23

JW: As far as you all knew and as far as it was, that was the end of the end, that was it.

JH: Yeah, yeah.

JW: The fight wasn't over on VE-Day, but it sure was on VJ-Day.

JH: That's right. My brother-in-law and I was talking about while ago, always said that if they hadn't dropped those bombs, he'd never made it back because they were getting ready to invade Japan.

JW: Well, modern historians say that the dropping of the bomb saved a million American lives and three million Japanese lives, is what the estimate is.

JH: I don't know about numbers, but there's some people that have a little bit of queasy feelings about the bomb and I can understand that, but I'm fully convinced it saved a lot of lives. I have no w

JW: That's what they say. And we haven't interviewed a veteran yet who has another opinion.

JH: Is that right?

JW: Yeah. Everybody breathed a sigh of relief when the bombs were dropped.

JH: Yeah, because they knew it was helping them.

JW: Right.

JH: Now, later, somebody told me not too long ago, not a veteran, said I wish we could have just kind of dropped one over here on a desert island someplace and let them see what it would do and maybe

JW: Right, right. Lot of them committed suicide.

JH: So you haven't heard a one, yet?

JW: Not a one, not a one. Everybody says, and course, I don't think anybody that we've interviewed likes the thought of hundreds of thousands of people being killed.

JH: Oh, no; oh, no.

JW: But everybody views it as a necessity that actually ended up saving lives on both sides.

JH: Hard decision. I think so. Now, I don't know if you can really prove that. I think you almost can, though; but that was a tough decision to make for President Truman.

JW: Right. And once again, it's like you say, looking at the island defenses that they had, that would have been a battle and a half that would have just worn on and people would have died.

JH: Oh, yeah. 24

JW: By the buckets full.

JH: Oh, yeah. It would have just been terrible.

JW: So it was unfortunate that it had to happen, but it sure looks like it stopped the war once and for all.

JH: And there's something else to think about, too. You know Japan and Germany were both working towards that end. And if we hadn't done it and they had gotten it, think what it'd been. Probably would

JW: Because the Germans were awfully close. I'm not as well acquainted with the Japanese efforts, but the Germans were a hair away.

JH: Well, they were. And if you remember, there was a Norwegian commando group of about twelve that were in Great Britain. And they landed on Norway, and Germany had this heavy water factory up there

JW: May have. Did you ever encounter a German jet in the tail end of the war? They were rare.

JH: Yeah, one time, I think. It wasn't really that close.

JW: They were clever, they were clever. So it's the end of the war and they tell you that you're going home. What happened there?

JH: Well, they finally went home. We left from Heidelberg and they put us in railroad cars just like cattle, I mean we were stacked in there, no place to sit or anything. And I said, man, if we weren' But it took us two or three days to get to Antwerp, Belgium, is where we left from. And you kind of had to take turns trying to sleep and everything else, and you had to leave a door open to get some

JW: Was that traveling day and night?

JH: Yeah, yeah, it was. And we got there in Antwerp, which seemed to be a pretty nice city. I always have a spot in my heart for Antwerp since that's where I came home from.

JW: Right, right. Did they put you on another ship?

JH: The Waterberry Victory. Victory ships were a much smaller ship and it was the Waterberry Victory because I got sick again coming back. But it was only either seven or nine days or something like t 25 stuff. I said, man, don't tell me I've come all this way for something strange to happen.

JW: And what month was this?

JH: Left almost the last day of March, I think, got in first part of April.

JW: Of '46?

JH: Yeah, '46, right. And came back to Camp Kilmer. And I called home, I said they say that I'll be out of here in about four or five days, but I said I can't believe the Army will work that fast. The

JW: Was Jefferson Barracks in or near Jefferson City, Missouri?

JH: I believe it was closer to St. Louis.

JW: Okay. So it didn't have anything to do with Jefferson City?

JH: I believe it was closer to St. Louis, I believe it is, I may be wrong. And then got on the train and came home to Little Rock. I wasn't able to make a call that I was on my way, I just didn't have

JW: At the train station in Little Rock?

JH: Yeah, they just came down on the chance that I'd be on it, so there they were.

JW: I imagine that was a pretty nice reunion.

JH: Oh, yeah. That was great, that was great. That was really great.

JW: Well, did you relax for a few weeks or months?

JH: Well, let's see, yeah, I did. I started school in I guess it was September of '46 up at Fayetteville, at the University. And during that time, I think it was called 51-20 Club or something, and if

JW: Did you go to Fayetteville knowing you were going to become a lawyer?

JH: That's strange you'd ask that. The answer is yes. And I didn't know I was going to become a lawyer until I got home.

JW: Is that something you thought about overseas?

JH: Well, in a way. I don't know. I came home, we were in Little Rock and I was talking to my dad and we were talking, and all of a sudden it was just kind of like a light went on or something, and I 26

JW: Well, when you're nineteen, what do you know.

JH: I worry sometimes that we make our children think that if they don't know by the time they're in the eighth grade what they're going to do, that they're not going to be worth anything. And I didn'

JW: Did you go to Fayetteville on any kind of the G.I. Bill?

JH: G.I. Bill. We didn't have to have an undergraduate degree to get a law degree, but you had to have two years of good enough grades to get in. And so I went two years and then I went three years  
la

JW: Boy, that's a lot.

JH: Oh, yeah.

JW: That's a good deal.

JH: Well, I did have a job, too, in the summertime that helped out. Not that first summer, but later on.

JW: Right, right.

JH: So it did.

JW: That sounds like it did what it was supposed to do.

JH: Well, I'm not the only one to say this by a long chance, that's a government program that seemed like it worked and they got their benefit out of because so many people, some of them just took it

JW: And you weren't a farm boy. There was some of those old farm boys that if it hadn't been for the G.I. Bill, they wasn't going to go to school.

JH: Yeah, that's right. And so that was a really good program, I think. Maybe it was because I was in it, but seemed to me like it really was.

JW: I think that's another thing that everybody is in universal agreement that we've interviewed, they all say that that was a great deal, even the ones who didn't wind up going to college. It helped

JH: Well, he's fixed mine before. I didn't know that, but that's right, yeah. But I guess the program works if the recipients make it work, I guess.

JW: Right. Well, at least it was an opportunity, a clear-cut opportunity. Some took advantage of it, some didn't. 27

JH: Yeah, that's right.

JW: It was a great deal. Well let's see, you went to Fayetteville in what I've always considered a pretty exciting time to go to the University. There was a lot of characters and there was a lot of-th

JH: Well, it may be. The basketball games were played in the old gym, which I think is a museum now.

JW: I think it was called the women's gym when I was up there.

JH: But the basketball teams played and everybody couldn't get in it, and you had to get in by your even or odd student ticket. And course, people would trade around and some people didn't want to go

JW: It's really not a very big building.

JH: No, it's not. I don't know how they ever played basketball in there, but it was really packed. Course the school wasn't near as big as it is now. But it was apparently great for the girls because

JW: You know, I think it was that a way when I went to school.

JH: And it was kind of strange because you had a mixture of the Veterans and then you had some kids just really out of high school up there, and then you had some kind of in-between. So you probably h

JW: I did the same thing with Viet Nam Veterans. I was a kid out of high school, and my dorm, there was four or five old men, I thought, and they had come back from Viet Nam and was taking advantage o

JH: Talk about old men. When you're eighteen or nineteen, anybody over twenty is kind of old.

JW: That's what I'm talking about.

JH: And one of the guys who was our squad leader, who took the place of the one I told you got the Distinguished Service Cross, he took his place. And then I took his place, that's where I wound up be

JW: Good advice.

JH: But we had such a mixture. Mission started off I think back in 28 November of '42 or something, they sent a whole bunch of people over for replacements. So when we went in we were going in as replacements. They still had a lot of the original group there but they st

JW: That is quite a mix. Well, one thing I want to cover that we didn't cover and I want to do it before I forget it. I'm sure you remember the day Pearl Harbor was bombed?

JH: Yeah.

JW: So can you tell us how that day worked for you.

JH: I think I'm right, that was Sunday, wasn't it?

JW: Uh-huh.

JH: I was listening to a professional football game.

JW: In Little Rock?

JH: No, in Fort Smith.

JW: Living in Fort Smith?

JH: And it was Philadelphia Eagles and somebody and I can't remember. And my reaction was, well, what do those stupid jerks think they're doing? We're just going to clean their plow. I was about sixte

JW: Do you think that you knew that you'd be going to war at some point in the future? At that age, it's hard to know.

JH: Yeah, it was kind of back of my mind, but it wasn't going to be next week.

JW: Well, I still find it amazing that a country the size of my finger could cause so much trouble and be so hard to beat.

JH: I know it.

JW: It boggles my mind that it took four years to do it.

JH: Yeah, yeah, they were tough.

JW: They were little pipsqueaks. When did you graduate from the University of Arkansas?

JH: 1951, Spring.

JW: Is that with or without a law degree?

JH: With. 29

JW: With a law degree. And then were you still single?

JH: Still single.

JW: So what did you do when you graduated?

JH: I came to Fort Smith and started practicing law. And I started practicing law, and during that time, I was Assistant City Attorney and I was a part-time U.S. Magistrate, not all at the same time,

JW: So you were in practice, private practice, up until 1974?

JH: Right. Although I had these other part-time things, but that's correct, yeah, that's correct.

JW: So somewhere in there, I think you must have got married and had some children?

JH: Yeah. I married my wife, Ann, married kind of late, had a child Eric, who is working at University of Arkansas and he's married to my English daughter-in-law I was telling you about. And a daughter

JW: And what was your wife's name when you met her?

JH: Brady, B-r-a-d-y. She was from Enola, E-n-o-l-a, Arkansas. That's northwest of Conway which isn't very big. And again, without sounding too sanctimonious, the best decision I made in life was when

JW: They have a very civilizing effect.

JH: That's a pretty good way to put it.

JW: That's way I look at it. So you were a Judge for twenty-four years?

JH: Twenty-four years. I told people it was the best job in the State, when you think about the lawyers we have and they get along so much better than most Bars do. When you think of the jurors we had

JW: That's a good long time. Well, I guess you were too busy, but you got home from the war, all of that, and I don't guess you had much of an adjustment period, you just jumped right into it?

JH: That's correct.

JW: Went to school?

JH: Except for that first summer, yeah, that's correct.

JW: Was it strange being home that first summer, or were you just so thankful it just covered it all up?

JH: Well, seemed like it was a little bit of both. And it was the strangest thing that happened during that first few months at home, I have no explanation of this at all. When I went into a departmen

JW: It is an odd thing, isn't it?

JH: Yeah, it was. And why department stores, I don't know.

JW: It didn't happen at church?

JH: No.

JW: Didn't happen anyplace else, just department stores?

JH: Right, right. It didn't happen if I went to a football game or basketball game.

JW: Well, too bad Sigmund Freud's not around to--

JH: That's right. But that was kind of, I don't know if it's unusual or not. I've heard of people that had other kind of problems or something. Sometimes a guy would hear a car backfiring and just abo

JW: It evidently was some shifting of gears for you.

JH: I noticed on your list there about things we might have learned or something, skills you might have picked up. I didn't really pick up any skills in the Infantry as such; but I did pick up kind of

JW: I'm sure.

JH: I couldn't tell you how many times that happened, but it has happened. And I think there's a bond between soldiers who have been in combat with each other that doesn't exist between soldiers who h

JW: So far so good, sort of.

JH: Sort of, yeah. And that's just kind of an indication of what things can happen or have happened in other places, and so it's kind of a scary thing. I don't know if when everybody gets my age, if t 31 feel like the younger generation is missing something or what, but you kind of get the impression that nobody really has that, I don't know if it's desire or if they just don't realize the dangers tha

JW: I'm sure there's lots that we've never been aware of.

JH: And just think of all the devastation and heartbreak and these poor people. Like I was telling you about the company commander's car driver that got blown up and just gotten overseas and just been

JW: Seven and a half dollars a week?

JH: A week.

JW: Not very much. I guess it bought a lot of stuff in 1941.

JH: Yeah, yeah, it did.

JW: '42.

JH: Bought a lot of stuff, it's kind of surprising when I stop to think about it. The whole experience is that I'm proud I was able to participate. I wouldn't want to do it again. I wouldn't want chil

JW: Well, we sure thank you for telling us your story.

JH: Well, I hope it's been helpful and are we still on?

JW: Yes.

JH: Well, I want to thank the Fort Smith Historical Society for doing this. That takes some effort to do it, and like you said, we waited a long time to do it. And I think although it makes us feel ki

JW: Thank you. It's rewarding, it's a rewarding experience. Met a lot of nice people I wouldn't have met otherwise.

JH: That's probably right.