

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
FREDERICK C. FOERSTER  
Cook, Army, World War II.

2001

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**Foerster, Frederick C.**, (1918- ). Oral History Interview, 2001.

User Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 85 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 85 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 85 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Frederick C. Foerster, a Stevens Point, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service as a cook and machine gunner with the 225th Ordnance Company in France and Germany. Foerster talks about being drafted into the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, being held back from assignment to Sicily due to wisdom teeth problems, and basic training at Fort Sheridan (Illinois). Stationed with the 255th Ordnance Company at Aberdeen Proving Grounds (Maryland), he comments on cook training, preparing food for those attending Officer Candidate School, creating menus, and loading bombs on airplanes. After a year and a half, Foerster states he was transferred to Canada for artillery testing with American, Canadian, Russian, Chinese, and Finnish ski troops. He describes training near Winnipeg (Manitoba) including living conditions, cooking four meals a day, seeing members of the Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWACs), and going on ski patrols. He speaks of spending a couple months cooking in Boston (Massachusetts) where his unit was cutting bayonets. Foerster comments on cooking on the troopship while shipping to Great Britain, training for a year at Gloucester (England), dating an Englishwoman, and being under buzz bomb attacks. He describes duty as a machine gunner while landing at Omaha Beach shortly after D-Day with the 1<sup>st</sup> Army, traveling with a "cook truck" equipped with stoves, and once having problems when someone sold the unit's gasoline on the black market and filled their gas cans with water. Foerster talks of being fired at with wooden bullets, clearing disabled German tanks from roads, and seeing a house get flattened after Germans were ambushing troops using a girl as bait. Periodically, he discusses visiting with his brother, who was in the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. Foerster tells of accidentally discharging his weapon in camp, moving through Europe following the breakout from St. Lô, making ice cream in Belgium, and preparing a turkey dinner to celebrate Christmas. He compares German Army food to American Army food and portrays pens of German prisoners of war. Foerster details doing twelve hour shifts cooking and then doing twelve hour guard shifts. He recalls that Christmas cards and packages were never delivered to him in central Europe. Foerster mentions performing two-tone whistling at camp shows and playing baseball. Shortly before the end of the war, he details having guard duty while occupying Leipzig concentration camp and portrays seeing Russian troops bury dead prisoners at Nordhausen concentration camp. He comments on female artillery spotters, being promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> cook, meeting Eisenhower and Patton, selling his cigarette rations, and winning a paid trip to Paris. Foerster tells of cooking aboard the *Queen Elizabeth* during the ride back to the States. He recalls hitchhiking home, traveling to California while wearing his uniform and

discharge emblem, breaking off his engagement with his English girlfriend and marrying a Wisconsin woman, and joining the American Legion.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Foerster (b.1918) served in the Army from 1939 to 1945. He worked as an ice-cream maker at Scribner's Dairy and West's Dairy for thirty-four years, and he was employed at Sentry Insurance for sixteen years.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2001  
Transcribed by Marie Drumm, 2010  
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**Interview Transcript:**

Jim: Okay, off and running.

Fred: Okay.

Jim: I'm with Fred Foerster.

Fred: That's right.

Jim: And, ah, where were you born, Fred?

Fred: Ah, Larimore, North Dakota, 1918.

Jim: Did you grow up in a—

Fred: I, ah, was there about a year or two and then we moved to Stevens Point.

Jim: A year or two and then to Stevens Point.

Fred: We've been living here about eighty-one years.

Jim: Very good. And then, um, tell me what you were doing on Pearl Harbor Day?

Fred: Pearl Harbor Day.

Jim: Everybody remembers what they did on that day.

Fred: Well, I think I was—let's see that was in June?

Jim: December 7<sup>th</sup>

Fred: December 7<sup>th</sup>. Well, I don't know.

Jim: All of a sudden there was a war.

Fred: Yeah.

Jim: That none of us expected.

Fred: Yeah, that's right.

Jim: Did that surprise you?

Fred: Well, they were having a meeting, if I remember correctly, with the

Japanese.

Jim: Yeah, what were you doing?

Fred: Well, I was in the field.

Jim: You were in the Army then?

Fred: I was in the Army.

Jim: You had been drafted?

Fred: I had been drafted in '39.

Jim: '39.

Fred: And I came out in '45.

Jim: Now, when you were drafted, you were in for a year, right?

Fred: I was in for a year and every year that would go by, I would say, "Well I should be going home now." Yeah.

Jim: And they would re-up [military jargon for re-enlisting or being re-enlisted] you [laughs].

Fred: They re-up.

Jim: Without discussion.

Fred: That's right. I got out at 70, I think, 73 points. We were on the point system. I think I had 73 points. And we were all ready to go to Japan. And, in the meantime, when I was at the Proving Grounds, I had wisdom teeth trouble. You know, they had the old peddle machine?

Jim: Yes.

Fred: And they pulled two of them out. And you know how they did it to you? They drilled down through the middle, and they took a hammer and chisel and chiselled it out. And you know, they were picking them to go to Sicily, and that kept me from going to Sicily, because in the next week I was supposed to have the other two teeth out. And they sent, I think, it was about 180 boys to Sicily. Seven came back. Paratroopers got them, and they came back to Aberdeen Proving Ground. They were put in for officer's candidate school. I was an army cook, by the way.

Jim: Well, you're jumping ahead.

Fred: Oh, okay.

Jim: I just got you in 1939.

Fred: Oh, yeah [laughs]. I was drafted in Fort Sheridan.

Jim: Right, and you had your basic—?

Fred: I had my basic training in Fort Sheridan.

Jim: Right, where did you go after that?

Fred: I went from there to Aberdeen Proving Grounds.

Jim: And now what were they training you to do?

Fred: I was an Army Cook.

Jim: Right from the start?

Fred: Right from the start.

Jim: Had you had any previous cooking experience?

Fred: I went to university over here and I went for a semester learning how to cook. And I went there and then the draft came and I went in the first draft with the National Guards.

Jim: 32<sup>nd</sup>?

Fred: What's that?

Jim: 32<sup>nd</sup>?

Fred: 32<sup>nd</sup>, yeah. Red Arrow. And then I went to Illinois, to Fort—

Jim: Sheridan.

Fred: Sheridan, and then I—that's where we had our physical, and I made it. Then, I think, a week or two later, I went back and I had my basic training there. And they trained us with a broom handle or whatever. They put rocks from one side of the sidewalk to the other. And we had our obstacle course there and then infiltration course. Is that what they call it where you have to crawl under the barbed wire? And I had to laugh—

- Jim: And cooks had to do that?
- Fred: Yes, sir, oh yeah. Oh, we had to do that training, and we could work all night roasting turkeys like Thanksgiving, and you still had to fall out in the street in the morning.
- Jim: Doesn't seem fair.
- Fred: Well, I could tell you what they did in England, too, but I won't tell you.
- Jim: We'll get there.
- Fred: [laughs] We're too far. And then, all of a sudden, we pick up and we go through Pittsburgh. I had never been on a train, a troop train, and you know how the smelters were, it looks like the whole city is on fire. And then we went to Aberdeen Proving Grounds.
- Jim: Tell me now what type of training, you knew how to cook over here. What was different about army cooking?
- Fred: Well, you had more people. You had more KPs [military jargon for "kitchen police," i.e. menial workers in US Army kitchens]. I know we had white ones first. One morning no white KPs came in. I looked to the loading platform and, well, we had probably about 20 KPs and there were about 40 black boys coming in. And those were our KPs. Yeah. They changed right away.
- Jim: Did you cook any differently or did they teach you any techniques of cooking you didn't know before?
- Fred: Well they teach you some things, like a lot of it was oil and we would do it on coal like that. But, otherwise, they were hard to get used to in the hot kitchen. You never really cook that long, or we would start at three in the morning and then we would work from breakfast until dinner. Next day you would come in for dinner and supper like that.
- Jim: So you only worked two shifts on a day?
- Fred: One shift a day.
- Jim: In other words you might have the morning shift.
- Fred: And then we could have the afternoon—
- Jim: And then it would be switched?

- Fred: Switch around, so everyone had the same. Nobody favored, you know.
- Jim: Right, and those shifts were eight hours, generally?
- Fred: About eight hours.
- Jim: In other words, okay, you're the first cook I've talked to.
- Fred: Is that right?
- Jim: Breakfast is at eight?
- Fred: No breakfast would be about five, start at three in the morning.
- Jim: That's what I'm getting to, so breakfast is at five, and the cooks get there—
- Fred: Well, we got there at three o'clock in the morning. Of course the day before, now, if there was something like beans, for instance, we had to soak them overnight and then, in the morning, you would take off from the other shifts what wasn't done. As soon as they had breakfast then we would start on the noon meal. And when you were done with the noon meal, you were working on supper.
- Jim: Yeah, but you said you were only took one shift per day.
- Fred: Yeah, the other shift would take over then.
- Jim: Okay, and the noon meal was generally at what, eleven?
- Fred: Oh, they started, it depends on how many men you had, probably a thousand men would be officer's candidates, and they were going to school there like anybody who goes to school. And they could have all they wanted to eat, but when they came to the garbage can, they wouldn't want anything to be on the plate because there was an officer. He would say, "Soldier, what is your name? When you come back tonight, you eat this up, right from the cool box and then you get your hot meal." And that put a stop to it.
- Jim: They saved that for breakfast
- Fred: They would save it, but it wouldn't be a whole army. There would be certain ones that had a bigger appetite than they thought.
- Jim: Group discipline. And they would eat it for the next meal.



- Fred: That's right, and they would eat it the next meal. And you know those guys would get kind of provoked at us. And when they graduated, if you were out on the street, and you see them and you salute them, you got a dollar, see. And if they had a pair of shoes that they trained with, they throw them in the garbage can. Of course if you wanted a pair of shoes, you just take a pair out and go down to the quarter master and they would give you a brand new pair, your size. I know because I brought a pair home. I was a skier and I used to use them for skiing. Yeah. But I cooked in Aberdeen, Maryland, for about a year and a half.
- Jim: Was there a certain level of cooking? In other words, was there a chief cook?
- Fred: Yeah, you had a first cook, a second cook, and then you probably had a third cook.
- Jim: Who picked the menus? Was there an officer? Was an officer in charge?
- Fred: The officer in charge. He would have a menu for the next day. This was the menu so that you knew before what you had to have.
- Jim: And then the first cook would decide what you did?
- Fred: That's right.
- Jim: You do soups or you do—
- Fred: That's right, you make the coffee, and you roast the meat or cut the potatoes. He'd assign that to you. Yup, yeah—
- Jim: And did you rise in this up to first cook?
- Fred: I'm way ahead on the first cook thing. Should I tell you?
- Jim: Tell me!
- Fred: Now we were in Koeln [Cologne], Germany.
- Jim: Wait a minute, that's too far.
- Fred: That's what I say, that's quite a ways—right now, I'm second cook.
- Jim: And you were there a year and a half, and then what happened?

- Fred: Well, a year and a half. Then, in the meantime, we were going back to Norfolk, Virginia. We had amphibious training there. You know, they would have these boats, and we would try to land. And then, there was a wooden Civil War ship out in the bay. No windows, just the ship, and we would round the view around that. The cooks had to know it. Then you would climb with no air. You'd probably get 50 guys down there and you know it was kind of strong sometimes. And the boat would come around and then you were ready for landing in France. This is what you were working up to.
- Jim: Did they tell you that? You knew where you were going.
- Fred: Yeah, we knew where we were going, regardless if there was a war or not. Now, when I first got to Aberdeen Proving Grounds, we were in an Aviation Ordinance and we would load bombs onto the airplanes, cooks and all. You loaded bombs and you'd go through the woods with "cat eyes," you know, following another truck. It was hauling another bomb. And then we would train that way so we knew we were all set, in case we had to do that.
- Jim: Had the war started for America by this time?
- Fred: No.
- Jim: In other words now we are talking about 1941, early 1941?
- Fred: No, I was in Europe and that was '44.
- Jim: But when the war started, were you still in Aberdeen?
- Fred: No, I was in—no, I left Aberdeen after a year and a half. We went by train to near Winnipeg, Brandon, Manitoba. And there was a road and the CWACs [acronym for "Canadian Women's Army Corps"], Canadian girls, were on one side, and on this side was Canadian paratroopers. We took over their camp, the Canadian camp. And we had Russians there, we had—
- Jim: Russians? And this was before the war started?
- Fred: Yeah. Before the war.
- Jim: What the hell were they doing there?
- Fred: And Chinese and Finland used to have these ski patrols that they dressed in white. We had a hundred pairs of skis there and we had to go out on these ski patrols. I come from the Proving Grounds, and they had the 220

or whatever was the artillery. They had a kind of railroad artillery. Ours were on semi-trucks. And they would get those, and they'd clean up, they'd take off the goop. Then, Saturday and Sunday, they would shoot across the marsh or no-man's land. The windows would drop, the mirrors were dropping, and the girls were all mad at us because there was too many broken windows.

Jim: What was the purpose of being there?

Fred: Proving Grounds, we were testing the big artillery up in Canada.

Jim: Up in Canada? Did you cook up there?

Fred: I cooked four meals. The fourth meal was at midnight.

Jim: And these other countries were there to learn the same?

Fred: Learn the same thing we were learning.

Jim: And this was still before 1941?

Fred: Oh yeah, I went in '39, so we got '40 and half of '41 that I was in the Proving Grounds.

Jim: That was the summer before the war started.

Fred: That's right, and that was what we were training for up there, in Canada.

Jim: This is so bizarre. It's hard for me—

Fred: We had four meals a day. I would sleep out on the sleeping bag with battery on at 30 below or 20 below. When you worked, they had U-shaped barracks, and they had one of those old steam engines with the high wheels that you would see, and they had a tube here and a tube there. In one, the heat would go into the barracks, and, in the other, the heat would go into the steam engine again.

Jim: The steam engine, was it coal-fired?

Fred: Coal-fired. It would heat all the barracks, and we were trained to sleep on the ground so that if we had to be put out in the field where you were in the snow or—

Jim: Did you keep saying, "But I'm a cook, I don't need this?"

- Fred: It didn't make any difference. They would call us at like three o'clock in the morning. They would come around and you had to get out of your sleeping bag and get ready to go to work. And you had four meals a day. That beef in a great big pan would be eaten up like that. Of course, the Russians, you know, they would come in one door and if they would go right out the other, you knew that they had a little bit too much to drink. And we stayed there four months, outside of Winnipeg. And our patrols would go further to Winnipeg, the tanks and whatever in practicing. Yup.
- Jim: What outfit were you in?
- Fred: I was with the 255th Ordnance. I was with the 271st Infantry in Illinois, and I had a choice.
- Jim: The first one was the 271st Infantry? This was before Aberdeen?
- Fred: The 271st Infantry in Fort Sheridan. And then I had a choice. This was before Aberdeen. I had the choice to stay in the infantry or go into the Ordnance. And then I was put in the 255th Ordnance in Aberdeen. That's a medium maintenance company. That was with the 1st Army. Aberdeen Proving Grounds.
- Jim: 1st Army?
- Fred: Yeah, 1st Army
- Jim: This thing in Winnipeg was a TDY [military acronym for "temporary tour of duty"], a temporary—
- Fred: It was temporary. It was just a winter training.
- Jim: You were still with the 255<sup>th</sup>?
- Fred: Yes, now we're going to move out of Canada.
- Jim: Getting close to Pearl Harbor—
- Fred: That's right. We are going to Boston now. We went to Boston and we stayed there, oh, it must have been about two months. And they were cutting off bayonets from WWI down to WWII. That was a service section that was doing that. And I was still cooking for the same bunch.
- Jim: For that same group? Did you have a different designation or were you still with the 255<sup>th</sup>?
- Fred: I'm still with the 255<sup>th</sup>, five years with them.

- Jim: That was their job in Boston, was cutting bayonets down to WWII size?
- Fred: Cutting bayonets and getting trucks ready so now we were moving out. They put us in a big pen and that was the only way out, up on the ship. So they put us on the ship that went from New York to New Orleans. A thousand men on there. That's the way I went for fourteen days to Glasgow, Scotland. On the ship.
- Jim: You went by the way of New Orleans?
- Fred: No, they had a boat that would go that far, but we were going across the ocean for fourteen days from Glasgow, Scotland. And I cooked all the way there.
- Jim: On board?
- Fred: On board, way down on the bottom of the ship.
- Jim: I would assume the Navy would manage the food?
- Fred: No, the Army did. The only thing the Navy had on there was artillery. Otherwise we didn't see—we'd be out about four days and they opened up the guns. And you were supposed to go this way and come down this way. They turned blue and they turned green, we thought they were being attacked, you know. But I was one of the cooks way down—
- Jim: What kind of facilities did they give you for cooking?
- Fred: Well, with the Army you get a kettle, and you cook the potatoes and you get a ring of rust all around the top, and that's the way it was. The Navy was much better. The ship was much better than that. But with the Army, that's the way it was.
- Jim: So what did you feed those guys aboard the ship?
- Fred: We had regular food. I know one night I was roasting turkeys. My bunk was number 8 up, and I says to the boys, "I'll come about midnight with a turkey and some fresh bread." And I took it up and, boy, they were really happy.
- Jim: So every body in the area—
- Fred: Around that section had turkey, yep. But you couldn't have no lights and no smoking.

- Jim: Because of submarines.
- Fred: One day there was a submarine, and they threw the ash cans out, you know, whatever they call it—
- Jim: Not from your ship?
- Fred: From our ship. There was a destroyer there and you know if you went overboard, you just were gone. That destroyer—they never stopped for you. And our company commander—you know where those life boats were? There was a chain, and someone forgot to put the chain up, and we were watching them shoot those Y guns. An officer fell in the boat. Otherwise, if he would have fell in, that's where he would have stayed. Cuz you could see the destroyers way—
- Jim: They would have never found him.
- Fred: No, you'd never get—but we had life jackets and when that happened right away our life jackets were on. We trained all the time. We'd be cooking down there and you'd have to go up the ladder to the trap in the floor and they'd be standing on it!
- Jim: You'd never have made it out!
- Fred: No, you'd never get out, because you could pound and there were so many they'd never hear it. And they were all so excited about that submarine. Now, we are going to Scotland, and we stayed there a short while. I know we landed at the dock and here comes a white officer with a company of Black boys. He give a speech saying they [the black boys] were there first. No matter what trouble they get in, you're at fault. I don't think we stayed there more than a week. We moved out to Swansea, Wales, and we stayed there quite awhile. Enough to know where you could get a little drink once in a while underneath. Then, we went to Gloucester, England. And I was there about a year, training all the time.
- Jim: You had a base there?
- Fred: Yeah, we had a base there.
- Jim: 1st Army had a base there?
- Fred: 1st Army had a base there.
- Jim: And you still were with the 255<sup>th</sup>?
- Fred: 255<sup>th</sup> right straight through.

Jim: And, now, how many men did you have to feed?

Fred: About 185, that was our company. I was with 170, probably, boys from Nebraska. We had a couple from Illinois, a few from Wisconsin, few from—and they added on to them at Aberdeen Proving Grounds. They come with their officers—

Jim: Came from a National Guard unit?

Fred: They said they were sponsored by the Chrysler Corporation. Did you hear anything about that?

Jim: No.

Fred: It was all right from Nebraska.

Jim: But, are they all from Nebraska?

Fred: All from Nebraska. They didn't have any cooks. They didn't have—

Jim: The army broke that kind of stuff up during the war.

Fred: Yeah. We start training right in Gloucester, and then we start working towards Southampton. At the beginning of the war (they must have figured that there was going to be war), we'd go down to Virginia and we'd come back, we'd go here and then come back and—

Jim: Where?

Fred: Not Virginia—

Jim: You don't mean Virginia.

Fred: In England.

Jim: Portsmouth?

Fred: Different—I can't remember the names. Different places, we went to so many. So that's what we did and we ends up at Southampton. That's where we were heading, across. Am I getting ahead of you too far?

Jim: No, no, tell me this, how about your rifle, did you carry a rifle?

Fred: Carbines.

- Jim: They issued Carbines to the cooks?
- Fred: Carbines, and we have two, four, two clips, I think it is, on the stock, and one, two on your belt. And they would check you if someone was killed or something. They'd come—but you know, when you get ahead, you always had more. You'd pick up a clip in case you needed it.
- Jim: So all the time you are doing two things: you are training to shoot somebody and also cooking?
- Fred: Cooking for them, right straight through. Yeah.
- Jim: This is getting into what year now? Do you recall when you got to England? What year was that?
- Fred: Let's see, I was in Canada, and that would bring it to two years, and about two years, a little over two years to get to England or to Scotland. I'd say maybe two years and a couple of months, because I don't remember the date on that.
- Jim: Well, just the year would help.
- Fred: Let's see, two years. I was in England a year so that would make it three years, see, that would make it three years.
- Jim: When did you arrive there, what year? Before D-day?
- Fred: No, that was before D-day.
- Jim: D-day was in 1944, June.
- Fred: On June 6<sup>th</sup>, yes.
- Jim: When were you in England in relation to that?
- Fred: I was there about a year before that. And now we were moving out to Scotland, Wales, England, and then we trained there, and we would convoy to different places like that.
- Jim: To where? Around England? Just practicing?
- Fred: Around England, just practicing.
- Jim: Did you have to climb down the landing nets and all that?



- Fred: Yeah, we'd climb down the nets, and we went in different ships. We rendezvoused in landing craft. But those were the real ones. They weren't the stationary ones like in Virginia. We did that, and then we kept on moving. In the meantime, I had a brother who was in the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, and he would come and see me wherever I was at Fort Bragg. Then he'd come to Aberdeen Proving Grounds and then I would go there. Of course, I would go and he would be training without the wings and I got to see him in England, quite a few times. And I know we would have our foxholes and he would come and somebody would swap right beside me and I would go over to where he was.
- Jim: So then you got into town around the airfield, around your camp?
- Fred: We could go into Gloucester. That was about the biggest one around us. And then I would go to England, you know, by train, or look around when I was off.
- Jim: Was there anything to do in Gloucester?
- Fred: Not much, it was pretty quiet. In fact, we were just training. We'd go out in the double-decker bus and we would have, get a girlfriend, you know, we'd have a girlfriend. In fact, I almost married one over in England.
- Jim: Almost did? Army wouldn't let you, though.
- Fred: No, the Army wouldn't let me. See, I was single when I went there.
- Jim: Then you could have talked her into coming back here. So many did that—
- Fred: I did, and then I met a girl here, and I had even wrote and told her to come over, but I never got an answer back [both laugh] and I married a girl that I knew from before. We've been married 54, going on 54 years. A local from [Wisconsin] Rapids, yeah.
- Jim: You came very close to having a big problem.
- Fred: [laughing] Then we got to Southampton with all the LSTs [Landing Ship Tank] and we went across on a raft. Now, what do they call them? It's like a small city block, a good-sized raft, and we put our tanks on there.
- Jim: Are you talking about D-day now?
- Fred: Now we are talking about D-day. Am I too far ahead?
- Jim: No, I don't think so. Did you know when you were going to go across?

- Fred: We had an idea. We were training for it. We knew it was coming up.
- Jim: Right. Okay. Did they move you closer just before?
- Fred: They kept on moving us—we had like three to four days that we knew we were going to go on ship. Of course no one was allowed on the street. No cars and no livery. In fact the buzz bombs were coming into Southampton then [“buzz bombs” is a colloquial expression for the German V-1 flying missile and rocket]. And we would shoot. We dug our foxholes, and they would shoot. We knew just how long it took for them to get across the channel. And when the buzz bombs came in, for as long as we can hear them, it’s fine, but when their engines shut off, you go into your foxhole. Yeah. And the Air Force had, I don’t know if you knew that, they had hooks on the wings like a piper cub, and they’d flip them around and would send them back [refers to piper cub aircraft wings and wingspan].
- Jim: But it didn’t always work.
- Fred: No, it didn’t always work.
- Jim: But they could be shot down or they were so slow—
- Fred: That’s right. They just moved—
- Jim: They could be shot down. Okay, so on June 5<sup>th</sup>, the day before, you thought you were going over and you didn’t.
- Fred: That’s right. There was a storm, a big storm. And we were in the channel, I would say, a couple of days before we went in.
- Jim: That must have been very unpleasant.
- Fred: Because I don’t worry about 4<sup>th</sup> of July, I said I had mine. We were out with the battleships and they were shooting at France, you know, and that was enough. And then we got the storm and a lot of our ships kind of—they went in with the tide, kind of, and they got pretty near tipped over so they roped them down. And I remember when I got into France we would go out with a little duck and get a 200 lb bag of sugar and we’d bring it back before the ship sunk. And they sank quite a few ships for breakwater so you could come in much easier. And I remember when I came in. We’d come in on this raft and I was a machine gunner.
- Jim: On D-day?
- Fred: On D-day. Yeah, I was trained.

Jim: What beach? Omaha?

Fred: We were on Omaha Beach.

Jim: Because 1<sup>st</sup> division went into Omaha.

Fred: Yeah.

Jim: I talked to three guys in the 1<sup>st</sup> division.

Fred: And there was an LST right next to us with tanks on it. And all of a sudden, boom, it turned it upside down and the [unintelligible] took off because it had cables so that when the airplanes came in it would cut their wings off, or whatever. And we came in on a raft, like I told you, and we came in with the tide.

Jim: Sure, you'd have to.

Fred: I was standing on a seat and the driver was sitting in water. They would go down, and they had a ramp that went down. We had our tanks and artillery—

Jim: Did you walk off that ramp?

Fred: No, I was standing on the seat of a—

Jim: Tank?

Fred: Truck. The cook truck. See we had four, three stoves up—

Jim: You didn't tell me about this. A cook truck?

Fred: And we had a rope from the back to where the cook could see if they were starting to strafe. We'd pull the rope and then we'd hit the ditch. And then they'd know what it was.

Jim: Tell me about a cook truck. What does it look like? 6X6?

Fred: 6X6, three stoves in front. You know, the Army stoves.

Jim: It was a 6X6 that was converted?

Fred: Converted into a—on the sides we had our cupboards. On both sides and in front we had a fan that run off the motor, off the battery of the truck, and then we had steps made down.

- Jim: You'd cook on that? With what?
- Fred: I'd cook on that. Gasoline, same gasoline you used in the tanks, same gasoline that you used in the stove.
- Jim: Dangerous cooking with gasoline.
- Fred: That's right. And of course this was when we were fighting now, though I shouldn't tell you that neither.
- Jim: Why?
- Fred: They would send a truck. Everything was five gallon cans, you know what I mean. And we'd have a double deck, sure, and this fellow would go after—the cans were all empty when you start to move out so he would go back to where the depot was or someplace and he would get the cans full. This was in France now. And he would sell the gasoline, see, to the Frenchmen. Or even trade the truck off and he would get in and buy a hotel or something and he was a civilian. And we would try to cook with that gas. It was water. He would fill the cans up with water. So we were supposed to move up today, just like that. We couldn't go because it was all water—
- Jim: Did they ever catch the guy?
- Fred: Not that I know of. It was a Black boy. You would come from the beach when we were pretty near Berlin. They were coming with headlights on bright down the highway, the Autobahn. And they were stuck so they'd have to dump it and get gasoline and send them up.
- Jim: On your landing on Omaha (we didn't talk about it much), how did you get off without being shot?
- Fred: Well, the artillery was coming in and it would go over our head. We'd hit the water—
- Jim: What time did you arrive that day? Was it early in the afternoon?
- Fred: No, it was early morning, and all we could—
- Jim: The infantry went in first?
- Fred: They went in first and they were ahead of us, quite a bit.
- Jim: I would think so.

- Fred: Because they were running into crossfire first, because there were Germans here, and they'd go down the middle. And they would shoot. We did the same thing. They shot at us with wooden—instead of steel or lead, it was wooden. So you could tell you were being cross-fired and the color of them was maroon color.
- Jim: Bullets?
- Fred: Bullets, the bullets were maroon hard wood. When they would hit you, it would splinter, see. Now when it hits you here or here or here, you were probably half knocked-out. It takes two to get a stretcher and take you off the field. And if they kill you, you laid there until some other time. And that's what we run into, crossfire. In fact I brought some wooden bullets home, but now where they are, I don't know.
- Jim: Wooden bullets? The museum would love to have them.
- Fred: You bet, and they were maroon in color instead of the lead. They were maroon.
- Jim: Boy, if you could donate them to the museum, they would go crazy.
- Fred: I'll have to see if I can find one. I brought a few things back that I wasn't supposed to. But that's what we run into. We just got over on the beach and we dug in foxholes. And then, our work was done, because that's all we could do. We couldn't cook, so I got a call from Carrington, France, that they had two German tanks there, and the tracks were off. They sent three wreckers and I was on the wrecker.
- Jim: I thought you said they assigned you to a machine gun.
- Fred: Yeah, there was a machine gun on the wrecker, see. You know how the one machine gun that would be around on the—
- Jim: Track.
- Fred: And you could track around. I was guarding there, and there was one on each truck, or wrecker.
- Jim: This was in Carrington?
- Fred: That's in Carrington.

- Jim: The guys who came in on Utah Beach are the ones who went to Carrington. I'm surprised that people from the 1<sup>st</sup> Division were over there.
- Fred: Well, we even ran into some Englishmen who were close to us. I don't know what army it was, but this was Carrington, France. I think it's on my list here. And we went and these were all booby trapped, you know the breach, well—
- Jim: The guns?
- Fred: The tanks, German tanks. They left them, see. So we tried to pull them with the three wreckers, but we couldn't without the tracks. So going back the next day, they loaded them on something like a semi or something. They had to. That was my first—and you look at all these people, you don't know if they are German soldiers or what they are, because they could change clothes, you know, because they were friends of the French.
- Jim: Oh, standing there watching you?
- Fred: Yeah, standing there watching you, see.
- Jim: So you assumed they were Frenchmen?
- Fred: You thought they were Frenchmen.
- Jim: You'd think the French people wouldn't let those Germans do that without telling somebody.
- Fred: But you know, they lived there so long, those Germans lived there for—we would go down the road. Of course it was mostly girls who would holler for help and you'd try to go in and you never got in. You were shot right at the door, because there was an officer or a soldier in there and they would shoot you. That was the first thing when we moved out. They hollered and these fellows were all green. They were told about the watching, but they shot these American soldiers, so the tanks just turned and flattened the house right out.
- Jim: The girl included.
- Fred: Yeah, everything that was in there. If they were alive, they weren't alive when they were done. Of course that was the way—
- Jim: That's war.
- Fred: That's war.

Jim: That's the price you pay.

Fred: Now we are going in France, and that's—

Jim: After D-day, where were you on the next day? Just inside the—?

Fred: I was just coming in on the beach.

Jim: Did they expect you to set up food?

Fred: Yeah. Oh, it took a while. It was K-rations for a couple of days.

Jim: Because you had no supplies there.

Fred: No, you had no supplies, you had to wait for the supplies to come in.

Jim: So they ate the K-rations.

Fred: And then they had food in cans. We had to heat it up and cook it and make pancakes. We'd make rolls. We had some but not enough.

Jim: For just your company—

Fred: Just for our company, no one else, but when you get into Germany, it is different again, but we won't—

Jim: Yeah, save that.

Fred: Yeah, that's right, and then we probably moved a half a mile off the beach and that's where we set up our camouflage. When I come in, I got a parachute, a green camouflage paratrooper's parachute. I still have part of it at home. I'd put it in my foxhole and cover my dirt up and it saved me from camouflaging. You go around the field like this. You don't go across like that, because from there they can see your kind of camouflaging, in a way, but you stayed hid under the kab flak. They'd make a regular light-foot post and put the camouflage above it so it wasn't right out in the open.

Jim: Did most of your company get ashore alright on D-day?

Fred: Pretty near all of them. We were lucky to get in. Well, you know, the infantry went in. You know, that moves things out again.

Jim: As long as you stay behind them, you—

Fred: You are right.

Jim: How long were you there before they moved you to Carrington? A week or less than that?

Fred: Well, oh, we were there longer. In fact we set up near where I guess you call it a chateau, a building where they had twenty rooms in it. They had a church there, a stable for the horses, and a swimming pool, and that's where we stayed. But we dug in along the hedge rows. We had to dig our foxholes, and we'd find dead boys in the foxholes, because they would strafe the hedge rows. If you'd go through the hedge row, there could be a German there and they'd shoot up through the bottom of the tank. That was the thinnest part of the tank, thinner than on the side I guess. So one day I was cooking and there was a couple of Germans up on the hill behind a stone wall and they were shooting at us. So we'd carry infantry with us and they would go out after them and the instrument section. Then they'd come to the officers' group and the cooks would go, and we'd always put the safety on our carbine. Cooks were kind of in back, because they would always stay behind as much as they could. And I felt my—to see if my safety was locked and my dang gun went off. And of course everybody went down, but I and my second cook, or the one cook below me. They knew it was us, that it was a mistake.

Jim: They didn't court martial.

Fred: No they didn't court martial. Then we started moving out. We started moving out and moving up.

Jim: How long did you stay in Carrington?

Fred: Oh, we must have stayed there a couple of weeks. Because I know I got—my brother come in the invasion about two days before. The boys went in to get our supplies from Carrington, and he said, "You know the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne is there." So dumb me, I get on the phone and I said, "Is the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne there?" and the officer said, "You know I could have you court martialled." I could be a German spy you know, but the officer says, "Things are too hot now," so I got to see my brother.

Jim: He made the landing okay?

Fred: He made the landing okay. He came in on a glider. He said that the boy who was with him, when they landed, he lifted the front up and he took off for the Germans as fast as he could go. He said he had to knock him down. He went kind of different. Yeah. And then he was there for just a few days and they picked him up for training again and he went back to England. Then I got to see him again in Carrington. This one was a little farther, I



guess this one was. When I got to the camp where the 101<sup>st</sup> was, you could see the Germans going in and out of their pill box. And they gave me something to eat and the dang mess kit—they shot the mess kit handle right off, and they had a tent there and it cut the rope. And he said it was time to get back, so he took me through the woods to where there was two pontoon bridges. And he says, “That’s as far as good. You got to go across on your own.” He said, “Right over there, that’s where the Germans are.” The Germans flooded this land, because they thought the gliders would come in, and they would tear themselves apart. So they got behind the Germans, and they drove them through there, and those Germans were dead soldiers. It was different, something to see. After that I kind of watched it a little bit, because the second time I went out it was raining, so the officer said, “You better take your brother down the road. There is a shed there.” They didn’t tell me what they were doing. They were making coffins in there. I got out of there and on the road and here comes an officer with a big aerial. He gave me hell for being out there, because you are supposed to be three or not at all, three people, three soldiers, because if one or two was killed, maybe one would get away.

Jim: So they wanted groups.

Fred: No, you couldn’t go alone. If you were alone they could shoot you, and you’d probably lay there and die.

Jim: So then where did the 1<sup>st</sup> Division go?

Fred: The 1<sup>st</sup> Army went—where did we go? Did we go to Aachen, Germany?

Jim: That’s right, I misspoke. You were with the 1<sup>st</sup> Army, not with the 1st Division.

Fred: No, 1st Army, and I think we went to Aachen after Carrington. Didn’t we go to Aachen there? And that was, well, when we got done there, there was nothing there. We could land and dig in there, and then in an hour we could pick up and move. Then we went near Saint Lo. They start bombing at daybreak, and they bombed till pretty near to sunset. We went up there and the Germans were getting out of their foxholes. They couldn’t make it, and then they took them as prisoners, you know. And, what else, our telephone lines were just strung on the ground. Of course, you know, when the tank went over it that was the end of that part of it.

Jim: Which division was the 255<sup>th</sup> a part of?

Fred: The 1st Army.

Jim: What division, do you know?

- Fred: All I know is that it was the 1st Army and 255<sup>th</sup>. Which division, I couldn't tell you.
- Jim: 1st Army, you mean the division or—
- Fred: No, the army. See, there was the 1st Army, then we had—
- Jim: I think that's the 1<sup>st</sup> Division—
- Fred: We wore an "A" on our shoulder, brown on black.
- Jim: 1<sup>st</sup> Division had a number one on it.
- Fred: Yeah, no, then we weren't with the 1<sup>st</sup> Division. Then we kept on moving up. I know we were in France a long time. We got into Liege, Belgium, and that was one of the first ones. In civilian life I was an ice cream maker, so I made ice cream that two days. They thought it was pretty good after not having had it for over a year. The first place we went in Belgium, the Belgian people had cleaned it down to a lake and cut the trees. And they had a big chateau, a big building with big windows. We could see flashing on the windows, and we thought the Germans of Belgium were letting them know that the Americans were there. But it was the bombing that was going on, and it would flash onto the windows. We pulled out of there right away because we thought we were spotted, so I know we moved out of there in a hurry. Now where are we?
- Jim: Moving East.
- Fred: We are going to—what is the next town on there?
- Jim: You don't have any town—
- Fred: First—is Nordhausen on there?
- Jim: Waldheim, Germany, and Stolberg, Germany?
- Fred: We were at a concentration camp, the first one, it was Nordhausen. Is that on there? That's getting up in Germany again. That's too fast.
- Jim: That's pretty fast. All right, March of—tell me about the winter then. Where were you in the winter? In Belgium?
- Fred: Yes, we were in Belgium but the foxholes were only about a foot deep. Because you would lay in there, and the snow would cover you, and you'd put your blanket right in—

- Jim: It says here that on Christmas Day in '44 you were in Barston [Bastogne?], Belgium.
- Fred: Yeah, and we cooked all night in the truck. We would get turkeys up there and we would get regular food. And if there was Germans, like a three below supplies (of course that would be in Germany again), we'd overrun it and take everything out like their meat—
- Jim: But on Christmas Eve, did you cook for the boys?
- Fred: We cooked for the boys and we worked all night. There would be three cooks and a butcher and a baker and at least five of us in the back of the truck cooking. We cooked all night. We cooked our cranberries and our turkeys. We fed 180 people. \$80 mess kits, and if they had a turkey leg they had to hold it in their hand and eat it like that. But Christmas didn't mean much, you know, but when in Germany—I could tell you about that too, but otherwise that was all. We sat on the ground and ate.
- Jim: So when you got into Germany, things were easier? Because the Germans were starting to quit.
- Fred: Yeah, things were easier. They had depots where they would get their food. They had better food than did the Americans. Their jelly would be in quart jars, and their potatoes—
- Jim: In Germany or in Holland?
- Fred: In Germany, and their French fries would be like French fries. You'd soak them then cook them.
- Jim: There food was better than what we had?
- Fred: Oh, yeah, it was better. Their meat, if there was a large hill, they'd hollow it out and put timbers up it and the quarters of beef—what we did when we got in Germany, we killed the deer and the wild boar, and we had fresh meat. We'd go out and kill them. Of course you know they had a lot of them there. The boys ate good there. Of course, your potatoes were all dehydrated or powdered you know.
- Jim: I noticed that one of the guys I talked to was a prisoner, and when they captured him they took his watch and rings. And then he had some K-rations. The Germans took one look at those and threw them away [both laugh].
- Fred: I don't blame them. They were from the First World War. [laughs]

- Jim: They said, "That's not food!" They couldn't eat it [laughs].
- Fred: I could talk German, and we would have a pen where we put the Germans. They'd throw their cigarettes on the ground. I could talk to them. We would take those number ten tins out, and we'd make them clean it up, make them put the cigarettes in the can. But when you captured them, you never had an officer. When you got an officer, you had to put them in one pen separate, because them men would tear them apart because maybe that officer was mean, and these soldiers were regular civilians and didn't want to go into the service.
- Jim: Just like Americans.
- Fred: Dang right. And if we captured them, like me, I would be a T4, and he wanted an officer his rank or more. And you know his boots were shined, his valet, or whatever you called him, would drive his car. You'd would have to grab him by the neck, five of them, and take him away because he wanted to be taken in by an officer and you didn't have no time for that.
- Jim: You did keep them separate though—
- Fred: Yeah, you did keep them separate because they would tear him apart, oh yeah. We'd have probably a couple hundred German soldiers with two Americans watching them. Of course there were tanks, and they were so glad to be out of the war. And when I would cook, they would wash the mess kit. They'd get a little dirty, that gas thing down there, and they'd light the whole area up at three o'clock in the morning. One morning I could hear the airplanes start and pretty soon—I started from my foxhole and I fell, I hurt my [unintelligible] and I looked up. There was the airplane pulling over. You know, if I'd of been a little earlier or he'd have been a little earlier, he would have got me, because you gotta have a target. You can't have—if there is a post there, you don't see it, but if someone was running, they would have picked me off. So I was careful after that. When you put that torch in there and it lights up, it would be awhile before because you could hear when the old airplanes started out.
- Jim: That attracted their attention.
- Fred: That attracted their attention. The sky lit up so they didn't know what it was. It could have been most anything. If you hit a mine with a truck, there was a flash too. I know one night I was on a guard duty—you see, I worked from three o'clock in the morning til three o'clock in the afternoon, cooking. Three o'clock when we were fighting. Three o'clock in the afternoon until three o'clock in the morning when you were sitting on the seat four machine guns and one trigger. And then you were on

guard duty, see. You didn't sleep. You didn't have no sleep when you were fighting.

Jim: That takes two thirds of the day. What did you do the rest of the day?

Fred: It takes a half a day. Three in the morning to three in the afternoon, cooking, and three in the afternoon to the next morning you were on guard duty. Twelve and twelve, twelve hours.

Jim: With no sleeping?

Fred: Well, you'd get a relief, you know. You'd probably stay right there and close your eyes behind the stone wall or the hedge row. And then if you hear a truck—I know one night I was on guard duty when I heard a truck coming, and it was a minefield. They were picking up mines, and they hit a mine. That truck must have taken off about three, four foot. And of course the civilians got their legs cut off, a couple of them, and a couple of soldiers got killed that were in the truck, but that's—then you gotta notify whoever you are supposed to notify if you got a telephone. If it was cut you were—but if the guards were around, you'd have machine guns on the corner, and if you heard a German tank, well then you yell all quiet and you got to get that bazooka ready.

Jim: They wouldn't let a cook handle that—

Fred: No [laughs]. The guards would have them. The worst thing I seen was in France. We would pull medium tanks out of the swamp with block and tackle, and because they would shoot a bazooka shell at it, it would blow up everything inside, would blow up the ammunition. I opened one of the traps, and there were pictures of the soldier, the family, you know, and it was around Christmas time. There would be cards. That was one thing we never—when we got in Germany we never got Christmas cards, never got packages, never got anything, because they would burn everything that would come in, because they'd want to know who was over there, what companies and that—

Jim: Oh, you mean the Americans wouldn't let their own soldiers—

Fred: No, they wouldn't let them have them. I was in five years. I never got home, never got any packages, never got any Christmas cards or nothing, any time.

Jim: Even when you were in England?

Fred: Oh, in England, yeah, but I mean when we were fighting in Europe. That was it. Once you were over the channel that was it. They didn't want

anybody to know who was coming. When we were in the Battle of the Bulge, Berlin Sally would be playing Christmas songs. “Boys you’ll be home for Christmas. Yeah, you are catching up to us,” or something. And in the meantime they were building up, yeah.

Jim: Where were you during the Bastogne thing? You were probably south of there. I think 1st Army was south of there. I may be mistaken. Anyway, you didn’t have to get involved with that—

Fred: We were in Holland. We were servicing the 101<sup>st</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> in Holland in September, and when we had guns, we’d have to take them up—

Jim: That was before that. Did your brother make Holland?

Fred: He was near Berlin or Holland, and he got a big chunk out of his leg. He said a shell came in and took his [officer’s] head off just like that. It rolled on the ground, and he was hit in the leg, and of course it got him out right away.

Jim: Was he at Bastogne?

Fred: He was at Bastogne, yeah. He was with 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne. Oh, that was a wild one, that Battle of the Bulge—

Jim: Is he still alive?

Fred: No, well, he made five parachute jumps and two with gliders. He got home and he wasn’t too bad. The government took care of him. And my mother was sickly and he and I was going to paint her bedroom, you know in those days you had to do some of that yourself. So I called him and he says, “Well, then I won’t come.” And he went down in the basement, and he painted his basement. And he had a piano down there, and he pushed the piano and he got a heart attack just like that. His heart exploded. They called me, oh, it must have been two o’clock in the morning. They said, “Your brother is in the hospital.” They gave him I think five hours to live. I said, “Well, I’ll come right down.” Well, he had two boys and a girl. “Well, maybe you better wait until later on today.” When I went down there, he was gone already, but a—he was a real soldier. And he has a brother—I mean, a son, who was a lieutenant colonel. He was in 23 years and so he—when they were in Korea, he married a Korean girl. He had been married before, you know, but now he is going to be a preacher [laughs]. And this Korean girl, he says she is a good cook. And they have a son, and he is teaching him English so he can talk Korean and talk English, now we are on a limb again—but I got to see him three times, and that was kind of a booster, because even if it was someone from your hometown—

- Jim: Better than a letter from home.
- Fred: That's right. Of course we didn't get much mail. We didn't get no toothpaste. We didn't get no toothbrushes. We were lucky we had salt. They weren't bringing nothing. Once in a while we'd have someone—
- Jim: No Red Cross package came? Any USO tours?
- Fred: Yeah, we have them in a tent. Then we'd hear the bombers coming and everyone would run to their foxholes. And I was a two tone whistler, see, and I'd whistle at these camp shows. I'd look at all these soldiers but all I'd see was heads, but in those days I could whistle good. Now when I'm in a car I whistle a two tone whistle, but you know you get out of the habit of it. Everybody would clap. I'd plunk it out on a piano and then I'd start whistling. It was nice. Then of course you'd always play a little ball if you'd have a lull. You'd go out and play a little ball. You'd have to do something.
- Jim: So did you get into any of the German villages?
- Fred: Yes, we got in. I'll tell you one, one is—
- Jim: You were there after the war, I notice.
- Fred: Leipzig, that was a concentration camp. And we had a raid at three o'clock in the morning, and we were getting shot at, so they made them bring their guns out. Some of them did, and we had quite a pile up. And I was up on the—this was a Nazi prison camp. And they put me up on the third floor, and there was a radio that they were talking back and forth with them. I pushed it out in the garden, and here all those Germans were down below and they hit the brick. And of course I got plenty of—but I watched that from three o'clock in the morning until it started to get dark. Here comes a civilian, and he had a cane, and he went out in the garden. Wherever there was land, they plant food. And he poked in the ground and I could hear: "Clink." He got a shovel—they must have done that before—and dug out a bottle of cognac. And I says, "I'll pull that same thing," so I went down. The shovel was there. I had the cane, and I found a bottle, and I found two 55 gallon drums of gasoline was in there, and I reported it through the—and they come and they dug it out—
- Jim: Oh, my! This was when you were occupying Leipzig? It was at the end of the war?
- Fred: Yeah, it was [Leipzig] and it was near the end of war. And we go into the concentration camp—there were these big lights. Of course they were

all—I suppose airplanes shot them out. And there was a stainless steel vat, oh, probably 50 gallons, and there was a little ladder. Of course, you didn't dare touch anything, because you could see the lice, lice crawling around the doors and sills.

Jim: Lice?

Fred: We went in there, and I look down in, and there was a horse's head in the bottom of that big vat. And I talked to—

Jim: A cook put it in there?

Fred: A cook put it in there. It was for his last meal. Sure, he put it in there, and he filled it with water and boiled it. So, when we came out, they put the [bug] gun down your back, up your pants legs, to kill the bugs, the lice you might have picked up [laughs]. You might have picked some lice up.

Jim: Did you see any of the prisoners, the people, that were interred in the camp?

Fred: You bet.

Jim: It must have been a terrible sight!

Fred: I was trying to tell you about Nordhausen that was a—Russians took over that German prison camp. And they make cornflakes there, sweet cornflakes, and like a big bin like they used with coal. And we would take a mess kit cup and put on their mess kit. Then they could have one spoon of sugar and then we had powdered milk. We'd dissolve it and they could have—but now we are getting—then there was a steel wall, oh, it must have been 200 feet long. They had holes made in it so the Russians could watch 'em, through that, what the prisoners were doing. And the Americans came along, and they bombed that so they could get in the fence. The Americans took that Russian camp over, and then there were prisoners. There could be two girls, probably [age] 17, no clothes. You could see where they had a wristwatch, and if they had anything gold, it was knocked out, and there they were laying with mouth open. And there the bulldozer was, oh, making a six foot, probably. I don't know what they were making. And they were just throwing the bodies in there, and they'd come and cover them up, yep. And they made us march over there after we ate our dinner. They made us march over there and see what was going on. You know, it was pretty hard to keep your food down. And, you know, it was warm weather, and they don't stay—I mean, it gets rank. So one day I was at the camp, Nordhausen, and I walked down the road and there was a river there, a little river. The Russians were on the other side of the river, and he was on the bridge with a white horse. I says, "Can I go



across?” “No,” so I traded an American dime for a Russian coin, and he says, “That’s as far as you can go.” I don’t dare—he wouldn’t let me go, but you know those Russian girls, they’d wear white dresses. And if you were on guard, you could hear them coming. They were blabbering and they were artillery spotters. If you went over up on the ring where they were fighting, you could see—we’d take those big things, not binoculars, but whatever—and we’d watch them. And here would come a Russian girl out. Then she’d go back and then she’d go out, and those Russians would shoot. They’d shoot at a building, and then that was it. They’d blow it up. I’d watch them blow up the buildings.

Jim: They were across the river from us.

Fred: They were across the river from us. They wouldn’t let us go over there, but we could see what was going on. And if you tried to stop those Russian girls you might as well—you couldn’t understand them. They would just keep on coming. You know, if they’d come into the American territory, you couldn’t stop them.

Jim: What do you mean, stop them?

Fred: Well, you know, they weren’t supposed to be there in the first place

Jim: What were they there for?

Fred: Well, they must have had the day off, just wanted to visit.

Jim: Oh, they just wanted to visit? They didn’t want to talk to you?

Fred: They talked Russian and you couldn’t understand them, but that’s the way the Germans done. You’d go, and the Germans would use artillery spotters, and they’d be dressed so you could spot them, you know. So that you knew what they were, yeah.

Jim: That’s different.

Fred: It was different. Of course we used a jeep with an aerial and you’d sneak up—

Jim: What about your cooking, now, when you got into Germany? Did you set up out of your truck again?

Fred: We used the truck mostly all the time. Now we are in—how about Cologne. That was where Patton was going to come and join the American Army to help. And he come in with his tanks. Oh my god. The tracks were like about that wide and you’d come to a kind of a hospital, a small

hospital, and one room was just full of bandages and what not. Eisenhower, Bradley, Montgomery, De Gaulle, and Patton, and, of course, Patton, we were working with Patton. He was going with a tank in front of the Americans for quite awhile. But he would sit on the jeep, and he'd come in, and he said, "Where are those officers going to eat?" I says, "Right on the ground with those soldiers. Where are you going to eat? There is no place to eat." They'd eat the same food we did and you could talk with them. I talked to Eisenhower, Patton. Of course the Englishmen were kind of hard to understand, but they would talk to you. But I says—well, I was kind of lucky. I got to see them anyway, and that's where I got to be first cook. They must have knew that they were around because we had our artillery, big tires. We were being strafed, so we'd be hiding behind the artillery and this one cook got shot. They must hit a direct hit on him, and I got first cook.

Jim: Did you get another stripe?

Fred: I got T4 [laughs]. Of course, that was a war time, you know. Because I know when I joined with this company, all the ranks were gone except the cooks. I was given the corporal, and the other one got the T4, and the other one got private, so—

Jim: Now you are on top!

Fred: Now I'm on top, but I liked it. It was good, and yeah, KPs. I never had trouble getting KPs, because the KPs and the cooks would always eat first. When we'd go down the road, we'd eat first, and then they'd be filled up and ready to help serve, yep.

Jim: Did people complain about the food to you?

Fred: Never did, never complained. We had fresh food. Like I said, we killed wild boar, and of course you know spam was an army—I'll tell you, in France there was so much mud we'd get our canned food—we'd put Spam down, and then we would put something on top of it. I betcha those farmers would plow, and they'd could get a whole case of spam just like that [laughs] and English stew, oh god.

Jim: You used them to prop up other things?

Fred: You betcha, oh yeah, but then as things went along, it got a little better. We'd get our oranges from Spain. We'd get chicory from Spain. I'm no coffee drinker. I was in the Army five years and I don't think I had one cup of coffee. And I don't smoke, and so you know we would get a carton of cigarettes every two weeks.

- Jim: You could trade that off for something else.
- Fred: I would give it to my buddy. My buddies, they wouldn't say "thank you," so you know I'd take my gas mask out and put all my cigarettes in my gas mask. This was in Holland. I'd sell [my cigarettes] for 10 cents a piece and they took—this was for a trip back to Paris where we were fighting and we were getting near Berlin or up—they'd take a helmet and put everyone's name in there and my name—a buddy got—so we got a trip paid. We rode in back of a 6x6 all the way back to Paris, and I got paid that day. I got money out of that helmet, two dollars for each soldier. So I send my check home, and I went there and had a good time in Paris with the money I won.
- Jim: What did you do in Paris?
- Fred: Food, show, whatever you could. I went through Paris, and I was standing on a seat, and a gal came up. They stopped the convoy, and she gave me a glass of wine and a big bunny, and she wrote on the back of it. I have it at home. And she says, "Good luck in Paris" or "Good luck in Berlin," like that. So I kept it, and we went back in the truck. The same group was going back, so they gave us a lunch. We got near where there was a fancy chateau in France and that's where we ate. Of course you know other GIs threw the sacks out, threw everything out, and we were ready to pull out. Here comes the jeep, and the officer says, "Okay boys, police the area. It wasn't that way when you came." We got out, picked up everything, and went on, jumping on down the rough road in that 6X6. Well, got a rest anyway. I think we left Le Havre. We were in occupation [unintelligible]. We didn't know the president died. We didn't know that the war was over. So there was a mess hall on this side, a mess hall on that side. One day I'd cook for the Germans, the next I'd cook for—
- Jim: Where was this?
- Fred: This was in Germany.
- Jim: Leipzig or Weimar?
- Fred: Weimar, yeah.
- Jim: That was your last stop.
- Fred: Yeah, that was it. See, they don't even have Holland on there, and they don't have Black Forest on there.
- Jim: If it was Weimar, that was July.

- Fred: We come back—I don't know when we came back now.
- Jim: It says Weimar in—and that was in July. You stayed after the war.
- Fred: I was there after the war. The whole company was there after the war, and I think we came back to Le Havre—
- Jim: Lucky Strike, that was Le Havre.
- Fred: Yeah, and we got on the *Queen Elizabeth*, and I cooked on the *Queen Elizabeth* in two mess halls. You know we'd have bunks that were 20 bunks stacked up that would be right in the swimming pool, but it would be—you know what I mean. It was dry, you know. They'd put bunks on a scaffold, and when I wasn't cooking I was on guard duty, so I'd lay right in front of the mess hall doors so I was ready when it was time to go to work [laughs].
- Jim: Did you work around the clock again?
- Fred: Yeah, pretty well. You know, there were so many people on there: wives, killed, wounded, prisoners. I don't know how many thousand were on. Of course, that was four football fields long, and, of course, they had two hallways in case they were struck then they'd shut that area off and you were out of luck. Everything was stainless steel, nothing like the Army. The vats would sparkle. And stainless steel, that was something. You know, in the Army everything was in the rough. We had to make our own potato mashers. You had to have a handle and the wires like that. You had to make your own. No spoons, no nothing, the way we got our—they were going to bomb a town in Germany tomorrow, so they would drop leaflets. Tomorrow you got your choice to be a prisoner or go with your people, so we'd go up there the next day before they bombed. And we'd go in the front door and check and see if the older people were gone. They'd be going out the front door. They would have a pillowcase. They'd put their personal belongings inside and away they'd go. So when I'd go through a kitchen if I'd see a nice scoop dipper, I would take it because I could dip the soup out with that [laughs]. Otherwise you'd have to make it. You'd have to go the [unintelligible], like a pancake turner. They'd have to make us one, and if they couldn't—and when we'd have to get out on the hurry, we'd get on the blacktop. I'd hear something [that] probably was the pancake turner hitting the blacktop [both laugh]. Then we'd go on the autobahn when we were moving up—where it was I don't know—and of course they put the side road over the top. They'd knock that down, and we'd have to go way down in the valley, make a road, bulldoze it, so we could get around that bridge.
- Jim: So you stayed in Germany until July?

- Fred: Well, it was after the war. When we came back to France, the apple blossoms were on the trees. When we came back to go to Paris, they were eating apples off the trees. I was in the foxhole for eleven months, yeah, before I came out.
- Jim: I see in the note here, you have July 2<sup>nd</sup>. Is that—
- Fred: It must have been when I came out.
- Jim: You took a truck back to Le Havre and then got a—
- Fred: A convoy. That's right. That's when we came back to New York or New Jersey.
- Jim: And then were you discharged right away?
- Fred: Well, I came back, and I was put back in the 271<sup>st</sup> Infantry. At Camp Kilmer [near Brunswick, New Jersey] is where we came back, and then we come back to—
- Jim: You certainly had enough points to get out.
- Fred: Oh yeah, I had 73 points. Then we came back to Illinois where we put in there. That's where we were discharged from. And I know I went to see my brother in Madison, and I stayed a little late. I got out. I couldn't get no ride. Then you could hitch hike, which you can't do now. I got on the road, and a gross truck from [Wisconsin] Rapids picked me up, and it took me to Rapids. And here I had my barracks bag and they had a little bus going from Rapids to [Stevens] Point and the people were—I couldn't—I got out on the road, and some fellow from Appleton gave me a ride home.
- Jim: The bus was full?
- Fred: The bus was full. I had to stand on the corner and try to get a ride, and this fellow gave me a ride from Appleton, gave me a ride right home. I got home. I'd been gone five years, and my mother was over to my sister's babysitting—
- Jim: They didn't know you were coming?
- Fred: They didn't know I was coming. My dad was working so I stayed home about a week. Nobody one knew me. I aged ten years, no hair, no teeth.
- Jim: [laughs].

Fred: So I says, "I'm going out to California to see if I can get a chef job." So I got on the train. Of course you could go for almost nothing because I had the ruptured duck and everything ["Ruptured duck" is U.S. Army or military slang for the cloth insignia worn by World War II soldiers depicting an American eagle inside a laurel wreath. It was also the discharge emblem for the returning G.I.s]. I went to Minneapolis. I had an aunt there. I went to North Dakota. I had an aunt there. I went to Washington State. I had an uncle there, and I stayed at his place. And I hauled the milk into the creamery, and then I'd go over to the sawmill where they had trees like that and a guy with no arm and no leg, you know [both laugh]. So I stayed in Burbank, and I'd go into Hollywood. I'd hitch hike into Hollywood. And I'd go around where they'd weigh you, and they'd give you 5 cents a pound for—and I'd get there just before closing. "How much do you weigh?" "200lbs." "Okay," and he'd give me 5 cents a pound. So I went to Earl Carroll's (that was a nightclub), and I met a sailor, and they wanted a couple servicemen to make a couple of girls come out with a little—to make them a dress, so he and I made the dress and I won. I got ten bucks, so they give us dinner, and we had dinner. Ten dollars was quite a bit when you don't get nothing, you know. We had a Black boy to bring the food. So I say, "You get me some change and I'll give you a tip." He took the whole ten dollars. So I said the heck with that so I went to the office and rapped on the door, "You know that Black boy took our ten dollars. We were going to give him a tip, and he took the whole thing." So he got a hold of the Black boy, and I got the tip back [laughs].

Jim: So then what? You still hadn't gotten married yet. What about this girl in England? How were you dealing with her at this moment?

Fred: Well, I got a letter from her. I didn't know my wife. I didn't go with her. I said, "You come over here and we'll get married." No, she wouldn't come over.

Jim: So if she said yes you would have married her?

Fred: Sure, I would have married her. I thought she was a good girl. You know you're there. You get their language. And now, you get some foreigner and if they try to talk English, I can understand them. Yeah, she always brings that up: "Yeah, you know, he was going to marry an English girl."

Jim: How did you end it?

Fred: Well, I said, "You come over to the wedding." That took care of it.

Jim: That's the first she heard that you were getting married?

- Fred: Right.
- Jim: You certainly smacked her in the teeth with that.
- Fred: Well, I was pretty smart. I got out of something.
- Jim: Well, that was one way of getting out of it.
- Fred: I'll say! Didn't want no answer.
- Jim: You didn't want to know what's going on. Have you kept in contact with her?
- Fred: No, I haven't. I kept a couple of letters. I tucked it away.
- Jim: Oh, that's too bad. That's a shame.
- Fred: I liked Gloucester, England. You know the people there were real good to us. You know, they are different than we are.
- Jim: Everybody is different. So then what did you do for work now?
- Fred: I was an ice cream maker for Scribner's Dairy.
- Jim: Where?
- Fred: Right in [Stevens] Point, [Wisconsin]. I went to work for them making ice cream, and then they sold out. And another dairy took over, and I made ice cream. And I got crippled up by filling glass jugs with boiler [unintelligible] and it ate my hand up. So I went and had it taken off. I had four operations. The doc says, "I've got to take your hand off." They put a stent in there. It worked pretty good.
- Jim: You retired after that?
- Fred: I retired after my accident. Thirty four years I was in the dairy business. And I made ice cream for a couple of other dairies. When I got done at 3 o'clock, they bring the order over, and I would make their ice cream, and I work until midnight. Then the next day they would pick it up.
- Jim: Did you and your wife have lots of children?
- Fred: No children. I wish we did. I'm not the only one, I know. You know what I mean. So I think we did pretty good.
- Jim: Oh, it sounds great! Did you join any veteran's organizations?

- Fred: I joined the American Legion. You know over in England—that's one thing—you'd be having fish and chips there, you know, and someone would have beer. I got tired of them begging for me to buy them a drink. So when I came back I went to the Legion. I went a couple of years and they started the same thing and I quit. I shouldn't have, but I talked to—
- Jim: It's been a disappointing organization, don't you think?
- Fred: That's right. I think my brother was with the Veterans of Foreign Wars and I think they are better.
- Jim: That's much better.
- Fred: You know they say you can be in the Army or whatever for a year or months, and you can belong to the American Legion. For the Veterans of Foreign Wars you have to be a soldier. You gotta be overseas. I don't get much on them but every once in a while I get a calendar from them.
- Jim: I've got all these labels. I have so many labels, and I get a request for money from them about every two weeks.
- Fred: Yeah, and you know I don't like that. We could do if we had an outside toilet we'd have—the one I give to is the disabled veterans with the wheelchairs. I give it to them.
- Jim: Those are the only two that I give to.
- Fred: And sometimes they get a little—you know. I send them a check today, and a couple of days later I get an ad, and I told the wife (she does the bookwork), I says, "You tell them I'm a veteran and I had service overseas and I got metal knees and I got a crippled hand. I don't mind giving, but I don't want to give it every time."
- Jim: Just throw it away. You know what I've done? I've put a piece of paper on my check book, and I marked it "DAV, January, June and December" or something like that. Three times a year, and the same with the VFW, so I don't even look at them. Then when it's time, I sent them something. Otherwise, I just throw them away, because they will never let up.
- Fred: No, I think if they get your name they must kind of sell them to all these other companies. Some way they get a hold of you, and that ain't right. That ain't right. You know I feel sorry for these veterans that are crippled like that, but I could have been crippled worse than I am now. You know what I mean. So, well, did I help to close out a little bit?



Jim: Perfect! You did perfect!

Fred: I don't know if I stayed on the right track or anything, you know, but you know I enjoyed cooking for the boys. I went to one Army reunion in York, Nebraska. My wife and I went there, but you know—

**[End of Interview]**