

Okay Mr. Plemmons go ahead and tell us your full name.

Mr. Plemmons: I'm John J. Plemmons

Where were you born?

Mr. Plemmons: I was born in Ashville, North Carolina.

Can you give us a little background of maybe your home life there in Ashville, North Carolina?

Mr. Plemmons: Well my mother was a widow and I just grew up and went to high school there. I was in there and I graduated at the age of seventeen in 1941. I'm sure everybody will remember what happened on December 7, 1941, or they would have been bothered by Hitler, Mussolini, and all these dictating things that we were afraid they would be over in our country. So when Harold Heto got into it on the other side everybody was really knowing we were going to have to defend the country that we had. I was never interested in becoming military before that, no.

What was your birthdate?

Mr. Plemmons: March 8, 1924.

Since we have already introduced the military a little bit what got you interested in the military, with the exception of World War II already beginning around you when you were seventeen. You had just graduated high school and here is Japan bombing Pearl Harbor the same year.

Mr. Plemmons: I knew I wanted to get in some part of the military but I didn't know what. Of course back in those days everybody wanted to become Air Cadets, which was the glamour part to become pilots, bombardiers and navigators. I was going to apply for that after I got in; you had to wait until you got in. Meanwhile this came up as a civilian type thing and they actually paid you for going. I forgot what it was but I learned to do radio repair work. When you would join the Army Reserve or go actively into the Army, they would get you into the Signal Corp and this would automatically guarantee you to get into radio repair work in the Signal Corp. Little did we know that it didn't work like that. All they were doing was lining you up and keeping you into

the Signal Corp and then they pulled you in as they needed you for whatever particular jobs that they had.

So backtrack a little bit, you enlisted....

Mr. Plemmons: I enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserve so we could complete this course that they had. I wasn't old enough to get into the reserves at first because until they started drafting people at eighteen; I was only eighteen. They were drafting at twenty-one. They stayed in there and one day while we were in there they said, "How many in here are between eighteen and twenty-one?" We all stood up and they said, "Well they passed a law today making you men." So they said, "Either you sign up right now for the reserves or you are no longer eligible to serve in this radio school." So I signed up for reserves along with everybody that did at that time. We are still proud of the fact that we did enlist; we were not drafted. Your Army serial numbers on that take, if you enlisted started with a one; if you were drafted it started with a three. Mine was 15373032. I will never forget that number. It doesn't mean a thing now.

After you enlisted, go ahead and tell us, did they send you straight into basic?

Mr. Plemmons: We went to Camp Crowder, Missouri. There were two major Signal Corp training camps. Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, which was the permanent camp and then this huge city and it was built up in Camp Crowder, Missouri, around close to Joplin. We took our basic training there, we went through that. As a matter of fact, I spent just about all my whole Army time that I had in this country. I went through basic training and then they gave us different tests for the different schools that they had to get into. In one of them, and we had been warned, they needed a lot of radio operators. They said that if you don't want to be a radio operator, they will give you this thing in code and you compare that and you would turn it over and they give you the same test on the back; which they don't tell you they are going to do. But word gets out so you deliberately messed up a few. So that is what a big part of us did. Meanwhile they had gone ahead and put us in radio operator school and we had gone through and we had to pass seven words a minute in order to go on ahead or whatever they were going to do and we just didn't do it. We just deliberately goofed off. So they got a bunch of us that they called down and interviewed one of the others. They got a hold of me and said, "Okay, you were in a high school band for four straight years and played trumpet?" I said, "Yeah!" They said, "Uh-huh and you are trying to tell us that you are tone deaf and can't tell one signal code from another and I noticed over here that you studied typing. If you type what you have to do when you get in a high speed course and you can't do that." They got us together after that and said, "Now look fellows, we will give you until tomorrow to pass seven words a minute. If you don't we need cooks and bakers, we need phone line construction and did you ever think what a nice target you would make swinging from the top of one of those babies from a thing like that

and we need truck drivers!" The Army was very funny. Just because you knew how to drive they wanted to train everybody their way. We had one guy in our outfit that was a pilot. Do you think he could get in the Air Corp? No! He wound up a PFC in the outfit that I will tell you about later on that I got into. But anyhow a whole bunch of us went back that same day and passed those seven words a minute right then and got in. Later on they must have decided that I was doing pretty good in that because they advanced me to high speed radio operators training which you have to start using typewriters some because you have to get up to twenty-five words a minute and nobody can write that fast. After that for some reason or another, I don't know what, I was assigned to radio intercept operator school where we had to learn German code or we had to learn Japanese code. I was lucky; I got in the bunch that had the German. We finished that and then they shipped us to \_\_\_\_ Farms, Virginia, which is right outside of Washington, D.C. Most people don't know there is such a place there. That is a huge Signal Corp thing. They call it farms because they got big beautiful barns; the roofs of the barns are made out of stones and so forth. Inside each barn they got all these radio set ups that could pick up German field nets all the way, believe it or not, in this country by using different links of wire on the thing and getting on the ones they had and we were trained in that for the intercept. Then they took a bunch of us one day out to one side and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) came down there with a Sedan, Plymouth Sedan, and they said, "We are going to teach you how to use mobile direction finding." Of course we had never heard of such a thing. I want people to know that if you decide that you are going to suddenly start operating a radio somewhere without having a license to do it, you will be nose to nose with a FCC man in less than a day. It's amazing how quickly they can pick a clandestine station up, which is what we were being trained for. They trained us in these Plymouth Sedans they had going around into town. It looked like a regular Plymouth Sedan with a place on top that you could put the loop antenna. You didn't put it in unless you were actually running somebody down. By sitting inside the equipment and by turning making an azimuth where you didn't get a sound, they could take that line and on the map along with the lines of two or three of the other cars and where they crossed is where the station was. Then they got equipment where they can track you right down. If it is in a hotel they could track you down to what room it is with this equipment that they got. That is what we were in training for. Of course in the Army you never know what you are or where you are going. But anyhow they picked thirty men out of the outfit for this particular training. We didn't know where we were going back in those days. They shipped everybody on convoys where a slip of the lip could sink a ship so nobody knew where we were going or anything. We didn't know until after we got on the boat that we were going to England for further training over there and I thought that well that was lucky at least we would be speaking the same language.

So you never had to really endure anything but this type of training. You never had to go through like a common basic training course?

Mr. Plemmons: Oh yeah, we got nine weeks of basic training before we got into our field training. Everybody is required to do that. You go out on the maneuvers; you go out in the field

and stuff, all nine yards. You go down under live machine gun fire and under barbed wire just like the infantry does. We had to do all that first and get that out of the way before you could be put into these specialized schools that the Signal Corp had and still does.

So now you are fixing to.....

Mr. Plemmons: Now we are in this camp up there and an interesting thing that they had up there, it was an awful thing as far as living as bad as anything overseas, they had us in six-man tents and there was some snow on the ground and all of that. You would get up in the morning before daylight and get out on the boardwalks and try to run through the snow to where you had to fall in for roll-call. I'll admit that it didn't take us too long to find out that we could send one man in and he could holler, "Here, here, here!" We did get to stay in a little bit later that way. We were looking down on the list one day and they had a list of people who were put on KP or on guard duty. They had some of us on guard duty. This guy said, "Hey you go and tell them that they can't put you on guard duty. You are CD-4." I thought, "Man this is great!" They went down there, everybody did so they pulled everybody that was off these other duties, "You can't do that, we are on CD-4." A day or two later I thought, "What is CD-4 anyway?" They said, "That is casualty detachment four." I said, "Oh, what happened to casualty detachment three?" "They are already gone!" So you can see why they couldn't use us and we did get to go to Washington on passes and stuff like that up there. When they shipped us over, they wouldn't put but five at one time on any one boat for obvious reasons. If that boat went down they would have the rest of us trained on what they were doing. So on the boat we sharpened up our skills a little bit and we got to go up in the radio room with the Navy radio operators because we were radio operators and just one at a time of course; it was a very small radio room. But on the way over an interesting thing happened. We were on Liberty ships. Those are the real small ships where they have like a hundred and something men that they are shipping over plus the crew of course. There were like five of us and five of other different outfits of either finance and some of them from infantry and other things. They had some new tanks that they had below deck that they were shipping over. On the Liberty ship the cargo is the bigger thing than the men. One of those babies got loose and made a whole in the side of the ship. From all of this and by the way the radio operators up there, when you are in convoy don't get to use Morse code and radios. They have to shoot by lights between ships because don't forget submarines can pick up a radio signal just like we were doing. From our nice big convoy they turned us around to ship us back to America because they were afraid that we wouldn't make it over there. So again, since they can't use radio equipment or anything, what they were doing, they were taking a radio signal from somewhere in New York, I don't know where, sending it out and from there they were taking azimuths from that on where we were on back to find the path where we were going. Other than that they would have no way of knowing where we were going. As I said we could go up there one at a time. One of the fellows was up there one day and this guy was showing him on a map where he was plotting a thing for the azimuth that they had to get the ship over to where we were going and the guy said, "Hey, wait a minute! You are ninety degrees off. You are

forgetting to take this ninety degrees....” After all that was our business, we were not just radio operators, we were intercept operators. If we had gone on the way that the guy on that boat was doing we would have wound up in South America; who knows what we would have done. Either we would have made it, I don’t know. Anyhow we got there and they sent us back and were in New York for several days. We got to go to some shows and things but we had to swear that we would not call home. They all knew that we had gone. Somewhere, we were on our way someplace, but we had no idea where and if had called them now we couldn’t very well tell them that we were on our way to England because we were and you can see why we couldn’t let that get out. We were sworn to secrecy on that. We got back on the same old boat. They welded her up and fixed her up and we got on the same boat coming back.

Where did you go to when they sent you back? Where did you dock?

Mr. Plemmons: I was so glad we were being shipped to England. At least that was a place where we could speak the English; we knew the language. We went over to South Hampton, England, where they took us on and they had a bunch of limey deckhands that came on board and I couldn’t understand a word those guys were saying. They were speaking English but the way they were saying it was nothing like we had ever heard. But anyhow we got from there and then we; like I said we didn’t know. We were the only group like this that they had that they had fixed together for this purpose of picking up clandestine radio stations. They knew that when they went on the continent in Paris and places like that that there were going to be snipers and radios left over. Meanwhile we were working on field nets and we did intercept some field net traffic over there. We got over and trained with the British Royal Signal Intelligence thing that they had and they showed us then how to use the equipment that they had like the FCC had done with there, they used station wagons over there that they just painted the windows and took coal so you couldn’t see in it. They would hide one of those and would train us how to pick them up and how to; they had this little snifter they called us that we could walk right on in and see the guy eyeball to eyeball while he was still operating. It was very interesting because they knew that we were going on a continent and we were going to need something better than those Plymouth Sedans that they trained us in over here so they sent us over in for what they called a carry-all in those days. Little did we know that was a four-wheel drive four runner; the fabulous SUV that they got today. Back then it wasn’t nothing but a glorified truck that had windows around the back. We had four of those. We did have some fun while we were training the ones that were out in staff cars. Of course they were painted an Army color with the staff thing and there were so few staff cars in England at that time that any GI walking down the street would immediately snap to attention and salute it because usually it meant there was a General or something in there. We had more fun. We would salute them back real sharp and then hang those P5 and P4 stripes out of the window for them to see. Anyhow they found out that they couldn’t get those cars to where they couldn’t get the radio signals stabilized. So they got rid of those two and got us two more. We had six of the Signal Corp carry-alls that we fixed in and then they found that the equipment wouldn’t work at all and the people in England said,

“Well first of all you can’t use those loops on top like we have got.” So they took wood to put around there to make a frame around and then got big wooden boxes. It looked like we were carrying boxes. We put them up on top and one of them was hinged to where you could get inside and take that loop out and go down and change loops for whatever you had to do and then they would put ropes tying them down; which really didn’t tie them down but it looked good. They painted the windows like they did on there’s and used the comb to where you couldn’t see in and couldn’t see out. They took all the inside furniture out and they got us little bucket seats from the junk yard. Everybody over in England had bucket seats. So we got those to put in and the equipment that the Signal Corp sent over there, we sent out to send over to an office. They had interesting things like recorders and radio equipment that wouldn’t hold up for when we got on the continent and out in the woods and stuff like that. So we used the equipment that we should have put in and then those were all fixed up. They found out that since we thirty men weren’t going to be attached to a unit, we had to have an officer.

Tell me more about that. Tell me more about there were only thirty men?

Mr. Plemmons: Only thirty men in our outfit, right. We would be attached to a headquarters that we didn’t know we would never see. We never did the whole time we were over there. We never got to go there, we didn’t know. We did all of our communication back and forth by radio. All of our shop records and everything; every company has an orderly room. Our orderly room was in a foot square box made out of oak about that high that had all of our records in there. Each group of five, there were six of them, had an orderly room. We had to keep that and protect them and everything as well as everything else that we had while we were on the continent. So they decided that since we were going to be out that we would need an officer. So they got us a very unhappy 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant that was being shipped from Iceland where he had been two years and they told him he was going to be sent to the states. They sent him instead over to Europe. He was in the Signal Corp. He did work pretty well in what we had really. But then they said that we needed to make up three trucks; one to have this field net that was going to go back and forth from England for our everyday orders from over there and then we were going to have to have one for our headquarters and then one for the radio repair part for the equipment that we had. We had one man specialized in that; one guy really got to do it. When we got all these things tied together they made up the bodies out of plywood like I said and covered them with canvas. We looked like a bunch of gypsies when we were going somewhere with that thing on top. We did not look like the good old Army things like you are used to seeing in convoy. We would go in there and later on we did order a jeep somehow so we had a jeep in addition to our other equipment. But that was us and our Lieutenant went with us and he would go back at the Headquarters in the jeep and he would get orders back and so forth, but we never saw anybody. We didn’t know where our headquarters was. The whole thing was highly secret. We could not keep even diaries telling where we were, what we had been; no way you could keep records. It was just highly secret. Ordinarily an Army; in the Army a man is more valuable than a piece of equipment. They will tell you, “If you can keep from being killed, do

that, because equipment can be replaced.” Ours was the other way around. If one piece of one of these radio vehicles had been picked up, it would have done away with the whole thing. In no way were we to have allowed ourselves to be captured. He said, “You can go down and get eyeball to eyeball to the enemy, but don’t get closer than that, get out of there.” In so many words, the equipment is more valuable than you are. That is what we had to remember everywhere that we were going. All through France, well let me back up.

Tell me your first assignment.

Mr. Plemmons: First let’s get over on the continent. Everybody remembers D-Day. You know what D-Day was and all that kind of thing. There were five beachheads; Omaha, Utah, I forget them all. But anyhow we went on Omaha Beach but we did not go over on D-Day. Thank my lucky stars for saying because the poor fellows that went over there... as a matter of fact we went over D+10 or 12 or something like that because we had to get that equipment off with us. I felt really like I had done somebody under for these poor fellows that lost their lives over there trying to take that thing for us. There is no telling at that time what the statistics were and how many were there. But when you would see all these bodies piled up there and all when you were going over, you felt guilty because you know you hadn’t been there to do your part of what it was and here you are getting to go on over after they had died. So we went on to upper France on the train going over, then when Paris was taken, I’m cutting this short for you believe it or not, when Paris was taken they still had snipers in there and they had clandestine radio things. We were probably in the first units to get in there right after the city was taken and the Germans were pushed on further back. That is the place where we sat down and waited to see where we would be quartered. We were going to be quartered, believe it or not, under \_\_\_\_\_ Mansion right off of Champs\_\_\_\_\_ because they had walls about that thick around it and went all the way around. They were so high up we could move all of our equipment in there and nobody could see it. So we got to go in there. Now we didn’t live in luxury. We took our cots in there and lived.

The old Army issued cots huh?

Mr. Plemmons: Oh yes, they took the other stuff out of there before we got there. They did have gold faucets in the bathroom and all that kind of stuff but we didn’t have any hot water though. But we were able to sit in one of these fancy things that had a couple of hundred light bulbs in it and all and you could get in it and dry off with that from the heat of those things. It was nice to be quartered. We were there for quite awhile too because we were running those clandestine stations for them. Of course we never knew which ones were picked up because everything was radioed ahead. We didn’t go in and get any of them. That was somebody else’s job. Our job was to find out where they were. So we were stationed in there for quite a while.

Then we went from there to Belgium. I can't think of the name of the place that we went but believe it or not we were quartered in a monastery there. We lived in a cubicle just like the monks and everything. Their restrooms were just right along inside a thick wall. It had an open trench there going down by it. So we were in there for the same reason. They had acres; I don't know how many. We could use anything back in there. Of course nobody could get in there to that and we did our jobs from there. We went from there to....

On assignments what exactly did you have to do when you all were ordered or assigned something? What exactly did you have to do?

Mr. Plemmons: You were assigned a certain area to go to and to get to. We had maps, as such as they were in those days. Of course if you were out after dark they had these little cat eye things that you saw, you can't use lights over there anywhere on the continent for obvious reasons. You would have to almost have a guy sitting on the front fender to steer you around. They would tell us where to set up, we had to get the angle of the car, the way it was sitting, and take an azimuth on that so that that could be reported back to headquarters. Then when they had from three to six of us out depending on what it was, when we found the station they wanted and it would cut it off. We would take the reading on that. They could take those in our Headquarters vehicle by having a big map on where these lines crossed again and that is what we were looking for. Now everything that we had over there, practically all the German nets that came in were all in code; not just Morse code, they were coded. I couldn't speak German anyway but the ones that were in the decoding department back at headquarters could and they would have to decode these things. Of course it would sometimes take a long time for them to get these things decoded. Again, the guys that did that did nothing but that. That was a full time job. We never saw them. We didn't get that close to headquarters back then. But I do know that there were \_\_\_ had some picked up there in Paris before we left and like I said we stayed there quite a while to make sure that they were all gone. We then went over to Belgium and then we went down to Luxemburg. Now I didn't know until I got home that Luxemburg was the headquarters at that time for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group. Both of these had Signal detachment divisions to them and I didn't know that either. We didn't know nothing, I said back then, I learned all this when I got back home. But as everybody knows the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was commanded by General George S. Patton, who was probably one of the most famous figures that we had over there. We brought this bunch of equipment, we were on our way in sitting in front of the main square in Luxemburg while the Captain (he was a Captain by then) and one of the Sergeants went through to try to figure out where we were going to get to stay and be billeted and so forth. Again, I did not know that this was the headquarters for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army Group and 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group. I was standing there looking at something on one of the vehicles and I heard this voice behind me say, "Sergeant, who does this outfit belong to?" I turned around and looked and there was General Patton over there with these two pearl-handled pistols and everything just like you see in the movies; three stars. General Bradley was over on this side with his three stars and he was the one that had spoken to me. I turned to him

and I said, "They are yours Sir!" because we were in the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group. Now the next thing that bothered me was supposing that he wanted to take a look inside one of those vehicles. He couldn't do it; three stars or no. It was strictly forbidden. I don't think nobody got inside of those things. He evidently knew it; he didn't ask to. I didn't find out they were quartered there, like I said, until after the war. That was just when the Battle of the Bulge was getting ready to happen, right in that part and down in part of Belgium and back in there. We got a new assignment when they came up. They wanted to use our vehicles and let us go out & be out for a week, three at a time and our job then was to get down just as close to the German lines as we could get, intercept all the radio messages that we could, and again radio back in. We didn't know what happened to them after they got there. As a matter of fact, we had one that we had intercepted, like I say they were all coded. This one came through in clear code but we wouldn't have known it. We couldn't have read it anyway that said that this supply train would go through at a certain time and it had so much stuff on it and so forth. The guys back in the decoding thing said, "Oh well, that's just another one of those bogus messages. They may be just nothing." But just to be sure they sent the Air Force over there. It was and they bombed it. They didn't even have time to put that one in code. We found out later on that that was such an important thing. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant from way back in the Headquarters back in way back somewhere got a medal for that even though we picked it up. But that is the way the Army operates. We didn't even hear about that for a long time. But we were very close down there; we saw German tanks and everything.

Did you ever have any close encounters that you all got a little nervous that maybe you were to close to the Germans?

Mr. Plemmons: Oh yeah, we got right down in to tanks and stuff like that. Like I said, we had orders. They were making, if you want to put it that way, cowards out of because we were ordered to get out. They said, "One thing we don't want in this outfit, we don't want a hero! Get out! Get that equipment out where it is safe!" But meanwhile we had to get it down as close as we could because these German field nets on their radio thing were just very small. Unless you had the antennae just a certain length you couldn't pick it up. We had to get as close as we could so we could pick it up.

Could you enlighten us maybe on one of those close encounters that sticks out in your mind that you'll had to get away from real quick?

Mr. Plemmons: Well we just had several when we got down, when we could see German tanks; we knew we were getting close enough to get out. There were a few that we saw actual German soldiers that were down there. Again we had to get out.

But you'll were able just to retreat every time?

Mr. Plemmons: We didn't have any men captured, I am happy to say. We didn't have one man captured; we didn't have one man wounded in the whole situation. We had some men who had to go to the hospital that had maybe for something that they had gotten cut or something like that on. But we learned, "Don't never go to the hospital or you will never get back to your unit." They would send us in some royal recruit that didn't know nothing to replace them.

You might be a machine gunner after you went to the hospital and they would send you back to Rome.

Mr. Plemmons: That's right; you don't know where you would go. After all this is the Army, they can send you where they want to.

That's right! No matter your skills or whatever! So continue on.

Mr. Plemmons: We got on in to Germany and got over, I can't even think of the name of the town there where we were quartered over there, but we were between Frankfurt and Berlin. We got to go to Frankfurt occasionally and in there. We did have some men, not with our outfit but with who our outfit was attached to, that did go over to the front and meet with Russians. I remember they used to take and go out and get all the watches they could find so they could go sell them and trade. You take a good watch that didn't make any noise, you couldn't make much for it. If you had one of these loud Mickey Mouse's or something that made a lot of noise, that is what they wanted to pay big money for. I didn't get to see any Russians over there but we did get to cross the Rheine River that way. We were there when they had all the civilians going across, where they would have them open up their clothes and they would spray them with DDT from head to foot. Of course you wouldn't do that now but back then that was the thing to do. They sprayed them all over there to debug them and all that kind of thing. When we crossed the Rheine, I remember we had to be on pontoon boats. They had already blown the bridges up for the things trying to keep the Germans from getting back any further this way.

So your vehicles would drive on these pontoon boats? Kind of like ferried over then.

Mr. Plemmons: Yes. All the engineers are great. The Engineers Corp that they got over there, everybody had their job to do in the Army. Everybody can't be infantry; everybody has got to

have a job. So without the engineers we would have never gotten across the Rheine River because of the pontoon boats we had to go on.

You had no complications at all going across the Rheine or any other river? Is that the only river that you crossed?

Mr. Plemmons: Oh no, we crossed lots of rivers.

Did you ever have and complications like maybe bad weather or rough water?

Mr. Plemmons: Oh yeah, some of the wide parts of the Rheine itself were a little rugged. You could get a little bit seasick going across just on these pontoon boats even though they are anchored down. They are just anchored with ropes and stuff on the other end at each end of it, so they swayed.

Again, here you are and you are crossing the Rheine River, where were you going?

Mr. Plemmons: Actually we didn't know.

You didn't know?

Mr. Plemmons: We got our orders every day by radio. We didn't know where we would be going.

What kind of orders did you get?

Mr. Plemmons: We would get orders to report to such a place at such an hour. It was our job to get there with maps. By the way when we were doing this down near the Battle of the Bulge, we had a Headquarters. It was a wooden house out in a thing like that out in the snow. It was very deep, I remember. We went down there three cars at a time and in one Headquarters truck. We would be out there for a week and then we would go back in to Luxemburg and then the other unit of three cars would go and they would go to this same place and they would be dispersed out from that then to where they wanted the trucks to sit or how close you wanted to try to get

to the German nets. We saw a lot of Germans; dead Germans, alive Germans, all kinds and unfortunately some dead Americans too. During the Battle of the Bulge, if you didn't have some specialty like we had, they took every soldier and put them in there and handed them a rifle. They took cooks out of there. They took people that were working in the offices as company clerks; they handed them a gun and they sent them in and they stuck them in a hole. I mean everybody that was able at all got in there. If it wasn't for the fact that we were going down and getting the information as we were going out, I'm sure we would have been. Let me tell you just one thing, since we are close to the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne here in Tennessee, the 101<sup>st</sup> was involved in that down there. That was the first place that they went that they got ready to ship them in there that said, "Where is the parachutes?" Well there weren't any, they were using them as ground infantry and taking them in by truck and making them shoot their way forward. I don't know how many of the 101<sup>st</sup> that we lost up there. Of course Bastogne was the bloodiest place that they had up there that they fought in. I do know that the 101<sup>st</sup>, the ones that did get back, the first thing they did when they found somebody that could get to an embroidery shop, had a special patch made that they all wore that said, "The Battered Bastards of the Bloody \_\_\_ of Bastogne" all B's. But we really appreciated people like them that were trained, that did know what they were doing. Then there were these other guys that were down there that they may have been trained like I told you we were back in the USA but not trained for combat like that.

Right. The 101<sup>st</sup> were an elite force.

Mr. Plemmons: Oh yeah. They always have been. In every \_\_\_ we had you would find the 101<sup>st</sup> out of Camp Campbell.

They were an elite force. They did a very good job.

Mr. Plemmons: They were in the jobs over in places like Europe just like the Marines are over in the other theater. The Marines are always the ones on the islands over there that come over and do things like that. They are always the first in there and they are always the first to get mowed down. The 101<sup>st</sup> and there were some other Air Force units, I don't remember the numbers now, that were over there that did this. But again they were very surprised that they weren't taking parachutes in on that. You would think they would still want to shoot them down and I'm with them. After dark or something behind them. That is the way they did D-Day and everywhere else. But they didn't. They needed ground troops because they were holding these areas for Germans. It was a bloody mess; no doubt about that.

In terms of terminal like that, did you ever encounter any American soldier getting to one of your vehicles pretty close or trying to get into one of your vehicles or asking you'll or trying to have a conversation with you all?

Mr. Plemmons: No, not really. They know what their job is and they know it's out there to do that. They didn't know who we were. They didn't know what we had in that vehicle. Instead of trying to ride they were trying to hide I would imagine. I don't know what was running through their minds at that time.

You all, after the Battle of the Bulge, you pulled out and went where?

Mr. Plemmons: Okay, we went into central Germany. We set in eight hour shifts monitoring German stations to see if they would pick up anything of a clandestine nature. It's a shame really at one point because our outfit and the way that it was designed to pick up clandestine stations was really a big part of it over there after the war was over that they were going to need people doing that. By the time that it got to that point they came out with this Army point system and like I said I didn't get to go on my furlough that I had in Switzerland. We were all getting out. We had enough battle points and enough points to get back to the states and we all came back at separate times. But whether they had somebody that followed us up, and of course we left one and two at a time, we didn't get out all together. Don't get me wrong there. Again, you are on an individual basis. We had replacements that came in. The big job that really we were trained for was over there to find them when the war was over.

How did you increase in rank? Were there any promotions in rank for you because it was just here you are.....

Mr. Plemmons: I will tell you where I got my promotions. Where I was training at Camp Crowder, when I got into the advanced training school, they made you either a PFC or a T5 depending on what you were in or what you had to do. A T5 is two stripes like a Corporal with a T on the bottom. I got to be a T5, a technician, or a Corporal or whatever you want to call it. They don't have that grade anymore. The Army doesn't use that now. That was just strictly a wartime thing. So I got that in the states before I got there and then when I got my promotion to T4, believe it or not, I was over in Burnham, England with this fellow from Louisville, Kentucky. We were over and were quartered in a civilian home in Burnham. Let me tell you a little bit about why we were over in Burnham, England; which is right outside of London. The \_\_\_ came through and sent my stripes up and they couldn't believe what the signal thing was. Most of those were Lance Corporals which was one big long stripe like that and I went over there with two stripes and Ed had one stripe while we were over there. I got my T4 promotion which was

three stripes and Ed got his which was two. They thought, "Man this is great!" I'll tell you where they were over there. If you had one stripe like that, they had what they called a \_\_\_ to make your bed for you and stuff like that. You couldn't find anything like that in the U.S. Army. If you had a bed to make, you made it. While we were over there it came through on that, they sent the stripes up to us. While we were stationed in Burnham, England, I will say one word about the people in London in that area. There is a lot of un-favoritism toward the British and all like that, but these people over where we were, every night they didn't get to sleep through any night because the Germans purposely planned this, this away. At 3:10 or 3:15 or whatever it is, bed check Charlie would come over on bombing raids. You would have all these bombers coming over there at night. Everybody had to get up and go down into bomb shelters. So you never got to stay in your bed all through the night. As if that wasn't bad enough, while we were stationed over there with that is when they came up with these buzz bombs. They came out and they are unmanned. They would set them over there and they would go over there and you are talking about something unnerving, when you hear one of these babies goes off, everybody stops and holds their breath. You don't know where it is going to land. You hope and pray that it goes off directly overhead because that means that it's got enough of a glide path that you are not going to get it. If it goes over and stops on this side between you and it you better hit the dirt in a hurry. But those people over there lived through this; all the civilians and everything. They lived through a horrible thing like this and of course they were doing this on these bomb raids before the American Army even got over there. But they had been through that for a number of years and of course they had already been through battle. The British Army did a lot. They did some things that we didn't like; like the only radio station they had was BBC and we could listen to that and they would tell you all of this stuff that the British Army had bombed and so forth and then they would go all the way through and down at the bottom it said, "The US 8<sup>th</sup> Army Air Force bombed all these different places." We were doing all the work but not getting the, you know. Over in England on itself they had very few men anyway. Most of them had been sent to other places and most of them killed before we got there like \_\_\_ and places like that where you lost lots of people like we did in D-Day. The British people went through a lot. Of course they rationed stuff. When they sent us up there they sent us coffee and two or three things that we had with us. We stayed in a civilian home. Both of us slept in one big large feather bed that they had there. We got a little tired of this stuff being had a good bed like to get ran down in a hole in the middle of the night. We finally, I'll admit, stayed there most night in bed. We figured if they were going to get us, they may as well get us. We may as well die in comfort.

You were just so tired and worn out.

Mr. Plemmons: Then when we got back into our unit we were in before, we were going over on D-Day. We were waiting on that then. I've got some pictures in a book that I have got that showed some of the fellows. I wasn't any saint or angel or anything but I didn't just sit around and drank beer. We were equally divided in our thirty men; fifteen from the south and fifteen

from the north. The other fifteen had been trained up at Fort Monmouth and were up there and they were; they are a different breed of people. That is all there is to it. I know we would get there and we would lay there and fight the Civil War at night when we would get together and stuff since we were so evenly split up. We had a lot of fun during the times that we weren't busy doing stuff.

Right, you had to make some kind of joy out of such a bored or ruggedness you might could say. Those were horrible times.

Mr. Plemmons: I'll tell you one little interesting thing we got over there. The thing on guns, when we went over there our issued rifles were carbines. Everybody had one of those things; it's a small rifle with all that type of thing on it. When we got over on the continent, they sent for each one of the leaders which would be the Sergeant in charge and I was one of them. They sent us all what they called a grease gun. Now we trained with Thompson sub-machine guns in this country; we used them on targets. But these things were called grease guns and they were made very cheaply because they are all made out of metal. They look like a grease gun and the handle pulls out and it's got a long clip that you could stand there with one pull of the trigger and you could empty the thing if you wanted to. They used 45 caliber bullets in those things. So I had one. They were so knew when we got over in Europe. The serial number on the one I had was 00037, so that will give you an idea. There is no telling where they were spread out everywhere else. Anyway we had six of them in our unit. I remember one time when we were out, we knew it was just a training thing that we were on in Belgium. We were out there and they had jackrabbits with ears about that high. The way we operated at the time there would be two men inside the vehicle and three men to a vehicle; two men inside and one man on guard duty outside to see if we wanted to get out of there in a hurry or something. But then when we were out there and there wasn't anybody around or something like that, they would take pot shots at these jackrabbits with those carbines. One day one guy was out there and his carbine was way back in the vehicle and he reached in there and grabbed my grease gun and cut down on that rabbit. All that was left was hair when he got through. Since I had all this 45 ammunition and all, I would have given anything for a Colt 45 to carry around for my personal weapon. I wrote back to my brother who was over at the time and my brother-in-law's uncle was on the police force at the time had a Cold 45. It was chrome plated and had stag handles on it. I wrote back and I said, "You know I am over here and I would like to have one of those hunting knives like Uncle George has got. It's chrome plated and has the stag handles." So that got through with all the v-mail stuff and would you believe that he sent me a 45 over in two tin cans, like you would pack a fruit cake in, disassembled and wrapped in oil and stuff like that. Believe it or not I got both of them over there. Normally if you send a cake like that to a place over there, if you got it at all you were lucky.

How did mail work for ya'll because it was all censored and you couldn't give out the location?

Mr. Plemmons: I have got in the back of a book and I will show you what I got here. We sent over what they call v-mail. It was sent over in a letter going through and then the Captain had to read every letter in there. He took scissors and cut it out and what's left is gone over, photographed, sent over here on film and then they had the copies. I've got a couple of copies of some I had sent back then. As far as letters and stuff getting there, as far as packages I mean that is far, far between. For example, my mother was a great fruit cake maker and always has been. She wraps her fruit cakes in wine rags. She doesn't soak them. She just wraps them around there several months before. She sent me one of those things over there, way before Christmas season and when we went into Luxemburg, when we were assigned, we had some houses that we had taken over there that had well stocked wine cellars. Like I said, "Wine in that country is a big thing." I told them I was looking for a bottle of wine to soak that thing in so we could use that thing and we could all get to enjoy it. We went through that and they were dividing the spoils up in the basement down there and they had one star one bottle of five-star Hennessy Brandi. We determined that rather than split that up they were going to give that to me to use for the rags on that fruitcake; which we did. We did that so we got to eat the fruitcake with the brandy that way. You were lucky. I mean when they sent us packages and stuff over there, even if it had been well wrapped it came over in pieces. Of course you hear the old jokes about the guys that worked in the Army post office, one of them is sticking his hands in and saying, "Here you like these kinds of cigarettes? Here is some that came in." Speaking of cigarettes, we drew rations over there just like everybody else. We got one pack of cigarettes a week and two or three kinds of some kind of Hershey chocolate bars that wouldn't melt. I think they were made out of cocoa-butter and some things like this. There was a lot of black market stuff going on selling those packages of cigarettes. What you could get for a pack of cigarettes is unbelievable.

So I take it you didn't smoke?

Mr. Plemmons: I did but I quit.

You quit and then you sold it?

Mr. Plemmons: Yeah. Well I'm ashamed to tell you this. I said I was the youngest; I was still about eighteen at that time. I traded a lot of my cigarettes to them for their candy bars. I always had me a big candy bar.

A lot of that went on. That was the way that, a lot of people could not survive without that pack of cigarettes. Some people wanted that candy you know?

Mr. Plemmons: Well there was a big difference in the American cigarettes and the ones they had over there in that country; even the ones from England.

I had one guy tell me that there was a lot of difference in the food too. He said, "You've heard of Korean food, Chinese food and American food, but you never have heard of English food.

Mr. Plemmons: Let me tell you another thing that happened while we were in Paris. We had to drive all the way to LeHavre. This guy that I told you that was a PFC, he was from Long Island, New York, and had his own plane and all that stuff. He wound up in our outfit, believe it or not. Like I say, the Army doesn't want to train you to do anything your way. It has to be done their way. We were going and drawing rations for one officer and thirty men and he was going up every two or three days to get these. He got a hold of a supply sergeant and he said, "Hey if that is all you got you are silly. On that one officer you put a one in front of that and on the thirty men you put a one in front of that and you are drawing for eleven officers and one hundred and thirty men." I'll admit, we did our part to prolong things in Paris there. Of course we got in with some civilian families in our off time and they didn't have food over there so any food that we had that we could take to them. They could take it and make a meal out of it. The stuff and the way we fixed it was a big difference.

Let's go ahead and jump forward a great leap here toward the end of the war. What were the signs, could you see the signs, did you realize about the war was fixing to come to an end in Europe?

Mr. Plemmons: Okay all through the war our heroes had been the B-17 Es, the big flying fortress bomber. I don't know how many millions they must have had of those things over there. But two days before the war was over there was a little bitty bomber called an attack bomber and the number was 820; 820 attack bombers. I don't think, I don't know, I had but two maybe three men on it, it was that small. But they had already loaded with bombs. Those things came straight over beyond where we were and into Germany. It was just a steady line of one following another and then there was another line going back the other way, back to England, to go over there and reload and turn around and get in the line coming back this way. I didn't know that we had anywhere near that many 820 attack bombers. We knew when those hit that like that we could get ready boys because it's got to be coming. They are going to be around here getting the guys out of the prison camps and all that stuff that they had over there. Like I said they had us on intercept duty everyday which those that did smoke a lot you got to where you chain smoked so you quit smoking anyway. I looked forward to my furlough in the Alps in Switzerland

but I never did get it because they said that I had too many points so they sent us back to a little place near LeHavre and we stayed six

What year was that, can you remember?

Mr. Plemmons: I don't remember now. I guess it was 1945.

It was already in 1945?

Mr. Plemmons: Yeah, by the time they got us ready to go home there were guys that had a lot more points than we had. They had some guys in there, for example, I told you they had five battle stars for that area. We got four out of five. I can't even name the four. I have looked them up since trying to get them to somebody for an article that they had. I do know that the one that we did not get was the Italy-North Africa one. That was all fought before we even got over there. They had some guys that, believe it or not, went through all of that and lived that and they sent back over there and sent them over on D-Day because they had had all this experience. You take somebody like that; they had points that I mean we were puny compared to that. They were gone long before we did. I would have liked to have gone on to Switzerland and that's why when my son and I got this opportunity to go over, we spent eight days. We saw eight countries in eight days and that is counting the United States. We didn't go to England. We passed that one up. But we went to France and spent two days because I wanted to spend a full day at the beachhead scene for all five of those beaches plus the one the French had, plus the one the British came over on. It will get to you when you get up on that cemetery. I know you've seen people that have witnessed things like that in Private Ryan that have gone back over there. You see these guys and this big field of plain white crosses. They will get down and cry. It will get to you. I didn't have anybody in particular in that because we didn't really lose anybody in that D-Day battle. These guys that did, I can see why they get down on their knees and cry like they do. But the worst part of it is, there are just acres of those things. They said, "You see those trees back over there? There is that many more on the other side of that you can't see." You think that there is the cream of the crop of American manhood back in those days that still stayed in that country and never did get to go home. It gets to you; there is no doubt of that.

It would have to. Even someone of my age of never experiencing anything like that watching that on a film as you recalled or seeing that or witnessing that, it gets to you.

Mr. Plemmons: By the way, any GI that goes over there, if you have got somebody that is buried over there and you've got the name and the company they are with, they will look it up and they

will let you go out there. They will take you out to it, I think, to where this particular grave is because there is miles of the things back there. They've got a beautiful thing that they built up out there that explains where the beachhead was and what they went up there and all. There's a big museum near that too that has got American equipment in it and they've got German and French in there too. You could spend days in that thing and never see it all.

Let's go back to 1945. You are ready to come home. How did you find out, who told you? You were not in no specific unit or anything. Who told you that it's time to go home?

Mr. Plemmons: Well you just had orders going in. Like I said, I started in, in Fort Knox, Kentucky, and then they sent me to a place outside of Indianapolis where we actually got our first uniforms. We got the uniforms; we didn't get any training at all. The training we got out there, I had a white shirt that I had to stay in for five or six days because for some reason they didn't have orders for the Signal crew about where they were going. They had us out cleaning barracks and stuff like that asking who could type and you would tell them, "Yeah, you!" and they would see a guy going on with a wheel-barrel full of type-writers. We learned in a hurry that with the Army, don't believe anything you hear. Then we went for our basic training where we were plus our advanced training. I had said that I had wanted to be an Air Force Cadet and I had applied for that. I didn't know until after I got out and was in civilian clothes that back in my hometown was the acceptance for this with a nice letter from the Signal Intelligence explaining to them that they could not release me because they had gone through too much in checking my background to get in the outfit that I was in and all this. So I went to the local drug store where everybody hung out and the lady that owned it, her husband the Pharmacist had since died, said that they came down and checked everybody. She couldn't believe the questions they had come in there and asked. So they said that they had too much tied up to release one. I would have liked to of been in the Air Force but maybe I am luckier this way. At least I got back this way. There were an awful lot of them that didn't.

That's right! Maybe that was the will. You are fortunate to be back here, sitting here and talking you know?

Mr. Plemmons: Like we said, I was discharged in Fort Knox, Kentucky, ever since I went in up there. That is where my sister and a big part of my family were. It came through in December. We went through the railroad station and remember we didn't have airplane traffic like we have now. You were shipped by train everywhere. Everybody went by train everywhere. What is interesting is when we went to \_\_\_\_\_ Farms I told you about, we thought it was real funny because every train we passed every civilian train would pull to one side so we could go through. It wasn't like that coming home. We pulled to one side for all the commercial stuff. They didn't care when they got you home. We got in the railroad station in Louisville, Kentucky,

and it was December 23<sup>rd</sup>. I can remember that because we were going to be home for Christmas and all that kind of thing. They got through and there were several MP's on it and they said, "Look fellows, we realize that a big part of you live in Louisville, Lexington, or around this area, but if you want to jump this train and get off, don't think we are going to be heroes and try to stop you. Let me tell you one thing, if you will go through and get discharged and get the civilian thing, they will guarantee to get you out two days after Christmas. But if you choose to jump the train and go now the first thing that is going to happen to you is you will forfeit everything you have got coming in pay." We haven't been paid in I don't know how long. We had quite a bit piled up so we stayed on the train. I called my people that lived in Louisville, Kentucky, on Christmas Day and got out. So that is how we knew we were getting out. Then when we got out they tried to get everybody to join the enlisted reserve. They asked how many of us have been in the enlisted reserve. A bunch of us did. They said, "Tell these guys how great it is and get them to join up." I said, "No!" I think I finally did. I got to thinking you know, "here we are in Fort Knox, Kentucky. I wouldn't take anything and I really wouldn't for the three years I was in the Army. I got to see parts of the world I didn't think I would get to see again and I got a lot of training." As a matter of fact, my father died when I was young and I was raised by my mother. I was raised without a father and really the Army had made a man out of me. I wouldn't take anything for it. We got to the point where you didn't sign anything. They were getting people to reenlist for three years. They were getting these three year contracts. I don't know about the reserves, but as far as signing your reenlistment papers you have got, I wouldn't take anything for the three years that I was in there, but I wouldn't sign one of these things going back in for three years for all the gold I am standing on right now here at Fort Knox.

I agree, I agree. That would have been a big step. You would have had to stay in that type of situation. You were at this time wanting to get back home.

Mr. Plemmons: Oh, I could have gotten over and gotten the direct commission for the commission for the officer because he was the first one out and I was one of the ones in line for what they had. By the way, I was supposed to have been a Staff Sergeant the whole war through. Like I said, we weren't attached to anybody so I'm surprised that we got the one promotion that we did after we got over there because of some of these guys and some of these bigger companies. We got to wear the stripes on a band but we didn't get to draw the pay or anything like that for them. But I could have gone back over and been the officer on this outfit. A couple of us really thought about that. What we were in was the Army of the United States. We found out that if we would have taken the commission, it's signed the United States Army. That don't sound like much difference. But the United States Army is what you go through like today, you sign into for three and four years at a time. The Army of the United States was at the convenience of the country. You could get out at any time. That is why we were getting out at the time that we got out. I didn't do that to get the pretty uniform.

Can you remember something that happened when you actually arrived back at your home?

Mr. Plemmons: Like I said, I came to Fort Knox and was released in Louisville, Kentucky, where my sister and brother were. My mother still lived in Asheville, North Carolina. I went from there and went back to Carolina. Yes, I can remember because we couldn't get clothes in those days. We hadn't gone through that ration thing. That is one thing about this book of Tom Brokaw that got me interested in looking and finding all about the Army situation I was in. I didn't realize all this rationing and things going on being here. I couldn't find clothes. I bought a sleazy looking top that I really didn't like. But it fit, so I got it. We wore our uniforms for a long time with the ruptured duck of course over the pocket. It was awhile ago and I didn't know what I wanted to get into while I was down in Asheville. I got my first drivers license. By the way, I didn't learn to drive a car until I was over in England. I learned to drive on the wrong side of the road, driving a 6X6 truck, double-clutching and so we got drivers licenses over there. When I came to Asheville, I got my driver's license and since then I just traded them in. I never have taken a driver's test yet. I'm ashamed to tell you that. That is one thing I got out of that. That is one thing I got along with the GI Bill credits.

Before you went in, you didn't have a girlfriend or anything so now that you have come back home, were you well-received by the ladies?

Mr. Plemmons: Yeah!

I know that you wanted to say something about how you and your wife met?

Mr. Plemmons: Well, after I decided that I wanted to get into Pharmacy I went to the University Of Kentucky College Of Pharmacy. At that time it was in Louisville.

Now how could you afford that?

Mr. Plemmons: Oh ok, that is what I was going to say. I wouldn't take any time for what I had done for the country or for what it had done for me. When I got to go to college was what I call payback time. I went under the GI Bill. They paid not only my full college tuition and all but also the books and the lab equipment. Of course the Pharmacy uses a lot of chemical equipment. They even paid for our breakages of lab equipment if you break a beaker or something it went through on your GI Bill. That took well good care of me. Now some people weren't in long enough to get the full time they had. I was. I went all the way through and I had a few months

left. I was even tempted to take up flying or something in the latter part but I never did. In order to get in school at that time there were so many service men coming back and going to college that it was tough getting in at that point. So particularly in a specialized field like Pharmacy was and I went down to Pharmacy school and talked to this nice old lady who was a registrar and she told me that the best way to get in was to start working at a drug store fast. So I went down to this T.P. Traylor Drug Company which was a chain and then I went and applied there.

Now where was this at?

Mr. Plemmons: In Louisville, Kentucky.

So you moved to Louisville, Kentucky?

Mr. Plemmons: Well I went back to Louisville, Kentucky. Like I said, my brother and my sister still lived there and my sisters family were there and all. So I went back to Louisville and went back to Taylors and applied and was accepted at one of their downtown drugstores. While I was there, there was a young lady I've gotten to know very well since then; also at that time was put into the drug department of this same drug store I was in and she was also in cosmetics. She was trained while she was there to do cosmetics, order cosmetics, go to these cosmetics schools; not what Taylors had got but with other companies like Revlon and all these people. She was very good in that so we met there. We worked together and one thing led to another. I will say one thing, that is one thing that I got on my payback time that I got from Uncle Sam, not only my education but by winding up there and finding my future wife that I had. When I was able to get my own drugstore and in those days it wasn't long like now anybody that went to Pharmacy school visualized of having his own store. You didn't do working in chain stores like everybody is doing now. By the way they would be crazy not to do it now. They've got a lot better benefits of borrowing money and being up to here all these years like we were.

Go ahead and tell us your degree. What was your degree?

Mr. Plemmons: Bachelor of Science that I got in to start with in Pharmacy and then we started taking continued education which I still have to do. By the way, I still work. I still got my license here and in Indiana too. I started doing this continued education and we piled up enough hours that we now have a Doctorate of Pharmacy that comes with it. The students that go now have to go long enough; they have to go longer when they get that Doctorate of Pharmacy when they graduate before they even have to do continuing education. I will say one thing for my wife getting back to that though, after we got our drug store we went to Paola, Indiana, which was a

county seat town and bought this drug store that had been in existence for about over a hundred years. I would have never been able to have run that drug store without her. She did all of the book work that we did and turned that all over to an accountant who wanted to do our work and write our checks and do all that. She said, "No she would do it." Not only did she do that but she did everything out front in the drug department. The education she had had going to all these different cosmetics schools, she took right up to that and continued doing it. She continued going to school after we had the drugstore and went up there. Up in \_\_\_\_\_, Indiana, there were three major counties and we were in the county seat. The other two counties, both had for some reason or another, drug stores that the owner had and their wives were also Pharmacist that they met in Pharmacy school and married and went in. Consequently, when we got there everybody assumed when we moved in that way that Jean was a Pharmacist as well as I was. She worked with me in the prescription department quite a bit and she worked with me so I could go home occasionally and eat and get back in. We didn't have any other full time Pharmacist there. I was the only one. We just used relief Pharmacist. But she did all this and like say ordered all this. She would have people that would rather she fill their prescriptions than me. They didn't care about that hunk of paper hanging on the wall back there. They knew she could do it and went through and kept all the Pharmacy records and who was allergic to what and all this kind of thing; long before it was required to do like it is now. I will say one thing; she didn't keep from raising our children doing this. Anytime they were in school, she came down and she did her book work and stuff like that and she also had a filing cabinet of desks and all that at home. Our kids did not stay there without a mother. When school was out, she went home with them. After they grew up and years later they came down and went to David Lipscomb down here then she came into the store of course and worked full time with me and the situation there. I wouldn't want anybody to thing that that took anything away from our children. I got two fine children out there and I got a great wife. When you get down to it, I can thank the Army for that.

That is what I want to ask you. The experience in the military, is this helped you to be successful and also in life and in family. Also, your experience in the military helped you with the GI Bill; you got to go to school. Do you credit the military for a lot of this?

Mr. Plemmons: Oh yes, definitely! It's a thing and like I said I'm sure I would never have gone to college. I know wouldn't try and do that right after getting out of high school. My mother was a widow and I didn't really have any idea what I wanted to do. I had wanted to work in drug stores, even back then I had applied just as a soda jerk. Back in those days they brought it out to your car. What do they call it? You sit in your car and order all of your sodas and stuff and they would bring it out. I even tried to get into that. I can thank the war, the Army and stuff like this. Like I said, I don't begrudge the three years I was in there. If I had it all to do again, yeah, I'd go back and do it again. When you see what happened to that country over there and how everything over there was bombed, how all the buildings in all these countries, France, Italy, Germany and Belgium; all these places. When you can see how these people had to live and had

to live under a dictatorship and how they had all these horrible things locked down at Dachau and places like that getting rid of the Jewish race that tried to get this super race. Had he gotten over there in this country, Hitler would have certainly I'm sure carried with that too. So yeah I would have gone back and done it again. But then like I say I called that payback time because my college education is worth I don't know what to me. I'm sure these other GI's didn't want to take advantage but they could do other things. They could borrow money to go into business. They had other things they could do. A lot of people got their homes that the government covered the thing and they got them on a low insurance rate, what they called a GI loan on them. GI of course meaning government issued. There were various other things that could be done. I have never been sorry that I took mine and my college education. I even considered very seriously about going on to medical school after I got out of Pharmacy school. But for a guy that had been gone away for three years and in competition with all these young squirts fresh out of school, it's tough going through there at that age. It's really hard getting through. It made it worthwhile. Now I told you a while ago about how hard it was to get into to college, like into Pharmacy. They cut our freshman class by fifty percent the first year we were in there. The second year they cut it by I forget what the percent was that went back. Some of these guys that were in there were sons of Pharmacists whose dads owned drug stores and who were big shots in the state of Kentucky. The only thing they knew people and back when they just had in the Louisville College of Pharmacy it went a long way and you went. But when the University of Kentucky took over it didn't matter who knew you or what, you would go through. We were in the first class to go in for the University of Kentucky. We were the first class to graduate that went all the way through with the University of Kentucky. They used us as a role model all the way through. They did not move the University of Kentucky campus in Lexington, Kentucky, until they were able to build the building while I was in school. We were the first class and also the last class in Louisville to graduate from there so they sent us our caps and gowns and we got up there the best way we could. I'll tell you a real quickie, John Sherman Cooper was the Senator from Kentucky that did our graduation thing. We were the first group to graduate in this huge field house that they built up in Kentucky where they had their basketball games and all these other things. Like I said, most of the people from the school had never been on campus before so when we went up the day for graduation, you would have your cap and gown under your arm. They had students directing traffic. They said, "Where is a good place to eat?" He said, "Over at the student union building over here." So he said, "Okay where is it?" The guy looked at him kind of funny and he said, it's over there." So he goes in and eats and it takes longer than he figures and he has to run to get back for graduation. He is putting his cap and gown on; it's the same student, "Where is the field house?" He looked at me and I could tell as well what he was thinking, you dumb so and so. Been here all those years and can't find anything that big. I mean it was huge back for that day. To show you how much I appreciate getting out and getting my wife and getting my kids and getting through school and by the way 1950 was the big year. It was the year that I graduated.

You graduated in 1950?

Mr. Plemmons: Let me back track that a little bit now. My wife and I, let's see we were working together, for T.P. Taylor and we decided that we wanted to.... Well they had this rule that you couldn't date other employees. It was right there at 4<sup>th</sup> and \_\_\_\_ which was the big corner in Louisville, Kentucky. It was a \_\_\_\_ hotel which was a huge hotel down in the basement which used to be there \_\_\_\_ cellar was turned in to an American Legion club which naturally I got into and got to go. I took my wife who I'll admit wasn't quite eighteen at the time down to the and took her for lunch and things like that. I said, "Now we are going to have to meet outside." We did that. We got out and down for lunch and back up. They built a new store down at 5<sup>th</sup> and Broadway and they put her, this gal as young as she is, in charge of the cosmetic department of course she also worked with the drugs and all that kind of thing; which I realized at the time was giving me valuable training for our drugstore. It's never been mine, it's our drugstore. I could not have had it without her. I will say one other thing, while I was in school I would have dropped out many, many times. Don't forget I had been over here as a man overseas and came back and went to college. I would have dropped out if she hadn't of kept my nose to the grindstone. By the way, we both worked in drugstores. We stayed in that same one for a big part of it and I also worked in a hospital pharmacy and some things like that. You did that, it was just part of what you were doing.

She kept you focused.

Mr. Plemmons: Yeah, I would have never gotten out of that school without here. She kept me down and I'm glad that she did.

She was the backbone to the success.

Mr. Plemmons: Yep!

That's how it usually goes and you appreciate them for it. Well I appreciate the interview. I believe that we are about wrapped up unless there is anything else that you would like to add to it or say; feel free. As far as questions that I have or anything like that, I am pretty much done unless there is something else that you would like to say.

Mr. Plemmons: I would like to say one thing on this statistic that we got now; that there are a thousand World War II Vets dying every day. When you start thinking about this, I'm one of the younger ones. There was a lot of guys older than me that I am sure are already dead. Of course I am no spring chicken myself. When you see those statistics I was a kid and can remember World

War I vets and I thought there were so many of them around and then gradually they widdled out and now they are all gone. It's not going to be too many years until we are all gone.

That's right.

Mr. Plemmons: I hope people will remember the thing that people went through in that war. That's why it gets to me when I see all these groups in there burning the flag and doing all these kinds of things when I think of what Old Glory means to us every time you come to attention when they are playing the Star Spangled Banner and stuff like that. I can't understand why everybody in this country doesn't see it like we do.

Stand proud and tall and remember those who fought and those who died and all the jobs that the men had to do.

Mr. Plemmons: I know. Like I said, I still feel guilty about the guys that died over in foreign fields over there. They were talking about D-Day that the water was red, like blood in the thing. I don't doubt that because even when we was sent over, they were still getting dead soldiers that got wrapped up in these propellers on these boats that got over there. Graves Registration Department and I will take my hat to them anytime, they got to take these mangled messes off and get up there and take dog tags and put them between their teeth and send the other ones somewhere else and bury them over there. It's quite a thing. Even though I was over there for two years I could have gotten into some problem and not come back because we had guys that we were fairly close to over there that did... I said that nobody got shot over there. We had one Captain that was out of our headquarters that we never did see that was in our area one day that got wounded and at all times when it was back when we were in Luxemburg. He was standing looking out a window and a bunch of planes went over and he took a machine gun bullet to the shoulder and it went straight through him. As far as I know he made it through. You feel guilty when people that actually do shed blood. But still in all of these veterans hospitals and when you go through and see the shape of some of these poor guys that were in and again remember this was the cream of the American crop. Most of them were taken some of them out of high school. I'm lucky I got to finish. Some of them didn't even get to finish high school; they took them out. Or they volunteered when you could volunteer. I hope that people will remember and hope we want all be together forgotten anyhow.

I know that I'm very thankful and proud of what you did.

Mr. Plemmons: Let me tell you on how I got interested in what I am doing. Like I said I didn't talk about it for a long time. I got interested in reading this book "The Greatest Generation" by Tom Brokaw. It's not just about service people but anything from how the women that worked in aircraft factories and all this kind of stuff. That got me interested to writing up to, and I have called, and I've called and got some things in there and that is how I got some information on my outfit. I was told that it was secret; you couldn't find anything. Now I have a letter that tells how our outfit was conceived, how it was put into, it had the table of organization, what they did and how they sent us over to England to train. They have a detailed roster that they came up with and my name is on it there as a T4. It was one of the things that describe our outfit and by the way there never was another outfit; we know that now. We were the original thirty; we were the only thirty. We were there with one officer, let's not forget Captain Keller. In the books that they had and they came up with some things on how we would be trained in England and we were to have been by such and such a date. I've got that in a letter. It said that they were to start it on such and such a date and they couldn't start the training with the thing on that date because part of the unit did not arrive at that time. That was us. That was the group on that bus that turned around and went back to New York and then came back. By the way let me tell you about when we went into New York that first time. We went down the harbor right by that beautiful green Statue of Liberty there. She was green there. I think they polished her off a little now. She was the most beautiful thing you could have seen and could imagine. We had us sitting up on top of the boat as we were going down the harbor in New York and there was some combat infantry men up there with their big huge weapons they had cleaning them. We got close enough that we could recognize people that were walking on this riverside expressway and they were all waving to the conquering hero. We had been half-way across the Atlantic and back again. By the way, I did get another medal for that and that I would like to show you while we are here. We got the American Theater of Operations medal. We were the only five in our outfit to get that because we were the only ones that were out there and came back. This medal cabinet was made for me and I got it this past Christmas by my grandson who is very interested in military. He got these for some fluke. I have never been issued all of my real medals. They have never come. I put in for them three times and they haven't. So he got all these the hard way; off the internet. I'm still going to try and get these. This is the European Theater of Operations and you can see the four battle stars and here on the chest one with the four up here. He said his hardest part was getting the T4 stripe because they don't make them any more coming through. I figured that would be no problem. But they did. We picked up this American Theater of Operations medal which was good for five points. Like I said, each of these battle stars was good for five points. Of course the medal itself was good for five points. There is the good conduct medal. One thing I don't have on here is the ruptured duck to show that you are discharged. He could not find one of those things and the one on the uniform that I still have was just in to bad of a shape to take off and put on there. Another thing that is not on here, I got the four gold bars for being in a battle area where I was gone for two years. It was good for six months; each one. Of course we got the Victory medal and one that they give to vets after they have been out over fifty years. I would like to say that my grandson, Zachary Nixon, he is interested in military. By the way, his father, my son-in-law, is in the military right now up at Fort Campbell. He is a career Army dentist. He is a full Colonel. He is a bird Colonel. He has been in and of course he has about another year or so before he gets out up there and Zachary is still

thinking about it. He just graduated from college and he may yet. Who knows? I told you about the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group while ago, that is what we were in there. This is our European thing that shows we served under. We served under Eisenhower under that patch the whole time. After I got out and moved to Centerville I enlisted in the Tennessee Defense Force. They commissioned me. Since I had never been an officer I figured that this was a good chance to be an officer. I went in as a Lieutenant and stayed long enough to become a Major. At that time they washed me out on the account of my age. At age seventy, out you go. But now we kept that up because we were being used in military funerals that they had. Used to anybody in World War II or anybody else that wanted to could get a military funeral that died. I shouldn't use a word or a name but Clinton's cutback that they did on this thing stopped that. The only way you can get a military funeral now is by sending people out of Clarksville like they used to do from the 101 up there. You had to be a twenty year retiree or you had to get the Congressional Medal of Honor, you had to die while you were in the service and there was one other. We thought as a group that anybody that wanted to have a military funeral and was a veteran from World War II or any other time \_\_\_\_\_. So we have had some World War II funerals. But I'm real proud of this though. Like I said, I got my medals together and everything and to have him do that for me was real good. I appreciate that.

That's real nice. I'm very proud of everything that you have done for this country and the job that you went over there to do. I thank you and with tapes like this you hope that what happened is not forgotten. I don't believe it will be. I appreciate everything that you have done.