**Ok, today is February 26th, 2014. This is Fidencio Marbella with the Westchester Public Library in Westchester, Illinois. Also present is Patrick Callaghan, a reference librarian here at Westchester. Today, we will be speaking to Mr. Raymond Tollefsen. Ray served in the United States Army from 1942 to 45, primarily in Europe. He was born in Chicago on April 28th 1922. Ok, let’s go ahead and get started. Ray, why don’t you tell us a little about your family growing up in Chicago?**

Well, I was a member of eight kids. My twin brother and I were the youngest. I had one, two, three sisters and four brothers. We grew up on the northwest side of Chicago. We went to high school, about two-and-a-half years of college at Northwestern night school.

**Ok.**

After coming out of the service, but then I went to on-the-job training instead of continue on with the night course because it I just couldn’t handle the night and work at the same time. So, outside of that, my next brother, Ace, who’s two-years older, he was in the Marines, and my brother Ole was in the Navy. He was about five-years older than us. I had an older brother, Thor, but he had bad knees, so he couldn’t make. But four out of five did get in, and everybody came home, fortunately.

**That’s pretty amazing that all of you came home. Must’ve made your parents pretty happy.**

Oh yes. Uh, I don’t know where I go from there.

**Ok. Can you tell us a little bit about your parents?**

Well, my mother and father came over from Norway. My father was a watchmaker, and my mother was a homemaker with eight kids. When jobs got too hard, he had to go to Indianapolis to work, so he was away from us for about ten-years, but my mother carried on. And, outside of that, we had normal illness. I had diphtheria. We were quarantined, the whole house. At that time, they used to put a sign on your door, and you couldn’t go out.

**Wow.**

And the nurse would visit you every once in a while. So, outside of that, we had the normal sickness of measles, chickenpox, and what have you. But everybody grew up happy and healthy. Everybody got married, had kids, so, outside of that, that’s it.

**Now, do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor happening?**

Oh yes, I was in the house with a friend of ours, there was four or five of us guys sitting there, playing Big Business, which is a board game. And it came over the radio at that time, and we heard it that night. It was just the five of us sitting there playing, and, so, that’s how we heard it. Over the radio at that time. So, of course, we didn’t jump up at that point. My brothers did, but my brother and I didn’t.

**You were still too young?**

No, we were twenty-years old. We were twenty, but we didn’t want to enlist. In fact, I didn’t think I would make because I was, at that time, I was five feet eight and a quarter, and a hundred and nine pounds. And they put a stamp on my paper that said nine pounds underweight, probably remedied by proper food and exercise. Well, in one month, I gained twenty-six pounds in basic training, so, they were right about that. My twin brother was about two, two-and-a-half inches taller than I was, so we didn’t look like twins. Nobody knew we were twins, but, so, he was much heavier than I was, about a hundred and sixty pounds. So, between the two of us, they knew we were bothers, but that’s it. So, we went downtown to Harrison Street. They did the induction and went through the physical at that time, and then went from there up to Camp Grant. Then the two of us were then shipped to Camp Roberts in Arkansas for basic training. We both were there for two months, and then I took off for Brooklyn, New York, and he went down to South Carolina, and I never saw him again after that until we came home. As I say, he went down to Italy and South Africa. So, I got into New York after two-months basic training. I had a month’s furlough. So, in March I was in Brooklyn. In June, I set sail for England. I was in the States for six months, and that’s it. I landed at Bristol. And from there—our unit, see, we weren’t all together. There were usually two or three men at one post who were stationed in the railroad stations and taking care of all incoming troops and equipment. So as a result we were on duty twenty-four hours a day. We lived in private homes and lived on a ration card. And we used to take the rations, another sergeant and I, and make a meal for one day. But they had a unit in the port. Port Battalion, and they had a Coypool outside of town. Army Coypool. We would go to those places to eat, except for those two little things, what we we got from the government. But, also, whenever they pulled in a train filled with troops, as I mentioned before we were out twenty-four hours a day. We had armbands, RTO, showing that we had passes. So we could be out from 00:01 to 23:59. I don’t know what happened, if went over midnight. So, troops would come in. And we’d have to have transportation for them to take them over to them over to the port, and then we would have to go through the train. Each one. And any damage to the train—broken window, cut seat, or what have you—we had to make a note of it because the United States government was responsible for damage. But we also picked up leftover C-rations and K-rations.

**[Laughter]**

And so we had extra food that way. So it was nice. We lived in private homes. We first got there, the night we got there, we were stationed at or put in a home, about a block away from the railroad station. We’re up on the third floor. And we got there, undressed, went to bed, and at three-o’clock in the morning, the sirens went off. And they started to bomb the port and the railroad station. So we ran downstairs, followed the whole group; in fact, we had to stop and pick up a couple of teenagers that fell. Couple of the British guys jumped right over them, kept going. We went down to the air raid shelter in the backyard. We had to sit there until the all-clear came out, and we got up and went back to our room. After that, we figured this was too close to the railroad station. So I moved out of town to an old couple, Rosie and Chippy—he was an insurance salesman. Must have been sixty, seventy years-old. And they set-up in their living room a big bed right there, a big fireplace there. I had that, and I had to pay them two dollars a day per diem. I collected four dollars a day per diem from the government. So, I was stationed there. I lived there for a while, and then I got a bicycle and drove back into town every morning into the office, and drove back and forth. And, later on, we used to stand outside of their house and watch the planes come over the top and circle back in and go back out again. They run back again and make another bomb. We could just sit up and look at them, but we weren’t affected by the bombs there. Later on, about six, seven months later, another sergeant and I got an apartment by ourselves. That was still out quite a ways from the station. So, a couple of times we were out, and the air raids came, and we were running back to our house. This one time, I remember distinctly hearing a whistle, and we both hit the ground. And a piece of shrapnel came, and just right across, would’ve cut us right in half. It hit the building by us, so then we got back up. But that’s the only scary thing I really had there. And then, one of our men had to leave. There were three separate collections of groups toward the invasion. The first one, if I recall, was the code name was “tiger.” One of the guys from our group went, from Plymouth, we had three guys there. One guy left, and he came back later on. What they did, they would bring everybody together, went through all the practice and everything for an invasion, and then send them all back. So he came back and then they had another one, but none of our guys went on that. But then the third one, which was Overlord, I went on. And that was the invasion. Overlord was the code name. So, I was sent to Torquay, and where we loaded the boat for the invasion. I was a staff sergeant. I was the ranking NCO at that point. So I worked for 44-hours straight at that point. And I remember we sent them out. It was on the third. We sent them out into the English Chanel, and they sat out there the whole day. After we had sent them out that night, they bombed us. They bombed the Torquay port. But, when we first got there, you know, we had been living in house and homes. They said, “dig a foxhole.” We dug a foxhole. Thank god we did because when they came over and bombed us, we hit those foxholes. And boom, you know, it was just helmets all over the place. But thank goodness we had the foxholes at that time. So they knew what they were talking about. And then after that, thirty days after that in June of ’45 —’44 rather—I went to France and came in on Normandy. And then we walked that night. I remember coming in and trying to get together with our unit. So we walked and walked and walked and walked and got to a crossroad there’d be MPs there with their Jeeps. But you could only have the little air raid lights on. But they’d direct us, and we went and we walked and we walked. Finally we said, “nuts.” And you could hear boom, boom way up ahead. The guns were booming, the big ones. Of course, they weren’t close to us, but you could hear them. So we finally just got so tired we said nuts and just lay down next to a hedgerow and put helmets over our heads and went to sleep. Next morning we got up. On the other side of the hedgerow was the American Red Cross with piles of blankets

**[Laughter]**

A lot of the time, at the beginning there, I don’t remember it all. I remember we were sitting, waiting to get together and a dock, a loading dock. And we sat there for 24-hours waiting. I remember that because I lost my whole paycheck playing cards there. And we sat there. And then, from there, we went to Cherbourg. In Cherbourg we were stationed and had an office on the first floor. And the upper floors were related. So we’d come down the stairs, and right across the street was a nun’s monastery or whatever you call it. There’s nuns there.

**Oh, a convent?**

Yeah. A convent, right. So we were there and from there I went to Saint-Lô. Saint-Lô was just shot. We were stationed in a big field right outside of Saint-Lô. We set up a big tent with food and everything. And then we all had our own little shelter halves. Our own little tents. I had two of them so I could have my own. In fact, I also had a cot and a mattress because while I was at Cherbourg we were in charge of allocating trucks and everything when they called. Unit called, needed a truck. When the hospital called we said if you can get us a mattress and a cot, you got the truck. So, when I went to Saint-Lô I loaded those onto the truck. So I had a mattress and a cot and my own two shelter halves. But, I mean, you know, that’s selfish. But then we were, we’d be there and the trucks—Red Ball Route . We were on the Red Ball Route. They came, the trucks would come down and they’d stop and they would stop for their food and go to the bathroom. The bathroom consists of a slit trench out in the field. In fact, one of the guys was very embarrassed because he was squat over the slit trench when some French people came by, went by and shake his hand and say, “thank goodness you got here.”

**[Laughter]**

But, at that point, I met Fred Astaire and Bing Crosby. They came by, and one of the guys in our group said—I was very skinny and everything—said, “Ray, you look just like Fred Astaire.” So Fred Astaire took off my hat and I had this head of hair. He was bald as could be. He said, “Oh no.”

**[Laughter]**

And then they went on. So I was there I don’t know how long. I don’t recall how long I was there, but then I was sent back to Cherbourg again. And when I got to Cherbourg I had my clothes and put them in—we weren’t back in the same unit, we were in a big building with a big courtyard. And in the courtyard was a big kettle with a bonfire, and we put our clothes in there to boil them to clean them. Unfortunately, while they were boiling I got a call to leave the next morning to go to Boulogne staging area. So, ok, my clothes are in the boiling water, so I had to requisition for new clothes. So, all I had was the clothes on my back. I put the requisition in, and I got the new clothes. I didn’t get charged for them. So, I was stationed at Boulogne, and there I met General Mark Clark on the railroad station. I didn’t know at the time, but I’m sitting there at the railroad station taking a break, and this crummy looking soldier sits down next to me, an old guy. So I’m talking to him, you know, everything is going fine, and he takes off. And a guy came up and says, “You know who you were talking to?” I said no. He said, “General Mark Clark.” He didn’t have anything to show it. So, from there I went back to Cherbourg again and was kept on Cherbourg until August of ’45. I was shipped to Belgium. By that time it was winding down. So I was ready to go home in the beginning of December when there were only thirteen of us to be sent home from this area. And they kept bumping us off the shifts because bigger units came in and we were pushed aside. So one of our guys called the colonel, says, “how you doing, colonel?” “Fine.” The colonel says, “what are you doing there? I thought you were going home.” He says, “well, yeah, but we got bumped off of three shifts so far.” He said, “sit tight.” We got put on a Navy ship. We slept in the Navy bunks, the thirteen of us. The only ones who were on that ship were the thirteen. We got sent over, we got sent back right away. And that’s why we got home just before Christmas. And then from there on, just arrive home, and that was the end of the war.

**Wow, ok.**

So, it was nothing too exciting, but—

**No, you did your part.**

Yeah.

**Yes.**

That’s what I figured. I gave them three years of my life, but I enjoyed a lot, but not enjoyed a lot of it, too. So you can’t have everything. I’m just glad I was not up in the front. I don’t know what else I can tell you.

**Well, let’s go back and get some of the details here. You went to basic training starting in Camp Grant?**

No, Camp Grant was where we were first sent. From Camp Grant we were sent to Camp Robinson Arkansas. We had two-months basic training at Camp Robinson.

**Ok. Can you tell us about the basic training that you went through? What kind of things did they teach you?**

Well, you had to go through the obstacle course, of course, and then I could never get over that wall. You had to run up that thing. I’d run up and hit it and stop.

**[Laughter]**

Well, we went through rifle training, and we were training to shoot the rifle. They show you how to wrap the strap around your shoulder. I had to breathe and take a deep breath and then let it go. And then because it had such a big kickback on the rifle, you had to have it tight there but you had to be sure that you took that deep breath and stopped and shot at that time. I got a medal for marksman, and I think it’s because I shot about as low as you could get.

**[Laughter]**

And then we had training with shooting pistols. And then we went out in the field, and you’d sit in a bleacher, and you’d look out over the field, and they’d say, “See if you can…” The guy starts talking. You hear a voice, but you can’t see him. See if you can pick him out. You couldn’t. Camouflaged, the guy was standing right up in the middle of the field there, and he was out there like you couldn’t see him. But they showed what camouflage, and why you had to be careful because things looked like that they weren’t like that. They were different than what they actually see. Then we went back down to training, and, of course, you have KP, naturally. But I went up there again. If you stood in line, and they started pointing you out, they stamp you number eleven. Because that’s the guy who cut up the ice cream. All you do is cut the ice cream after lunch, and then you go back to your cot while everybody’s peeling potatoes and all that kind of stuff. So you learn fast. On the way over, in the boat, it took us twelve days. They went up to Newfoundland, around the cross, and came down to the English Channel from the north. We were fed. There were five-thousand men on this boat. It was the SS Barry. It used to be an ocean liner. So there were five-thousand men on there, so there were five-thousand men up on deck, or twenty-five hundred up on deck, and twenty-five below. And so we had to shift. So half the trip, you were on the top; the second half the trip you were on the bottom. Of course, you’d shift during the day just to get some air, but otherwise, most of your time was spent on one place or the other. You were fed twice a day, like, seven in the morning and seven at night. Now they had tables, like from here all the way across the room. One table like this. They were all bolted down, of course. And you would stand at this table, and, in the English Channel, we had a big storm. And you had to be careful and hold onto your plate because if you didn’t, they thing went like this, you would be eating his food.

**[Laughter]**

It slid right down. It was such a horrible thing. But you just stood there. But, again, I got to know somebody and was able to get a handful of bread and jam, so I could have lunch. So you could always work little deals, so we were able to eat in between. Otherwise, you’d eat twice a day. And when we got to Bristol the people were all waiting there, and we were throwing them our oranges and everything. They couldn’t get fruit. Just like on our K-rations—not our K-rations—our English rations. You had one piece of meat a week. A lot of potatoes. I guess they got them from Ireland or something. And vegetables, you could get vegetables. But no meat. It was very scarce. So eating that kind of food wasn’t too healthy—I mean it was healthy but not too filling. Ok, I don’t know where I go from here.

**That’s all right. What was it like on a sea voyage for you? Was that the first time you had been on a big ship like that?**

Oh yeah.

**Did you get seasick?**

No.

**No? Wow. Ok**

No, no. They said, first of all, they said if something happens, let the group down below get off first. And we go, “Oh sure. We let them go first. Right”

**[Laughter]**

But, uh, they would shoot the guns off every so often. They would practice. Well, they need to practice, but I guess that’s—and you’d hear the gun going off. First I thought we were being attacked. You learned later on what they were doing. But it just got to a point where you sat and relaxed and didn’t do anything. You read, and you just talked. There was really no activity because you couldn’t do anything because it was so crowded. The sleeping arrangements were alright. I don’t remember what they’d look like, but I don’t remember having any problems. So it was a long voyage being twelve days, but then we found out later why they did that. Probably to avoid the U-boats, I suppose. But they knew what they were doing. But the voyage didn’t seem to bother me. I don’t recall any of the guys getting sick. We didn’t rue like that until that storm came. That’s the only time you could feel it. Otherwise, I really don’t remember too much about it.

**So, when you landed in England, and you were billeted with the English families, how did they decide which families you would go with or stay with?**

They had so many people volunteer for that. The one we had was a funeral director. It’s great to start with. There was only one man there when we got there. He was a corporal, and he was shipped out right away, and then we took over. So there’s only two of us at that time, and then a captain came later. Captain Stopford and then one way or another a sergeant came later on. But they put us in this one house right by the railroad station. But I don’t know how they determined that, but I suppose they had some volunteers, and they just gave you that one. But after that we looked around ourselves, and that’s how we got the other—I don’t know any reason, well, why they ever put as that close to the station I don’t know why. One of the guys we had, Polish kid—I didn’t know how to drive a car at that time. So we had Captain Stopford and Sergeant Wyora, and he was away at the time. And then this corporal. Polish kid, and he was a Section 8. I had to get him to the ordinance depot, to the hospital there, or ambulance, so they could take him to a hospital or ship him some place because he wasn’t quite right. And the captain was away at the time, so I was there all by myself. And I had this kid, and I had to get him there, so I drive the Jeep over to the ordinance depot. And when I came back, there was the office here, and then they had the parking area here. But the tracks were out here, but they were down. If you went off the end you went—and I pulled the Jeep up there, and almost went off the edge there.

**[Laughter]**

And then I walked in the office, and the captain looked at me and said, “Tollefsen, go out there and throw your hat onto your head.” I said, “Why?” “What the hell are doing driving a Jeep?” I said, “I had to get him to Coypool.” So, that’s the first time I ever drove.

**So, did you learn how to drive after that?**

No, when I got home I did.

**[Laughter]**

**Not until you got home?**

Until I got married. Then I got married, needed the car, so I learned how to drive. I don’t know where to go from there.

**Did you have much chance for like R and R in England?**

Oh yeah. I met a nice girl there: Winifred Jean Stanberry. Her father was the head waiter at the big hotel in Plymouth, fortunately. So we would go there and have steak dinners on occasion. You couldn’t get it unless you knew somebody, and she and I would go there. And I dated her, and this guy Lenny Wyora met a girl, Rebecca, and he got married while we were there, and then his wife got pregnant. And then he was shipped out, so I was there at the birth of his son. And I had pictures taken with his wife and me and his baby sent to him.

**[Laughter]**

That was the personal stuff. Like I say, I had Winifred, my girlfriend at that time. We corresponded a lot after I got home, and then that faded. I couldn’t afford to bring a woman over at that time. But we did have some recreation. And then they had a USO, not a USO, this was at the home of Lord and Lady Astor. And Lady Astor had a big building, which they used for recreation. They had ping pong and all that kind of stuff for the enlisted men. We used to go over there and play ping pong. And right outside our office was a coffee shop, not a coffee shop, a place for refreshments. They don’t call it coffee shop because all they drank was tea. But I did go up there once for a glass of water, and I got a glass of hot water. The only thing they have water for is for tea. We’d sit there and have tea and crumpets outside our office there. But then we had, in our equipment there, a list of every unit in the UK. And where they were. We had it. All of that. And we used to get our PX-rations from Exeter, which is a district office. They would send that down once a month with our cigarettes and our candy and what have you. And cigarettes were five-cents a pack at that time. But then we used to also go to port battalion and get PX-rations from them, and we’d go to the ordinance depot and get PX-rations from them. So, we’d get them from two different—I hope this doesn’t go on the—

**[Laughter]**

So, we were living alright. Well, it was just normal, everyday calls. It’d be three-o’clock in the morning, we’d have to get up and go out, meet these trains coming in. so I guess we were on call twenty four hours a day. That kept on going all the time. You didn’t get them every day, but you just had to be aware of everything. So, it was nice knowing all that information, which we had to know, of course. And we were kept busy at that time. I don’t remember what we were doing, but we were busy. Busy all the time doing something. So that was a year of that in England.

**And then you went to France right after Overlord?**

Right. About thirty days we went there.

**What was that—can you describe landing at Normandy, what it looked like?**

Well, we got in there. They pulled the boat up. Not all the way. We had to go by a small craft. The entire water was filled with broken machines, the tanks and everything else. All the debris. There was no bodies left. All the debris was there. You could just see all the stuff sticking out of the water. It was just loaded with destroyed equipment. And then we got up on the beach, and there was equipment up there, too, but then when you got further inland, there was nothing there. But you had all these hedgerows, so when you were walking there, you were in a maze until you got to a corner and met an MP somewhere. Like I say, we walked there all night and finally gave up. You know, I don’t remember ever being scared.

**Really?**

I think it was maybe just too stupid. I don’t know. Maybe I was scared, but, at this point, I don’t ever recall being scared. But, yes, that stuff was happening all the time, but you just went on, and you just kept and going and going and going and doing what you were supposed to be doing. Just taking it one day at a time. And all of a sudden, it’s all over. Well, not all of a sudden, but—well, like I say, I don’t recall being afraid.

**Did you have much contact with any of the French civilians while you were there?**

No, no. Only in connection with our nunnery or whatever you want to call it. The convent. We saw them. The only thing we did was we went out in the front of our house, along the gutter. We poured lye all the way along there because they have in the courts in every town these urinals. The men just walked in there and, it’s covering you from here to here, and they’d just urinate there. And then it goes down the gutter, and the gutters were just running with this stuff. And we put lye out there in front of our office; otherwise, you couldn’t walk out. And the nuns would fertilize their fruits and vegetables with human waste. Dirty country, I mean. It was just horrible, but, then, we didn’t have too much contact with them at all. We were in our office. Contact everyone by telephone, so we didn’t get out that much. The only time I really got out was up in Belgium. There we got around, of course, the war was almost over by that time. But we had a nice recreation place. We’d go dancing, drinking, whatever you want. It was nice in Belgium but, by that time, like I say, it was winding down. Otherwise, in France we didn’t have that much association with the French people.

**Can you describe what you saw at Cherbourg, the port that you went to?**

No, I don’t recall seeing anything in the port itself. I just recall getting there and getting into this office. But the port itself, no. We went down to Deauville for recreation. That was nice, it was sort of a summer place. We were down there for about a week, and then we got back to railroad. I have no memory of Cherbourg outside of where we were, except for the fact that having the trucks, we were able to do things that a lot of other people couldn’t do. We got a bunch of guys together and organized a baseball team, and we would play other units in the area. So we would have truck to take us to the ball field and back again because we were in charge of those, so we could do that. they played the twelve-inch. I’m from Chicago, we played the sixteen inch. That called that kitten ball. This twelve-inch stuff, you got a glove. And it was so easy, you could catch the ball with a glove. You used to catch it with the bare hand. So, we had a pretty good ball team going. But the pitching was a lot faster than you do with a sixteen inch. So we had quite a number of teams there. Also, I got acute appendicitis and had to get rushed to the hospital and have that taken out there. I had that taken out in Cherbourg.

**Can you describe, what was the Red Ball Express?**

They were bringing equipment from Cherbourg down to the front lines. They had this steady run of trucks. They wanted to make a stop in between in order to refresh themselves and eat and so forth, and from there, they went on to the front and delivered the stuff and came back, and the trucks kept on coming through to keep that supply line going. And we were the intermediaries to take care of them in between, feeding them and letting them go to the bathroom and what have you.

**Sounds like a very tough job driving these trucks non-stop.**

Oh yeah. Those poor guys. It was really, really, really rough for them. But they were really nice. We met a lot of nice guys that way. But we had to be there, again, we’re on duty twenty four hours a day because they don’t come through nice-to-five. We lived in those little pup tents all that time. I don’t recall how long it was, but it had to be a couple of months at least. You had to do what you had to do.

**Now, do you remember where you were when you heard the war in Europe was over?**

Yeah, I was in Belgium. That was a nice place to be, too, at that time. Everything was so nice and clean, and you’re living in a nice barracks. I think it was a Shell Oil building we lived in. We had this big office. Like I said, it was winding down at that point. Everybody just waiting to see if they’re ready to go home or if they had enough points. They had to gather enough points to go home, so we just waited.

**Ok, were you worried about having to go to Japan after the war in Europe ended? You had enough points to get out?**

I never gave it a thought. My type of a unit, I think, that unit wouldn’t be necessary. I could see it with some of the fighting men, but us? We wouldn’t do it because we knew nothing about the country. We wouldn’t be able to—transportation and all that stuff would be so different. Our unit, you couldn’t get us all together again like that. Like I say, there were only two or three of these things, so, I never had—we got a whole unit. We couldn’t do that. I never knew anybody to. So, it’s three or four men. That’s it.

**Now, you mentioned earlier that your voyage home was on a Navy ship? Can you describe that to us? What it was like living on a Navy ship for a couple of weeks?**

It was like going from Days Inn to the Ritz Carlton.

**[Laughter]**

With the Navy ship, we got to sleep in the Navy berth. Eat the Navy food, and you never heard such griping than the Navy guys, “Ahh, we have bacon and eggs again.” You know, they’re frying them right there, while you’re looking, you see that. I hadn’t had that for three years, and all they did was gripe and complain, and we were so happy with what we had. It was like living a luxury life. And it was so nice and smooth and a nice ride. You can’t explain it because it was much better than what you had. And they were so upset with what they had. I guess it takes all kinds. But it was a nice trip over there, except when you finally got there and saw the mess. Then you started to realize that you’re still in a war. And then you got to try and find your unit that night, and walking and walking and walking and never getting anywhere. You’re lost, you’re in the country, and you meet the MPs, and they give you a direction. And you head in that direction, hope you get there. So it was sort of a maze. I’m surprised we won the war. In our unit, for instance, our major was a street car conductor. Now, why he would be a transportation expert, I don’t know. But that’s why he got to be a major because he’s a transportation expert—a street car conductor. And then a buddy of mine went into basic training, he got to be a Jeep driver. He didn’t know how to drive, but he was a Jeep driver. How they assigned these people, I don’t know, or how they assigned me either. I was a private. I never became a private first class. I went T-3, technician third grade. And then after that I went to T-2 rather, and then I went to T-3, which is a sergeant with a T. Then I went to staff sergeant instead of a T-4. I went to staff sergeant. Now, the difference is T is a technician. You’re like an office worker. T-4 would be a staff sergeant with a T on it. Without the T you’re a full staff sergeant. You outrank a T-4. So, I got to that point. There I was.

**Yeah. So, your voyage home, where did you end up in the U.S., did you land in New York?**

Yes.

**Can you describe it felt like when you finally got to New York City after leaving Europe?**

Well, I guess an immigrant or something. You come in, see the Statue of Liberty and all that stuff. It’s like a big load off your mind. Hey, I’m going home, you know. Everything is so peaceful. And everybody’s so nice and everything went so nice and smooth. Then we were put on a train. We didn’t fly planes at that time. And then took a train to Camp Grant and got discharged there. And then coming from Camp Grant we were on the bus—I don’t remember where this way—all I remember seeing was a big street with the street lights on at the end. And I could see Chicago coming up, and it was such a beautiful sight. Then he dropped me off about three blocks from my house. I’m carrying my duffel bag about three blocks, looking around. This is home, you know. And I felt so good. And then get up to the house and meet my whole family.

**Were they expecting you?**

Well, yeah, they knew I was coming, but they were all home, too. My brothers were already home. My brother twin brother got home about a month ahead of me. So they were all there. That was a nice Christmas.

**Because that was right before Christmas of ‘45?**

December 22nd. The first one took me December 26th. That wasn’t a good one. We were leaving at that time. So, that’s it.

**Has your time in the service affected your life afterwards, in your career, or your life in general?**

What I was doing there had no bearing. I worked for a bonding company, Fidelity Surety Bonds. Not insurance, they also had a burglary insurance department. That’s where I came—I was a file boy when I left. When I came back I was in the burglary department, selling burglary insurance. And then I moved into the bond department. So I was with that company my whole life. Fifty-one years on two-weeks trial.

**[Laughter]**

They never told me I made it.

**I guess you did ok.**

I was afraid to ask.

**Fifty-one years, I guess you did alright.**

So, I retired from there December 31st 1991, and I’ve been living the life of Reilly. Now, I’ll be 92 in April, so I can’t complain, I guess.

**And how many children do you have?**

I have two: a boy and a girl. Jeff has now just turned sixty, and Lisa will be fifty-five. And then they both have two kids. Jeff has a son and a daughter. They both graduated from Vanderbilt. One is twenty-five now and one is twenty-three. The boy is twenty-five, the girls is twenty-three. And my daughter has two daughters. One eighteen, and one fourteen. So, I got a nice family.

**You have much to be proud of.**

Absolutely, yes. And I’m thankful for what I got because I came through it ok. My twin brother died when he was seventy-nine. So, there’s only three of us left in the family now. My older sister who lives here in Westchester, she just turned ninety-nine. And my brother Ace, he lives in Cincinnati, he’s turning ninety-four now, and I’ll be turning ninety-two. We still got three of them in the nineties left.

**Yes, that’s great. Anything else you want to share with us?**

Can’t think of anything off hand.

**Well, thank you so much for sharing your stories with us today.**

Well, it’s not much but, I mean—

**Like you said, you did your part. You know, three years in the Army, you gave up three years of your life to serve the country. Thank you.**

You’re very welcome. Glad I could do it.