

Albert Leigh

Interviewer: I am Tom Edwards with Austin Peay State University and this is Mr. Albert E. Lee, Leigh I'm going to get that right before this convention is over, of the 101st Airborne of the 907 and were you with the glider?

Mr. Leigh: Yes

Interviewer: Artillery?

Mr. Leigh: Yes

Interviewer: Okay and we're going to be talking about his WWII experience of course but before we do I wanted to back up a bit and ask you where and when you were born.

Mr. Leigh: I was born in Cincinnati 1922.

Interviewer: 1922

Mr. Leigh: My father and mother they lived there also but they had been there quite a while and I was the first of five boys and supposable they had a physical problem with me because I don't know what it was. But I had some kind of medical problem and I had to be put in a bathtub I don't know what for but they were afraid they were going to lose me. And I went to through various doctors I guess they weren't anything important to me at that time I don't have any recollection. But my father and mother told me they thought that I was not going to make it. So anyway I did I was the first of five and I was the oldest.

Interviewer: Did any of your brothers have any similar medical issues?

Mr. Leigh: No I was strange I guess but anyway we did alright. But my mother or father either one were rich they didn't have much money. My father worked in John Douglas and a business in Carthage where we were raised. And he was working as a he wasn't a foreman but he was a minor boss in the company he worked for. And he was making not very much money and with five as I said over the years five of us were born and they had a difficult time both of them. And when I got old enough I went to Hughes High School in Cincinnati and well I went through St. Charles first and then I went to Hughes High School. And my father had gotten laid off.

Interviewer: This would be during the depression?

Mr. Leigh: During the depression yeh. And I felt that it wasn't necessary for me to be in high school and them fighting everything especially with my other three brothers the fourth one was in the same school I was in Rodney. But I thought well I went through two years of high school and I thought well I don't feel right doing this and I think I'm just going to quit and go to Formica Corporation or someplace else in Cincinnati and get a job. So I quit of course my mom and dad didn't like that but I said you don't have no money to do anything around here with us five boys eating all the time I said its too much and I just feel right that I've got to do something. So I quit and I put in an application that was advertised in the paper Formica Corporation seeking strong healthy men to work in a factory. Its dirty work and all that but I

said well I've got nothing to lose cause I walked up and down the street and I couldn't find no job. So I got an application or a notice in the paper a couple of days that said report to Formica Insulation Company Spring Grove Avenue in Cincinnati. I said well that's fine I've got a shot so I went down there and I talked to the guy that I guess he was just an interviewer for the company. And he said do you have any physical problems? I said no that at that time I didn't have. And he says are you afraid of hard work and I said no sure I'm acceptable to that. He says you got any other objections you like the dirt and smoke and stuff your getting into? I said no I don't have any objections at all so he says okay when can you start and I said I can start right now if you want me to. Well he says well you go home and change your clothes and come on back down and we'll put you to work.

Interviewer: What was your job description?

Mr. Leigh: It was it wasn't right a way but he said you can work as an extra man with one of the experienced employees we've got and then my job was to become a press operator eventually. So I started working there and it wasn't good pay I mean it was they were one of the cheaper companies I guess. But I had a job so to me that was important cause when I got my pay I gave my mother everything that I had and she'd give me five or ten bucks back and spend for whatever I needed. But we did that for quite awhile and then my other brother Rodney he quit also he wanted to work at a company down town that was oh it was a factory and all but it was I don't know he wasn't in machinery but he was in something like tool work. American Tool it was at that time and he was working down there and I was working at Formica so we began to get things together we had and of course my other three brothers were still pretty young. But then I worked at Formica and then I stayed there for a long time until they called me into service.

Interviewer: During the depression other than of course your father getting laid off did you notice any visible signs that would indicate to you that you were indeed in the depression? Did you for example did you see bread lines did you were you ware of soup kitchens and that kind of thing?

Mr. Leigh: Yes we they had a or at that time we called it charity group in Cincinnati and I can always remember the truck driving down where we lived and I would have to pick up milk from the truck driver and take it in a house. And then we had to pick up great big sacks of potatoes and stuff, take it off the truck that delivered it and I guess bread stuff. I don't remember all of the stuff I was a bit young then and even though I knew everything was tuff for my mother and father I still felt that I didn't know enough. But at least I knew these things were happening to us. And thinking of me and my four brothers I said well we need all of this stuff. And there was other stuff I'm sure besides potatoes but I always remember those big sacks of potatoes. I don't know if that time if they were 25 pound or 50 pound it might have been 50 pound with 5 boys. But anyway re were doing alright we never had no money to spend or anything like that.

Interviewer: But you were eating and

Mr. Leigh: But we were doing alright. And we knew it was difficult for a lot of people besides us. So we were doing alright then this one of the parts I have wound up in by accident more than anything else. But my father since he was out of work and my uncle he got into bootlegging business and my father he

asked my father to come in and we can make some money of this and we can survive cause he had three kids at that time. So he said Billy lets get into this business and we can get ride of this by helping with the alcohol stuff. So I knew about it I was old enough then cause I went to high school and I knew what they was doing and I said you shouldn't be going in that stuff dad and he said Al I have to have the money. You got six kids five kids he said we've got to have something to eat and I don't have a job so yeh I'm going in with Uncle Joe and he's going to do all of the basic work and I'll just help him distribute it. Well then Joe Uncle Joe brought it to the house and we had a what you call a I don't know what they call it now but it was a platform built across one of your mirrors and down in there there was big opening so they put all of the whisky bottles down in there. So I knew all of that stuff was going on.

Interviewer: Were they actually making it from scratch or did they have it somewhere else?

Mr. Leigh: They were making it somewhere else and they brought it to the house I didn't know where they made it. Anyway it was there and then of course dad was he asked me said son now I need a little help in here and he said now I've got certain guys who were older men at that time and guys who liked whisky. So he says there will be some guys coming in here now you be very careful he said they will want just a shot or two. So I said you sure you want me to do this? And he said well you know it's alright as long as you know who you're dealing with. Of course at by that time I did know see the guys coming in and all of that.

Interviewer: How much did you charge for a shot do you recall?

Mr. Leigh: I think it was ten cents.

Interviewer: Ten cents?

Mr. Leigh: Yeh and he said when they come in whatever they want ten cents a shot. He says I've got to go here I've got to go there so you take over I said okay. So I was doing that and I didn't have a whole lot maybe five or six guys not all at one time come in and I'd ask them what they wanted of course if I knew them you had to be careful because there were detectives looking for that stuff. So I said I don't want to make no stupid mistakes or I'd go to jail. But anyway I served them all and charged them ten cents a shot whatever that don't sound possible but it was. Anyway dad came back later and we got along for I guess maybe a week maybe a month. Then I think somebody warned us that the detectives were going to be around they were checking other people I guess doing the same thing. So we said well we've got to be on the lookout for them and sure enough the detectives came in there. And one of the guys I remember his name Steiner he was the head of the detectives there was about three or four of them come in and they said now we are going to get you. By that time me and my brothers we were upstairs and this was on almost on an Easter morning and we were upstairs cause mom was getting ready for Easter. And my dad heard somebody coming up the steps and it was one of the detectives and he said you got five boys in here? My dad said yes and this once detective he I don't know who he was but he was a real nice guy and he was up there checking us out and he came back down the stairs and then detective one went this way one went that way and one was going another way checking for anything that could be used. So anyway this nice guy came down and he went to that place and he lifted up you know where the whisky was the I forget what they call it but it's an extra extension like with a mirror

and that and he checked everything he looked in there. And he said Dewey he says I found it he didn't tell Sargent Steiner nothing he says now when we leave here he said you better get that shit out and you better dump it down the toilet cause I'm going to have to tell Sargent Steiner he said I ain't telling him know but said when we leave you get it out of here cause if we come back we've got you. And so as soon as the Sargent went around checking, anybody see anything, no, anybody see anything, no, anybody get anything, no and they felt so as soon as they went out me and my dad went downstairs (he makes the motions of dumping out bottles) all down the toilet. And after that he said I quit this is too close he said I've got five boys upstairs and we're having Easter coming he said I'm not going to get in this trouble no more. So he told Uncle Joe he said forget it I'm out of it.

Interviewer: Did they come back?

Mr. Leigh: No but they never did well I guess they figured by that time my dad was pretty cool he wasn't involved. I think they might have found some at my Uncle Joe's but I don't know whether they did or not I never heard about that. But that was the kind of scariest experience that I had.

Interviewer: I'm sure it was.

Mr. Leigh: I knew I was doing it I knew maybe at that time I might have been fifteen or something maybe even twelve. But I thought oh man I could go to jail too. They probably wouldn't put me in jail like they do kids now. Anyway my dad said I'm out of it and I said good dad. We never got no more involved after that.

Interviewer: How did your mom feel about this?

Mr. Leigh: She didn't like it either but she said we've got to have some income dad she said we've got to have something. And like I said when I quite school I felt I had an obligation to help out the family because I was the oldest.

Interviewer: And your older brother did something similar?

Mr. Leigh: I was the oldest brother.

Interviewer: Oh the youngest next younger?

Mr. Leigh: Yeh oldest I guess. It was a king of I always say it was a difficult time but yet when people say did you really suffer during the depression I said yeh but I'm catholic and I don't worry too much about what happens. I believe the hey I am a catholic my mother always made us all go to church it was just St. Charles right up the road a little bit. And so you know I thought well we're getting out of this and I had my job by that time even though I didn't make a lot of money. I started out at forty cents an hour.

Interviewer: Forty cents an hour?

Mr. Leigh: Yeh

Interviewer: It was above minimum wage at that time.

Mr. Leigh: Yeh it was but that was it. And I did that for well eventually I got up to I think it was sixty-five cents that was the next raise I got.

Interviewer: Did ya'll have a radio?

Mr. Leigh: No

Interviewer: No okay

Mr. Leigh: So anyway I got to let's see when we maybe I got a year and a half maybe a year and a half working at Formica and then I heard about they was having trouble. And then we heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor and of course we already knew about what was happening over in Germany. Not that we paid that much attention but we knew there was a war on but we weren't in it. And then when Pearl Harbor came why we were there. But it was quite awhile before I got a notice and I was at that time I was playing football and all of that me and my brother Rod and we liked playing football. And I was doing real well until one day we played at Flicker Inn and I was a tackle and I made a pivot to tackle a guy that received the ball and when I did another guy laid right across my leg and when he did I knew right then and there my leg was shot because it bent inward. And I said oh my God I'm gone now and after that I went to a doctor after we got back from playing football and I saw my regular doctor and he said oh my God Al you tore all of the ligaments in your leg. I said what's that mean and he said well frankly I wish you would have broke it and I said what do you mean broke it at least I can walk on it can't I? He said yeh but you are going to suffering because there is nothing I can do with this leg he said all of the ligaments are torn so I said okay but can you give me some aspirin or some medication for it. He said yeh I'll do what I can now and says you can wrap it and all of that and I said what about my work you can't work for I think it was two or three weeks and I said boy that's ruff. But I said okay you mean I can't play football and he said no no you can't play no more football I said well that kills that too so. I did go back to work a couple of weeks after that and I worked there and then I finally got my letter from the government saying welcome you know all this jazz.

Interviewer: You were drafted in other words?

Mr. Leigh: Yeh so I thought well at least they might not even pass me with my knee it was you know what it would do was swell out and if you left it alone and massaged it it would go back. It was hurting all of the time but you could still work with it and do whatever you can. So I thought well I'm going to report to induction and see what happens. So I went down to the induction center and reported in and they examined me. And they said have you had any accidents recently are you injured anywhere? I said yeh I hurt my leg about two months ago and I tore all of the ligaments in my leg and all the guy said was can you do a knee bend well when by that time it was about three or four weeks ago I said yeh I can do a knee bend so I did a knee bend and he said A1. So I'm in the Army.

Interviewer: You're in you got the highest rating first to go wow.

Mr. Leigh: Then my brother Rod he was inducted almost the same time but he wound up going to the Pacific. I went to Europe and he went to the Pacific but then when I got notice to report to Fort Thomas

that was the induction area I guess there was about oh I'd say maybe 12, 15 guys that were waiting we didn't know where we were going to go. But they sat us down and asked us what units we'd like to be in what we'd like to do and all that stuff. He asked me he said where would you like to go I said well I don't care he said what outfit would you like I said well I like artillery but I wasn't thinking of no 75mm howitzer I was thinking maybe a 155 or something like that. When we took off you know they had me marked down artillery so hey I've got something but I don't know where I'm going. We got on a train and went to Fort Bragg at that time I didn't know where Fort Bragg was and we went to Fort Bragg and we pulled in and I was asking the guys who were directing us I said what base is this and he said it's a base where you've got I think he said he didn't say paratrooper he said it's an airborne base. I said airborne what's that mean he said it means you ride in airborne I said well where's the barracks and I said what kind of guns they have? And he said well you've got howitzer I said oh good yeh I'm feeling pretty good. And I said when we got into camp I said where the heck's all the hawletsers at and he said right over behind them huts over there and I imagined like I said 155s or something and I said there can't be any hawletsers over there I said how big are they he said their 75 pack hawletsers I said pack hawletsers I said you know I'm dumb I don't know anything about that. So I said what the heck are they supposed to do? He said well that's the airborne infantry the airborne infantry you mean those are going to go in the plane and he said no those are going to go in the glider

Interviewer: And so are you with them.

Mr. Leigh: I said oh boy I'm in for it now. That was my induction in the Army.

Interviewer: How did your parents respond? Now after his brief stint as a bootlegger did your father manage to find employment?

Mr. Leigh: Well he went back he got called back to work he went back to work.

Interviewer: So this wasn't a situation where you would be your brother and yourself

Mr. Leigh: No we would be providing the income?

Interviewer: Wouldn't be helping great great. But how did they feel regardless of you and your brother going?

Mr. Leigh: Well they regretted both of us leaving because we had to leave basically at the same time. But it they said no get where you're going and take care of yourselves and we'll pray for you and all of that stuff. We said don't worry we'll be alright and of course I wasn't sure cause I thought my knee and this is airborne so well its going to be ruff. But then we was in I don't know if it was a week or two weeks then we had to take a 25 mile hike. And I said man I don't know whether or not I can do that but my leg's feeling pretty good. So we went out about 15, 20 miles out and we had to come back and of course that was really ruff on my leg. This is where Sargent Webber he was my Wire Sargent he was the gun section chief but he was the Wire Sargent and I liked him real well and he was like to me at that time a father figure. Because he was in there I don't know I forget when Sargent Webber went in but I liked him real well. So we were marching back and I guess we were several miles from back to camp and I saw

several of these guys hopping into what they called meat wagons they had you know worn out or exhausted or what so I saw them hopping in these meat wagons and I said Sarge I think that's what I'm going to do. I said my legs hurting me something awful he said you don't want to do that Al I said why he said when those guys get back to camp their going to be put on KP their going to be put on all the shit details around here he says so you don't want none of that. I said okay and then I happen to see I don't know who he was a lieutenant almost half the size I was walking up and down all these guys that are marching saying how you doing soldier how you doing soldier he'd see a guy that was really exhausted he'd say here let me help you with this and he'd put his on his back and he was carrying already one pack. And he walked down some more and I said if that little son of a bitch can do it then I can do it so you know I walked on it. It was bad I felt terrible and when I went back to barracks we flopped on the bed and just like the Sargent said the other guys who hopped on the meat wagon unless they were still physically injured, KP, KP, clean up the barracks do this I said well God is with me so I guess I'm blessed that way. But that was my initial experience in the Army.

Interviewer: When what was your first trip up in a glider like?

Mr. Leigh: I'd say well it was several weeks I guess because they had to let us know what glider riding was. And they told us I think we had to go down to Fort Pope or somewhere because they didn't have any gliders at Brag. So anyway when it did come I don't know if it was three or four weeks or what but we had you know regular basic training in the mean time. But when we got to ride the gliders they said we'll ship you down to Fort Pope or wherever it was and we'll take you up in the glide and that's the first time I saw a glider then.

Interviewer: First time you'd been in a plane?

Mr. Leigh: Yeh yeh and anyway I think there was the first time I think they might have had maybe five or six of us in a glider. And when we went up you know we was taking off we didn't go very far very long but we went up and a lot of the guys got sick they got sicker than a dog. And I didn't you know I it was a funny feeling but I wasn't sick or anything thing in fact I enjoyed it not that much but I enjoyed it. And we flew up and I said this ain't bad but at that time I wasn't concentrating on an invasion or anything like that. But we went around it wasn't too long but we'd fly around I field I guess and then we'd come back and then he cut lose and then he'd glide in. it was real smooth and of course they were making it that way they didn't know what we had when we went in like but.

Interviewer: You weren't trying to land on a hedge row?

Mr. Leigh: No

Interviewer: Or through a hedge row.

Mr. Leigh: But it was nice I enjoyed it but a lot of the guys didn't they were sicker than a dog. And some of them said I want to get in the paratrooper I don't want to get in this damn glider anymore.

Interviewer: During the training were you normal situation at least going into a combat drop in the glider correct me if I'm wrong but you would almost you would have team of two gliders. One would carry the keep and some men and one would carry the hawletser.

Mr. Leigh: Yeh

Interviewer: Did you train that way or did that only come

Mr. Leigh: That came I was in the wire section at that time I wasn't into the batter you know we had A, B, and headquarters I think was our battery. I wasn't in there but I was training to operate with the phone between the batteries you know. So I didn't relay get into to any of the tying down of the 75s or the jeeps or whatever but all I had to do was take care of my wire I was in a wire section and you know part of the that group. And so it that was part of my basic training other than the regular usual drills and that worked out good for my leg. Except for one time when I as in Brag I was playing basketball I shouldn't have been but I was playing basketball and I dribbled down and one part of the floor we called it was real soft sand and I was dribbling the ball and I went up and when I came down I said oh shit my knee when I said oh darn it. They carried me off said you've got to go to the hospital I said its just my knee it will be alright just give me time to you know right. He said no you twisted that damn knee I said okay so I went in the hospital then I told Jack he asked he said what have you been doing out there. I said I had this I had that he said you've never been with us I said no I've always been with caught in something I didn't technically cause but that happened so I was in there I think two or three days my leg was blown up like a balloon. And the outfit moved out they went down to Tennessee maneuvers.

Interviewer: Up in Springfield.

Mr. Leigh: Yeh and I said of course when they got ready to turn me out of the hospital there was nobody to be found I mean nobody when I got out of the hospital. And I asked the Captain I said where am I going to go Captain I can't go back to the barracks there's nobody there you want me to clean up some barracks or something and get ready for him. He said no let's see what we can do for you he said where do you live? I said Cincinnati, Ohio what do you want to know where I live for he said well its going to be at least ten days before they get back how would you like a furlough? I said hey that's right hey I'll take a furlough yes sir. So he said okay I will right you out a pass and you have a furlough to go back to Cincinnati for ten days but you better be here in ten days because we're going to be doing something else. I guess I was getting ready when we went to Camp I can't remember in New York where that was but anyway he said your going to have to be moving out so I said I'll be back. So of course in these days you didn't have these long highways and all that sort of stuff so I went back through Blue Field, Virginia and all these small towns I got home. My mom and dad was what are you doing home are you out of the Army I said no no I'm still in the army I got a ten day furlough. How did you get a furlough so quick? I said I hurt my knew he said you mean you still got a football knee I said yeh and I hurt it they put me in Fort Brag hospital and since my outfits down in Tennessee on maneuvers there was nobody around so the captain gave me a furlough. So I said I'm home so we had a good time at home of course my brother Rod he was still over towards he was probably in Australia over there.

Interviewer: Had you had your parents received any letters or word from him as to how he was doing?

Mr. Leigh: Well in fact I was I had been writing my father and mother and I wrote them if something was happening and what outfit I was really in because they didn't know. They knew that I was possible in an airborne not airborne but in an artillery outfit but I hadn't been able to tell them which one. So then when I wrote to my dad and told him and of course he passed on to my mother and it said I was in the 101st Airborne Division it was a paratroop and glider outfit and boy my dad like to went ballistic. He said you mean you volunteered for that outfit I said no dad I didn't volunteer for it he said well how did you get in there? I said I was inducted in there he said well in the paper here in Cincinnati it says all how did I forget how they said it but all men in this division are hand picked volunteers. He said it says you are a volunteer I said I didn't volunteer I said in fact I'm not in a paratroop I'm in a glider what the hell's a glider I says you go up in a plane when you get where your going you come down a plane that's all I told him cause I didn't want to get him anymore excited than he already was. But we had a great time and the other three brothers that was still home they was all patting me on the back and they would take pictures and all of that. And some of my cousins come to the house and it was a real good celebration but then when it come time to come back I got back real quick and by that time they were coming back in. And then I think maybe a week or so after that why we got on a train and headed to New York. And we got into one of these place where they show you know your going in with the English your going in with the British and you've got to know these languages you've got to be nice to them and treat them properly don't cause any problems in their countries cause your going to be in those countries. So you know that we had to sit and I can't sit real long and you had to sit and they were short trains and I had to pull my legs back like this you know and your I mean those rows I don't know how many of us was in there. But we was all watching the same movie and it took at least an hour maybe a little more I don't know. Anyway when the movie was over everybody started to get up oh shit my knees locked I said oh no it wasn't hurt or anything I just couldn't straighten it out I said oh my God so I had to let everybody get out and I went out to the end of the row and when I got out there I was just starting to do this and it was coming loose. That's all it was it wasn't hurt or anything but it was locked and my lieutenant came down the aisle and he said what's the matter with you Leigh? I said my knees locked I said it's okay I'll be alright he said here let me do that and I should have never let him done it he reached down put his hand behind my knee and went up like that and my whole head just seemed like it was on fire I said oh my I called him a son of a bitch you know it just popped right out of my mouth.

Interviewer: Which Captain was this?

Mr. Leigh: Huh when we was getting ready to go over seas. We was in New York I forget the name of the place we were Jack probably could tell you but anyway I was then it did hurt. It was like lightening had struck. And like I said I called him a son of a bitch I said then the captain that had been in the hospital with me he come down and he said what's the matter lieutenant he said oh I was just helping this kid straighten out his leg. He said you straightened his leg out he said lieutenant the kid just got out of the hospital in Fort Brag he said he had an absolutely torn knee and he got better there for eight or nine days I forgot what he said. But you go out in the street and call an ambulance and get him over at that time I guess the emergency hospital. He said take him over there he said he's alright he said lieutenant get out there and get an ambulance tight now. He went out and got an ambulance right now so he went out and got an ambulance so I went to the emergency hospital. And like I said it wasn't hurt that bad it

was just that initial shock I guess but I was laying there on the bed and this lieutenant come in and I pointed him I said get out of here lieutenant I said I don't want to talk to you. He said let me explain something I said look you already messed me up I don't want you to mess me up again he said I'm not going to touch you he said I already talked to the Captain. And he said I made a terrible mistake and I'm sorry I'm apologizing I said okay you apologized now get out. He said let me finish and I said okay finish and he said I thought honestly thought you were trying to avoid trying to get out of joining the army. He said now I can do that for you I said hey I don't want to get out of the army I want to go with my unit. I trained with them I know most of the guys and that's where I wasn't to go. He says now you can get out cause I can put on here excuse you out of the army and get you right out I said lieutenant forget it I'm not going anywhere he said okay I'm sorry and he walked out. But you know at that time I was still mad I thought well I don't want to get out because I was beginning to really like the outfit I knew most I had gotten acquainted with most of the guys and like I said Sargent Webber I really liked him. And I knew I would be in the same section but not in the same battery because he was one of these in the gun section and I was in the wire section so that was my first incident after the hospital.

Interviewer: So then you eventually piled on to the transport neighbor all Indian crew wonderful food from what I understand.

Mr. Leigh: To be honest that was one of the things that concerned me because I heard it was Indian or England ship but then I heard there was Indians on so then I went and asked the galley I was kind of checking things out and so help me God those Indians they were cutting meat on the galley floor. And I looked at that and said oh my God I dint want to eat none of this crap. And I said what am I going to do now and I asked them if they had a PX on the ship and they said yeh so I bought me a tin of corned beef about this big and I ate that all the way I lost about 16 pounds.

Interviewer: You never ate the meat?

Mr. Leigh: Well I ate the corned beef but none of anything they had no. And I like I said I lost weight when I went over there cause I couldn't eat nothing else except that corned beef. And maybe I think they had some little crackers or something but other than that I never touched none of their food. Then when we got to well when we went out and we had

Interviewer: Had some damage?

Mr. Leigh: Had a boiler break and had to pull back into port at St. Johns. Then that was really terrible well we had wasn't for me woken up to Fort Pepperell kind of up on the hill and we stayed there you had to take turns from the ship a certain group would go up and stay there for a week then come back down then another group would go up and come back down. In the mean time all of those guys that had eaten all that stuff from the scrap neighbor those poor guys were down in the hole they were vomiting they were it was coming out both ends and I said man-o-man I'm sure glad that I didn't eat none of that stuff. Because I probably would have been one of them but it was terrible it really shocked me I guess to see how bad people can get sick and it had to be from eating cause there wasn't nothing else that we got into. I saw one guy go down and he was telling the guy hurry up I've got to go he said man I'm still going I can't get I said oh my gosh I'm getting out of here.

Interviewer: That doesn't sound like a fun place to be.

Mr. Leigh: No but

Interviewer: So eventually you ended up in Liverpool?

Mr. Leigh: Yeh

Interviewer: And then what did you do?

Mr. Leigh: Well then we got on I think it was I don't know whether it was it had to be train or some trucks they hauled us down to Bradford Farm and well at first we didn't even go in to Bradford Farm cause we went some place else and we dropped off. And I was on little guard duty and it was foggy as all get out and you couldn't see anybody but you could hear people walking past you. And I heard somebody coming by and I heard some Englishman say oh ya how you doing and I couldn't even see him. I thought my God what's this and he went on buy and then when I got off duty I said this is terrible but we were in like a barn I guess it was because we weren't we didn't have regular established places. I guess at that time they were still setting up Bradford Farm. Bingham House was where the headquarters went and we went to Bradford Farms so when we got ready to go to Bradford Farm well then we was alright because we had a great big open field and barracks on the side. So then we settled down there.

Interviewer: Did you suspect I guess you didn't know yet that on the night of June 5th you would be heading out? And I'm assuming you went ultimately you didn't end up going in on the glider.

Mr. Leigh: No

Interviewer: But you probably assumed you would be.

Mr. Leigh: Yeh

Interviewer: Did you suspect that you would be participating in a giant invasion?

Mr. Leigh: Well I knew there was something big going to happen but we didn't get much information and I surely didn't I knew I figured at that time I wouldn't be in a glider going into Normandy or anywhere else. But yeh like I said I trusted in God I didn't know what I was doing or where I was going or what was going to happen so I said God you've got to take care of me cause I don't know what I'm doing. And that's what I believed really all the way from the begging to the bitter end. But anyway that I took it easy I was just relaxed then like I said Wilber Hilton I was s buddy of his he was on KP and he said hey Al he says how about going into town and meeting this girl for me and telling her I can't make it I'm on KP and all that stuff. I thought at that time I wasn't with no girls or nothing like that and he says will you do that? I said Wilber I don't know any English girls I don't know anybody around here he said she's a nice girl I said she may be but I don't want to get involved. And finally he started calling me chicken and some of the other guys go on in go on in Al. I says Wilber I'll go on in but if you set me up boy I'm going to get you when I come back. So then I did I went in and I met her and at that time of course she didn't know me I didn't know her. But she real black horn rimmed glasses I mean my son calls them

coke bottle glasses and I couldn't really see her eyes and she was very trim and all she was only 17 and I said I don't know what she looks like. So I said Ilene will you take off your glasses she said what do you mean take off my glasses? I said no I just to see your eyes that's all I'm not trying to get smart of anything I just want to see your eyes. Then when she took her eyes off she had nice brown eyes. I said oh man you know she's missing bad so we went out that evening and her girlfriend Gene she was there and she was with Erna Adkins that was Ilene's friend. So we both went around of course I was with another yank and I knew he was in I don't know if Erna was in A Battery or not anyway I knew who he was. So we went around together and when we went around something just clicked in my head you know I really like this girl yeh I really do. I don't know I guess when I go back I'm gonna tell Wilber your out boy and I did I went back and told him and he said you mean you like her that well and I said yeh I said but I had to ask her to take off her glasses she almost killed me. Cause I don't know what she was thinking but she must have been afraid of me or something but I said after I saw here eyes something just happened to me. I tell you Wilber I said I don't mess around with no girl I went with two while I was in Cincinnati when my cousins took me out but I said I only met them that one time . But I said I really like her he said okay okay so from then on all we were doing was going to we couldn't go to to many shows but we went to shows and we did a lot of walking. All the way up Beacon Hill it's up on a hilltop and he and I would just sit down together and look at the view we had a great time and eventually got a little closer and a little closer and I said Ilene would you marry a yank? She said not a redheaded yank I said on I was dumb for a yank I was dumb and she said no I wouldn't marry a redheaded yank so that kind of depressed me a little but well come see come saw. And then she wouldn't never let me go into her house and I always wondered about that so I asked her and it was raining that day so I said why don't you go into your house? She said my fathers in there I said I know but I ain't going to hurt him and she said I know but he may hurt you. I said how's he going to hurt me I had met him before by accident I didn't know it at that time but he was a crippled guy he had a pretty bad leg. But anyway I said well he can ask me to leave if he wants and I'll go I want give him no arguments I don't want to fight with nobody. So she says okay but she said mom and I are going upstairs. He must be kind of strange so anyway I went in and we sat down and we started talking and it was the best conversation I had with anyone over there. In fact we was talking so much that Ilene and her mother came down from upstairs and Ilene said are we going to the show tonight Al? And I had forgotten all about it I said oh yeh I said what time is it I forgot what time it was but we still had time to go to the show so we went to the show. And she said you were talking to my dad so long I figured you never get done and we wouldn't go to the show. I said well you told me he was a hard guy to get along with and I said I didn't find him hard to get along with at all. He and I just conversed about the war and everything else. I said he's a great fellow I said I didn't know he was handicapped she said yeh he was so I said you made a mistake she said you don't know what my dad went through. I said well tell me about it she said well he was in a pub I forget he usually went to two or three pubs but he didn't stay all the time but anyway said he went to this one pub and some yanks were there too GIs I don't know whether they was airborne or what. But he was in there and he told he told the airborne guy or whoever it was that guy that was handing the money out you know giving him the drinks was cheating him he said he's taking too much money from you cause you know we didn't know much about how much English money. So the guy was just putting it out whatever you wanted you know they got so much money in England I guess they've got to count every penny. So the GI told him said shut up old man said I don't care how much he charges I've got plenty of

money and that you know it really hurt him at that time so he was pissed about all the yanks after that. And I guess that's what Ilene was thinking when I came in cause I'm a yank too but like I said we sat down and she introduced me and from then on her mother and her went upstairs.

Interviewer: That's great

Mr. Leigh: And we got along real great.

Interviewer: And you ended up marrying this woman?

Mr. Leigh: Yeh eventually well here comes

Interviewer: Well hello

Mr. Leigh: Pretty much and I did like her very much and we talked about getting married and all that stuff and she said she didn't like the Yang but Oka the Yang but then a couple of weeks later we're still talking and then we started talking about well if we got married how many kids do you want how many kids do you want I said well I'm raised in a family of five and I said we really worked together pretty good I said I would like to have five at least. She said well I'd rather have four I said well we could work that out. But anyway and that's the way we talked we were serious and so I said but I've got a war to go to and I don't know whether I'll come back or not. But if I do then we will plan on getting married and maybe get you to the states she said okay we'll see. That was all and then

Interviewer: And then you went on?

Mr. Leigh: Yeh

Interviewer: And you ended up going into Omaha Beach is that correct?

Mr. Leigh: Utah

Interviewer: Utah Beach okay

Mr. Leigh: Yeh that's where our outfit went. Omaha was the other beaches.

Interviewer: When you landed on Utah beach obviously it was later in the day.

Mr. Leigh: Well that's where another story comes with my knee. We were on the Susan B Anthony.

Interviewer: Yeh and it got hit.

Mr. Leigh: Yeh and I was sleeping down the second or third deck there was about three or four of us in there at the time and you know I sleep pretty good. I don't know whether it's God's will or what but anyway I sleep pretty good and I'd been sleeping for a while and I got up stretched a little bit I said where the heck's everybody gone cause I didn't know anybody had left I went to sleep you know. So I went on up deck and here everybody's gathered alert in one section said where have you been Al I said sleeping what's going on. They said the ship is sinking I saw oh my God. So then they said you've got to

jump off and you know they were the ships were there was we had an English destroyer on the side and the Susan B was here and they were both bobbing pretty well. I said man I've got jump from here to there I don't know cause I'm thinking my knee you ain't going to make it. So we were bobbing up and down and one guy said wait until it gets about there and then jump because it will come up a little bit more and it will be almost flat across. So it's coming up and I was watching and it got about there and I jumped then that thing went down and when I hit that still deck a limey soldier come up said you hurt yang? I said yes sir I am said my knees tore again and I went bam I said oh man. So I didn't get to Gwen when the rest of the guys so they said well we've got to keep you on deck we'll do what we can to your knee but eventually you'll get off. I said when will I get off he said well maybe tomorrow so had to wait at least another day before I even got off the ship. But that time I had to climb down then ropes to get on to whatever that was to take you over there. But I got into the area where there was a lot of soldiers injured, wounded, dead and

Interviewer: Oh that's okay come on through (interviewer was talking to someone) sorry to take over like this. I really appreciate it we'll be done shortly.

Person walking through: I want your card I would like I'll give you that money for the tape but I would like a tape of all of this.

Interviewer: Oh you'll get a tape we absolutely will send you one.

Person walking through: All of them?

Interviewer: Well no just yours

Person walking through: I wanted the other ones from the 907th.

Interviewer: Well maybe we can work something out.

Mr. Leigh: But anyway when I went into the beach and they told me there the said we'll send you back to England get your leg taken care of. And I saw a guy there and he had either two or three bullet holes in his neck. And he was asking for some water and I said I couldn't give him in any water and he was begging me and finally one of the medics came up and said no water said he can't have any water cause he was shot where if he got water he would drown.

Interviewer: Yeh sure

Mr. Leigh: So he said but we'll take care of you I said just forget it where's the 907 gone he said well I really don't know but there's an MP up this crossway. He said go up where that MP is and then he'll direct you from there so I walked up the crossway to the MP and asked him said where's the 907th gone? He said I think they went up about a mile and a half up the road up there so I said okay so I went up there. Then I was looking like I told Tom for Sargent Floyd cause I was they didn't know where I was so I was going to report to Sargent Floyd. So I went up to where the guys were and I said where's Sargent Floyd they said Sargent Floyd he's gone. I said what do you mean he's gone did he get killed? No, he was in a fox hole and wouldn't get out they said Sargent Floyd back in Fort Bragg he was a tuff

man cause he had been an Army man before and I thought he's a tuff guy so he's a strong guy. I said you've got to be kidding me he said no he's gone we don't know where he went but he's gone. I found out later from John last night when we was talking down in the hotel and he said all the lieutenants and I guess Sargents and everything else was talking about what did he call him Floozy. Floozy is no damn good he's a I won't call him a coward but anyway he was letting everybody do the work he wouldn't do any work and he was supposed to get out of the fox hole but anything he could do to get out of work he would. So I didn't no more worry about him and for that I was back home for the rest of the time so. And that you know like I told John I said you got out of everything I said well it's God's will it wasn't mine. That wasn't the thing I was looking for.

Interviewer: So you didn't have to you didn't have to go to Market Garden?

Mr. Leigh: Yeh oh yeh I went to Market Garden oh yeh. We went up to Market Garden like they said it's going to be a quick thing you know but I didn't believe in the General for England. But anyway we went there and we went into Ian covert why that's the first time I really got in a glider when we went into Ian covert. And we took off from I don't know what that base was back in England but anyway they well in fact before afterwards a glider crashed in England. I guess you heard about that.

Interviewer: Yeh

Mr. Leigh: And Wilber Hilton was one of the guys that got killed. So anyway I took off and I thought I was on a bunch of ammunition just me and the glider pilot might have been one other guy in there. But we were on this glider and then when we come into land we didn't really have any trouble but we came in to land and we landed pretty softly and from there we went to find our different positions. But that's why I say the man upstairs was protecting me anyway that was my entry into Holland. And we all I did after that was get the wire sections and everything done and my phones hooked up and figure out where the batteries were but we was in there a total of 72 days. And the only real incident that I had all the time I was in there really wasn't nothing to do about the Army except that the Germans we firing these 88 howitzers.

Interviewer: Oh the 88s

Mr. Leigh: And you had to be careful with them and anyway we were having chow and I think we had a stew that day cause I like stew that was the first real meal we were getting. So I went to where they had the stuff laid out and I was coming back and I was carrying it in my mess kit that stew and I was really enjoying that stew even before I ate it cause I knew that's what I was going to get. And I got part of the way back and a heard a whip bam and I hit the deck my stew went all over the place and here I was laying on the ground my stew out there. And you know thinking about that 88 that just crashed in the tree right above me and I was just thinking about my stew and God damn it. I was madder than hell because I lost my stew and then I looked up and what is that up there I pulled a piece of shrapnel out of the tree right above my head I've still got it at home it's about that big. And it was shrapnel thank God I didn't miss that stew at all. And boy that could have hit me right in the head if I wouldn't have dropped. And I said man alive I said father keep protecting me I know I don't deserve it but keep protecting me.

Interviewer: He had been doing a good job thus far.

Mr. Leigh: He sure was.

Interviewer: So after Market Garden after your 72 days you went back to England no no no you went to France and waited until you were called up for Bastogne.

Mr. Leigh: Yeh we weren't expecting to get called up because we were back there rest and recuperation some of the guys went to Paris of course I stayed around and wherever I think some little barracks we had and that was just about all I was doing there just waiting. And then we got the car and I don't think any of us had a whole lot of ammunition or anything else cause everything was kind of we were resting. But then they said you've got to go to Bastogne. And we didn't know where Bastogne was but anyway that's we got on the I call them a ten ton truck and we stank on them and we just ran hot all the way through. We didn't know where we was going well I mentioned Bastogne we may not have even been told but we knew we was going somewhere. And it was in a hurry we knew we was getting in trouble but what and I don't know how many miles we went and we had an open road all the way just straight through waving us through. And we got close to Bastogne and then we knew where we were because the guys coming out part of the 28th division.

Interviewer: They were retreating as you were advancing.

Mr. Leigh: Yeh they said where are you guys going? Of course all of the guys we're going into Bastogne. You don't want to go there we said that's where they sent us and I guess some of them made their little bravo they said hey we're going in to kick their ass I said something like that. I of course I didn't talk that was cause I was still respecting my savior but anyway we went in there and the guys someone said well my son Mike said why didn't them guys pick their stuff up and go back with you? I said hey this is a full retreat for this outfit and they were young guys too they had I read it later in one of the magazines they were pushed in there because of the quite area they didn't expect no trouble either. And when you haven't been in the army very long and suddenly your hit with tanks and everything else coming right straight at you why yeh I imagine you get scared at that.

Interviewer: Absolutely

Mr. Leigh: So I felt sorry for them but we were in there and then from then on it was just a battle placing our guns wherever they would give us the most fire or best fire. And the only other thing I remembered is we were in a barn a big barn had a big barn like it was an out house it wasn't an out house but it was a big barn somewhere I guess they maybe raised hogs or chickens or something else. But my fire mission was right in said you know we had the phones set up and the wires connected and everything else and the battery was outside and I got a fire mission and at that time there was a German bomber coming over and he was dropping bombs but the guy couldn't here it the concussions. And I knew he was coming seemed like right overhead so they called a fire mission and I said where are you at and they said we're in the I guess like a castle down in the basement and I said can't you hear them guns going off and them bombs dropping? And they said yeh but this is a fire mission I said all of my guys are outside not my guys but all the guys are outside and your down in the trenches. I said there's a bomber coming right

over our head so I'm hanging up and I'm getting out in the trench with them. So they said okay and I put the phone down and I started to go toward the door and I tripped on some wire of course that I'd laid out there and I went flat. And the door boom and I said oh my God I almost ran right straight into it I said

Interviewer: Boy I need to get in touch with your guardian angle.

Mr. Leigh: I swear I praise I'm a Catholic like I said I believed all my life and I guess he rewarded me from the time I was a baby or I was sick like I told you about. I said you sure took care of me there cause if that wire hadn't tripped me I don't know I probably would have been gone and may not have even knew I was gone. But I said man that was horrible cause I went out and looked and said man was that gone I was imagined that I guess I was shocked I didn't know what to say or what to do. I didn't know whether to go out anymore or just sit there and think. But I said man thank you God again that was it you know it's not a where your right up against infantry or something like that but to me that was a real personal experience I felt and I said man alive God's sure taking care of me I hope he ain't got a bitter destiny for me later on because we still had to go to the rest of the war.

Interviewer: Sure

Mr. Leigh: But anyway we got through that and after all of the Bastogne stuff we was settling down pretty good then we had a simple detail the wire section at least the wire section I don't know where the battery went with us to Noose Germany it was right across the boarder and we were just in a small place so it must have been just a wire section with us. I don't think we even fired any batteries from there and it might have but it might have been maybe the 321st I don't know. But anyway I was reduced from a not reduced by my job was no longer needed so they made me a mail man. Whenever mail come in I would go around pass them around all that stuff I said man this is good duty. Anyway right after that I think Sargent or Captain Bigalow came down and he says Al draw you've got to draw a card and I said draw a card for what? And he said just draw a card so I drew a card and I think it was either an eight or a nine and he said these cards are for somebody we've got I think one card for the whole battery or section he said only one but he said if you get the right card this will get you on a trip I said okay. At that time I really wasn't sure what kind of trip I really got but and at the time I really had a bad cold I was really feeling punk even though I was glad I wasn't in combat I was feeling punk. Well he said by now I'm going to tell you one thing you better sharpen up and get ride of the cold or you ain't going. So I went to find Kelly who is our medic and I say Kelly you got nay aspirin or something? He said yeh I said give me a couple of them and he give me about five or six I took them drank them down the next morning I went in I had on the best that I had and he I got the card. And he said this trip you've got three choices you go to the Riviera in France and I said well I'm not really interested in that, you can go back to England, I said oh cause I was thinking go back to Ilene and the last one he said the last one you can go home. I said go home you mean I can go to Cincinnati? He said yeh I said that makes a tuff choice and it did.

Interviewer: Sure

Mr. Leigh: And I said I haven't been home for three years I'm going to have to take the trip home. Then when we left I didn't know we was going to stop at South Hampton and when we pulled into South

Hampton I said oh my God I'm only 50 miles away from Newberry. And I had a tuff choice then because I really did think about saying well I don't want to go home I want to go to Newberry. But I didn't know whether they would let me off or not so I'm going home so I went home. And I got a big welcome 30 days worth.

Interviewer: Wow

Mr. Leigh: Then from there I went to Camp Buckner that's where the next orders sent me and then from there I went to Jackson Barak Louisiana. Then I heard that the 101st had come home and were disbanding and I'm thinking what am I doing down here in Jackson Barak Louisiana? And I said the war in Japan is still going on and I already heard their taking guys off furlough and just ship you off to the East or the West. But then my bronze star come in and my medal for my Army come in and I had 65 points and the Sargent or whoever it was come down and said you've got 65 points your out of the Army I said oh yes!

Interviewer: So then you went home?

Mr. Leigh: Yeh

Interviewer: This time for good.

Mr. Leigh: For good yeh. Then it took me a long while though before I finally got my wife over here from or my future wife but then I had to thank Senator Bob Calf for that because well he and his Cincinnati Citizenship Council because I guess between the both of them they made it possible. The rest is history ten kids.

Interviewer: Ten kids my goodness. Well Mr. Leigh I appreciate this interview again I think you big time.

Mr. Leigh: Thank you for doing it.

Interviewer: It's my pleasure.

Mr. Leigh: Like I said I'm not ashamed of anything or anything like that and I wasn't a hero like John said you were just a guy that was the luckiest ass I've ever seen I said I may have lucky but you knew and I knew that the man upstairs directs us where we're going to go I said (tape ended).