

Taped Interview

Dallas Reunion 2006

James (Jim) E. White, Co. B 409th

It was the Fourth of July and I heard them going down the hall talking. I just stayed in my room and kept my mouth shut. This was in Biarritz, France. I was sent there for a while. When I went in to get it done, get the certificate signed, he looked at it and said I haven't signed a certificate for a flare pistol. He said, "Have you ever fired a flare pistol?" I said, "Yes, Sir." "Have you ever fired this flare pistol and what was the occasion?" I said it was the Fourth of July and my birthday. He said, "Yeah and it would have been your damn court-martial if we could have found your butt." He laughed and signed the certificate. He said, "Boy, what you infantrymen will do."

What time of year was that? This happened September of '45. I had been on rehab. Did you hear about Biarritz, BI University? I was put on the permanent party there. Biarritz is like the Riviera, except it is on the Bay of Biscay. We went in and setup. We went there in June and took over a number of hotels, some villas. I lived in a casino, a beautiful, fantastic place

that I couldn't even afford to go in the door now. I had a private room, bath and so on. They set it up like a university summer school. They brought people from Germany and Italy in for six weeks of college just like a summer school. They brought professors from the United States over. In fact, the fella that wrote my thermo dynamics books was brought over to teach thermo dynamics. Of course, while I was there I was involved with officers' payroll but I also got to go to school while I was there for college credits. That was a nice tour.

I spent every afternoon on the beach. My roommate and I said when we first got there, "We got to have some bathing suits." I told him, "By the time we got a letter home and got a bathing suit back the summer is going to be gone. Why don't we just make some bathing suits?" He said, "What are we going to make them out of?" I laid my shorts out on the bed, took an OD towel, and laid it out over them. I cut out the basic size, I thought. We started sewing and the way we folded it there is nothing on this side but we used shoelaces to tie up the other side. Of course, we did not make it quite large enough. Therefore, of course there was skin like that showing. And we went on the beach. And everybody was dying laughing. *The Stars and Stripes* came down and found out who did this. And my roommate had something else to do. They wanted some pictures. I said, "I've got a date."

She is supposed to meet us. So when we get down there. They said, "It would be nice if we pretend that she is making you a bathing suit." I said I got one on. So they just draped my trousers across my lap and she is there with the OD towel. And it comes out in the paper and it's got my name and my hometown. Somebody said, "What are you doing sitting out there on the beach with no clothes on?" I said, "I did have clothes on." You can't look at that picture and tell. It was all over Europe. I don't send the picture home. I get a letter from my mother saying, "What are you doing sitting on the beach in the nude?" I got forty pictures of it.

When did you get wounded by the hand grenade and where? The last of September, right before the unit went to Selestat. I was on a machine gun on a roadblock. My being wounded was the best thing that ever happened to me. Otherwise, I'd have been taken prisoner with my company. While I was in the hospital being treated, I came down with diphtheria. If I had had diphtheria as a POW, I would not have survived. It was the best thing that ever happened to me. The good lord was looking after me, wasn't he? I was in Company B 409th. *They lost ninety-two men or something like that, mostly prisoners.* I would have been in that if I had not been wounded earlier. You never know how fortunate you can be.

Did you come back to the 103rd? I did not come back to the 103rd.

While I was there at Biarritz, I was reclassified, ready back for duty. I do not know why I didn't get pulled out. I spent two and a half months in the hospital. Best thing that ever happened to me. My temperature went to 105 while I was in the hospital. They came around one day. The doctor was looking me over. He asked me if I was feeling all right. I said that my throat was a little funny. He said, "Let me take a look." I said, "I am not complaining." He looks in there. He said, "Uh huh." Then he goes on his way. A little while later, the ward boy comes in. He said, "Which one of you is White?" I said, "That is me." He said, "I need to get a culture." I said, "Oh, what for?" He said just precautionary. He takes a Q-tip, swabs my throat, puts it in a test tube, and goes on his way. After a while, they came back with a gurney. They asked, "Which one of you is White?" I said, "That's me." They hauled me off into a room with a beautiful nurse and two Moroccans and a Frenchman in there. They had hung sheets to make cubicles. I said, "What am I doing in here?" The nurse said, "You have diphtheria." I said, "I couldn't have, I had the shot." She said, "You might have had the shot, but you have diphtheria." A little while later she said, "do you know what a CC is?" I said, "Yes Ma'am." She said, "I have a shot that has so many CCs. Do you want it in one or two shots?" I said,

“Two.” She came back later. And I will tell it the way it happened. She told me to take my pajamas down. Then she said, “Don’t you know to roll over and hide your privates and pull your pajamas down?” She hit me and I thought I was going through that bed. She came back later and said, “Do you remember the procedure? You roll over, hide your privates and pull your pajamas down.” I said, “Yes, Maam.” Do you want it in the same cheek or the other one? I said, “The other one.” Then boy, I started sweating and my temperature went up to 105. I never felt bad at all. I sweated and they changed the linens. That is what the Moroccans and the Frenchman had. Later she came back and shampooed my hair. She brought a radio in. We played cards. She couldn’t talk to the others.

When did you come home? I enjoyed it so much where I was on the beach and I could not get back in time to go to school spring semester. So, I volunteered to stay a couple of extra months. I got home in April of ’46. Then I went back to school at Texas A&M. *Is that where you had been before?* I was in the ASTP at Texas A&M. *How many semesters or months?* I got there in September and we left in March.

Where were you? *Oklahoma A&M, but I was only there three months, December, January and February, one quarter or whatever they called it. I didn’t join the Division until Howze, L Company, 409.* That was

Harley Richardson's Company. *But, I got out. I got into Headquarters, Third Battalion 409th. I had radio training for nine months in the Enlisted Reserve Corp, in '42-'43. I had a similar experience. I wouldn't have been here if I had stayed in L Company. On the march up the mountain above St. Die, one of the guys in my Rifle Platoon that I had been in sat on a Bouncing Betty mine. It killed two of them and wounded four. I was right there. Again, fate.*

So you went to Texas A&M and graduated? I graduated in June '49. I went to work for Texaco. I graduated in June '49, also. I was at Pepperdine University in LA. What did you get into? I was in Industrial Engineering. I got involved with can manufacturing and packaging of motor oils, greases and stuff like that. Texaco had its own can manufacturing facilities. I guess Texaco was a big employer. It was then. At one time, it had over 6,000 employees and that same facility now has less than 1,000. I took early retirement with an incentive to go. Was Texaco bought by anyone else? Texaco is part of Chevron now. I was 57 when I retired. Back then, it was even hard to get an interview. My dad worked at Texaco. When I went out there for an interview I told them I majored in Industrial Engineering. They said, "What is that?" I said, "You do this, that and the other." They said, "We only use people out here to do that sort of thing who have been

here for twenty years.” They said, “We could look to see if we have a job for you in the engineering department on the drawing board. I said, “Uh oh. I had been told to avoid that.” They said they could put me in the “bull gang”. I said I think the other option is better.

Golden Triangle Veterans Memorial Park is located in Port Arthur, Texas. The Park was a project of VFW Post 4820 Port Neches, Texas. The Park was started in 1988 with the donation of eleven acres by the Butch Bean family. Considerable fill dirt was used to increase the elevation of the marsh land. Fill came from local hiway and refinery construction.

Funds and materials were donated by local industry, business, and individuals. Over 90,000 man-hours of labor were recorded prior to 2008. Our Post membership is now down to 200. Ownership of the property was transferred to Jefferson County in 2010. A Post member lives in the house. There are names of about 12,000 veterans on bronze plaques on granite panels from Orange and Jefferson County that made application and supplied discharges as proof of eligibility.

On the triangular shaped monument in the Tower of Honor are plaques with the names of 930 from the two counties that were KIA or MIA from WWI, WWII, Korea, and Vietnam. A temporary plaque of those from later conflicts' are on the wall inside the tower. These will be put on bronze plaques at a later date.

Currently programs are held in the pavilion on Memorial and Veterans Day. For speakers we have had two US Senators, two US Representatives, four star General for USAF, Army and Marine Brig. Gen., a Navy V. Adm., several Col.s and two local mayors.

During the construction I served 3 terms as Post Commander and 13 years as Park Chairman. I have planned and conducted 29 programs plus over 4000 man-hours of labor. Poured lots of concrete, made lots of copper shingles for the tower, Spent lots of time working off the scaffold during tower construction.

Spent considerable time and effort with the USAF, USA, and USN in securing the static displays. Also spent time with the sculptor on the 3 statues.

The picture in the Tower is of VFW National Commander Paul Spera and a former school classmate of mine that also served as Park Chairman. Great fund raiser as he had been a representative in our state legislature.

Jim White