

Interview with John Schroeder
Interviewer: Katie Warren
November 9, 2009

Transcribers Notes: There has been a technical issue concerning the tape. During the transcription, the tape cuts out momentarily and jumps to approximately 15-45 seconds later in the interview. Most of the [inaudible]'s in the transcription is due to the skipping of the tape.

Q: What do you recall about events leading up to the war?

A: Leading up to the war?

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: Not the war itself.

Q: Just right before...

A: Well, I can't recall it vividly, not anymore, because it was all going on through Nazi Germany. The whole thing came up through there. [inaudible] The Nazi regime then took over France, then they took over France [inaudible]

Q: Yeah, yeah, all of it.

A: Oh, well it was the latter part, when Japan came in. We're talking about England, now... [inaudible].

Q: Just right before you got involved, I guess. What did it feel like to be in America right before the war? Was there an element of people being scared and worried? Or was it more patriotic to you?

A: I got out of school in 42. And things started before that, you know. About '38, '39 [As he was speaking, the tape cuts to another section of interview]

Q: Did it seem to be expected that every person would join the military?

A: Yeah, it was, unless you had mental or physical handicaps, Yes.

Q: Mm. OK.

A: It was all matter of when your number came up. If you had a good number, or a bad number, how fast you got in, you know.

Q: At the time, when you went to Camp Lee, were you in a relationship?

A: Like my wife, you mean?

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: I had a girlfriend; we were quite serious. She died 30 years ago this is my second wife. We went to college together. She went to UE; I went to Wabash.

Q: Did you stay in contact with your family? Your parents?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean... my dad was quite into the war for being a civilian. He ran the Sun Beam company, which is now Whirlpool here in town. He was the general manager.

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Q: Were you stationed with any friends or family members?

A: In my station? In Virginia? Nobody knew me; I didn't know them. So, the next morning, I stayed overnight, I went down to the [inaudible].

Q: Tell me about your training experiences. What was that like, getting you ready to go to London? What all did you have to get ready for?

A: Well, when I went to London, I mean when I went to the Army and volunteered, I had to be in it a month's time before I could... I either was going to be a quarter master, or in the medical field.

Q: What was it like being in a different kind of culture?

A: It was the best place in the world to be.

Q: How did the English treat the Americans there? Did you get treated well?

A: 100 per cent. Perfect, yes, They all knew that America had saved them.

Q: What exactly was your job or assignment there?

A: I was stationed near... do you know much about England at all?

Q: Very little.

A: Well, in the southern part around London, there are two counties... well, I call them counties... Norfolk and Suffolk; you may have heard those names. And that was an area that was the heart of the English country. London was 30-40 miles south, and the population was mainly was down around that part. And the middle part of England was less populated, then you had Scotland way up there. So, we were in the area that England really was. Norfolk and Suffolk were just [inaudible]. When every 15 miles you saw an airbase. England was actually an airbase; they flew planes everywhere. When the bombings of Germany, and France, you know, came, the bombings would be during the day times, and our planes would go out during the night times, and they'd take pictures of this [Pictures taken were of damage done by the bombings of surrounding countries.] Then they'd bring them back to develop them. And if they found they hadn't bombed enough, well, they'd go bomb them again. And the other thing we did at our base, was a weather base. And they had planes that would fly halfway from England to America. They'd go halfway over there, then they'd come home. And they were taking readings of what the weather was in the middle of the ocean, because that was all coming towards England. And they would be able to tell when they could bomb or they couldn't bomb because what was out there, would be here in England, good or bad, a day or two's time, they could plan that way. But Norfolk and Suffolk are the two colonies in London [inaudible] where I was. [inaudible] took the plane, after we had that bombing, we had reconn planted at our base, and they went out and took pictures of the bombings, and they would know what they have done or had not done. And they could tell when they were developed [inaudible] they flew halfway back to America from the Germany/France area. Because the weather readings they got, the weather reports, were telling them what was going to be in Germany or France the next couple days. And they would know the good weather, and the bad, you know. They didn't have to wait until they got the boats to France to tell. They could tell what's going over there. But our base would go halfway to America, they'd make the readings for that, and they were so far away from our

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base, they'd go down to what is called the Canary Islands, you've heard of those, and that was the base that they'd stay overnight, get refueled, and come back to our place. So that was the mission of our base. So, I wasn't in combat; I was in quarter master.

Q: Now you said something I'm not familiar with. What is a recon base?

A: Recon means they go out and take readings of what happens.

Q: OK.

A: Reconnoiter I guess is maybe the full word. Where I take the readings of what happened. And if they haven't bombed [inaudible] Germany [inaudible] I'm sorry. The recon took the weather reports. The weather reports told you what the weather was going to be in France, a day or two later. That was the purpose of that one. The recon was something else.

Q: When you went to England, was it different than you thought it would be? Or did it meet your expectations?

A: Well, I thought it would be like America, because we came from there, you know. Back in those days, the Americans, we saved them, you know. If I had to pick between Germany and France, I'd be in England first. [inaudible] In some ways they're better. I mean they're more calm people [inaudible].

Q: Was there a most memorable time? During the 2 ½ years you were there?

A: Well, I wasn't in combat, so that leaves that one out, that'd be a big memory, I guess. Let me describe England to you. Chicago to Evansville, was like Scotland to London. That was the country. England is no bigger than Indiana, basically. Three hundred miles up and down, back and forth. And it was just the same. [inaudible] The bombing was mainly over... but we had some bombing. [inaudible] but London was already bombed.

Q: Did you stay in touch with your family at that time?

A: No. We didn't have a way to do it except to write letters. There was nothing else. [inaudible]

Q: What did you all do for entertainment while you were there?

A: I mean, I was an officer. I was lower down, but I was an officer. We had clubs there that we called "The Officers Club." We went there at nighttime. We had shows down there. Movies all the time, at nighttime. The English are great people. All during the war, what they went through, they were as much true as they are now during the war. There were a lot of things that happened... a lot of ruins over there. But London had been bombed before I got there, mainly. They had some after I got there, but...

Q: How long before you got there had they been bombed?

A: Oh, two or three years I think, yeah. The major part of the bombing was over with. Now, don't get the picture that England was all bombed out. There were a lot of areas that were bombed, but there was a lot of England that was untouched. That was there before World War II. [The next 30 seconds of tape cuts in and out. It is inaudible.]

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Q: Did you become friends with the other soldiers and officers? The other men?

A: You mean the Americans?

Q: Yeah.

A: Sure, we were friends. We had to be. We were on the base there together. We had our Officers Club; I was an officer. I was a low rank, but we had meals there all together at nighttime, and the G.I.'s, the rest of the guys, they had their meals out there [inaudible] I couldn't pick a better place.

Q: What was it like on the day that your service ended, and you came home?

A: I have a hard time talking about it, really.

Q: Yeah?

A: I mean... it gets me upset. It gets me... uh, not upset, but whimsical, you know. Emotional. Yeah. Go ahead.

Q: What did you do when you got back to America? Did you go back to school? Did you work? What did you do after that?

A: Well, I had a girlfriend. And, that was before the war. [inaudible] No, that's alright. She was my girlfriend during high school, and the last couple years of school, of college, and we had nothing planned, but I saw her the first night... we got engaged then.

Q: Some of the people you met in the army, did you stay friends with them once you got back home?

A: Yeah, yeah. But that's died out, though, after all these years. In fact, they've died out, too, my friends.

Q: How did your experience in the army influence the way you think about war or military in general?

A: I wouldn't say the experience in the Army changed anything, I was never really far out in any direction before that. My dad ran the Sunbeam Company, which is Whirlpool now, in Evansville, which is shutting down. [The next few seconds is cut out, but he was telling me that he went to graduate school at Harvard University.] ...went to college there. I had to go somewhere else for business school, so I went to Harvard. It was pretty easy for me to get into. I had a good record.

Q: What differences do you see, in terms of what people thought about war then and the way they think about war now?

A: If you ask me what they thought about it then, I mean, I was only 18 years old then...

Q: We had a World War II vet come to our class and talk, and he just kept talking about how back then every person, almost every single person, had involvement in the war. And now, that's not... do you think that's still so?

A: Well, that's true but that was a war we were in. We're not really in this war, really; we've got troops over there, I mean [inaudible] I see it as one side of the view. I don't like the way the administration is treating this whole country. I think the country people are different, too. I think the American people

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have changed; you know. I think they were more solid stock, if I can use that word that way, than people are now. People take up on all kind of flamboyant ideas, like our President [Barack Obama] has, and I don't want to get into politics, but there are differences that way, the way that I think, you know. But I don't get excited about it. So, I can't do anything about it, for one thing. And secondly, I'm 89 years old, and I'm not going to be around to worry about what all this debt we got and all that. But if I were 25, I think I might. But maybe if I were 25 I'd be too young to worry about it. If I were 60 I'd worry about it, yes, I would a lot. But it's just the way things have changed [inaudible] but I think it's going alright, it'll straighten out. It's not going to stay this way all the time, I don't think.