

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with William H. Hunley
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PREFACE

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WILLIAM HUNLEY

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Question: All right, Mr. – Mr. **Hunley**, we're going to start the interview now.

Answer: Okay.

Q: It is Friday, the 21st of February, in 2014. Can you state your name, and when you were born?

A: I'm **William Henry Hunley**, and I was born the first of May, 1925.

Q: Where?

A: In **Matthews County, Virginia**.

Q: And did you grow up there?

A: Grew up there and lived there until I finished high school, and – and came up to the **Washington** area to work, and – and then worked for the navy most of my life.

Q: What was it like growing up there?

A: Oh boy, you wouldn't believe. It's a – **Matthews County** is a – is 99 square miles of delta. The ne-next county, **Gloucester County**, is full of hills. All the topsoil is washed out of **Matthews**, so in some places the topsoil is 75 feet thick. Man, it – it-it's beautiful swamp country, and full of – of various – all kinds of waterways and coves and bays. And was a marvelous place to grow up, to play on the water.

Q: Wha – what – what did your parents do?

A: I'm sorry?

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Q: What did your parents do?

A: Well, we had – we had a small farm, that – that belonged – come down through the family. And my father was a steam engineer. He went – while he was growing up, he was, from the time he was 20 years old, for a while he worked for a lumber company, and he ran the steamboat that – that carried these lumber crews back and forth. And then when the lumber business dried up, he came to **Washington** to work. So when I finished high school, I came to wash – to – to **Washington**, and I worked up here, too. And then 1950 I started working for the navy, and I worked in the ship design office, through my career.

Q: Let's go back to your childhood though. What would – do – do you remember school, do you – did you like school, were you a good student?

A: Oh, man. Didn't – didn't want to miss any school. I – I walked four miles to school –

Q: Okay.

A: – from the first grade on. Until I – I guess maybe I was a fourth grader, we **[indecipherable]** had a school bus used to take it – take us back and forth. So I – I really – I really liked school, and even now I probably **[indecipherable]** go running off, because I want to go back school again. There's some things I hadn't learned yet.

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Q: What were you good at?

A: In school?

Q: Yes.

A: Well, I – I did passably at everything, and from the time I was about nine years old, I decided I was going to be an engineer. So I concentrated on the things that would be the most useful to me as an engineer. And I got through that pretty good, you know, at the **George Washington University**, and the other – well, I wa – first I – the war came along, and I went into the army, and I got into the army specialized training program. And they sent me to loyal – **Loyola University** to study engineering. And I got in [indecipherable] was going fine, and five weeks later they closed the school, everybody went in the infantry.

Q: Oh dear.

A: So I spent – I spent the war in – in **Germany**. And tha – tha-that's how I got the wounds of course. And –

Q: Sure. Getting back to your – getting back to your childhood; did you play any sports, or did you hunt or fish, or do anything like that?

A: Well, I – a lot of hunting and fishing. I was in the river every day as soon as I – as soon as I finished my schoolwork and got home, threw my books in the house and off to – to the river. Down – down in **Matthews**, there are two rivers that come

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off the bay, and the **East River** was about 10 miles long, I lived on the **East River**.

So I had the full run of the **East River**, with relatives on both sides watching, to make s – make sure that I was doing all right. And that my mother knows if I didn't do things right.

Q: Right.

A: And every – I think it was marvelous, and there was plenty of woods to hide in, and I had a lot of fun with that. And in school I – I – I didn't play ball, because when I was about – at about six years old, we had a big yard, and all the neighborhood came su – every Sunday afternoon to play ball. And I was batting, and my cousin, who lived next door, and was twice my size and was pitching, and he let one fly, hit me smack on the nose. And that ended my ball playing. I didn't play ball after that.

Q: Yeah.

A: But I – yeah, I – yeah, and then [**indecipherable**] try the track team, which came in real handy when I got into **Germany**. I remember one time I was out in the middle of about a 600 acre beet field, they started firing at me with a machine gun, and I had to run to get off. Man, those boots were flying.

Q: I bet. I bet. Whe –

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A: But the good – I got – had – had a real good run through high school, and I started the archery club, and we had lot of fun with that.

Q: And when did you say you came to **Washington**?

A: In 1938.

Q: Okay, so relatively early.

A: Sorry?

Q: Relatively early.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Well, I came up in '38, but then I went back to the this – I finished high school in 19 for – in '42, then I came up here to stay.

Q: Okay.

A: But I – in '38, I came up here to work for a while in the summer, and back and – back for – for summers. And then after I finished high school, I go – came up and stayed here, and worked for the navy.

Q: Were you married before the war, or after?

A: Married?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: After the war.

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Q: After.

A: Got married 1950.

Q: And did you meet her after the war?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay, fair enough.

A: I met her at **George Washington University**.

Q: When the war broke out, did you volunteer, or were you drafted?

A: I volunteered, I was –

Q: You volunteered.

A: – that was – volunteer.

Q: What made you come to that decision?

A: I – what made me come to that decision? Well, I knew that everybody had to help, and I wanted to do my part. And I wanted to – at the time I wanted to go into the air force, so I enlisted for the air force. And that was great, they **[indecipherable]** my enlistment, and all that. And then it came time to report for active duty. So I went down to report for active duty **[indecipherable]** and made all the oaths and everything. And then they said, oh, we're sorry, but the air force quota is filled for today. So, can't get in the air force. I had enlisted for the air force, but the air force, it was part of the army. But, so they said, since you can't get in the air

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force, if you go over and talk to those folks over there, they're setting up the army specialized training program, and if you pass that exam, they'll send you to school anyhow. So I took the exams and they sent me off to lo – **Loyola University**, which closed in five weeks, and I went off in – into the infantry.

Q: What was the appeal of the air force? Did you want to be a pilot, or an engineer?

A: Well, I – I really wanted to be an aeronautical engineer. But I had been taking an air – correspondences courses while I was going to high school, in aeronautical engineering, and I wanted to learn to fly, too. But – so I could have a better understanding of how the airplane worked.

Q: Right.

A: But since I th – couldn't get in the air force, and they sent me to **Loyola University**, they put me in a mechanical engineering program, which I wanted to do anyhow. So I learned – I got a degree in mechanical engineering, and I work – worked for the navy. In order to get the job I wanted in the navy, I had to have a degree in naval architecture. So I went back to the **University of Michigan** and studied naval architecture.

Q: Okay.

A: It – it – it worked. I got to be – got to be chief naval architect and – chief naval architect, and technical director for ship design for the navy.

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Q: Now, when they went you to **Loyola** for school –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – do you understand why they shut the program down, and sent every –

A: Yes, yes, the war was progressing, and they really needed troops in **Europe** [indecipherable] **Pacific** too. But it – th-the – mainly **Europe**. And the – the – the need for engineers were not overwhelming enough to – to keep the – keep the kids in school.

Q: Where did you go to basic training?

A: Went through ki – **Camp Roberts, California**.

Q: When?

A: That was in 19 for – 1943.

Q: And what was that like, how long were you there?

A: I – well, when I went [indecipherable] **Camp Roberts** for basic, I was supposed to go into the – th-the **AFCP** six weeks basic training. But on the way to **California** my records got separated from me, and never arrived. So they put me in the infantry basic, 17 weeks. Which is the best thing that could have happened to me.

Q: Why?

A: Because wa – when I got into combat in the infantry, I needed that.

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Q: Yeah.

A: The – the extra – extra training, basic training was very valuable to me.

Q: How did you find training? Was it difficult, physically, or mentally, or what have you?

A: It was all difficult, but not – not impossible, I to – I mean, basic training
[indecipherable]

Q: Yep.

A: Yeah. No problem with that.

Q: And was there any – was there a particular military field that you wanted to go into?

A: Well, I was – I was assigned to the infantry, so that was it.

Q: Right. It's my understanding though, that beyond infantry, you were specifically selected as a scout sniper.

A: Yeah, ri – I – my – when I got in – well, I went through the basic training, and made the mistake of being first on the rifle range. And when our **[indecipherable]** boarding the ship going to **Europe**, somebody walked up and handed me, and said here, here's your sniper rifle. And I became – I became a scout – scout sniper.

Q: So there was no – was there any specialized training specifically for sniper training?

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A: Just – just marksmanship.

Q: Just marksmanship.

A: Yeah.

Q: And do you feel that your childhood of hunting helped in that regard as well?

A: Yeah, oh yeah, yeah.

Q: So you were very familiar, even before basic training, you were familiar with small arms, and –

A: Oh well, tha – that time I got into a problem, because growing up on a farm, and on a river, I had guns from the time I was about six, seven years old. And one of my favorite sports in the fall was to go down to the cove, and shoot the heads off of water – water moccasins when they – they'd come up in the mating season, you know. And I got so that I could hit them pretty good. So when I – when I got in the army, I was too good on the rifle range, and I – I pretty well set – set the course.

Q: After basic training, where did you go?

A: Well, I – I went to the [indecipherable] reservation in **California**, and we were on watch for the Japanese. They really were afraid the Japanese were going to attack the west coast. They had a submarine come in, I think on either **Oregon** or **Washington**, and fire some shells ashore, and they thought that it was maybe the oncoming of another **Pearl Harbor** attack on the west coast. So my division was

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scattered along the coast range **California**. We sat there for about, I don't know, six months or so, to be there in case anything happened. Then they decided that my division was going to go to **Europe**, so they shipped me to – to **South Carolina** for more training at **Camp Buckner**, and then shipped me through **New England** to – to – to **France** and to **Germany**.

Q: When did you arrive in **Europe**?

A: Ah, let's see. January 1945.

Q: Where?

A: At **LaHavre**.

Q: Okay, so directly into **France**.

A: Yeah, mm-hm.

Q: And what wi – did you – you were transported by – by troop ship?

A: Yeah, mm-hm. There was a – a German troop ship, she – her – her German name was the German equivalent of [**indecipherable**] and she was called **Alexander B. Hamilton**, in the **US Navy**. And she took us over.

Q: What was the crossing like?

A: That was in January, and it was cold, and it was rough. Two weeks. And I – I did fine til I went down to my – to my – to the bunkroom. My bunk was on **G** deck, the lowest one down, right against the fore big bulkhead. And so you're up and down

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40 feet every – every time [indecipherable]. And when si – to go to – to eat, you had to go up [indecipherable] the ladder to the main deck and stand – get in a line, and the – the feeding was continuous. The line went around all day long, and you'd go wa – go up, got in the line, went over to eat, and if you felt you might be hungry again during the day, you went around twice. Then back down to – down to the bunkroom. Well, I went down to the bunkroom, that's on my first [indecipherable] and going down that ladder, all the way up and down, that really fixed it. And when I got down there, the whole bunkroom was about that deep, with the re-results of the other pe – other people's had eaten lunch. Man, that was awful. So immediately I got assigned latrine duty, of course, which was cleaning up the whole place. That – that made it a very miserable trip.

Q: I bet. Was it very crowded?

A: Crowded?

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, very crowded. The – by the [indecipherable] before I get down the [indecipherable] them. There were – I think there were – think it was 5400 people on the ship. She wasn't very big.

Q: Did the crossing go under escort, or –

A: Oh yeah, yeah.

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Q: Under escort.

A: [indecipherable] right around, and dropping depth charges, and I di – I didn't see the – the ship get hit by torpedoes, but I – I know that some were fired while were going across.

Q: Did you make any friends on the way over, or did you have any special friends before landing in **Europe**?

A: Well, the – the people that were my friends were the people I went to school with. We all got – went and got [indecipherable] over the same – in – in at the same time. So the people I went over with were people I had gone – gone to school with, and they – they stayed with me, long as I was in the – the division. And of course, when we came back, we were get – we were – came back from – from the war, we were all still in the reserves, and we all got called up on the same orders to go to – to **Korea**. And I was working for the navy then, and the navy didn't want me to go. I was – I was there working on ship design. So they fought the – the orders all the way up the line and got – got me released from the orders, and I stayed and worked for the navy. The rest of my buddies went to **Korea**, none of them came back.

Q: Oh dear.

A: None of the ones [indecipherable] the war.

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Q: Let's go back to the landing in **France**, when you actually arrived at **LaHavre**.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: What was your first impressions getting off the boat? You're in **Europe**, what was that like?

A: Well, the first impres – impression was that it needed to warm up a little bit. It was January, so th-the – the fresh goop had melted, and when you stepped into the goop you were up to your knee, and the next time you went almost to your hip. And when you pulled your leg up, it weighed a ton. Bad. I had – I had read about that, and I talked to family and friends who had been in World War I, and I knew it – what it was going to be like. That was really a **[indecipherable]**.

Q: And now, when you arrived at **LaHavre**, your unit did not immediately go into combat –

A: No.

Q: – there was some – what happened in betw – what happened with those tr –

A: Well, we went – we did a lot of training and maneuvers and camping and all that kind of stuff in **France**, and then we finally shipped up to – to **Germany**, up through **Belgium**, across **Luxembourg**, and into **Germany** at **Trier**.

Q: Yeah. So, you – you still had several weeks of – of pre-combat training in **France**.

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A: Yeah, right. Yeah, mm-hm.

Q: And what was that like? Do you – do you –

A: Well, same thing I had done before, had two or three training sessions in camps in the **United States**, we just marched around and simulating formations, and combat formations, and things like that. And then off to the front.

Q: Yeah, now you followed up the **Sauer River**, is that right?

A: It's what?

Q: You followed up the **Sauer River**?

A: I went up – well, I – from **LaHavre** I went up to – to – went into **Belgium**, and then across **Luxembourg** to tr – **Trier** and then down the – oh boy. Holy smokes, I can't bring up the name of the river

Q: The **Moselle**?

A: The **Moselle**, right, **Moselle**, right, yep. And down the **Moselle** to the **Rhine**, and across the **Rhine** and down through southern **Germany**.

Q: Now, when you crossed over the **Moselle**, that should have been about March.

A: Mm, let me see. I think it was in March, yeah, mm-hm. Early March.

Q: Okay. When was the – when was your first combat engagement?

A: That was at tra – **Tr-Trier**.

Q: **Trier**.

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A: Just – just below **Trier**.

Q: Take me there. What was that like? Te-Tell me about the entire experience, wa –

A: Well, we took a train thr – across **Luxembourg**, and we got to **Trier**, we de-
detrained, and from – and to our – our division formation, and we looked dow-down
the **Moselle**, and I – I was – had been designated this – the scout sniper for my
platoon, and I was leading the parade down the **Moselle**, and the first incident in
combat, I – we were – I was following a – a fire break – in the fire

[indecipherable] Moselle. And I come up over a hill, it's very early in the morning,
and I see two Germans setting up a machine gun to – to cover the place where we
had just crossed the river. So that's where I started.

Q: And –

A: And that – that was the only time I got hit during the war. Got – got a – got a
[indecipherable] fragment [indecipherable] buckle.

Q: Who opened fire first –

A: Yes, I did.

Q: – the Germans on you, or you on them?

A: Yes. Yeah, I did.

Q: You on them.

A: Yeah, yeah.

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Q: What – what type of sniper rifle did you have?

A: I had a **Springfield 384**, with a **Weaver** scope.

Q: A **Weaver** scope. And what was that experience like, what – di – were you – were you shocked by it, were you addled by it at all?

A: Well, I – it's not an enjoyable experience, but I – I knew what was coming, and I was ready for it.

Q: Okay.

A: So I – I was able to [indecipherable] and – but I lost my s – I lost my second scout.

Q: How?

A: He got shot.

Q: Was he killed?

A: No, he didn't die r-right then, but he did later – later on. He had – he was shipped back, but he – he was pretty badly injured.

Q: Okay.

A: But I can't st – still can't understand quite how it happened, but I – I got all the way through I never got hit except for one – one grenade fragment.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I, a number of times where they started out just to get me.

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Q: Yes. And did you have to – did you have to take out both of the Germans, or –

A: Well, by – my squad was somewhere all behind me, so as soon as I fired, they all joined in.

Q: Okay.

A: And I got passed that and – and went on down the **Moselle**. Then I – when I got down to the **Rhine**, when we're crossing the **Rhine**, I lost my best rifle. I

[**indecipherable**] these little paddleboats, and I thought I was going to be on the left hand side of the boat, so I hung my [**indecipherable**] my rifle on my right shoulder. When I got to the boat something happened, and they shifted me onto the right side, and we're paddling, trying to dodge all the shells that were coming in, the rifle slipped off, it fell in the **Rhine**. That was a good one.

Q: Now that should have been the **Rhine** river crossing, we're probably approaching the end of March.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: At that time, the combat should have been picking up a good deal.

A: Oh, yes, it was thick, and pretty rugged. Well, we go – we got to the **Rhine**, I do – I don't quite understand the rationale, but they decided that we – we – we sat on the **Rhine** on one side, watching the Germans, and they were on the other side watching us for three days. Then they decided we could sneak across three o'clock

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in the morning, they wouldn't know we were coming. So we got out into the boats, and as soon as the first people got in the boats, the Germans fired tracer ammunition into buildings on both sides that were prepared, lit the place up like daylight, and those were the wooden boats that they can't [indecipherable] in a hurry. But we managed to get across, and get the beachhead, and went on.

Q: Now, the – the main body of the 89th did not cross the **Rhine** in boats, they crossed on a pontoon bridge that was set up afterwards.

A: Yeah, right, but –

Q: So you were in very adv – you were in a very advanced unit –

A: Yes.

Q: – in a very, very for –

A: I was advanced unit, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: One of our – one of our squads, ma – my – the – the second – I was in the third squad of our platoon. The second – the first squad went across the river first, about one o'clock in the morning, and set up [indecipherable] along the beach, along the riverbank, to guide the boats that were going to be paddling across, bringing us across. And they were under the – under the little seawall, there was a little seawall about that high. They were under that seawall for two o'clock in the morning until

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two o'clock in the afternoon before we could get to them. And when we got there, they had just fired their last round of ammunition; they didn't lose a man. But there were Germans laying all over the place.

Q: And during that crossing, and after the crossing, after you made it over, the whole time you were under fire.

A: Oh yes, yeah, yeah.

Q: That had to have been –

A: Artillery and rifle fire –

Q: Had to have been frightening.

A: – and machine gun fire too.

Q: Now, when you lost your rifle, how did you replace your weapon once you made it across?

A: Well, the only weapon I had going up east bank of the riv – of the **Rhine** was a – an **[indecipherable]** doub-double edged knife that my – my **[indecipherable]** knife that my father made for me, I wore it in my boot **[indecipherable]**. And I didn't get – I didn't get a rifle for two days. But I we – I went up the bank on the east side, and I'll – they'll never know how I had got there, but I got along bank, and I was starting down the bank, looking for a place that I could get out of the way of this rifle fire, and there was laying a – a **M3 Grease Gun** machine – sub-machine gun,

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with two packages of ammunition. I never will know how they got there, but there it was. And from then I was the guy that opened the doors. Really something.

Q: Now, what –

A: Two day – two days later, I go – I g-got a rifle that the guy didn't – didn't need any more.

Q: Yeah. He had been killed?

A: Sorry?

Q: He had been killed, or injured?

A: Well, he was cul – was killed or wounded at least – well, he wasn't there any more, yeah.

Q: Yeah, okay. So, going into April –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – I guess you were approaching **Eisenach** as you were coming in?

A: Well, **Eisenach**, we could [indecipherable] we went through – went through the town of **Velmic**(ph), that was – that was a little village where we crossed. And then we went up the – up the [indecipherable] right up to the top, and w-we started going up, and there's a little – a little walking path that went up to the apartment, and there was a stream coming down. And I'm going up [indecipherable] with my little sub-machine gun, as first scout, going up the – this little path, and I got – get

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to the first corner and I peek around at [indecipherable] setting up another machine gun. And [indecipherable] with my little **Grease Gun**. And I didn't come close to hitting him. I me – I mean, rocks were flying everywhere, and they – they took off. So we got up on top and then the – the next day we came to a big sugar beet country. That was the middle of a – I guess maybe a 600 acre shi – beet -- beet field. And the guy who [indecipherable] the beet field [indecipherable] with a – one of the **MG-42** machine guns that fire 1200 rounds a minute. And I'm right in the middle of the field. Man, you talk about boots [indecipherable]. I was [indecipherable] I in the – in the track team in school.

Q: Sure.

A: But anyhow, I made it over, and dived into the ditch, and survived that one.

Q: By this time you've had ample opportunity to see the Germans in action –

A: Oh yeah, yeah.

Q: – and you in action against them. What opinion did you form of the Germans as soldiers and as professionals?

A: Oh, they were good soldiers. But I still – I can't – can't really bring my mind around to understand why, but in the time there that I was in the lead, and we were moving forward, I always saw them first.

Q: You saw the Germans first?

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A: Yeah.

Q: Before they saw you?

A: Yeah. I ca – I can't understand how that happened, but it did. Cause that day in the – in the beet field, I saw them before they started shooting at me, but they wasn't a thing I could do, I was right in the middle of this beet field, no place to go. But several times I was able to – I think – I think I saved – saved a good portion of my – of my outfit, by being able to alert them to the fact that they were running into something that was going to be bad.

Q: So this is March, April 1945, how old were you?

A: I was 19.

Q: Okay. What – at that time, March, April 1945, what was your understanding of what it was you were fighting for?

A: I was fighting for **America**, for the **United States**. And I'm up – my people came here in about 1623, and we grew up in **Virginia** and helped to build what the united – what the **United States** is, so it meant a lot to me. Still does. That's what I was fighting for.

Q: And was your understanding that wer – was it your understanding that you were fighting against the Germans, or was it against Nazism, or –

A: Well, I – I was face to face with the Germans.

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Q: Right.

A: Nazism was a concept. The Germans were people trying – trying to kill me.

Q: Right. So it's something very personal.

A: It got pretty personal at times. A couple of times where they were to – to – they were [indecipherable] of several trying to get me, and that – what made it pretty intense.

Q: Yes. Now, in very early April, specifically be-between the third and the fourth of April, you're moving up. What – when did you arrive at – what was your first approach to **Ohrdruf**?

A: Oh, **Ohrdruf** was quite – quite – quite a while later. It was probably – let's see, I guess it was maybe three weeks or so over there.

Q: Okay.

A: Then there was skirmishes along – along the way, and then we went to **Ohrdruf**, and of course the – the tanks were the first ones in. We were following the fourth armored division, and the – the tanks were in there first and they started bringing things up, but then they – we were – we were right behind them, or right with them. And I was first through the – through the wall [indecipherable] went in, and [indecipherable]

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Q: Did you understand what **Ohrdruf** was beforehand? Did you understand that you were going to –

A: I had no idea it was that til we hit it.

Q: Okay, so you had no idea.

A: Mm-mm.

Q: As you're marching up, wh-when was – did you first make sight of it? And what was that like? What did you think it was?

A: Well, the first – first tu – first day, I was – I had a – was the **[indecipherable]** started firing, and we were right along with the tanks. And then the – it became obvious that there were, you know **[indecipherable]** on this enclosed area, and the – it – my infantry get it – moved up to move into the area. And there was a – it was a – the **[indecipherable]** and there was a – a wire fence **[indecipherable]** fence. And I went through that.

Q: What did you think it was?

A: Well, I didn't have any idea at first. But wer – after the fence, stacked in – I **[indecipherable]** along the fence, was dead bodies of the people that wer – that they had killed.

Q: Were you receiving fire on the way in?

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A: Not war – not at first. The – the – the guards were pretty well shook up by the tanks when they came in. Now there's some – some [indecipherable] firing, but not a real pitched battle. But there were – some of the German guards were still around [indecipherable] inside the – the compound, but they took off pretty quick.

Q: When you crossed the wire, and were inside the camp, what were the first things you started to see?

A: Well, the – first thing I'd see, of course, were these – these bodies stacked against the fence. And then I could see the bodies laying around on the – on the ground, just all over the place. Where – where – wherever the people – the people were, they shot them, where-ever they were. The only ones that were still alive were the ones that were smart enough to get down and pretend that they were dead. And there were still quite a few that were – were alive, and as we moved in, they thought that we were – you know, the Americans moving in, the Germans were leaving, some of them started getting up, and go – got this – I see some of them. And some of them who were wounded, and some of them were not wounded, but in horrible shape, had a – they were in horrible shape. They were beaten and – and burning up, and sick, and – and it was just horrible.

Q: You said the Germans were leaving. Were they escaping, or were they –

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A: Yes, whatever – ever th-th-they – well, when – when they re-realized that we were moving in, they marched the prisoners out for 60 miles or so. And of course, a lot of them – a lot of them died along – along the way. But the ones that were left were the ones that were too sick to march, and they killed most of those when – whe-when – when we – when we moved into the – there – they killed most of those, and then left. But there were still a few alive.

Q: Did you personally encounter any Germans inside the camp?

A: Not individually, no, mm-mm. I – I was in – in the firefight, but they were distant from me, they – they were not –

Q: Right.

A: – that close up.

Q: Did you interact with any of the prisoners?

A: I – well, I didn't have the language capability to talk to them, but I tried to convey the idea that I felt sorry for them, and that we were – we were trying to help. And we [**indecipherable**] had all kind of help, these people were lying all – all over the place, they were still alive, that couldn't – couldn't move. And dead bodies all over the place that need to be moved. We bu – we buried a lot of people. I wasn't involved in the burials myself, because I was first line combat scout, and I had – I

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had move on. So I was ha – I moved out very shortly after we got in there. And they had – lot of people came up behind and took care of the administrative business.

Q: When did you come to an understanding of what **Ohrdruf** was, and what the purpose of the camp was?

A: Well, was pr – was pretty obvious when we got to the edge of the camp, you could see what it was, right. And I didn't knew that the – the Germans had concentration camps, and war camps. **Ohrdruf** was a work camp, it wasn't – they – they di-didn't have the – the killer machinery, the ovens and all that, but they were working them to death. And when that didn't ha – fast enough, they beat them up, killed them. They had – they had clubs to beat them with.

Q: Right.

A: Yeah. They were all dead, horrible. And I wouldn't want to go back through that again.

Q: Did you understand that many of them who were there, many of the prisoners were Jewish people?

A: Oh yes, yeah, I knew that, yep. Yep. Very bad.

Q: How long were you in the camp?

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A: About – well, actually in the camp, only about one day, I was right next to the camp for another day. But I was on the front line, and we were moving, so we had moved on out into the forest.

Q: Did you – wa-was there any effort to try to provision for the remaining camp survivors?

A: Oh yes, they did that, the [indecipherable] gave the artillery. Our artillery – our detachment were the first ones in after us, after the infantry, and they did a lot of the cleaning up and taking care of the people. And then of course the – the other – other support troops moved in and they cleaned up the place, and buried the dead, and fed the survivors and took care of them. But – and I – I had – I had to move on. I was – I was in front – I was scout for the outfit, and I was – I was going.

Q: You said when you entered the camp, the bodies were stacked up.

A: Yeah, mm-hm.

Q: Were they clothed, or unclothed, what –

A: Some of them were clothed, some of them were partially clothed, some of them were naked.

Q: Okay. Had they obviously been starved and worked?

A: Oh yes. They – th-they were in ha – in horrible shape. Some of them had just been shot, and they were so bad off they weren't even bleeding. You could see the –

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see the bullet holes with a little blood around them, but they weren't – weren't actively bleeding.

Q: Right.

A: They were – they were in horrible shape, all – they were almost dead. They di – they were the ones that were so – so sick that they couldn't – they couldn't go on the forced march, th-they couldn't – so they were – they were **[indecipherable]** they were treated horribly. Beaten up with clubs, and shot and most – practically all of them were shot.

Q: Is there any way of you estimating how many of – dead – how many o-of the dead people were there, that you saw?

A: Well, I – I – I – there – there were heaps of them, and I – course I didn't – didn't have time to stop and count them, but there were hundreds, hundreds.

Q: And how many – how many survivors?

A: Well, I only say maybe 15 or 20. Maybe the – thi – maybe not even that many. They were stoo – standing up and moving. God, I – I – they were the only ones that I had really – well, there were – especially the ones that were standing up. And in – most – most of them were **[indecipherable]** on the ground either dead or dying.

Q: The ones who were still alive, what – did they try to interact with you, or anyone else in your platoon?

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A: Well, yeah, we ha – they came running up to let us know that they were overjoyed that we were there. And we tried to – tried to talk, but I couldn't talk to them, because they couldn't – they don't – couldn't understand their language.

Q: Sure.

A: And most of them were – were too bad off to do very much talking anyhow. But they – they came up to let us – let us know that they were glad that we were there.

Q: Both men and women?

A: I don't remember any women.

Q: Men, okay.

A: Just they all – all that I remember were men.

Q: Okay. Very good.

A: I don't know if there was women there or not, there may have been, but I didn't – I don't remember seeing any.

Q: Did that experience, seeing the camp, s – and seeing some – th-the dead people who were – who were stacked up, and also some of the live people who came and tried to – to speak with you, did that change at all, your understanding of the war, and why you were fighting it?

A: Well, it reinforced what I already knew, yeah, I knew – I knew – I knew what we – what we were up to, and what we were fighting, but it – it sure reinforced my

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understanding of it, because there were – it was just absolutely horrible. I just finished reading the book called [indecipherable] **Patton**. And one section in it they discuss the – the – the – **Ohrdruf**, and **Eisenhower** and **Patton** came to s – to see the place, and they said it was so bad, that it upset **Patton** so bad that he went off to the side and – and lost his lunch. [indecipherable] **Patton** [indecipherable] that'd be a pretty rugged – he wasn't the type to get all excited.

Q: And he came several days after you were there.

A: Yeah, oh yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Q: When you moved out of the camp, where did you go then?

A: We went down as fast – far down into **Thuringia** forest, and right into [indecipherable] and had – there was several firefights going through **Thuringia** forest.

Q: What was the fighting like? Could you feel German resistance strengthening, or weakening?

A: Well – well, I was – it was weakening, because we were gradually wiping out the ones that were in there. And I got into some pretty – pretty fierce set-ons myself. At one time – one point, we were leaving a unit of the 76th division, and my platoon moved up to relieve one of that platoons, and I walked alongside the platoon sergeant, and he stood up. And of course, **Patton** required that we wear our insignia

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on our helmet right there, in gold. Nice and fi – nice and flashy. So he stood up, and when he stood up, bing, right through his insignia. And the next shot was for me, but somehow he missed. I don't know how, because he had a fine rifle, and a fine telescope. But he missed. And I got down behind a spruce tree about that big. And he shot a group just where I'd be, though the – his first tree, about this wide, he had about like that. And he wa – he sees – he saw some part of me, I guess that – that he thought, or at least he thought he did, and he was shooting at, and he – and he had put right in there. He was shooting one of their – I ca – I can't remember the designation [indecipherable] 10 shot semi-automatic – automatic rifles, that they designed and built to counter the **M-1** rifle. And it was a very fine rifle, and he had a – a bi – a b – a beautiful telescope on it. I [indecipherable] telescope [indecipherable] and he's still using it.

Q: So you – you engaged that German – you – you had to kill him.

A: I – I didn't kill him, I [indecipherable] the – I had two – I had a – a [indecipherable] on both sides of me. And [indecipherable] and when I got down behind a tree, and he was – he was – he had me st – stuck, I couldn't move. And they could hear him [indecipherable] they didn't stop shooting at me. So I went up and got his – got his rifle, and took the scope off, and sent the scope home to [indecipherable] my scope.

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Q: And as you're moving – as you're moving on, at some point you cross the **Mould(ph) River**?

A: Which one?

Q: The **Mould(ph) River**.

A: Let's see. I don't recognize that name. Well see, we went – we went from – **Woodruff(ph)** is just south of **Gotha** right?

Q: Right.

A: We went through **Gotha**, down to **Woodruff(ph)**, down through the **Thuringia** [indecipherable] and I wound up Czechoslovak – **Czechoslovakia** border, it wa – the little town of **Langenbach** in **Germany**. And I can't even remember all the towns we pa – we passed through light – no, no, let's see – no, I been – it's been too long since the war.

Q: Sure.

A: I'm [indecipherable] I'm getting sort of – I don't recall the names as well as I used to. But we went through [indecipherable] a number of times between **Gotha** and **Langenbach** and a couple of them, there was some pretty fierce fighting.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: [indecipherable] that was a – a-actually it was before – yeah, [indecipherable] was before **Ohrdruf**. Had a big fight at [indecipherable].

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Q: Had you ever been to **Europe** before the war?

A: No, mm-mm.

Q: So that was your first experience of **Europe**?

A: Yeah.

Q: What did you think of it, in terms of the terrain, the land?

A: Oh, it was beautiful. **Germany** was just gorgeous. I thou – I remember when I was going across southern **Germany**, I couldn't understand why people from places as beautiful as that would be [**indecipherable**] to take – take somebody else's land. It was a [**indecipherable**] a hilly country, all beautiful green farms, there's little villages on top of the hills, little white villages on top of the hills, and it was just beautiful scenery.

Q: Now, apart from the German soldiers, who were clearly trying to kill you an-and you were trying to kill them –

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: – did you interact with any of German civilians as you were moving through?

A: Oh yes, yeah, yeah.

Q: What was – take – te-tell me about that experience.

A: Well, as we went through, of course, we would come to German homes where they would – they just – I – I – al-almost every Monday – Monday was baking day,

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we'd come to a home [indecipherable] baking. And absolutely beautiful breads and cakes, and all kinds of stuff. And when we come through, the – the ladies of the household would trot out the baked goods for us to sample, and man, oh boy it was good. And the – the – in the – in **Germany**, southern **Germany**, most of the civilians that I ran into were not too – not too bad to – to talk to or get along with.

When we got into **Austria**, man they were the most vicious ones that I ran into.

Right in **Salzburg**.

Q: In – in what way?

A: Well, the ones in **Germany** would – would talk to us, and they would just talk about, you know, just the average whatever you talk about. In **Austria**, as soon as you [indecipherable] was around **Salzburg** that this, you know, what – what we were doing to them, taking away their radios, taking away all this and that kinds of stuff. They didn't have any of the stuff that they should have, because we were taking it all away. And what they had, was houses with six or eight rooms, some of them, with one room solid full packed with silverware that they got -- looted out of **France** and other countries that they'd taken over. I [indecipherable] they had a room full of – of plate and – and tableware, and all kinds of hou – silver [indecipherable]. All that kind of stuff just stacked up. Crazy.

Q: Yeah.

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A: And they were very, very perturbed because we were taking away their stuff.
Their stuff. Man.

Q: Was there – was there ever a point in the war that came, where you – where you thought for yourself, we're winning this, we-we're – we're – this is going to end soon?

A: I thought that right from the beginning.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. I mean I – in **France**, soon as we got ashore and started moving, we were pushing them back. This Battle of the Bulge was sort **[indecipherable]**. I was off on the right hand side of that in – in **France**, but we were – obviously had them on the – on the **[indecipherable]** along.

Q: Were you engaged in the Battle of the Bulge, or to – off on the flank?

A: Yeah, I was – I – I was not in the Battle of the Bulge.

Q: Right.

A: I was off on the side.

Q: Right.

A: And – but I went up too far to that, after the – the actual Battle of the Bulge was over.

Q: Mm-hm.

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A: But, very interesting experience.

Q: Was there ever a – a sense – was there – di – wer – did there come a time where you could sense that the German war machine was slowing down?

A: Yeah.

Q: That there weren't being – when was that time?

A: Oh, we're actually across the – actually across the **Rhine**, they definitely [indecipherable] slowing – slowing down. And the troops there who were – who we were battling, were becoming less and less efficient. When we crossed the **Rhine**, the – the troops that we were battling were from around **Salzburg**, and they were the – the Home Guard type. And they were not – not as proficient as the soldiers we fought all up – up through the **Rhine**.

Q: Right.

A: Some of them were very poor shots. That's the reason I'm still here. Thank heavens for that, but a lot of them were older, and they were not the – not as – not the top notch soldiers that we fought [indecipherable] across the **Rhine**. But that was [indecipherable] where we ran into SS troops, and people were very topnotch soldiers. And at the end, when we were – when we wound up at – at **Langenbach**, we were getting ready for another push on the fifth of – fifth of March, I think, we – fifth of April – fifth of May, we were having another push into sh – into

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Czechoslovakia, and there was a whole – I don't know how the arrangement is of SS troops, and the other t-topnotch troops that had been digging in and getting ready. And we were p-p-pushing off against them. But that would have been – that would have been a horrible battle. But just the – the – we lined – we lined up th-the – the – the infantry lined up in battle formation, the trucks started their engines, the tanks started their engines. And just as we started following, the word came down the war was over. Happy day.

Q: So what ha – what happened then? What happened when the word came over –

A: Everybody shot everything they had into the air.

Q: And what was the reaction on the opposite side, on the German side?

A: Well, I-I don't know what – what went on over there, but there – there was no – there was no battle or anything like that.

Q: Right.

A: They – they initially – they di – they didn't just immediately dissolve and go away. But th-they started coming in and – and – and, I mean ha – by the thousands.

Q: Surrendering.

A: Surrendering, yeah, mm-hm.

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Q: What was that experience like? Were they – these men who you had been fighting against for some time now, all are coming towards you, presumably with their hands up surrendering. What wa – that must have been an odd experience.

A: Very odd. And ye-ye – course th – y-you didn't – ye – we had no idea whether – whether we could trust them or not, you know? Th-That – they were pretty sneaky at lots of things, and it was a sort of a hard experience to stand there and watch them come out, you know, thousands of them, but just a – a few of us. And [indecipherable] weapons, they could have [indecipherable] us up pretty good. But it [indecipherable] surrender, they were – that's all good.

Q: How long did that take? How long did it take before – for all of the – the German units to start surrendering to you? What was – that process take a day, a few days, a –

A: Well, it took a few days. There – there was – they were also – course, behind the German front lines, it di – di – took a few days before they acquiesced to – to come in.

Q: Even after you said, okay, that you understood the war was over, at that point when the war was over, were there every incidents of still receiving fire from the German side?

A: Not that I remember, no.

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Q: Okay.

A: Once – once that over, and we got the word that the – the country had – had surrendered and it – there were some si – local fights, but I wa – I wasn't – I was not in any of them.

Q: Okay. And when the Germans came to surrender, what did you do with them?

A: Oh, they just pass them on back, and they – they had [indecipherable] times, and I wi – I didn't – I didn't see any [indecipherable] they were behind me. But th – the – they [indecipherable] been – been just miles for troops marching. Lots of them.

Q: Where did you go, once the war was over, what then happened, what happened to the 89th division? Where did you go, where did you st –

A: Well, we went to **Austria**.

Q: Okay.

A: And we were in – in duty in **Austria** for about a year. And then the – the di – the division was dissolved, and we came home.

Q: What did your duty in **Austria** consist of? What did you do there?

A: Well, I – there were mostly was just – just living there. There wasn't anything much to do. Once in a while we would have an assembly with – we'd fall out in

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uniform. Sometimes we [indecipherable] and sometimes not. But there was not very much to do, just – just a matter of just staying there.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And it was a beautiful country and a lovely place to be. And I was on **Wolfgangsee** at **St. Gilgen**. This is just out – just outside of **Salzburg**. And we stayed there for almost a year. It was just this gorgeous place.

Q: And how were you living? We-Were you in garrison, or –

A: Yeah, well, there was a – a – a – an apartment building, a big, big apartment building in **St. Gilgen**, and my – my [indecipherable] was in that apartment building. And they – we all were very comfortably housed, and everythi-everything went fine, but there was nothing to do except to stay there.

Q: And – but you were still interacting with the Austrian people, even if you did not understand the language. What was th –

A: Well, by – by that time I [indecipherable] so I could talk to them.

Q: Okay.

A: And that – I got so I could carry on a pretty good seventh grade level conversation. So I go – I got along fine with them. But the Austrians, most of the adults that I ran into, were really, really bitter. They kids, I got so that I could talk to the kids and a lot of them were pretty friendly, and some of the – some of the adults

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were pretty friendly. But a lot of them were very bitter. We we – we were taking away their things, you know.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Of course, they'd – they robbed the – the whole world as far as they could reach, of everything they could get, but we were taking away their things. Yeah. Very peculiar.

Q: Yeah. When did you get word that you were going home?

A: Well, let's see. I came home in April 1946, and I can't re – I can't even remember the details of how – how that came about, but th – the di – the division, which is all [indecipherable] back to **France** and took ships to the **United States**. Came into **New York** harbor. Very nice to [indecipherable] sign them up there.

Q: So, you were on deck when you came into the harbor?

A: Yeah, oh yeah, mm-hm.

Q: What was that experience like, seeing it?

A: Oh boy, that was – that was – that was really great to be home, I'll tell you.

Q: Yeah.

A: I seen the Statue of Liberty standing up there.

Q: Did you get to spend a day or two in **New York City**, or not?

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A: Well, as soon as I got ashore – I shouldn't admit this maybe, but I went **AWOL**, went to see my mother.

Q: Okay. Where did you go to see mother?

A: I got th – but I didn't re – soon as we got into **New York**, right away they took us to **Camp Kilmer, New Jersey**. Soon as I got into tha – got ma – everything settled, assigned my bunk and all, I took off for the train station and went to **Washington, D.C.** to see my people.

Q: What was that like when you first saw your – your mother?

A: Oh, man, that was great. I hadn't seen her for a long time. You know, I'd been out – I'd been in the army for three years, and I spent most of time in **California** or someplace else. I'd only seen them one time during that time. And it was very, very nice to get back to them, yeah.

Q: Did they know ye – that you were coming?

A: Basically, yes. That – I don't know how my mother found out that I was going to be in – in w – in **Washington**, but my dad was working in **Washington**, and my mother was out on the farm. And when I got – when I – I-I – as soon as I got in [indecipherable] into **New Jersey**, and got settled in the camp, I hopped a train for **Washington**. And I must have called my dad, I guess, or I just sent him a – you know, a telegram or something, so he knew I was coming. But when I got to his --

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where he was living in **Washington**, my mother was there. I was really surprised. I didn't think she knew I was coming, I was going to pick up my dad, and go down and see her.

Q: And did you see – did you first see them at the train station, or at – at home?

A: No, I – at home, yeah.

Q: At home. And so –

A: And that – yeah.

Q: You came walking up, and wish they – were they already waiting on the porch, or –

A: Th-There they were, yeah. They didn't know what train I was coming or anything. But we had a – getting home, really, really exciting. That was good.

Q: How many days did you spend with her?

A: With my – at home?

Q: Yeah.

A: Well, I – I had to go right back to the c – the camp, because I was **AWOL**.

Q: Sure.

A: If I didn't get right back, I'd get stuck for sure. But I – I didn't – didn't get in the – they didn't – they didn't give – give me any trouble. I went back and got signed in, and got all processed out, and then went home.

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Q: How long did that process take of – of output –

A: About two weeks.

Q: About two weeks?

A: Yeah, mm-hm.

Q: And then where did you go, did you go to **Washington**, or –

A: I went back to **Washington**, yeah, then went – when went back to **Matthews County** again.

Q: Okay. So if – you spent –

A: But my – my dad was working in **Washington**, and now I had been working there with him before, and he helped me, so I went back to **Washington** and [indecipherable] from their home.

Q: Okay. So after – after demobilization, you're back in **Virginia**.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Okay. Wh-What did you decided to do? What – did you just do nothing for –

A: I want to get – get back to school. Went to **George Washington University**, soon as I got back, and registered for the first class I could get in.

Q: Okay. When was that?

A: Yeah, that was – let's see, I came home in – in mar – April. First class I could get was a fall class, so fall of '46.

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Q: So – so September 1946 –

A: Yeah.

Q: – you're back at **George Washington University**.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Did you stay on campus, or did you stay with your parents in **Washington**?

A: [indecipherable] before . And I went back to working with him part time, while I went – while I went through.

Q: Where was he living in **Washington**, do you remember?

A: Yeah, on **15th Street**.

Q: Oh.

A: **15th** and **M**.

Q: **15th** and **M**, okay, so relatively close.

A: Yep.

Q: What – and what was he doing, remind me.

A: He was running the power plant and machinery in a hospital steam plant. Still steam engineering.

Q: So you were both working, as well as going to school?

A: Yeah, right.

Q: How long did it take you to finish school?

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A: Sixteen years. But I – I – well, I – I got – I got two degrees – three degrees, really. I got [indecipherable] degree from **George Washington**, and then I worked for a while for the navy, then I went back to **Michigan** to get my degrees in naval architecture and marine engineering, cause I wanted to be chief [indecipherable] I could do that once I got those degrees. So I went back to the navy and went back to designing ships, and I worked my career through there, 30 ye – 30 years.

Q: What was your first job out of school?

A: Out of school I was still – I – well, I – I – I wa – I was working for the navy – I – I was go – I was going to **George Washington**, and soon as I got settled in to **George Washington**, I went to the navy. The navy had – had pretty much closed down the ship design office after the war, because it had – it wa – had more ships than they could use, they were trying to get rid of ships. But by 1950, they were – they were at a point where they were starting to assemble a ship design team again for the future. And I went in on ja – speculation just to see if there was anything that I could get to do. And they hired me as a – a part-time draftsman. I couldn't get a po – a government appointment, three years before I could get a government – federal em-employee appointment, but I worked as a part-timer for – for three years as a – as a draftsman. And when they finally started staffing the office at the end of the

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three years that I was right – I was right at the – at the bottom when things start to [indecipherable]. It was perfect.

Q: So that would have been the early 1950s, or so?

A: Yeah, 1950, August 1950.

Q: So i-it's around this time when you meet your wife.

A: Well, I met my wife at – when I was still – when I – when – started at **G** – at **GW** in 1946 – no, for – '47. She ki – she was going to school at **Lisberg College**, and she came to **George Washington** for her sophomore year, so it was 1947 I met her.

Q: Were you in class together?

A: No, oh no, she was a – she was, you know, ki – she was studying economics, I believe, and I was in engineering.

Q: How did you meet?

A: At this fraternity party.

Q: Okay.

A: One of my buddies – she was – but they thr – my buddies, he ca – he was a – a marine type too. He got on a ship, went to **South Africa**. He was gone too long.

Q: When did you decide that you liked your wife? When did you decide –

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A: Oh, almost immediately. She was very attractive, and she was from – she was from **Lovell(ph), Virginia**, I was from **Matthews County**. And of course I speak the – I still speak a little bit of the **Matthews County** brogue, you know, in we – my family moved to **Virginia** in the 1620s, and they brought with them the Elizabethan English, and **Matthews County** is very isolated. Practically all the traffic in until – until I was born, practically all the traffic into **Matthews County** was by boat, so there wasn't much traffic in and out. And the language tended to be preserved. The men who worked on ships, they went all over and they – gradually the men's language changed. The women's language stayed pretty much Elizabethan. When I was kid they still used something very close to Elizabethan English. I had a lot of that – a lot of **[indecipherable]**. And this – thi-this – so I still had a lot of that. So when I went to college, lot of the kids couldn't understand what I said. And **Carol** showed up, they said hey, you speak the language. You gotta go talk to **Bill**, we can't understand what he says.

Q: What was your first date together?

A: Well, our first date together was well, I wasn't dating her, she was dating my buddy. And he and I were double dating. And then he took off for **South Africa**, and the fraternity had another party, so I invited her.

Q: When did you decide this was the woman for you?

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A: Oh, about at least a month later.

Q: When did you propose, and how?

A: Well, it was the nec – the next summer, I guess, and we were out rowing in a rowboat, and I – we listening to the concert down at the **Watergate** in **Washington**.

And I got a little romantic, proposed to her, give her my fraternity pin and all that.

Q: So that was on – you were on a rowboat in the **Potomac River**, and that's when you decided?

A: Yeah.

Q: What year was that?

A: Well, I had decided before that, but that's the first time I told her about it.

Q: So she got your pin rather than a ring.

A: Yeah. Got a ring later.

Q: And she agreed straightaway, or did she put you off for a while?

A: Well, she put me off for a while. Took a little while to convince her.

Q: When did she finally come 'round?

A: Well, it was – it was almost 1950. We were married in 1950. August 1950. Sep – September 1950. So it took a little while to convince her that everything was going to be all right.

Q: And did you have children straightaway?

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A: Sorry?

Q: Did you have children straightaway? Immediately have children?

A: Well, our first – our first child was born in '55. So we didn't have any right away. And had the daughter in '55, and another one in '58. Boy. Lots of memories coming back.

Q: Sure.

A: Yeah.

Q: And where were you living when you – where did you make your family?

A: Well, I – I was living in **Washington**, working for the navy when we got married, and then we rented an apartment in **Washington**, and then after a few months we bought a house close to the apartment. And then we moved back to **Virginia** when everybody – when we decided to have children, we moved back to **Virginia**, to get to – to a more congenial neighborhood, and be able to get to the schools easier.

Q: Where in **Virginia** did you go?

A: I went to **Alexandria**, in the **Monticello Park** area.

Q: Okay, bri – I know that area.

A: Yeah, it's pretty nice.

Q: Mm-hm. How many years did you stay there?

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A: Fifty-one.

Q: Fifty-one year, a long time.

A: Yeah.

Q: Very long time.

A: Yeah, the kids grew up there, they really – they loved it. They – they – we – we were on **Argyle Drive**, which is a short street with a cul-de-sac at the end. It's only one blo – one block, and then a cul-de-sac. And the whole neighborhood was full of – full of kids when mine were coming along. And so ver – the kids were all up and down the street all day, everything ver-ver-very nice. Wonderful. And a good – the – the parent dig – the parents all right, very good neighbors. Nice place to live. But –

Q: And you said – how long did you – how many years did you work for the navy?

A: Thirty years.

Q: Thirty years.

A: Yeah, mm-hm.

Q: And as a – and your official job title when you retired?

A: When I retired I was chief naval architect, and te-technical director for ship designs for the navy.

Q: And what year was that?

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A: That was 1980.

Q: 1980? Okay.

A: Yeah, mm-hm.

Q: So all the way – you were designing ships from –

A: 1950 to 1980, and then after I retired, I still designed ships for another 30 years.

Q: What sorts? What kind of ships?

A: Oh well, I – I did quite a bit of de – the design work for the navy under contract.

And I designed a few [indecipherable] vessels, some smaller vessels, 40 – 40 – 45 foot work boats and fishing boats, things like that. And I designed the – the [indecipherable] for the alexan – **Alexandria Seaport Foundation**.

Q: Right.

A: After I retired, I – I joined the **Alexandria Seaport Foundation**, and in '92 I became chairman of the **Seaport Foundation**. And at that time we had the old schooner, **Alexandria**, 125 foot [indecipherable] schooner. And I started a boatbuilding school to ha-have something for the kids at **Alexandria** and **Washington** – whole **Washington** area to do. And we – we – it really took off, I was amazed at that. You know, wh-when I went to set it up, I talked to the city council, and they weren't very interested. I went and talked to the school board, ah, you're wasting your time, they said, your kids don't want to do anything like that,

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they want to play in the streets and all. But I – I persisted and I got the school started in 1992, and I started off with a – a group of 15 little kids that were 12 - 14 years old, and had a group of neighborhood supporters that would support them. And they all came in and we split them up into groups of five kids, with at least one adult with each group, so that they had some good supervision. I started them building little wooden boats. And I – we found that boy, when – when a lot of – most of those kids – most of them when they came, they were – boats didn't mean anything at all to them. And doing anything with their hands didn't mean to them. They didn't do – they'd never done anything. But when they came in to us, about a week of working on a little boat that was going to be theirs when they finished, as long as they could actually do something, man, the effect was amazing. So that's gone on since '92 and it just kept on growing, it's national now. A-As our system that we developed has been spread all over the country, and now a hundred, 185 organizations in the country that use our system, teaching kids to build little wooden boats. The little wooden boat is – is the key to it. They come in, and they get started with hammer and – and chisels and saws, things they had never touched before, and they learn to use those things, and they start building a little boat that they can see, I can do something that's going to last and will be good for me –

Q: Sure.

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A: And that – it really gets them. Works very good. Then, a-after we got that going good, we started adding classroom exercises to help them with their schoolwork, and now we teach mathematics and physics and hi-history, and a couple of other courses occasionally, for the kids that are in high school and have trouble with a – with the high school. They don't do well in – in math, a lot of the – a lot of the boys particularly don't do well in math because they're sitting there working on mathematical problems that don't relate to anything. They can't see any – any sense in it at all because it doesn't – doesn't relate to the things they do. But when they come in, we start teaching them to use mathematics to lay out the boats and [indecipherable] and all that kind of stuff, and they see the use for it, it makes a big difference.

Q: I bet.

A: Yeah.

Q: Your – after the war was over, you had a long life, very long, a good long time after the war.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did your experiences during the war bother you? Do you they come back to you later on?

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A: Oh yeah, it came – it came back to me constantly. When I first got home, if a car – car go down the street backfire, I'd wake up under the bed. But I gradually got over that, and it – it – it didn't bother me so much as it, you know, changed my outlook a lot.

Q: In what way?

A: Well, one thing, I was – th-the group that I was with were practically all volunteers, enlistees – enlistees, and of course, the – the – the main – main body at the World War II army was draftees. And I found that the people who went voluntarily, they were – had a slightly different outlook on things, and I – I – I was glad that I had enlisted and gone voluntarily [indecipherable] what I had to do.

Q: Can you talk about that a little bit? In what way wa – in what way was it different? Was there a sense of professionalism, or was wa – how was it different between –

A: Well, yeah, professionalism, and in the way that indu – individ-individuals reacted with each other, the ones who had enlisted tended to be more interactive and worked together better than the ones that were drafted. That – that wasn't – I mean [indecipherable] not the across the board thing, wa – everybody was still different. But the – the – overall, the – the – the people that I knew that were enlistees tended to, I thought, be a little bit easier to – to – to work with, and get things done. A lot

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of the – a lot of the draftees, some of them that I knew personally, were just, you know, absolutely overwrought with having been drafted. They wanted nothing to do with it, and that – that influenced everything they did. The ones that – that volunteered knew what they were going – going to do, and th-they – they tended to respond a little differently.

Q: Sure. You said when the Korean War broke out, there was an effort to re-mobilize you?

A: Well, when the Korean War broke out, I – I was already demobilized [indecipherable] to the navy. And they – they started calling up the reserves again, and I got called up. The first sheet of orders that I got included me, and most of the people that had been in my immediate organization in World War II. And the navy [indecipherable] back to them. They didn't want me to go, because I was working on a ship design business, and so they managed to the – get the orders – pre – get me off the orders. And that amazed me too, because th-they have to track it up unit by unit. They first tried the unit that I was assigned to, were turned down, and the next [indecipherable] they took it to the office of the president to get me released. As I [indecipherable] that really amazed me because I hadn't been at – I hadn't been at the navy very long. But apparently they – they had something they wanted me to do, so I stayed on and became chief naval architect.

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Q: And – but you did not initiate that process –

A: No, no.

Q: – that was initiated by the navy.

A: I – I – I went in – when – when I got th – when I got my orders [indecipherable]
got my orders [indecipherable] got married, and I had already taken two weeks off.

And when I went back in after two – two weeks after I got my orders – course,
when I got my orders, I had to notify the office. And when I went back in two
weeks later to pick up my books and thi – drawing tools [indecipherable] from the
office, and I was leaving to go report to duty, and the – th-the – the assistant chief
naval architect at that time, came running down the aisle, said hey, **Bill**, hey **Bill**,
you don't have to go. Man, was that good news.

Q: I bet.

A: Oh boy. Cause th-the – the – the group of my – on my orders that went, didn't
come back.

Q: No.

A: None of them.

Q: I'm curious, by this time that you've had a few university degrees and what –
were they trying to remobilize you as an enlisted man, or as an officer?

A: Well, I was – I was a **PFC** in the – in reserves.

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Q: Okay.

A: I had been offered officer training school before I was demobilized, but I – I didn't – I didn't want to take that as a career, I wanted to be an engineer.

Q: Right.

A: So – but I was called – I was called up as a first – first class private. First class, too.

Q: How old were you at that time?

A: Sorry?

Q: How old were you at that time?

A: Let's see, that – that was in 1946, I was – hm, 20 - 22.

Q: When did you decide to leave **Alexandria** and live where you are now?

A: Well, I – well, I always said, living in **Alexandria**, we became interested in this old little village of **Waterford** up in **Loudoun County**. You know **Waterford**?

Q: Yes.

A: They have a very won – they had a wonderful – well, they still have a wonderful annual event where they have the old homes tour and colonial craft exhibits. I was very interested in – in the colonial crafts. I trava – I'm a gunsmith and make furniture, and all that kind of stuff. So I used to go to **Waterford** and go – go there for the fair every year, and got to working with some of the craftsman up there on

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different things. So I – we got – both of us got so interested in it that we watched for a – a lot that we could buy, we were looking for a house, really. But we – none of the houses came up for sale that we could – could ha – could handle. So a lot came up for sale, so we bought the lot, 1968, and then we started drawing back – I started making designs for houses. And, of course, in **Waterford** they had all – had all kinds of restrictions on what you could build because they wanted to keep the tenor of the village. So I designed what I thought was a real **[indecipherable]** house, and I took it to the **[indecipherable]** took it to the – the architect who was the **[indecipherable]** on what you could build. Showed it to him, he said, oh, that's a nice little house **Bill**, but that – that's – that would look beautiful in **Lancaster County, Pennsylvania**, but that's not for **Waterford**. So I went back, and I designed a brick house. Oh, he said, man, **Williamsburg**. Beautiful **Williamsburg** house. Not for **Waterford**. So about that time, my wife was reading **[indecipherable]** the "**Washington Post**," and at the bottom end of the classified ads was, log house for sale. They were tearing down a log house because they built – had new houses all around it, they – they couldn't do anything except tear – tear down and move it. So we went over – she said, let's go over and take a look at it. Well, that was the first week in May, 1970. And I said, oh, I'm too busy, I can't take – make it. So next week she tried again. The house was still for sale. Third

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week, still for sale, tried again. The fourth week, Sunday – Sunday afternoon, it was raining cats and dogs, the kids were grumpy as all get out. Said okay, let's take the kids over, we'll go look at it. So we went over and there's this log house. By that time they'd taken the roof off, and it was raining for all week, and water dripping on everything. We opened the back door, and the inside of the house had been lone – had been lined with [indecipherable] board, you know, this fabulous tan, soft fiber, insulating board? And when we opened the back door there was enough [indecipherable] that the whole ceiling collapsed, and two tons of water and all frazzly wood came down. But it opened up everything so I could see all the logs. And it was in good shape. Only two logs needed some – some moderate repairs. So right there we bought the log house, and we [indecipherable] hire a guy to haul the logs over to our lot to **Waterford** so we could rebuild it. And he started loading up the logs, he says, hey, you know, my father's got a log house three miles over there, that he hasn't used for 10 years, he'd probably sell that to you, if you wanted it. So [indecipherable] that was very reasonable, so I bought that and they moved both of them over, and we combined the two of them to make one house in **Waterford**. And we finished it [indecipherable] lived in it to the point where we lived in it about 1975. And we had – still had floors missing, and no doors or windows installed, things like that, but we moved in in time for the kids to go to school in the

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fall, and then I built it up from the inside. So that's how – that's how we got into that.

Q: Very nice.

A: And it's be-been nice, I really – really had a good time there. I still live in – still live in there.

Q: Yeah. Is your – is your wife still with us?

A: No, she died in ni – in 2003.

Q: I'm sorry.

A: But she enjoyed the house as long as she was there. She liked it.

Q: Okay.

A: I was planning on building a boat, I had – had – had a design along the way for a 36 footer. But she wasn't really too keen on a boat. So she saw this old house thing, and she says, why **Bill**, you're – you're really interested in all this colonial craftsmanship and stuff, you'd di – you'd like this log house. We ought to – we ought to go look at that. I put her off for a month, just – when I went to look at it, she finally got me. So I never – never built my boat.

Q: No. Now, I'm sorry, but going back to the war –

A: Yeah.

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Q: – there are people today, not only in the world, but in this country, who say and who claim that the Holocaust never happened.

A: Oh gad. Can you imagine people as stupid as that? I can't.

Q: Now what –

A: A-A-And that's not – I understand what you're saying, but th-that's just absolutely insane. I – I – I – I – that just – I just can't come up with any – anything to explain that.

Q: What would you say to those people?

A: Well, I've never run across one of them, but I – I sure I would come up with some proper things to say.

Q: Yes.

A: I was there. I was in the original play. I c – I can read you script line by line. Man, some of the places that I saw were raps – just – just – it's unbelievably horrible. And how – how a nation could do that, I don't know.

Q: Did it change the way you felt about the German people?

A: Well, yes, of course. I – I didn't know much about the German people pu – before. I have some – I – I have a very extensive family, my people who were in **Virginia** by – by 1623, and so we became [indecipherable] a lot of them came from **Germany**. But none of the German people that I – that I knew had any – a-any

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i-indication of anything like that. I don't know – I just can't understand ho-how that could develop.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But on the other hand, the Germans have a history of that, that there have been battles from – from way back, all the way from the beginning.

Q: Did you ever return to **Europe** after the war?

A: Oh yeah. I've been back to **Germany** tho – about six times. I used to go to **England** frequently because I – and **France** because I was chief naval architect for the navy, and I was involved in naval design programs for the British, Canadians, and the [indecipherable] the Australians. So I used to visit them all.

Q: Why **Germany**? Why did you go back to **Germany**?

A: Well, I – I went back – I-I wanted to go back and trace th – follow my trace – the – my wartime trace from **Germany**. I went back four times to try that and never got to do it. I took my family with me, and we'd always run across something that they liked so much they didn't want to leave. So I never got to go back and trace that trail again.

Q: And what di – do – so you – were you traveling by car?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, mm-hm.

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A: Yeah.

Q: And when – when was that? When – what –

A: Well, let's see, yeah, we went in – boy, let's see. In – in the 60s and 70s, it was – our da-daughters went with us. And before that I was too busy with – with the navy. But in 60s and 70s, and we went back once in the 80s. We went to **France** – in the 80s we went to **France**, but instead of going to – to **Trier**, then going down to **Moselle**, or down across the **Rhine**, and follow my tracks, when we got to fr – to **France**, we rented a car in **Paris**, and we drove up to where we go into **Germany**, and man it was gorgeous there. And the weather was beautiful, and so we **[indecipherable]** to **Germany**. I – I still would like to go back, but I don't think I can do it now.

Q: Going back to **Germany** then, how, if at all, did both the country as well as the German people change?

A: Well, of course the – when the war was over, the – the people changed pretty rapidly. And I – I became a – a pretty good **[indecipherable]** with a lot of them aster – after the war. Used to correspond with some of them, and course you never can tell what they're actually thinking, but what they said was quite different.

Q: Yes.

A: Yeah.

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Q: That's –

A: But they – they were – at th – I can't understand how – how it could develop to what – where I was, but they were – that was a vicious nation. Horrible. I'm glad that's over.

Q: We're making this recording, this recording will go into our archives.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: It'll be used by historians and scholars, and people who study not only the war, but the Holocaust in particular.

A: Yeah. Mm-hm.

Q: Do you have anything in closing that you would like to say?

A: Well, no, can't think of anything we haven't already covered. And I've lived a long life, and I've done a lot of things, so I could talk on and on for the rest of my life, probably, and never stop, but it probably wouldn't be of too much interest for your researchers. So I hope that what I have been able to cover today will be of some use to you.

Q: It is very useful, and it was very, very interesting –

A: Good.

Q: – and very, very nice speaking to you personally, so –

A: Good. Nice talking to you.

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Q: So –

A: I wish you good success with the program.

Q: We hope so as well. It's an ongoing program, and hopefully it will be going on for – for a few years more, so –

A: Yeah, mm-hm, very good.

Q: So many thanks for your time, and many thanks for your service to the nation.

A: Oh, you're certainly welcome.

Q: Thank you.

A: And the service for the nation was for myself, too.

Q: Very good. Thank you.

Conclusion of Interview