

Recorded Interview
New Orleans, LA 2011

Robert O. Briggs, Company L, 410th Infantry, 103d Division

I was born in Natoma, California, which no longer exists. It was absorbed. Folsom, where Folsom Prison was located, had ten or fifteen houses. In 1998 people were dredging for gold all around this area. About two miles from here was a town my father always referred to as “Camp”. That was an area of active gold digging. There were ten or fifteen houses as well as a post office. The company had a cookhouse and a school. Folsom, California expanded and absorbed Natoma. Now the town is nonexistent. Currently, I live five miles out of Ione in Jackson. That is my mailing address. It is beautiful until about June 15th. Then it is burnt brown until the next rain. I lived in this little company town and was in the _____ grade at Folsom High School when I heard about Pearl Harbor.

We had a window that looked out on the side of our house where there are some play things. All of a sudden one of my high school buddies shows up on his bicycle from Folsom. He asked me if I had my rifle out and said, “The “Japs” have bombed Pearl Harbor.” I thought he was just talking crazy. He came in the

house and we turned on the radio and low and behold, “yes”, it happened. My dad was taking a nap and I woke him up to tell him.

Dad and I were convinced that the war would last about thirty five minutes. We had an incredibly low opinion of the Japanese as did all of Californians. They had taken our scrap metal and they ate rice; what in the hell are they going to do! (How about when Germany got into the war, what did you think then?) From an early age, I had a goal in life. I wanted to be in a position to tell other people about history. When I discovered that there was an actual job where you could read history and be paid to teach it to other people I was elated. We were not poor but we were definitely not rich. My father was fortunate enough to have a job all thru the Depression but he also had five children. College was out of the picture for me. I followed the progress of the war in Spain because we would have arguments in high school about our involvement. About a month or two before I was eighteen, I enlisted because I was bound and determined that I was not going to be a draftee. My mother was very reluctant about signing but I explained that in a month I would have to register for the draft and would be taken anyway. I assured her that they would not take me until I finished high school. I joined the Enlisted Reserve Corps. a month before my eighteenth birthday in May of 1943. I went to work for the **Natoma Company**, a very paternalistic company.

They always had work for the sons of the employees. After the war, in my sociology class, I was taught that company towns were just horrible but I had not experienced that at all. Natoma took care of their people. The company built everything. When they purchased a truck, they just bought a truck “body”. Then, they took it to their carpenter shop to get a bid on it. The company had a blacksmith’s shop with big steam driven hammers. In back of the shop they did welding and sheet metal work. When Natoma started supporting the war effort they made cargo hooks for the Navy. We had steel about six or seven feet in length and I used a mechanical hacksaw to cut it into chunks about [redacted] inches long. And then it was sent to the welder. That is what I was doing while I waited to be “called”. The company had some of the biggest lathes I could have ever imagined.

One of the last things we did in the last quarter of school was to participate in a “senior ditch day”. We all went to Sacramento City College and spent the day talking to counselors. I went because it was better than going to school. I explained that I was in the enlisted reserve corps and I was just waiting to graduate and be called up. One of the counselors told me that they were offering a test and it would be to my advantage to take the test. I did take the test and eventually, I received a card in the mail that said that I had passed. The card also mentioned that when I reported for duty

I should give the Army the card. I graduated from high school and went to work for the Atoma Company. About the middle of June, I received a letter from the government requesting my graduation date. A week or two after I sent my graduation date, I received a letter back indicating that I should report to the Presidio of Monterey on July 8. The day came to report; at eighteen years of age, I boarded a train for the first time, basically with the clothes on my back, and headed to the Presidio of Monterey. That Sunday night, at the age of eighteen I stayed in a hotel for the first time. I have a niece who lives in Fulsom currently and I told her I had traveled extensively in and about Fulsom.

After a pancake breakfast, I walked up to the gate at the Presidio and basically said, "Here I am." The Presidio processed enlistees; draftees were sent to Fort Ord *en masse* like a herd of cattle. One corporal was assigned to me and led me through the process. I sat down with the classification personnel and found out I had some choices since I had enlisted. Not having thoroughly looked at the options I might be offered, I had not worked out a plan for my Army experience. I did share that I had taken a test, and gave him that information. The Corporal found out that I had passed the ASTP test and encouraged me to talk to someone about that.

Basic Training

Soon, I found myself riding in a Pullman for the first time and heading to North Camp Hood, North Point, Texas, and Basic Training, and ASTP. I was on detached service so I was riding a civilian train, myself and four other servicemen. We had been given meal tickets, another “first.” Eighteen year olds think they know “everything.” I did not make the connection, so I did wonder what we were going to do for food! The other servicemen were aware. To this day, I recall the white linen table cloths, the silver utensils, and cut glass! I enjoyed my first breaded veal cutlet and it has been a favorite entrée ever since. Three or four days later I was in North Camp Hood, Texas. We were formed into four companies and we began thirteen weeks of Infantry Basic Training. I started early in life trying to see the logic in things.

North Camp Hood was a tank destroyer base and Fort Hood was a tank training base. Why would you send 1000 guys to a tank destroyer base to give them infantry training when you brought the Cadre from _____ to train them? Why didn't they send us to the Cadre location? Since the war in Africa was over they did not need tank destroyer personnel and hence decided do turn it into an Infantry Training Replacement Center. We were the first batch to go through. We were still considered ASTP and I thought that was fascinating as well. We were in with other men who were not in

ASTP. Some may have had a little college experience. Some men were older than me. I had just barely left high school. It seemed like almost everyone in my company was from New York City and at least two thirds of the company was Jewish. Almost half of the men had gone to City College of New York, CCNY.

We had thirteen weeks of basic training and then were shipped out to colleges. I was shipped back to California, to Los Angeles City College. About two blocks from Los Angeles City College were the old buildings of Chapman College which had moved to a bigger site. The gym and classrooms were still there. The Army must have leased it and we were stationed there. We formed up every morning and marched to Los Angeles City College and split off into our companies.

Basic training was fascinating! We were so high up in the priority list in the Army that we trained with Lee-Enfield Rifles, high end rifles (surplus from WWI). It was enlightening because when we were training with the rifles, the bolt would break off. It was stimulating to be around different people of different ages and listening to their philosophy.

My platoon Sergeant, _____ was another interesting character. He knew obscene words to every song ever written. An interesting character. He was a staff sergeant who had come up from California. He liked us and got along well with us. He claimed to be a professional college student. He ran track and under several different names and competed at three or four different schools over a period of years. Peacefully after the WWI, he spent his whole life being a professional student running track. He had always taken ROTC and he knew the manual backward and forward. “If the sergeant would reference the manual he would ask, “What is that citation sergeant?” Then he would recite it for all of us, practically word for word. Sergeant _____ believed in an esprit de corps within the platoon and everywhere we went we sang songs with all these nice verses in them. _____ was his name. We had just come back from the rifle range after pit duty which is the most exhausting detail you can get in Texas, hotter than the hounds of hell. We were just dragging our tails back to camp. Then I heard, “Carter!” “Sing!” Suddenly, we picked up our step; we were standing straighter; swinging our arms with more enthusiasm; marching into our barracks area looking like we were some elite drill outfit.

I had a little experience at North Camp Hood. I was on detail to fire the boilers which provided the hot water for the steam

cables, for the showers, for the kitchen. I had never seen a boiler set up; I was eighteen years old! I could work a coal oil stove. They gave me about a five minute course on when and how to throw the coal into the boiler. I managed to successfully smother the fire every time. The officer of the day, the lieutenant, knew more about it than I did. He would come, save the fire for me and get it fired up again. He would leave and I would destroy all the progress he had made. That scenario would go on all night. I never got the heat in the boiler above “tepid” all night.

I would go back to the barracks and crawl into bed. When that was over and we got over to the mess hall everyone in line was moaning and groaning about how cold everything was. Something was wrong with the boilers last night. I very quietly got my cold food and sneaked away.

It fascinated me, that when we left basic training on October 1, the government decreed that we would go to wool uniforms from the khaki uniforms. Five of us were going to Los Angeles City College and we were in wool uniforms in about 120 degree temperature in the shade and there was no shade. I was assigned to A Company. A fellow named **Bridensbach** had been following me around. We would take turns being in the top bunk. From Camp Hood, to ASTP we were together.

We had our beds in the gym at first, before they got us totally organized and enrolled. I use to say I received all the experience I needed to live in a dorm after living in a gym, with 108 roommates. They were trying to find some configuration that would work. They tried dividing the gym into two areas using the lockers. It was great fun to lift the bunk of a soldier who was sleeping soundly, set it on top of the lockers and watch the funny things that would happen when he woke up. At other times we would pick up a soldier's bed and put it in the front of the gym where there was a large space used for formation or place his bunk in the center of the field used during formation. We even extended our creativity to the balcony on the one end of the gym where the noncoms lived. **The noncoms who had passes to leave.....??**

We learned to take advantage of soldiers engrossed in reading the paper in chow lines. If you moved very carefully you could move up seven or eight people in line and nobody would notice, whatsoever.

I did not do well academically in high school. I discovered that everything the teachers told me was true. They told me I had a lot of talent, I was lazy as hell and I should work harder. I received good grades in history and average grades in my other subjects. I was not thinking of college and therefore was not motivated to excel. I was totally lost when I was out of the history

class. Then now having college physics thrown at me really threw me and I did not perform well. My math teacher was not the greatest math teacher. I had taken algebra and geometry in high school in an accelerated program. I loved geometry because of the logic and reasoning involved and received good grades in the subject. I thought math was hard enough when the answer was unknown but even harder in Algebra when there might be two additional unknowns. I dropped my pencil, picked it up and missed Algebra II. When our teacher went to Chicago for his father's funeral, the head of the department, who also wrote our textbook, taught the class for about a week. Amazingly, for one brief moment in my life, Algebra made sense. The guy knew his Algebra, he had written the book, and he could teach. He returned to his original position when our teacher came back.

I found out more about the ASTP program much later. The Army's ASTP program was the answer to the Navy's B-12 program. We should have learned from the experience of the British in WWI and WWII where they killed off the college generation which causes you to lose many things. We should have read the small print at the bottom of the page. The ASTP program was to give people a college education until they were needed. When you were needed they sent you where you were needed. That proved a hardship for a lot of people. You could

transfer into ASTP from outside or you could enlist, specifically, into ASTP, like I did. If you specifically enlisted in ASTP they sent you off to thirteen weeks of infantry basic, when they needed you, they needed you. Everyone in ASTP was a private and could have come from different branches of the service. We had a guy who had been a sergeant in the Signal Corp, who had to give up his rank. When they finally broke us up in February and March of '44 and sent us all off to the infantry, some of those guys were demoted. I had thirteen weeks infantry basic; I did not come into the outfit totally ignorant of what it was about. They always liked to point out to everybody that the army tested general intelligence. The test was not an IQ test; it was a test of trainability. You had to score 110 to go to OCS but you had to score 115 to go into ASTP. We were in LA Community College one quarter. The quarter was over in February. I believe that if they had not abolished ASTP I would have been shipped out anyway because my grades were not that exciting.

They had recalculated the potential casualties for D-Day and decided the army needed us. We were required to report when we finished our academic quarter. 75,000 of us did just that at various times. I feel that this was to my advantage. To the best of my knowledge, I joined the 103d on the fifth of March and on the sixth of March I turned nineteen. I was the first ASTP man in the

company and the only one. By the time the other ASTP guys got there, I had been accepted. I kept quiet about being in ASTP because there was some animosity toward us from the men who enlisted in the infantry or had been drafted. There are so many of us here at the reunion because we were so young when we moved out of ASTP and into the army.

I was called in at Los Angeles City College due to a very interesting thing. Since I had enlisted on February 8, '43 that was recorded as the date I started my time in the Army even though I had been in active reserve. I was paid after the officers as well. The officers got paid, the regular army got paid, enlisted men and draftees last. I got called down to the office. There were five of us scheduled to go to Camp Howze, Texas. I was the ranking private and therefore in charge. I can't even take care of myself and I am going to take care of four other guys? That set me off into a psychological world of my own. I really enjoyed that because all that time counted, so shortly after I got to the 103d I got PFC stripes. I just had them sewed on my uniform and painted on my helmet. I was put on the kitchen garbage detail. Since I was the only PFC, I was in charge. I rode in the truck with the driver and the other soldiers lifted and emptied the garbage cans.

I was asked, "Do you want to be infantry or cruise serve weapons?" We had training on mortar and machine guns. He

finally decided that I would like cruise surface weapons. I was sent to L Company as a replacement in the weapons platoon.

In basic training we were training with the M16 mortar. We were out on the rifle range ready to fire the mortar for the first time. On the dummy round we pulled the pins, but the round did not go all the way down. We panicked because we did not know what to do. We screamed miss fire, miss fire. The officer encouraged us to follow the drill to get the shell out. You are suppose to hold your hands at the end of the barrel, unhook it from the base plate and lift it up. Because there is a pin you have to hold on to it to make sure it does not arm itself. We tried the whole thing over again and the same thing happened. It misfired. Once again the officer comes down and we go through the whole routine again. Then the officer looked down into the barrel and pulled up the two **aiming sticks**. His expression said it all, “College kids, stupid as hell!” So after that shell everything worked correctly.

I got to the orderly room, after chow, about 6pm. It was March, overcast and cold. I was introduced as the “new man” for the weapons platoon. The supply **sergeant** came out of the supply room, looked at me, and about that time, **Captain Whips**, the Company Commander came out of his office. **Escobitto** came out of his office, looked at me and asked the captain, “Does he go?” Captain **Wips** said, “Why not!” The Captain gave me his

equipment. I found out that Monday morning bright and early we were leaving for a three day problem at Lake Murray, Oklahoma. That was good in many respects. They rushed me in and took me down to the weapons platoon. I was really fortunate because Richard Norton was the platoon sergeant. A man who was a born leader if you ever saw one; I had great respect for him. He asked me questions and welcomed me to the platoon.

The next morning we fell out and I started learning the routine of the 103d infantry. This was just a month or two after they had completed Louisiana maneuvers. I was an ammo bearer in the first squad. I understood that we took turns carrying the mortar. I happened to be the last man the first time I was involved. No one ever explained to me that after twenty or thirty minutes carrying the mortar, I was to give it off!

The whole experience was an interesting one and I likened it to the experience of the poor replacement that gets sent into combat. For example: We had a mortar squad section and a machine gun section. I did everything I could to help them. I also developed an animosity toward the staff sergeant who was the machine gun section sergeant. We were forever shipping people out and we had green recruits coming in. The story going around for a while was that we were going to be a training division. But what they were doing was taking soldiers from here and sending

them to England to fill in the divisions with openings in preparation for the invasion. When they decided to reassign us to the seventh army and ship us overseas, they froze the former procedure at that point.

A young man, who was married and whose wife recently had a baby, came to us from the guard house. He wanted a pass to go home. The captain told him, "This is a war, you can't have a pass." What really angered the soldier was the fact that when the captain's wife had a baby, the captain took off for a week. The young man went AWOL to see his wife and was thrown in the guard house. One was a captain and one was a private. The section sergeant was the acting platoon sergeant because Norton was not there. The section sergeant hated the private because he was a "jailbird."

I made sure that when Nelson came down everything was perfect. The section sergeant had nothing to complain about, everything was perfect. I remembered to share what I had learned because I had experienced how hard it was when I started. I tried to make it as easy a transition as possible.

Louisiana maneuvers were horrible. Two jeeps were attached to the platoon to carry mortars, machine guns and ammunition when needed. I became friendly with one of our drivers and I used to tease him because he would talk about Louisiana. One time we

were pinned down pretty bad and I called to him, “Tell me how “*bad*” Louisiana maneuvers were!” “Live ammunition?” “Were Louisiana maneuvers worse than this?” I heard many Louisiana stories.

They were pulling all these men out and looking for other men to fill their positions. I am a visual learner. If I see somebody doing something four or five times I can step in and be successful at performing that task. I moved from ammo man to second gunner and then replaced the first gunner who was shipped out. I was friendly with another gunner in the machine gun section. We were both on KP one night when a runner came in and told us we were on the list for shipping out. We were peeling potatoes. To celebrate we went into the “walk-in” and each took a quart of milk and sat down to peel potatoes. We downed the milk and had a contest to see who could peel a potato in the shortest length of time. The easy way was to make six “cuts” and the potato was “peeled!” (The potato cube was rather petite but the potato was peeled.) The next morning we heard the men in the KP line complaining about KP drinking all their milk.

We were shipped to Camp Shanks, New York. I loved it because I had been in tarpaper barracks for almost a year or so. At Camp Shanks they had grass and it was maintained. We went up to West Point to see a football game. I believe West Point played

Maryland. Of course West Point was playing the leftovers. All the physically fit people were playing for Army. That was the beginning of Blanchard and Davis. The score was something like forty to nothing in favor of West Point. The Maryland line did not have a chance.

Three of us got together and toured New York and had dinner at the Hawaiian Room of the Hotel Roosevelt. They took pictures of us and I still have them as a reminder of “fate.” I came back but they did not.

When I was at the Presidio of Monterey, they did not like what they heard when they listened to my heart. They sent me over to Fort Ord, to the hospital. This was the early days of the EKG machines. They had ten thousand wires hooked up to the machine. I felt that they would discover that I had a heart murmur. I told the guys, “Give me your girlfriends’ phone numbers and I will take care of everything for you. I might even write you a letter.”

I was examined by two techs the day of the “big physical” at Camp Shanks. One tech had a tongue depressor and one tech had a stethoscope. One tech pressed my tongue down with the tongue depressor and proceeded to look away toward the other tech, engaging him in conversation. He asked if the second tech was going into town that night. The second tech had his stethoscope on

my chest but focused his attention away from his task. He asked the first tech, “Are you going? Do you have some girls lined up?” Eventually, they said I could leave. The heart murmur was not detected. That was the BIG physical.

L Company was chosen “Guard Company” on the ship. My job was to guard the officers quarters. A really tough assignment! We were 6 hours on and 12 hours off. That came in very handy about two days out from New York when I got sea sick. Until then I had been priding myself for how well everything was going. We hit a hell of a storm. The crew who had been in the Pacific, which was known for terrible storms, said our storm was worse.

We were three or four miles out of Virginia and everybody in the boat was sick. The guard company was located in the bow; only the latrine was further into the bow. The latrine had long troughs covered with slats equipped with holes. Everyone was sick and some had to be sick into their helmets. They would come through our area to dump their helmets into the latrine! Sometimes they would reach our door and dump their helmets in our area.

When the ship’s bow would hit a wave and drop down, I would swear that I saw the ship buckling. We were on a converted Liberty Ship. When we went on guard we were taken to the guard room for coffee, sandwiches, cake, pie, or cookies. I could “gag” that down. I tried to go down to the mess hall once during my

twelve hours “off”. I got about four steps down when the smell drove me back up. So, the guard room snacks had to keep me alive.

Everyone was to wear a life belt. It was not a floatation device and I am not sure how successful it would have been. The most daring thing I did happened when a Colonel was not wearing a life belt. I told that Colonel to go back and get his life belt and fortunately he did not know who I was.

Finally, the storm ended and we were in convoy going along pretty well, until they decided we needed to get physically toned up a little bit. The Colonel had us out on deck touching our toes and instantly we became sick again. We got through Gibraltar and into the Mediterranean and we hit another storm. To get out to the deck you had to go through a bulkhead door into another area and close the door behind you. Then you would open the next door and go out on deck. This was to prevent light from the ship to be detected by the enemy. I reacted to that storm in the same way I had reacted to the first storm we experienced just out of New York. The First Lieutenant was with me; suffering just the same, had a can of peanuts which he shared with me. We tried to keep the peanuts down. Finally, the storm stopped and we were told that in one direction we were looking at Oran, which was held by the Vichy government.

We reached Marseilles and witnessed the attempt the Germans made to keep us out of the harbor. They had sunk hundreds of ships to block clear access to the harbor. We did clear the harbor but did not unload until about four or five o'clock in the afternoon. My buddy **Larson**, a first gunner in the third squad, remembers that we went over the side of the ship onto cargo nets and then into Higgins boats. The boats brought the soldiers to shore where a ramp would open at the end of the boat and the soldiers would disembark.

Then we began what one of my buddies in the Company called the "Marseilles Death **March.**" We marched fifteen miles to the staging area carrying everything we owned at the time. "*Security*" had been drummed into us. We would meet the 103d musket battalion; for all we knew they were the SS troops. We would hurry up and wait, hurry up and wait. One soldier sat down and leaned back to rest his load on the ground behind a retaining wall. But instead of setting his load down, he and his load fell over backwards into a small stream. He started screaming that he was going to drown until he realized it was a creek, not more than two or three inches deep.

We got to the staging area and we pitched our tent. We started a procedure that continued throughout the whole war. The section sergeant and I had been friends in the States. He had been

busted to private for screwing up but he knew more about mortars than anyone in the section. I was a _____ in the mortar section. Our mortar sergeant turned out to be useless. (The Colonel, who was a professional musician in private life, had kept him on and loved him because he was a professional.) We lobbied to have Biedde to become the section sergeant and he did. He and I and our squad leader pooled our resources. We had three shelter halves and three blankets. We pitched our tent with a shelter half for the ground cover and three blankets. I was the tallest so I got to sleep in the middle! We practiced that procedure throughout the war which was perfect for me because I kept the warmest being the third to go into the tent. I kept telling them that we had to “ditch” the tent. My buddies said, “No, no we’ll be fine.” The squad leader finally told me, “If you want to ditch the tent, you “ditch it!”” I ditched the tent and about three in the morning it started to rain like you would not believe. Lo and behold the three of us were nice and dry the next morning and everybody else in the section was soaking wet!

We were at the staging area long enough to keep us busy. They would truck us into Marseilles to work as stevedores unloading the ships. Biedde, who was still the section sergeant, would become a private. He came back and said, “We hit it big! We were unloading candy rations and he tied a string of candy bars

inside his jacket. They were all MR. GOODBARs and I loved peanuts, and chocolate but I don't like MR. GOODBARs. I felt kind of like beating him to death. "Why in the hell didn't you get Babe Ruths?"

I can remember that when we went into Marseilles we had a Frenchman or GIA driving the two and one-half ton truck. Whoever it was, they hated civilians. When he saw them he would drive in such a way that they were crouching in the doorways to keep from getting hit. I also remember that if you used the public latrine for #2 you had to signal the public lady to come over and sell you little sheets of paper.

Another significant event was riding the streetcar. Everybody was trying to ride, troops and civilians. We would be forced to stand in a doorway, sometimes having to lean out of the car. All the while cars are whizzing by you. The streetcars never stopped they just slowed down and the passenger jumped off. At one point we decided to get off while the streetcar was going up hill. My first step was about forty-five feet nearly smashing my nose on the cobblestone. I tried to regain my balance. We were there about a week and then we followed the Rhone River loaded on 2 ½ ton trucks. We had relieved a unit of the Third Division. I think it was on November 11 on the old Armistice Day. (We may have jumped off on Armistice Day). We went on line somewhere

in the early part of November. When Biedde and I went on line we went as the two riches men in the mortar section. In the back of that two and half ton truck we were playing a game called red dog. To this day I can't tell you how to play it. Biedde and I pooled our money and dumped it in the same helmet. When one of us was hot, and one of us was always hot, we practically took all the money the men in mortar section possessed.

We finally went on line and that is when I realized I was in big trouble. The first gunner carries a forty-five and I discovered that I had a real knack for a forty-five. I would slip that clip in and pull the back and if I stuck it in your pants I stood a 50-50 chance of hitting you. I began to wonder if that was the way I was going to go through the war. When we first got online, two or three of us were in a hole. We occupied positions that the 3d had already dug. We had a piece of canvas partially over us. It was about 9 o'clock and dark as the ace of spades. I heard a noise. We were new to this situation and like everyone else we were scared "spitless". In our imaginations it could be the whole German army out in front of us. The people kept coming toward us so I slid out my forty-five. All of a sudden I heard the voice of Norton, my platoon leader say, "Briggs, Briggs." I replied, "Norton." We threw the canvas back and saw Norton and Dublonsky, our platoon leader. I said, "Norton, don't ever do that again! I almost shot you

guys!” The next morning, in the little briefing we had, Lieutenant **Dublonsky** said he had come out to see if we were “up to snuff,” doing your thing, and “god damn Briggs almost shot me.” I realized he was doing a good job. I am not going to do that again.

The first gunner, the position I held, runs the mortar. He sits on the left side and has certain responsibilities. The sergeant sets a stake out. The sergeant goes out to set another stake to line you up in a straight line to the target. Once you get that set up you have a site on the mortar. Using the bubbles on the mortar you line it up with that stake. The three ammo guys keep you supplied.

The first gunner carries ammo and the tripod. The second gunner wears a larger “penny” which holds three more rounds of ammunition. Then the have three rounds of ammo here..... And here..... You are trotting around with a mortar and 18 rounds of ammunition. When we would move out in the morning there would be a couple of tables or couple of 1x10 boards on the ground with ammunition and food. That is when we would “fill in.” If the mortar man had used up three rounds, he would pick up three rounds.

People will often ask, “Did you ever kill anybody? You can say, “I don’t know.” But the real answer is, “yes!” The first time we went into action, they lined us up. The 1st platoon had been pinned down by a machinegun. I fired three rounds. Then, the

word came to pack up and move out which meant the machine gun wasn't shooting anymore. We were concerned about the crew and the gun. In a face to face situation I never

Since I was called to do things like that, in all modesty I Just before we went overseas the battalion had a shootout out in the mortar range. We all had a weapons platoon, sixty mortar men firing against each other. I finished first and my friend Larsen in the second squad finished second. If you talk to him he will tell you he finished first and I finished second. I was very good at what I did. My squad leader had us lined up correctly.

Ninety percent of the officers had no idea how to use a use a weapon's platoon. Norton, our platoon sergeant, was very capable with this area of expertise. Our Company Commander was very smart and he kept Norton very close to him. In theory, the mortar is under the direct orders of the captain. The two machine guns in the machine gun section would be assigned by the captain to support the attack platoon; the mortars would be behind them. We just walked along until they told us, "We want you to shoot there". We are more or less under the command of Company Commander. He decided where we would shoot and when we would shoot. Everyone in the weapons platoon was in a very hazardous position. The minute the machine gunner opened fire he became the target

for everyone on the other side. The enemy wanted to get rid of him just like we wanted to get rid of theirs. To be successful in the mortar section you have to hit what you are aiming at and you have to hit it fast. You want to get out of there before counter battery comes in and blows you all to kingdom come. Schillersdorf was our division's biggest battle. L Company was in reserve when the Germans broke the line. We moved A Company and L Company up to fill the break. We were on the Moder River line in _____ (Schillersdorf, Niefern).

We were pulling away from the outpost line. We wanted to sleep in the mill in Niefern. The rule in France was you had to ask to use the mill. We crossed the bridge at Niefern, asked if we could use the mill, and received permission. We also spent time digging in for the main line. We also zeroed in on the borders at Niefern to cover them in case of an enemy attack. The squad leader felt that the mill should be another target and would have the biggest impact on the enemy. I spent the afternoon and about twenty rounds blowing the mill to the ground. That was kind of our secondary objective. They wanted us to cover the bridge with fire if troops tried to come across. When they took the two companies off to protect Schillersdorf they took our machine gun section. They left us dug in to protect the bridge. Therefore, we did not take part in the attack on Schillersdorf.

Some people understand the fact that we were a “forgotten army” and we did a damn good job and a very important job. There were significant battles occurring *besides* the Battle of the Bulge. After the battle of the Bulge, Hitler came up with the Nordwind concept. His idea was to come down and break through the seventh army and take Strasburg. That would split the American and French forces. He thought with that plan he could sue for peace and get a bigger piece of Europe. The 103d, SS Mountain and Grenadiers Divisions were along here at Schillersdorf. Because of the trouble E Company had and exposed the flank of Company causing them trouble, the Germans broke through to Schillersdorf. They only occupied Schillersdorf for six or seven hours. We pushed them back out again and reestablish the line. Then everyone went into defensive positions until jump off on March 15.

The first sergeant was in our area and they laid down a heavy smoke screen. The Corp artillery and army artillery shelled the hell out of everything. And we pushed off. The smoke screen really worked; we could not see the hand in front of our face. Our first sergeant was named Nelson Moore. We always called him big goon. After the first night I spent in the field at Lake Murray Oklahoma, I woke up and someone had not used his shovel to cover up his business and someone reported this to “goon.” He was

using profanity and I swear to God that the swearing went on for two to three minutes. He would pause occasionally with a, “God Damn and a ...” I heard words that I had never heard in my whole life. He said that this behavior was going to stop ... wait until the smoke clears. We proceeded to walk down the paved road to **Gunder**..... We felt that there was no “downhill” in the Vosges Mountains. We had been fighting in the Schillersdorf-Strasberg area. At one point they loaded us on trucks and took us way up here..... We occupied the area that the **sixth armored** had occupied. The sixth armored was part of Patton’s force to strike north to cut the German off in the Bulge. We went into defensive positions **up here**. We stayed there until things simmered down a bit and then we moved on. There are twin cities on either side of the Rhine, **Manheim and Ludwigshaven**. (**doesn’t know which side he crossed over from**) We were on one side of the Rhine a couple days and then we crossed the Rhine on a pontoon bridge. ...the mortars, jeeps I was looking at the scenery. The town had just been blown to the ground. I looked off ahead of us a bit and I saw what I thought was a building. As we approached I realized it was wall and not a building. I looked back after we passed it and sticking out from the wall held by the pipes was a tub.

From here on it was a race to Berlin. We were in Army reserve for a few days. I would not go because I received a three

day pass to Brussels. Brussels was depressing as a reader and lover of history. I had read Mann's Early History of Western Civilization from the fall of Rome to the French Revolution.

Brussels was drab and dull, a town that has been occupied, liberated and shelled. One good thing about it we got pretty good food and nobody was shooting at us. I was rather disappointed at my own screw up as a history buff; As I went past the streetcar line that advertised WWII going all the way out to Waterloo. I wanted to go out and see that but I never got to. The ride out and the ride back in the 2 ½ ton truck was fascinating. Either going or coming there was a medic discourse (side comment). I don't think you will find an infantryman in the whole country that won't fight you at the drop of a hat if you say anything about a medic. While you are walking down the road and keeping your "five yards" you have no idea how comfortable you feel when you look back at the end of the column, and see a medic with a Red Cross zip bag stuffed with supplies. The guy joked, "That is a crock; they yell "medic" and I throw them a bandage!" Later, another medic told us the man we talked to had been put in for the Congressional Medal of Honor, and The weapons platoon is never thought to need a medic. One guy screwed up, he had been in the Merchant Marines in the army and overstayed his leave in New Orleans. The army snapped him up. He was a bedpan orderly somewhere in

Paris and they sent him to us as a medic. When he left we did not miss him at all. A medic in the first or second platoon as far back as in the states had kind of adopted us. After a long march, he would take care of his platoon he would come down to the Weapons Platoon and ask if we had any bruises or blisters. One time when he was hung-over they called him out to the local population to help deliver a baby. Everything went well and the farmer celebrated plying everyone with liquor and wine. He was so hung over he said, "If I ever have to deliver another baby, I won't live through it."

We were coming back on the truck around **Mardar** and we saw field after field of gliders. Eventually, the military saw that gliders were not the way to go.

When I came back, the company had moved and I had to try to find the 103d. I had such a good time in that truck going through villages that had been liberated. The DPs (Displaced Persons) were all having a ball. The fellow that I had helped to counsel was full but he helped to find us food and beer somewhere else. The 103d had helped to liberate them from their captives. We finally caught up with the 103d somewhere around Ulm. Ulm had had been shelled but was now liberated. We were happy we received good food and no one was shooting at us! **Jail bird, he**

was polish, kept us in food and beer that they had liberated from their captives.

Brussels was drab and dull, a town that has been occupied, liberated and shelled. One good thing about it we got pretty good food and nobody was shooting at us. I was rather disappointed at my own screw up as a history buff; As I went past the streetcar line that advertised WWII going all the way out to Waterloo. I wanted to go out and see that but I never got to. The ride out and the back from in the 2 ½ truck was fascinating. Either going or coming there was a medic discuss (side comment) I don't think you will find an infantryman in the whole country that won't fight you at the drop of a hat if you say anything about a medic. While you are walking down the road and keeping your "five yards" you have no idea how comfortable you feel when you look back at the end of the column, with a Red Cross zip bag stuffed with supplies. The guy joked, "That is a crock, they yell "medic" and I throw them a bandage!" Later, another medic told us the man we talked to had been put in for the Congressional Medal of Honor, and The weapons platoon is never thought to need a medic. One guy screwed up. He had been in the merchant marines in the army and overstayed his leave in New Orleans. The army snapped him

up. He was a bedpan orderly somewhere in Paris and they sent him to us as a medic. When he left we did not miss him at all. A medic in the first or second platoon as far back as in the states had kind of adopted us. After a long march, he would take care of his platoon he would come down to the Weapons Platoon and ask if we had any bruises or blisters. One time when he was hung-over ... they called him out to the local population to help deliver a baby. Everything went well and the farmer celebrated plying everyone with liquor and wine. He was so hung over he said he never wanted to deliver another baby, I won't live through it.

We were coming back on the truck around **Mardar** and we saw field after field of gliders. Eventually, they saw that gliders were not the way to go.

We found the 103d. We may have been coming back from Brussels we ran into a major that was taking over a town for the night. We stayed with them and ate with them. In Germany the people were told, "Get out and get out now!" Some wanted to give them an hour or so to get some belongings before we moved in. I would say, "Sir, if you give the hour there will not be anything left in there ... even the light fixtures!" He changed his mind told them to get out immediately insuring we had beds to sleep on.

We were down around Ulm when we caught up with the division. We went through **Berches Garden**, down into Innsbruck,

Austria. In Innsbruck we proved we were very seasoned troopers. We had liberated a couple of BB guns and were standing on a balcony in Innsbruck shooting them. We were in Innsbruck when the war ended on May 5; the Germans were gone. When the war was over for us we moved out of Innsbruck to a little city of Amerros for a week or ten days. Then we moved down to a place called Robin on the Inn or Enn River. We didn't understand why we were guarding a bridge when the war was over.

We had two fellows down at the rifle platoon, one short and one tall. They always referred to each other as "Big Wop" and "Little Wop." They were always horsing around. They would do a little routine where ... Big wop would grab little wop by the hair and lift him up Little wop said he did not know what he was going to do in life. All I have ever done is guard a bridge! I guess when I get home I will buy a gun and go down and guard the Brooklyn Bridge.

German prisoners: North Camp Hood was also a prisoner of war base with Africa war veterans. When I pulled guard duty I would see marching details going to and from work. I saw those Africa Corp boys marching three and four abreast in white shorts and white T-shirts, miles from home, all in perfect step with each other. They looked 6'4" and 120 pounds. At eighteen years old, I could not believe we beat them. We guarded all sorts of things.

We had Lenan field rifles and didn't know what we were doing. They told us if anything went terribly wrong just hit them with the rifle. We heard that somebody had escaped and someone had challenged him. When the guard worked the bolt of the gun the man stopped.

We were on the move in southern Germany and all of a sudden troops appeared out of nowhere and surrendered. We finally stopped at a town with a railroad depot, put all the prisoners together and realized they outnumbered us. We figured that the war was close to being over. They were surrendering in regiment numbers.

Because of gas shortages and things like that, a lot of the German tanks and machinery were being pulled by horses. Apparently, our air corp. had caught them in the open and machine gunned the hell out of them. They were burning trucks, wagons and dead horses. It was an ugly sight.

The army does do something intelligent every once in awhile. It happens so seldom that it really stands out. One of the local newspapers in California ran a picture of the "miracle of San Francisco". It was an illegally parked truck in San Francisco. The 60 mortar and the 81 mortar were shipped off to the 2nd chemical 4.2 mortar battalion. It took us about two minutes for us to learn to work the 4.2 mortar.

We started training immediately, because all of a sudden the order came out for us to ship to Marseilles and to go through the Suez Canal as part of the attack force on Japan. Our Captain who had been overseas with the second chemical as a second lieutenant took off to find out. He said that we were all combat veterans and if you want to send them overseas, send them through the States. Let them have a couple of days with their families and then ship them out of San Francisco. He ? managed to talk them out of it again. Then “Harry,” bless his heart, dropped the bomb. We knew we were not going to fight a second war, we had finished our tour.

I didn't have enough points while with the second chemical mortar battalion to go home. A buddy of mine went to C Company and I went to A company. There was another fellow from Who went to ... A company, second chemical mortar battalion. The war is over and I ended up guarding poison gas dumps! I saw a notice on the board saying that the 20th Corps was running a school at **Winestepphen**, just up river from Munich. **Winestepphen** is to Munich as **UC Davis** is to California. **Winestepphen** was also the largest brewmeister school. Some of our guys actually got the ticket. ... They asked me what I wanted to take. I had done so poorly in Physics in ASTP I decided to take Physics again. The GI Bill was in and I just knew I would be able to go to college.

Physics wasn't any different the second time around. There were four of us in a house on campus. We had to be out of the house or the barracks by 8 o'clock in the morning. That is when the maids would come in and make the beds and tidy up.

You had to salute officers. I learned to like white fish because we had an excellent mess hall. A day room was at our disposal. I can't remember how long we went to school. I had to go back to the company because I didn't get any better grades the second time than I did on the first try. I started working at a gas dump. A notice for class was circulated again and I applied. I was accepted again but this time I went and chose to take forestry. I had the second highest grades in the class! I would have had the highest grades but a classmate had taken two years of forestry at the University of Wisconsin. I developed a friendship with a kid from New York who was there. He was a sergeant. I used to give him a hard time by saying, "Anybody can make sergeant. All you have to do is live longer." I would wear one of his blouses and we would go down to the NCO club and have a ball. The DPs always led **Barsall**, the jailbird, to all of the money and all of the booze anytime we raided the town. He would always give me a cut of what he received. I had a "jillian" **German marks** and while we were using invasion money, the Germans took the invasion money. I had amassed two uniforms and would wear my ODs two or three

days. I was in a barracks like set up. The second time I was in the house. I would buy little pieces of soap. A little girl would come through and pick up laundry once or twice a week and I would pay her in soap because they were so eager to get it. I had my laundry done once or twice a week and I was close to the cleaners. I thoroughly enjoyed myself.

I had German **marks** coming out of my eyes. I was doing pretty well in that respect. I didn't smoke but I bought German cigarettes. I use to give the cigarettes to some of the guys at Second Chemical who, instead of smoking them, sold them on the black market. I thought that was a crock. I was selling pretty regular and I sent the money I made home to my dad who put it in the bank for me. On payday I would just sign the book and the money would be sent home for me. I was living high on the hog! As a PFC I earned fifty-five dollars a month and an additional ten dollars a month because we were overseas and the money Arthur slipped me. I am not sure if we received additional pay for being "combat infantrymen." The corporal who I had come over with was now a first sergeant, moving up rapidly because there was a big change over. He said, "You have to stop going to school. I can't make you a sergeant if you are always going to school." I told him I have no desire to become a sergeant. I had put in once for overseas to attend a school in **Nance**, France. The man who

had been my first sergeant also put in and we were both accepted. I went down to talk to him and he said he was going to turn it down. (At that time they had dropped the bomb.) He said, "The war is over and I have had all of this I want." I turned it down as well and continued school. I enjoyed the camaraderie, drinking cokes and beer, playing hearts and talking. We had good food, a couple classes in the morning and the rest of the day off. I did have one problem with the school; they say they lost my records. I spent a year in the army of occupation; I probably only needed six months to have enough points to go home. As it turned out, they said they made a new set of records for me. I feel like they just were able to find the original records. I was able to go home at that point. In 1946 they sent me off to one of the camps in Belgium. I turned twenty one in March and in May they sent me home. We landed in Camp Shanks and for the first time I had been back and forth across the country from one camp to the other. I had always been in detached service riding in a civilian train with Pullman cars. I was on a troop train when we went from Camp Howze to Camp Shanks. But this time I was in a compartment with my sergeant. We were on a troop train coming back from Camp Shanks to Camp Beale. The bunks were three high. I had to live just like the rest of the soldiers. It was tough duty. Camp Beale is out of Marysville.

It is now an air force base and **Stealth** used to fly out of it. It was an army set up then and later became air corps and then air force.

My family did not know I was coming. I just showed up and knocked on the door. I said I was born and raised in **Natoma** and I went from there to the Army. My family moved to **Folsom** at one point. I got a full day pass when I was at Los Angeles City College. My family did not know I was coming. Shortly after I got to Camp Howze I had enough time to qualify for a thirteen day furlough and went home. When my two brothers were in high school I taught one of them.

After the war I worked at a couple of jobs in the summer. That fall I enrolled in Sacramento City Junior College. I went one semester there.....**Placer** School District in Auburn had a Junior College, **Placer** JC. They ran a bus that came down from Placerville to Auburn. I figured that was easier than going to Sacramento where I had to provide the transportation. I transferred to PJC and graduated from there. Then I went to Sacramento State College. I had thirty-nine months on the GI Bill and that would give me four and one-half years. If you had enough money to start the year the College would finish the year for you. I got five years of college out of the GI Bill. You had to go five years to get a secondary credential. I got my credentials as a high school teacher and went back to Folsom and taught history. In college I made the

find of my life, my late wife. I could not understand why one of the prettiest women in the whole world would marry me. My oldest brother said, “Carmen, you are pretty and intelligent why are you marrying him?”

I replaced a guy who had been drafted during the Korean War. He came back after the war to his teaching position. I went to a teaching job in Ion, in **Amadore** County and married Carmen. We planned to take the teaching job in Ione and then move to teach in a bigger district. That was in 1952 and I am still there. My wife was also a Sacramento State graduate. She taught elementary school. She finally got a chance to teach kindergarten and taught at that level for sixteen years. During that time I got a Masters Degree in History. We had a young son and Carmen would walk with him to the Post Office. Ion was a big whopping metropolis of five hundred or so. He left his little car that he was playing with in the Post Office. The next day when they went to get the mail the car was in the Post Office. Carmen was familiar with the post office because her Dad worked for a company that was doing some mining in that area. She had been there a week before I had been there with my Aunt and Uncle driving through the area. Carmen and I would agree that it was hotter than hell. We could teach in a lot of places after we left Fulsom and you could bet Ion would not be one of them. A year or two later I am there! We decided to stay

there. When I went to Ione I got a whopping thirty-four hundred up from thirty-two in Folsom. I got to be a teaching principal, then a Superintendent Principal, and ended as Superintendent. I was always a renegade. We belonged to the mother load athletic league and I spent four years as president of the league. I was the only principal in the league who was not an ex-coach. I met so many people in administration who I thought were complete idiots. Unfortunately I can't keep that feeling hidden well. I was in a meeting once and we were discussing what we do to keep in shape. I said I run every morning. I asked one of the participants what they did for exercise and he said, "I lie in bed and "think" fifteen pushups. If that doesn't tire me too much I think five more on my fingertips." I got associated with ACSa Association of School Administrators. I was president of the local branch which put me in a position to part of the Sacramento group. We flew down to southern California for a meeting and the speaker opened with, "In this room are the smartest minds in California." I said, "Oh my God, are we in trouble."