

Interviewer: It's the 11th of August 2001. I have the honor of interviewing Mr. William France a veteran of the 501st parachute infantry battalion. We're at the 101st Airborne reunion in San Antonio, Texas. I'm sorry parachute regiment. You said before I turned the camera on that you volunteered for the army?

France: Yeah

Interviewer: What year did you volunteer?

France: 42

Interviewer: 1942

France: Well I started right after Pearl Harbor to get into the Marine Core.

Interviewer: Is that right?

France: Yeah

Interviewer: My next question is what induced you to go in patriotism due to Pearl Harbor?

France: Yeah that was part of it. I think very specifically I had an exemption I was 18 years old 19 years old about 19 and they were building a naval plant near my home where they were supposable going to build aircraft for the navy. And so I had a routine job I mean but because it was in this navy project I had an exemption they gave me an exemption to give by draft board. And I didn't even think about that really to be honest with you know I thought I was doing my little thing there working for the navy I felt real good about that. But my mother and the lady next door were talking about the gentlemen who lived in our neighborhood who I don't even remember how old he was anymore but he was married and had three kids and he was drafted. And they were I wasn't part of the conversation but I heard them saying you know this is ridiculous here's a man with three children and they're taking him in to their bringing him into the service and look at all of these youngsters around here who don't have responsibilities. Not that their life is not worth any more.

Interviewer: Right

France: But they don't have the responsibilities that a head of a household has particularly a father with young kids you know. And although I am a slow thinker it didn't take long for that to register with me and I'm thinking yeah I should be I should be in the service I mean that's where I belong in combat. Not here you know checking materials on a construction job. So I talked to my good buddy I grew up with and he said yeah you're right I want to see if I can get in the Air Core. The Navy he wanted to join the Navy he wanted to be a Navy pilot I said Navy? Join the Marines well it's a long story but I talked him into a compound of many things and he may still tease me about it how I got Williams into this and into that. So we went down to the court house there the second floor where the marine recruiting was and we went in and this is not you're not taping this now are you?

Interviewer: Yes

France: Oh my god. Well anyway I'll have to bore you with this.

Interviewer: Oh this is fine this is interesting.

France: Well we went in and of course you know you strip down they give you this big brown envelope with a string to hang over your neck and you go from station to station you know. Check your eyes here your weight there do that you know one or the other. And I'm walking through and I get to the one guy who's handing you a jar well they don't have to tell you what to do. There is a room there it wasn't a latrine or nothing there wasn't a toilet there was nothing in there just like an overgrown closet. And I guess you might just as well have done it outside.

Interviewer: Go urinate in the closet.

France: Yeah in case you were a little shy they gave you this room to step into. Well when I stepped into this room I thought I walked into Charles Atlas. There is this guy this blonde haired I mean he was built like oh Jesus. And I looked up and he has tears in his eyes and I just said what's the matter sir. And he said I've been here five minutes and I can't piss in this cup. I said I don't know what possessed me but I said give it to me I'll do it you know. So I filled both of our jars and out he went. Well he made it on my urine but when we got through I got the bad news the lieutenant commander he was the physician there he said son I'm sorry but you don't pass the physical. And I was like I don't pass the physical. And he said yeah you have a malocclusion in you bite. And I looked at him kind of funny and I guess he had to explain. He said you know son when your teeth meet properly in the front there's a space in the back and when they meet in the back they don't meet right in the front. I looked at him and I said do I have to bite the Japs aren't they going to give me a gun? That didn't go over too well he said out of here. Well you can imagine I mean I was crushed I mean here my buddy that he wanted to join the navy I got him in the marines and Charles Atlas I got him in and here I am I'm 4F I'm thinking you know. It wasn't all that bad but this was in the middle of maybe March of 42 if I had waited a few months I'm sure the marines would have grabbed me like anyone else but. I went down to you know the station and waved goodbye to my friend and he's off to Paris Island and I'm really crushed. I went down to try again and got the same business. As I sat down in the hallway from the marine recruiter's office there was this full size not a manikin but like a cardboard cutout of a trooper standing in the door of a C47. And over in great big letters it said jump into the fight. I said that's for me so I stepped in the army recruiting office and I said I want to be a paratrooper. Come here kid you know and they took the data and that was it from there.

Interviewer: So the army didn't care if you had a malocclusion.

France: No they didn't care about anything. In fact I remember the there was staff sergeant there in the recruiting room when I said I want to be a paratrooper like oh yeah you must have rocks in your head. But I was supposed to be inducted they took me down the first time on November the 11th Armistice Day they called it then and they call it Veterans Day now. But I thought this is novel I'm going in on Armistice Day but I was sent back they didn't have enough people I guess to send or whatever. But I met Hank Astrotdy down there the first time I met Hank and we were off to Indian Town Gap and spend a week there. And got issued our stuff and got our shots and one things or another and then they waited until they had a group that was going south. Because my papers said I was to go to Toccoa Georgia where they were forming the 501. And so Armstoski and other fellow by the name of Denver Madden from Pennsylvania the three of us on a train we went down to Toccoa. And we got there I guess in mid-December I know they were forming the 2nd battalion at the time because the three of us were assigned to F Company. And then from then on I was one of the troopers and of course that was just basic training. We went from there to Benning with the 180 went to jump school and from there up to McCall

and stayed there for a bit. January we were off to England Scotland it took 17 days to get from Boston to Glasgow. I don't know how we went.

Interviewer: A very evasive course because of the fear of the boats.

France: Fortunately I enjoyed it we sat and played cards and ate. A couple of times of one thing I'll never forget it was ridiculous they made us field strip our rifles put all of the parts out on the bunk you know. And we were up in the like the real bow of the ship right up front and it was bumping and tossing all over the place. And I said crap I won't be able to find the parts of the gun one piece. But that was an interesting experience. But anyway that's how I got in.

Interviewer: That's how you got in the 101st 501.

France: Yep I don't regret it. My friend went to the Pacific and he had a rough time over there. But not that we had an easy time but when I talk to some of those guys over there digging those holes and having those three foot centipedes crawling over you. Man I'm glad I'm in Europe.

Interviewer: You would rather be in the snow in Bastogne than in the jungle in the Philippines.

France: Right I'm not an anthropologist I don't go for examining bugs on the close up.

Interviewer: No and Europe doesn't have that many fine critters to harass you. Training in England?

France: Yeah training in England I didn't find it bad we made one night jump and I was always a little skeptical about night jumps. But as I remember for me it was like a parade ground jump I didn't have any equipment.

Interviewer: Right

France: So it and I didn't

Interviewer: It was like a Hollywood jump it wasn't like a combat jump.

France: Yeah right and I got reassigned there when I was I was got my rank back I became private first class again.

Interviewer: I sense a story here.

France: I don't think I want to put this on tape.

Interviewer: Okay that's alright so you were PFC again.

France: I was with I was in Howard Johnson's regiment and he had his own ideas about things. And well I have to say this I mean I spent a little time in the regimental stockade when we were in McCall. And the day I got out the day I got out I got back to my barracks the guys that it was a Thursday as I recall and no one is in their fatigues their all in their uniforms. And I said what's going on he said come on you don't have much time get changed. And I said what's going on he said we've got to meet formation in a

minute anyway the end of it was that we were being a certain group of us were being issued good conduct medals. So the day I got out of the stockade I got me my good conduct medal.

Interviewer: Oops

France: Oops yeah and a seven day pass or furlough. You know I was like I don't know what I'm thinking oh really great. But later on when I reflected on it I figured boy it's only in Johnson's regiment things like that would happen.

Interviewer: Now were assigned as a rifleman?

France: I was assigned as a I was my original assignment was with a machine gun squad but really I was an assisting gunner.

Interviewer: Thirty cal?

France: Yeah and the assistant gunner carries a gun so I was not all together happy with that. I managed to move out from that position to a rifle. But it's a long long involved story. Johnson had a band that was not part of the TO he couldn't have it. So he just took people from here and there and other where. So I got out of F Company into the band first I went to service company and then I ended up in regimental headquarters. And we had all kinds of crazy assignments I was assigned to the medic detachment and had no training whatsoever as a medic. Well Sergeant Shell gave me a three hour thing on what to do how to find the vein you know to put a needle in and give blood plasma and that sort of stuff. But really I didn't know a damn thing more than the basic stuff that we had had.

Interviewer: Basic first aid

France: Yeah basic first aid. But another crazy thing happened the Catholic Chaplain's assistant went awl and he was looking for and for a short time I was his assistant because they needed somebody to clean up his detail. Do his boots and that sort of thing so I became his assistant and when I went in to Normandy I went in as a medic I was assigned to the medical detachment. I was in regimental headquarters I was in the medical detachment that's part of regiment not the battalion aid station but regimental aid. But I was assigned to Father Samson Captain Samson so I jumped with him and aside from the fact that we both landed in the irrigation ditch I didn't after that I didn't see him after the first night. I ended up we were all messed up I ended up with the 506th I stayed with the 506th I guess 10 days until I got back with my outfit again. I was working out of an a regimental I mean a battalion aid station out of the 506th and.

Interviewer: So you worked there as a medic at the 506th?

France: I worked there as a medic in fact my entire combat career so to speak was as a medic. I was like a lot of company medic I didn't do anything fancy. Stop the blood from until they could get them back to the battalion aid station or something like that.

Interviewer: And you carried morphine.

France: Oh yeah I carried morphine.

Interviewer: So first aid, morphine, blood plasma

France: I didn't carry plasma but at battalion you know it was available. I don't ever remember taking it out except in Bastogne we had a couple of guys we couldn't move and they needed plasma and so I did what I was told. I was assigned to it and I remember we had a little trouble with it freezing there and we put it under the hood of the jeeps and someplace there was some heat to keep it from freezing.

Interviewer: Right so you said it took you about 6 or 10 days to get away from the 506th and back to the regiment?

France: Yeah

Interviewer: Back to the aid station

France: Back to my own unit.

Interviewer: Right

France: And I ended up in regimental aid station and I'm trying to think I don't think I had any other assignments outside of I think I was in regimental. I went out to battalion aid stations to relieve somebody or something like that but I didn't you know it's so foggy. An incident happened when I was coming back to regimental when we were in Caritan that made a in fact I can close my eyes today and see this thing. I was with Corporal Huddle and myself and we had gone out to battalion aid station we were on our way back to regimental. And we were we got a little artillery in there the 88s came in not heavy you know but sporadic and you didn't know what was going to happen. And we were coming up the street toward regimental aid station and we hear this thing whistle in and we just hit the bricks so to speak right there. And it hit in an alley and blew up and we're waiting there for a second round we don't hear anything so we stood up. It was just a matter of seconds really I guess and as I stood up I saw this little child lying in the middle of the street. So the two of us ran over and by the time we got there there was an old woman who ran over and she was kneeled over the child and she looked like she was asleep. She didn't look like there was anything wrong with her at all but Huddle sensed you now he's like motioning neither of us spoke French. But she saw that we had the guard on so she knew I guess we were doctors or associated with so she picked the child up and took her to the aid station we took her to the aid station. And I'll never forget I mean she laid the child on the floor and Walden Captain Walden was there and I mean he pushed open her eyes and looked at her. And there was two of them there was an old man that was with the woman he came but anyway he just looked up at us like she's dead. And she didn't seem to have a mark on her on her stomach there was like a little I don't know something might have pierced in there and went up and shut everything down I don't know but. I mean she didn't look like there was anything the matter with her but it became apparent to these people you know when Walden kind of looked up. And I still remember that old man he had his fist against the wall and like this and his elbows and he's banging on the wall like that. And I wanted to go over and you know and I don't know someone said leave him alone. And I guess there was a few instances like that prior to that when I was in the 506th in that aid station. There was a farmer and his wife and a little kid in there she was older than this child maybe six and we had a few rounds mortar rounds from time to time but it didn't pass. We had a big flag you know indicating it was an aid station which was not supposed to be fired upon. But of course we got some well at any rate this little girl was with her mother all the time we just took over the house we had the wounded we brought in there. We had the croutes in one room and our guys in another and they just stayed out of our way. But the little child stayed with her mom you

know it was. And this one day she went out there was an outhouse out back they didn't have a toilet in the house she was out there and a shell came in maybe 100 yards or so but she knew what to expect. She ran out to get the child to bring her into the house and the two of them were coming in and one landed in the back yard and they went down. A couple of our guys you know ran out to get them bring them in the house they were both dead killed them both. And you know when I think about it I was sad you know but the impact the whole damn thing I mean this was three or four days after I jumped in. I remember the first trooper that I saw that was dead and I went over to check and see that he had an MT tag on so somebody had been there to identify him they didn't remove him. I mean braves registration wasn't active then so you just leave him there. But I remember a funny feeling I was sad I wasn't scared I was like numb. And it wasn't until later until after this little things because I helped them dig you know there were going to bury them there at the farm house. I remember seeing there was one person there that spoke some French and I remember seeing that man you know and he just he had a blank look on his face you know there he was I don't know it's hard to describe. It's like I don't have the words for it I'm not that articulate to be able to describe my feelings you know. Then this other little kid in Caritan and this little child you know that really got to me more than seeing my buddies being shot at. Because we're soldiers you know we expect it you know. But to come in and see this these civilians you know and particularly little children being devastated by this you know it happens but you just don't think about it until you've experienced you know. Man it was an experience that I still carry with me you know I mean war is hell and it's violent it's not the only people involved are not just the military you know.

Interviewer: That's right

France: It's anyway

Interviewer: I interviewed a medic with the 82nd last year and he said they were given the option whether to go armed. Was it the same with the medics in the 101st were you allowed to carry a weapon if you wanted to?

France: I nobody ever questioned I didn't carry a weapon except the ones I collected. I had a couple of times I carried a P38 or something like that. I never carried I was never issued a weapon and I was reminded I think that we shouldn't do it because it would be against the Geneva Convention. In other words if I wore this thing on my sleeve then I had to be unarmed. And so I never I really never gave too much thought to it. Of course as I said I cheated a few times because I was armed.

Interviewer: Now at Normandy you were you know treating casualties on the battlefield you were frequently exposed to enemy fire.

France: Yeah

Interviewer: Did the Germans appear to respect the brassard? Did you fear that you could safely treat the wounded without I mean artillery and mortars are really hard to defend but rifle and machine gun fire.

France: Right rifle fire and machine gun fire I guess the most honest answer I can give you is I didn't really think about it. Most of the time most of the time when I had to go out like when I was out where the troops were. Now I'm not talking about being at the aid station battalion station if I was out with a squad or something and there was an injury it was quiet. That is to say it was quiet I didn't feel as though I was being putting myself in any danger to do my job. I can only remember one time I was with

a group and I don't even remember now which company I was with. I was with two riflemen and we were in a common hole dug in and there was some mortar fire and a barrage when I say barrage for a few minutes they five or six rounds you know in the short time we're all huddled in there waiting for the damn thing to stop. And it just about had stopped we didn't know that it had stopped and somebodies yelling medic medic and I didn't know who these guys were you know but I'm in this hole between them. And they both look at me like we'll you're a medic why don't you. So I rolled out and got to that fellow but and some other there was another medic there by the time I got to him. But that's the only time I ever remember of feeling as though I was you know put myself in any special jeopardy any more than anybody else. I can't say that and I never remember I know there's a Sergeant Langley who I thought was a little kooky. I mean he didn't fear anything he got me to go with him to pick up somebody on the OPAR that had been wounded that they couldn't get back and this was up in Holland. And they were out near the dike and it was just a big field it was maybe 100 yards from where there was some cover to where we had to go get him. And we knew where the Germans were they were up on the other side of the dike because they were firing from that direction. And anybody would know if we walked across that field that we're going to be in full sight of them you know. Now we both had little things we didn't have crosses on our helmets or anything we only had a little thing on the arm you know. But I followed Langley out there with a litter and I'm thinking to myself you know you've got to be out of your mind. But there was a case a report came back that there was somebody out there they were unable to move and we had to go get them. And so Bob did what he had to do and he couldn't do it by himself so he turned to me and he said you know let's go and I went. But I don't consider myself a hero I just did my job.

Interviewer: Now a lot of the riflemen I've interviewed give you guys a whole lot of credit the medics. And they felt they felt better about what they were doing because they knew the medics were there. How do you feel about that?

France: Well I have to expand a little when you say felt better about what they were doing. We had a job to do we were there to defeat the enemy and the fact that I was an unarmed medic would mean that if someone had thrown a rifle at me or gave me a machine gun again and said one of those guys I wouldn't have hesitated a second I would have shot them I would have knifed them I would have done anything. Not it's not a personal thing you know it's not that's war and you don't play to see who's going to see who's going to win the first day you play to finish the job and it's killing people. Unless they surrender now if they if you do something to somebody that has disarmed themselves that had turned themselves over to you that's a different story. But I will say that most of the men that I was associated with I was impressed by their obedience to orders and doing their job. I was present sometime when they would make up well you know when a squad leader or somebody has to make up a platoon you know to go out. And so okay George and you go there was no nobody passed the buck nobody made excused you know I can't man I mean if they got the assignment they did it. And I was impressed I was impressed with guys that I patched up and I want to send them back to regimental aid station you know to get a little more treatment or just take a break. And no they were doing their job and that impressed me if they were physically able they hung in there and did what they had to do.

Interviewer: How about treating the enemy wounded?

France: I didn't have a problem with that. I mean I thought as far as we were doing what we should as far as Geneva Convention goes yeah we were obliged to do that. And I treated quite a few well I gave first aid you know.

Interviewer: Right

France: And I remember in Veckle I spent for about a week in Veckle I was regimental all of the time and we would just go and collect the ones that needed special attention and bring them in. They sent us this German prisoner he was huge I remember trying to carry the sucker on a litter. And we took him in the place and the doctor he was conscious he had severe abdominal wounds and we carried him right up to where they were going to operate on him. And in fact I was assigned to stay there while the procedure took place and I remember he survived the operation. And I remember there was a Dutch doctor and Carol Major Carol were the two that performed the operation. And of course they were speaking in English the Dutchman spoke English. And I one thing that sticks in my mind I remember one of them turned to the other and saying did you ever suture a liver you know. And I guess organs I think he was pretty messed up and at any rate he survive the operation. And he was off someplace on an alcove or something in the hospital I walked by and he was still there because I had put him over there. But oh I guess it was maybe a day later one of the nuns at the hospital there I saw her she was like leaning over him and talking to him softly in German because he didn't understand any English. And she's kind of consoling him in his own language and that really impressed me because I thought love your enemy.

Interviewer: This was a Dutch nun?

France: This was a Dutch nun yeah.

Interviewer: Consoling the German soldier in German.

France: Yeah consoling this German soldier in German right.

Interviewer: That shows a lot of compassion.

France: I'll tell you it sure did. Because in fact I couldn't understand why they just didn't give him an overshot of morphine or something put him out. He didn't survive he did die in a few days but you know they did I guess

Interviewer: Everything that they could.

France: Everything that they could.

Interviewer: That's very honorable very honorable. That's one experience in Veckle what other experiences do you recall from the campaign at Market Garden there in Holland?

France: Well that was what I was telling you about about Langley walking me out to the dike out there that was a Holland experience. I met at the hospital there in Veckle a young woman a young girl I should say she was maybe two years older than I. And she had a friend who was a nurse there and my sergeant became friendly with the nurse and this girl came in to visit brought wine. And we'd get a break this friend would say come with me and we'd go under this stairway there and they had a little place set up in there where we'd sit and we'd drink this wine where this girl brought in. And I don't know why this girl was attracted to me or whatever but anyway she wanted to meet me. And so she spoke about ten words of English and I spoke no Dutch but I enjoyed the wine and I also enjoyed a break and sergeant was telling me to do it. So hey sir I'm obeying orders I mean what do you want for me.

Interviewer: If your sergeant tells you to drink wine how can you refuse?

France: But I did get to talk with her a little bit we could communicate. She understood English and she understood English very well and she finally was able to tell me what she was doing. And Sprinkle and I called her Emilia Earhart because she wore an old fashioned like leather helmet like the flyers would wear and big goggles. She rode a Crown motorcycle and from what I could understand I've tried to search this out asked some of the Dutch folks to help me to see if I could find out anything about her. The thing is it had been years later but she was doing like a liaison thing she was going to where the Germans were and coming back and they didn't bother her. I guess they figured she was not doing anything to their detriment and she would report information about where they were. And she was part of the Dutch underground and her name was Yoce and she was a tough kid I'll tell you. I remember thinking about it at the time I mean predicaments and stuff the she situations that she would put herself in that you wouldn't have to. And I never was totally antifeminist or anything I didn't think that girls belonged you know in the sewing room and that only us men could handle things. But I really was impressed by this girl. And I've told this story a few times to the youngsters that I've been having to share war experiences with and I said you know we define toughness sometimes and not really think about it. We think of football players and cowboys and that sort of thing. But I said when you really think about it as to what you can inflict but I said toughness is not what you can inflict toughness is what you can endure. And Yoce was a tough kid and made a long impression on me I can still close my eyes and see her. I haven't been able to make any conflict.

Interviewer: Can I get you a glass of water?

France: Yeah I'd appreciate that.

Interviewer: Let me pause this for a minute. (Tape pauses and then restarts) So we were finishing up in Holland we hadn't talked much about Bastogne yet.

France: Well that was probably the most uncomfortable time in my life from the standpoint of weather.

Interviewer: Right I'm interested in the challenges that it presented to the medical profession in trying to take care of the soldiers in that environment.

France: Well the obvious I think I did say we had a little problem with plasma freezing and that sort of thing.

Interviewer: How about morphine does morphine freeze?

France: My most honest answer is I don't know.

Interviewer: You never experienced it?

France: I never experienced it.

Interviewer: I don't know that's why I'm asking. So there wasn't any problem with the morphine?

France: No

Interviewer: But there was with the plasma?

France: Yeah and it was something we had to deal with that was all. And as I say we used to keep some of it under the hood of the jeep you know so that it wouldn't freeze. But yeah Bastogne was a nasty uncomfortable experience. I guess the worst thing that happened I wasn't even present when it happened. The worst thing that happened in an incident was when a tribe of mines blew up and we lost 13 guys all at once. And I mean and strange thing they were collecting these things and apparently it wasn't deactivated something wasn't deactivated properly and they were frozen or whatever. But I knew a couple of them and you know just the that incident is one thing that hangs in my memory of Bastogne.

Interviewer: And didn't you also lose your division level medical people? At Bastogne there were quite a large group of medical people that were captured by Germans.

France: Yeah they were captured right the 46th medical group or whatever. Well that didn't impact

Interviewer: Did that impact your mission at all?

France: It didn't impact me you have to realize in a sense at the time I didn't know what was going on.

Interviewer: You were a Joe.

France: Yeah I was a Joe.

Interviewer: You were a soldier.

France: I did what I was told to do I reported where I was supposed to go and that was it you know I didn't. In fact if people hadn't written about it I would have no idea what went on in the war. I know one time I dove into a hole a foxhole and it was covered in snow. But there was a few rounds of stuff coming in and I just dove for cover. And I'm scratching to get down further and I realize that there's something already in there and when I finally found out what it was it was a dead German in there. It just simple little things like that kind of turns you stomach kind of creepy.

Interviewer: How much assistance were you able somebody had to educate these soldiers how to avoid trench foot and how to keep from getting frost bit. Did you spend any time with that trying to teach Joe hey make sure you take your boots off dry your socks out you know put your socks inside your clothes to get them warm rub your feet.

France: The reason I'm smiling is because I did none of that. And I went back to the battalion aid station 3rd battalion aid station and they were issuing new socks and I think I probably pulled my boots off for the first time in three weeks or so. And my feet were killing me for a while I mean pain awful bad and then it gradually went away and I was fine and I didn't even think about it anymore. And I remember you know we were really talking more about keeping trigger mechanisms from freezing and that sort of thing.

Interviewer: Right take your bullet out and put it underneath your shirt.

France: Right and keeping things dry you know so they wouldn't get wet and then freeze and not function you know. And but I never told anybody how to take care of themselves and I didn't take care of myself.

Interviewer: Was there any foot powder available?

France: There was stuff available I'm sure there was stuff available. I'm sure that we were told you know to do certain things. But I had to admit I guess stupid I didn't do it.

Interviewer: Well in your case of course you were behind the eight ball because you didn't have the formal medical training.

France: Well yeah

Interviewer: You were a machine gunner.

France: Well I was no more of a medic probably than any other rifleman would be. But when you're working around with these people for a while you learn a few things.

Interviewer: Sure

France: Most of which I have forgot. But at any rate I went to get my new issue of socks I took my boots off and it started to burn when I took my boots off. When I took my socks off scared the hell out of me because my toes were black up to about here. And Captain Jacobs looked at me he said France when's the last time you whatever. And they put me on a litter I said well I've got to he said lay down. And he carried me out and stuck me in an ambulance and took me back to Nancy France the hospital at Nancy. And there they were debating about which toes they should remove and that sort of thing and man I'm I was scared there for a little bit because I didn't realize it was as serious as it was. But I managed to come around I never had any problems since then from it but they sent me over to England to a hospital over there and I was off the line for two months. With frozen feet or frost bite.

Interviewer: Frost bite

France: Yeah

Interviewer: Trench foot too you said it burned a lot.

France: Oh yeah it hurt a good for a while but then after you lose the feeling in it and you're not really aware of it. That's why I ignored it but like I said my feet were killing me for a while but I wasn't in the place where I could change my boots or change my shoes or anything so my socks or anything. So I just and when it went away you don't think about it you've got other things on your mind.

Interviewer: So you were returned to the division you said you were out for a couple of months that would have been about March.

France: I went out on February the 3rd and I got out of convalescent hospital or whatever they call it because when they released me from the hospital to this other place I had to be examined every so often you know they look at my feet and do these exercises and you have to soak them and all of that

sort of stuff. I felt fine I mean I didn't have a I would say in a month after we discovered what the problem was I felt good again. I lost all of my toenails and things like that but stuff started to grow back and I had an apparent problem. But I'm trying to think when I got released I was in the hospital with a guy from the 17th airborne and we were in beds next to one another and I struck up a friendship with him. And we went on a couple of one night passes when we got up and were able to do that. So they finally discharged us both at the same time and we got papers to go back I don't know how they determined it but I got about three months' pay. I mean I had a load of money and a ten day pass before I had to report to South Hampton to be sent back and then on to my I have a bunch of paper work for this. But the exciting thing was that I was in London with my friend Cliff Stockdale on VE-Day. And man

Interviewer: So you were still in London when the war was over.

France: Oh yeah I was in London when the war ended.

Interviewer: So I've never talked to anyone who was in London when the war ended. What was the atmosphere can you try to describe it?

France: You've seen on television Time Square New Year's Eve.

Interviewer: Yes

France: Well we were staying at Big Valley Circus at Stray Palace there and we were about on the fourth floor. I can remember looking out that window morning, noon and night for about three days and you couldn't see the street. I mean there was people and it was partying

Interviewer: Beer and wine

France: And everything I mean it was really a Stockdale and I met a couple of Canadians there that were lucky enough to be caught in there at the same time. And they took us to a I don't know I forgot what they call it now like the Royal Canadian Club we got in over there. In fact one of them was an officer and we were drinking pretty well. We changed uniforms I put his jacket and hat on he had mine on. And when we tried to get into this place I mean they were pretty upset with him for doing this. We got back into our regular uniforms that was an exciting time. But that was the I guess it was sometime the end of May they were near Hafcasine near Burgess Garden my regiment. And I guess it was probably the end of May or beginning of June to some event. So from the beginning of February the 3rd of February until sometime

Interviewer: Then you went on occupation duty.

France: Yeah I was on occupation duty.

Interviewer: What did a medic due on occupation duty? Sick call or

France: I had a great time.

Interviewer: Or sit around and

France: Right

Interviewer: A little chalet up in the hills a few bottles of

France: Right well there was a guy a very wealthy man who was Austrian who was the founder or the owner of the pen company Waterman Pen Company. At any rate this guy had to be in his late his late 80s or early 90s and his wife was like 25. And she met this buddy of mine and this guy was a fanatic about playing bridge he loved playing bridge so they were looking around for a bridge player. And my buddy knew that I played bridge and so the two of us went down and we sat in this hotel down in Alpkinstine with this old gentleman. And food was not abundant then I mean we had lots of food our supply but I mean in town there wasn't much. But I mean we had some pretty fine wine and some good food down there and so I played bridge in the height of the mountains and I don't remember doing a damn thing to be honest with you when I got back.

Interviewer: How long were you there before they mustard you out?

France: Well I was there when did they break up the regiment?

Interviewer: The division was deactivated in November I'm not sure

France: No this was earlier than that.

Interviewer: I'm trying to remember I can't remember the order of deactivation of the regiments.

France: Well I left there and went by 40 and 8 to Sons France and was attached to the 327th. And had to wait for my points system to come up I don't remember anymore what the numbers were but I was a little shy of points to be sent directly home. So I was reassigned to the 327th and then I got involved in a little program that they had there. And I didn't get I didn't ship home until December. As a matter of fact I landed in the states Christmas night because I can remember the Captain of the troop ship we were on he said I'll have you men home for Christmas. And he didn't lie.

Interviewer: Where did you land?

France: We landed in no we landed in New York Harbor someplace because when we got we were on the ship for a day or two and we went from there to camp Mile Standish. And then that was everybody that was on the ship and then they looked at your papers and then I ended up I went from Mile Standish back to Indian Town Gap. And got mustard out there in Indian Town Gap and got sent home. But I came back to the states on Christmas night and I got out of the army on New Year's Eve.

Interviewer: Very good.

France: Yeah

Interviewer: Well I thank you.

France: Well you're welcome.