

Tom: I was born in Indiana. I was drafted into the military in February of 1943. I had basic training with the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division out of Fort Jackson, South Carolina. After the Tennessee maneuvers in March of 1944, I went overseas as a replacement for D-Day. They knew it but I didn't know. When we got overseas they asked a bunch of us if we had any objection to be put in the Airborne. We were already over there so we didn't object. There was a bunch of us that ended up with Company C of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division.

Could you tell us your names?

Mr. Lott: I'm Bob Lott. I'm from Annapolis, Maryland. I was born in 1924 in \_\_\_\_, Pennsylvania but I grew up in \_\_\_\_, New York. In 1952 I moved from the Washington, DC area. I was going to be a Navy pre-flight. I had my papers all set for it. It turns out I was color blind and didn't know it. I applied for the aviation cadet and was color blind there. So the only thing I could qualify for with the Airborne was \_\_\_\_\_. I could pick them out. The next thing I knew I came over on the same ship that Tom did. We arrived up in Wales and spent some time there. I remember D-Day looking up in the air and seeing so many layers of \_\_\_\_ going in every direction. It was a magnificent sight. Of course from then on..Bob you want to take it over?

Bob: My name is Bob Stranton and I am from Michigan. I was born in 1921. I was working in Milwaukee and I was drafted so I figured if I would enlist I could get what I wanted. So I enlisted in the Air Force but at that time they wanted Airborne. So one year after D-Day was when I went into the service. I went to Fort Sheridan at the camp there and then from Fort Sheridan we were assigned to Fort Bragg into the Airborne. The train took us 4 or 5 days to get to Fort Bragg. It went down to Louisiana and up and back to Fort Bragg. That is where I had my basic training. While were there having basic training they were forming the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne and the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne. The cadre where they keep Camp Clayburne, the advanced cadre went to Fort Bragg and that is where the 101<sup>st</sup> was formed. I had my basic training with the 101<sup>st</sup> actually. From there we had Tennessee maneuvers and all of that. I was in the glider unit and we had the basic training gliders tying jeeps down with the cargo. I will always remember Jackie \_\_\_\_\_. He was a child star and then he was in that Muenster hit, what was the name of that? He was the minister and he had the bald head. He was a tricky pilot. I can remember him at Fort Bragg. He was doing loops and everything with this glider. I think he went into combat with the glider.

Let me ask you a question....Were all three of you enlisted?

All three: No!

Bob was enlisted and Tom and Bob Lott were drafted.

How old were you when you were drafted?

Tom: I was eighteen.

Mr. Lott: I was eighteen.

Bob: I was nineteen.

Mr. Lott: I wanted to get in before the war was over really.

What year was that?

Mr. Lott: February of 1943 for me.

Bob: 1941 was Pearl Harbor; 1942 was when I went in.

Tom: February of 1943 was when I was inducted.

Do you remember what you were doing that day?

Tom: The day I was inducted?

Right.

Tom: Oh we just went down to Fort Benjamin Harrison of course green horn you know and they gave you a box to send your civilian clothes home in and they issued you some clothes.

Mr. Lott: What I have to say about my draft examination, I was there on time. They had the eye test and getting my heart checked and stuff like that. One of the fellows came in late and he said, "What did I miss?" The doctor said, "You missed they eye test but you found the place so you passed that."

Did you always want to go into the Army?

Bob: Yes. I went to Normandy in Holland. I got hit up near \_\_\_\_\_ when I went up to help the British. Then I came back and the week that I was back and \_\_\_\_\_ for about a week and then we went up to Bastogne. I remember when we went up to Bastogne we didn't have any equipment, we didn't have any overcoats. Some had overcoats but we didn't have anything and we were on these big cattle trucks squashed in there like sardines.

Tom: We had been on the front line in Holland for 72 days. When we pulled back we were supposed to be back there resting. Some of the guys got passes and everything and they didn't worry about reissuing ammunition and everything. We were just kind of taking it easy. Then here all at once they called and said, "You are going up there. Get whatever you could find; whatever you think you need there."

Mr. Lott: They opened up the supply room doors and said, "Help yourself!"

Tom: I got a bunch of D-Bars and I was glad I got them.

Bob: D-Bars are those real bitter, bitter chocolates that you have to be real hungry in order to eat them.

Tom: You could heat you some water up and sliver those D-Bars up in there and you had hot chocolate. It kept me alive for thirty days.

Getting back to the states before the war, did each one of you know the significance of the bombing of Pearl Harbor or did you even know where Pearl Harbor was?

Mr. Lott: I had a brother there but we never found out until New Years Eve that he survived it.

Tom: What I knew about Pearl Harbor was that Sunday that they attacked. I knew about Pearl Harbor and the seriousness.

Mr. Lott: I want forget Pearl Harbor Day because I was up in Williamsport with a girlfriend at the top of a mountain when the report came over the radio. Here I had a hot date but my brother being there that killed it you know. I went home which was like a hundred miles away.

Bob: It was on a Sunday.

Tom: My present wife of 54 years; that night we had been to MYF. That is a Methodist Youth thing. When we came back home it came over the radio.

Bob: It was on the radio on a Sunday morning. I was at home when it happened.

Tom: When I was a senior in high school, we were taking History XII. The History teacher, a real nice lady, we were kind of laughing about the service and stuff and she said, "You guys you better get serious. A year from now you guys will be overseas." Sure enough she was right.

What is something that you remember about basic training that just kind of sticks out in your mind?

Tom: We went into a brand new division they had just created, the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. All that was there was the cadre so right away they picked me out as an acting Corporal. I never was a PFC. I was a Corporal, a buck Sergeant, and a Staff Sergeant before I hardly knew what was going on. I was a squad leader but I enjoyed it. I was pretty good at close order drill. I caught on pretty quick for a little farm boy. I enjoyed it. I tried to be a good soldier.

And this was all when you were eighteen?

Tom: Yes.

Mr. Lott: They made me work all the way through from Private all the way up to Staff Sergeant. I couldn't jump the gun. The thing that I remember about my basic was when I went into combat which was when I dropped into Holland; my first thing was that my God they trained me about shooting the Germans. But I don't think they trained me enough about them shooting at me. I thought, "Oh my God, they are going to shoot me." But my training was good. The airborne training was much better.

You were in an elite force.

Mr. Lott: That is right.

Bob: Our Sergeant was \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and these two guys took me out and I was clean cut. I didn't smoke or drink or anything. They took me out and introduced me to moonshine. They gave me moonshine and then they had some of that 3-2 beer North Carolina. It is not regular it is a wheat beer. I think I was sick for three days. I remember

we were on an overnight problem digging a foxhole and I threw up all night. That was my basic training right there.

Tom: I remember coming up from Fort Jackson, South Carolina and we had Christmas early there. I still got the Christmas menu from that Christmas dinner. We had it early because we had to be at \_\_\_\_ in Tennessee. It was about the middle of December through December, January and February. It snowed and rained and we were never inside. We were out on a problem and we were guarding the flank you know. It had been raining for a couple of days. I think I had about half of my squad. So we went over to a barn and slept up in that barn that night. That lady fixed us the nicest breakfast. With respect I think between all of us we had maybe \$2.50. Of course, she did not want to take that. It was right over in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

Mr. Lott: Each one of us got shot and all three of us survived and we are all in pretty good health.

Bob: For the condition we are in.

Tom: I was wounded on my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday in Battle of Bulge.

Mr. Lott: I wasn't 21 yet when I got shot.

Bob: I didn't keep track of what age I was. It was in Holland.

Let me ask you'll about the trip overseas. Of course you went on ship, what ship was it?

Tom: I went overseas on a Liberty ship, Excelsior #2. It was 385 feet long. I remember that. We got on the ship and one of the storekeepers came down through the hole and he said, "I would like to have a volunteer." Nobody moved. So he started on down the ladder. I thought, "Well what the heck!" I went over there and I crawled down there and he said, "Do you want to do this?" I said, "What is it?" He said, "Will you be helper going overseas? You show up on deck every morning and I stir paint but I got to food from there." When you are going overseas you only had a couple of hours up on deck for exercise and you only had two meals a day. Well heavens, those merchant marines they ordered from a menu and what they had left over they would give to me and I would take it down and give it to the guys. So when we went overseas I didn't get sick or anything. I was up there and pretty sure it was really good.

Mr. Lott: I have to add something to that trip. On that trip we were on rough water for a period of time. The chow was served on a long table, real long. Some guys got seasick and I didn't, thank God. I almost did because you are sitting there and when the ship rocks, some guy that upchucked comes sliding down the table.

Did it not start the domino effect? Did a lot of guys start getting sick after that?

Mr. Lott: Guys were running to get outside to upchuck.

Bob: Most of the fellows of the 101<sup>st</sup> were on the \_\_\_\_\_. It was a British ship. The crew was mostly Hindu. They wore diapers. All we had to eat was kidney stew. It smelled and the bread was full of flies. So everybody I think was living on chocolate bars from the PX. We got halfway over and there were German \_\_\_\_\_ out there so the convoy had to close in. When they closed in one of the ships in the convoy went in front of our ship they had to put everything in reverse and they blew out a couple of our boilers. So we had to go all the way back to New Foundland. The whole trip took 48 days for us to get over. In

New Foundland we were running up and down the hills to keep in shape. I think there were about 5000 soldiers on this ship in which they could only handle maybe two or three thousand sleeping on the deck, cold. This was in the fall. They finally got the boilers fixed and they were pulling out of Saint John's and they hit the bottom and put a whole in the bottom of the ship. So they had to go back. Then finally they got that fixed and the ship went down to Halifax and we got on a Swedish ship and then we went over. That was hell. Most of the guys slept on the deck. Sulpik and I slept on the officer's bathroom. Late at night we would sneak in their bathroom, close the door and lock it. He would sleep in the bathtub one night and I would sleep on the floor. The next day we would switch. That was all the way over.

How did you get away with that?

Bob: 48 days; Columbus went around the world.

Tom: The ship Excelsior #2, when we pulled into Birmingham we hit a sandbar and sat out there in the harbor. The tide pushed us off and they towed us into the docks where we sat up in the harbor overnight.

Where did you'll land?

Tom: Birmingham, England. Then we went over to Wales where we were quarantined for two weeks when we moved to the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne.

Bob: I was already there. We landed in Liverpool, England. From Liverpool we went to Roxbury, near Redding, England. That is where we were stationed before he did.

So for the record, here you are, you are overseas now and let's go ahead and repeat the division that you were in.

Tom: I went into the Company C and that was the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 401<sup>st</sup> Glider Infantry of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division.

Were you in the same?

Mr. Lott: Yes, just a different platoon.

Bob: Yes

What was the first thing that happened to you when you got overseas?

Tom: When we were quarantined there wasn't much to it. You couldn't get out and go to pubs or anything. As soon as we got to block barracks they got right on us; we had officers with us and tie downs. We couldn't get out of block barracks. We couldn't get a pass or anything. It was just mainly learning the glider and tie downs and everything from taking glider rides and qualifying and getting all ready for when those guys came back.

Bob: We were already in Normandy.

Tom: We were there replacement.

What is the first thing that you remember?

Bob: Well I didn't sleep for the first three or four nights. It was like a nightmare actually.

Mr. Lott: What I remember about being in England was wondering how we stayed afloat because when we went out on field maneuvers every \_\_\_\_ we looked at was Americans crossed British supply \_\_\_\_\_. You wondered why the \_\_\_\_\_ if the US really had supported the invasion. They sure had equipment there.

Tom: \_\_\_\_\_.

Bob: We went to Plymouth. That is where we went before we went to Normandy.

You arrived at what time in....

Bob: At Ross Barracks?

We know it was in 1944. You were in D-Day right?

Bob: Yes.

You were there June 6, 1944?

Bob: Yes.

Tell me a little bit about that experience.

Bob: It was like a nightmare. It was rough and a lot of the sea was rough. The landing craft was bouncing around and there was organized confusion as well.

So you went in on the beaches. You did not go in a glider?

Bob: We hit the beach and then went up on high ground. We stayed in that position until we got our bearing and until the officers got their bearing on where to head inland. Our mission was to go inland and contact the paratroopers that landed so that we could have an open pathway from where they were to the beaches so they could bring out the wounded and prisoners.

So you were one of the first to penetrate the beaches?

Bob: We landed I think it must have been about 10 o'clock in the morning. But it was real smoky. Actually when we came back 21 days later there was still shelling. We were in there for about three weeks. When we came to England they were still looking for artillery placement. They would come up out of the ground and fire a shell and then go back down. Three weeks later they were still firing.

Tom: The reason part of the people went in seaborne instead of airborne was because they didn't have enough gliders. There weren't enough gliders for every airborne trooper to go in by air. They went out of gliders and just assigned him to the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

Were you in an LST Higgins?

Bob: No it was an LSM; it's what they called a landing when the door comes out. The LST is what they call a door that opens sideways.

Right and then they had the Higgins and is it called the LSM?

Tom: LSI; Landing \_\_\_\_ Infantry. It drops down.

Bob: Then you run out of the water and hit the beach. We were on a small ship. It wasn't an LST. When we were relieved we came back on an LST. After we got back the first time they gave the whole division a blanket furlough. Everybody had a furlough; all the regiments.

Tom: All but the replacements; we had to stay there.

Bob: We all had a seven day pass. I went to \_\_\_\_; some guys went to Edinburg. You could travel from one end of England to the other end in a day.

Mr. Lott: One guy in the company, I think it was Company C; he went back to the states. It took him a couple of weeks or so to get back. They didn't court-martial him because they said if you seen combat, went back to the states and came back...I don't know who it was.

They court-martialed him?

Mr. Lott: No they didn't. They thought that was pretty good of him to see combat, go back to the states, and then come back overseas.

Where did he catch that from?

Tom: But they always said about the Airborne, at one time the Airborne wasn't made up of the same configuration as the Infantry. I know about the Infantry because of all of my infantry training with the straight line infantry division. I understood that the Airborne only had two rifle platoon and a weapons platoon. When they figured they needed more fire power for the invasion of Normandy, they added another platoon.

When did you'll come in as replacements?

Tom: We were there at Rock barracks before D-Day. We came in as replacements. As soon as they came out, we went in there.

Bob: We made room for them.

Mr. Lott: In September we went into Holland.

Bob: Then they had one false...in France they had the Germans surrounded but there was about a five mile or so gap. They couldn't close that gap and we were on alert. We were actually at the airport ready to take off so they could drop them in to fill that gap. We were in the glider ready to take off and then they called it off because General Patton closed the gap.

Tom: There were supposed to be 500,000 Germans in there.

Mr. Lott: After they called it off we were all out on the airfield getting out of our gliders. General Taylor got out and said, "I knew you guys were ready to go into combat and you were looking forward to it. We had these life jackets on you heard one blow up. Our CO turns around and said, "Anybody that pulls their cords is going to be court-martialed." I guess everybody in the company went and pulled their cords. Nobody got court-martialed.

Tom: We were on another alert for something and we didn't even have to go to the airfield. But the third time we went into Holland.

Did all of you jump in Holland?

All three: Glider.

Explain the glider. I know we talked about it.

Mr. Lott: It's a CG4A canvas \_\_\_\_\_. It cost like \$1700.00 to build them. They were shipped over in wooden crates. After the war the crates were worth more than the gliders. They sold the wooden crates in surplus and the gliders came along free. I saw that in West Virginia.

Bob: There was a company in Indiana that had the bid on making gliders and they needed them in a hurry. The price of the glider was outrageous. I don't know what the company was charging the government. So finally the government went to Gibson Refrigerator in Grand Rapids, Michigan. They got the bid and they were making gliders. But still it was a little too high priced. Ford was in the mass production making cars and all of that; so then Ford got the bid for making gliders and he ended up making most of the gliders because of the mass production there for less than half of what the other company was charging.

Mr. Lott: The only thing that bothered me about flying in the glider was that the glider pilots were the guys that flunked out from the Air Corp.

Tom: There was always only one of them in there.

Mr. Lott: So we got the rejects.

Tom: I was the ranking non-comm usually on the glider so I sat in the co-pilots seat. One time in England we were just flying to qualify and the guy said, "Hey why don't you take the controls?" Both sides had feet pedals but he would set the wheel over there to me. In a little bit we hit an air pocket. He said, "I will take over." We were going down and down and the helmet fell off. He said, "I better take it."

Bob: The glider pilots were warrant officers, they weren't Lieutenants. Warrant officers were probably a grade below the second Lieutenant.

Mr. Lott: You were supposed to ride in the glider with your helmet upside down in case you upchuck. You would get the blast from the propeller of the plane and it would push you up and you would fall right down and come back up again. Quite a few guys would upchuck.

Tell me about the glider ride into Holland; explain that.

Bob: A lot of the fellows got sick but I never did.



Mr. Lott: I got sick when there were bullets coming up through the cable.

So there were bullets coming up through the cable?

Mr. Lott: It was small arms fire.

Tom: As soon as we flew over land you could see those big emplacements down there and the next thing you know they were sending up small arms like a 20 mm, \_\_\_\_\_, small arms, everything.

Mr. Lott: Even a 31 caliber.

Bob: The window weren't glass; they were just plastic.

There was no protection at all? There was probably about 13-15 men in the glider?

Mr. Lott: There were thirteen men.

Thirteen men in a glider and there was no protection at all? You were just a box in the air.

Mr. Lott: You sat in a bench and you kept your cheeks together.

Tom: There was just a layer of plywood for a floor and plywood seats.

Bob: We went to the museum and Tom got some struts that were made after the war.

Tom: They weren't a big loss. They didn't worry about picking them up much when they crash landed. When we went overseas the weather got foggy when we were flying over the North Sea and some of the gliders landed in the water. Some of them didn't make it over across the channel. I heard on one occasion where the tow rope got flipped around the wing so he had to cut them loose wherever he was at.

Bob: The way they take off is three planes abreast. There is one and then it is like in a triangle. They go down the runway, all three together. They all have long tow ropes. When they get down so far all three gliders are side by side and the three planes are going down. If anything ever happened to one of the planes the gliders and everything would be all screwed up. It's really a beautiful sight to see three planes taking off right behind the gliders.

Tom: They say that the C-47 would be going 90 mph. When the tow rope tightened they would be going 90 and well we had to be going 90 pretty quick.

Bob: There is a certain give for that rope.

Tom: The nylon rope caved a little but it wasn't long till it was right there.

Were all three of you'll in the same glider?

All three: No

Were two of you'll in the same glider?

All three: No.

All three of you'll were in a different glider?

Tom: Yes different gliders.

Mr. Lott: The neat thing about going over there was the guys that we lost in the glider a lot of the underground got them up to us. The underground were not on the same task as us, the Dutch underground. They would go down the road on their bicycles making sure and they knew where they were supposed to be.

Tom: Most of them got up to the lines pretty quick. Walter Cronkite flew in with our battalion gliders going into Holland because of the Holland invasion. He was a glider rider just as a correspondent. He got special permission from General Taylor. He really shouldn't have gotten it, but he got it. He flew into Holland in gliders with the 401<sup>st</sup>.

How about you're landing in Holland? How was it?

Tom: The glider I was in, we landed in pretty good shape but we had a pretty big impact. We hit them end post and of course the dirt kind of piles there in front. It wasn't anything bad. You just jump out of there and run for cover. There wasn't anybody hurt.

Mr. Lott: Ours was bad. We all came in unseen so we wouldn't be a target. We came down and there was a cow in front of us. So the pilot went back up and when we came down we bounced with the nose. \_\_\_\_\_. Nobody else got hurt. We were out of there in two minutes.

So you went over that cow?

Mr. Lott: We went over the cow and hit the ground. I never did see the cow.

What about you Bob?

Bob: We had a perfect landing. I remember the Dutch people coming out, even the women. The first day was just like a rehearsal. There was no resistance. The Germans weren't grouped there. They were spread all over the country. It is usually the second or third day is when all hell breaks loose. That is when they group together and come back to you in force. The first day I can remember the Dutch women and kids running around. They were happy and it was a beautiful sunny day.

Did all three of you'll land about the same time and the same time frame?

Bob: It wasn't in all one day. We were close to the first day; then the second day more came in and the third day I think there were more jumping. But our day we went in I don't think the \_\_\_\_ was as bad as it was the second day or third day because they had the guns zeroed in and applied their math the way they were coming in. I remember we were on the ground and we were counting the planes that were shot down and how many, there were paratroopers and how many got out of that plane and so on. I think a couple of days later they really let loose. I always say it is the best to be the first one in because you are a surprise element. It's when you come in the third or the fourth that you are not a surprise.

Mr. Lott: We were either the 11<sup>th</sup> or the 17<sup>th</sup> glider. When we landed we were the 7<sup>th</sup> one. \_\_\_\_\_. I don't think any of ours got shot down.

Bob: Well they missed the drop zone but it wasn't through artillery. It was pilot error or malfunction of the glider or something.

Tom: We did see that one place in Holland there, I don't know if it was the first day, there was a couple of gliders; they always told the glider pilots when they turned them loose to get down on the ground. It was safer to be down there than be getting shot at. Occasionally they would run together when they would land.

Mr. Lott: It was the first day or the second day that I saw a glider that came in and land with the crew in it. It went up on its nose and it kept going back and forth. I don't know if the guys inside were keeping it up in the air. Finally it went upside down. It hadn't crashed or anything.

Right; it just hit on its nose and was pivoting. What were your missions in Holland?

Mr. Lott: To open the corridor.

You hear so much about Hell's Highway. Would one of you'll want to explain that, just explain why it is called Hell's Highway and what the significance of it is?

Tom: All I know is each group that landed had a mission to hold a certain section of that area of road open. After about the third day the Germans toughened up and cut the highway. Well then we had to open up a highway. It was H highway that night.

Were you dealing with SS troops?

Mr. Lott: No.

Tom: I don't think it was SS troops.

Bob: It was tankers.

Tom: They had 88's everywhere.

Mr. Lott: Their mortars were good too.

Bob: The British were supposed to go up the highway in so many days and so many hours. They were way behind schedule.

You'll didn't have any anti-tank guns or anything like that did you?

Tom: We had some. We were supposed to open that highway so that the British went up that highway and went into Germany from the north to avoid the \_\_\_\_ imaginary line \_\_\_\_\_. It was supposed to be the fast way into Germany to get on German soil.

Mr. Lott: It was the first allied airborne army that should have been called off. In face Montgomery was almost told to call it off because the Germans were very aware of what was going to happen. They were ready for us.

Bob: We were under the British command and our rations; the cigarettes were British and then we had oxtail soup.

Mr. Lott: The airborne doesn't have a kitchen. We had no cooks.

Tom: We butchered chickens and we killed a pig in Holland.

Bob: Our job was to go into the chicken coup and ring the chicken's neck and shoot them up through the hole. The guy up catches them and plucks them and we have chicken soup. You live off of the land.

I had someone that I was talking to and he said, "Have you ever had any cooking from Britain or anything like that? I said, "No." He said, "And you want, you want see in America; you will see a Chinese restaurant, a Japanese restaurant or an Italian restaurant but you don't see any Britain restaurants and there is a reason for it. The food is awful!"

Bob: In Normandy I remember one of the guys the cow stepped on a mine and the guy grabbed a frying pan and was trying to catch a steak. I think it was true though that you were trying to kill a pig.

Tom: Yeah, we did kill that pig. In Holland I went out on an outpost with some guys. I took them out there and I had had some experience as a farm boy. When we butchered that pig I took out the tenderloins. I had a little frying pan and some of those guys had never had tenderloins before. We went out at a house; it was after we had moved up on that island in Holland I think. We went out and up on an outpost at the house and we fried up that tenderloin. We were living high on the hog for a little while. Everyday wasn't like that but once in awhile.

Bob: The First Sergeant, the head cook and the supply sergeant, if you were on the good side of those three guys you had it made.

Mr. Lott: That is when you are on base and not in combat.

Alright, here you are in Holland and you are trying to secure the bridges, at this time are there any close calls or accounts that you can remember so vaguely that you would like to share?

Mr. Lott: It wasn't like combat in Bastogne. It was more of a holding job. It got so boring. We held the longest on the front lines than another group. I shouldn't brag about it but the Germans were such poor shots with the rifles; they were good with their mortars. We would go from a certain distance and see how slow we could go and get shot at. They were like 300 yards away. We would count how many times they shot at and none of the guys ever got shot going back and forth. That was just to kill the time day after day.

Did you participate in that?

Mr. Lott: Yes I did.

Tom: Most of the time we were under artillery; they knew where we was at and everything. They would throw in a few shells to let you know just to keep you on your toes.

Was it mortar shells and stuff like that?

Tom: It was more artillery and mortar. We were never out of the range of their artillery pieces.

Bob: In Holland they had canals and water in the canals. We were in this one area and a German tank came and behind the tank were German infantry. We were firing at the infantry and the tank went right through our line. Trudeau (?) gets up and tries to hit the tank with a bazooka shell. The tank was going through and all of a sudden the tank stopped and Trudeau was given a little windage. The tank stopped and the bazooka shell hit the front end of the tank but didn't knock it out. The turret turned around and the machine gun wiped him out. I was in the mortar and we had a hole there for the 60mm mortar and when the tank went through it evidently we ran out of mortar shells so we had to get up and start firing rifle bullets at the infantry. When we came back to the whole that we had gotten out of, one of the shells evidently had gone right down the barrel of the mortar and it looked just like an orange peel. It's a good thing we got out of that damn hole. That night we ran out of ammunition. I think there were 13 guys that got hit in our company. We were getting ammunition that night when I got hit by a sniper.

So you got hit by a sniper? Where were you hit?

Bob: I was hit in the leg. At that time I remember pulling with other fellows. They were helped out first and then I was able to hold on to the guy and get back to the first aid station. From there we had gone to an evacuation hospital. It was just like in M.A.S.H. I am sure they had eleven or thirteen operating tables in their where they were just shoving the fellows into that tent. All they did there was open you up and take the bullet out or if you were wounded by shrapnel they would take it out; then they would ship you out to another hospital. I went to Belgium which was a British hospital. There they gave me a shot of Penicillin every hour. I don't know how long I was there. I left there and went to Oxford, England to an American hospital and I went through the same thing of shots because they said that the British didn't know what they were doing. So they gave me shots again in both arms.

Mr. Lott: Bastogne as far as I was considered, that was a real battle. It couldn't have been any worse in comparison to Holland.

Tom: In Holland there were some scrimmages. There were Germans in the houses and buildings on one of our first attacks. Guys in the platoon were killed there and the day after that we were going up the road and the Germans kind of had us pinned down. I don't know if you remember or not but we were kind of pinned down. General Taylor drove up there in that jeep and said, "Hey this is a heck of a way to win a war. Get up and let's go!" When we went up from Holland onto the island artillery was pretty heavy up there when we first got up there. Two of my squad members were killed there in a direct hit by an 88 in a foxhole. There were some days that it wasn't too bad and there were other days when we had scrimmages.

Bob: After we got out of there the Germans were about 35 miles on that land for all those days. After we were leaving out of there the Germans had all that land.

Tom: I remember in Holland we were in a little apple orchard and one of our sergeants crossed a dike and he had went over; some Germans had been killed in an orchard across this dike and he went over to see if he could get something that we could use as something. The Germans weren't all gone. There were some still in the orchard and they shot him. The medic went over there and they shot the medic. It wasn't too long after that that we were on front and the Germans had some casualties across the field there and they

took their little cart and were going to go from the house down to this ravine to get those wounded and we shouldn't have done it I guess. We held our fire until they got just about to where they wanted to go and then we opened up on them. We paid them back.

Neither the Germans nor the Japanese ever went by the Geneva Convention.

Mr. Lott: That was a holding territory. They had time to have to go out and patrol. The Germans were very good at putting down shoe bombs. You stepped on it and it would blow a leg off. That is on every patrol; you were afraid of that.

Is that the same thing as what they call the bouncing Betty's?

Mr. Lott: No. It was a little wooden box that when you stepped on it, it would release it and take a leg off.

Bob: They had a spike too that came up between your legs.

Mr. Lott: Bastogne was completely different.

Let's talk about Bastogne. All three of you were in Bastogne. Does one of you want to go ahead and give a location of the battle and everything and then explain a little bit about what it was and the significance of that?

Tom: I might mention the fact that when we were in France and they told us we were going on these trucks to Bastogne and that there had been a breakthrough. That is all we knew. We got just about to Bastogne and everybody else was going the other way. We were on these trucks trying to get through the traffic and they said, "You guys don't know what you are doing going up in there."

Mr. Lott: We thought we were going to get a battle ribbon for just going up and being there. It turned out it was all hell the whole time. There wasn't any let up at all. They had 12 divisions against our division. In fact our General or somebody said that we were the whole in the donut.

Bob: That is where they get the expression that the poor bastards have got us surrounded.

Tom: We were surrounded for about five days and they hit us with everything they had. They sent a German through the lines with a white flag on a stick and told us to surrender. Well they came right through Pearl Harbor our regiment came through, the 327<sup>th</sup> regiment, for us to surrender; either surrender or be annihilated. Of course they had enough that they thought they could do that. General Taylor was back in Washington for some reason so General McAuliffe was in command and he told them, "Nuts!" He sent back the word "Nuts!" We survived for a few days until Patton came through and helped us out.

Mr. Lott: All three of us got shot there at Bastogne.

Oh really? Let's start with Tom and just tell us...

Tom: After we were encircled there for those however many days it was, four or five days; then we went on the offense. We went in there on the 18<sup>th</sup> and every day we would step off and try to claim a little ground. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of January we stepped off like we

always do and gained some ground and about 4 o'clock that afternoon they sent over a bunch of screaming \_\_\_\_\_. I had just passed a nice whole that the Germans and when the Germans dug in they dug in some nice placements. I thought I would just get in there. I didn't get in there all the way and I got a piece of shrapnel in my leg. It wasn't bad.

You could never get in quite far enough could you?

Tom: I just didn't quite make it. We lost some men that day. When I finally got back to where I could be evacuated there were 16 other guys waiting to go out.

Mr. Lott: We took a hill without any artillery support. There were two tanks up there and we knocked them out and killed all the Germans there. The Germans told me that they didn't fight at night. But that night they did. I'm up there right at the tip of the hill and I heard somebody up there. I put my head up and as I did I turned. I saw somebody out there but it was too late, I got shot. The bullet went through my cheek and came out my mouth. I said, "To hell with this!" I walked down on the hill and didn't see anybody. I was told that I walked 7 miles before I found somebody. They came out with rifles. I had on a long overcoat that I had found and I couldn't say anything. I put my hands up. They came out and saw that I was American. They took me to an aid station. I woke up in a warehouse that they rented out a room to be used as a hospital. Then they shipped me to \_\_\_\_\_ to be operated on, then to Paris, then over to England.

So who was it that captured you? Who did you surrender to?

Mr. Lott: I surrendered to Americans. I remember the snow was all over. They kept wanting me lay down in the snow but I knew better. I had walked that far. I got back to England and believe it or not on Easter I went back with the 101<sup>st</sup>

Tom: After I was wounded I went back through the different hospitals and went on a ship back to England. I was in England with my leg and I didn't get back to the outfit until the end of the war but I went back up when they were in Berchtesgaden just at the end of the war. I got back with a good reason.

Bob: I got wounded by a screaming mimi. It's a demoralized concussion type shell. It went off behind me. I thought I had lost my arm. I didn't want to look. Actually it hurt more than being shot in the leg. I gradually lifted my arm but it was real sore. I never did get any \_\_\_\_ or anything like that. At that time they didn't have first aid or anything like that.

What year was Bastogne?

Mr. Lott: It was December of 1944.

Tom: We went in there December 18, 1944. I think they were relieved if I remember right the day after I was leaving on January 17<sup>th</sup>.

Bob: I remember Christmas Day they dropped frozen turkey. They dropped by parachute. I remember we had to walk around with the turkey under our armpit to thaw it out so we could eat it. It was cold.

Mr. Lott: I got shot on the 28<sup>th</sup>. I was in Paris on New Year's Day and they served me a tray in the hospital with turkey. I was pushing it up through my teeth. The nurse was

wondering what I was doing. She said, "Oh no!" and they brought me back a turkey bar. I was supposed to be on a liquid diet.

Tom: Bastogne was awful, awful cold. It was terrible.

Bob: It was the worst winter in years. You hear that story every year. I think the Dutch people were more appreciative of what we have done over there even to this day. If the Dutch people are over here on tours or what not and we have a 101<sup>st</sup> emblem somewhere on a hat or a buckle or something, they will come up and thank me. They are really appreciative. The Belgium's are too. At this banquet you will probably have a couple of representatives from Holland from the underground or the ambassador or something. They always come here and thank the soldiers.

I know that you are going up through ranks. What was your rank at the time of Bastogne?

Tom: I was a staff sergeant. I was a squad leader and part of the time. When Sergeant Bowen was captured what there was left of the platoon I was in charge of who was left. There wasn't too many left.

You had a huge responsibility.

Mr. Lott: I was a PFC. I didn't make sergeant until I joined the outfit. I earned it then and made staff sergeant.

Bob: I was a first gunner with mortar. I had three squad leaders and they were all killed. I was acting gadget for awhile. That was it. Then I became a sergeant later.

Tom: It wasn't too hard to make rank in combat if you could survive.

Did you'll receive a lot of mail from home?

Tom: Something unusual happened to me. When we went into Bastogne it was on December 18<sup>th</sup>. My Christmas packages were already coming. Of course we went into Bastogne. I was wounded and went to England and when I went back to the outfit some of those Christmas packages had caught up with me. When the airborne went in they always had a rear echelon where they left their barracks bag and stuff. When you would go back to the outfit you would hold there until they got a truck load or two and my Christmas packages caught up with me in April. Some of them were as flat as a hat. There wasn't anything left but maybe a label hardly and a rope. That was my Christmas packages.

Mr. Lott: I had a Christmas package too and it is in a book. There is a story in there and I forget the name of the book; it was Holland all the way to Berchtesgaden. There was a battle that I took place in on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and I mentioned in there that we had to leave. The Germans had us surrounded and we had to run through the ranks to get out of there and all. I was upset because I left a can of homemade chicken soup that was made from my aunt in Pennsylvania. That bothered me; here I was saving it with my Christmas package and I never got to taste it.

Bob: I can't recall anything exciting like that.

Tom: When you are in combat you do get a little mail sometimes. When you are wounded and then you go out and mail goes up to the front and then it goes where you



are. When it finally gets around to you it is pretty stale news. Every letter I wrote home to my sweetheart she still has them. We still have that. We've got all those letters that I sent home and some of them are written when we were at Berchtesgaden. I got stationary with heading of \_\_\_\_\_. I used that and some were from \_\_\_\_\_.

None of you were married though before?

All three: No.

You were all just courting or dating someone in the states?

Mr. Lott: I even had a girlfriend in England too.

Bob: Yeah; I went over with my wife on the 50<sup>th</sup> and tried to find that girlfriend. I found her sister and her sister said she was living over in Canada. So I said I wasn't pursuing that anymore.

Mr. Lott: If my wife wasn't here I could talk about it.

Tom: It wasn't too hard for the Americans. The English girls got along with the American soldiers.

Bob: Yeah, the American soldiers were rich and had a lot of money.

Mr. Lott: This English girl I had met, I told her I was shipping out so I asked for her address. So about two days later I showed up on her doorstep and her family was upset. Her father said, "Remember there are some bad Yanks and there are some good Yanks. He might be a good Yank."

To continue on you are now in Bastogne, when did you realize that the war was coming to an end?

Mr. Lott: After Bastogne knocked the hell out of them. We really did. I feel that Bastogne was an involvement of; my feeling is that we had the breakthrough. The Battle of the Bulge was done on purpose. They put 106<sup>th</sup> division up where there were two or three divisions to hold that fort. When we were in Holland we were told what unit of the German army was massive in that area. Here they put 106<sup>th</sup> division that had never seen combat. What they wanted to do was help them breakthrough and then our men would get up there and just tear them apart as they came through. The weather changed and the fog was the main factor. The planes could not fly and everything was in favor to the Germans. They just massacred the 106<sup>th</sup> division. They just tore the hell out of them. I believe that was done on purpose. Now when the weather cleared up there were miles and miles of bumper to bumper equipment of the Germans that our planes did wipe out. It was downhill from there. From then on it wasn't hard to fight. In fact we went from town to town to wine cellar to wine cellar until the end of the war.

Bob: There were younger soldiers too.

Tom: They had a lot of SS troops in the Battle of the Bulge.

SS troops and Hitler youth and things like that?

Tom: They had good troops up there and they were just wiped out. They didn't have much left.

Mr. Lott: What was interesting, right at the end of the war there were so many prisoners coming to give up to us. They would come by the hummer and give up. I was going by one of the places where they were displaced and I went down and talked to this German soldier who could speak English. He was an ambulance driver and he gave me his ambulance because he was done with the war. The guys in our company had different vehicles and I had this ambulance and when we came into Berchtesgaden and came up the mountain, up to the Hitler retreat, our company commander said he looked down the hill and we looked like a Barnum & Bailey circus coming up there. There were all kinds of vehicles. We could use those vehicles as long as we could use American gas.

Did you collect any souvenirs or anything like that?

Mr. Lott: The only thing is, I lost them all. The guy who used the false header of the Smithsonian Institute sent a letter that at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Airborne they were setting up a museum there. I had a 15 x 18 foot Nazi flag, a \_\_\_\_\_ beret; I had so many things I brought home. I lent it to a Smithsonian Institute I thought but when I pulled it out the Smithsonian Institute had nothing to do with it. I'm not the only one. There were several guys with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne that lost souvenirs. I have a German gas mask that I am going to donate to the museum. I couldn't find that. I have a note from them, an IOU; my uniform, my medals, everything I had.

Tom: There were so many flags around Germany, swastika flags. I brought a huge swastika that is cut out around the middle. I couldn't carry everything so I just cut around the swastika.

Mr. Lott: This flag that I got, I was embarrassed about it because my two brothers were in the war. There were three of us. We were at the VFW and they wanted something for the newspaper. I had this flag and I was showing it to this group of guy's that were all brothers and they took their picture with it. The guy asked my name and that is all he asked me. I would be embarrassed if anybody from the airborne ever read it. He said I climbed a rocky tower to get this flag. Hell I got it out of an attic in the barracks. He had me in an armored outfit.

Tom: Probably everybody was at Berchtesgaden at \_\_\_\_\_ Hotel. They had all kinds of silver things.

Bob: They used to knock the doorknobs off the door just to say they were there.

Tom: We were straight looters.

Mr. Lott: I do have at home one thing. I have a set of Hitler's \_\_\_\_\_. I was in charge of the underground at Berchtesgaden under Hitler's house. They asked who could read blueprints and I said that I could. I was put in charge of it so I was able to send home the \_\_\_\_\_.

You'll were pretty reluctant though to be caught with this souvenirs. Did you think about that at all; if you were captured by a German or anything like that?

Tom: When you were in combat you didn't carry anything. You didn't want anything like that on you and you didn't have time to.

If you would have been caught with a German Luger that would have been your death sentence.

Tom: Oh yeah you would have been dead then.

Bob: In most cases it was the ones that came in after you that got all of the loot. If you captured a town you went on to the next place and whoever came in after you was the one that got all the loot. They got the money, they got everything.

Tom: But the American soldiers, I would say we were pretty good looters.

Mr. Lott: They would take rings off of the dead Germans. They would cut the finger off because it swells up and they couldn't take it off. They wanted souvenirs you know.

Now that you know the war in Europe is coming to an end, you know this, did any of you think about or heard of any rumors that you may be sent to the Pacific?

Tom: Yeah. They took us out of Berchtesgaden and sent us down into Austria for awhile and then we went back to \_\_\_\_ France to prepare to go to the Pacific.

Bob: ....because we were occupation troops.

Mr. Lott: I was on a pass to Paris from \_\_\_\_ and they had headlines about the atomic \_\_\_\_ in French. I can't remember but we knew what the hell it was saying; the atomic bombing was dropped by the US. We knew the war was over.

Tom: When we read some of those love letters I wrote back to my girlfriend and I went through some of them the other day, I was hunting those headlines from \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. There were a couple of little sections there that said that I might be coming back to the states. There were rumors that we might come through the states and we would get passes.

Instead of going through Asia?

Tom: We might go through the Suez Canal. So I said that I might be home for a little while.

Bob: That is when they came up the point system. If you had so many points, how many years over, how many battles, how many purple hearts.

Tom: Once they dropped the atomic bomb by then we knew that we wasn't going to the Pacific. We were preparing to come home to the states.

Out of you three, who had the most points?

Tom: Probably Bob had more points.

Bob: Yeah, we were the first; a group of us came in at once and the war in Belgium and from there one would top that and we came home.

Mr. Lott: He had another year on us.

Bob: We were the first group that came back and we landed in New Jersey. They had to educate us again on how to be civilians.

Did they really?

Bob: Yeah because we were so barbaric.

Mr. Lott: They told you how to pass the butter. You don't ask a certain way.

Bob: You don't pass the so and so butter. We got a little rowdy and no manners. We were only there one day. They were blowing balloons and they were up in the air. Everybody was smoking and the 90 day wonders were trying to tell us to behave ourselves.

They were trying to teach you how to be civilized.

Mr. Lott: One of the neatest things at the end of the war that happened to me one chance in a million was in the depot where they were unloading us in New Jersey, the train in front of us we were waiting for them and I was going AWOL with three guys and we were going to go to New York City. We didn't go to chow. We went into this big auditorium to find out where our barracks were going to be so we could be brought back some place. They were these 77 Division patches that was my brother that was in the Pacific. I got up on the bench and I hollered, "Is Ray Lott here?" because anybody might know him. I got up on this bench and hollered it way loud. I hadn't seen him in three years. He said, "Yeah what do you want?" We got discharged together. We came home together. We never went to bed that night.

That's a wonderful reunion. You were just looking for someone that may have known him?

Mr. Lott: Yeah. You know the chance of somebody knowing him out of a division. It's one chance in 10,000. He was probably about 15-20 feet from me and he was leaning over a barracks yelling, "Yeah what do you want?"

Did he recognize you?

Mr. Lott: Oh yeah.

Tom: One thing I would like to mention though, when I went in the service from a little town of 600 people in Indiana, while I was overseas I ran into a cousin of mine just by chance in the hospital. He was walking through there and I yelled, "Hey Frank bring back my cousin." In \_\_\_\_\_, Indiana there was an 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne trooper and he was up in Holland. When we went back to take showers one day I asked around if anybody knew Jim Crosby and somebody said, "Hey we got a Bing Crosby." It was always Jim at home. He said, "Well I will show you." There sure enough it was my friend from my hometown. He was called Bing Crosby over there. When I was moving up to the front back up to the division we was riding on the trucks with the barracks bags and things and our drivers had a little front end or rear end \_\_\_\_\_ and we stopped and was looking there and here comes a command car. It pulled up there and stopped and darned if that guy driving that jeep wasn't from my little home town. His name was Junior Morgan and he had been in the 82<sup>nd</sup> and he had been wounded a couple of times. So he became a driver. He was driving a Colonel or somebody around. I ran into him and then after we was

\_\_\_\_\_, a couple of guys came up from my hometown \_\_\_\_\_ the 101<sup>st</sup>. So I got to meet from my little hometown probably six guys overseas.

Bob: The guy that wrote "Hells Highway" and \_\_\_\_\_. He and I went in the service on the same day from \_\_\_\_\_ Michigan. We went to Fort Sheridan, we went to Fort Bragg and you know the rest of the story. The odds of meeting somebody from a small town in 20,000 and he's from a small town of maybe 1,000. We both went in a year after Pearl Harbor.

Fellows I appreciate it and thank you so much for everything.