

Testimony of John Epps Teel

Subject: World War II

Interview Date: October 5, 2001

Interviewer: John R. Teel –son of interviewee

Intv: Dad, what do you remember as the first time you heard about a coming war and the possibility that you might be involved with it?

Teel: In 1939 in history class - senior history, we had a teacher, Mrs. Marbury, who was a German Jew. She always took the time to criticize Hitler and the Nazis and what they were doing to the Jews, because we were getting information slowly - what was happening. Of course the Nazis were moving in Eastern Europe and the Japanese were moving in China and the Pacific, so we always got off the history lesson when we talked with her about the coming wars. Now she said that in a few years we would be in it. This was in 1939, when we learning about it, but she said we would get in it. She said, "All you boys, young men 17 to 18 years old stand up. My friend, Bill White, was in the class. You know Bill became a chaplain. Well we all stood up and she said well all these young men in two or three years would be fighting wars in the Pacific and in Europe. Well that was really the beginning.

Intv: Did you believe her?

Teel: Yes. The Nazis were really moving across Europe and the Japanese were really taking their time in China....?..and, so actually, in 1939 I finished high school in June, of course, and then I worked in a few retails stores. I didn't want to do that the rest of my life. So I was reading in the paper about the Roosevelt Youth Movements. You could go to school and pass certain tests. So I went to the Employment Office and talked to Mrs. Granger. And she said, "Yeah, the Police Department is looking for people. They're changing from working twelve hours a day to eight hours, that means three shifts - so they're looking for people." So that's how I got in with the Police Department. I went down there and talked to Chief Holket. He was satisfied because the government would pay me - not very much - but they do pay for it; the city would not have to pay for it. And in the meanwhile, Mrs. Granger said you have the opportunity to take a test to go to college. I took the test and passed it, but it was in mid-semester so would have to wait a while. In the meanwhile, I went on to the Police Dept. And Chief Holket took an interest in my work.. You know I did identification work with Mr. Gay - Nolan Gay - fingerprinting and photography. I also worked on the desk. And, so Chief Holket liked my work and said, now if I would be willing to stay on until July, the beginning of the fiscal year, he thought he could get me on regular.

Intv: This was in July 1940? (interviewer's note: Interviewer may have misunderstood. Apparently the time frame in July 1941.)

Teel: Uh-huh. So, in the meanwhile, I got notice that I could go to the University of West Virginia, I think that's in Wheeling, West Virginia. But Chief Holket said, Well if I put you on, you are going to start the first of July of '41 (clarification about name of the

Police Chief).....and so I decided to stay on and work with the Police Department and turned down the scholarship to go to college. Well I worked there a while, it was 1941 in July, and of course, in December the 7th, was Pearl Harbor. We knew good and well we were in then. Well, I worked about 6-7 months after that, Chief Holket called me to his office and said Mrs. Granger had called, and he talked to her – she was in the employment office – and (she) said, “They were building Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville and we’re in desperate need of fingerprinting men to fingerprint workers.” He said he would let me go down there, leave work and help out down there. So I went down to Jacksonville there and helped fingerprint all these workers – they were just lined up for blocks. I fingerprinted all day. There were three of us in there fingerprinting. There were three young ladies who did the typing. So that was my first time away from home. We all got along real well.

Intv: Where did you stay in Jacksonville?

Teel: We had a room there. We stayed in a little house there, just a room. So I worked there for about three months, I guess it was. Then one day, Chief Holket and Mr. Gay and several others popped-up there and said, “John, you’ve got to come on back and get to Wilson.” So I left there. But that was a good experience....first time away from home and working and meeting other people. I met this good guy, Rudolph Crumplerno, that wasn’t it. I can’t think of his last name right now. He lived nearby. And his father was in World War I and was gassed. He was completely disabled but we had a good time working together. Anyway, I went back to Wilson.

Intv: Before you go any further, I wanted to ask you something. The year you finished high school, 1939, wasn’t that also the year you went to the World’s Fair in New York City?

Teel: Yeah I did. Dad got me a pass and I went to New York City and the World’s Fair.

Intv: The World’s Fair, was a showcase for other countries from all other the world coming to the United States. While you were at the World’s Fair, was there anything there that happened that made you to think that a World War was going to happen?

Teel: No, it was a celebration. There was nothing indicated.

Intv: Do you remember if there was a German pavilion?

Teel: No. You know, I went by myself. Of course I covered plenty of territory.

Intv: So you went back to Wilson.

Teel: In the meanwhile, I registered for the draft in Jacksonville. Mr. Brown, who was the manager of our little section there in “Piney Green” – there was one little building there called “Piney Green” – so I signed up there for the draft. He said, “Now as soon as you

get back to Wilson you go to your draft board and report to them.” Which I did when I got back to Wilson. I went to the draft board, and they didn’t have a record on me.

Intv: They didn’t have a record that you had registered in Jacksonville?

Teel: Right. They said well that information would be in Raleigh. So I went on to work, and they said to wait until we hear from Raleigh. Well, several weeks went by and I didn’t hear anything, so I went back again. And talked with them about it, and they said, “No. Raleigh had never notified them.” So I had to register over again. I registered twice. So you could say I was a volunteer.

Intv: Was everybody having to register?

Teel: Oh, yeah, a lot of them. Bill Johnson was gone and LeRoy Leach was gone, and most of my buddies from high school were gone, and I was still there. So I registered again. Then, Chief Holket was still chief, of course I had to train somebody to take over “Identification.” Because fingerprinting, classifying fingerprints and photography, and crime scene investigation wasn’t something you couldn’t just pick up real quickly. So the draft board allowed me another month to train somebody. So finally, after that Walter Robinson was in there for training....after that, well let’s see now....then April of ‘43, of course, your mother and I married. Then it was about six months that I went in service. Well I went to Ft. Bragg. Usually you went to Ft. Bragg and in another seven days you go for basic.

Intv: So you registered, then you got a draft notice, then you went down to Camp Lejeune or Ft. Bragg or whatever?

Teel: That’s right. I got my notice, so I didn’t have to register. They give you so many weeks to register. I went down to Jacksonville to register for the draft.

Teel: But, anyway, I went down to Ft. Bragg and in a day or two they called my name out, and they assigned me at Ft. Bragg to take other recruits to different stations to be fingerprinted or to be interviewed. So I was there about three weeks and was able to get around, which was unusual – to be drafted, go into service, and be able to get home within a week or two. Of course, that didn’t last long, but anyway, several weeks there I helped out. But the thing was, apparently,all the basic trainings had already started. They had started at the beginning, and I was at the middle. So finally they called me up and said get ready to ship out the next day. It’s an odd thing, a fellow came by, Cobbage was the last name, and I knew him – I had met him before, and he was stationed at Ft. Bragg. He went with the trains with all the recruits going to different basic training. His job was to line up the trains for all of them. And he said, “John Epps, come on up, it’s time to ship out.” I said, “Where are we going?” He didn’t know, but he probably couldn’t tell me anyway. But he was right good to me – he was from Wilson. But anyway, I caught the train that afternoon and headed out south. I ended up at Camp Wheeler....right out from Macon, Georgia.

(Tape stopped for a moment. Interview resumes.)

Teel: I started my basic training at Camp Wheeler, out from Macon, Georgia. I tried to remember a lot of things that went on there, but I know I enjoyed the rifle range, shooting there from day one, and I passed it all right. But what was interesting is the fact that if you missed a target, there was a man underneath the target who would waive a red flag. You know what we called that? –Maggie's drawers! (chuckling) I got a full of those, I'll tell you! And on machine gun, heavy weapons, training on heavy weapons, a 30 caliber water-cooled machine gun that sits on a tripod. So that was really interesting. You could traverse and search that thing up and down, crossways or horizontal and vertical. It was interesting what you could do with a machine gun. I never knew you could do all of that.

Intv: Did it have a scope on it with crosshairs?

Teel: It had little handles on it you could adjust up and down and go crossways. I was trying to remember – one incident there. The Company Commander called me into the office there one Monday morning and said, "Teel, what did you do over there in Macon on Saturday night?" I said, "Captain, I wasn't in Macon this weekend – I didn't go. I didn't get a pass." And it was confirmed by the Officer on Duty. He knew that I didn't have a pass. And a lot of the fellows in the barracks knew that I was there. He sort of laughed and said, "Well somebody used your name and got into some trouble. (laughing) He said, "That's OK. Just being clear." I knew that anyway. He just had to check up on it. Well, that was one instance.

Intv: Did you ever find out who it was?

Teel: No, never did. Somebody who knew me in the barracks, I am sure. Never found out who it was – nobody volunteered.

Intv: Did you get along well with the guys in your barracks?

Teel: Oh yeah. Got along fine with them. I was able to do everything. I never had to go on sick call. I did everything. I do remember one night we had to go marching around the clay – you've heard about the red clay of Georgia – well let me tell you something, it is just like glue. It was raining and we had been marching way back in the woods down a dirt road – clay road, and I fell. Fell right square flat in that mud, rifle and all? (laughing) I don't know what I did....I slipped, slid – it was dark, you know. And that was a Friday. Well, on Saturday we had inspections, and we had rows of guns with red clay on it. I stayed up the rest of the night – we got in about 11 o'clock, and I stayed up the rest of the night – there were two or three others with me, we had to clean those rifles, I mean, so there wouldn't be any dirt, dust, or anything on that rifle. I didn't even sleep that night. I passed inspection, but I really did clean that gun. It took a long time to do it. I remember that. It was a terrible, rainy, slippery night. So I went on through it all right.

Intv: Did you ever think when you were marching in the woods of Georgia what it must have been like a hundred years earlier during the Civil War, when those confederate and Union soldiers marched in that red clay?

Teel: Well, I used to wonder what all those people living in that vicinity thought about all those boys out there at night, and training all night and all. I only went over to Macon one time on a Sunday – I didn't see anything of interest. I didn't go to the club there. They had a club there.

Intv: What did you do with your free time?

Teel: I stayed in the barracks.

Intv: Did you play cards or read?

Teel: I read. I didn't play cards. There were some sharp players, you know, who played cards and won a lot of money. I wasn't involved in that. There were too many who were sharp, and they played poker for money. I finished up training all right – no problem.

Intv: How long did it take – basic training?

Teel: About six months. Let's see. It was about six months. I went there in October. Training started in November – November, December, January, February, March, April, May. So that's seven months, at least. In May I finished and came home a few days in route to Ft. Meade, Maryland and stayed with Dolly (his wife) for several days. Then I had to leave. That was a really sad leaving because I knew I was going then.

Intv: How did you get home – did you take a train from Georgia?

Teel: Yes, we took a train. And then I took the train from there in Wilson. Daddy came down to see me off. And gosh, there were lots of soldiers.

Intv: It was really sad to say goodbye to your Dad too.

Teel: Yeah. Yeah. The trains were filled up with soldiers. And the train station was filled up with soldiers waiting to catch a train. Anyway, we then went on to Ft. Meade in Maryland and stayed there for a few days. And then, I think it was Camp Shanks in New Jersey or New York, one, which was the point of embarkation. We stayed there a few days till they lined up the convoys. We just laid around. We didn't take in any exercise. One interesting thing there, one of the fellows would go to sleep with his eyes open! Did you ever see anyone sleep with his eyes open? That's a weird looking thing! He said he'd always done that – he didn't realize it, but he'd sleep with his eyes wide-open. Anyway, the time we boarded ship was at night. The thing I thought about a lot was the ladies who got us coffee and donuts as we got on shipboard. I wondered what in the world those – I guess those ladies just felt really sorry about all these young men having to board ship

and go over the sea. But those donuts and hot coffee were good. But anyway, on the ship I was on what they called the promenade deck.

Intv: What was the name of the ship?

Teel: I don't. But it was a big ship. It was a cruise line. My bunk was just off the deck - I wasn't way up. You know some of those things were four or five ..?...some of those fellows were way up. If they'd fallen off it would have killed them they were so high up. Well, anyway, I was on the bottom. The next morning we passed on out to sea and I went out on deck. I saw all these ships - you just couldn't hardly believe it. Of course your know, troop ships ride in the middle of the convoy. The other ships were on the side of you. There was a British aircraft carrier on our left side. It's what you called a Beta carrier - it was not a huge carrier. That was real interesting - this thing was like camouflage paint. Once in a while you'd look out there and you wouldn't see it. It's just hard to believe. It was just unbelievable! We were out there in the middle of the convoy and as far as you could see, left-right-front-and back were ships -I tell you! And off to our right there was another big ship with wacks, waves and nurses. (laughing/hard to understand comments) Well it was calm. We didn't have any storms - just the swells of the ocean. But that ship was so big it didn't (roll). I didn't get sea-sick but one time. I'll mention that. You know, I told you that you could eat all you wanted. But you better eat everything on your plate. And one day, I went through and just stacked by tray with food - ice cream. I was sitting there eating and all of a sudden I began to get a little dizzy. (laughing) I couldn't, I couldn't finish the food. So I took my tray over to the can, the garbage can there, and there was an officer standing there with his board, with his notes. And I said, "I sorry, Sir, but I just can't finish it (mock crying)." He said, "What's your name?" I told him my name, and the next day I was called out on detail. Now that was very interesting, I was sort of glad I did, because I had an experience that I never had before. Went way down - down in that ship. Almost way down except to the bottom. And looking through the hatches at the bottom, the bottom was just filled with tanks and trucks - man that was really something. I could hardly believe it. I tell you I don't see how anything could float with all that in it. Anyway, my job was to go into the freezers and bring out beef. There was a couple of us working together. Then all of a sudden bells were ringing and horns were blowing. I said, "What in the world is going on?" The sailor who was overseeing us said, "Oh, that's a drill. Everything's going to close up. Get out of the freezer now." The doors were all going to close up. I just did get out of that thing when it closed up. And I thought, "We are below the waterline. If a torpedo hit that thing we'd be (?frozen?)." The ship was divided into departments and we'd be sealed in. Boy that was quite an experience. Other than that it was a quiet voyage. Then one day, I was standing there and somebody yelled, "Hey, John Teel." I turned around and it was Bill White. He was a Lt. now. He said to come on and let's go to the Officer's Club to drink a Coke Cola or something like that. Cause we didn't drink hard liquor, just a Coke. After that I didn't see him anymore. But he was the only one I knew onboard. You could make friends anyway. We were all about the same - all headed for trouble.

Intv: How long did it take to cross the ocean?

Teel: It only took three or four days. You remember the fastest ship had to slow down to the slowest. Those great big merchant marine ships loaded with supplies moved slowly, so everything else had to slow down. One night I heard some noise, some explosions, way out somewhere. I guess they were dropping these depth charges – there may have been some German submarines prowling around out there. But the troops ships were in the middle and would have been hard to get to. Other than that it wasn't very eventful.

Intv: Now where was this ship going?

Teel: Liverpool in England. Now that was a strange thing, the damage, because you saw some of the buildings tore up. There were skeletons (of buildings?) all over the place and bricks. Well we got off the ship and got onto the train – a Pullman. That was the first time I'd slept on a train. I felt like a big-shot. It run all night long. The best I can remember.....

Intv: (interrupted): So you didn't stay in Liverpool even for a night? The train was waiting for you?

Teel: No, the train was sitting right there waiting for us. The war was moving us fast. Now remember, this was before June 6 now - D-Day. This was in May. And best I can remember it was near Bristol, England. It was just a camp on the moors, you know, barren land and tent after tent as far as you could see. There was about eight men to a tent. Pretty good accommodations, fed good; we had everything we needed. We marched some and exercised some until the morning of D-Day. I guess it was about three or four o'clock in the morning, we were awakened by the drone of airplanes. You've never heard anything like this – droning of plane after plane after plane. And the sergeant came down and said, "Well fellows, it's on. We have attacked France." That was June 6 about three or four o'clock in the morning. Those planes just went on and on and on..... It was interesting because we didn't take off for Southampton until later on in the day. So the planes were still going and coming by daylight. So finally about five a fighter plane was coming back and part of one wing was gone. The other wing was all right. There was a plane in front of him, in back of him, and on each side of him and above him. Those fellows were bringing him back in. I imagine he had to bail out – I am sure – he could not have landed like that. But they were escorting him back as far as I could see. I thought that was really something. It was unbelievable what a morning! I guess it was about 12 o'clock we all piled into trucks, two and a half ton trucks, and headed for Southampton. We got down there on the dock and sat there. When you went down to the dock there was the houses..a road, and then there were the apartments right there on the side...?... and all the women were waving and saying, "Go get them, Yanks!" We sat there on the dock for three hours and weren't doing anything. Finally the trucks started up and took us back to camp. We didn't get on the ships. We found out later that there were just so many men on the beaches, it was just such a chaotic situation, that they couldn't put any more men on it. So it was the 12th, six days later, and that time it was at night. But we boarded a British ship to carry us across the Channel. (Speaking of that?,) we had to climb down these rope ladders, you've seen them, to get in the LST's. It wasn't too bad – we didn't have any problem walking on them...?getting down into them?

Intv: You had your equipment on?

Teel: Yeah. Well I just had a pistol. I didn't have a rifle. They had issued me a "45." ...?...in getting across the Channel we didn't expect any problems because the troops were in about 12 miles. The beachhead was about 12 miles inland. That was pretty good. The German airforce couldn't deal with it, because our airforce just dropped in there and had command of the sky. And we landed on the beach there, Utah Beach. The thing I remember there was the big hospital - a tent hospital - but it was really big. And men marching, I'm telling you it was really something to see how many men were marching up that road....I fell in behind them and followed the man in front of me.

Intv: When you landed at Utah Beach, had anyone told you what had happened there?

Teel: Well we were aware (of the thousands killed and what a mess it had been). The sergeant was telling us that the reason we didn't go in on that June morning was because it was so chaotic. There was just no place...there were thousands of men on the beaches. So I thought it was just required. We just marched on. Best I remember we just bivouacked. I do remember the Germans flew over that night and dropped a few bombs. A piece of shrapnel went through my tent. But that was about it the first night.

Intv: Was that at Utah Beach on the first night?

Teel: We went inland, but I don't know how many miles. We were in the countryside. You just dig a hole. One time we went up with a hack ax. I guess we were protection for anti aircraft guns. There wasn't any action except that there was shooting. At sundown he was shooting at the ground; there wasn't anything in the air to shoot at. We were moving on up all the time towards our company.

Intv: Let me ask you a question. You're a private at this time. Do you know what your job is going to be? Do you know that you are going to be a runner at this time?

Teel: No. I knew that I was going to be a machine gunner, because I had the experience and the training. So I knew I was going to be with a heavy weapons company. There were several days and nights of moving up. I did have one job there. They took us up on Hill 122, I believe it was Hill 122, where the Germans has the higher ground and could see everything. We had to go up there after the battle and pick up the dead- Germans and Americans. Well at that time the Germans were booby-trapping the dead. So we would have to go up to the bodies and tie ropes around the legs and then go back about 10 or 20 feet and yank them. That rope would kind of shake them.

Intv: That was kind of gruesome wasn't it?

Teel: Yeah.

Intv: Were any of them booby-trapped?

Teel: No. But it was bad seeing all those dead Americans soldiers and Germans. It was quite a battle they must have had there.

Intv: Pretty torn up there?

Teel: Well the ones I saw there weren't torn up too bad. Looked like shrapnel, which gets most people anyway. But they weren't tore up too bad. After that job we pulled them to the road and stacked them just like cordwood. It was something to see stacks of human beings beside the road. Trucks would come along and pick them up. That was good training in a way because you were seeing what war was really like. We had missed that at D-Day and Utah Beach. We were getting to see what was really going on. You could hear the artillery roaring and shooting. But after that we moved on up in trucks and they said they would take us to our companies. So I thought about seeing movies of WWI and the men moving on up – marching to the front lines and thought, gosh, 'This is about the same thing.' It was night and it was dark. So we moved on up next to a house. The sergeant introduced himself, but it was night and we couldn't see a lot. He said, "So this is it – this is as far as you go." I was with a machine-gun squad. You could hear the artillery shooting up. There was a little rifle shooting. Next morning the sergeant said, "Ok, we are moving on out. Teel, you are going to start out carrying some ammunition." There were two boxes of ammunition. I had a carbine in my hand, 30 caliber with a magazine that holds 15 rounds. It was not automatic – later on they made them automatic. Anyway... "What's this, pick up these two boxes of ammunition, take off. You've got a man with a machine gun, a man with a tripod, and other fellows on the mission, and you just start on out." Walking we finally starting to get some artillery fire....some air bursts. You could see them. We'd hit the ground and start digging a hole. You were wore out digging a hole. Finally we thought that was foolish. We got used to it. It was wasting a lot of time. But what happened, well one night I was sitting on the machine gun. Of course, you're on only about two hours on the gun at night. Then you could rest the rest of the time if nothing was happening. I mean to tell you it was a black night. There were hedgerows in Normandy at this time, of course. We set the gun up against a ditch bank. The sergeant said, "If you hear anything out there, wake me up. Don't you shoot. Just wake me up." When my turn came, it was early in the morning, about 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning. Pitch black and sitting up there scared to death...listening, just listening. After a while I heard something scurrying out in front of the gun. I said, "Oh oh, something's happening." So the 2nd (guy down from me) ..went off to tell that something was going on in front of us. And he came on up to the gun and said, "Sure is." So he threw a grenade out there and it was quiet after that. You know the next morning there were American soldiers out there. They had come up in front of our gun without letting us know.

Intv: Oh my God! Were any of them killed?

Teel: No. It happened that they heard the grenade hit out there and they had a hole, so they were all right. But that was something. They had come up in front of our gun and didn't let us know.

Intv: So that was a friendly fire incident.

Teel: Yeah. I could tell you some more about that. So, that was a close incident there.

Intv: And an eye-opener too.

Teel: So next morning we picked up the gun and the ammunition. Sometimes I took the gun, at times the tripod, and at times the ammunition. We all worked together. And I remember one night I was on the gun, you could hear a dance somewhere out to the left of us. The Germans had a fast repeating machine gun. It would thrill. The American gun would go "putt- putt- putt." This lasted for about an hour.

Intv: So you were thinking, "What kind of equipment do we have?"

Teel: Not only that, they had smokeless powder. But ours, when you shot that 30 caliber water-cooled machine gun of ours, you got a whole lot of smoke. You thought, my God, they can see us but we can't see them. They had smokeless powder. But these machine guns were 1915 models used in WWI that we were using.

Intv: So you could tell we weren't prepared for the war.

Teel: No, the Germans had much more superior equipment. And gosh, that was about it. You packed up your gun and moved on out. Sometimes nothing happened. You were just marching up a road.

Intv: Let me read something here. We might want to go date by date here. Some of these places might trigger in your mind some of the things you did. The first one talks about June 6 – 27, 1944 – The Battle of Normandy.

(At this point in the interview, the interviewer refers to **A History of the 90th Division in World War II**. No author is listed for this work, though the forward is written by Major General Herbert L. Earnest. Within the book is a large map of "Divisional Historical Highlights." The second entry of the map text reads:

The Battle of Normandy 6 June – 27 July 1944

Group A landed on Utah Beach 1000-1600 D-Day 6 June and assembled vic ST MARTIN de VERREVILLE. The Main Body arrived off Utah Beach mid-morning 8 June and began debarkation by noon. By midnight, all foot elements had closed into allocated positions, TURQUEVILLE – REUVILLE – AUDONVILLE – LA HUBERT – ECOQUENEAUVILLE. Division made its first attack 100400 June through 82nd A/B Division with the high ground E of Douve R as its objective. Elements had reached the western shore of the Peninsula by 18 June vicinity PORTBAIL. Battle of FORET de MONT CASTRE 3-12 July. 22 July, 358th Inf made its ill-fated attack of SEVES ISLAND. 25 July, under cover of a tremendous

aerial bombardment, VII Corps initiated its assault from position W of ST LO.

By dark, 29 July, entire 90th Division, together with supporting units, had crossed S of PERIERS – COUTANCE ROAD, thus ending the first phase of the Division's combat action.

Intv: It says "landed at Utah Beach. Assembled at St Martin de Verreville.

Teel: We didn't really know the names - unless you saw a city sign.

Intv: It says that by midnight all foot elements had closed into allocated positions. Division had Division with the high ground. Elements had reached the western shore of the Peninsula by 18 June. Battle of FORET de MONT CASTRE. Do you remember the Battle of FORET of MONT CASTRE – 3-12 July? It says ill-fated attack at SEVRES.

Teel: Yeah. Was that the island. We set up – The 357th I think was the infantry regiment that made the initial attack. We were on the right flank sitting up against woods on this side and woods in front of us sort of like this....With woods in front of us and woods on the side.

(Turn tape over. Being Tape 1, Side B.)

Intv: So the Germans were on the left?

Teel: Yeah. They were on the left and the 357th was assaulting what they called "the island" – the Sevres Islands. The Germans had dug in their tanks they were using definitely as just artillery. We were on the front to catch any of the Germans that were coming this way to the right. We just shot in those woods all day long with those machine guns. So I didn't really see any Germans.

Intv: Why was it called an island?

Teel: I don't know. I don't know if maybe there was swampy land in there.

Intv: It says ill-fated attach under cover of tremendous aerial bombardment. It says that by dark, 29 July, entire 90th Division, together with units, crossed S of PERIERS – COUTANCE ROAD, thus ending the first phase of the Division's combat action.

Teel: That was just before St. Lo.

Intv: Right. The next part says the breakthrough 1-10 Aug joined the 3rd US Army.....

The entry on the 90th Infantry map being referred to reads:

The Breakthrough 1 – 10 August 1944

1 August, Division joined Third US Army. The 90th, spearheaded by TASK FORCE WEAVER, marched 140 miles in 10 days to objective, LE MANS, had fought three tough engagements and captured MAYENNE bridge intact. (1st Bn, 357th Inf.)

Intv: So what do you remember about that?

Teel: I remember the St. Lo situation. We were standing by trucks. We were going to wait until the planes did their bombing, and then we were going to be on trucks passing through. But the interesting thing there was seeing the bombers. Well the first planes that came over, Pathfinders they were called, they dropped these streamers – long silver-like streamers to pinpoint targets for big bombers to drop. It was interesting to see those streamers falling down ahead of us there. Then the big bombers would come over and start dropping bombs. I mean it was a rattle through you. That's where we lost a General – remember? The first General we lost was at St. Lo. That's where one of the bombers fell short. Then after the bombardment we got on the trucks and moved on forward.

Intv: You mean the General was killed by his own - by Americans. It was a friendly fire situation?

Teel: Yeah. Some of the bombs fell on the troops. I don't know how many were killed, but the first General got killed there. We just passed on through on the trucks, but the destruction was just unbelievable – cows and horses and Germans scattered everywhere. The one I remember particularly, one of the German troops was on a motorcycle. Of course he was barbequed, pure barbequed – sitting up on a motorcycle. One of the flashes from the bombs must have got him. He was intact except he was cooked. The destruction was really something.

Intv: Were you in the countryside or in the town of St. Lo?

Teel: We were to the edge of it. These trucks and uh.... incidentally, you may remember me speaking about Carl Fulghum who was in the Airforce. He was in one of the bombers who dropped bombs on St. Lo. Of course he passed away several years ago. But anyway, I asked him about that, if he was in the bombing over St. Lo, and he said yes he was. I said, "You really done a job." Well anyway, we moved off in the truck and that's where we went. We went on and on and on.

Intv: 140 miles?

Teel: Yeah. The German's line broke down.

Intv: OK. Then we're up to the 10-22 August. The Falais Gap and Chambois.
(Interviewer reads the entry.)

The entry on the 90th Infantry map being referred to reads:

Falais Gap – Chambois - 10 – 22 August 1944

The campaign which began with the advance N from LE MANS and culminated with the juncture of American and British forces N of CHAMBOIS will be forever regarded as one of the most brilliant episodes in the battle of France. At CHAMBOIS, the largest steel-ringed trap of World War II, closed by the 90th Inf Div. In a period of four days, the Division took over 13,000 prisoners, killed or wounded 8,000 Germans and destroyed 1,800 horses, freeing 1000 more. Material box score is as follows: Tanks – 220, SP Arty Pieces – 130, Half-tracked vehicles – 130, Motor vehicles – 5,000, Wagons – 2000. The German 7th Army had been mercilessly mauled and beaten into the ground with only remnants escaping the trap.

Intv: On our trip (to France several years earlier) we almost went up there (Le Mans).

Teel: Yeah we missed.. I wanted to see Le Bourg St. Leonard was the little town, the city we were in. But anyway, on up the road to go onto Le Bourg St. Leonard, and we heard some firing up ahead of us. There was just we eight runners and one lieutenant. We wandered on up the road and there was two Americans killed there. The Germans had cut....they were linemen. They string the telephone wire. The Germans, they have a habit of cutting the wire (utility lines) and then sitting there in ambush for linemen to come and fix them. And that's what happened. If we had just been two minutes sooner, we would have caught them. Anyway, that's what happened. They were two good fellows – I don't remember their names, but I knew them. But anyway, we went on up to company to see Peter? at Le Bourg St. Leonard. And that was when I went two days and two nights without sleeping. We stayed awake. It was really tough. That's when the Germans broke through and got behind us. And we lost a good runner....this fellow that was killed, see there was two of us. He was trying to put two together. We didn't dig holes, we just lay on the ground. We didn't take time to dig holes. It was that close – they were everywhere. He was by himself out there. He was to the left of me. And they came in on him instead of coming in on me. It was a dark night, I mean to tell you, you couldn't see anything before your face. I didn't even realize there was shooting out there. I heard them talking – you could hear the Germans talking out there. I didn't know they had killed him until the next morning. Ah, but we laid up there all night long.

Intv: Was it just you and one other guy – the machine gunner?

Teel: After St. Lo they made a runner out of me. After St Lo I was just a runner – I was just laying up there.

Intv: What does a runner do?

Teel: You take messages. You were with the battalion commander. The battalion commander was a very important man in battle. He directed everything. Of course, they had a radio and wires and telephone, but the thing is, sometimes they didn't want to use the radio. And at times you couldn't get the wires laid out. So you fall back on the old runner.

Intv: It was just like as in ancient Roman times.

Teel: Yes, yes. Or like in the old west – the guy on the horse trying to get through the line to get help.

Intv: And you did that by yourself?

Teel: Yes, by yourself. And you can't carry your gun in a firing position. You've got to have it over your back. You were going through your line and theirs and you could get shot by your own people. It was dangerous. You step on a mine and you are by yourself – that's the last. Pretty scary at times. Yeah. Anyway, to get back to Le Bourg St. Leonard. We were told mostly, I think it was the Germans, does it say the 7th, (referring back to the map and text) were trying to break through to get back through France and get back home.

Intv: It doesn't say.

Teel: Well anyway, as I was saying, that's another time I was up all night. The next day some of them got behind us because they were shooting. What protected us was a road area behind a house. They were shooting up and hitting the windows above us there. And I tell you when you have an opportunity to see your officers start to burn maps, you realize that you might be captured. It was close. Anyway they kept on shooting at us. The Lieutenant told us that we had called back to regiment and they are sending up tanks and want us to lay low cause they are going to come up shooting. And they did. They came up the road in them big tanks. I thought those guys had gotten in behind us. Then we moved on up to...it was just like an amphitheatre. There was a little ridge and it sloped down to the road where the Germans were coming through. We got right up there and could look down on them. There were German vehicles, and we saw an opportunity to hit one of these gasoline tanks. That thing went up in flames. You could see tanks all knocked out and Germans coming out with their hands over their heads. There were coming out by the thousands. I've never seen so many German troops. I was glad it was getting over. (A break in the tape here causes reader to miss some dialogue.)

You should have seen the equipment. That tells you right there. It was unbelievable.

Intv: 5000 wagons. No, 5000 motor vehicles; 2000 wagons; 130 half-tracks.

Teel: Well they use a lot of half-tracks. They were piled up in what I call "the valley". The thing I remember about these German prisoners of war was one German who was

limping. He was trying to keep up with them. It was only 10 ft in front of me. When they got down to the aid station. One of the American aid men came out and pulled him out of the line to help him. I thought this was really, really nice. But that was my biggest adventure at that time. That was the largest group of German prisoners I had seen. That town was beat up. That was quite an experience.

Another experience there. There was an American tank in the yard there, at the house. Somebody said there were some German tanks coming up the road. They must have known there was an American Sherman tank sitting there because they fired and hit that tank. And as they hit the tank I was jumping over the fence to get out of the way and that was when I turned head over heels and got a concussion. My rifle went one way and my helmet another. I cart-wheeled over and over. But I didn't get hurt. But then our tanks came up. I didn't know we had tanks as big as these. They were really big tanks. I'd never seen tanks that big. About four of them lined up back of us. We were better off because we were at the edge of the town. It was just a small hamlet. The infantry was lined up in front of the tanks. The gun was about 20 to 50 meters long.

A German tank came up. You see the gun comes up first. It was interesting to see where the tanker was to shoot. So the tanker just shot at the edge of the building. See they wanted to take out the tank, not the gun. And they knocked out the corner of the building to hit the tank and knocked it out.

But anyway, (the test was real?) there was a General Weaver. That was the first time I was with a General and I was right beside him. Someone said that the German tanks were coming. Our tanks cranked up their motors.

Intv: And they gave themselves away?

Teel: And they started backing up a little bit. And I was as close to him as to you. The General pulled out his 45 and said, "Don't you move a bit. You stand where you are. Don't you move." That was one time I had respect for a general. I mean to tell you, he was right in the open - toe to tankers. "Don't you move. You stay where you are." And they did too. A German tank came up and they beat it to a pulp. Every time our tanks would shoot, I would bounce up about that high from the concussion. It was about ten feet from my head. I finally got cleared from there. Then we moved on up to the edge of the field where it sloped down to the road. So the German equipment (was there) and the gas tanker was there that had blown up. An airplane flew over but he didn't do anything. It wasn't necessary. The artillery had them. The artillery was just covering it, I'm telling you, and they were hitting direct. That night, I remember, laying up there on the ground there, the stars were out and you could see the sky. All of a sudden I could see somebody coming, against the stars you know. So I got my rifle. I didn't challenge him. By the time I could have said something he disappeared. I'll never know if he was German or American. I've often thought about that. Was he a German or American? I think it must have been a German because for some reason they didn't come forward, went on my left and walked over Frank, who they had killed.

Intv: Do you remember Frank's last name?

Teel: No.

Intv: Do you remember any of the names of the guys who were with you, or on the machine gun with you?

Teel: No, I don't remember.

Intv: After the Falais gap, it says (returning to the map text):

Sees to Reims 23-31 August 1944

90th Division moved through Montmiral – Chateaudun to establish bridgehead for crossings at Fountainbleau and Montereau over the Seine R. On the 29th, Division again moved with mission of establishing a bridgehead over the Marne R. and occupying REIMS in conjunction with 5th Infantry Division. Mission completed by 1500, 3 August.

Teel: Well we went on to Reims, we were task force "Regal", we were 50 miles ahead of Division. We were just going and going and going. It was just wide open. All of a sudden we stopped. We ran out of gas. That was when they diverted gas to the British. Cause they were out of it. And that's where we saw the cathedral of Reims. It was just two or three miles away. They wouldn't let us go over there. We just stayed in the trucks. It was the next day. But anyway, we got word that the Germans were coming back into Metz. They had left Metz – they had pulled out. That was a fortified city. But they were pouring back into Metz. Because we had run out of gas, we would have had to make a stand. Otherwise we would have been in Metz. But nothing happened there - it just stopped. We were really far ahead. We had the roads, but the countryside – there were probably Germans in the countryside. But we had the road. We didn't think too much about that until we got to Metz.

Intv: Let me stop you there because the map continues with:

Reims to Thionville to Metz 1 Sept – 4 November 1944

Entire Third Army virtually immobilized as the increasing gasoline shortage assumed critical proportions. 90th resupplied by air 4 September. 357th Infantry moved by motor to occupy positions E and NE of Etain. The remainder of the Division made its shuttle move on the 6th to the Verdun bridgehead, closing all elements by dark. A new mission had been given 90th Division to capture Thionville and establish a bridgehead over the Moselle R at that point. 357th Infantry advanced on an axis Etain-Briey, 358th Inf on an axis Landres-Fontoy. 106th Panzer Brigade totally destroyed or captured 8 September when it penetrated Division zone. By the 13th all enemy resistance had been eliminated W of the Moselle R in our zone. At that time, Division moved S to relieve elements

of 7th Armd and 5th Inf Division facing German defenses W. of Metz. The relief was completed by midnight of the 14th. The defenses of Fortress Metz could not be penetrated by frontal assault, and by the 22 September, the whole Corps front, except for the fall of Maizier les Metz, was at a stalemate. This condition lasted from mid-September through the first week of November.

Teel: Yeah, we got stalled. I had pictures of my foxhole. Anyway, we stayed there. I had a wood stick trench with a canvas cover. It was very interesting. Most of what I saw there was our own planes dropping bombs on fortress Metz.. You know it had never been captured by a frontal attack – it was a fortified city. (Interruption in tape) I was watching our P-47s, the big, big attack bombers – they were our infantry planes.

Intv: What were they called?

Teel: P-47s, I think. Thunderbirds. Or something like that. They carried lots of bombs for straithing. That was very interesting. Well I always liked to see them dealing with the German artillery. They were dive-bombers. You could see the bombs hit the walls of the fortress and just bounce off. But the interesting thing, I was standing there one day and I saw this American plane. There was woods and open field. I was standing just in the woods area. I saw the plane coming over the field there. I said, "Gosh, there's a bomb hanging down." And he was wobbling his wings and I realized then he was trying to drop that bomb and it was hung up. I said, "Fellows, hit the ground. Our American has a bomb and he's trying to release it and can't." So they hit the ground and he was just shaking it. About opposite me it hit, he did shake it loose. And you could feel the weight. I mean to tell you the concussion from that thing just shook the trees. It just went over us cause we were down in a swamp.

Intv: Where did the bomb hit? Out in the middle of a field?

Teel: Yeah. It got hung up. He had to drop it or he could not land his plane. He went over 50 people who were on the ground. It was shaking. And I don't know where he was going then. Of course that was another thing watching those bombs bounce off that fortress there. And then I remember one night we heard these Germans talking. We were on one side of the road and they were on the other. Apparently they didn't know we were over there.

Intv: And this was near Metz?

Teel: Yeah. Just before we pulled out. The staff sergeant had a little flashlight, a red light, very colorful, and you could see him checking names. Listening to them talking over there, we went off to sleep. They must have gone on. They weren't there the next morning. Nothing happened to me. Then our planes came in low, but they didn't do any straithing. They were just observing, seeing what was going on.

Another incident, I remember. We just pulled out. We didn't go into Metz. I think the Germans finally just left or gave up. The next campaign was crossing the Moselle. That was a tough situation. We got into the little town – I don't remember the name of it. It was an assembly area for us. The artillery was there; they were shooting artillery over our head while crossing the river. But anyway, we were getting ready to cross the river. (Short tape interruption) The Moselle was at flood stage. It had been raining. I remember that night, the Germans really threw the artillery. They were really plastering the road in there in this little town. Somebody, bombers or ?... Of course they probably saw us start moving. But anyway, when we started moving, they started out with their artillery, so somebody was looking, and listening, one or the other as we starting moving towards the Moselle. I guess it was about a mile to the river. It was hitting some of our soldiers. You could hear the ringing and screaming. And I stepped on one. It was night and so dark I couldn't see.

Intv: You stepped on a German?

Teel: No, one of our men. He must have been dead, cause I don't see how... And the officers were saying, "Keep moving. Don't stop. The Aid men will come to their aid. The Aid men will take care of them. Keep moving. Keep moving. Keep moving." And the artillery was falling in there, oh man, it was really something. But anyway, where we got out of there and finally got close to the river, and it was muddy and I was slipping and sliding and remembering the clay hills of Georgia, but I didn't fall down. We got to the river and got into the boats. The engineers had the boats there. We got across all right in the boats and landed on the other shore. And we had just started to move into the wooded area and all of a sudden there was a bunch of men right on us, and we all hit the ground. And a guy in our bunch said, "This is A Company." And it was a long Georgia southern accent. (laughing) We were so glad! We said, "We are D, A, B, and C Companies."

Intv: So you thought they were Germans!

Teel: Yeah. We didn't know who they were. Instead of coming down the beach or the sides of the river, they were supposed to go in. We were going into the woods, but they were up to the river - right into our flank. I mean there could have been a massacre there. But that's where your trained veterans come in. When that man said, "This is A company," in that old southern drawl. I'm telling you, that was happy. Well anyway, that's when I moved on in and I walked right up to two Germans - one a machine gunner. I walked right up. The barrel was right there. But you see, they were outlooks and wanted to give up apparently. Cause they could have mowed us down. They were sitting right at the hand.

Intv: But they probably saw there was a bunch of you.

Teel: Yeah, they knew, they knew. There were boats all up and down that river. It was night, but, you know, you make a little noise. You can't breath without making noise. Somebody said, "We'll take care of them." But I don't know what happened to them.

Maybe somebody may have shot them. But anyway, they ought not to cause they sure could have killed me. So we moved on in. And every time we tried to put a bridge in during the day, the Germans could knock it out with artillery. Cause the river was so wide, it was just something getting a bridge in. The engineers had a hard time, so we couldn't get any heavy equipment. I mean you needed tanks out in front of you, ahead of the Germans. But none of them came in. There was no action except walking up that road and all those fellows getting hit by artillery. That was the worst thing in the world. And you couldn't do anything about it. It was so dark you couldn't even see.

Intv: That was German artillery?

Teel: Yeah. Yeah. We were moving up from the river and they were throwing up artillery. They knew it exactly. They had it pin-pointed. They had that road pin-pointed. Anyway, we got on across and moved on up. Later on the next day, I wasn't in much battle except for a little artillery.

Intv: And running up on those Germans with the machine gun!

Teel: Yeah. You aren't kidding!

Intv: That's enough to scare a couple of years off your life.

Teel: I tell you.

Intv: It then says:

Drive to the Saar 24 – 30 November 1944

The Division turned E upon the capture of Metz and fought its way to the Saar River. By 30 November the division had cleared the Germans from W of the Saar River and entered Germany proper and commenced plans for assault of the Siegfried Line. Beyond the Saar River water barrier lay the thickest portion of the vaunted Siegfried Line, the Saarburg Switch.

Intv: So you remember anything about going towards the Saar?

Teel: The only think I remember is getting up there close to Dillingen, Germany, which was a fortified city in the Siegfried Line.

Intv: It was called Dillingen?

Teel: Yeah. Dillingen. It was a fortified city. That's where I got my Bronze Star. In Dillingen, Germany.

Intv: What did you do to get the Bronze Star?

Teel: Well I was going to get up to that. We had to cross the river, which was the Saar. I don't remember the name.

Intv: It says you crossed the 6th of December. (The map text continues)

Saar River Crossing

6 – 22 December 1944

It says the operation lasted over a period of 18 days during which time nine battalions of infantry, 712th Tk Bn., 773rd TD Bn., and 100 organic vehicles were crossed, sustained, and subsequently withdrawn without bridging facilities, in rain, snow, and ice with the enemy counter-attacking as many as 23 times in a 24-hour period. Pacten and Dillingen fell to our forces and a threatening salient had been torn into the Siegfried Line defenses in the area before the Division was ordered to withdraw its forces back across the river on 21-22 December. The mounting German offensive in the Ardennes, and the threat from the N between the Moselle and the Saar Rivers necessitated the withdrawal.

Teel: Yeah, OK. Well we crossed the river in a little boat. There was a cable going across the river. You would pull on the cable – that's how we got over there. In the flood plane which was about half a mile. It was open. The Germans were very observant because every time we tried to cross it they would drop artillery. The things I remember there ... the first thing I remember was we had a bombed out service station where we set up a radio with our radio men. We were setting up in the morning and we heard a tank. No artillery had crossed the river. We were just infantry over there. And we heard the tank roll and looked up, and there was a damn German tank about, I guess it was over 50 yards from us, heading right towards the service station. They knew we were there. They shot one time and hit some barrels. I guess someone said it was ammonia, but it was a black substance that came up out of it. But the wind had blown it away from us. It didn't come over us. Our radioman called for artillery, cause we had no tanks – not a bazooka or anything, just our rifles. Do you know our artillery knocked that tank out. They had to go over some buildings.

Intv: Now how does the artillery do that? Do you give them coordinates? How do they know where to aim?

Teel: Yeah. You give them coordinates. You give them up and tell them where you are.

Intv: They could just as easily hit you as a tank?

Teel: Oh yeah. They could have, we were lucky. And they knocked that tank out. It's a good thing cause it could have got us. Come to find out there was two tanks. There was one behind that one but we didn't see that one. But that night an engineer, a couple of

engineers came up and got some of the wounded. I don't know why I didn't, but I didn't know anything about it until the other ones came back. But they went with the engineers to booby-trap In fact, the Germans came in and got one of those tanks that night. They slipped in there and got one of those tanks. So the engineers then set an arrangement up and booby-trapped the other one. But I wasn't in it with that. But anyway, Dillingen was really bombed out. There were some apartments there, they were two story apartments. The only things standing of course was the first floor, but the second floor the roofs were blown out. But it had been such intense heat that the cement and bricks were one. We could go in there and the people were just comfortable, but the danger was that the top ceiling could collapse on you. But we took that chance. But anyway, when you get to what happened to me, you have to remember that there were Americans in there and rubble was really horrible, bricks and everything scattered everywhere, and Germans too in the town there, but I was to take a message to the company machine guns, and I just happened to run across a German patrol. And there were Americans in there too in those buildings, and the Germans had to be leery too, cause they knew the Americans were in there. So that's all that happened. I wasn't supposed to fire, I was supposed to deliver messages. However, I had to get around them somewhere. It's one of those things, you just walk up and shots are fired, and of course there were other Americans in there. I was able to get behind various rubble and get away. Of course they couldn't just come up on me either because they knew there were Americans.

Intv: Did you ever have to throw up your weapon at that time and fire?

Teel: Yeah. I kept the rifle out then. I had had it on my shoulder.

Intv: So you were by yourself? You were having to shoot all these guys yourself?

Teel: Oh yeah. We were just shooting at one another. They were in rubble too. So we had plenty of cover. I just had tobring the message to the company. I don't even remember what the message was now. I just remember that – how hot it was for a few minutes. But that city fighting is something. Everybody's got plenty of cover, popping up and shooting, firing at this and that. It's dangerous. Yeah. But anyway - took care of that. One of the A Company almost got covered up in an artillery shell laying near him. He came in and was telling me about it. He was scared to death. He said that damn shell almost got him. He was a fellow from Asheville, North Carolina. There were a lot of North Carolina boys in that Atlantic Division. But anyway, after that episode, we went back our little CP there, the little service station, we still had that service station there. And I got word, well one fellow, I guess..... turns to me, the company commander called me and said we need.... Usually there's two runners to a company, one can run one time and then the other, the two work together. And he called up and ah.... in crossing that river, in crossing that flood plain the Germans were dropping artillery on you all the time, the company commander called regular and said, "Teel, we need a runner." He was a man I would say about forty years old, maybe he just turned gray because of the war, but he wasn't very active. But anyway, the Company Commander said, "Teel, the danger of crossing that flood plain and getting artillery all the time, would you stay up there and I'll

keep the other runner here? But it will be up to you now, if you want to stay up there. And I said, "Yeah, I'll stay up here."

Intv: You mean at the gas station?

Teel: Yeah. At the gas station. And the other runner stay back with the Company CP on the other side of the war. Yeah. I'll stay up here. I didn't want to cross that flood plain any more. So that brought attention to me because I volunteered to stay up there. In other words, and after that incident, of course there was a break-through up in the Ardennes. And we got word to pull back, to pull back, and I think me and my radioman were about the last Americans to pull back cause after we got to the river and pulled ourselves across on the rope, I didn't see anybody else, anybody else.

Intv: But you had to go back across that flood plain, didn't you?

Teel: Yes, we had to go back across, but our generals apparently, were paying attention to the break-through up there in the Ardennes, so we didn't get any artillery fire at all. So we got back and crossed. We left.... I don't know what we left over there. Anyway, we got out all right. And then, the next day we got on trucks and headed, I think it was north up to the Ardennes. And that was quite an ordeal. That night it started....

Intv: Was that heading towards the Battle of the Bulge?

Teel: Yeah, heading up to the Battle of the Bulge. It was sleeting, just like you were reading, it was sleeting and snowing, and I guess there were eight or nine of us in the truck and we didn't have any canvas cover. We just sat there in an open truck. It was sleeting on us, and snowing, freezing. I'll never, never forget that trip as long as I live.

Intv: It says:

The Battle of the Bulge

90th Division moved N on the 6 and 7 January to an assembly area N of Arlon on the Luxembourg – Belgium border with a brand of secrecy and speed seldom seen before.

Teel: Yeah, they covered... you know all of the vehicles had... the 9th Div armored, the 359th, .. the 357th, the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, it was 7, 8, and 9. Anyway they covered all that, the insignia so nobody would know what division we were in. But can you imagine sitting there in an open truck all night long, I mean, sleeting and snowing. It was just unbelievable, unbelievable.

Intv: You were going north, and it was getting colder and colder.

Teel: Oh yeah. We traveled all that night, and next morning we stopped and it cleared. We rode most of that day until almost twilight. And the truck stopped and we got out

right in the woods in the snow. No orders or nothing. We just got out. We didn't know where we were. Luckily there was a building a little way from where they dropped us, so we eight, all of us, went over to the building and it was filled up with GI's. They were freezing too. It was freezing cold and snow up to your waist. So we stayed in that building all night. I slept in a sitting up position. But you could sleep any way. It didn't matter what position you were in, you could sleep. You were so dead tired.

Intv: Let's stop for a little while and take a break. (End of Tape One)

Interview with John E. Teel

October 4, 2001

Tape II Part C & D

Intv: Dad, the next part we are going to talk about is the Battle of the Bulge, 9-29Jan 1945. It says that the 90th Division moved north the 6th and 7th and assembled near Arlon on the Luxembourg/Belgium border, and that everything was very secretive.

Teel: Right. All the insignias were covered by tape, even our lapels, "T&O" - the Texas & Oklahoma patch was even covered so no one would see what division we were in. Anyway, we got that afternoon about sundown off the trucks - snow up to our waist. Nobody gave us any orders. Now these were the runners. So I spied a building over to the left of me there so we went over to that and it was filled up with GI's. It was taking shelter. I went in and went to sleep that night just sitting down. You couldn't lay down there were so many soldiers. But it was a little warm because of the body heat. I bet there were 30 or 40 soldiers in that small building. The next morning we started out through the woods there - through the snow. We walked all day through the woods. We didn't run into any enemy fire or anything. But right at sundown there was a little farm house there, and the Battalion Commander was there and said, "All you runners come over here and stay with me tonight 'cause I might need you." So this was..a picture ..this building must have had a picture window cause it was all blown out. The shell had hit in the center of the living room, so there was a hole down in there. That's where the Battalion Commander had his radio and everything. It was dark by then. There was a bunk over there so I took that bunk and lay down to go to sleep. Then early, early that morning, about 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning someone yelled out, "D Company Runner, come here." And I said, "Oh me." He starting talking about it...you couldn't use a radio, he didn't want to use the radio. And they didn't have any wires - telephone wires stretched, so it fell back on the old runner. He wanted me to go and bring up the mortars.

Intv: You mean to go and tell the people with the mortars to come up?

Teel: Yeah. To lead them back up to where he was. And he said you are going down this road about a half a mile or so and there is a crossroad, you know, as you came up there. I said, "We didn't come that way, we came cross-country." We didn't come across a road. Anyway, he said you will come to the crossroad and take a right, and you will find them in there somewhere. And I thought, "God, it was cold and snowing." But that road I was going on had been traveled right much by some tanks and trucks. So that won't so bad.

Well, the first thing I ran into was a rifleman right in the middle of the road dug in – really a foxhole. He was standing up. So I faced that rifleman. So I gave him the password. A password was life to a runner. You got to give that or they could shoot you if you couldn't give the password. So he let me pass. I went down about twenty or thirty feet and I was looking right down the barrel of a dag-gone tank gun. So a tank was challenging me. So I gave him the password. Well I looked around cause usually your tanks are going to be at a crossroad. But when I looked to the right and it was just snow – the field – just straight across. There was no road there that I could make out. Nobody had been up that road – no tracks of any sort. So I didn't know what to do.

Intv: Did you ask the guy in the tank?

Teel: No. I walked on down the road a way. I said, "I've missed it somewhere." Then I heard a jeep, a motor vehicle coming. It was a jeep, and I got out and thumbed it. I thumbed that jeep down. It was a "D" Company jeep. That was luck, wasn't it? I told him I had a message for the "D" Company commander and he said, "Hop right in. We are going right down." So I jumped in the jeep and road on back to the company. And I saw the Company Commander, so he got a jeep and jeep driver, and he drove me on back to the crossroads. And by that time the Battalion Commander must have realized that I got lost or hit or something, that I hadn't found the mortars. Anyway, so I guess he had radioed finally as a last resort. But I don't know that. But anyway, the mortar-men were coming up. They were already at the crossroads. So I just fell in with them and went on back up to ? But I didn't see that Battalion Commander anymore, but nothing was said to me cause they knew that I kept going, I didn't stop. They knew I did not stop until I got back to the company command post. So I carried out part of the orders, I just didn't make that correct turn. So that was one of the highlights. The next day, next morning, one of the lieutenants said we were going to jump off this morning. "This is the attack to close the bulge, to trap the Germans down below." And he said, "We don't know what we are going to run into." But anyway, we moved on up to the main road, and that day was almost like a movie. Tanks and "TDs", Tank-destroyers, multiple-50 machine guns, I mean tell all that you saw on that road. infantry-men and planes flying over. It was really something. We moved on out with no problem. We knew the Germans were just through. They were finished. I remember that - I remember that was quite a picture. All that equipment moving forward and falling in with them. That was really something. So after that most of it was just traveling and running into some spontaneous fire here and there - on up to the Rhine.

Intv: Let me go through some of the dates here so we don't skip anything.

Teel: It's hard.

Intv: I know. If I go date by date, you might remember some things. So the Battle of the Bulge, you didn't really get involved in any kind of the heavy fighting?

Teel: No, not where I was.

Intv: You were primarily with the movement of equipment

Teel: Right. The Germans threw some artillery at us now and then, because most of this was rolling hills sort of like Asheboro. But then you had some ridges, the hills would come up like this, with trees along the line. I was running along one of those ridges one day and a shell came over my head. It went right over my head and on down into the valley and exploded. But the concussion threw me to the ground, but luckily there was snow. But I really hit the ground hard. But the snow prevented me from getting hurt or anything. That was one thing there. There was a soldier in a hole there and I looked around to find a hole and he was in it, so I couldn't get into the hole. So I got caught on that ridge there and got knocked down. The rest of it... After that the convoy moved on out and finally closed the gap to seal off the Germans in the bulge. The rest of it was moving on trucks.

Intv: The next part it says:

The Siegfried Line 1-28 February 1945

During the month of February, 90th Infantry Division and its normal attachments fought their way through Germany's West Wall in vicinity Habshied – Pronsfeld. February was a month of conquest – conquest of dirty weather, cold, heavy snows, concrete and barbed wire, and stubborn enemy groups committed to a “do-or-die” effort to hold the West Wall. Over 500 pillboxes and log bunkers had to be captured and destroyed. 3,195 prisoners were taken. 25 tanks and 13 SPs guns were captured or knocked out, plus quantities of miscellaneous enemy materials. The Reich was entered; the West Wall had been cracked.

Through the Hills of Eifel 1 – 10 March 1945

After bitter weeks of vicious fighting, the Division began a rapid advance in pursuit of a wildly retreating enemy who fell back in rout before the surging weight of American forces. The Division route of advance, Schonecken – Kelberg – Mayen, brought its forces abreast of the Moselle R 40 Kms SW of Coblenz.

Intv: Do you remember any of that?

Teel: There were so many little ole towns. All I remember about it was the mud and snow. The trucks were getting stuck. And they parachuted supplies in one time. That was right interesting. They parachuted supplies into this – really it was just on to the Rhine. In my particular section where I was – one soldier doesn't see much, just what's in front of you – you're not covering a tremendous amount. Whereas a mile away they could be fighting tight and you aren't involved in it. But we moved on up to the Rhine, and spent one whole night. They already had a bridge across. The 50th Division made the initial crossing of the Rhine at Mainz. So we just sat there all night. There was just one German

piece of artillery which shot a shell about every 15 minutes, but that went on way back of us. So we just sat there in our trucks until the next morning and then started crossing that pontoon bridge. You know, that's a wide flood plain there. It's about 4-5 miles.

Intv: I've seen it – it's huge.

Teel: And those little houses on the other side were just a hovel of smoke. The airforce and artillery had flooded that little town. I don't remember the name of it. We got across that and across the flood plain. Most of the city, the people, had their white surrender flags. They had already prepared for that.

Intv: Did you actually go into the city of Mainz? Did you see the city?

Teel: No. Just the remains of it. That was at night. The next morning we crossed the pontoon. We crossed the Rhine River went on across the flood plain to the next little city. Those folks already had their white flags flying. So what we would do – the Company Commander would send a patrol to the next city, and contact the mayor and tell him to get those white flags out or else we are going to destroy your city. And I mean to tell you the white flags – those white flags of surrender were all out the windows. It was just something! I went down the streets there and they were just flying – those white surrenders. But that was most of it from then on.

Intv: Were the cities you were going into pretty much bombed all to pieces or were they intact?

Teel: In fairly good shape.

Intv: When I saw Mainz it was pretty much intact. It had been the part of Germany that had been part of France when Napoleon was Emperor of France. All the architecture, or most of it was French, not German, except for that big cathedral. It says here that:

From the Moselle to the Rhine 12 – 23 March 1945

90th Division made its second crossing of the Moselle R 14 March, vicinity Hatzenport – Moselkern. The crossing was made with comparative ease in contrast to the experience of the first crossing in November. From the initial bridgehead, the Division resumed the rapid pursuit of the retreating enemy. The chase for the period culminated with the capture of Mainz and the drawing up of Division forces on the Rhine R in that area, preparatory to making a crossing of the Rhine itself, the German's last formidable defense.

Teel: It was during this time that we lost "Little Lewie." You know I have his little, what do you call it, that his folks sent us, about his funeral and all. (Obituary notice, still in possession of interviewer.) And that could have been the Moselle, I'm not sure. But we

already crossed the Rhine, so that could have been the Moselle. We cross the Moselle twice.

Intv: What was his last name?

Teel: Castrantas.

Intv: Where was he from?

Teel: Oh gosh. I have forgotten now. Up north somewhere. I have that information in my little war book.

Intv: And what did he do for you guys?

Teel: He was a runner too. For A Company. He took a lot of pictures. He was a photographer. He loved taking pictures. And he won't suppose to go on this river crossing. The Company Commander told him not to go, and we went and begged him not to go, but he said he wanted to make one more run. And he made one more run – his last one. We moved on out the next morning in trucks, and we passed by and he was in the ditch – like this. He was a mascot for us. It really made a real sad day for us, to know Lewie got killed.

Intv: And he could have just crossed with you guys?

Teel: He could have stayed with us. We begged him to. And our Company Commander did everything but give him a direct order, but he wanted to go. And that was it. So the rest of the time was a few artillery duels.

Intv: Let me see, as I read through some more of this it might trigger something in your memory. It says the 23-27 March you went from the Rhine to the Main River.

Teel: Maybe that was the river where Lewie got killed.

Intv: It says:

From the Rhine to the Main R. 23 – 27 March 1945

90th Division crossed the Rhine R in trace of the 5th Division at Dexheim – Oppenheim 23-24 March. The advance to the Main R was paced by the 4th Armd Division. Darmstadt fell to elements of the 4th Armd Div and 90th on 25 March. In a matter of a few days, all enemy resistance had been mopped up to the Main R in its zone as our troops came abreast of the River E of Frankfurt – Hanau.

Teel: I remember Frankfurt. I remember Frankfurt on the Rhine. There are two Frankfurts.

Intv: This is Frankfurt on the Main – is that right. I thought it was the Rhine R that goes through Frankfurt. (Looking at map) No, it's the Main. There's the Main R.

Teel: But there is a Frankfurt on the Rhine?

Intv: No, there's a Frankfurt on the Ober. It's in eastern Germany. East of Berlin.

Teel: That's too high up for me. We weren't way up.

Intv: Yeah. You were at Frankfurt on Main.

Teel: So the rest was little towns surrendering and putting out their white flags and surrendering.

Intv: All the way to Czechoslovakia?

Teel: Yeah.

Intv: It says you crossed the Rhine, went through Mainz, crossed the river near Hanau.

Teel: I don't remember any of that.

Through the Hills of Hessen 28-31 March 1945

The 90th crossed the Main R vicinity Hanau – Doernigheim 28 March. From this bridgehead, the unit was poised to continue its history-making mission – the slicing of Germany in two parts across the middle. Following the 4th Armd Division again, it struck NE across Germany via Fulda – Vacha – Schlitz – Zella-Mehlis, the backbone of the famous Thuringen Forest.

Teel: All I remember during that time was riding on tanks along the highway. That was interesting. We were all piled on tanks rolling along the highway. Then we were in trucks. One of the tanks rolled off the road and down the hill. There was a sharp curve and the driver of that tank just misjudged it. I think a couple of soldiers got killed on it. It was on its back when I saw it. Of course they had already got the soldiers out from under it. That was the only incident there. The rest of it was riding on trucks and marching some.

Intv: But never knowing if you were going to have any resistance?

Teel: Oh no. Well that's what you do anyway. "Let's go," so get up and go in the woods or you go up the road in columns until you run into fire.

Intv: So you were surprised that you just didn't run into any.

Teel: Well, we were pretty sure that the German Army was scattered everywhere then.

Intv: They were surrendering?

Teel: Right. They were surrendering by the thousands. And in the town of Mainz where we crossed the Rhine, I helped escort thousands of troops. I just happened to be there and there were just about two or three GI's and all these German soldiers, and one of the soldiers asked me and several other runners to go along with them while they were taking them back to the prison cage. They were a happy bunch of Germans – smiling and waving. Just as happy as they could be that it was all over. As far as the war, when we crossed the Rhine that ended it. That was really it.

Intv: That was the heartland. You were entering Germany.

Teel: Yeah. They lost a lot of equipment and gas because they did not stockpile all their stuff on the west side of the Rhine; they did it on the east side. Then we got so close to it that they couldn't bring their stuff across the river. So they lost a lot of their supplies because they failed to get their stuff across the Rhine. Of course we got word that the war was just about over. And we hit this little town in Czechoslovakia.

Intv: Yeah. We're about to get to that.

Teel: Was it Cheb?

Intv: Let's get to that:

The Split of Germany 1 – 18 April 1945

The Division's long range objective was changed from Dresden to Prague, and it turned SE as the 4th Armd Div continued its advance E. On 4 April, Division elements discovered the hidden gold cache at MERKERS.

Teel: I heard about that. There were millions of dollars – American money. Millions of dollars.

Inventory of the booty disclosed the following: 100 tons of gold bullion, 5,000,000,000 German marks, dollars 2,000,000 American currency, hundreds of pieces of sculpture, and over 2000 famous paintings. HOF fell on the 15th and three days later patrols crossed the Czechoslovakian border vicinity CHEB. Germany had been split by the 90th Division.

Intv: Then it says:

The Advance into Bavaria 20 April – 6 May 1945

The Division advance continued SE, parallel to the Czech border, into Bavaria...

Intv: That kind of going in the opposite direction.

Teel: Remember they are talking about the whole division. There were three regiments, and they were broken down into battalions and companies. A division is spread over a wide area.

Intv: Your group went to Czechoslovakia and then stopped. You didn't go on to Bavaria? That was a different group altogether.

Teel: Not until a day or two later.

Intv: A day or two later?

Teel: We did pull out of Czechoslovakia and went back into Bavaria.

Intv: Really? Cause that's a long way.

Teel: That where we settled.

Intv: That's a long way. Look at this (referring to map.) Czechoslovakia is here and Bavaria is way down here. Near the border with Switzerland. See there's Munich, the capital of Bavaria.

Teel: Amberg. Do they have Amberg on there? (Spelling it out.) That was a big city – one of those cities that had a moat around it from Mideaval times. Anyway, we stopped in this little Czech town that was very particular – this little town, and we got word then that morning, I reckon about 10 or 11 o'clock that the war was over – the Germans had surrendered unconditionally. And I mean to tell you, the Czech girls came out in their best-dressed Czech costumes – really, really nice, and a lot of the GI's were on their knees. They may have been saying their prayers, being thankful, as I did too. They were hugging the girls. One of the girls came up to me and I hugged her, and I didn't take my helmet off and banged her in the head and knocked her back.

Intv: Now tell me. In Czechoslovakia, didn't you stay at a chateau?

Teel: Yeah. We left this little town – Cheb – the next day, and went back to a beautiful chateau in the country. The man looked like he was about sixty-five. He could really speak the king's English – perfectly, perfect English.

Intv: Was that in Herschau?

Teel: No that was in the country-side of Czechoslovakia. We were still in Czechoslovakia then. They had a lot of slave labor. Of course, they were all released then from the farm. But one of the runners was a Polish-American. And let me tell you, he could speak Polish as clearly as English. One of the ladies there that looked after this young girl was a Polish girl. They made right good friends. We talked and associated a little bit during the day. We only stayed there one night. But this chateau had this big staircase with deer-heads and bear-heads. Man I really thought that was something!

Intv: So you went inside this big chateau?

Teel: Oh, yeah. Well, being this friend, this other runner, that was a Polish-American was right in there with them. Of course he could speak Polish fluently. Anyway, that's where I went in swimming. The next day this young girl, she was about 16 or 17; and this lady who looked after her who was Polish -she was about 25 or 26, about our age. So buddy and I and these two girls went down to this lake, I mean it's cold there. It's chilly. So my buddy said, so and so, this girl is going to put on a bathing suit. "She's going to put it on right there. So don't look at her." I said, "Ok." And I didn't. I was a gentleman. Anyway, she got her suit on. So I said, "What am I going to do?" So I took my uniform off except for my long-johns. And I took my trench knife and cut the legs of the long-johns to make them short to go in swimming. When I stepped in that water, it was just like stepping in ice. I said, "Oooohhhh, I can't." She was out there swimming around and just laughing at me. I never went in that water, I started in it and then I backed up. I tell you that was cold. I reckon the Army would court-marshal me for cutting up my long-johns to make a bathing suit out of it. Well, we got a big laugh out of that! Well, anyway, we left there and went on to Amberg, which is in Bavaria. I stayed there just a few days and then D Company's 1st Sargeant came up in a jeep and said, "Teel, come on, we're going back to the Company." So we went on back to Herschau and I got back with my company. But that was the oldest man. Well, not right then, because in a few days the men who had been in the company ever since they had left the states, by their high numbers – by how many year they had been in the division, came home. So I didn't have high enough numbers or enough points, so I was the oldest man after these other fellows left. And then I was a friend with the mail clerk, and he was one of them who was leaving. And I said something to him, I said, "Well, I wouldn't mind taking over the mail job if you put in a word for me."

Intv: What was his name – do you remember?

Teel: No. Of course he said, "Sure, I don't know anyone else who wants it." Of course, then you sat around and did nothing, except part of the company did go to, what was this name of this city, it had mustard gas dumps, I can't remember the name of this city. I went up there one day and saw aerial bombs and big barrels of gas. Some of the gas had escaped. It was all roped off. One of the interesting things about that – the Americans knew where that gas dump was, but they dropped lots of bombs on the road around that wooded area where the gas dump was. They didn't bomb in it because they would have released all of that gas. The Germans would have thought that we were gassing them. So there were a lot of bomb holes all around it.

Intv: So it was from World War II produced gas. It wasn't from WWI?

Teel: I guess. There were aerial bombs and there were old artillery pieces in the wooded area. That was interesting. Raffenrow, that's it. Sound's like Graffenrow? It wouldn't be in there because the war was over.

Intv: There is something here that kind of interesting. It says that part of your division helped to liberate Flossenberg concentration camp. Were you involved in liberating Flossenberg?

Teel: I was about a block from it. Some of the guys said, "Come on, Teel, let's go over to that concentration camp." Boy, you could smell death. I said, "No, I had seen so much of it." But we saw some pictures of it, with bodies stacked up. Nude bodies. I'm glad..... – in a way I wish I had – it would have been history. Some people said they didn't think that ever happened.

Intv: They couldn't believe it.

Teel: Yeah. They couldn't believe it. But I was within smelling distance of it.

Intv: You know Dachau is just outside of Munich. And I've seen there. It's really tough to go to those places, even now.

Teel: So the things I recall about my little camp in Herschau, which was a German camp. And it was a nice camp - it was an L-shaped camp. It had a parade ground and a flagpole. We had a raising of the American flag which made you feel mighty good. When that flag was flying over we thought about the work it took to get that flag flying there. But when we moved into this little camp, part of it was occupied by a Russian dancing group - the women and men. The Germans had brought them back from Russia to entertain the troops there in Herschau. Most of those men in Herschau were on the eastern front, so these folks never saw them anymore. The people I knew there, her husband was a prisoner of the Russians, and she never heard a thing from him. Probably never did. Anyway we settled down. They put on a show for us there – with dancing.

Intv: You said the lady - did you stay with a family in Herschau?

Teel: Uh-huh.

Intv: What was the name of that family? You used to know the name of that family.

Teel: Mater. Mather. Something like that. We called her Frau Mather. Elsie was one, and I can't think of the other one now. Yeah, I took them a lot of food. Of course, most of the GI's did. They had families there that they looked after and fed.

Intv: In Herschau?

Teel: Yeah, In Herschau. Of course it was a town on only 5,000. It was all women and young boys.

Intv: How did that work. Did you stay at the camp? But how did you have contact with this family?

Teel: Well, one of the GI's introduced me to them. I was sitting in the barracks with nothing to do. I never got out myself. He said that he ran into this nice family that I probably would like. He said, "You would like to help them." So I went with him to this home, and met them and they were nice. There was a grandmother – she called me a shoener chavalier – The Grossmater....(laughing). We had some good clean fun there.

Intv: So it was the grandmother and the wife? Did she have children?

Teel: Yeah. Two children. And there was an uncle there, but he only stayed a little while. He left there and I didn't see him. I saw him several times.

Intv: How young were the children?

Teel: She was about 13 or 14, and the other was about 18. Two girls. And I remember, I think I mentioned to you, one night I popped some pop-corn for them. Of course, they had never had any popcorn. We just filled our bellies with popcorn. And the next day they said it was too much for them.

Intv: It had hurt their stomachs?

Teel: Yeah. They said that they could not tolerate it. I would take them oranges and fruit. They had never eaten an orange before. They said that because of the embargo, fruit wouldn't come into Germany. I took them loaves of bread. One time I took them five pounds of marmalade. Of course, remember the fellow we went to see in Tennessee that time who was a friend of mine, I can't remember his name...

Intv: You mean the "Neighbors?" He was in Virginia, - Roanoke.

Teel: Yeah, the "Neighbors." He was a cook. He'd give me a loaf of bread, this and that.

Intv: You all were pretty good friends.

Teel: Yes. I always had a raincoat. I'd wrap the stuff up in my raincoat and the guard on the gate – there was always a guard at the gate – never asked me what I had there. He probably knew, cause all the guys were helping out.

Intv: Just trying to help out.

Teel: Yeah.

Intv: So how often did you see this family? Did you see them everyday?

Teel: Ah, no, not everyday. Two or three times a week.

Intv: And how long did this go on?

Teel: A couple of months. See we left in December. The first snow – the night we left it began to snow. The biggest snow flakes I'd seen in my life.

Intv: That's a beautiful part of Germany.

Teel: Yeah. You could see the Alps. I used to go back to Weiden, which was the division headquarters, when I was mail clerk, I had to go there once a week to take money orders for the guys. There was a lot of gambling. I would take the money and get money orders to send back home. Various things like that. This particular road we would take – see I had a jeep assigned to me and a driver. I didn't do any driving. Anyhow, you could see the alps in the background and the snow.

Intv: How did you manage to get a jeep and a driver?

Teel: Because I was mail clerk. I had to get to division and do business back there. That was the best job I had there as mail clerk in Herschau. Of course, that's all I had to do. And I'd get the mail sorted out and given to the fellows and I was through for the day. I didn't have to do anything.

Intv: So you could enjoy the countryside.

Teel: Yeah. I didn't have any other duty, so I was free every night.

Intv: So how did you spend your free time, when you weren't with the Mather family?

Teel: Well, I played football – things like that. We kept busy doing something. See I didn't have to pull any guard duty. We still were on guard duty. I'm trying to think of some other interesting things. Well it was just routine- nothing really outstanding. Except it helped you to have something or someone to go to. Although they spoke German and didn't know any English, but we used sign language and things like that. We got along pretty good. And just when we were getting ready to be issued winter ice-skates and skis, we got orders to leave.

Intv: And when you left there, where did you go?

Teel: Went back through Switzerland; went back to France on trucks. On the Mediterranean Sea, I can't remember that town. Anyway they told us to stay in camp because there were lots of Communist sympathizers in this town and they didn't want any unpleasant instances. So we were pleased just to stay in camp there cause we knew we were getting ready to go home. The camp I was staying in – they were named after

cigarettes – I was in “Lucky Strike.” There was “Camels” and “Chesterfields.” But the name of my camp was “Lucky Strike.” We just stayed there for a day or two until we boarded a ship and went on out into the Mediterranean.

Intv: So you went straight on there back to the states? Didn't stop in England?

Teel: No. Just went straight from there to the North Atlantic. And there was a storm there.

Intv: And “Lucky Strike” was somewhere in France?

Teel: Yeah. Right - on the Mediterranean. You would see the mountains and those huge hills in Italy. So it was close to Italy – to the border. I mean to tell you, those mountains are way up there. They are beautiful. But we left at night and went through the Straits of Gibraltar. You could see the lights way up there. I so wanted to see the hills around the Straits of Gibraltar. But we went at night so we couldn't see. In the morning we were in the ocean. So that was it, except it was a rough stormy time of it. I tell you...

Intv: And the crossing coming back is slower than the crossing going over.

Teel: Oh yeah. We were on a small victory ship with 5,000 men on it. We had to eat in shifts, we ate all day and all night. When my time came, and the ship rolling this way and that, and up and down. I'd get so sick I couldn't eat. I had to go back to my bunk. When my group got through eating, I'd run up there and get some burnt toast. I lived off of burnt toast for the 4 or 5 days coming across that ocean.

Intv: When you got back to the states, what port did you come into?

Teel: New York.

Intv: And from New York you trained by to Wilson?

Teel: Yeah.

Intv: You got discharged in New York City?

Teel: No, I got discharged at Ft. Bragg. We went right through Wilson. It was right after Christmas, and the Christmas lights were on. I wanted to get off that train so bad. But we went on to Ft. Bragg. That next day I got my discharge – or that afternoon. Then there were 4-5 fellows from Wilson that was in the group and we talked to some taxi driver who wanted 300.00 to drive us from Ft. Bragg to Wilson. After we couldn't make a deal with the driver. One of the fellows was Willie Horne. I said, “Well the train comes through here. Let's check on the train.” There were about 5-6 of us. We went over to the train station and the ticket clerk said that the train would be here in about 5 minutes. Wasn't that luck? So we bought a ticket for about two dollar and boarded that train and came on to Wilson.

Intv: Got back in about an hour and a half?

Teel: It didn't take long. I had my duffle bag on my shoulder. I got on Douglas Street, remember that alley run off of Douglas Street that ran to the Police Station? Just as I got into the alley here comes a police car. It was Ray Hardis, Claude Fulghum and 2 or 3 more. He said, "Well, It's John Teel." Old Ray stuck his head out and said, "Don't you want to go with us. We just got a call down East Nash Street." I said, "No Sir-ree, I'm going home." I went on to the station there and Mr. Garris was on duty. It was later hours. After greetings and all I went on up and took a shower up the stairs there. I called Dolly. George Oakley, one of the highway patrolmen, happened to come in. I said, "George, how about running me by to pick up Dolly up at the Nurse's home." He said, "Sure thing." So George and I picked up Dolly and went down to Mom and Dad's on Daniel Street.

Intv: And what was the date, do you remember the date?

Teel: It was latter December.

Intv: So it was sometime between the 26th of December and the 1st.

Teel: Yeah. And that was it. But I'd like to go back, because I thought of some things that happened along the way that I'd like to mention. One was back in France. The battalion was on the move. We were marching up a road. And I saw a Frenchman up ahead and he had a bottle that he was giving to the men. When my turn came up, he was giving out wine. So he was pouring wine in a glass and giving it to the guys as they passed by. And it was good wine, too. He probably hid it from Germans all these years. I looked up at the column. It had been straight. I looked up again and it was waving. (laughing). Company commander came up and said, "What's going on here." We said that Frenchman was giving them wine. So they cut that out. But that was really funny. Seeing that line begin to waiver.

Intv: He must have had a lot of wine to share.

Teel: Well he had. Plenty of bottles of wine and sharing it with us. The other thing, I don't think I mentioned that shrapnel that tore my uniform. I think that we were still in France, and we had moved into an area of a dry creek bed. And it wasn't quite dark, but it was evening. **(End of Side C.)**

Intv: You were digging your trench?

Teel: Yeah. It's called a slit trench. You could lay all the way in it. In a foxhole, you dig down and you can stand up and your waist and head are above it. But this trench you lay down in so the concussion can go over you. I had dug my hole there and by that time it was night. The other fellows were digging in too. After awhile, I was just about to fall asleep. I could hear a shell coming from way back – you could hear it. We knew it was

coming right in on us. So I was laying on my left side. That shell hit a tree right above me. You know when a tree burst, there's no protection from that except you have some shelter over your head. My arm went numb for a moment. I shook my arm and it was all right. There was no pain, so I went on off to sleep. The next morning, when I got out of my hole there, some of the fellows said, "Teel, what the world happened to you?" I said, "I don't know." I looked down at my uniform jacket and it was just ripped all to pieces. You just couldn't believe how that piece of shrapnel had gone round and round and ripped that thing. It had even cut my underwear some, but it had not touched me. I had one little red mark right there, just a little red mark – no blood or anything. And I almost fainted. I think I had one of those survival candy bars in my pocket. It cut that in two. But it hadn't hit my skin. Wasn't that something?

Intv: That was probably several pieces of shrapnel. Not just one.

Teel: Yeah. That's true, cause it was just ripped all to pieces. So I went back to the aid station that. And they said, "Golly. You mean that's all you got – that one little red streak?" He said, "Well, I can't give you a purple heart for that cause there's no blood. Take your trench knife and cut it. Get some blood and I'll give you purple heart." I said, "No. I don't want a purple heart that bad. I'm thankful that's all I did get." We got a good laugh out of that. I went to the Company Commander – I went and told him what happened and he was all big-eyed too. He thought, "What in the world!" Did you get hit!" He wouldn't give me a jacket. He said, "No, I'm not going to give you a jacket right now." And when the new replacements would come up, he'd call me over there and he'd want the new recruit to look and he'd say, "See how close you can come to getting hit." So he used me as an example that you could get it and still not get hurt. It was just unbelievable. After about two weeks he gave me a new jacket. But I tell you I will never forget that. It was hard to believe. Of course two men were killed in there by concussion. We checked it out the next morning. They got in there late and were getting ready to dig their hole, but it was too late. Nothing hit them, there was no cut or anything – just the concussion from that shell. Of course that was a big shell, cause it came from way, way back. Anyway, and then, not only that, all of a sudden after I got out of the hole, we were standing around talking and got a volley of bullets hitting the trees all around us. That's quite a sound – bullets hitting a tree! The Germans were right up the same creek bed that we were in. But apparently we didn't know it. We'd slept there all night. But they emptied their rifles at us and then left. Cause it just hit up in the trees. They moved on out, and later on that morning, these "Packer Cubs" – small planes were artillery observers. . You don't hear much about them, but they were brave fellows. Anything would bring those things down. We spotted some Germans near a house standing around. I was with the radioman. He called the scout in the cub plane. He called for artillery fire to run them away, and they scattered. But that was right interesting – being right there and hearing the radioman calling to the "Packer Cub" pilot. And then he calling for artillery.

Intv: You know something you used to tell me as a kid, I don't know if you remember this story or not, but you told that the night or day that Ellen Raper died, Mom's mother,

that you were in a foxhole or a bunker or something, and you heard someone call your name.

Teel: Yeah. "John...John...John...John....(fading away).

Intv: Whose voice was it? Mom's or Ellen's.

Teel: I don't know. Yeah, I've told Mom about that.

Intv: And that was the day she died?

Teel: As best I can figure.

Intv: Isn't that something! And how did you find out that she had died? Did you get a letter?

Teel: Yes.

Intv: Did you and mother write a lot of letters back and forth?

Teel: Yeah. I guess at least once a week. It was called V-mail. I don't know whatever happened for those letters.

Intv: They'd be nice to have those. Now you went in as a Private. And then didn't you become a Corporal?

Teel: Yes, when I became mail clerk at the end of the war. Yeah, because I was satisfied as a runner.

Intv: Did you get more pay for it?

Teel: Maybe a couple of dollars. Not much. That's where I made friends with Ralph Dumford from Ohio, who came down. He and I bunked together in Hirshau in camp. He looked after the concession stand. And I looked after the mail. I didn't know him during the war itself. I met him after the war.

Intv: Who were your best friends during the war?

Teel: I would say a boy whose first name was "Joe." We went out together to gather eggs. You know, in Germany you could eat off the land. And we just collected eggs when we could. And at night we had a guy who would cook them. And we'd all sit around and eat them. They were the best eggs.

Intv: Do you remember his last name?

Teel: No. I have a picture of him though in my book. Then, Lewie, of course. And there were several more. I did leave out something. When we were in Hirshau, doing occupation duty, I walked into the orderly room one day and "POW." One of the officers was playing with his .45, cleaning it or something, and it went off. He said, "Teel, where did that bullet go?" I didn't know where it had gone. And I moved my foot, and that bullet had gone under my foot against the wooden floor over cement, and ricocheted out the other side of my foot without touching it.

Intv: You had some close calls. I mean that's a close call.

Teel: I could have lost a foot – those .45's!

Intv: I know. And then the bomb exploding in the tree above you tearing your coat. And walking right up to the German machine gun aimed at your chest.

Teel: I mean God and angels were walking with me. But anyway, that Lt. was my friend for then on. He could have gotten court-marshaled for that. But I never said a word about it. Anytime he got any extra rations or cigarettes, he said, "John, come here." We were buddy-buddies. Talk about another narrow escape, the whole division was on the move and everyone was pulling off into the fields and there was all kinds of equipment. It was twilight. At twilight the Germans always sent a reconnaissance plane to see what they could see. We called them bed-check Charlies. We'd say, "Oh-oh, there's bed-check Charlie. We're going to get it tonight." Because all the equipment was lined up in that field. I dug in near a house, about 30 yards from a house I dug my hole to get some sleep. I thought I'd try and get some sleep, cause I knew there'd be bombers coming that night. So in a couple of hours, here they come. You could hear the roar of the motors. And they dropped flares. You know these flares on parachutes – they almost stand still. Any it is bright as day – bright as day. One of the soldiers ran by me. I told him to get down because they would see him. They could see anything moving. We were supposed to be dead silent. Anyway, they started dropping those bombs. All around us. Well it seemed like hours, but it probably didn't last long. Anyway, I went on back to sleep because nothing was bothering me, it wasn't close. The next morning I got up and looked over at the house and there was a thousand lb bomb as high as the house and this big around stuck in the ground. That much of it was above ground – I don't know how much was underground. It had not gone off. It was a dud. I said, "Oh my God, they would have never found me. If that thing would have gone off, I'd have been buried."

Intv: And you were in the house?

Teel: No, I was outside about 30 ft from it. I dug my hole, but that wouldn't have mattered cause that thing would have made a heck of a hole. It was the biggest bomb I had ever seen in my life. Sticking up straight up just like that. And it didn't go off. But that didn't do much damage. But another incident, about the first or second day in combat there, we stopped beside some German artillery pieces – these 88 long shells about this big around stacked in these racks. We were within 4 or 5 feet of these shells. Here come

these 3 phosphorus mortars that are supposed to set things on fire. Landed about ten feet from where I was. They were trying to hit that artillery. They saw us, and they were trying to hit that artillery, and they came that close. Three of those phosphorus mortars almost within arms reach.

Intv: But they did not hit.

Teel: No. They just fizzed out.

Intv: Just about made you wet your pants, though?

Teel: Yeah. You are tight, I'll tell you that. There was a lot of narrow escapes. It wasn't my time to go.

Intv: Do you remember the Neighbor's man up in Roanoke, VA? What was his first name?

Teel: Frank. Frank Neighbors.

Intv: And he was your friend through the war or just at the end?

Teel: Just at Hirshau.

Dolly Teel: And who was that who came to see us?

Teel: That was the Dumfords. That was after the war. They brought their kids. Remember the comment about Yankees? (Laughing)

I only met him during the occupation. He and I had a room in the barracks. He looked after the concession stand.

Intv: How did they handle money, Dad? I mean, you got paid as a soldier, right?

Teel: During the war you just signed a piece of paper. I didn't want any money. You just signed for it. And they just saved it. A lot of it went home.

Intv: They would automatically mail it home?

Teel: Yeah.

Intv: That way it would automatically come to you (referring to Dolly Teel) and you would put it into the bank?

Teel: But during occupation I would keep it and put it in my pocket. It wasn't much.

Dolly Teel: I got a \$10.00 check each month.

Teel: Didn't you get about \$50.00?

Dolly: Then it went to \$60.00. But it was \$10.00/month. Not hardly enough to buy me drinks.

Teel: But you know, you were sacrificing for your country. There was no way they could pay you lots of money. We were taking so much equipment. We were just about feeding England. That's why they were so cinchy on that ship where I got sea-sick.

Intv: Well, you could only eat toast, so it didn't matter.

Teel: This was going over. It was pretty calm. But I still got sick and had to dump my food and had to work detail.

Dolly Teel: I tell you I got a lot of teasing. Every time Dr. Clarke saw an American soldier with a French girl he'd cut that article out and leave it on my desk next morning.

Intv: That's terrible. He should have been put in prison for treason. (laughing)

Dolly Teel: But he did that and the girls would laugh about. But you know, it really wasn't funny.

Intv: But it sounds like Dad was kind of shy and quiet.

Teel: Well I tell you, the only women I had anything to do with was in Hirshau after the war was over with - with the Maters. Going thru France, the infantrymen didn't have much chance to associate with the people. In fact, we won't suppose to. We couldn't confiscate any houses in France to stay in if you had a chance- you went out into the woods to sleep - because we were guests. But when we got in Germany we could confiscate a house to stay in if we could, but we had to make arrangements for that family to stay with a neighbor. We had to do that. We couldn't just walk in and run them out into the street. We couldn't do it. So I think the first Americans, the combat troops, were great ambassadors.

Intv: Did you ever get sick over there, like a bad cold or sick on stomach?

Teel: No. Never. Except one time we fell back for a break. Every once in a while you would get a break. Two battalions would be up and one on a break for maybe a day or two. And I had a toothache, and I told the 1st Sargeant that I really needed to see a dentist. I had a bad toothache. He said, "Catch one of these trucks that's passing by here, and go on back to battalion and see the dentist." He said it was a lot easier. So I thumbed one of the trucks going back and I saw the tent there and the dentist. So I said, "I'll get out right here." And luckily the dentist was there, and I walked in and said I had a toothache. And he yanked the tooth out. And I got back on another truck and went back up.

Intv: You mean he didn't even use Novocain?

Teel: No, no. Heck no! He didn't even warn me. They didn't believe in filling teeth. No, they pull them out. You see how easy it was. I can't think of any thing else right now.

Intv: That's OK, if you think of something else. We'll get it later. I think we have about three hours worth.

Dolly Teel: Daddy, you know that box of all those pictures in it that you took during the war? That might recall some things you wanted to tell him.

Intv: Also, do you have any letters that Dad might have mailed to you during the war? (Directed to Dolly Teel.)

Dolly Teel: I don't know. I don't think so. I only got one and part of it was cut out.

Intv: They censored it.

Teel: Yeah, everything you wrote was. Well heck, you didn't know where you were anyway. Somewhere in France or Germany. That's about all you knew anyway. They didn't tell you anything, hardly. Being a runner you really knew more about what was going on than the average GI.

Intv: Why did they take you from being a machine gunner and make you a runner?

Teel: I don't know.

Intv: Did they think you were real fast or something?

Teel: I don't know. I made real good friends with the Lieutenant. He reminded me so much of Uncle ...the one who lived in Asheboro.

Intv: Uncle Leonard.

Teel: Uncle Leonard. He was built and looked just like him. He was the one who did it. I guess he justIt was more dangerous being on a machine gun than being a runner.

Intv: I guess so, dealing with all that smoke and all. Putt-putt-putt-putt. (Referring back to the slow repetition of the American machine gun.)

Teel: Yeah. Putt-putt. I mean that German one was called a bert-gun. It was just like that too. One day we were going up a road there and a German tank began to shoot at us. You know they are right direct, and the shells were going all over. You could hear them slamming the shell in the gun - we were that close to it! So I was talking to Ira Yelverton about it and said it would go, "Bang! Shooooooooo! Boom!" He said, "Yeah, that was an 88. He knew exactly. "Pop, zing, boom!" They could slam it in there. "Zip-boom!" That 88 was a fast thing!

Intv: And finally, you were in the 90th Division. What company? What's the rest of it, if you can narrow it down for me?

Dolly Teel: 359th Infantry.

Teel: It was the first battalion. See we had three regiments. And I think it was broke down into two battalions. And each battalion had four companies, three rifles and one heavy weapons. I was in Comp D, 1st Battalion, 359th Regiment of the 90th Division.

Intv: Ok. That's what I needed to know. Want to stop?

Teel: Yeah.

End of Interview