

LAWTON M. CHILES CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY
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Oral Interview With: Dr. Carroll Blake Gambrell, Jr.

Interviewer: James M. Denham

Place of Interview: Estates at Carpenters
Lakeland, Florida

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M = James M. Denham ("Mike")

C = C. B. Gambrell

M: Today is March 26, 2015, and I am resuming my conversation with Dr. C. B. Gambrell. My name is James M. Denham, and once again we are resuming our conversation today and we are about to begin discussing Dr. Gambrell's experiences in WWII. Dr. Gambrell, how are you doing today?

C: Good to be here.

M: Good. We left off last time, you were training, leading into your service in WWII. One of the things we might not have covered that thoroughly, is the type of training you did, and is there anything you would like to say about the training you received? Was it intensive? Was it physical? Was it classroom? What were some of the things that stand out about your training?

C: Well, the training that I experienced early on once I had been transported from Fort MacPherson in Atlanta to Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri, it was a big engineering base and I went there for specialized basic training. That went on intensively for about five weeks, and at the end of the five weeks, not that that was a particular goal to achieve, they called me out and sent me out across the base for some testing. Of course, anything to get out of basic training was welcomed. So I went over there and along with a good many other people who had been recruited from various locations, and went through a testing program. Several days later, they notified me that I was going to the University of Wyoming, it was a classification center. And it turned out that was a screening process for people to go into what was called the Army Specialized Training Program the ASTP program, where they sent various enlisted people to colleges all across the country. And the classification center at the University of Wyoming handled a great many of those assignments. I was there for several weeks, three weeks I guess, and all of the people who had gone there with me had since left and gone to their next assignment. I was pretty well left there and I wondered if they had not lost my records somewhere. The group I was with slept on cots in the gymnasium. I think I slept under the hoop and so forth. In any event, I was there for a period of three weeks, and they called me out and along with thirty-seven other people, and thirty-eight of us boarded a train and were headed for Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut.

M: What was the daily activity like at Yale? Would you do classroom, would you do physical training?

C: It was one hundred percent academic experience.

M: So it was classroom.

C: Yes. We took regular classes out of the catalog and so forth. One of the features I shall always remember. We were the first contingent of Army people to arrive at Yale. They gathered us on what was called the Green, it was an open lawn type area, and Glenn Miller and his Band were there. They had recently joined the Air Corp. Glenn and his musicians welcomed us to with a concert to Yale University.

M: How many were in your group would you say?

C: There were thirty-eight of us; others came along later. I think the total contingent of Army troops there must have been something in the neighborhood of 125 to 130.

M: We've already gone through your post Yale period and you are moving forward to go over across, and of course your marriage. We covered some of that. So take us to maybe the first five or six days before you got on the ship to go across.

C: The unit that I joined, after having left Yale, was a combat engineer unit and they were on maneuvers in Tennessee sleeping in pup tents, dusty roads or else muddy roads and we gathered up all of our equipment, mostly rolling stock, loaded up and drove half way across the country to Camp Gruber, Oklahoma, where we were doing staging work for shipment overseas. I guess that's why we were there at Gruber. That was the home base of the unit prior to maneuvers, so they returned home so to speak. We did preparation work there for what was to come -- ordering equipment, lots of equipment which included big items such as prime movers, Caterpillars, and so forth. In any event, we boarded a troop train and off we went to the port of embarkation at I believe New York City, it could have been in that harbor area. I don't remember just for sure. We boarded the ship and it turned out that the ship had been a liberty vessel and had been converted for troop carrying. The bunks were tightly placed, not much room to move around. Feeding the ship, which was just totally loaded with people and the food services ran twenty-four hours. You never knew when they would call your unit to go to meal time. The wash room for utensils used trays and so forth didn't smell very good. The line to get your tray loaded with food went right by that wash room, and I think it would sour your stomach pretty badly. In any event, over time, I would get dizzy doing things like merry-go-rounds and so forth, so when we got on board the vessel, I just knew that I would get sea sick. And I did. I think I was on about the third or fourth bunk from the floor, and I found that if I just laid down in that bunk, that I got along pretty well. So my big objective go eat, eat quickly, get it in your stomach and run back down there and get in the bunk. One day the weather was excellent, the water was smooth as a table top, and I just knew here was my chance to get a good meal, get it down, with no difficulty, and I did. While I was eating, the weather changed rather abruptly, the ship started tossing, and your tray went up and down the table. You had to hold the tray with one

hand and eat with the other one. I just knew boy, if I could get in that bunk I will have retained this. So I went back and I was either the third or fourth deck down from the top, and I went down the stairway and I noticed that there were big containers at each landing. I got to the third landing down, and I looked over and there were three or four fellows hanging around that big container and throwing up. I just went over and parted them and got in there with them and I lost my well sought after meal. We arrived, it was about a twelve day trip; we were in a convoy and in those days, and I presume it is still that way. The convoy travels at the speed of the slowest vessel. That was our case, and we took about twelve days to get to Plymouth, England. We docked at Plymouth which is the southern part of that gigantic island and we got there at the beginning of the evening time. By the time we got off of the vessel, we were carrying our heavy duffle bag and anything else that seemed necessary, and they put us on a train to take us to the small community township of Yeovil. We arrived there after about an hour train ride in the middle of the night, and what was done very thoughtfully. I think, the people conducting our arrival had arranged to have the mess hall open and food available. For the first time in my life I saw a garbage can full of milk. It was a clean garbage can and so forth, and I had not had any milk in a long time, maybe two weeks or more. I went over and took my mess kit cup and dipped it in there and I drank two of those cups of powdered milk. It was quite a treat I guess you could say. We had a meal in the middle of the night, and three hours later, we had another meal! They got us up out of our bunks, they farmed us out in residences, they took over residents in their neighborhoods, and we were all booked in to various houses that had been obtained.

M. Now, just so we remember where we are in time frame, do you remember the date that you arrived in England?

C. Yes, we got there in October.

M. October of 1944?

C. No, no, it must have been '43.

M. Okay, 1943. How many people would you estimate were on that ship; how many people?

C. Oh, there must have been 2,000.

M. Two thousand, on one ship. That must have been miserable.

C. Well, I have learned over time, to make your place as comfortable as possible, so I began to search around to relax and enjoy the trip. When the weather was good, I was up on the top deck.

M. Did you have pretty much free rein to go where you wanted to go?

C. Oh, yes.

M. Now were there any calisthenics or anything like that?

C. No, and come to think of it, if there had been, it would have been a welcomed activity.

M. So, when you got to England, where the houses they put you in, were there families living in the houses?

C. No, they moved them out.

M. Okay. What did you think of, this was a whole new country, what were some of the things that struck you in terms of the differences, and that sort of thing, or were you even mindful of that?

C. Well, everything was new to me, and driving on the wrong side of the road was a problem for our drivers and we had any number of small accidents and so forth until they got used to it. The Captain called me in and said that we had a problem. The rail head which brings in rations is quite a ways away and I need to send someone over there to orchestrate that whole operation, and he asked me to do it. I was pleased to do so. Twice a week I would go with two trucks, sometimes three, to load up the rations to feed all of our people through the mess hall process. Going through some of those British towns was quite interesting, and I'd always had an interest in history. We went through one town and here was a big castle over on the right hand side, and a hill moved out to the left rather abruptly and half way up that hill was one of these towers, it was round, and it was built as a defense mechanism back in the crusades time. I thought, boy I'd like to go over there and look at that thing first hand. Well, I had some free time later and I walked around in the neighborhood and I thought if I could get a bicycle, I could ride out to that little town. Well, I saw a man on the street and asked him where I could rent a bicycle, and he told me I could borrow his. He took me to his home and turned his bicycle over to me and didn't take my name, a deposit or anything. I thought, boy, he sure is trusting! So I got on the bicycle and biked out to that little town and I thought maybe I'd go over to the castle first. So I went over to the castle and went up to the front door. The front door was the biggest door I'd ever seen in my life, and I banged on the door. A butler came to the door and looked down his nose at me rather dramatically, and said, "Yes?" I told him I was a GI there for the war effort, and asked if I could visit his castle and grounds. He told me I could visit the grounds, but the castle wasn't available. So I walked around the gardens and so forth associated with that castle and came back, got on the bike, and drove to go up that hillside to that round type tower that had been built several centuries earlier, and I did. I couldn't take the bike up the hill, so I got off and walked up the hill. Well, I had forgotten that inside of that circular structure there would have been at one time, a stairway. It had rotted and gone away so about all I could do was to go through the open door and look around. I admired the construction work because it had lasted such a long time. It stood in a very dramatic place to monitor activities in the near vicinity. I did all of that on my own and I think I benefited from it.

M. What unit were you in, the numbers in the battalion?

C. I was in the 276 Engineer Combat Battalion. There were four companies; there was the headquarters company, and then there were three line companies we referred to them and they

were the working company that did the jobs. The headquarters company provided the plans and supervision and coordination and so forth. I was in the headquarters company. I was in the S4 Division that had to do with supplies, materials, and that sort.

M. Were you a lieutenant?

C. At that point in time, I was a corporal.

M. Okay. So, when you got there, I guess you had another regiment training established. Walk us through the daily activities you would have gone through every day.

C. Well, in my case, I was awfully busy keeping the unit supplied and following up on the various needs and so forth. In the meantime, others in the headquarters company were busy acquiring equipment and so forth from the various depots to supply the line company so they would have the equipment available to do their job. That went on, we were in England, well, the Battle of the Bulge started about that time, the sixteenth of December, I guess. We were alerted right away to move across the channel into France and on to the direction of the Bulge. I was selected to go on board ship with the equipment and the rest of . . . well, let's see, about four or five of us, were in that capacity, and the rest of the people were taken across in a troop ship. They moved to a staging area, a farm-type area that somebody had rented from the farmers. We were headed for the Port of Le Havre, and when we loaded up and off we went, we thought it was going to be an overnight trip, and that we would unload the next morning. Well, about two weeks later, we were still on board ship, waiting in line waiting for our opportunity to dock to unload. We had to wait our turn. In the meantime, submarines were active in the channel. I was hoping that somehow the Germans would forget we were even there. One of the activities of the submarines, they wanted to sink as many ships as they could in the mouth of the harbor to block the harbor. It just didn't come to pass. The ships they sunk, were farther out in the channel and that was really not a problem for us to get in and out of the harbor. We unloaded there at the harbor and the equipment went out to the staging area that had already been occupied by our people and we were there for a short time until we collected all of our troops and so on, and then we went off in the direction of the breakthrough of the Bulge.

M. So you were in England how long?

C. About, almost three months.

M. So you had daily calisthenics and all of that, kind of rigorous training?

C. To do anything with a large number of people was very difficult because we were in the downtown residential area, and about the only open spaces were the streets. We would take over a street for a period of time and the Bobbies had to help us, you know.

M. So, three months of October, November, December, and you were moving in December, correct?

C. It was early January when we headed over.

M. Early January, okay, and that was 1944. Okay, just to clarify then, you arrived in England in October of 1944, you do your three months' training, and then by January of 1945 after the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge, you arrive in the French harbor of Le Havre. What did you experience when you got off of that ship, when you had to wait in line two weeks in the harbor? Were you in the harbor, or just outside of the harbor?

C. We were just outside of the mouth of the harbor, but every time a ship left, we moved up a little bit. We weren't in that precarious situation long.

M. Probably they were able to secure the area behind you, I would imagine, with U boats correct. The U boats couldn't come in there and wreak havoc. So, you are waiting there two weeks in the harbor. That was probably pretty tedious, right?

C. Well, one of the things that turned out to be a problem, because we were told it would be an overnight trip, and there we were. We didn't have a canteen, we didn't have any food, and the Navy fellows there felt sorry for us and it wasn't too long until they brought in several big boxes of C-rations. Apparently that ship had been used for that purpose earlier, because on deck was a steam kettle container that you put the cans in there, put the lid on it, and turned the steam on it and it warmed them up for you. So we lived that way for quite a while. We were hard pressed for water and something to drink, and the Navy fellows felt sorry for us so they said we could have all the coffee we wanted. I started watching that big coffee urn and the thing is, I never did see them clean it out, but I saw they had lots of coffee grounds. Those Navy fellows were very kind to us.

M. So when you finally got off of the ship, what was going through your mind as you hit the soil and you looked around?

C. Well, the first thing was I was awfully glad to be off of the ship. At that point in time we were on French soil and the French had . . .

M. Le Havre, of course that is France.

C. Yes, we had to follow some of the local rules about what we did, traffic patterns and whatever, by that time the GI infantry forces had moved through and were ahead of us considerably. You heard of the Hedgerows, well we got to see them and they were very prominent and very difficult to cope with. That was, in a sense, a natural fence to identify property lines.

M. Were there still any Germans in that ridge at all?

C. I didn't see any at that point. Then we got in the equipment, we got drivers, we had an escort vehicle and so forth, and we moved the equipment to that staging area I mentioned a little earlier. We collected ourselves and got organized so that we could move out whenever we were ordered to.

M. How many miles from the coast, from the port, to the staging area, or do you remember? Was it about fifty miles?

C. I guess it was about 50 to 100 miles. And the roads over there were vastly different than in this country. They were narrow and they were curvy. The bridges; you never knew if a bridge was strong enough to hold up your equipment. We had one case, right now I can't tell you just where it was, we were pulling a trailer with a Caterpillar tractor on it that had an A frame type mechanism on it and it was supposed to go under a railroad and it hit the railroad trestle member and moved it several inches and the train came along and jumped the track! We had to take care of that problem.

M. Did you, in the staging area, moving through, of course you were working hard and you don't have much time off to observe anything, did you see any evidence of damage and fighting? Were there people in distress, were there bombed out places?

C. Well, the French, in my opinion, adjusted rather rapidly to the big change and they apparently had been looking forward to it for quite a while because they just moved down and took over and were quite operational, I thought. Yes, the damage that took place was mostly from artillery shells. There was, I don't believe, any aircraft bombs and so forth at that point.

M. Now, at this time, did the Americans or the Allies have full air superiority over that area that you were involved in? Were there any enemy aircraft coming over?

C. Well, the farther inland we went, the more we encountered the buzz bombs.

M. Right. Talk about that a little bit.

C. We ended up in a small mountain type community and we took over some local residences and so forth and I was in a building that was pretty much on top of the mountain and I felt like I could just reach up and touch those buzz bombs as they flew over on their way to England. There wasn't a lot of clearance.

M. Wow!

C. You just knew what was happening because they made a lot of noise. And I never knew how effective any of that was because I hadn't encountered that anywhere. There was one case where one of our advance units, we actually supported the infantry whenever necessary, they would call upon us to assist them. One of our units was pretty far forward and they had run out of ammunition. The Captain wanted to send them some ammunition, and he asked me to take a truck load of it up there. Well, I got a driver and a truck, and we loaded it and off we went. It was in the dark of night, but somehow, the Germans followed us with their artillery shells, and they came pretty close in their accuracy. I unloaded it and I just couldn't get that driver to put his foot far enough into the carburetor to get that truck going. That German artillery unit tracked us all the way back. Fortunately, they were shooting behind us. That just gave us more incentive to get going. That was a close call, I thought.

M. So how long was it before you actually began to see action? Now, were you as an Engineering Officer, or Engineering enlisted person, did you have a gun?

C. Oh yes, everyone had a weapon.

M. Did you have pistols or did you have . . .

C. No, the officer corp. had pistols and/or 30 caliber carbine type rifle – a small rifle. In my case I had a Grand M 1 rifle, which was about a ten pound unit and it went everywhere you went – you slept with it and so forth. I didn't, well, until I got to the city of Wahlberg later on, I'll mention when we get that far along, we used the weapons and supported the infantry at that point.

M. When was it that your unit actually got to the outer periphery of the Bulge?

C. It occurred spontaneously. We were in the vicinity of the Ludendorff Railroad Bridge sometimes referred to as the Remagen Bridge. That was the first crossing of the Rhine River that any of the troops made. It was a fluke on the part of the Germans because they tried to blow the bridge and some of the explosives didn't go off. They were made in Italy and they had been sabotaged by the Italians and so when they placed those deposits for exploding purposes, they didn't go off and the bridge didn't fall. Our troops had captured the bridge as a result of that. . . .

M. So were you actively engaged on the bridge working and building?

C. Yes, it was part of my duty to keep the workers on the bridge supplied with all the materials that were needed to do the job.

M. How many people would you estimate were working on the bridge, and even at the gunfire that was coming over, correct? They had to do the work and at the same time, dodge the artillery.

C. Well you never knew where an artillery shell was until it exploded. They travelled so fast you couldn't see them. In any event, yes, people were working there, and when the artillery shell finally hit the particular structural member that was critical to the bridge remaining upright, it crashed. I guess it was early in the afternoon of the seventeenth of March, I believe it was, and the bridge went down. Our battalion commander, Colonel Rust, was on the bridge along with several of his senior staff members and when the bridge went down, one end of it went down first into the water. Then, when the other end turned loose and came down, it lifted the front end up out of the water and the officers and personnel who were on that part of the bridge; they floated down stream and were pulled out at that heavy tread way bridge I mentioned earlier. We did lose quite a number of people that drowned while they were being held under water on that first movement of the bridge.

M. How many people would you say were on the bridge when it collapsed?

C. Probably fifteen.

M. Where were you?

C. I was on my way there with a load of equipment.

M. So, what happened then?

C. Well, the bridge was gone and we pulled back and lost a lot of equipment when it went down with the bridge. We pulled back and had to reorganize because we had lost quite a number of personnel and a lot of equipment. We backed off and did what was necessary to become operational again. Then we, well, if I don't tell you this item, I'll forget it. At that point in time, I was sleeping in a cloak room of a schoolhouse down river a little distance. There was a sort of mansion on the western side of the river, I guess a wealthy person must have lived there, the Colonel took over that residence and the German lady, who I guess owned the house, she was forever giving him a bad time about his personnel not operating correctly and so forth. About that time, while we were still there reorganizing, a USO troop showed up. Some of those girls had short skirts and all that and would bounce around on stage – we used the stage in the schoolhouse. They sang and danced for us, and we just thought that was too much to pass up.

M. While we are talking about that, and one of the things that we haven't mentioned at all is, you did mention the incident with the bike, and the kind gentleman that loaned you the bike in Britain, and then you were obviously in France for quite some time and then you moved into Germany later on, can you reflect a little bit on some of the interactions you had with the people in England and then France and then when you crossed into Germany?

C. They were all, no matter what nationality they were all very understanding and very helpful. I still remember we moved into one German town and the part of the residence that they assigned us, there were about three of us that were to stay in that, the German family moved out into the back yard, sort of like a garage or something back there, and they moved into that garage while we were there, and we had their whole house. They didn't complain at all. There was a latrine back there, and several of our people were using the latrine and they carried toilet paper roll with them. The German man saw that, and he came over and asked me if I would give him some toilet paper. I gave him a whole roll and you would have thought I had given him quite a treasure.

M. So, did you anticipate when you knew you were in Germany, obviously you were in France, but when you crossed into Germany, did you anticipate . . . what was going through your mind?

C. I personally, was very cautious.

M. Very cautious. Were there incidents of people being killed or anything like that? They kind of understood that the end was . . .

C. We were plagued with a problem, because as we moved ahead, the German troops began to dissipate. They got out of their uniform as quickly as they could and into civilian clothes.

You never knew when you saw a male out there whether he was a German after you, or he was hiding from anybody. It was not very pleasant to deal with that and you never went anywhere by yourself -- always at least two, maybe three.

M. So, as you were moving in to the Ramagen Bridge incident, the German army after the Battle of the Bulge was really beginning to disintegrate. Would you agree to that?

C. Yes, yes, that is correct.

M. So, you are seeing maybe waves of people kind of, are people surrendering, are soldiers surrendering?

C. Yes, there was some of that, but I didn't participate in that although when we settled in Wildberg, I did participate in the capture of three German soldiers. They were stragglers and had been left behind. We went hunting, we had captured some weapons and when we would move into a town, we would issue an order, "All civilians, turn in all weapons to the Mayor's office." Great guns, you wouldn't believe how many weapons were out there in the possession of those people! Shotguns, rifles, pistols, bayonet type daggers and so forth. After the war was over, we had to do something to occupy our time and I knew the dispatcher in the motor pool, and we were talking one night about we ought to do something interesting. He said, "Why don't we go hunting?" He said that one of the fellows had come in and said he saw some rabbits in that field over there. So this fellow got a vehicle and about four or five of us I guess, and each of us had a gun we had gotten out of the Mayor's office. This one fellow that had got the vehicle for us, he had a stinking personality, he was just rotten. He was riding on the floorboard up on the passenger side of the vehicle and we hit a bump, he dropped his shotgun, and it shot him in the butt. He had a medical problem and we had to turn around and bring him back to the medic. They picked those little pellets out of his fanny. That day we didn't get any rabbits, but the next day we got a rabbit or two.

M. Let's go back to the Remagen Bridge and it is half in the water and it has been ruined after the break, collapse. How long did it take before you all could get the rest of the bridge built back up so where it could be used?

C. It was a total loss.

M. So, you abandoned that spot?

C. Yes, we got orders to go across the river to an assignment on the eastern side of the river. We went across on one of those pontoon bridges.

M. Okay, did you build any more bridges?

C. No, there were special units for that purpose.

M. By that time, it is April of 1945?

C. Yep.

M. So, walk us through the concluding months of the war.

C. Well, as things began to speed up in terms of movement of troops and did our best to keep up with the infantry, behind, and take care of things. We had to do something with respect to the flow of traffic – the civilian type flow of traffic. They had things and necessities that needed to be taken care of and so forth.

M. Refugees I guess?

C. Have you ever heard of a Bailey bridge? That was invented in England and you could span across a crevasse with a Bailey bridge. It was put together like an Erector set; a gigantic Erector set. We used that in several places. Our line companies knew how to construct those bridges and the components of the bridge would be brought up by big trucks. Several trucks, maybe eight or ten trucks; it took that many to carry the bridge and its components. Well then, if you put a bridge up, then you have to build access roads and exit roads and so forth. We were awfully busy keeping things moving and when the enemy moved ahead rapidly, they bypassed some towns. Well, it fell on part of our assignment to clear out some of those towns if at all possible. There was one town there that I was given the responsibility of clearing it up this particularly area over here, borderline business area, I went in this one building, and it was a motorcycle shop. Did I tell you this earlier? There was a brand new Bosch motorcycle. I had a conference with myself. I knew if I passed it by, the next fellow that came along would take it. So I took it. I had a personal motorcycle for a while. Whenever we would move from one town to another town, I had a couple of friends in the motor pool, they would load my motorcycle up and tie it to the side of a Caterpillar tractor and off they went. When we settled in Wildberg, the Mayor moved out and we had his complex, and it was on the side of a hill and a very prominent facility. I woke up, I believe it was a Sunday morning, and it was early and the cook had not gotten to his job at least, I had some time on my hands and I thought, “Boy or boy, why don’t I just get on this motorcycle and ride around!” So I went down the long driveway to the main road and I turned to the right and went out in that direction for several miles maybe two or three. I got to thinking, now this is a dumb thing to do because I am out here by myself. There could be German soldiers behind every bush. I better turn around. So, I went to turn around on a cobblestone road with condensation on those stones, and the motorcycle went one way, and I went another. I thought boy or boy, nobody knows I’m here, I’m by myself, now the motorcycle probably won’t run, how on earth am I even going to get back to the unit? Well, I went over and picked up the motorcycle and I said, “Lord, please help me start this thing.” I kicked that stand and it popped right off. I got on that motorcycle and I rode back to the motor pool and the first fellow I saw, I said, “Hey, do you want a motorcycle?” He said he did and I gave him my motorcycle. When I told the communications officer what I had done, he said, “Well, I want that motorcycle!” So he went over to this fellow and he took that motorcycle and used it as a messenger vehicle to take messages back and forth between the units. And it served a real good purpose in that regard.

M. That would have been around April?

C. Yes.

M. Are there still incidents where you are still taking fire from people, are people firing?

C. No. We were seven kilometers down the road from Wetzlar, Germany, where the famous Leica cameras were made. We were in Asslar I guess it was. We were in Wilberg when we were given orders to prepare to ship – when the war was over we thought they were going to send us to the Far East. Things there moved along rapidly and the unit – I was designated to stay behind, there were about ten of us that were selected to stay behind and turn in all of our equipment – the rest of them loaded up and got on board a ship and off they went. They were going to go through the United States on their way to the Far East and they got to the United States and the war was over, over there too. They got home early.

M. Were there any incidents between the motorcycle incident and the surrender that you can remember vividly? May 8th I think is when the surrender occurred. Are there any incidents that you recall that between that time and the surrender that were memorable that you would like to talk about?

C. Yes, where we were quartered, there was a canal for shipping purposes. Along the canal were locks. Station houses for the person who monitored the locks lived with his family. Several of us, three or four of us, went down and watched the locks operate, and we got to know the family. They were very gracious and understanding. Maybe they did that because they knew it was good to do rather than a heartfelt feature. The canal itself was probably fifteen feet wide, and I don't know how deep it was, but it flowed full of water the whole time we were there. The locks worked beautifully, and there was a small amount of canal traffic.

M. What went through your mind the day you learned the Germans had surrendered? What was that day like?

C. Well, first of all the cooks gave us a good meal. We celebrated with a pretty good meal that day, but it was difficult for most of us to understand and appreciate what all took place. We just didn't know what the next move – if that hadn't of happened, we knew we were pushing ahead and taking over territory and so forth. When you stop, what do you do? We didn't understand and it was a while, maybe a couple of days before we really understood what had taken place and our part in it.

M. Did you immediately start thinking, "I can't wait to get home!"

C. Oh, yes, we were always . . .

M. You were just thinking how you could get out of there and get on a ship.

C. Somebody in the high command developed what was called a point system. Every soldier, every person, officers included, participated in the point system, and you went home by

points. They grouped you, not necessarily, in a fighting unit but a point group. Those from sixty to eighty points in this group, and so on. You had to carry your merits bag with you.

M. So, where did you regroup to go back?

C. Well, we were in Asslar, and I was in the Mayor's house, they left one officer; have you ever heard of Warren Spahn?

M. Oh, yes.

C. He was a staff sergeant in C Company and he got a battle field commission at the bridge. They left him behind along with about eight or ten enlisted men to turn in equipment and tidy up things and so forth. We were there at that location doing that for about, I don't know, maybe a couple of weeks. By that time, all of our other associates had long gone.

M. What date was it when you were able to get on that ship and get back?

C. Well, they transferred me, I was transferred from the 276 Engineer Combat Battalion to the 100th Infantry Division. I went to their location, and they had been scheduled to go home through Marseilles on the Mediterranean shore. I was with them for a couple of months, maybe. We had acquired some vehicles from somewhere, and we needed to take those vehicles to Marseilles and turn them in and board a ship down there. In those days, a good many of the troop ships were coal burning ships and John L. Lewis was big in the coal miners' union. Well, he called a strike. The troop ship that was supposed to come get us, didn't. We were quartered on a hillside in tents outside of Marseilles. I don't know how long we were there, but we were there a long time – five weeks I think waiting for a troop ship to come in that had been released in this strike business. While there, you look for something to do. Well, I got to go into the big city and I took one of those Red Cross tours. That was very interesting. I learned how you make perfume. They took us to a perfume factory. I got a couple of containers of perfume for my wife.

M. I guess it was wonderful to get those letters. Were you able to get letters during the time you were over there?

C. Oh, yes. The postal service worked real good.

M. Was that a longer trip back across once you got on that ship?

C. We loaded up on the ship; no need for a convoy, just strike out! We had two events that took place on the way back. I was a sergeant by that time, and I had a choice bunk. I was, I think, next to the bottom. I wasn't the bottom bunk. Well, we hit a storm out there in the mid-Atlantic somewhere, a huge storm, and the bow of the ship would come out of the water and then pancake. When it pancaked, the whole ship vibrated like you wouldn't believe.

M. What time of year was that? What date, what month, do you remember?

C. That was in January of 1946. Anyway, somehow, we lost a man overboard. So here is this bad storm, and we've lost a man overboard. There were other ships in the vicinity, so all of those ships stopped going toward home and started circling looking for that lost person. We never found him. Then we were given orders to resume direction and we came on home. Now, there is one interesting feature about that you might like to hear. There was a captain in the 100th Infantry Division that knew something about dogs. His objective was to get a real, live German shepherd dog and take it home. He went out somewhere and bought two German shepherd dogs. They were young dogs, they weren't fully grown, but they weren't puppies either. He started training those dogs to be in a barracks bag with the top of the bag open for breathing purposes so he could walk on board ship and not be noticed. And, by golly, he did. He got on board ship and we were at sea before anybody found out he had two dogs. He made it to New York, we docked in New York I think it was, and he got off with his dogs.

M. How many days did it take you this time to get across, roughly?

C. It was about the same. We were delayed badly because of that storm and we lost a few days there. It was in the neighborhood of ten days.

M. So what was going through you mind when you got back and saw New York harbor?

C. Well, I was concerned about a job. All day I wondered, "What kind of talent have I got?" Well, I didn't know about the GI Bill at that time. I guess I was wondering, what can I do when I get home? I don't have any money to amount to anything. I had, in my mind, had decided I would move in with Olive and her family. It was just she and her mother. That worked out quite nicely. When I was there, you'd get up the next morning and what would you do? There was no TV and so forth. I was concerned and I had pretty well made up my mind I wanted to go back to college. There was a money source. In Birmingham you could go down to the unemployment agency and sign up for some kind of award. I think it was a three week award for veterans. I did that, and that was really a big, big help. I had my mustard out pay, and Olive had a job at that time. We learned about the GI Bill and what that amounted to. Now, by the way, I might mention that when we were in Nice, France, ready to board up and get on board and come home. I thought about staying over there and going to college. Well, Olive was in this country, I didn't speak French, and I learned that at the local university, all the teaching was done in French. So, that didn't seem like a good choice. I remembered that and when I got home I capitalized my interest on to continue college. So I went down and signed up at the University of Alabama Birmingham residence center and took a Civil Engineering course and Olive, at that time, took an English course, so we were both back in college, but barely. In the meantime, features of the GI Bill were clarified and I then registered at what was called Howard College. It is now Samford University. What I intended to do, they had a free engineering program, and I could take that program and put all of my courses together into some reasonable package. So, I went there for nine months; academic year. When that was over, I had made application to go to Clemson in their engineering program.

M. So, that was 1947 by that time?

C. I was discharged in February, and I worked for the Crow Construction Company for several months following that while things settled down. I did get a temporary job with Mr. Shepherd who was part of the management of that company. I had to get ready to go to school in September so I was there at Howard for an academic year. By that time the GI's were inundated colleges everywhere.

M. Talk about that a little bit. Talk about how that transformed.

C. The colleges that I dealt with were mainly three I guess, University of Alabama Residence Center at Birmingham, Howard College and later on Clemson University. They adjusted to the influx of GI student and processed all of the paperwork to not only admit you to the college, but they had books you bought from their bookstore, you had in some cases to live in their dormitory and eat in the dining room and so on. I lived at home in Olive's house while I was at Howard College, and my Dad had been a student at Clemson for a short time in WWI. He had kept up with some of the activities there and when I applied to go to Clemson, I was turned down because I was not a South Carolina resident. They were giving preference to those people. My Dad said, "I know the alumni director, I'll see if he can help us." He wrote a letter to him and the next thing I knew, I had an admission slip to go to Clemson. I went there and I was a student there for two, two-and-a-half years I guess. I guess ninety percent of the enrollment was returning GIs. When I was graduated, in 1949, the commencement speaker was J. Strom Thurmond. I don't know if he was a graduate or not, but he was the governor.

M. Yes, Governor. Okay.

C. He was the commencement speaker. Then I was invited to stay on the Junior Faculty in the Textile School and I took that job and by that time Olive had a job in the Treasurer's Office. We lived in campus housing in a WWII prefabricated building which was really pretty nice, a two bedroom house. Anyway, I was a Junior Faculty member there for two years and I rejoined the Army. I joined the Army Reserves in the ROTC unit there at Clemson and I learned that there was a process to upgrade yourself even to the commission ranks. I got involved in that and took an exam, had an interview and all that, and they commissioned me a second lieutenant in Engineers. I was out of the service for maybe a year-and-a-half, something like that. I, later on, retired from the Army Reserves with 34 years of service. That was a smart move on my part. Not too many smart moves, but that was one of them. Over the years, in that capacity, I achieved the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. I went to active duty two weeks every year that I can remember, I didn't miss a year. In one case, after my first year as a faculty member at Clemson, I didn't have a job. They didn't need me in the teaching ranks. . .

M. One year appointment and that was it. Right?

C. Yes, they offered me a second year, but what are you going to do for the summer -- three months? So, I applied for active duty. It was approved and I was sent to Fort McClellan, Alabama, for three months where they were doing revetment work preparing for National Guard troops to come there to spend their two weeks recycled across the whole summer. I went there, and I had been there ten days and the Korean War broke out. I put in my time there, they got alerted. After about ten more days, they were alerted it was a 44th Engineer Construction

Battalion. They were alerted for shipment for San Francisco to the Far East. Well, they never told me one thing or another. They just assumed I was going with them. They shipped me a foot locker and I don't know what all. I didn't feel too good about that, so I called up some headquarters somewhere to find out what the story was with me. Well, they had never heard of me and I didn't get an answer there. They sent a troop train in to load up all those people, and by the way they were getting their equipment – we had done this before – they were getting their equipment and everything ready for shipment. Well, the day before the troops were to load on the train, the IG came over from Atlanta from Fort McPherson. I understand he went down every personnel. He said, "What's this man doing here?" That was me! They said, "Well, he's here on active duty." He said, "Well, have you made preparations to separate him?" "No, we are taking him with us!" He told them, "No you are not. He's here until the first of September and then he goes back to civilian status." "Oh, no! We need him!" He wouldn't approve it. The day before the shipment took place, I got pulled off the shipping list. I served out my remaining three month time in the post engineers.

M. So, how do you account for that? Just luck?

C. Well, somebody followed the rules is really what took place. Now if the IG hadn't come over there, I'd have been in Korea. I don't know whether that was a fluke or what. I'd never experienced anything like that.

M. Did you do another year at Clemson?

C. Oh, yeah. I was two years on the faculty there. Then I told Olive I liked teaching, it is interesting and rewarding, but if I'm going to be in teaching, I need some advanced degrees. We decided that I ought to go on for a Masters degree. I went to the University of Florida.

M. Now did you consider, you have an Engineering degree, but that seems to me that would have been in high demand? Did you ever consider going into private industry working for a construction company?

C. I worked for the Boeing Company.

M. The Boeing Company, that kind of thing. You didn't like that as much as teaching even though it was probably more money?

C. Yes, you know what my salary was as a teacher? Twenty-six hundred dollars a year!

M. Yes.

C. And we weren't hurting.

M. What was the salary at Boeing?

C. Twice that.

M. You ended up deciding to go to the University of Florida, correct?

C. Yes, I was there for fifteen months – two summer schools and a nine month academic year. I changed disciplines from textile engineering which was Clemson’s version of industrial engineering, to industrial engineering at the University of Florida. I had some make up work to do. I was there for fifteen months. Then I learned of a new college in Beaumont, Texas. I don’t know how I learned about it, but I did, and I wrote them a letter and asked them if they needed a junior faculty member, that I might be interested. They sent the Vice President over to interview me. They offered me an assistant professorship and I accepted. I was there for three years, then I said to Olive, “If I want to stay in this teaching business, I probably need a graduate degree.” So that meant that I needed to go for a doctorate. In those days, a doctorate in industrial engineering was scarce as hen’s teeth. Only four schools in the whole nation offered a doctorate – Georgia Tech, and Purdue, Stanford, and I don’t know the fourth one. I visited Georgia Tech and Purdue. I really like Purdue; the people, the program, and so forth. But, I had to get an assignment where I could be a full time employee and work on the degree part time. Purdue offered that. I accepted, and continued with Boing for the summer and then in September of 1958 I think, no 1955, I’m sorry. I went there and went to work somewhere every summer I was there. I went to the Operations Research Office at Johns Hopkins twice and then my last summer there they put me on a teaching assignment. In three twelve month years, I earned a full time living as a faculty member and also earned a degree. Then they invited me to stay on as a full time faculty, and I did. Although I interviewed at NC State and somewhere else, I liked it better so I stayed there. During the course of my stay as a faculty member at Purdue, I knew one of the people that I learned later was the dean of a new school of engineering at Arizona State University – Lee Thompson. So, I wrote Lee a letter and asked him if he ever needed somebody, that maybe I’d be interested. Well, he invited me out for an interview and I jumped all the way to Department Chair.

M. Wow! So that was your first administrative job plus teaching then as Department Chair.

C. Yes.

M. How many faculty did you have?

C. None.

M. None?

C. I was the first one.

M. Oh, they were just starting the school. So you hired all of the people?

C. Yes, and I was out there eight years. Again, I learned something about them starting a new school, a new university in the Orlando area. Seems like I knew somebody on the staff, and I wrote them a letter and asked them if they ever needed anybody, and Charlie Millican was the President, and he came out to Tempe to interview me and offered me the Vice President’s job. Pretty big jump! So I accepted that and joined him, and the rest is sort of history I guess.

M. That is probably a pretty good place to wrap up for today. What we will do next time is pick up with your career.

C. There may be some gaps in there too, and you might like me to go back and fill in. I'll be glad to do that.

M. This is the end of the day, the second day. Stop.