

State University of New York College at Buffalo - Buffalo State College

Digital Commons at Buffalo State

History Theses

History and Social Studies Education

5-2012

Buffalo, New York's Citizen Soldiers: Personal Histories of Combat, Trauma, and Returning Home after the Second World War

Drew H. Lewandowski

State University of New York, Buffalo State College, drewlewski@gmail.com

Advisor

Jean E. Richardson, Ph.D., Associate Professor of History

First Reader

Gary Marotta, Ph.D., Professor of History

Second Reader

York Norman, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of History

Department Chair

Andrew D. Nicholls, Ph.D., Professor of History

To learn more about the History and Social Studies Education Department and its educational programs, research, and resources, go to <http://history.buffalostate.edu/>.

Recommended Citation

Lewandowski, Drew H., "Buffalo, New York's Citizen Soldiers: Personal Histories of Combat, Trauma, and Returning Home after the Second World War" (2012). *History Theses*. 6.
https://digitalcommons.buffalostate.edu/history_theses/6

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.buffalostate.edu/history_theses



Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Military History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Abstract

Buffalo, New York's Citizen Soldiers: Personal Histories of Combat, Trauma, and Returning Home after the Second World War

This thesis focuses on interviews from nine World War Two veterans who are from Buffalo, New York and the immediate surrounding areas. Included are three infantry men from the European theatre, including one paratrooper. Three who served in the Pacific theatre, including one medical officer, a medic, and one man served in the occupation of Japan. The remaining three served in the Air Corps in Europe, one pilot, one bombardier, and one fighter pilot.

Through extensive interviews, both written and filmed, this work captures the experience of veterans that fought in World War Two. Servicemen from that era are dying at a steady rate everyday. Their experiences must be shared to better understand the psyche of the warrior, and what turns ordinary civilians into soldiers.

Furthermore, this work explores what attitudes, upbringings, or experiences, set the World War Two era veteran apart and why they are mythologized as the "Greatest Generation." Details will be given about circumstances of enlistment, basic training, and through first hand accounts the reader will experience combat through the eyes of someone who survived. This study will further show how men formed bonds during combat. The attitude expressed by the men interviewed was that they fought for each other. The overarching objectives of the war were foreign; most did not even know Hitler's Concentration Camps existed until after the war. They did not fight to preserve democracy; they fought for the man on either side of them. Elaboration will also be given on how each veteran reentered civilian life after the war.

Drew Lewandowski

State University of New York

College at Buffalo

Department of History

Buffalo, New York's Citizen Soldiers: Personal histories of, combat, trauma, and
returning home after the Second World War.

A Thesis in

History

By

Drew Lewandowski

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

May 2012

Approved by:

Jean Richardson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of History and Social Studies Education

Thesis Advisor

Andrew D. Nicholls, Ph.D.

Chair and Professor of History and Social Studies Education

Kevin J. Railey, Ph.D.

Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

Table of Contents

Abstract

Title Page

Introduction.....1-18

Chapter 1: Upbringing.....19-25

Chapter 2: Basic Training.....26-43

Chapter 3 Combat.....44-90

Chapter 4: Returning Home.....91-105

Conclusion.....106-109

Bibliography.....110

Introduction

Why are Americans fascinated with the generation of men and women who fought in the Second World War? Looking back in hindsight it is easy to say that World War Two was the last “just” war. Society is told that the ever-justified arsenal of democracy defeated Nazism in Germany and Imperialism in Japan. World War Two can be synthesized down to very black and white terms: good vs. evil, Hitler and Hirohito were evil and defeating their armies was defending humanity. Viewed through a nostalgic lens it is easy to create the myth of the “Greatest Generation” that fought the war.

What is the “Greatest Generation”? The Greatest Generation was a term coined by journalist Tom Brokhaw¹ in his 1998 book of the same title. The term is used to represent the generation that was born in the interwar years, after World War One, lived through the Great Depression, and were of military service age and fought in World War Two.

In his book, *Worshipping the Myths of World War II*,² author Edward Wood takes a critical look at what he sees as America's dedication to war as cure-all. He believes that war is the government's primary method for leading the world and believes the lessons of World War II are profoundly relevant to today's events. Wood discusses such topics as the killing of innocents, which became increasingly acceptable during the war; and that actual killing is usually ignored in war discussions and reporting. Wood speaks on the widely accepted concept of the Greatest Generation and how this group of young men

¹ Brokhaw. Tom. *The Greatest Generation*. New York. Random House Inc. 2004.

² Wood, Edward. *Worshipping the Myths of World War II: Reflections on America's Dedication to War*. New York: Potomac Books Inc. 2008.

really had no clear objective to fight. They were called to service by their country and through personal duty and sometimes peer pressure they agreed to fight. According to Wood memory is a tool that can both benefit and harm the remembering of events.

It is important to consider the fact that World War Two veterans are coming up with memories nearly 70 years after the events took place. In that time the veterans have been influenced by society, consciously and unconsciously that their actions were right and justified. Wood dismisses the notion that the United States won the war largely on its own; and on the effect that the Holocaust had on our concepts of evil and purity. His final chapter focuses on how the war on terror is different from World War Two and why the myths created about the latter hide that reality. It is clear that American society put the World War Two veteran on a pedestal and the veterans are associated with all that was good and prosperous about American society.

Why is World War Two looked upon with more romanticized eyes than later conflicts? It can be said that due to more available media coverage during the Vietnam, war was brought in to the average American's home and the brutal and savage nature of war was truly seen. Furthermore, due to this increased media coverage the support for the war on the home front dwindled. Social unrest and political instability at home brought support for the soldiers to a stop. Whereas the support and sacrifice of the men and women on the home front during the Second World War was a driving factor in the victory. With the support from home, servicemen were further justified upon returning that the war they were fighting was right.

I grew up on tales of victory during the Second World War. I am too young to remember the Vietnam War and the only experience of combat that I have are the images seen on the news from our current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. I hold the veterans that served in World War Two in high regard. Perhaps it is due to the fact, like so many others of my generation, we were shown images of the war that solidified our belief in the struggle of good vs. evil. We heard dialogue of Hitler railing against Jews overlaid on images of emaciated Concentration Camp victims barely walking and looking like human skeletons. These images shown to me in school, and taken at face value, further bolstered my opinion that every veteran of the Second World War knew that they were fighting to rid evil from the world. After conducting the interviews contained in this study I found out that my expectations were not entirely true. When I asked the veterans, who served in Europe about the Concentration Camps and the great evils that were done there most did not even know the camps existed. If they had some knowledge of the atrocities it was vague. So why were they fighting the war? Without getting into flag waving, and I in no way intend to sound patriotically biased, these men fought for the men next to them.

Camaraderie is what the veterans in this study talk about. This bond forged through combat can be seen throughout the history of warfare. Sources can be read that deal with Civil War soldiers speaking of the bonds of combat. Furthermore we can see evidence of the same bonds formed in today's military. Camaraderie and brotherhood in war differs from friendship. Friendship reflects the way that you feel about someone; brotherhood in combat is putting the safety of your unit in front of your personal security.

Sebastian Junger in his book simply titled, *War*,³ explores the brotherhood forged by young men in combat. Junger follows a company of United States servicemen in Afghanistan's Korengal Valley, from 2006-2009, a place where the heaviest fighting had taken place in the war. Junger, through living with and documenting these young men's experiences, gives a vivid picture of combat and throughout the themes of camaraderie and brotherhood are palpable. Junger expands on the notion that men in combat fight for the man next to them the soldiers "understand their mission in a tunnel vision way they are fighting for no great overarching objective, but for the safety of their brothers." Both in the book and the interviews conducted with veterans, the feeling is that no one can truly know how it feels to have that combat brotherhood without actually experiencing war.

Is the so-called "Greatest Generation" a myth? Is it a myth that a society with a need for moral and military justification has created? Are these veterans simply remembering the 'heroic' things that society said they did? Memory and the overwhelming feelings of the collective can be a powerful and influencing tool. In these interviews you will see the true reasons that these men fought. They fought for their comrades in arms that they slept in foxholes with, went with on a bombing mission, and with them endured artillery shelling. Their views on the war were not of a global conflict between super powers, it was a view that was lived 50 yards on each side of them. Facing life and death in their micro chasm of a war they fought for the man next to them. The

³ Junger, Sebastian. *War*. New York. Hachette Book Group. 2011.

myth that they fought and died for democracy was laid upon them by a society that no longer claims victory in conflicts and blurs the line between just and unjust.

World War Two veterans from the United States are dying at an ever-increasing rate. As the war slips further and further into the past it is imperative that historians seek to archive, record, and above all appreciate the experiences and firsthand accounts of these veterans. This work seeks to contribute to those experiences and accounts.

In a lecture at the Pritzker Military Library in Chicago, on May 2, 2011, Rick Atkinson, laid out figures that show just how close we are to losing, forever, the experiences of our veterans. Atkinson relates that of the 16,112,566 American veterans of all services in World War Two, only about two million remain alive. Veterans are dying at a rate of 795 per day. That breaks down to 33 every hour or close to one every two minutes. If this trend continues, by the end of 2014 the number of surviving veterans will drop below one million. By 2024, less than 100,000 will remain. By 2036, there will only be 370. That is half the size of a standard Army Infantry Battalion.⁴

Many books and studies are available on the topic of the Second World War. There are a myriad of general histories as well as works dedicated to personal accounts of the war. The focus of works on specific units, or groups of soldiers, generally details how they came together and formed a unit, how that unit helped win the war and then how the men made their way back home after the conflict.

⁴Atkins, Rick. *The US Army in World War II: Ten Things to Know*. Recorded May 11, 2011. The Pritzker Military Library.

This paper focuses on the shared experiences of Buffalo veterans. It provides a personal and explicit look at combat based on interviews; it gives local connections to bring those experiences home. This is a case study of individual soldiers to add to the general histories of war experiences. The focus is on these veteran's upbringings in the same city during the Great Depression, the circumstances of their enlistment, how they morphed from citizen to soldier, their part in the war, and how they returned and readapted to a post-war existence.

These veterans deserve to be remembered. Remembered not just in history books with a general overview of how they fought and won the war between Democracy and Fascism. These men who gave their youth to their country, who have seen unspeakable atrocities committed by human beings during their most animalistic moments, deserve to have their personal stories told. These veterans deserve to be remembered as individual and unique soldiers. While historians can never capture the entire experiences of the millions who served in the United States armed forces during World War Two, this case study seeks to further enrich the material available on veteran's first-hand accounts.

There is a gap in the histories of the Second World War. There are many works on the complete history and political motivations for the war; some of the more prominent titles include the *Time-Life*⁵ series that documents the entire war and each campaign. However, a more in-depth social history is needed. Reading about the political, financial and military goals of the major powers involved in the war, the United Kingdom, Russia, Germany, Japan, and the United States of America, gives those

⁵ Whipple, Addison Beecher Colvin, ed. *Time-Life Books*. Alexandria, Virginia: Time Life Inc, 1981. s.v. *World War II*.

interested in the larger perspective a window into what the leaders were planning and what policies they were instituting. However, this lens provides an overarching view. In order to appreciate the policies of nations one must view the instruments of that policy, in the case of the Second World War, the instruments were the soldiers on the ground, in the air, and on the sea.

The most popular works that focus on the individual soldiers of World War Two are by Stephen Ambrose. For example, in *Band of Brothers* Ambrose draws on the experience of a specific unit of American soldiers, who fought in the European Theatre of operations.⁶

Band of Brothers follows the experiences of Easy Company the 506th parachute infantry regiment of the 101st Airborne Division. Ambrose traces the lineage of this company from its formation in 1942 in Toccoa Georgia, through jump training at Fort Mackall and overseas to Europe. Ambrose gives a vivid description of how the American military took the brand new concept of airborne infantry and forged that doctrine into victory in the Europe theatre. Ambrose describes the Company's jump into Normandy on June 5th-6th 1944, D-Day, the breakout from the hedgerows of Normandy, Operation Market Garden in Holland, as well as the monumental Battle of the Bulge in Belgium. Thus Easy Companies actions are documented from its inception to the end of World War II.

⁶ Ambrose, Stephen. *Band of Brothers E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne from Normandy to Hitler's Eagle's Nest*. New York: Ambrose-Tubbs Inc, 1992.

Through the lens of a single company of soldiers Ambrose shows the reader how men from all across America, from all walks of life, came together through mutual training and hardship to form one of the most successful units in the American armed forces of World War II. In researching for this study I found no works that concentrated on a specific geographic region or a specific city's veterans. The following attempts to show how men from the city of Buffalo went to war, fought in multiple theatres of operation and branches of the service, and then readjusted to civilian life and came back to their common starting point, the city of Buffalo.

While Ambrose documents very well the formation of the company and the experiences, both individually and collectively of the soldiers in wartime, he does not explain how these men re-entered the civilian world after they were discharged. The following study is an attempt to gain further understanding of how the men who went off to fight during the Second World War readjusted to civilian life.

Another work by Stephen Ambrose, *The Wild Blue: the Men and Boys who flew the B-24's over Germany*, examines the American strategic bombing campaign in Europe.⁷ Similar in scope to other works by Ambrose there is a clear and primary focus. While the major theme, obviously, is the air war a subtler subtext is weaved throughout the book. The work chronicles the tour of duty of Lt. George S. McGovern. McGovern was a bomber pilot who joined 741st Squadron of the 455th Bombardment Group of the Fifteenth Air Force stationed at San Giovanni Airfield in Italy.

⁷ Ambrose, Stephen. *The Wild Blue: The Men and Boys who flew the B-24's over Germany*. New York: Ambrose-Tubbs Inc, 2001.

Ambrose offers a very intimate view into the lives and forming of a bomber crew. However, the experience of the McGovern crew is the experience of just one crew out of hundreds of crews that comprised not only the Fifteenth Air Force, but also the entire Air Corps in Europe. Due to the specific focus on one crew you do get a vivid account of their experience but their experiences may differ from others who participated in the air war, or perhaps even the same mission. Experiences vary from crew member to crew member and from plane to plane.

The above work does not deal with the adjustment to civilian life nor do works written by the soldiers who served during the war. Two examples are Robert Leckie's *Helmet for my Pillow* and Eugene Sledge's *With the Old Breed*. Both authors were Marines in the Pacific theatre and both saw combat. Leckie saw action on Guadalcanal and Sledge at Peleliu and at Okinawa. Both men served in the 1st Marine Division.⁸

Beginning with boot camp at the Marine Corps Recruiting Depot at Parris Island, South Carolina, *Helmet for my Pillow* follows Leckie through basic training and then North Carolina where he is briefly stationed, and is then shipped to the Pacific. Leckie is wounded after the battle of Guadalcanal and is eventually shipped back to the United States before war's end. Leckie's book gives a gripping first-hand account of the Pacific theatre and the first major Marine Corp battle in that theatre.

⁸ Leckie, Robert. *Helmet for My Pillow: From Parris Island to the Pacific*. New York: Bantam, 1957;

Sledge's work, *With the Old Breed*,⁹ covers the second half of the Island hopping campaign in the Pacific. Sledge documents the horrors faced nightly on the islands of Peleilu and of the bloodiest battle of World War II, Okinawa.

Both authors give thrilling accounts of heroism and really bring alive the utter brutality of war, something that can only be described by those who were actually there. However, as stated before, these are only the experiences of two individuals and the work is only viewed through their eyes.

Prisoners are an inevitability of war. Adrian Gilbert, in his book, *POW: Allied Prisoners in Europe 1939-1945*, chronicles the experiences and struggles of those British Commonwealth and American soldiers and airmen imprisoned by the German army and the Luftwaffe during the Second World War.¹⁰

Gilbert focuses on eleven specific stories of both British and American troops. His well-researched work is heavy on oral history interwoven with contextual information that makes the prisoner's story relevant to the war that is going on around them. His distinct format traces the troopers from battlefield surrender, their journey to the camps, daily life and rituals within the camps, discipline and leadership, escape attempts, and the POW's homecoming. His work is both comprehensive and paints a vivid picture of life inside a prisoner of war camp, as well as giving enough background and context to the reader so the oral histories do not read as muddled.

⁹ Sledge, E.B. *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*. Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1981

¹⁰ Gilbert, Adrian. *POW: Allied Prisoners in Europe, 1939-1945*. London: John Murray, 2006.

The following investigation into the lives and experiences of Buffalo, New York veterans is not viewed through a narrow scope of one military branch. While conducting interviews for this project a conscience effort was made to find local veterans from every major branch of the armed service during the war years. Unlike the authors mentioned who focus primarily on a very specific aspect, i.e. a particular company, unit, division, battle etc, this study will include the experiences of veterans from both theatres of operation, European and Pacific, as well as varied branches of the service, Army, Navy, and Air Corps. This will give a broader view and the ability to compare experiences of men serving in different branches.

The veterans in this study have varied life and military experiences, one may have enlisted while another was drafted, one may have chosen to fly over Europe while one chose to go to the Pacific with the Marines, their lives have one common thread, however, that is their connection to Buffalo, New York.

A total of nine veterans were interviewed. There are three veterans from the Air Force: one pilot, Bob Sommer; a bombardier/Prisoner of War, Robert Heine, and a fighter pilot, John Seneff; all three of these men saw combat in the European Theatre and John Seneff was in the Italian theatre as well.

Three men from the Pacific campaign share their experiences; one a Sergeant in the Infantry, Efner Davis; and the other an officer in a medical battalion, Captain Thomas Lombardo. Daniel Kay was an infantry private during the occupation of Japan.

Ed Drabczyk who fought in France; Joe Stefaniak who served with the 82nd airborne; and Robert Schneider who was a motorman and a Sergeant in the Infantry represents the European theatre.

My intent in this paper is to capture as much of the veteran's voices as possible, thus in the following pages the veterans recount their experience in their own words. Context of the explained event is given at the beginning of each quote.

The following is a brief sketch of each interviewed veteran.

Robert Sommer was born in 1918 in a neighborhood in Buffalo's East Side known as the Fruit Belt. The streets were named after different types of fruit, Peach, Cherry, Grape, etc. It was an immigrant and German-American neighborhood at the time. Sommer enlisted in the Air Cadets in 1942 First Lieutenant Robert Sommer piloted a B-17 bomber in the Eight Air Force in Europe. Sommer was part of the strategic bombing campaign. Sommer flew dangerous missions during the day trying to bomb strategic targets. His counterparts in the Royal Air Force [RAF] flew at night and adopted a strategy known as 'carpet' bombing. The objective of carpet, or area, bombing was to inflict as much damage as possible to both civilian and military targets. The continuous pressure on Hitler's supply and production facilities was a major reason why Hitler's 'Fortress Europe' crumbled. A common saying among aviators was that Hitler built a fortress but forgot to put a roof on it.

I don't know why I picked the Air Corps, I guess I liked the idea that if I was going to get shot down it would be over with [laughs] I didn't want to go into the regular army.

Robert Heine grew up on Buffalo's East Side on Glenwood Avenue. This area consisted mostly of eastern European immigrants and their first American born generations. This area, much like the Fruit Belt, consisted of middle to lower class working residents. Heine enlisted in the Air Cadets after he read some test questions in the *Buffalo Evening News* and knew all of the answers. Heine chose bombardier as a specialization because it was the quickest. He was eager to fight. First Lieutenant Robert Heine became a bombardier in the Eight Air Force. Heine was responsible for dropping bombs on strategic targets throughout Europe. His crew was shot down and he became a Prisoner of War [POW]. Heine would find himself in arguably the most famous prisoner camp, Stalag Luft III. This is where the famed "Great Escape" which occurred the night of March 24–25, 1944: 76 men escaped. Heine was brought to the camp shortly after the escape. He has a unique view of the war seeing both combat and captivity.

It was like watching a silent movie. You didn't hear any noise, the only noise you heard was the four engines on your plane and if your gunners were shooting at anything. Planes would blow up on either side of you, the flak would blow up alongside you and you wouldn't hear a thing.

Jon Seneff was born in Illinois but moved to Buffalo for a job. He enlisted in the Air Corps because he always had a love a flying. First Lieutenant John Seneff was a fighter pilot. He flew the P-47. Seneff was assigned to the 86th Fighter Group 525th fighter squadron, throughout the war he was stationed in Italy and France respectively. Seneff flew over 70 missions in the European Theater. He received extensive training in the United States before being commissioned. Seneff enlisted and took training with several close friends and they all volunteered to serve overseas together and wound up

being stationed in the same unit. Seneff witnessed intense combat missions over Europe and lost some of his closest friends in the process.

I did all of that when I was 19-20. I got home in time to be 21 and be able to vote [laughs]. [You miss] The camaraderie that you had with the other guys that you flew with. We just had a reunion. The trouble is that there aren't many people left to show up.

Ed Drabczyk was born in Niagara Falls, New York. He grew up working hard as a busboy in a Polish-American neighborhood in Niagara Falls. He joined the army without finishing high school. Drabczyk joined the 3rd Infantry division and was involved in the invasion of Southern France [Operation Dragoon]. The 3rd Division suffered more combat deaths in World War II than any other U.S. division Drabczyk was wounded twice in combat. The second time he was hit, an unknown Sergeant that was part of a tank group in support saved his life. Drabczyk's squad was assaulting through hedgerows. Drabczyk has a very emotional testimony regarding his time in the Army. He acutely remembers when his views on war changed dramatically; it was when he saw a member of his unit killed.

And he was just killed instantly. So after that I started getting nervous and unsettled because until then John Wayne and I were going to win the War all by ourselves. That all changed.

Robert Schneider grew up in the German-American area of Buffalo's East Side. After High School Schneider went to college at the University of Kentucky where he was involved in the Reserve Officer Training Corp [ROTC]. Upon hearing the news of Pearl

Harbor, Robert and his fraternity brothers went down to enlist in the army, forfeiting their commissions. Robert Schneider served as a sergeant in the Army in the European Theatre. Schneider was assigned to the 104th Division as part of a mortar squad. Schneider saw combat in Holland [Market Garden], The Battle of the Bulge, and in the Hurtgen Forest. Schneider witnessed Adolf Hitler's final solution first hand. His unit was the first to discover the concentration camp at Nordhausen.

Our division was the first ones into a camp. And we smelled it before we got to it. One of those terrible Concentration Camps the Germans had. We were the first ones into this thing and it turned out that it was Nordhausen. I couldn't bring myself to go in and look. I smelled it bad enough to not want to have anything to do with it.

Joe Stefaniak grew up in an area of the City of Buffalo known as Black Rock. This was a blue-collar area of the city. Stefaniak was drafted in 1942 and upon hearing about the upgrade in pay [paratroopers got an extra \$50 a month pay], decided to join the paratroopers, an experimental unit at the time. He was assigned to the 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment 3rd Battalion G Company of the 82nd Airborne as a private. He jumped into Normandy on June 6th, 1944. The D-Day objective was to help secure the Merderet River crossings. Stefaniak describes his unit as a tight knit family, and feels combat cannot truly be recounted to those who were not there.

Every so often I think of the memories and it hurts. When you are with your own bunch you don't mind talking about it because every one of you saw everything. They know that you're not throwing them some bull. And you try to keep the bad things away from one another.

Dr. Thomas Lombardo was born in Buffalo, raised in Buffalo and practiced medicine there. Lombardo was in his senior year of medical school when war broke out and was recruited by the Army to serve. Lombardo was a Captain in the Infantry. He was commissioned as a medical officer in the 25th Infantry Division and assigned to the Pacific Theatre. Lombardo was on the front lines during the battle of Luzon. He dealt daily with the responsibility and split second decisions that either saved a man's life or resulted in a man dying from battle injuries. Lombardo gives a unique perspective on the war. He did not fight with a rifle, but used his brain and ability as a healer to help those hit by the implements of war. He gives a descriptive insight into the officer hierarchy. Captain Lombardo had several instances where the Japanese were not the most dangerous enemy; it was his fellow officers that posed a threat.

During the day you wouldn't shake because you were too busy taking care of your casualties. The bullets and bombs didn't mean a thing. You just had a job to do and you did it. I was in combat, not a field officer way of sitting back a hundred miles away from the fighting.

Efner Davis was raised in Arcade, New York a rural town about 40 miles south of Buffalo. He was an avid hunter and fisherman in his youth. Upon hearing of the attack on Pearl Harbor Davis enlisted in the Army. He eventually made his way into the medical field. He was trained as a combat medic. He would serve on the front lines, stabilize men who incurred wounds and assess their situation and if needed evacuate them back to an aid station for further treatment. Davis was not simply armed with bandages and morphine, as he quickly learned the Japanese saw the Red Cross on the medical helmet as a target. Davis was armed to the teeth and did his best to blend in with the other soldiers.

When I first arrived I was wearing a white helmet, with a red cross- front and rear, red cross bands on my arm and a khaki uniform. A round [of Ammunition] goes over my shoulder. So at that point I decided don't monkey around with the red cross, they make a beautiful target.

Daniel Kay did not see combat in the Pacific. He was drafted out of Saint Joseph's High School and went into the Army. As he was training to go overseas he received word that the Japanese had surrendered and the war was over. Kay, however, would go overseas as part of the allied occupation force in Japan. Kay's experiences with the locals provide a very different viewpoint than those who faced them on the battlefield.

If I was involved in actual warfare I would probably tried to get involved in a medical group or something like that. I would've liked to save a life rather than take a life.

The following chapters are grouped according to themes: the first chapter discusses the veteran's pre-war existence in the city of Buffalo and the circumstance in which they came to be in the service. The second chapter deals with the veteran's basic training and assignment to a theatre of operation. The third chapter focuses on combat and is divided into three sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter deals with fear, the second deals with traumatic events that occurred during the war, and the third relates problems that some of the soldiers had with officers, both during training and in combat. Chapter four centers on the return home from the war and the adaptation back into civilian life. Each chapter centers on the actual words of the veteran. An effort was made to preserve as much of

their voice as possible. Clarification has been given where needed but the majority of the work is in the veteran's own words.

Chapter One: Upbringing

Chapter one of this study introduces each veteran, describes their pre-war lives and the circumstances of how each came to be involved in his respected service.

Bob Sommer was born and raised in Buffalo, New York. Bob grew up in the German-American area within the city of Buffalo, known as the “fruit belt,” a collection of streets that are named after corresponding fruits: Cherry, Peach, and Grape. Sommer learned a strong work ethic and sense of duty from his parents who were first generation immigrants. He had this to say about his experience and circumstances of his enlistment:

I was born in Buffalo, in the fruit belt. I was born on High Street between Peach and Grape. It was a beautiful, very German neighborhood; there were lots of stores on High Street, bakeries and meat markets. I was born in '18, 1918.

I enlisted in the aviation cadets then I took my flying lessons, I started flying in Florida, that's where I soloed, and then went from there to South Carolina where I flew B-25's and then they [Air Cops] needed a body so they shipped me overseas. I had never been in a B-17 before. I had to learn how to fly a B-17 while I was in England, in a combat zone. There was no training before, nothing.

It was called the aviation cadets at that time and they were taking practically anybody they could get their hands on. This was in 1942. I can't remember where I was when Pearl Harbor was hit, but it didn't have a real effect on me, to tell you the truth, but after Pearl Harbor the men were enlisting like gangbusters. I was 20, 21, when I enlisted. I don't know why I picked the Air Corps, I guess I liked the idea that if I was going to get shot down it would be over with [laughs] I didn't want to go into the regular army.

Dr. Thomas Lombard was in the beginning stages of his Medical Residency when war broke out:

I was born in Buffalo, raised in Buffalo, and practiced medicine in Buffalo. First of all, I volunteered. When I was in medical school and it was our senior year, France was invaded by Germany (1939) and in a week they took over France.

So the Army (US) sent a reserve officer down to our medical school. I would imagine to every medical school in the country, and he (reserve officer) told us this. 'I'll give you two choices men, he talked just to the men in the class not to the ladies, I'll give you two choices you can volunteer and I'll let you finish your senior year and your internship or you don't have to volunteer and I'll send you down to your local draft board and they'll pick you up as a buck private." Obviously, with a gun to your head (laughs), you volunteer. And that's what I did. So I volunteered. So I finished my internship on June the 30th 1942 at Millard Fillmore Hospital and on July 1st (1942) I had to be in Carlyle, Pennsylvania where the Army had a medical training staff to teach us first aid, actually.

Efner Davis was born in Arcade, New York a village approximately 30 miles south east of Buffalo's metro area. Davis was raised in a rural atmosphere with an emphasis was on self-sufficiency and living off the land. Davis was trained to shoot and taught self-discipline and independence at an early age. In response to either being drafted or enlisting Davis' situation was out of the ordinary

I was born in Arcade, okay these are the medals I was awarded but anyhow, if you get shot at enough they'll give you medals, not that they did you a damn bit of good.

The original set up was a little bit weird, when the Japs attacked Pearl Harbor, I was out fox hunting and I'm coming back into town walking down the main street of Arcade with a rifle over my shoulder when the chief of police pulled up and said hey Davis! I threw my hands up, I'm innocent! He said damn good thing you're an excellent shot with that rifle- you're gonna need it- the Japs just attacked Pearl Harbor so that's where I was, when Pearl Harbor happened- I was sixteen. Okay well I thought let me at them; I'll fix those dirty Japs!

I mean, the idea that the Japs would attack and what they did to Pearl Harbor I was really gung-ho at the time and I was a boy scout, so on and so forth I just said let me at them those son of a guns, I'll fix them, so,

this is a long way to end up at your question, but I went into enlist and signed everything all up, but since I was only sixteen, my parents had to sign, but they wouldn't sign and they said "the day you graduate from high school you can go into the service, so basically that's what happened, so the day after I graduated I went to enlist and was informed you can't enlist because you are now eighteen and you're on the draft list. I said, "That's a heck of a note, what happens next? Nothing was happening, just go home and wait for the papers.

I went home and Dr. Davis- not a relative of mine, our family doctor- was on the draft board. I said "Doc how do we get around this and he said you can't and he said let me think about it...he said a guy by the name of Stanley Davis just got killed, he was to go into the Army right away - he was drafted and so he said we can just (switch draft numbers) (laughter) I guess we can do that. So, my name goes in place of his, so the moment I went into the army nobody knew if I enlisted or got drafted. My serial number is an enlisted number- 42020519, but I was drafted, so from that moment on my records have all been screwed up, so that's what happened so I don't know – did I enlist or did I get drafted?

John Milton Seneff was born in Moline Illinois and went through high school there. While not born in Buffalo, he moved to the city after the war and has lived here ever since completing college.

I was on scholarship and spent the first semester at the university of Illinois in Champagne. I spent one semester in school and during that semester I think most of us who were in a fraternity at the time were either contemplating some enlistment. This was in fall of 1942. I went up to a place called Chanoot Field, which is about ten miles north of the school. And that is where I enlisted and was accepted into the Army Air Corps. So I was in the Air Corps with the assurance that I would go back to school and spend the next semester and probably the next year in school before you are called up. And that lasted for two weeks! [laughs]

I was called up in February 1943, I went to Chicago, got on a train went to Sheppard field Texas. Sheppard Field is at Wichita Falls and that is where we did basic training. I was there for about two months. It seemed like every place we went was for two months. But at that time the losses were so great in the air force that what they did was they took everyone in that enlisted and they didn't know what to do with most of the younger people.

What the air corps did was they put most of us into what is called a College Training Detachment. After our basic training we were sent to Sentinary College, which was in Shreveport Louisiana. And we were there for I think another two months. The rigors we did there were neat, I think they taught us all the basics because they weren't sure if anyone had any knowledge of math. Our basic classes were mathematics physics and aerodynamics. While we were there we also went out to the Shreveport airport and got ten hours in a Piper Cub, in the back seat of a Piper Cub[a small one-engine training aircraft]. Nobody soloed, nobody did anything else but fly around in the airplane. It was just training flights to get us used to actually flying, there were no criteria, there was no exam. I'm not even sure what the criteria for graduation was (laughs) we just existed that's what it amounted to.

I always wanted to fly. Besides that when I was in high school, I had a friend whose father was a controller of the Monocoop aircraft company. My friend Vern was actually a test pilot for the company and he got me involved in flying and my objective in life was first to learn how to fly an airplane and then learn how to build an airplane. And I followed those goals right through my life.

Edward Drabczyk was born in the rough area of Niagara Falls, New York a city approximately ten miles North East of the city of Buffalo. Drabczyk was raised in a Polish neighborhood. Like all of the World War Two generation was raised during the Great Depression. Hard work and self-sufficiency were traits that were instilled at a very young age. Drabczyk did not finish High School he went to work.

I didn't finish high school. I had to leave to get a job. The Depression was still on believe it or not. I was a busboy. I worked in a paper mill, and I worked in a paper mill until I got drafted.

[In response to Pearl Harbor] I was on a bus going downtown, I was a busboy at a restaurant downtown. Like everyone else, you know, [I thought] where the hell is Pearl Harbor? That's when I first found out about it. I was drafted in '43 but I left in January of '44. I did basic training in Camp Blending Florida. It was swampy, you know, sandy, and like every camp, even God can't find it. We did night problems [patrols simulating combat at night] and there were snakes and stuff. I didn't mind

the marching and the training. I really thrived on it. But I didn't like the snakes and the swamps and all of that stuff.

Joe Stefaniak served with the 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment 3rd Battalion G Company 82nd Airborne. He was raised in the Black Rock area of Buffalo. Of Polish-American ancestry, he was taught that duty and service to his country was paramount. He was drafted and wanted to serve with the then experimental US Airborne.

I got into the service in 1942. I was drafted, went to Fort Niagara and a friend of mine came up and asked me what outfit I was going to join. I said I have no idea and he talked me into signing up for the Paratroopers. And at that time we were getting 21 dollars a month regular infantry pay and for 50 more dollars jumping out of a plane wasn't too much more of a risk, I didn't think anyways, being a young kid.

So I signed up for the Airborne and I went to Fort Benning, I believe it was outside of Macon, Georgia. We took our thirteen weeks of basic. Basic was where you learned to be a soldier how to shoot the rifle and all that. But when you went into the paratroopers they put you through the mill. If you didn't make it you were out of there. And I mean climbing rope, and if you couldn't climb it you came down and you had to go back up again. And every time you opened up your mouth to be a wise guy, it would be give me 25 pushups or sit ups, it was up to the Sergeant. Then at Benning we made our five jumps.

Robert Schneider served in Europe as a mortar man. He was with the 104th Infantry Division. He touches on his fondness for the military, attending college and the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC).

Yes I grew up in Buffalo. After high school I got a job with Buffalo Forge, its long gone. That's the place where air conditioning was discovered incidentally. And I worked there for a while and finally after a year I decided I wanted to go to college. So I finally wound up at the University of Kentucky because I was working for the engineers at Buffalo Forge and that's where they suggested I go to school. So I went to

the University of Kentucky got into ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corp), which I happened to like.

I always did like the military. The way it was set up in that time, if you survived two years of ROTC, after that it was optional and you had to sign a contract for the following two years which would guarantee you a commission in the army as a second lieutenant. Just about the time my first two years were up Hitler decided to do what he did which caused us to come into trouble. At any rate we declared war and our whole fraternity went down, lock stock and barrel, to enlist.

Robert Heine grew up on the East side of Buffalo. At the time it was a strong German and Polish Community. Heine had these comments about his enlistment and Pearl Harbor.

I grew up in Buffalo, East Side, Glenwood Ave. When Pearl Harbor happened? I was sitting in the front of the house with my buddy in my car- when we heard the news.

I was kind of surprised, but I knew something was coming. I knew we would eventually be in that war, because me and all my buddies were draft age. I was 21 at the time.

I enlisted in the Air Cadets. *The Buffalo Evening News* ran some test questions in it. My older brother asked me if I could answer them and I could answer all of them so he said why don't you take a chance and see if you can take it. So it was me and two other guys went downtown and took the exam and we all passed it. So the next week we had to go up for the physicals. I figured if I passed that exam I would fail this one, because I was as skinny then as I am now, but I passed it. One of the guys didn't pass it because he had asthma they wouldn't take him, so there was the two of us. That was in July of 1942.

So, I got sworn in, I was officially in the Air Corp until after I was sworn in then January 1st of 43 I was sent down to San Antonio and went through all of the exams again, and passed them. The guy I was with decided he didn't want to be there, he was a musician and so he wanted to be in an Army band, so I was left all alone.

Daniel Kaye was involved in the occupation of Japan after the hostilities ceased.

The beginning (of my military service) would be my senior year in high school when I was 17 at Saint Joe's Collegiate. And it was the war year and of course no 18 year old was exempt from drafting if you were A-1. So I had to accelerate my senior year at Saint Joe's, double up everything. I finished in January, I was 18 in February and I was in the service in March. This was in '45.

I went to Fort Dix New Jersey for a couple weeks orientation and testing and from there I went down to Camp Gordon Georgia for basic training. Fortunately the hostilities were declared over when I was in the last phases of training camp. You didn't want to be in training camp with guys having guns when the war was declared over. They were shooting off rounds all over the place. They were so happy and being there was the worst place to be (jokingly). Anyway, I survived that!

While there are geographical differences with the veterans listed above, the willingness to serve is evident, as well as their passion for their respective services. All of these men are proud of their branch of the military.

Each veteran had his own personal circumstances under which he came to be in the service, but the aspect that brings all of these veterans together is that when the country called these young men to leave their families behind and head into the unknown world beyond their hometowns, they answered the call and served their country.

Chapter Two: Basic Training

The United States Army of World War II was created from a tiny pre-war army in the space of three years. On June 30th 1939, the Regular Army numbered 187,893 men, including 22,387 in the Army Air Corps.

The outbreak of war in Europe on September 1st 1939, led to an expansion of the Army. On September 16, 1940 Congress passed the first peacetime draft. Unfortunately the draftees were inducted for only one year. On August 7, 1941, Congress approved an extension of service for the National Guard, draftees, and Reserve Army officers. Four months later to the day, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

On December 7, 1941 the Army consisted of 1,685,403 men. This increase was a magnificent achievement, however, shortages of equipment and trained personnel were still serious. Over the next three and a half years the Army expanded further to 8,291,336 men in uniform at the end of the war.

These men were plucked from civilian life by the draft, or enlisted for their own various reasons. This chapter will discuss the training, in some cases, lack of training, the servicemen received before heading overseas.

Bob Sommer discusses his lack of training as he prepared to become a pilot in the Army Air Corps. Sommer was sent to the European Theatre of Operation having never piloted the aircraft he was assigned to fly in combat. He was trained on B-25's and was assigned to a B-17. As he will relate, the mechanics and way of flying the two planes, is very different.

I started out in Colombia, South Carolina like I said with B-25's and then they grabbed me and shipped me overseas on the Queen Elizabeth I. We had 15,500 people on board one ship. It was a hell of a crowd of people. It took us about a little less than a week to get overseas. There were two or three guys that were with me in training, my best friend Bob Knight he was part of the Knight-Ridder chain of newspapers, which is a big newspaper in Miami, Florida. He is part of that family. His family owned about 15 solid blocks of business in Miami. We were shipped overseas together. We were based in a little town by the name of Chalveston, England. They must have added about a couple of hundred airfields, all within a short radius of each other.

I was a second lieutenant when I shipped overseas and then I was promoted to first. I didn't make captain because the commanding officer and I didn't get along. You don't argue with the guy that is your headman (laughs). He and I just disagreed on how to fly and a lot of other things.

Flying the B-25 as opposed to the [B]17 is totally different. A B-25 has a nose wheel, a B-17 has a tail wheel and the tail comes down first when you land and the 25 with a nose wheel, the nose comes down first when you land. It was a completely different type of flying. It wasn't that difficult for me to adapt to it to tell you the truth. We had 5 crewmembers on the B-25 and we had 9 on the B-17.

Dr. Lombardo, after talking with the Reserve Officer that was sent to his medical school had this to say about his basic training. Lombardo's case is another example of these men learning their new jobs on the fly and having to adapt to the "Army way" of carrying out their duties. He emphasizes the extreme lack of preparedness especially concerning his first aid training. Dr. Lombardo would be commissioned and be promoted to Captain. He was responsible for training the medics under his command. He would, however, run into the ever-present politics within the Army.

Obviously, with a gun to your head (laughs), you volunteer. And that's what I did. So I volunteered. I finished my internship on June the 30th 1942 at Millard Fillmore hospital. On July 1st 1942 I had to be in Carlyle, Pennsylvania where the Army had a medical training staff to teach us first aid actually.

You'd be surprised, in medical school you got no first aid lectures, you didn't get a lecture on bandaging, NOTHING. They [Army] depended on you getting this in your internship. And in your internship they are too busy to teach you bandaging.

So I got into they Army and they fortunately gave us this six-week course in Carlyle, Pennsylvania. Before they sent us overseas. So they [Army] gave us this six-week course and they gave us a beautiful field manual on how to bandage. Thank God. I memorized that book. I was married at the time and every day I got through with the Army that was teaching us how to march and how to salute and everything basic, at 5 o'clock pm when they dismissed us, my wife was with me so we had rented a small apartment in Carlyle. And every night I would come home and put her on the floor and put a splint on her leg or her arm, bandage her head, whatever the book and our instructors taught us that day I did to her, to teach myself. (Chuckles) So that came in very handy.

I was sent to the West coast, we were in Oregon and the state of Washington and northern California for almost a year training with this new division called the 96th Infantry Division and I was assigned to the artillery to be the physician for the artillery. I was a first Lieutenant at that time and after six months they [Army] promoted you automatically to Captain.

Now, unfortunately for me I'm one of these people who believes if you're a G.I. assigned to me, you can come to me for help. Or you could go to the chaplain. But we had a wishy-washy Captain, so the men would come to me if they had a problem with the field officers because some of them were very nasty. You know they're G.I.'s, give 'em a chance, they're away from home, it's a new experience for them. Well they [GI's] would come to me. So I'd listen to them and if I couldn't help them, I made myself do everything I could for them. They have nowhere to go, they are away from home.

This one particular artillery officer we had, he was a Captain, like I was at the time and he was looking to be a Major. He was just a..... No good S.O.B [son of a bitch] He would say to the men, 'Today you're going to put a half a canteen of water around your belt [in your canteen] you're going to drink out of that, shave out of that. Whatever you need water for that's all you have.'

He had his headquarters about a hundred yards away from mine so I could see what he was doing and he could see what I was doing. He would get water assigned to him, like I did, being a medical officer, I had about a five-gallon container issued to me. So this guy would take his container, in the morning, pour water into his helmet and shave with it. Then he would throw the water out right in front of the men. Fill it

[helmet] up again and then give himself a sponge bath. Then throw that water out.

So I went up to him, after all, I'm a medical officer, and a Captain, I could have done the same thing, but I felt that this was the order and you follow orders. So I went up to him in a nice way, I said what are you doing Captain? You're setting a poor example for these guys; you're the leader of this group. And he said, 'Get out of here you S.O.B, I don't like ya!' So I said nothing

Another time we were on maneuvers and he [Captain] decides he has to urinate. Now on maneuvers you didn't have toilets you had to dig a hole and you had to squat or take a leak, you did it in the hole. And most of us did that. And he had a meeting with his officers one day to discuss the maneuvers they were on that particular day and correct mistakes the men made. So he says just a minute men, I've got to take a leak. So he takes out his penis and he urinates right in front of all of us. And we had set aside certain areas where we had these latrines dug. So I wouldn't take that. I stood up and in front of all these officers, I said, Sir correction here please; you're violating every health rule that there is. I said you shouldn't be doing this. You should use what the men use. He said nothing. Later on he told his officers that when we [96th] got into combat that I would be left behind.

And sure enough when we got through maneuvers I got an order, from the Army, for overseas duty. Captain Lombardo, it was two citations, now I trained my men well. I had the best-trained men in the whole division. So, I received this citation from the War Department and it said right above my name Captain Thomas Lombardo is hereby cited for having the best-trained men in all of the Corps. Now a Corps is made up of more than two divisions. So you're talking over a hundred doctors who are supposed to be training men and who are not training them, their attitude is you'll learn this as you go along. Bologna.

These men that I had, if you had a broken leg, they knew how to set it with splints made of wood. I taught them how to find wood from trees that fell and the branches and what have you to make a splint. After all you're not going to have a bunch of pre-made splints with you in combat. You don't have that luxury, in a field hospital, yes, but not the average first aid man. He had a bag with bandages and simple stuff and adhesive tape that's all he has. Well I had to teach the medics how to be successful in the field and unbeknown to me they were inspected. Nobody knew. But they must have been stopped during maneuvers and told hey so and so has a laceration on the scalp let me see you bandage his head, and the kids did, or they'd say so and so had a fractured thigh, let me see what you do with it, and they knew what to do. So my medics were well trained

and that citation is verification that they were trained well by me. I was very proud.

So when I got my order I figured I'd go to the Chief Medical Officer of the Division and ask why he is sending his best man [Lombardo] overseas. So I did, I got permission to talk to him. And he was one of these guys not doing his job, very gruff 'What do you want Captain [referring to Lombardo]' I said I'd like to know why you're sending the best man you have, overseas? Why don't you keep me so I can pass the skills down? He says, because we need fighting men overseas. And that was that I had no recourse.

I went to San Francisco to head overseas. I was one of ten thousand men on a ship. That's how many men we were going to replace. I ended up in the 25th Infantry Division. And this boat ended up in New Zealand. And all ten thousand of us went to this one outfit, the 25th Infantry. This was a regular Army division that was stationed in Hawaii, and they lost from casualties, from Guadalcanal and all those little islands; they lost ten thousand men. So they had to re-outfit and re-train the new guys coming in. Fifteen thousand were left from the campaign and we were ten thousand new. I was assigned to this outfit. The boat landed in New Zealand and we went to New Caledonia for training.

Efner Davis was selected to become a combat medic. He would be responsible for all first aid for his unit. He originally volunteered to be a paratrooper, but was selected for the medical program. He came to discover that the training got him into great physical shape and prepared him for the rigors of running around, helping wounded men on a battlefield under fire. He would, however, have some difficulties adapting to life in the Army.

Like Captain Lombardo, Private Davis would speak his mind to the officers he came into contact with and comes off as a cocky smart aleck. Unlike the calm, mature Captain Lombardo, Davis tends to fight with other men during basic training, including officers. Davis matter-of-factly relates how he did not make friends while in the service.

Due to the fact that he was a medic, he needed to maintain a level of separation between himself and the other men.

Basic was in Camp Grende, Illinois. We were in a medical, I guess you would call it an experimental company- basically they wanted to find out what the human body could take and when I got out of basic training three months later, I was so muscle bound, I couldn't cross my legs.

I had a first aid badge and was certified as a first aid instructor for the American Red Cross and I made a classical error of volunteering for the paratroopers and so I ended up in the campground Illinois in the medical basic training and so I'm checking with the guys- how did we end up here?!- I got talking to these guys they were pretty good shots and in excellent physical condition and come to find out that this is about maybe the end of the first week of basic training. The company commander- the captain was on the stage and said " you men think that you have been railroaded because you're medical but every one of you here is a volunteer for paratroopers, ski troops, rangers, any of the top branches and you think you're tough you're gonna find out by the time this basic training is over what tough really means because you're going to be assigned to the different groups that you're interested in, but when those guys fall flat on their face you're going to double time, pick them up and carry them the rest of the way, and that got interpreted in the ear as rushing up and picking up some guy that got shot and getting him under cover and that's basically what we did. That's one reason why the combat medics took such a high casualty rate in the Pacific because basically that's what happened because when one guy got shot everybody else tries to find a hole.

I was a first sergeant in fact when I was eighteen, but that didn't last long – I got busted in about five months. I knocked my commanding office out cold. Well, the story starts back in basic training. We came in, this was about the third day, we had a sixteen mile hike, but anyhow, I'm sitting on the bottom bunk, two tier bunk, I'm gonna take my boots off and this nut, who was out of the Bronx in New York City, and he was a bully. He liked to trip people, kick people, he would just like to see blood run, you know, so this nut comes up and puts his foot up on my knee and says " take my boot off." I pushed it off and said "grow up" and that time he jams my head down so my nose is at the knee and at that point I lost it a little bit and said the hell with this and I'll show you, with Jujitsu I can take one finger here and one here and dump you on your head, so he pushed me down, I come up and there's his arm, so yeeha, he takes the top bunk right along with it and there was a hell of a crash we were on the second floor.

So First Sergeant Sparrow came up and said what the hell blew up and here's this guy, his shoulder is on the floor, his one leg caught on the broken part of the bed, his leg up in the air and he's laying there and he says gosh Sarge, I think the bunk broke! And the other guy in the barrack's saying he got what he had coming right there. So that was the first one, and I got into a couple of other little hassles, and then it's about five weeks into basic training and I've got to explain something else.

When I was a kid all the way up until I went into the service, I would trap all winter long and I would trap muskrats with breaking down through the ice getting my trap, so I can hold ice, but I can't hold a cup of coffee. It wouldn't be hot to you, but it would burn and it feels like it's burning. I got stuck- it goes like this, In the Army they say you don't salute the man, you salute the uniform, but if the General's vehicle comes by, you have to salute the general's vehicle you know, okay, etc.

I'm going down the company's street salute and Lt. Smith comes up and said hey soldier! What the hell are you doing? And I said Sir I'm following orders and he said what do you mean? Well, that's General Motors and that's General Electric sir- no sense of humor, right? So he sorta fell for that- don't let that happen again, yes, sir, so a couple of mornings later it's about 4:30 in the morning, there's a little tree in the company area and I'm shaking the tree and Lt. Smith comes over and says "alright soldier what the hell are you doing now!?" Well, nothing important sir, but if I have to get up at this hour then the birds aren't going to sleep." Well, there were a couple of other little instances and finally they decided this is a little too much, so you're on KP. So, this is where the next one comes.

I get on KP and I'm standing there holding the sides of this metal tank that the dishes are in and I said to the staff sergeant, the mess sergeant and said "Sarge, you gotta cool this down a little I can't put my arms in it, so he comes over and turns on the hot water, it's typical Army, makes it hotter " and he's standing behind me takes my elbows and runs my arms down into the water ... ah ha, but down in the bottom of the sink one of the steel pitchers that they use I just took one of them and brought it around and drove him down like a fence post.

Well he went to the hospital, needless to say, in fact he was gone all of the time we were in basic training, so the MPs come and get me and on the way out one of the medical officers walked in saw me and said what's going to happen with your arms? First degree burns sir...how'd that happen? I told him, and he said you gotta take this man to the hospital so they treat my first degree burns and decided that they had better leave well enough alone so they sent me back to the company I never did end up at the guard house and a few other instances and then we graduate from basic training three months and mind you we were over

trained, over exercised, to the point where you would fight your grandmother just for the exercise I'm telling you it was something else.

We got out to camp Pittsford, California and they bring in a new company commander this guy had been overseas, he was shot, came back he recuperated and now they put him in charge of this replacement company so and it's in August in San Francisco and it was hotter than hell- damn warm, and anyhow we were sweating like mad and there we were standing at attention he's going up and down the line and saying- "you bunch of sissies- anyone here think they can take me? He keeps it up and finally somebody at the back says don't pick on Davis. All right, Davis I'm at the end of the line and I said I'm over here sir! Comes over and stands about here and says Davis, do you think you can take me? Sir, you're three seconds from finding out. He says, "Step out first sergeant and take care of these sissies." That was it and now I had charge of the guys. So, now I'm a first sergeant and were headed overseas, headed for Guadalcanal and mind you that time we had no Navy, no protection at all and we were on this ship zigzagging all over the place trying not to get targeted by a sub so the captain of the ship says if anyone falls off of the ship, forget him because to swim in any direction is five thousand miles. So I've got my company out on the deck, we're right under the equator, dead on, and it's hot I've got them standing on these cork life preservers and giving them real slow exercises because the captain had ordered we have the exercises.

So he steps out of the officer's quarters and says, "Davis those men are supposed to be shirtless. Sir, we're going to boil the company! Davis get those shirts off of those men!" Okay fine, we got the shirts off we got sunburned needless to say. So I'm still giving them these real slow exercises and he comes out again and says "Sergeant Davis, start giving them exercises in quick time! I said Sir, I'm sorry and pulled out my canteen and started to pour some water on the deck and it's not even making a puddle, it's just steam right? He's not paying any attention, he could care less and finally he says "get your ass up here!" So, I get up on the platform and here's this idiot and he gets a hold of my belt and he's giving me a hard time and he's shaking me and I said "Sir, please let loose of the belt, then I said "Captain, would you please let loose of my belt?" nope, then I said now Look bud, I said "this is the last time – let loose of the belt, nope then BAM! It was the end of the conversation, he went out and I got busted all the way to private.

It took me a year and a half to get back to being a Sergeant. But I ended up as E7 a senior Sergeant one notch down from where I was.

We did not have any real close friends. You really didn't want a close friend.

In basic there was no time, we were at it from the wee hours of the morning from 4:30 and all day long. We hiked in basic training with full field equipment we hiked 140 some miles in three months. The last hike was 44 miles with full field equipment. And we were in excellent condition. The only time I had off when I was in the service was right after basic training they gave us three days. I came back from Illinois to Arcade it took me a day, I was there a day, and it took me another day getting back, that was it. No furloughs. And it's not like in the service now, where they say you've got one year left in your enlistment. In World War II your agreement was quite simple, for the duration plus six months. So we just didn't know. There was a guy in my outfit that was in the army for sixteen years and we thought give this guy a discharge, but he had to do it just like everyone else, right up on the line. And that was part of the problem, when the war ended in Europe they had the troops over there scared silly because they were going to send them to the Pacific.

I noticed in the paper and it said we lost 5,000 troops [present wars in Iraq and Afghanistan] and it has been eight years, we would lose 5,000 in a day in the Pacific.

Jon Seneff discusses his flight training and his basic training as a fighter pilot, including his first solo flight. Seneff recounts the thorough training needed to be a successful combat flier. He describes the camaraderie that was shared between his fellow fighter pilots and relates how not only did his "gang" request to be posted to fighter planes they were shipped overseas together, and found themselves serving in the same fighter group.

We went to San Antonio. San Antonio with what was called our first cadets. Then we were actually classified as aviation cadets. Before that we were just GI's. We then went through the start of cadet training and that involved a bunch of things. We took classes in ground school, code, we were taught code and a lot of drill a lot of physical training. A lot of air force regulations. Most of these things prepared you for a bunch of things because this was officer training as well as headed for flight training and the rest that went along with it. We didn't have a specialization track yet so we were given basic knowledge in everything and when you graduated from flight school you were commissioned as an

officer and then went on to more specialized training. So we went through code, and light signals, and navigation.

Then from there we went to what was called primary training. That was flight school. This was at Coleman, Texas. I just remember a big wide field with a bunch of airplanes on it and all of our instructors were civilians. They were all civilian instructors. The pilots that gave the army tests and things like that were army pilots but the instructors were all civilian. We flew PT-19's this is a Fairchild airplane that has an open cockpit. It was a good little plane.

So after we got through flight school we went to more basic. Basic was a BT-13. We went to Saint Angelo, Texas we flew about sixty hours of flying time.

As you were going through all of these different aircraft the instructors were seeing where you were more proficient.

The primary trainer was a very simple airplane; a BT-13 was big, overgrown and lumbering. But it was an airplane that you could do almost anything with; it had instruments in it so we got our first taste of instrument flying. We also did enough acrobatics, spins and all that, to familiarize you with being upside down in an airplane. But there was criteria the instructors were very tough and very restrictive as far as the flight tests. The final plane we flew was an AT-6 and we flew that at Foster Field in Victoria, Texas. That was what they called the advanced trainer also if you passed that, then that was your graduation. At the end of the two months of flying you graduated.

We learned all about flying in formation, flying acrobatics, flying individual, somewhat individual combat. And we logged a lot of solo time. It was a good program that greatly familiarized us with aircraft. So we graduated in class 44-D, which D is the fourth month and we graduated in 1944. It took that long to get through. Then we had our first leave since we had entered service. We got a week. I flew home that was the first time I had ever been in a civilian airplane.

After leave we reported back to Foster Field and we received more advanced training on aerial and ground gunnery. This was the first time we ever fired guns that were in the airplane. At that time the gunnery range was in Matagorda Island. We had both aerial targets that were tow targets. What they had was a plane I think it was an AT-6 that towed the targets behind the plane and what you would do was go around with your gun, it was a single gun, and fire it and they had bullets that were painted different colors for different people. So you would go out with your group and fire at the target. That was for the aerial targets and they had ground targets as well.

Then we went back to Foster Field and were checked out in a fighter, the first time we actually flew with one of the fighters and that was a P-40. We were given ten hours in the P-40. Of course that was the first time anybody had allowed us to fly without being checked out by the instructors. It was a single seat fighter and you can't fly with anyone else. Here was where we were allowed to select, whether or not you got what you wanted or not. But we were allowed to select the type of flying you wanted to do.

We had a gang that got together, there were five of us, and it actually ended up being a miracle, because out of the five, we lost one guy in Pocatello, Idaho, I'll talk about that later. But out of the five, four of us not only got to be fighter pilots, which I think they were only allowing ten percent of classes as fighter pilots. All five of us got fighter training and four of us that didn't get injured, ended up in the same Squadron overseas! It was quite a deal for four good buddies to be not only in cadets, I think we all met at Centenary College, we were then separated but we all ended up at Foster Field and graduated. And ended up selecting P-47's partially because three of the five of us of the gang were from New Orleans and they figured by going to Baton Rouge and flying P-47's and the P-47 assembly area was at Baton Rouge. And these guys from New Orleans figured that they'd get enough time off that they could go home in New Orleans. So that's partially why they selected the 47's [laughs]. That probably had as much to do with it as anything else. We ended up going to Baton Rouge and yes indeed we did go to New Orleans it was quite a deal.

I chose the P-47 because I wanted to go with the rest of the guys (laughs) you know? We decided that we would all go together and so we did. And interestingly enough we did go through the school at Baton Rouge, what they did is they transitioned us to train on the 47. And of all the things on it that I still can't believe they put seven car loads of Second Lieutenants on a train and sent us out to the different training bases that they were going to go to for the P-47 without any supervision and every time the train stopped of course there would be a number of these guys that would get off. And it was funny because there were Lieutenants all the way from Baton Rouge to Pocatello, Idaho catching up with the train via taxis and other trains whatever they had to do. So we ended up in Pocatello Idaho.

That was where we took our P-47 transition training. And that was training flights and up there you did a lot of formation work, individual combat work in the 47's, and the way that worked was you'd go out one on one with an instructor and the instructor would go off and you would go off and then you'd start the sequence of combat and your goal was to get on the instructor's tail and that would be a big dog fight. And it was good training they pushed you hard. Sometimes it was exciting because

some of the airplanes we were flying were the earlier 47's and actually there were some quirks on that airplane that didn't necessarily bode well for you. And hopefully you learned the in's and out's.

The unfortunate thing about training was we lost one of our gang, the gang of 5, Norm Kaufmann, had an engine failure and bellied in a 47 in the Badlands up there and broke his back and on a consequence of it he was sent to the hospital and missed going with us.

We went from Idaho back to Baton Rouge where we were staged for overseas. And we were allowed to go on a Liberty Ship, the way the housing on the Liberty Ship worked was there was a main deck that was put under the top deck and they would usually put in 300 GI's into that cavity. And the officer's quarters was on the side of this right next to the outside of the hull and they had a little room where they had 12 bunks in and they were 3 bunks high and 4 bunks long and that was the whole room. That was our quarters and we spent 30 days on that ship. Believe it or not, it took us 30 days to get to Naples on the marvelous piece of machinery.

I was a second lieutenant coming out of flight school, incidentally the graduation at that time most of the people who graduated were commissioned as a second lieutenant. There were some flight officer's but they were not considered commissioned officers. That rank is about equivalent to a chief warrant officer and about twenty percent were flight officers and the balance was second lieutenants.

Ed Drabczyk notes that basic training consisted of marching, field drill, physical fitness and shooting skills. He further expands on the experience of being away from home and he also gives a vivid picture of the Atlantic crossing to Europe.

Really, this was my first time away from home, outside of a trip here and there, go see a ball game in Cleveland or something like that.

We got two weeks leave after basic training. Then I reported to Fort Mead, Maryland, we were shipping out. We got loaded onto a Liberty Ship the name was the Patrick Henry. And it was the first one that Henry Kaiser had built. Of course it wasn't brand new then, but that was his first Liberty Ship. So we were on that and naturally I got seasick. Oh man was I sick. For about five days I didn't eat anything and I slept up with the gun crew, the navy gun crews, and they told me it was the smoothest crossing they ever had [laughs]. So we were on the ship fifteen days until we got to

Naples, Italy, and somewhere between the rock of Gibraltar and the coast of North Africa we got a submarine alert. And I thought Oh man, you know, which way do I swim? And the navy guy said that way is about 30 miles and the other one is about 40 miles so you're not going to get very far. But it turned out to be nothing and we landed in Italy. We were put us in a camp outside of Naples and that night sure enough, we got bombed. But nothing happened to us.

Joe Stefaniak points out the physical training that separated the Airborne from the Regular army. Stefaniak also vividly recounts jumping out of an airplane. American paratroops had to make five jumps to receive their jump wings. Needless to say, hurling yourself out of an aircraft is a dangerous undertaking; Stefaniak bore firsthand witness to this fact, as he was injured multiple times during training.

They taught us how to jump out of mock towers. You had to make up your own chute for the first five jumps and you better make darn sure that the risers and all that was in order. On the third jump I had I got hit in the side of the head, and was bleeding, I was going to quit, but a friend of mine, the one who talked me into going into the Paratroopers, called me chicken or yellow or whatever it was, and I didn't go for that. I completed my jumps and then we went to what was called the Frying Pan, in Alabama. We stayed there for I don't know how long, we made a few more jumps and then we were transferred over by train up to Alliance, Nebraska. We made more jumps and went down to Louisiana for maneuvers with the 3rd Army. On one jump here I got stuck up in a tree and saw my buddies on the ground and I hollered give me a hand, and this smart ass said this is war time, and wouldn't help me. You can imagine the words I used [laughs]. So I finally got down.

On two jumps I got hurt pretty bad. I ended up in the hospital. I hit really hard and my knee gave out on one and the other they had to cut my boot off and bandage it up really tight and they sent me on a plane back to Nebraska. I stayed in the hospital about a week there. And then I went back to active duty. At that time they needed bodies and they didn't give a damn if you were hurt or not, you went in. We stayed in Alliance for quite some time and then we went to Camp Shanks and in '43 we went over. And we went over on some ship, I can't remember the name, but it should have been sunk in the Civil War. And I don't know how long we were on

that ship but all I remember was heaving my guts out most of the time. They didn't feed us well and it took about maybe ten or twelve days.

We arrived in Liverpool from there we went to Port Rush, Ireland, Northern Ireland, we stayed there for two or three months and then we went to Nottingham, England and we did some more jumps and training.

Robert Schneider discusses his circumstances of enlisting in the Army. He further emphasizes the intelligence of his fellow soldiers within his company.

I went down to volunteer but we went home on vacation because they weren't ready to take us into the Army yet. So I went home. I was told not to go back to Kentucky because we were going to be called up. If I had gone back one day I would have been paid .25 cents. I had already signed a contract but until they paid me it wasn't valid. I would have been paid the .25 ct and gone into the Army as a Second Lieutenant. Well that didn't work out so I wound up being called up and entered the army as a private. I wound up at Fort Niagara and from there I wound up in the Army Engineers training. So I got an engineering training program. Which was particularly helpful because I was working towards a career in engineering.

Well, the Army decided at that time that we were comparatively intelligent and they wanted to keep a battery of people in the service, but they wanted to keep us in school so our education would proceed. And if we were needed to be sent overseas, fine, if not we would have been educated by the Army. So I wound up at the University of Delaware and also had some classes at Georgetown. I started at the University of Delaware and then when we were shuffled off to Georgetown, almost immediately Patton was running wild in Europe. And they decided, no matter how damn intelligent all of us were, overseas we go.

So they drained all the universities and sent us all over. I wound up in the 104th Division, which was the most intelligent division ever put in the field according to the army records. There were a lot of us, my best friend who died only recently, was a student at Princeton, our cook had a master's degree in bacteriology, but all the rest of us, almost all of us were in at least our second or third year of college. But all the gosh darn officers; because of the training they had, our Executive Officer was a cowboy. Our commanding Officer was a shoe salesman, so it was completely lopsided. I had to write and read the letters for my first sergeant he was completely illiterate. At any rate we were shuffled over to

Germany. We were the first troops to arrive in Cherbourg, a few weeks after the invasion [Normandy].

Robert Heine discusses going through bombardier school in San Antonio, Texas. The training was highly academic as well as fast paced. As a bombardier, Heine would fly in the nose of his plane and be solely responsible for accurately hitting the designated target.

I got through bombardier school; I had my choice from the beginning. I chose to be a bombardier because it was the quickest. I graduated from bombardier school in July 15th of 1943.

We spent so much time in San Antonio- got indoctrinated and all that and I was sent up to Ellington field in Houston where we went through the basics and after that I got through that they sent us up to Bombardier school at Big Springs, Texas we had classes in the morning for science, math and all that crap. In the afternoon we flew at the bombing range. They had twin engine Beechcraft that were small and held 10- 100 pound practice bombs. There were two cadets to a plane with an instructor. So we practiced bombing at a target on the ground and we had to maintain a certain score. A lot of guys got washed out because they couldn't hit the target and some guys got washed up because they got air sick and a lot of guys just wanted out and I was lucky enough I got through to the end.

On July 15th I got sworn in as a second lieutenant. After that I got sent up to Efrado, WA where I was assigned to a B17 crew. So I ended up as a bombardier on a B17. We picked up our crew of six gunners, a navigator, a pilot and a co-pilot. Then went down to Walla Walla Washington for tactical training flying on the B17.

From there we were sent overseas. We did not fly our aircraft we went by boat, the Queen Elizabeth. It took a week to get across. It had 15,000 troops on that boat and it was crowded.

We got over to Scotland, that's where we docked. We came out of there and were assigned to the 384th bomb group. We got to Scotland in the middle of October; I didn't fly my first combat mission till I don't know, maybe the first week in December.

We had a good crew except for the tail gunner. He liked his women. He was always out with a case of Venereal disease.

The name of the town we were based in was Grafton Underwood. If you look at a map of England, you see a section on the East coast called the Walsh, we're about 50 miles inland from there it's north of London. I got sixteen missions in before we were shot down.

Dan Kay recalls a lesson learned in basic training that he still remembers all these years later.

In basic training we had these forced marches and I'll never forget the one incident. They were giving salt pills to those who needed it and I never took 'em. My company did fine on the march but A company was dropping out like flies. When they got back to their barracks their sergeants made them cut the grass using razor blades as a punishment for dropping out. I'll never forget that. What a way to teach them a lesson (laughs).

We were never really severely punished because we did fine. One thing was if they wanted volunteers you never volunteered, I'll never forget I had to sort out about a thousand nails of different sizes, it was a task, it wasn't hard but if you volunteered you probably got KP [kitchen police] peeling potatoes. They were always looking for volunteers.

Also another thing in Camp Gordon we had to do of course KP, I'll never forget the situation where if you were on KP you had to peel spuds and did whatever all day to help in the kitchen. Then you rode out and took food to those in the camp. It happened to be a rainy day and I thought 'oh boy I'm not going out in this' and when we got back I went to my barracks and turned on the lights and there were thousands of cockroaches.

Every Saturday we would have these so-called GI parties where you would have to wash down the whole barracks with soap and water and this was ideal for the roaches. So if you had a trunk for your clothes and stuff you had to get prophylactics and wrap your candy bars and food in the condoms (laughs).

From there [basic training] I was sent over to Fort Orde, California to get prepared for going overseas. I don't know one week or two weeks.

They were giving lessons on swimming and I had never been a swimmer in my younger days but here we were on KP, instead of KP I

thought 'I might as well learn to swim' and I finally made it to graduation of swim class. So I survived that.

Then from Fort Orde, we were there only a couple weeks then we went up to Seattle to embark for Japan. And I lucked out again we were on a military ship that had staterooms for officer's wives. So the elite were coming down and we were able to have good meals because the officer's wives were there. Coming back was a little different (laughs).

I started out as a Private First Class (PFC) and I was assigned to the Hawaiian Division. But when I got to Japan they were going back to Hawaii without me. So from there I was assigned to the 33rd division.

The ability to adapt as a human being is essential for survival. As shown these men adapted to the new way of life that they so suddenly found themselves. Efner Davis would curb his temper and learn to respect the authority of his superiors, Bob Sommer would receive the most intense on the job training one could imagine for flying a bomber over Europe while contesting with enemy fighters and anti-aircraft fire. The basic training these men received was just that, basic.

Here we begin to see the roots of brotherhood take place. Efner Davis is reluctant to make friends because during combat he will have to make split second, life or death, decisions that will leave some men alive and some dead. Friendship and familiarity with the men would result in second guessing his decisions.

John Seneff, however, seems to base his decisions solely on camaraderie. He chooses his aircraft, the P-47, because all of his buddies are choosing that plane. He volunteers to go to combat just to remain with his friends.

The roots of brotherhood are beginning to take hold and that foundation will be tested under fire. Each man relays his story and motivations for joining, however, not one

of them mention the need to eradicate the enemy. They are joining because society and the environment around them say it is their duty to serve.

Each man found the will inside to pursue through the hardships and some had to deal with incidents of incompetence during training. These hardships would pale in comparison to those suffered when these men saw combat.

Chapter Three: Combat

Chapter Three A: Combat and Fear

The following chapter is divided into three parts. The first part deals with those veterans who, in their interview, spoke of having fear in combat. Every veteran interviewed that experienced combat expressed fear. You will experience the veteran's reaction to combat and through their narrative you will get an extremely personal and realistic taste of combat during the Second World War. Robert Heine will describe, in detail, the procedures and anxieties of a bombing mission from waking up at 4 am to bailing out over enemy territory that same day.

You will get a feeling of how utterly exhausted these men truly were. Robert Schneider describes being so tired that he was actually asleep and still firing his mortar on the enemy. When confronted and thanked by those soldiers he saved with his fire, he had no memory of his actions. That is fatigue.

The second section of this chapter deals with those traumatic events each man experienced. While simply the thought of entering into combat is traumatic enough, the incidences expressed during these interviews go beyond simple anxieties. The events in this chapter are at the core of what will be burned into these men's minds forever. These traumatic events become 'their' personal war in the context of the larger war. Robert Schneider describes the feelings that were aroused in him when his unit came across Nordhausen Concentration Camp. These are but some of the memories that are burned into these men's minds nearly seventy years after the fighting ceased.

The final section deals with those veterans that had problems with their superior officers while in combat.

These men saw horrific combat first hand. They witnessed their friends being blown apart by artillery, shot, downed in aircraft, and they did it all while being between the ages of 18-25! These veterans may have entered the service as boys but they unquestionably came out of World War Two as men.

Bob Sommer had this to say about the fears of piloting a B-17 aircraft over Germany. Sommer's crew flew at the head of the bombing formations that decimated German cities. He talks about the fear of fighter pilots and the constant state of anxiety felt by those airmen.

Oh yeah, you're always scared, they are shooting at you from the ground, and the fighter planes are shooting at you as well, anyone who says that they aren't scared are lying. It's a scary type of living.

Sommer describes reacting to fighter plane harassment and the dangers of being a lead crew.

Yes, my last mission I flew was to a little place called Cottbus, it was right on the German-Polish border and we were bombing the airfield, there were German fighter planes that were on the field and we were trying to knock them out. We were also under attack by German fighter planes, they would line up and they would make a pass at you and we were pretty much sitting ducks, because they could shoot us down easily. Generally the fighters would knock out one or two planes every time they made a pass, however, one of the fighter pilots that was escorting us, got above them as they were queuing up to make another run at us and he made a pass at them and he shot down six enemy planes in one pass. He saved our asses.

The Germans like to shoot down the leader; it's not the greatest place to be. They did that because it would disrupt the formation so they always went after the lead plane. We were unable to evade or maneuver at

all, and you dealt with that by sitting there and crapping your pants! It wasn't easy, war isn't nice, and there is nothing nice about war.

We went to Leipzig Germany, where they were making artificial gasoline. Now they still aren't making artificial gasoline in this country today, but they were making it during World War II. I don't know how they did it, but they were making it.

One mission to Schweinfurt, where they made all of the ball bearings, we sent out 24 planes and only 6 came back, it was a rough mission.

Getting sick turned out to be a good thing for me, it was Thanksgiving dinner and we sat down to dinner and the flight surgeon, the doctor of our group, was sitting at the end of the table and I was sitting right next to him and we had a wonderful meal of turkey and all the trimmings, and I said doc I can't eat this, he said I must have had a bug so he sent me to the base hospital and there was not room there, and they sent me to the general hospital and I was in there for six weeks. While I was gone we lost quite a few planes and I guess I was lucky that way. The plane that I would have been in was shot down and all of the crew was killed. 50% of the planes that flew up out of England never came back. It was a high casualty rate to say the least.

I saw planes explode and you saw a lot of planes that went down in flames. The Air Force song says we live in fame and go down in flame. And that is true. It was written before the war started, but it was very true.

Jon Seneff flew seventy-four combat sorties as a fighter pilot. His aircraft, a P-47, was hit on several occasions. Seneff experienced hellish combat and split second decision making that could either save or end his life, and as he concludes, when he got back to the States he was twenty-one and just barely eligible to vote in the coming elections.

See what you would do is we would fly close to the ground on bombing missions. And since we were so low the Germans could fire anything at you they could fire rifles. We always said they threw everything but pitchforks. As you'd get near the ground on them they had small arms fire on you all the time, machine guns, then you would go off and the 20mm would fire then the 40mm and of course the 88's. You had to get pretty high altitude to get out of range of the 88's, those things were big and the flak was black and they were nasty and loud and all that kind of stuff.

I got shot up 13 times flying those 74 missions two of 'em were scrap jobs, which means the plane was scrapped. So I got into a mess enough times. It wasn't particularly fun. This one mission we were dive-bombing a target and my entire canopy was shot off before the bomb run. So I had to dive bomb without a canopy, pretty scary stuff. Then when we landed and I got back to base I look down and there is a hole and enemy bullet hole through my seat about two inches from my backside. The ground crew guy pointed it out when I stood up in the cockpit and I damn near fainted that was a close one. It wasn't all fun and games.

That was in May and I guess I had had enough missions by that time and they had a point system, I had enough points that I was headed for home. So we went through the long process of coming home. I ended up coming home and I got home in time to be 21 and be able to vote (laughs).

Robert Heine vividly recounts the procedures of waking up for a mission, being briefed and his feelings as a bombardier in combat. Heine's plane also experienced mechanical failures while on a mission. The entire crew needed to bail out of their B-17 over German controlled territory. He shows a slight detachment and humor from combat by saying that he had the 'best seat in the house.' He was seated in the nose of the plane and was responsible for timing the release of the bombs in his plane as the formation was over the target.

I mean you're in this huge machine about to fly into combat. I had butterflies in my stomach, I didn't know what to expect and soon found out. I found out what flack was and what fighter planes were.

Flack you can't do nothing about. If you're on your bomb run and you see that big black cloud ahead, it's near the target, that's flack. Fighters you can shoot back at. I would rather have fighters than flack.

There was a plane in our group called the Silver Dollar and we are up there on a mission and I noticed there is a group above us, and bombs were coming down, I thought what the hell are they doing, and I looked over to the left and there was the Silver Dollar like this, the whole tail end was blown off, a bomb went right through the waist and exploded. I can

still see that thing going up like that and then it went down, I think only one man got out of it. And the navigator and the bombardier were in the barracks that I was in over there. Another one I saw on a mission there was a plane off to my left, and a Faulkwolfe come down and he was under a fighter attack and I look at the fighter and it blew up and the next thing I knew the bomber blew up, poof.

Let me tell you right from the start. You're sleeping in bed and some orderly comes to you and shakes your shoulder at 4:30am in the morning and says Lieutenant, breakfast is at such and such a time and briefing at such and such a time. You got out of bed and staggered over to the mess hall and had breakfast of fried eggs and whatever the hell they were

Then you went over to the briefing room where you found out what your target was going to be and all that stuff. And from there you went over to the equipment room and you got your parachute and whatever else you needed, your flying suit and all that. From there you got in a truck and it took you out to the hardstand where your plane was. And you loaded all the planes, you put the guns in, the bombs are already in the plane and the mechanics were just finishing up the work they had to do from the last mission. Then you all climbed in and the pilot started the engines up, four engines, and you sat there and you kept your eye on the control tower, if a red flare went up, you said great, mission was scrubbed. If a green flare went up, you took off. So you took to the main runway and all of these planes would taxi out and they are waiting in line and they took off at thirty-second intervals. And we went up to about 5,000 feet, at 5,000 feet I had to crawl back in the bomb bay and pull the cotter pins out of the tail fuse with a tag on it and bring them back after the mission to show that I had pulled them out, because the bombs had a fuse in the nose and a fuse in the tail. And it had two or three safety factors, the nose fuse had a propeller on it and a brass wire that ran into the bomb rack into the hole in the propeller to keep it from turning, and the rear fuse just had the cotter pin in it that I had to pull out. So when that bomb left the rack, maybe about 500 feet below the airplane, the propeller and the nose fuse spun off and the bomb was fully armed. All you had to do was hit the nose fuse and it would go off when it hit the ground, so at 5,000 feet I had to go back there and pull them out and crawl back to my position.

Say we took off at 6'oclock in the morning; we would never depart from England until 11:30 or 12 o'clock. All the rest of the time was forming. First you form your squadron, then you found your group, then you went to another place and formed your division, then you formed your wing. Everybody had to be at a certain spot at a certain time. If you were supposed to be over this spot at five minutes after 10, you better be there at five minutes after 10! Because somebody else is going to be there at ten after 10. One time I just got back from pulling the fuses out and I sat down

and the plane took a nose dive, and ammunition boxes were floating in front of me. And I looked out the window and I saw the tail end an airplane go right across our nose. We came back from the mission and found out that either we were there either too early or too late or the other guy was too early too late.

So between flying from our bases in England and the bomb run we just sat there. I was sitting up in the nose and when you crossed the English Channel that's when the action starts. We used to cross the Channel and get over into Holland or Belgium and the flak starts coming up, and then the fighter planes start coming up. And you had fighter protection in the early parts of a mission, Spitfires would take you across the Channel, that's all they were good for, P-47's could take you in and maybe escort you halfway to the target then they had to come back, and after that you were on your own

I think the worst one was, we had to bomb a city in the northern part of Germany, Schludwigshaven, or something like that, and we ran into this cloud cover, we were flying at 30,000 feet and we were still in it. We had a mickey ship, it was a plane that had radar on it, so we were going to bomb by radar. And we came over the target and when the mickey ship dropped his bombs, we dropped ours. And we headed out over the North Sea. We couldn't see a damn thing. And the pilot was letting down, he had the engines just idling, we were coming down trying to get out of that overcast. I watched the ice build up on the gun sights and then break off, the propeller was throwing ice all over the airplane, every once in a while you'd see a plane drift across your nose in the front. That's the only time I was actually scared. Finally we broke out over the North Sea, about a thousand feet over the North Sea, right on the deck. And I looked around and there were airplanes popping out all over. It's a wonder nobody ran into each other. That was the worst one I had, the other ones were basically routine, except for the last one.

So, while I was over there I was involved in two crash landings and one bail out over England. Well these, one of them, I take that back- the first crash landing was in Wallawalla Washington, the landing gear collapsed, the second one was over England when we were on a practice flight and couldn't get the landing gear down, so we had to crash land and the third one was when we got shot down. The bailout was when we ran out of fuel coming back from a mission and we ran into one of those so called English fogs and we didn't know where the hell we were going and the radio was full of people calling for help so we flew around until we were running out of gas and the pilot took it out to 5000 feet and told us to bail out. He and a co-pilot crash-landed the plane someplace. Everybody got out.

So, you had to physically strap on a parachute and jump out of a plane that was the first time I ever did it. I said to myself- “you have a 50% chance that the parachute will open and 50% chance that it won’t.”

Actually I only carried a bombsite once, I never got to use it, but in a group of airplanes, the lead airplane in the lead squadron, the bombardier sighted for range and deflection, in other words, he aimed right at the target. The lead bombardier in each of the four squadrons, or the other three squadrons at the bomb site, just aimed for deflection- right or left because you could not have 42 or 24 bombers and each one have a bomb site and each one aiming at the same target, you can’t have 24 planes at the same place at the same time, so consequently if you were in one of the four squadrons, flying Charlie, you open up your bomb door, and you watch the lead plane, and when his bomb went out, then you hit the cell door lever and yours went out and each squadron had a lead bombardier and a lead navigator.

Captain Thomas Lombardo’s encounter with field artillery is enough to leave anyone shaken but the manner in which he first encountered it was unforgettable.

Lombard relates the experience and split second decision-making a doctor in the field must make.

You had to take a quick look and many times you bent down and just ripped his shirt open or cut his pants or whatever you needed to do to get at the wound and you look at the wound and you decide I can take care of this, and another guy no I can’t take care of this, half of his face shot off. But you learn quickly this I can do something with this I can’t do anything with. This man has to get to an aid station right away. And that’s what you did and left it up to the field station to evacuate further back. And I think I did a pretty good job with it.

I get up one morning and I hit my head against something solid. And I said what in the hell, so I looked up here was a bomb, and this is a good field artillery bomb, a good two feet long and really thick. So when I saw it I got scared! I jumped up yelled to my men GET OUT. There’s a bomb here I don’t know if it’s live. So we ran. And as I was running I ran into an officer and I said there is a bomb there, near my aid station. He said I’ll take care of it right away Captain. We had certain men trained to dispose of bombs and ordinance so he sent a man over. And he said [to me] Captain that’s a dud. He said somebody must have placed it there for you.

Trying to scare you. Well who else would do it? It was the Capt. who else but this guy. This guy did to just be an ass.

All of a sudden one day, we are in combat and I'm doing my job as described, while we are working there is always shells going over your head ok, a few to the right a few to the left a few over your head. Fortunately for us, all of these casualties and me, the Japs that were shooting at us were very poor marksman. Had one shell landed we would have been dead, all of us from the shrapnel. But now we were being barraged, I said holy crap if they were missing us with occasional shots over our heads and now we have this massive group of concentrated shellfire coming at us. And we were the only ones moving around, due to moving the casualties and what have you. And I said to my aid men they have moved the outfit and we are here alone!

We were isolated. Our company had left and not told us. I said any volunteers and a GI will never volunteer (laughs) that's the first thing he is taught don't volunteer. I had this second lieutenant; there weren't enough doctors to help me so they sent me a second lieutenant that had special training for first aid. I said Fred will you take a man and go and find out what happened to our outfit where we are at and where we are going. He said I'm scared. And all of the other men I tried to get moving all said Capt., Doc we are afraid. I wasn't going to stay there alone and get shot, I'm the Capt. I'm in charge of this outfit, I have to know what the hell to do right. So I picked out one kid and I said you come with me. And we will find out what's going on. So I turned to the men I said stay here, get these casualties on the ambulance get four men in there get three on the jeep and I said one of us will come back. We both didn't go back because one was needed to guide everyone back to where the outfit had moved. So that's what we did. Fortunately after a short walk we found the signal corps rolling up wire. I said what are you doing he said well the outfit moved and you are alone out here. We had a field telephone but they didn't call us! Nobody called and nobody told us they had moved Nobody! Imagine the guy in charge was that Capt. I was telling you about, it was up to him to say call the medics and tell them we are moving.

Lombardo discusses combat in the Philippines and some interesting interactions with the locals. He saw combat from a different perspective. He was not on the front lines shooting a rifle; he was treating those who were; some of the men in his care suffered from shell shock.

Mainly on the Philippine islands and Luzon and all my combat experience was on Luzon. A couple of interesting things happened in Luzon, the natives soon found out where the medical officer was. We were told, when you are not fighting try and help the natives. So they eventually found out where our medical offices were, we didn't put a sign up because we didn't want some sniper shooting at us. So in appreciation for what I would do for them, and they were minor things sometimes just a bandage or an aspirin. In appreciation they would bring us chickens. So I made a deal with our kitchen every day the natives would bring four or five six chickens and we were still eating K rations. So I made a deal with the kitchen. Being an officer I would get a case of beer a week, and a bottle a day is enough for me. And I would give it to the GI's and my medics. So the kitchen would prepare the chicken in exchange for some liquor. So I'd give them beer but I said if anyone gets drunk this stops. I even said that under my supervision I'd give them each a shot of liquor.

So they would broil up these chickens and I gave it to my men. So instead of lousy K Rations we were getting chicken. I ate well.

I also took care of a lot of guys that they call shell shocked, its actually battle fatigue. Some kid would come to me and say please Captain let me stay her for just an hour. And they would be shaking and I'd say alright just stay out of the way while we are taking care of the wounded. And I'd give em a shot of liquor and fresh water. And as soon as they tell me that they can go back, and most of them after an hour or an hour and a half, would say Captain I'm ready to go back. They knew their buddies needed them. They were just scared kids.

Now you say were you scared? And at night when I'm trying to sleep and you don't sleep. Your body vibrates every time a shell goes over. They guy next to me to keep warm we would lie down pretty close to one another, a few of us would, we had to always disperse ourselves because we didn't want the whole outfit killed with one shell. And the guy next to me said Captain you're shaking. I said I'm scared! I said sure I'm scared if those Japs were accurate we would have been dead a long time ago. I said you'll forgive me for shaking. During the day you wouldn't shake because you were too busy taking care of your casualties. The bullets and bombs didn't mean a thing. You just had a job to do and you did it.

Our outfit got involved in a tank battle because we heard a tremendous amount of firing one night and the next morning the firing stopped so as a medical officer I had to go see if there were casualties. So very gingerly, because you don't know where the mines are, you have to be careful.

So I'm looking around and I finally found a row of tanks our artillery had destroyed. Our reconnaissance did a beautiful job, they saw this line of tanks coming through our station where we were bivouacked, about ten of them. They were all killed every tank, and they were burnt to a crisp. The boys get so jumbled in their minds, they got their flamethrowers even though they shot them they burned them. Oh it was so terrible looking at em. But combat does strange things to men. Maybe the kid with the flamethrower lost a buddy and these Japs were responsible. That was the only time I saw dead Japs and the other kid was the only living one.

Efner Davis, a combat medic, serving in the Philippines, expressed these feelings when it came to fear in combat. Dealing with stress and the inevitable, 'it can't happen to me' attitude is a practice that people adopt when coping with great fear. Davis had these words to say when asked if he was ever scared during combat.

Well probably, but you didn't want to admit it to yourself, it was one of those things where there would be four guys going out and three aren't coming back and you would say to yourself I'm going to miss those three guys. It's a self-defense mechanism; you can't admit that any moment you're liable to get blown off the map.

Ed Drabczyk describes the first shelling he ever took, which had a profound and sobering effect on him. But, fear and adrenaline allowed him to avoid capture by the Germans.

The first shelling we got, a guy I took basic training with was killed. Here I go (crying) anyway, during the two weeks we had, him and two other guys went home. They had gotten married. And we were standing around drinking coffee and the shell landed on one side of us and everything was split by shrapnel and it caught him in a foxhole, writing a letter. And he was just killed instantly. So after that I started getting nervous and unsettled because until then John Wayne and I were going to win the War all by ourselves. That all changed.

After that it was all just moving out. One attack after another, small houses, fields, woods. I was an ammo bearer, and we were going to attack down a valley and cross to another side, this was in France, the Volge Mountains. And there was a lot of fire coming from the opposite hill. And first of all they said we were going everybody's face went down. Then the word came that we were not going and everyone started to get giddy and then all of a sudden we are going.

So I laid down two belts of fire and the guys just picked up and Hi Ho Silver, they started hollering and down the valley they went. We picked up our guns and I had the ammo, I looked like a milkmaid from The Netherlands carrying these boxes and I was running down behind the men and halfway through a machine gun opened up on us. And I was crawling and the bullets were snapping overhead and I was dragging and pushing those damn machinegun bullets. And there was a house in the middle of the field, so I finally made it to the house, I don't know how long it took but it seemed like eternity. It was a pretty big house so we went downstairs and the rest of the guys were up trying to silence that machinegun nest. After a while they said it was all clear. So we started to get out of the house and down at the bottom of the stairs was a mine. Three prongs sticking up, the Germans had forgotten to take the pin out. And the pins were all bent over from being stepped on! And nobody had noticed it. Oh my gosh that was weird. So we finally got out of there.

Late fall, snow comes a little early in the mountains there [France], we were in reserve and there was a fire fight up ahead of us we could hear the firing going on and then as we approached that area it started to snow lightly and there was dead GI's and dead Germans and we were walking along a path, and along the path there was a German, a dead German, laying face up in the snow, and the snow had wafted down and filled in all the crevasses on his face, chin, eyes, nose, and it was the most grotesque mask I had ever seen. And that shuddered me. I had seen a lot of corpses but that bothered me. From then on I guess it all bothered me. There was always a constant fear. I never feared dying, I never feared getting hit, it was just a constant fear. Just scared all the time.

Another time in the winter there was a canal type river that had one single wooden bridge going over it. They sent us across first and then the armor was supposed to follow us. Well the first Sherman that hit the bridge the bridge collapsed. In the meantime out of the woods comes two or three tanks and infantry. The machine guns started firing real low, trying to clip you in the legs and the tanks tried to go around us to cut us off to capture us. I picked up my gun and I started running back toward that canal that we came from. And I hit that damn thing and it was full of ice up to my thighs. I kept kicking with my thighs and my hips trying to get back to the other side, I slipped and the receiver of the gun fell in the

water and I ran down and got it. I picked it up and I thought I was going to faint, and all of a sudden I feel somebody take the receiver off my shoulder, I thought it was a German, it was my Company Commander. He said come on let's go. So we got to the opposite bank and we made it. But they couldn't come across because the bridges were out. That's as close as I came to getting captured. There were guys behind me fifteen, twenty yards, Kamerade Kamerade, getting captured, not me brother I wasn't going to get captured I was getting out of there.

On D-Day, June 6th, 1944 Private Joe Stefaniak of the 82nd relates that exiting the C-47 aircraft and jumping into occupied France, proved bittersweet.

You were scared in the plane going to make the jump, but at the same time you wanted to get out of that plane because you look out there and it's lit up like a Christmas tree. Our plane was taking fire, let's get our asses out of here, everybody's hollering, there were tracers going through the plane but nobody was killed in the plane. We couldn't jump until we got the green light, but man I'll tell you when we did we were out! We jumped so low, man when that chute opened up, you were looking around, and then BANG you hit the ground. I pulled my knife from off my leg and I cut them risers so fast. And those knives were sharp; you could shave with them [laughs].

Bob Schneider was in combat in Holland and Germany. His actions while in Holland lead to him being awarded the Silver Star. Schneider was given the task of bracketing an enemy position. Bracketing is putting shellfire over the position to drive the enemy closer to you and then putting fire in front of them to drive them back, then putting fire in the middle into a confused and disorganized enemy. Schneider was so fatigued by combat that he fired his mortar while asleep on his feet.

At any rate I put up my little coffee-making contraption in the corner of my foxhole and I lit a little fire underneath, now I was on a mortar squad at the time, and the mortars have a charge in them but they have a bunch of cellulose tabs around the outside, so if you want to go a

thousand yards or two thousand, depending, you elevated the mortar to the right height then look at your chart and tear a lot of these tabs off for the appropriate distance. So I had a lot of those nitro cellulose tabs and I sat across the damn foxhole and was throwing those little charges of dynamite into the fire. And it heated up the canteen cup, but god darn it, it sent up puffs of smoke, so some damn German apparently saw me and tried to drop round on us. I was on an 80mm mortar but someone was obviously on a 60mm mortar and saw the smoke signal I was sending up so he decided he'd take me out. Well he came so close that actually I could put my hand over my shoulder out of the foxhole and put it in the shell hole! That wasn't so good, but fortunately he didn't continue it.

The part of it that eventually lead to me receiving the Silver Star, it started out with probably the worst 24 hours anybody could have. We were in an area, sort of a swampy area. And we set up our mortar and got ready to do whatever we do. And we needed more mortar shells. So we took a big old cart that we found, a German cart, and we walked it back over a bridge that was just barely off the water but it was quite long. And I was pulling these mortar shells, and by God all of a sudden there's machine gun bullets landing next to me. Some guy at the far end, he had me dead right on lead but he didn't have it on elevation. Because I dropped the dang cart handle and ran fast and he traced me almost all the way over to the end of the bridge. He was dropping 'em [bullets] right next to me to the point where I had water on my pants. So I got out of that.

Then we got back to the mortar position and we were all set up. And we got word that we were going to draw artillery or mortar fire because there was some artillery guy or mortar that was harassing our people. And they couldn't pin him down because the son of a gun would fire from here then he'd fire from there and they couldn't triangulate his position to maybe do some damage to him. So our mortar was picked to draw his fire. So what we did was to just throw shells in the air. Bang Bang Bang Bang, we didn't give a damn where they went as long as they went. So that he would zero in and when he zeroed in on our position we were going to zero in on him. So I was in effect, a target. Well, it was a mortar, and he finally dropped one almost into the mortar hole I was in. I determined before that he had just put a bracket on me. A bracket, whenever you fired it, we would fire and it was done almost exclusively through observation, you can't sight a mortar. And a mortar is a hell of a lot more devastating than artillery fire normally, because it goes up and comes down and shrapnel goes to all sides, artillery fire goes in and 90% of it goes up in the air and you might be to the side and not get hit. At any rate there was one shell in front of us and one behind us [bracket] and I told the other two guys in the hole, get the hell out of here, and boy we ran for the building and he was a good mortar guy I'll tell you that, he darn near put it in my mortar position. In fact the concussion itself knocked the

mortar over. Then he hit the house a couple times, I must have been in four or five houses that eventually got hit with artillery or mortar shells.

Now, here's the situation on this, the Germans knew that we were going to have to take it [West Wilder] so they were very lavish with their anti-personnel and anti-tank bombs. So we knew they were there when we were advancing and we don't want all those bombs in there when it's time for our guys to go in. So we bombed the hell out of that area to blow up the bombs so that our guys could go across. When we stopped bombing the area, they knew we were going to come across so they start bombing us again. So Jesus, we had anti-tank, anti-personnel mines and shellfire coming in everywhere. One there, one behind you, over there, you were just luck it didn't hit you right in the helmet. So at any rate one of the reasons I don't particularly think I deserve the Silver Star, damn it I did something and I don't know how I got the guts to do it. I didn't have to go on patrol because I was a chief gunner on the mortar. And I said I personally just can't ask another man to go through what we went through the past two nights. So I took on that job for myself.

I don't know how many [Germans] were in my house or the house next door or anything else, it was dark when I got in and the very first thing happened. I was put in a little room with three German soldiers that we had captured. Now, once again there is no light in this damn room, but I was told that they were sort of tranquil, one of them died when I was in there, another one spoke a little bit of English and I had a couple years of German that I had in high school we could somewhat communicate. He was a Dutchman who didn't like Germany to begin with and didn't want to be there. So the third one was the only problem and I just said, I'm going to go sit down here, and I've got my M-1 in my lap, and if you even turn during the night without telling me, I'm going to shoot you. Well the night went through, but as soon as it got daylight at all we had a lot of stuff tucked in the window, this was in the basement, all of a sudden that stuff came in, along with hand grenades.

In came these hand grenades and there are two different types. One is a potato masher, which had a lot of dynamite on one end and a big wooden handle on it. And you could throw those things a god darn mile. And they were particularly dangerous because of the dynamite but also because when it exploded the wood would fracture and you'd wind up with slivers that were going a mile a minute. Apparently they used those on the upper floors and I was apparently the only one left on the ground floor with the Germans. So the grenade came in and the Germans obviously knew their compatriots were in there because they used concussion grenades on me, which is similar to a high-pressure firecracker. It's supposed to knock you out, not kill you. Well I was fortunate, it didn't knock me out and I still had the German prisoners and

they weren't giving me a problem. But the guy who threw the grenade in was stupid enough to look through the window to see what damage he'd done and I shot him through the neck. He decided to poke his head in!

By this time with dawn coming on our troops started to come across the field, now because we had establish something they figured that they could bring the rest of the troops through. So by the time I got out to look there's guys all over the place.

Now I kept these two German prisoners with me and I went out into the main part of the cellar. This was a cellar that had a leg out here, this way, and another way, so it had a common wall, like a hub, so before I got there we must have bazooka'ed a hole in the two walls so before our guys could get up to the outside. I was trapped in the big part. I vacated that little room now I'm in the common room still guarding my two Germans. And all of a sudden the Germans are on the other side of the wall from me. This was a real standoff. They had the whole damn German army on the other side and just me on the other side, but if they want to send someone through I'll pick em off right and left. And I certainly wasn't going to go through. I don't know how long it lasted. It seemed like hours to me but probably wound up being a couple of minutes. But by that time we had the complete outside of the building and it was just a matter then of flushing them out.

One of the nights we were called upon to put a bracket around our guys that were out on scouting duty across the Ruhr at the time. We always knew where they were they would keep in contact by the sound powered telephones. We would know that they would be at position A or B. So we knew exactly where they were so if they got into trouble we could take the mortar and put shells up this side and that side and the other side and make a defensive square and you leave one side open so they can get back across the river.

One night the guys thanked me for what a great job I did putting mortars where they were, and I don't remember a damn thing about it, I must have been sound asleep firing them. I was so god darn battle fatigued. I'm almost sure I did it but I would never swear to God. (Laughs) These guys got out so that worked out good.

One can only imagine what was going through those young men's heads as they went into combat for the first time. As they have related, all felt fear. But it was the

feeling of duty, comradeship and the simple fact that they did not want to be seen as letting their country, unit, or friends down, that made them push down that fear, channel it, and do their duty to the best of their ability.

Fear in combat can make men do many things. The toughest of men can be reduced to nothing in the face of a heavy shelling, or fighter planes buzzing from all angles while miles above the earth, with no protection but a .50 caliber gun. These men fought that fear head on. The training that they received in the States, and some they learned while under fire, would prove invaluable. They did the job they were trained to do and through seemingly impossible odds they survived.

Chapter Three B: Traumatic Events

Traumatic events have the ability to plague the mind long after the initial incident has passed. Facing combat, and the expectations that you will take another human life, burns deep into the psyche.

While it is difficult to see if these men are suffering from clinical Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, it is clear that the fatigue of battle and the events surrounding their experiences in war have affected them in later life.

This chapter deals with the traumatic events that the veterans interviewed endured during combat. These men faced death from the air in a fighter plane, dropping bombs on a city, or wielding a rifle in close quarters with the enemy, or in Captain Lombardo's case as an administrative medical corps. It is these events that come across as the most vivid and difficult to speak about.

War tunes man into his most basic instincts, kill or be killed, and the experiences that these men relate show that their instincts of pure survival kicked in at all times.

The war, for these men, brought about unimaginable hardships, seeing their buddies killed by shellfire. Seeing dead bodies in the snow and blood and carnage all around you for days, weeks, years at a time takes a physical and mental toll. These veterans will describe what it is like to kill. And in some cases like Joe Stephaniak he felt no remorse for the dead Germans it, "rolled right off your shoulders." However, seeing their dead countrymen always brought pause to these men. Seeing young men killed is something that one can never forget.

Through these hardships, the bombs, bullets, and blood one can see the special bond that these veterans and all veterans who honorably served have; a camaraderie that cannot be fully understood unless you have lived it. There is an undeniable brotherhood that links men together after they have seen combat. Putting your life in someone else's hands brings men closer together than any biological relation.

Dr. Lombardo was at the end of his wits, suffering through incompetent officers and the constant flow of death that ran through his aid station in the Pacific. Lombardo had the following to relate regarding his physical and mental state at the time.

So I said I have to get out. We were waiting to be reassigned to another area for combat and I went to this other medical officer in another battalion he had a job like I had. He was a battalion surgeon. And I explained to him. He said you look like hell. I said I am I'm sick. I've got bloody diarrhea. So he put this EMT (Emergency Medical Tag) and he sent me to the closest field hospital. So I got in my jeep got my duffle bag put all my belongings in there and I told the jeep driver to take me to this field hospital. They took one look at me and said we have to send you to a better place we just have tents here.

They started two IV's on me one in each arm. And first thing in the morning they said that I was going to be evacuated with about a hundred others to a field hospital about a thousand miles away. I said I would volunteer to help on the plane because I was still able to work and they just had a nurse on this plane. So they got me a hundred miles away, still on Luzon. I kept getting transferred further back because I was too sick to be in field. God in heaven was up there saying this guy deserves a break and I was so exhausted. So I took another plane, same deal as before. And this plane was going to New Guinea.

Efner Davis although a combat medic, adapted to the 'kill or be killed' attitude when fighting the Japanese. Davis devised ways to keep men alive while fighting in the Pacific. He relates his feeling about the enemy and losing a close friend. Davis had an attitude of not making close friendships while in the service; he had to maintain a level of

detachment as a medic. He did not want his personal feelings getting in the way of his judgment when lives were in the balance and a split second decision was needed.

However, combat builds bonds within the men who serve. Those bonds are sometimes formed unwillingly.

When we went onto Boughenville we were told that we would have to evacuate in three weeks, I was there almost a year. It was an island about 105 miles long and about 7 miles wide and had two live volcanoes one on each end and these things are spewing gas into the jungle and the jungle is so thick there would be days that you couldn't see the sun, and you're in a swamp and the mosquitoes are on you it looks like you are wearing a fur coat. And we took this island from the Japs and we would always say give it back to them let'em have it.

The thing that galled me about our rations, besides the fact that we didn't have enough to eat, but those two cigarettes we had a lot of guys die because of that, in the jungle at night if you light a match it's like turning on a search light. And if you're smoking the coal on the cigarette is a perfect target. In fact you'll notice I'm wearing my wristwatch with the face facing in, this way the light doesn't reflect off of it and give the Japs a target. When we tried to get the mosquitoes and the Japs would take a shot at the aluminum face of our wristwatches. So all of us from the islands put the watches on the inside.

One of my buddies – Johnny Cranford got killed three days after the war was over with; the Japs killed him, because a lot of them decided they weren't going to surrender anyhow. What had happened was we were both up on the lines and they wanted to commence evacuation for the evacuation hospital gave us a choice actually I outranked him by a day or so, no big deal, he always was sure he was about to get killed. The Evacuation hospital was about five miles back from the lines and generally considered safe. Anyhow, okay Johnny; you take the evacuation hospital, now this was before the war ended and about two or three days after that they dropped the big bomb. And about two or three days later the Japs managed to sneak, what we called, a flying box car- it's a 240 millimeter howitzer- they dropped one round in the middle of the evac hospital and just like that everybody's gone- you're picking pieces out of trees and you don't know who's who, I would think..but anyhow, then I went from there to the occupation in Japan with the original troops.

We were getting ready for the invasion [Japan], we had been told and I kind of believe that it probably would happen that it would dissipate ninety nine per cent casualties. The estimate was that if we had invaded

Japan, we would have lost about 1.6 million more Americans and the Japs would have lost somewhere in the neighborhood of 56 million. So it was a wild one, but when we landed in Sindai and you could see all the kids in uniform and everything you'd say to yourself, someone would forget that we had been ordered to cease and desist. Because the orders originally had been- meet them on the beach and take one with you, kids with knives and women with bamboo spears and old guys with axes, or something, but we had no problem- zero problem, it was like someone flicked a switch you know.

I can't say I actually shot a Jap, when things get kind of thick you're not exactly sure. The problem is when they get really close and are shooting, you've got casualties. And at that point you've got to ignore yourself and take care of the casualties. The armament that the medics carried, I think it was more camouflage than anything else so you couldn't tell us from the other troops. You get into a firefight and if the Japs are shooting at you and charging your positions you don't really know who got who. And I was very lucky I never got scratched, literally. But they shot the pouch off me, the little medical pouch on my belt. Each soldier had a similar pouch on his belt that had one triangle bandage and a sulfa packet that was another reason that we didn't have to carry so much medical supplies. The troops always had something. They also shot the heel off my right boot twice. I also got a round through my pack which was holding 400 rounds of ammunition and 6 hand grenades and luckily nothing blew. That's where I got my nickname 'Lucky.' The guys around me said he must be the luckiest son of a bitch alive.

John Seneff describes joining his squadron in Italy, then moving later to France.

He relates his experiences dive bombing targets and losing the members of his "gang," who all went to flight school together and collectively were shipped off to the same squadron.

We joined a squadron; I was in the 525th fighter squadron. We were checked out, I flew with a guy by the name of Bill Colgan, he was our CO [Commanding Officer] of the 525th squadron. I flew on his wing a couple of times I believe for the first two missions at least. Unfortunately my best friend on the group of four of us a guy by the name of Sam MacArthur, we went, on our second mission, I really don't know what we were dive bombing, but we went in to dive bomb sequence and I was in the first flight and came off of the target and came around and looked to see where Same was because he was in the second flight, and he went right straight

into the ground. To this day I don't think neither I nor the guy who was following him, a guy named Carl Beronik, he was following him, neither one of us ever really figured out what happened. We didn't see that much flak; there was nothing that would have indicated that he should have happened. So we never did find out what went wrong, but it was a real wake up call. It happened in a hurry.

We stayed there, I was there [France] till after VE day and in fact I didn't see VE day because as I said there were four of us who joined this squadron together, four buddies, Sam went out of there pretty quickly and Wally Huerabet bailed out early, I'm not sure if it was the last of February or the first of March, it was right after we had moved up to France, and he got pretty well shot up and had to bail out and as he bailed out he hit the tail and he really busted up his leg real well. He was sent home right away he never came back to the group. So that left Ray and I as the remaining two buddies and Ray was a forward controller. A forward controller is a guy that, we used to have one of our pilots, they started out by having the squadron commanders on it but they ended up being one of the lead pilots that would go out as an FC, what they would do was they would fly a light plane and they would mark targets for the P-47's and call us in and they had radio capabilities with both the ground troops and the aircraft so they could direct the fire.

ED Drabczyk is still haunted by seeing a grotesque dead body of a German soldier. Drabczyk remembers the close calls that set him on edge and his pure fear during combat. Stress and trauma affected soldiers at differing times. Drabczyk describes how a man broke down while witnessing a machine gun being tested, the man went through combat and was in a safe zone, but the rattle of machine gun fire by a sergeant testing one, broke him. Drabczyk talks about dealing with the harsh conditions of winter in France in 1944, about the times he was wounded in combat. Drabczyk's dedication and commitment to his unit lead him to going AWOL [absent without leave] from the hospital, so he can fight with his unit rather than be reassigned as a replacement to another outfit.

Late fall, snow comes a little early in the mountains there [France], we were in reserve and there was a fire fight up ahead of us we could hear the firing going on and then as we approached that area it started to snow lightly and there was dead GI's and dead Germans and we were walking along a path, and along the path there was a German, a dead German, laying face up in the snow, and the snow had wafted down and filled in all the crevasses on his face, chin, eyes, nose, and it was the most grotesque mask I had ever seen. And that shuddered me. I had seen a lot of corpses but that bothered me. From then on I guess it all bothered me. There was always a constant fear. I never feared dying, I never feared getting hit, it was just a constant fear. Just scared all the time.

We assumed a position on the ridge of a hill and we set up our gun, by that time I was a gunner, you know people get knocked off, wounded, advancement is fast. And I was standing by gun and a spent bullet landed at my feet. If it had hit me I don't think I would have broken the skin but that had a hell of an effect on me. To think that somebody had me in their sights, you know from way over there. Thank goodness, maybe it was a faulty bullet or whatever, and it just landed at my feet.

Another thing you do is test all your machine guns, like we did, the sighting and all that. Everybody tests their weapons. So after we started going back to where the Company was there was a bunch of GI's standing around and this one Sergeant pointed his Tommy gun at the ground and just sprayed it. Testing it. And one poor guy it was just too much for him. He broke down. [Muffled crying] it was just awful to see that guy.

And now we get to the first time I was hit. We had taken a position in the Kolmar pocket they called it. The bridges were blown and we couldn't go across this Ill river they called it and the Germans couldn't come our way because the bridges were blown. So we had taken that position and the word came down that we had hot chow back in the lines. So they took me and our section and we went back to eat. And boy it was great.

And then we got the word that the Germans were coming through and we better go back. So we got back and there was no foxhole, no nothing. And across the field we could see this Tiger tank coming out of the woods with infantry. In those days the people used to collect turnips and they used to make piles of them into a pyramid shape and they cut off at the top and they were quite big and dense and packed with mud. So the Kraut tank opened up, so we ran around that turnip hill, he opened up again, and we ran to the other side. And the third time he outguessed us, he hit the side that we going too. And I got hit in the instep with a big piece of shrapnel. So I was looking around for a place to run to and there was a hole but there was already three or four guys in it. But I jumped in there anyway. And my ass was sticking out and I hollered to the Sergeant

and I said I was hit. And he says can you make it back? I said I don't know. There was another guy hit in the arm or shoulder and there was an irrigation ditch leading back to where we came from. So I said to this guy you want to try it. And he said yeah.

So as soon as the tank fired his last shell we up and ran to the irrigation ditch and it was half frozen and we are clumping our way through and it seemed like eternity but finally we got back to our lines. And a guy in a jeep said the aid station was over there. And there was a big piece sticking out of my shoe and they took me in and cleaned it up. But they didn't want to take the shrapnel out so they send me to a field hospital. That was great! I had three weeks there just lolling around. A nice fresh hot bed, oh that was great.

But then they told us that we weren't going to go back to our regular outfit so me and this guy on the night we were going to be discharged from the hospital, we went over the fence to try and find the 3rd division, we could hear the firing, they weren't too far from us. And so we are still AWOL as far as the hospital is concerned

That following morning we were on this hillside and a lone German came down, started walking up the hill and he didn't see us either. All of a sudden somebody hollered halt and he looked up in disbelief. He took off his helmet, threw it to the ground, turned around and started running. And you know he didn't get very far. Everybody opened up on him. But that was the strangest thing there was fifty guys up on that hill, all with weapons. Why he ran I'll never understand.

In the Kolmar plains, in the wintertime when they get very cold you get a fog. It rises up to about five feet or more. The 6 footer guys could look up and see over but I wasn't quite that tall. So we woke up this morning with this cold, cold, fog billowing above us. You couldn't see anything we could light anything it was so damp the matches just wouldn't burn. All of a sudden we heard the sound of a tank coming. And a guy sticks up his head and he sees the black cross on the turret, he says its Kraut. The hair on the back of my neck stood up. We didn't know where to fire because we couldn't see anything. But he ambled off thank god.

Now I'll get to the second time I got hit. We had mounted 90mm tanks. And they told us it was going to be a lighting thrust into Germany, be light, we are going like hell. My machine gun section got on one TD [tank destroyer] and we were going down we got through some heavy woods. Brambles eight feet high, we went from a nice clearing to this road that went through these bushes. And they were so high and so brittle they scrapped the side of the tank. We got about halfway through it and German machine gun fire opened up ahead. The column stopped. We are waiting for word. We got off the tanks and we were just standing around

and the Screaming Meme shells, rocket shells, from the Germans came in on us. And they make a god-awful sound. They scream, really scream. I laid down and I got hit in about fifteen different places. I only felt my leg and my elbow and I was hit alongside the spine which I didn't know, but had a lot to do with my mobility. So I laid on the ground and everybody around me was hit. Everybody was crying Medic. And medics couldn't come through because the bushes were so thick. They couldn't get stretcher-bearers through there. A guy got out of a tank and came over to me...I don't know how many times I told this story, but it gets me [crying]....

So he came over to me and he says can you get up? I said I don't know. So he tried to pick me up but my legs were wobbly and I was starting to get a little faint, but I had never lost consciousness and all of a sudden the Germans threw another barrage on us. This guy, without hesitating, laid on top of me to protect me. Thank goodness nothing happened. And he said we are going to pick you up and put you up on the tank. Can you hold onto the barrel? Let's see if we can get you out of here. And I said I guess so. A few guys picked me up and they laid me on the sandbags of the tank and they put my arms around the barrel. And my left leg, I lost half my thigh, and it was wobbling when the tank started to back out. So this guy stayed with me, holding my leg as we backed out. And when we got to the clearing the Krauts threw in another barrage on us. So I said man you better get out of here. So he took off to the safety of the tank and that's the last I ever saw of him. I don't know who he is or what he looks like, but he sure saved my life. And there was a jeep right there with stretchers on it right there in the clearing. If he hadn't helped me I would have bled to death. Without him I never would have made it. I had too many holes in me. So they put me on the stretcher and took me right to the aid station and started pumping blood into me. I don't know who that guy is but I bless him ever since. I'd never have him (gesturing to his son).

I spent nine months in the hospital recuperating. My funny bone nerve was cut in half by the shrapnel; I couldn't move these two fingers the surgeon fixed that up. I wasn't fully paralyzed but partially paralyzed from the wound along my back. It had compressed my spine and I could feel my legs but I couldn't do too much moving. And they couldn't put any sort of a brace or cast on me until the wounds healed up. So in the meantime, I had to lay prone and quite because they didn't want me to disturb my spine. A neurosurgeon worked on me and put a big cast on me from here to here (chest to legs). I carried that from June I think it was until August something before my mother and aunt came down to see me.

Joe Stefaniak saw combat in France and at the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium. He relates both the good and bad memories from the war finding that even in war that the human side of people still comes through.

Stefaniak shows how the paratroopers used humor to relieve the stress and mask the fear they all had, he good-naturedly ribs a buddy about being hit in the back. Stefaniak recalls a good memory of the war in dealing with a young French girl who gave him a treat of a hard-boiled egg. Later, however, he sadly learns that the Germans killed her.

Due to Stefaniak's combat experience in France as well as Battle the Bulge and Belgium, he cannot watch the television series Band of Brothers. "All the new kids we got [in the Bulge] I don't think we had one new guy that came back with us." He blames lack of training in the States for casualties, especially to replacement troops.

So anyway, we stayed in [France] for 37 days and actually when we got back to Nottingham, a little over 2,000 men had jumped on D-Day. A little over 700 of us came back. I'm not saying all of them were killed, but they were captured, wounded and a lot of them they were just direct hits and you would never have found anything.

Combat is tough. You forget that you're scared let me put it that way. I got hit once in the leg, I hollered and one of the guys said shut up you're only bleeding a little bit, kidding around with me. I was scared but you took care of the job, I mean we took one area up in Graignes where I jumped, It was on a Sunday I remember and we ran out of ammunition and we had to get out of the area so we went to Carentan. And in Graignes I saw latter on in records that we killed over 1,200 Germans. Who got them, we don't know, nobody wants to take credit for killing, when you are shooting you must have hit somebody.

It's you or them, kill or be killed. We had a pretty good bunch of guys. One machine gunner that I knew he ran out of ammunition completely, that gun was red hot. You got rid of all your hand grenades and everything else, I had one clip left to load into my M-1, that was it.

And when we got out of there and up to Carentan they gave us ammunition and food and everything else and took us down to our Regiment the 507th. I don't know how far it was away but we got onto trucks and they loaded us up and took us back to our companies. When I got down there a lot of guys that I knew were killed and all that. You just didn't know what to say. Where's this guy? He's killed. Where's this guy? He got hit; he's back in England. One of my good friends got hit on the 9th of June he was taking a bridge and he was awarded the Medal of Honor.

A buddy of mine got hit in the back and I kid around with him, I says Joe, you got hit in the back if you were facing the enemy you never would have gotten hit in the back, he says I'll kill you, you damn Pollock [laughs] that was after we got out of there, but that was hell, let me put it that way. Have you ever watched the Band of Brothers? We jumped beyond them. If we hadn't have jumped where we were, we kept a Regiment from coming at them. So everybody had a piece of the action.

One good memory is when a little girl in Graignes took me by the hand and took me in her house and the mother and father were sitting there and they gave me a hard-boiled egg. Which tasted like a T-bone steak. I went to France a few years ago and I had a translator in the village where we were fighting and we were in the area where this family was at the time and I was trying to find this little girl. And through the translator I learned that the Krauts cut and burned everything down, all the houses killed all the civilians in that area that had helped us. So I felt really bad about that.

The other incident, this is funny, I got an order from Lt. Mar, he said hey Stefaniak come here I want you to take this Frenchmen and go out over there and make sure he gets his cow out of this pasture. So I went with him and he went over to open up the gate to this pasture to get the cow out. We passed our machine gun that was set up at the crossroads of this pasture. And in the meantime maybe about 20-30 yards four or five Krauts at the crossroads. And as the guys was getting the cow out these four or five Krauts popped out and I jumped to the side and I emptied two clips into that area, there were 8 rounds to a clip, I never thought I could reload that fast in my life. The Frenchman ran back and the cow was still in the pasture. I came back and the guys at the machine gun were laughing. They said the Frenchman beat you to the lines. And I called those guys everything under the sun.

Those are the two incidences that I wouldn't mind talking about, some of the others though I can't. I was watching Band of Brothers here one night and when they were showing the Bulge I shook. I had to shut it off, no more of that bullshit.

The worst memories are ones in the Bulge. When the 88's were landing all over us. A guy and I got orders, we were runners, and we were told to run a line to Company HQ on a hill. The snow was really deep about a foot and a half, two feet. I looked at the other guy, called Potts, from Texas, I looked at him and he looks at me and we were both cursing the Captain. I think about every fifteen feet or so we were hitting that snow because of the 88's coming in, they were blowing up everything. That day I will never forget that was one of the worst experiences we had. All the new kids we got in that were replacements all got killed, I don't think we had one new guy that came back with us. Lack of training.

Let me put it this way, it's something that you don't forget. I was 22 when I went in and I was 25 when I got out. We lived in a neighborhood that was poor and all that. You had to fight for anything you got. I had pretty good training being from Black Rock but over there it was something different, it's hard to talk about unless you are with your own bunch.

When you see dead bodies it hurts. Especially when they've got the United States uniform on. Germans, forget it. I mean it just rolls off your shoulders. When you see a dead American it hurts.

After the Bulge we went over the Rhine. I was in the hospital at the time, when I got back to our group they had already prepared to jump and they said you get in with the ammo trucks they are going to be following right behind us. So my buddies went down there to make the jump. And I followed with the ammo trucks. And then we went right on through. The war ended on May the 8th and we were in Hissen Germany at that time we were in Omnuer for a while we took some prisoners, as a matter of fact they had a camp there that was all Polish slave labor. So we had to give up all our rations and fed them. It made me feel good because we went to the Germans and took their food and gave it to the prisoners.

A lot of the younger guys got into a little bit of trouble. I went to a store, I was on a scouting mission you could say, for food I went into the store and they had canned goods and all that, and there was a young women and her child, I got a bag and put anything the kid wanted in the bag. The owner of the store started saying something in German to me, I didn't understand a word of it, I had my submachine gun on my shoulder and I swung that around and said, shut up. That was the end of that. I don't know if he understood or not but he stopped talking with that Tommy gun in his face [laughs].

Robert Schneider had his first taste of combat in Holland. He would later go on to experience battles in Germany and in the Hurtgen forest. Schneider graphically recalls how the French civilians bayoneted the paratroopers who were stuck in the trees. Schneider also vividly describes the fellow soldiers in his unit, noting a member of his unit's possibly homosexuality, but this man took massive shrapnel wounds and refused treatment. Schneider calls him a "real man"; Schneider also relates how he tried to save a fellow soldier who was shot in the neck there was nothing he could do, he died. He also relates how a comic strip saved his life! Schneider would also bear first hand witness to a Concentration Camp at Nordhausen. This is a different type of horror. Schneider could not even bring himself to go into the camp. The smell was unbearable.

Unfortunately a guy I knew got married before we went over, and the jackass, the first thing he did in France was decide to smoke a cigarette and get up and look around to see what's going on and he got a bullet right through his head. You can see a cigarette burning a long way, and what makes a better target than something in a guy's mouth? So that was a stupid thing he did.

So we got into Germany and immediately we got involved in what they call the hedgerows. And those darn things are really something; it's like a dog gone corridor with walls on both sides. And for a little while we were stationed there and it was terribly uncomfortable living in a little pup tent and it was pouring all the time. One of the things I noticed very quickly when I got to France, there were parachutes hanging from the trees, I saw quite a few of them. And I found out later on that those were the Americans that came down got hung up in the trees and the "great" French people shot 'em. France was no great ally for a while there. At any rate the corpses were gone.

Then we got on a bunch of trucks and headed toward the combat zone, which happened to be in Holland at the time. My first experience actually I was getting out of a truck and all of a sudden something bounced next to me and it wound up being a bullet. That was my first experience being shot at [laughs].

That was the beginning of that day; particularly at that time one of the biggest battles of the American invasion into Germany was the

Hurtgen Forest. And the Hurtgen is a huge forest and there were a lot of battles going on in there. Eventually, the first time I got into the forest I actually saw dead Americans piles up 4,4,4,3,3,3,2,2,2 and one on top. They piled them like cordwood.

So the kids came back, and I say they were kids because they were. The first night they came back and we had lost a good amount of them. I mean the Germans were protecting the town pretty good. Well the next night they send out some of the same guys but other new ones and I'll tell you I've never seen a more horrible situation in my life. There was a bunch of young American kids sitting in the cellar of the house that we were in. They came back sobbing. Some of them to the point that they just as soon commit suicide then to go out in that field again. It was a terrible thing.

At 5 o'clock we were going to jump off. So I was up with all the guys on the line and we were getting ready to go. Except I tried my telephone and a German had dropped a bomb on it or something and blew it up. So I went back to repair it so that I would once again be able to do my duty [spot mortar fire]. By the time I got back up to the line they had already passed out the password and the counter sign. So I didn't have the damn thing. So I went on and I got halfway across the area and I ran into a damn German machine gun nest. I took it out with two hand grenades; I used to wear them on my lapel. So with the two grenades I was able to take out this machine gun nest. Then I progressed across the field and now I'm coming up into a village that was damaged with all the shelling that has been going on and the guys were no longer available they had gotten into the houses. I didn't know which way to go. And I'm sitting there wondering and a German century walks by me. It was real dark and I was in a clump of trees. All of a sudden I heard some guy swearing up a storm. And he swore this good old American swearing and I thought, God bless him, and I went right towards that window of that house. Then I had a machine gun pointed at my nose.

And that's what I had at the other end of this machine gun. Here I'm looking at the machine gun and he's got his hand on the trigger. And I said let me in I'm an American. He said I've got to kill you. That was his order. We were all supposed to be in the house, kill anyone that doesn't know the counter sign or password. He said what's the password, I didn't know it. What's the counter sign, I didn't know it. Then he was damn sure he was going to kill me.

Then I came up with the idea that somebody told me once before that if you could use something from what happened in the Stars and Stripes that day you might get away with it. Not the day after because the day after the Germans used to ask us what happened to Little Abner, because the damn things would blow right over there and they would see

it. So they were keeping up on Little Abner too. So I happened to know what Little Abner did that day and I told him and I said holler that back to your Lieutenant or whoever is in here. So they allowed me in.

There was one fellow, speaking of getting hit in the neck, one of these guys from our outfit was lying there and he's gasping and half his neck was shot away. I pulled him in through the window and laid him on the table and did the best I could, but there was just nothing I could do. I put my bandage on him; I just couldn't help him at all.

One of the things I remember specifically, we had a young man, and his name was Shea. And if Shea didn't have lace on his panties I'll eat my shirt. I mean he was a 'doll.' A real nice guy and I have nothing against that type of person. In fact I liked Shea very much. And he was hit. It was a good size chunk out of his side. From a mortar or whatever the hell it was. And I saw him and I hollered Shea get in here. And in his quite effeminate voice he said oh Bob there are other people around here hurt more than me. Take care of them I'll take care of myself. Some of these other guys were squealing and they didn't have half of what he had. So who is the real man? I mean if you want to take the measure of the man, I'll take Shea any day.

I came out of it fairly good we got back for a night and the next night we were put up where we had a night off so to speak. And I wound up in the damn cellar where I was the night before. With the corpse there. And the next morning when I got out, do you see any shaking in this hand at 90 years old? No, but on that day it finally got to me. In World War I they called that shell shock. And you could wind up like that the rest of your life. The sensed that in me and sent me back to Belgium for a couple days. And I got back in Belgium just in time for the dog gone V bombs that were dropping.

We had rather nice houses as a matter of fact and we went in and they decided to park a trailer load of anti-tank mines right outside this house. There was a couch where I slept then a wall then the trailer. During the night the damn Germans dropped a little anti-personnel mine, they would just scatter those things just to keep you on edge. One of them dropped into the ant-tank mines and blew out the window in the room and blasted a hole in a camera that was hanging on the wall directly opposite me. Blew it all apart as well as hitting my canteen and my pistol. It really put a lot of stuff through that area.

Prior to that, that day, a young man named Erwin Malmett a nice Jewish young fella, just as nice a young guy as you could have met, he was a dedicated photographer. He would just love to grab pictures to the right and left that was his hobby. And while he was over there he was going to get as much use out of his camera as possible. So he came to me

that afternoon and he said Bob, I'm going to die tonight. And I said Mal we all think that. We all have that feeling. And let me tell you we all did have those feelings. When things were bad you always thought you were the next one to get it. And he said I'm so sure of it and he said I want you to have my camera. That was like asking your best friend who just inherited a new Cadillac to give it to you. I said I don't want your camera. He says I want you to have it. I said Mal I can't take it. Well he was called up to go on patrol and he died that night and as I told you a minute ago his camera was smashed that night. So he died and his camera, both of them died. And that left a terribly horrible impression on me. All the rest of my life. As a matter of fact, that is one of the reasons I feel there is something more in this world than just people. I don't know if you are religious or not. It turned out to be one of the horrible nights.

Our division was the first ones into a camp. And we smelled it before we got to it. One of those terrible Concentration Camps the Germans had. We were the first ones into this thing and it turned out that it was Nordhausen.

I couldn't bring myself to go in and look. I understand I was right outside the gate and I smelled it bad enough to not want to have anything to do with it. It was a camp for a little town not too far away and in that town they had buried tunnels, they had trains that would run down through the tunnels and that is where they assembled the V-1 and V-2 rockets. Van Braun who eventually was the head of our rocketry he was one of the head people in Germany. But the Germans used all the slave labor. And I guessed you worked and if you keeled over you were kicked and if you didn't get up they'd throw you over in the pit. They would put you in the furnace or whatever and it was just a horrible amount of people that were in this from what I heard. It was my division that stumbled into this and it was one of the worst camps over there. You don't hear too much about it. But it was one of the worst ones. As we were going through we busted the gates down, I just happened to be in the jeep as the gates were being busted down. And what was left of the people scrambled across the street and they dragged some guy out of a building and we were told not to interfere with it. But I don't think he was treated very nicely. I imagine that by the time these people got a hold of him, and he was probably their nemesis for so long I doubt if they were too dog gone nice to him.

Robert Heine describes combat flying, accidents that happened in the air, and the details and circumstances surrounding his plane being shot down and his consequential internment in a Prisoner of War camp, Stalag Luft III. Heine showed up a short time after

the famous “Great Escape” occurred from the Stalag. Heine emphasized that no one was safe from allied bombings, not even the POW camp or the civilian population. He remembers having bricks thrown at him by civilians who were irate that they were being bombed. It was the duty of every officer to try and escape captivity Heine never attempted an outright escape, however he was involved in organizing escape attempts. He was on a “secret escape committee.”

We lost one plane that had its tail cut off and the other plane had a wing cut off, two crews, twenty people killed right then and there.

Well that’s the only one that I saw. The only other time I saw was on a mission over France, trying to bomb those rocket targets, we called ‘em crossbow targets, there were planes all over the sky and I looked up once and there was a group coming right at us. But they spread apart I had a good pilot. And these were just young guys, 18,19,20 year old kids. You take a guy about 21 years old and give him a big airplane like that to fly.

[When we were shot down] the target initially was Olgzburg, we were going to bomb a Messerschmitt factory. We got over the target but it was socked in with fog, so we hit a secondary target. Olberfafenhafen, that’s a name for you, there was a factory there too so we bombed that. I dropped the bombs and I told my pilot, the usually thing I say, bombs away let’s get the hell out of here. We dropped the bombs and we started to turn, we took flak hit in number 2 engine, it’s the one right there on the left wing, the inboard engine. Now in a B-17 you have to have at least 90 lbs. of oil pressure to feather the propeller, well that flak hit sent shrapnel and it must have cut an oil line because before the pilot could feather the pressure dropped too low and the prop started wind milling. Wind milling means the engine is dead it’s not turning, but the forward motion is turning the engine over, that lasted for about two minutes before the engine froze up and the crankshaft must have snapped or something and the propeller started wind milling. Now the normal RPM’s for an engine that size was about 2500 rpm, when that prop started wind milling it was going three times that speed. And the airplane started to vibrate like hell. Our air speed dropped from 150 indicated, down to 120 indicated, you couldn’t go any faster because that wind milling propeller was a big drag, it’s like having a big round circular piece of plywood on the front of your engine not moving.

So we dropped out of formation and we dropped down into the cloud cover. We stayed in that until it ran out, it cleared up and then we hit

the deck. We flew anywhere from 50 to 150 feet off the ground. All the time that damn propeller was dragging us down, if it had flown off we would have been alright we could have stayed in formation. Flying at that low altitude, every town in Europe has a church steeple, so you could see the steeple up ahead, so we either went to the right of it or to the left of it, we tried to stay away from any ground fire. So we are flying along and we come to a church steeple and we went to the left of it. I'm sitting up in the nose and looking down and all at once I see tracer bullets coming up, one on this side one on that side. So I start shooting back with my chin turret, I forgot to mention that we dumped everything overboard, except the chin turret guns they couldn't get at 'em. So I'm shooting back at them and the co-pilot gets on the interphone and says what the hell are you shooting at Heine, I says I'm not shooting they're shooting at us. I looked down and it was a camouflaged German airfield, the runway was so camouflaged you couldn't see it.

So we flew along and they were shooting at us, they knocked the number one engine out, which is right next to the dead one, they knocked the left wingtip off, and they knocked ailerons off. They shot the hell out of the airplane. I was sitting there looking at the ground and I saw these high tension wires ahead of us and I wondered if we were going to go over them or under them, when we went over them I thought I better get off of this chin turret, I no sooner got off that turret, I got off, I stood up and we hit, and I turned around and where the chin turret was, was a big hole, the guns were pointed down, they dug into the ground and ripped the chin turret right out. If I hadn't gotten up I wouldn't be here.

I was the last one out of the airplane; I was way up in the nose, when I got out there was a German officer with a pistol saying, 'for you the war is over.' And it sure was.

Nobody got a scratch. I was the last one out, I had to run from the nose all the way back to the waist, there were bullet holes all around; I was looking for dead bodies. Not a scratch. What the guys in the waist were doing was there was two pieces of armor plating on either side, they were curled up right next to that. The whole left side of that airplane was shot right up. Half of the horizontal stabilizer was shot off.

The Germans then took us back to the airfield. In the early years of the war each man used to carry a .45 but they stopped that because all you had to do was reach for that weapon and you were dead. We didn't have any weapons. They kept us in the airfield overnight and they put us into like an old school bus and took us up to Paris I remember on the way to Paris that bus go a flat tire so they made us get out of the bus and we sat on the side of the road while they fixed the tire, all at once we heard this noise and we looked up and here comes a Faukwolfe, right on the deck, about 50 feet off the ground, and right behind him was a P-47. That was a

sight, we just sat there and we didn't say a damn word, so we watched the airplane and it got passed us and the German pilot pulled up, the worst move he could have made, that P-47 shot him right out of the sky. And we just sat there looking and smiled at the guards.

The only German soldiers I came across were Luftwaffe and I can truthfully say, and I don't care what a lot of people say, we were glad we were captured by the Luftwaffe. There seemed to be camaraderie between the air forces. We were better treated in our prison camp by the German Luftwaffe officers. If you were captured by the Whermacht [German Army] like an ordinary soldier was, they just as soon shoot you, as to look at you.

This bus took us up to a railroad station in Paris. We got on the train and it took us down to Frankfurt Germany for interrogation at this camp. They put us in solitary confinement, each one of us. They kept us in there for about four or five days. They would interrogate us, they wanted to know, of course they would fool you right away they would say, 'you graduated from Burgard High School, 1939, you went into the army at such and such a date, they knew everything about you. It was supposed to freeze you, you know. So they couldn't get anything out of me, I didn't know anything anyways.

They put us down in the main section of the camp, there you met friends, my pilot met a guy who went overseas with us he got shot down the same day we did. We had a good meal. That night the RAF came over and did their usual thing; they just bombed civilians and everybody else. When the air raid came they put us down in an air raid shelter. The RAF came over and every time a bomb went off in the city the concussion would open up the door of the shelter. One guy was standing there and every time it would open up he would shut it and hold his arm on the door. The next bomb that came over it hit us, and the first one was so close and the concussion was so great that the guy who was holding the door shut, it folded his arm up like an accordion, you could hear him screaming. A guy who was next to me in the shelter, I was sitting down, he was standing up, he was told to sit down, holding up the roof of the shelter was a 6x6 beam, when the concussion came in the door it took that 6x6 and mashed that guy's head right in. The next morning when it was all over we got out and there wasn't much left of that whole damn place. I walked around and right next to our air raid shelter there was a hole where a bomb went straight down, it didn't go off. All the buildings were blown up and they got us all together, except a few that were dead, and they marched us into Frankfurt, we were on the outskirts of Frankfurt. We made our way over to the train station and the civilians are lined up there, you could see all the houses and buildings that were all blown up. Those that survived were throwing bricks at us, screaming at us, our German guards had to tell the

civilians that we were Russian prisoners that had nothing to do with the bombings. Then we got on a train and I ended up at Stalag Luft III.

When I got there I was assigned to a room, I had to sleep on a table because there was no bunk for me, when we got there I noticed there were an awful lot of German guards in that damn prison camp, we were in the south compound, the British were north of us, that was the North compound, well they had dug a tunnel, they had three tunnels going, and their tunnel, they put 78 people out, the night before I got there. So I got there the morning after that escape. They made a movie out of that The Great Escape. So I didn't know what the hell was going on. And the guys told me that the English put out 78 men. A lot of those guys that were in that prison camp they knew all about that stuff that was going on because before the South compound was built, all the Americans that were captured were put in with the English. So they knew a lot of those guys.

I never tried to escape, but I was involved in an organization, every camp had an organization it's like a secret escape committee, stuff like that.

These are the kinds of food we had, you either got a British parcel, an American parcel, or Canadian. Most of ours were American. You got one parcel a week from the Red Cross. From the Germans you got mostly potatoes. Sometimes for lunch you either got a soup, oatmeal, or nothing. Meat, I only saw meat once in the whole time I was there. And I wouldn't eat it. It stunk like hell. In our American parcel we got a can of powdered milk, a can of Spam, and a can of corned beef. I won't eat Spam to this day. We had a can of liver pate, a can of sardines, and margarine, which nobody would eat, four ounces of Nescafe. Either a box of prunes or a box of raisins and after a while the Germans took that out. You got one chocolate bar, called a D-bar, a small bar of soap and cigarettes. When I got to the prison camp I never smoked in my life, but everybody in my room smoked, and one day a guy gave me a cigarette, 'here try it,' I took one I got sicker than hell, the next day I took another one, and I was hooked. I've since quit.

So anyway we had a theatre building there were two prisoners there they used to take the prunes and raisins we got and put them in bottles, I don't know what the hell they did to them, but they would sit in the bottle of water for about a month, and they would sneak over to the theatre building at night and get a hold of some instruments we had there, like a tuba or anything with a tube on it and they would set up a still. And they would sit there and distill this stuff and drink it all night. One day they got caught, a German guard came in. These guys were smart they offered the German guard some drinks; he sat there all night drinking with them. One morning when I got up, before the appeal, I looked out the window and there's a German guard walking alongside the barracks, he'd

walk so far and then he'd fall down, and he'd get up, then walk so far he'd fall down, that was the guy who was in there drinking with the prisoners, he was blind drunk. We had good days and bad days.

There were guys in the camp called Ferrets. These guys here, these are the guys that are in the camp all the time, each barracks had a crawl way on either side of it these guys would crawl in there and they could all speak perfect English and understand English, they would crawl in and listen, of course if anyone knew they were in there the word went out that there was a ferret in the barrack, so everybody started washing their floors, on the wooden floor you'd get buckets of water and pretend to wash your floor and all the water would run down on them and they'd come hurrying out. You took all your old razor blades and you'd drop them into the cracks of the floor down into that area and if they come crawling through there they'd get cut. We got even with them.

We were called Kregies, the German word for Prisoner of War is Kriegskafanagen, so we called ourselves Kregies.

I was captured March 16th 1943 and I was liberated at Mooseburg, Stalag 7A April 29th, 1945. Thirteen and a half months. I had a birthday while I was a POW and the day just came and went, just trying to survive. We got down to Mooseburg that's when the Russians were getting only about 40 miles away from Stalage Luft III, they gave us a half hour notice, about 7 o'clock in the night in the end of January, about 10 below zero outside, and they marched us. They marched us out of Stalag Luft III and they marched us down to Spenberg, took about four days, down there they put us in box cars. World War I they called them 40 and 8's, 40 humans and 8 horses. We had 50 or 55 guys in them damn box cars. No food no water no nothing, for four days. They took us down to Mooseburg, which is in the southern part of Germany, they were moving all of their POW's down into that section because the war was near an end and the Russians were getting closer. They wanted to save us officers as hostages. So I was down there from the end of January till April 29th. That was one hellhole.

After I was liberated they took us to camp Lucky Strike, in France. They gave us new uniforms to wear, fed us, put us on a boat and sent us back home. I was on that boat for three weeks. I think I got home sometime in June 1945. The war in Europe was over but the Jap war was still going on. As a matter of fact I got a sixty-day leave and in August I had to go down to Atlantic City for reassignment. While I was down there the Japs surrendered. They had a point system and if you had enough points you could get out. Well I had more than enough points. But they offered to make me a first lieutenant if I stayed in. I said where would you send me. They said they would send me to Big Springs Texas, that's where I graduated from; I hated it there so I said forget it.

It is clear that the traumatic events witnessed by these veterans greatly affected their psyche. Nearly seventy years later these men can recall specific nuances of their time in combat, it says a lot about how greatly they were affected. These men served their country in the early part of their adolescence. It is a sobering reality to see that war truly rips away innocence and forces young men to witness horrible atrocities that stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Chapter Three C: Problems with Officers

Dealing with officers in the armed service is inevitable. Most officers are competent and have respect of the men they command and do their jobs to the best of their ability. Some officers, according to the interviewees, do not meet the aforementioned criteria. Some officers are incompetent, have no idea how to effectively manage and put their men's lives at risk for no reason. Some officers do everything by the book and while that may work for a peace-time army marching around the parade square, it does not always work when slashing through a jungle or advancing on an enemy position. As the veterans interviewed will relate, they had a range of officers while serving spanning from the incompetent to those who were extremely rigid and even those that were reckless.

Captain Lombardo, himself an officer, had several encounters with fellow officers that he deemed to be less than fit for command. As described earlier he had a run in with an officer during basic training. Lombardo, who was a Captain, would come to see that officers do not always extend the greatest courtesy to other officers.

The army equipped medics with weapons to defend themselves; just because a man was trying to save a life didn't mean that the Japanese soldiers would not attack him. The Medical officer Lombardo was replacing was shot and killed because he was sent into an off limits area by his commanding officer. Lombardo took care to keep his survival instincts 'tuned in' and was always aware of where the fighting was taking place.

I was taught in basic how to respect another officer, how to salute. So I report to this tent, this was in New Zealand, there were no barracks all we had were tents. Fortunately for me I reported to this officer and he was a Captain and I was a Captain. Without looking up the kid puts my 201

file, officers have what's called a 201 file that tells them everything, what medical school you went to, when you graduated etc. He puts my file down and says OK you're dismissed, so I'm left alone I'm still standing there saluting he's not returning my salute, finally he says without looking up he says 'I hate medical officers' [laughs] How do you like that? I'm going to be the first guy, if he's wounded to take care of him. Sometimes I get confrontational and I said to myself this guy's not going to get away with this bullshit. I said sir you don't have to look up if you don't want to, but I suggest you do, you should look at me so you know who the hell I am because if you come to me bleeding I want you to know that I'm going to let you bleed to death. Let him know that I'm not scared of him, let him know he can't bullshit me. It didn't even faze him he just said you're dismissed.

Now, in a normal situation with officers who are more accommodating and cordial to others, he would have probably called me Thom. He's a Captain, I'm a Captain. Out of respect for our double bars [Captain] you would say is it ok if I call you Thom or Doc. There is a way to handle personnel and way not to and I had some experiences with officers that just lacked common sense.

That's something that always came up with the GI's I always said just call me Doc. They are civilians at heart still so be friendly with them.

So this experience was how I was first greeted. Imagine that? You're in a foreign country fighting the Japs, getting ready to fight the Japs and here he wants to makes an enemy out of me. The Colonial was the same way.

So, I'm in this tent with this Captain and I said I wanted to know a few things sir, I wanted to know what happened to the medical officer I was replacing. Now, in the Pacific, the Army did give medics carbines and rifles to protect yourself. The Japs didn't care, that Red Cross turned into a red flag and it made a good target for them. Our aid station was always on the ground, not even in a tent, on the ground and if we were lucky and we found an old Jap position that was dug into the ground and camouflaged we would look for that. No one taught us that we had to use our heads. We would set up in these dugouts so we could work with the bullets going over our heads instead of at us.

I had fifteen aid men who were new you had to have at least 20-25 so 15 of those were new 10 worked with me and you had to assign so many to Company A Company B Company C and HQ. So I had to train all these men. I did ask the men who were still left, I asked one of the older men, what happened to the medical officer I'm replacing? He said he was shot, and the reason he was shot was he was in and off limits area and

it's because of the Captain I told you about earlier sent him there. The Captain told him there were some casualties over there.

Later on when we got into combat I'd look around for the off limit signs because I said to myself that this Capt. is going to send me in an off limits area and get me killed! Off limits meant there were either mines there or there were Jap snipers. The Japs would climb trees with a sniper rifle and shoot down, that's what happened to the kid I was replacing. This same Capt. tried to pull that act on me when we were in combat. He said there were some casualties in an area and I said I just went there Capt. All they have to do is yell medic and I said my men will be there in no time. I assign men to areas where we are fighting and this area wasn't a place we were fighting. And I checked it out and it is off limits and you have no right to tell me where to go. I said I'm the medical officer. I know where to put my medical station I have to be available to A B C companies, wherever the combat is they [medics] have to bring them [casualties] to me. If I have to run to points XYZ a mile over here then run back and go a half mile over here I would exhaust myself in no time and I'd be useless to all of them. So I told him don't tell me how to run my station. If you ran your outfit like I ran my station the war would be over in no time [chuckles]. So right away this guy knew I wasn't going to take any bullshit from him.

So when we got out of combat we were in a rest area I thought I should tell what happened to the Colonial. I got permission to talk to the Colonial. I walked in gave him a proper salute. And he was very nasty. No courtesy whatsoever. Doc? Thom? No, it was, what do you want. I said I wanted to report an incident you should know about and I explained to him that we were left without notification. Right away, I don't believe you. He said that man (the Capt.) has been in combat with me on Guadalcanal, New Georgia, this, this, I don't believe you; I'll take his word against yours. I said what's the sense of talking anymore here. So I said good day sir. Thank you for your time. And I left. And I made up my mind that if I stayed in that outfit I was going to be killed!

I said to myself I have to get out of this outfit. All I wanted to do was be reassigned, because these guys were out to murder me! How many times have you heard of 'friendly fire?' Where you didn't get along with somebody some bastard of an officer didn't like somebody and had them shot? And they would say oh friendly fire or we don't know what happened to them. And the Army says that he is Missing in Action. Bullshit, half of the missing in actions are murders! Because there are a lot of crazy people in the service.

Efner Davis was a soldier who was intolerant of incompetent officers. He felt that officers who lacked common sense had no business being involved in the service. Davis was busted from Sergeant to Private, for fighting, before going overseas. He did gain back his rank, which is a testament to his skills as a soldier and as a leader. Davis treated patients in the Philippines. While treating a mother with twin babies Davis points out just how indiscriminate shrapnel can be. The mother's baby was cut almost in half.

It was 9th of January 1945, when we made the invasion. So after I got a chance to swim to shore, my LCI [Landing Craft Infantry used for beach landings] got stuck, one of our own bombs hit and blew a big hole in the coral and we come up and hit the edge of that and we had a nutty officer that didn't know, anyhow, he said -we had these life preservers that you crush and they would swell up. So he said "inflate life preservers and we said- Don't do that" some of the guys did and they died- as soon as you go in to deep water this damn thing expand under your harness well you can see I'm carrying a pack of 400 rounds of ammunition, six hand grenades, and assorted other stuff, you go wrong side up. So the guy drowned.

By the time I got to shore, I had dragged a guy in with me. We were oh maybe not far, about 100 ft. offshore.

So anyhow, they pumped the water out of me and I got back into operation, but in the meantime I got Filipino parts all over the place and one of my patients, for instance, when the original shelling started, the original Filipinos who lived through that rushed into a little Catholic church a town called Dinali and the Missouri was aiming using the church steeple as a point of aim, but unfortunately one of the sixteen inch shells actually hit the tower and threw shrapnel into the crowd below. One of my patients was a Filipino girl probably about seventeen or eighteen maybe she had two twin babies holding in her arms and a piece of shrapnel about that big, came down lengthwise and cut the baby right in half and took a big gouge out of her leg -she was one of my patients.

We had some good ones and we had some very bad ones. MacArthur being the worst of the lot. General Oscar W. Griswold was our commanding officer that commanded 14th corps he was a great officer and General Stillwell was a great officer. We had a few good officers but we had some officers that were not good. I was the head of the dispensary and this was on Luzon, and I was working on a guy, and he's laying on a captured Japanese operating table and I'm renewing a patch on his back

where he had been wounded this first Lieutenant, they rushed him through medical school and rushed him overseas and he becomes my commanding officer. I swear if you put a bandage on this guy's thumb he would either choke to death or he would fall over, he was useless! So I'm there and this nut comes up behind me and he sticks a .45 over my shoulder, and I'm working on a patient, he says hey Serge how do you work this thing? I take the darn .45 and it never dawns on me that he would give me a loaded weapon, so I'm still trying to do my job with the patient, so I pull the action back and I say just like that sir and I let the hammer down and started to hand it back to him and he says what do you do if you want to shoot it? Pull the hammer back and we've got Colonial Black going across the area. Boom....and I got busted again (laughs) fortunately he was way out of range for the .45. That officer was just dumb. When the reports came through and they wanted to know what happened this nutty Lt. isn't going to tell them that he handed me a loaded weapon so he says the Sergeant accidentally dropped the weapon. Busted again to Private. The guy who doesn't protect himself is in trouble in the service.

I always said I'm not going to start a fight but damn if I'm going to lose one. It's as simple as that. Incidentally I was pretty good at protecting myself.

Robert Schneider also experienced the affects of an incompetent officer.

Schneider describes how poor decisions by high-ranking officers killed the soldiers that they were charged to protect. Stationed near Russian soldiers, he analyzes the differences between them and their American allies. For example, the American soldier was left a little more to his own initiative and looser discipline. The Americans on guard duty were playing poker Schneider remembers, and the Russian counterparts were straight to attention and not allowed to relax while on duty.

Schneider offered the rank of Lieutenant in the Engineer Corps but was deemed ineligible because he was an, even though he completed ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Cadets]. He was relegated back to front line duty as a Sergeant. His view was that, "a Sergeant in the infantry is better than a First Lieutenant every damn time."

One of the nastiest things I heard after that was, we were going up on the dikes [in Holland]. And the guys that preceded us on the dikes, all of a sudden the word came back and there was damn near a mutiny, and rightfully so. Some brass, I don't know who the hell they were, if it was a Colonial or what the devil, he said 'ok we are starting down the dikes' and POW they hauled a kid back, one leg gone. We get everybody together start down the dike. POW another kid back with a leg gone. The next time he said it there was like I said damn near a mutiny. If you want to go down that damn dike use your leg not our legs type of thing. Just nobody would do it. I can't remember how we got it sorted out, but we eventually got out of that. So that was sort of an unhappy situation. Just to think those couple of young guys had to have their legs blown off; they were crippled for the rest of their lives. So that was that part of it.

If you're going to replace anybody at the front lines the chances are the guy that comes in will be new. If you put two new guys up there and three old guys, the chances are that one of the two new ones will die before the three old guys. You get a feeling; all of a sudden you know when to dive. I don't know what it is but I survived an awful lot of stuff by purely and simply instinct. But the very worst thing you could have on earth is a new guy that's all of a sudden panicked.

At any rate we were pulled out of that. And the war went on as usual. Then finally several days later we wound up in an area that was like a T. we were coming up the base road and it branched off in both directions. And beyond that there was sort of a no-mans-land. So we wound up branching off and I understand that our divisional headquarters was established right at the corner of the T. And we were stationed maybe 6 or 7 houses down from the corner. We were put in decent houses. All of a sudden during the night something went KAPOW. I heard later on that the Germans hit the corner house and we lost a lot of our brass that night. I don't think our General was in it but a lot of Colonials and such.

Also we heard at one time that there may have been a railroad gun that hit the house that I told you about with all the Brass inside. Two times during that night I was in that house all of sudden my god something would go over and it went KA-BOOM. Like something tumbling. And there was a massive explosion after it. And it hit right across the street from where we were which happened to be an empty field. The second one that went over I was in the mortar position, which was about 15-20 yards from where the first one hit. Then the second shell came over and POW it hit and I sat in that damn foxhole and I had to lift my helmet over my head because the rocks were falling. We eventually got out of that.

I can't say anything monumental happened to me after that we were one of the closest to the Russian. And we could have gone in and taken Berlin but it was decided that we would let Russia take it. We

eventually had a chance to meet the Russians. And the only time I ever saw them was our guys were standing guard on one side of the bridge and the Russians were on the other side. Our guys were playing poker or something and the Russians were standing there at full attention. They were, I don't know, a lot more organized or not, I think the fact is that the American soldier was left a little bit to his own initiative, if somebody said go right, and you could honestly say it's not going to work, and you went left, nobody is going to bother about it, with the Russians they would probably kill you.

I was at this house one night, the one I was supposed to die in, and all of a sudden word comes down Bob Schneider is supposed to report to Company Headquarters, Company sends me to Regiment, Regiment sends me to Division, Division sends me to Corp and I thought what the hell, soon I'm going to be seeing Eisenhower. Finally I got to a little town way in the back, quite a ways from the front lines, and I went into a room and there was a sergeant sitting there and I said Sarge I haven't the slightest idea what I did. Am I in trouble? He says no you're not in trouble. He said Sergeant when you come out of that office I'm going to have to salute you. I said do you mind telling me what you're talking about? He said they will tell you inside.

So I went in and there was a Colonial or a Brigadier General, I can't remember which, and he was all real nice and told me things are going pretty good, and we've got something to offer you. And I said what's that and he said you were studying engineering when you were in ROTC? I said yes. You had completed engineering basic training? Yes. You're a Sergeant in the Infantry? Yes. He said I'm prepared to make you a First Lieutenant in the Engineers. I said you've got to be kidding. He said what's your outfit? I said 104th Infantry. And he said oh hell it applies to everybody but Infantry. So right back in the damn front line I go. So I like to tell my friends that wound up with bars on their shoulders, A Sergeant in the Infantry was better than a First Lieutenant every damn time. That goes back to the business of why take a guy out of there that's going to take two or three to replace. So I guess that was the thinking at it.

Bob Sommer distinguished himself while serving in the European theatre and became a lead pilot. He literally had Generals looking over his shoulder on more than one occasion. Sommer, however, was not deterred by the high ranking officers, being a pilot, a position known for attracting cocky personnel he was convinced that he knew more

about piloting than the Generals. Lead pilots were responsible for guiding the formations of bombers to their intended targets and placing the bombs on that target accurately.

I became a lead pilot and I flew with two different Generals and both times we hit Berlin and we lead the entire 8th Air Force on both of those missions. We lead twice with two different Generals. Eisenhower, who was the head commander over there said that any of his Generals that had pilot's licenses had to fly missions, so that's how I managed to get a couple of Generals in my aircraft. It was pretty nerve racking, not only did we have the fighters to deal with but here is a General looking over my shoulder (laughs). But I knew more about flying missions than the General did.

Not all the officers were incompetent. Jon Seneff was fortunate to have the experience of a well-trained officer leading him into combat. Bill Colegan was Seneff's commanding officer, while somewhat reckless at times, Colegan embodied the spirit of a fighter pilot and set an example for his men that sticks with Seneff more than sixty years later.

Our CO [Commanding Officer] Bill Colegan had over 200 missions in the ETO [European Theatre of Operation]. We've got stories about him. He really was an aggressive pilot. He flew into a flak tower in one place and cut off a whole part of his wing and came out of there rolling, and what you could do is the 47 had an emergency power capability that you could throw water to a fire and throw it into full throttle and the water was to cool the cylinders. But he apparently got sufficient speed that he could fly the thing and had enough control on the one side that he actually landed the airplane. But when he hit, this was back in Pisa, and he hit on one end of the runway and then he hit on the other end then the next field and finally came to a halt. The airplane didn't roll it was big and strong enough not to. When we found him he was at the officer's club bar and he still had his parachute on (laughs). That was kind of our introduction to our squadron commander.

While we were in France his airplane went out of control and he tried to get out of it and his foot got caught between the throttle and the side of the seat and he couldn't get loose. In the meantime the airplane

straightened itself out and he got back in the cockpit and pulled the plane out and flew it home. It went out of control over our airfield and he bailed out in the parachute and landed. So he led, you could say, a charmed life!

Joe Stefaniak describes his unit like a family. Paratroopers feel they are a cut above the rest. Stephaniak held his superior officers in high regard, Officer's lead from the front' according to Stephaniak. The officers would never ask a man to undertake a mission that they would not do themselves. For that they gained the respect and loyalty of their men.

PFC one of the best, I couldn't get busted any lower [laughs]. Rank didn't mean much over there. The all fought. And we had one damn good officer; I've got to say that.

The camaraderie, you're like family. I mean everybody sticks together. If you had a pair of boots on [paratrooper boots] regardless of what outfit you were with, you had a friend. Another paratrooper from some other outfit sees you; he was like a brother to you really. We all stuck together, we had a damn good outfit.

Pretty good, with the exception of one or two, the majority of them were out there with you, they weren't in the back lines, they were right in front of you. We had one bad officer; we should have shot him, that's what we thought of him. In training he was one of the toughest guys and then he turned chicken. But we didn't get too many guys like that. I have got to say we had top officers.

Robert Heine, who was a lieutenant, relates how sped up training in the States gave him a sobering lesson when he got into combat. Heine also offers a perspective on life as an officer in a Prisoner of War camp.

I found out when I came back from my first mission that I was in charge of the gunners. Plane that was flying in had a chin turret on it on the front. I didn't know how to put the guns in, so I got one of the gunners

to put the guns in it for me. When I came back from the mission, the gunnery officer came up to me and wanted to know why I couldn't put the guns in, I said "Look, after I graduated from bombardier school I was supposed to go to gunner's school, but you guys were so anxious to get us over here, I didn't go to gunnery school, I never saw one of those things in my life. So I got a quick tour, a quick lesson on how to put the guns in, and after that I was in charge of all of the gunners.

All of the enlisted men respected the officers and all of the officers respected the enlisted men. Because up in that airplane each man depended on another man, you couldn't have any enemies or anything like that.

We had training procedures and we could use an officer's club- they had a movie picture show there, a lot of times in between bombing missions, you caught up on your sleep and stuff like that.

It was all officers there; Stalag Luft III was strictly an officer camp. We didn't have to work or do forced labor. Twice a day we had to go out and be counted, they called it appell you had to go out to the open field and you had to line up by barracks and they would count you. You did it once in the morning and once in the late afternoon.

The responsibility to lead men into combat should be looked upon as just that, a responsibility. Not a privilege. The fact that a man passed through officer training school and was given command does not necessarily mean that he has the ability to lead. The accounts above are filled with encounters with both good and bad officers. The men who were interviewed were not afraid to speak up when they saw something wrong with their commanding officers. The hierarchy of the military does not permit this and this is why some demotions were handed out, however, common sense must be taken into account. These men obeyed orders when given by a superior; they would not however, risk their own lives unnecessarily for officers who failed to recognize the lunacy of their orders.

Chapter Four: Returning Home

Returning from military service can be a difficult experience. Men have served with the threat of death looming over them for months and even years at a time. Readjusting to civilian life can be difficult for servicemen. Perhaps it was even more difficult for those veterans returning from the battlefields of World War II because the services that are available for veterans now, are more comprehensive and thorough, compared to those offered to veterans of World War II.

According to the United States department for Military Benefits, Post-Traumatic stress disorder occurs following a life-threatening event like military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents, or violent personal assaults, like rape. Most survivors of trauma return to normal given a little time. However, some people have stress reactions that do not go away on their own, or may even get worse over time. These individuals may develop PTSD.

People who suffer from PTSD often suffer from nightmares, flashbacks, difficulty sleeping, and feeling emotionally numb. These symptoms can significantly impair a person's daily life.

Post-traumatic stress, in popular culture, is more associated with the era surrounding the Vietnam War, with infamous terms such as “thousand yard stare” but the reality is that veterans from any conflict could, and do, suffer from post-traumatic stress. The reason that PTSD is not as evident in the World War II generation could be linked to the conventions of society at the time, as well as a legitimate lack of knowledge in the

subject area, and simply due to the fact that those veterans returning from battle did not speak about what they saw and how it affected them.

The National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder estimates that one of every 20 World War II veterans suffered symptoms such as bad dreams, irritability and flashbacks. According to Department of Veterans Affairs' statistics in 2004, 25, 000 World War II veterans were still receiving disability compensation for PTSD-related symptoms. Studies suggested that the most poorly treated prisoners of war had fewer symptoms than front-line soldiers because the prisoners were no longer in a position where they had to kill.

Robert Sommer had a unique view of the war. He was above it. Having that distance from the carnage gave him a slightly detached view and left him less affected by the horror below. Sommer is not entirely unaffected by war. Sommer talks about the bond that formed in combat, keeping in touch with his crew, the memories that he still has for them, and the dedication of a memorial in the town in England in which he was based during the war. The action creates a link to those airmen who served in England during the war. Sommer seems very appreciative of this action.

I still keep in touch with my Captain, his crew was already formed before I joined it and they needed a co-pilot, so I became his co-pilot. I still stay in touch with him. His name is Norm Heard and he lives in New Jersey. My bombardier was flying with a different crew, not our crew and the bombardier sits right in the nose of the plane in a Plexiglas bubble and the plane had an oxygen explosion and it blew the nose off the plane including him with it. He went into the North Sea and they never found his body. That is one of the tougher parts.

I imagine what happened in that explosion was that somebody decided that they wanted to smoke and you don't have flames around oxygen. That's pretty dangerous.

We dedicated a memorial in the town that we were based in, about three years ago. And they shut down everything; it's only a town of about three or four hundred people. They shut the town down and we took the mast of the windsock, every field had a windsock so you could tell which way and how strong the wind was, they used the mast of the windsock to build the memorial. It was quite an affair. They even had old vehicles from the war at the ceremony. It was very impressive. The queen's guard came; it was unbelievable and very moving. You don't forget being in that war and being in that town brought it all back.

Talking about the war really doesn't bother me to tell you the truth, I was above the action I felt a sort of disconnect from it all. You were so far away from the earth, thousands of feet, 25-30,000 feet in the air, it wasn't like ground fighting like the regular army.

Sommer reveals his pride in doing his duty, and getting the job done. However, there are some images of the war that still stir up memories to this day.

We had to do what we did, if it wasn't for our service we would probably be speaking German today. I am proud of what I did in the war and it's not hard for me to talk about but those images of those planes burning up and crashing, those things never leave you. I did my duty and I am proud, but I was scared every time we went up and just prayed that I got through alive.

Upon returning home, the war with Germany had ended, recalls Captain Lombardo. At the time a point system was used by the Army to determine if a soldier was eligible for discharge. Lombardo was more than anxious to take advantage of the system and accepted his discharge. He was done with the service. His experience with other officers left him bitter and disgusted with the military hierarchy. Those interactions with other officers greatly shaped his reflections on his war experience.

They put me on this boat and it took about three weeks to get to San Francisco and when we disembarked they read my report and said we will send you to Fort Dix that is closer to your home. By that time the war was winding down. By the time I got to Fort Dix the Germans had quit.

At that time they had a point system that had developed. So many points per month of service, if you were overseas you got more points, if you were married you got so many points, wounded so many. I think the deadline was something like 82 and I quickly added up how many I had and I had 85. He says we will send you to Germany and I said like hell you will. The war was over in Germany and it was just occupation duty. I said I've got 85 points and the Army says I can be discharged because I have more than 82. And the war in Japan is going to be over soon. And while we were going back and forth with all of this Japan did give in. So they sent me back home.

As I look back at this I said someday I'm going to tell this story. I was always kind of afraid to tell this story because if by chance it got picked up by the national media and reached Kansas where this Captain was from and Connecticut where the other guy was from. But I said the hell with it somebody should know what's going on in the service. I've had a couple of men, when I got home, wrote me and thanked me.

Dr. Lombardo easily re-adapted to civilian life after the war was over. He then comments on his service and the appreciation that is readily shown to veterans.

I adapted very quickly what I did was I took a residency and finish my internship and I wanted to go into a specialty, and being so small, I'm a short fellow, I couldn't go into adult medicine, internist, the guys would come in and I'd have to get on a stool to examine them [chuckles] by process of elimination I went into pediatrics. I took my training for three years at E J Myer hospital it's the old county hospital. When I finished my three years of training I was board certified and I opened up an office right across from D'Youville College. And the practice grew and grew very quickly.

I'll tell you I was sitting in Wegmans grocery store I'm sitting there and I have my WWII veteran cap on I wear it once in a while. A former GI comes by and he saluted me. He says can I ask you a question and I said sure, he asked where I served and I quickly told him medical officer Capt., in the Philippines. I said I was in combat no field officer way of sitting back a hundred miles away from the fighting. I was right there taking care of the wounded. And he says thank you very much for serving. Ten minutes later another guy comes back with a hat his was from Korea. Then he saluted me as well. People recognize your service and most are very grateful most people were. I'm proud to say that I have two other brothers, one served with the Coast Guard, he was smart, before war was declared he saw it coming and he said I'm going to join the Coast

Guard so sure enough all of his service was stateside. When I got back from the Pacific I met him in San Francisco he was there on duty at that time. My other brother, kid brother, was in the Korean War. He was a private. So there were three boys and we all three of us served.

I didn't think of it as I was doing something heroic. I thought I was doing my job. I was trained as a doctor to do doctoral duties. And that's what I thought when I was doing it I wasn't thinking I'm going to get a medal for this medal for that. As a matter of fact even after I got my medals I didn't make a big fuss over it; I said nothing. I don't go around bragging. We had a job to do and that's what we did.

Efner touches on the controversial issue of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki that ultimately brought World War Two to an end. He voices his views on the modern military as well as his ever-present problem with incompetence with those in authority.

But there's a lot of misconceptions that people don't really realize- the bombs were necessary, if they hadn't dropped those bombs, I wouldn't be here, no question about that, but I believe the bomb that blew up Hiroshima only killed 87,000 and yet the B-29's firebombing killed 250,000 in one night in Tokyo. You know you get a thousand of these B-29's loaded with the incendiaries and they just pattern bombed the place and Tokyo was primarily bamboo and paper, so that firestorms cremated an awful lot of people. But the Japs would have continued fighting- I'm sure of that, except they really needed an excuse- boy that was an excuse - what in the heck is an atom bomb? Now you have to remember that the bombs that eliminated Hiroshima and Nagasaki were midgets, you know little bombs, they had TNT to blow them up in case it didn't work, but now we have that much power in an artillery shells, you can imagine what would have happened with the bombing if they had the accuracy in World War II that they have now. The Army claims that they can hit any place in the world within three feet. Then what you'll see them do not too long ago, on TV and in the papers that some guy is sitting in an enclosed room in a ship out in the gulf some 300 odd miles away, piloting a drone, and spots a guy driving a car in the mountains says yup, that's the guy we want and that's it he's dead.

Davis relates a story of a man in his unit that displayed heroism, like all vets he is reluctant to use the word hero when describing his own service but will use it when describing the actions of fellow soldiers in the heat of battle.

I don't believe it, how the heck are you going to take a bunch of guys in combat and say that one's a hero and that one over there isn't? Forget it. There isn't such a thing. Not only that but I have seen instances where guys that deserve far more than I were not awarded what they should get. We had one guy that when we went across the Basik river in Manila, the Japs were in what they call the intramural section, it's a walled part of the city. And we were on the other side and the Japs are firing down on us while we are crossing the river. We had one guy with a little wooden row boat that made I think three or four trips across hauling guys over there that were getting shot up in the same boat he's in. They were going to give him the Medal of Honor and he said stick it, every one of these guys deserves one. And that's the attitude that I'm talking about.

The type of training and personnel we have now, they've downgraded the services to the level of the lowest individual, which is a girl, who doesn't have the strength, the pack they are carrying now is maybe 40 lbs. or less. I hate to say it, but I've spent some time in the reserves and my experience was that the people there couldn't hit the broadside of a barn from the inside. They didn't have the training. A prime example, I was on the range and we had rifle practice and there was a First Lieutenant blazing away with an M-16 at a target maybe 50 ft. away and he's not hitting it, ridiculous. So he comes over to me and he says here Sarge sign my report and I said sir you didn't hit the target. I said sir you didn't qualify and he said that's an order. And I said too bad sir, I'm not going to sign it. So a while later a Colonial comes over and said did you refuse a direct order from the first Lieutenant and I said yes sir. And he said why, and I said do you see that target out there? He was blazing away and didn't hit it and he wants me to sign a report that says he's an excellent shot. The Colonial says Sergeant do you think you could hit that target and I said, damnit sir which eye do you want me to put out? And that was the end of that.

I always said I'm not going to start a fight but damn if I'm going to lose one. It's as simple as that. Incidentally I was pretty good at protecting myself.

John Seneff had some trouble upon returning home and found that the thrill, excitement and hardship suffered in war is a lot for a young man to handle. The monotony of civilian life simply didn't compare with his war experiences.

I got back in November 1945 and of course V-J Day was in August and so the army didn't want us anymore. They had all these surplus pilots and air force people. So went right back to school and three years later I went back and started my second semester of school (laughs). Which was much harder than the first one. It was very hard to settle down I must admit.

Well yeah I think everybody did, its like going out and were a road warrior for three years and then went back to school. You have trouble settling down. I think my worst thing in trying to settle down was I had to take two courses, which I didn't really appreciate. One was a health course and the second was rhetoric and in this course you had to write stories. And man I was terrible (laughs). The first one I did was a failing grade and the second one I turned in wasn't a hell of a lot better, the third one I was living with a friend at the time at the University of Illinois and we were pretty much broke but we decided that we would go buy and have a bottle of wine for supper and so we did and we went and got a bottle or two and all of a sudden, this was a Friday night and I had this theme due on Saturday morning and all of a sudden it dawned on me that I had to write a story and so after the wine it was much easier to write the story, I got a C on that paper (laughs). And I thought aw man this is the way to do it. So every time there after we went and bought a bottle of wine so that we could write. And I came out of there with a pretty good grade.

The camaraderie that you had with the other guys that you flew with. We just had a reunion. The trouble is that there aren't many people left to show up.

I'm still flying we have a little four-seater airplane. I'm still flying still have my ratings.

After the war I went back to school I really contemplated getting in with the airlines, staying in the service wasn't too attractive to me, the reason that it wasn't is because none of us had had our college education and so we were all commissioned incidentally we were all commissioned in the Army of the United States, it was not the regular army. And our commissions died at the end of the war because the Army of the United States was disbanded. And those guys who wanted to stay, very few were offered commissions so you had to take at least a downgrade for example Wally went in there as a staff sergeant he was later recalled as a pilot and

was given his Captaincy but for a while he was a supply sergeant for some base.

Of course our missions were short, let's say we were supporting the 10th Mountain, they were only ten miles away. You could go there and drop a load of bombs and fire all of your guns and come back, and you had a mission that was a half hour long. And of course the 8th Air Force in the strategic missions were up there for 8-10 hours so they were racking up all kinds of air time plus the fact that they had twin-engine time and four-engine time. So us fighter pilots got out of the Air Force having five or six hundred hours of flying time and had 75, 80, 100 missions. I think I had about six hundred.

Seneff describes the job that brought him back to Buffalo after the war and his education under the G.I. Bill. Seneff embodies the 'can do' attitude of the generation. Everybody had a job and a duty to do. The job was finished and it was time to readapt and get on with the way life was before the war.

A job brought me back [to Buffalo]. After I graduated from the University of Illinois I went and got my Master's Degree in Aeronautical Engineering on the GI Bill. I got married then I got a job with Bell Aircraft. My studies were pretty much all internal aerodynamics. And I never worked a second with internal dynamics. I went to Bell and was hired as an aero dynamist and a guy came over and asked if I wanted to see what the rocket section looked like and I said yeah I guess so. And he went out and fired up two rocket engines and asked me if I wanted a job and I said oh man yeah! So I stayed with rockets for thirty-seven years. Then I retired and went to be a snowboard instructor (laughs).

I'm no hero, but I think some of those other guys sure are. There is a mindset and during that period of time in World War II at the beginning we were pretty mad at Japan, you know the whole nation (United States) was. And I think everyone said well lets go try and fix this and right the wrongs. I think the whole generation came out and said let's fix this and then get back to what we were doing before. Let's go back and try to finish what we were doing before we got into this mess. I think everyone just saw they had a job and a duty and that's what we did.

After being wounded several times in France, Ed Drabczyk had a difficult and painful journey home. He spent time in a military hospital and describes coming back to the United States. Drabczyk's recalls his heartfelt reunion with his Aunt and Mother in a diner that was just off the hospital grounds. They could communicate only in Polish and years later a seemingly innocent conversation would come back and affect Drabczyk's life.

I went in June 9th from southern France I came home on a hospital ship and we got to Staten Island and I called home naturally. I still had the cast on me and mother said she was going to try and come down and see me. And I said to the doctor I said, my mother sees me in this cast she's going to be broken. And he says alright we will get it off and give you a brace that will be under your pajamas. I said ok that's good. So she came down on a Sunday and the place was so loaded because it was the first visiting day of that shipload. And I think every parent in the world was there. And you couldn't hear yourself talking. My building was right outside the gate of the hospital going out. And right outside there was a little restaurant. So I walked with my mother and my aunt and I said to the Sergeant I said hey Serge how about letting me and my mother and my aunt go into that place. He said I can't let you out you don't have a pass. I was on crutches too and I said I can't go anywhere on crutches. He said ok go ahead. So we went in there and we talked.

Probably nine or ten years ago I was in Atlantic City with my wife and I saw an old lady sitting with a patch on her eye sitting at a machine so I sat down next to her and I said do you mind? So while we are playing she kept looking at me and looking at me and finally she says, don't I know you? And I said that's supposed to be my line [laughs] and she says I know you from somewhere. And I told her I was from Niagara Falls, outside of Buffalo, then I happened to mention that I was in the hospital on Staten Island. She says that's where I know you from, you and two ladies come into my father's restaurant on a Sunday, I was mopping the floor and you were talking a foreign language with these two ladies [Polish], and says how can you remember that? She says I remembered your blue eyes [Laughs] and I said my god you're as bad as my wife she remembers everything too. So I called my wife over and she called her husband over and we had coffee and talked and she had cancer of the eye. So for a while we corresponded and then everything stopped so I assume she was gone. But that was something, after all those years, something like that could happen.

So anyway I spent nine months there and I wheeled my way out before Christmas. I had to go to all the different doctors and report that I was feeling great. I went to a nerve doctor and one shrink who asked me if I enjoyed killing Germans. I said I don't think so. So I got out December 20th and that was my tour.

Some of the things in life that seemed so vital at the time now held no interest for Ed Drabczyk. His regret though was his tryout with the St. Louis Cardinals was put on hold for the duration of the war.

Well in 1943 the St. Louis Cardinals were having a tryout at Hyde Park Stadium in Niagara Falls. And I was a ball player. So on a lark, my cousin, and a couple others of us went down for a tryout. And I was a third baseman. I did well, I had a couple of good hits and I fielded well and I impressed the scout. He says I won't sign you up now because you'll be going to the service, but when you come out I want you to report to me and we will send you to South Carolina for another tryout. So that was my one regret, but there was a lot of guys like me. But as far as anything else no, I wouldn't do it again, but I'm glad I went. I don't know if it gave me a different outlook on life, but when I got home I kind of thought you know, taking out the garbage and stuff wasn't very important. You know things like that. Things that other people held so important to them were meaningless to me.

I see some of the kids today that can't possibly get along without a Walkman or something like that. We were born in the Depression, we had a used radio that never worked half the time. I think I'm a pretty good guy, it didn't affect me badly, I didn't come out wanting to kill people, I don't harbor any grudges, I don't even feel bad for the Germans, except for the ones that did the bad things to the Jews.

No, I never heard of it [Concentration Camps] until I came back. And then when television came in and all these history channels started coming out, I wanted to know about the rest of the war. All I knew was fifty yards on each side of me.

The things I saw though did affect me, I would say I do suffer from the post-traumatic stress I have nightmares and that stuff and that fear and the things you see never leaves you.

It is impossible to describe combat to someone who has not seen war says Joe Stefaniack. When you fight side-by-side in life or death situations there is a bond that is created. The camaraderie that these men share and can only be understood by those who served together. Stefaniak reflects on raising hell before his service and how you only get one life, it is important to live to the fullest.

Every so often I think of the memories and it hurts. When you are with your own bunch you don't mind talking about it because every one of you saw everything. They know that you're not throwing them some bull. And you try to keep the bad things away from one another.

I have the same feelings for the kids today overseas; it is such an awful thing. But if someone points a gun at you, you have to take them out period. Or you aren't going to be here to talk about it. We didn't have that problem over there, we knew who we were fighting.

Oh yeah, I thought hell I'll never make it through the service, that's why I raised hell before that [laughs] you want to live before you die. There was more than once where I thought I was going to get hit.

It was a different time when we grew up, when they hit Pearl Harbor everyone and his brother was signing up. I was going to sign up but if you were drafted you were only in for the duration, if you sign up they can keep calling you back in. So I said the hell with that. I've got to be honest that was a different breed of people. Most of them were poor kids, poor families. But we made it. As my buddy Joe Pallic would say, I don't know how in the hell we won the war, but we won it. I would do it again, all of us would. We didn't do it to be heroes, we did our job.

Robert Schneider describes the circumstances of where he was when the war ended, his feelings on the atomic bomb, his thoughts about his service, and what he did when returning home. As did the other veterans, he has a great sense of pride and accomplishment looking back at his service during the war.

Yes, as a matter of fact we were pulled back and sent back to the United States. As we were leaving to head back I was offered to stay in the

Army, they didn't say if there was a commission out of it. But we were shipped back to the States and we had a thirty-day leave. And then we were shipped to the West coast. And we were supposed to invade Japan. All these guys are being dragged out of Europe and now we are going to be put on ships and invade Japan. Well there was a mutiny the guys in one of the outfits got aboard one of the ships and tore all the electrical gear out and threw it overboard. And then there was such a big ruckus back here from people like my wife. They started to get in touch with Congress and everybody else saying can't you use different troops? These guys are already battle weary. And finally the Atomic Bomb came along and stopped it. But from what I understand, if it hadn't been for the Atomic Bomb I never would have lived at all. Because they had the shores so well defended that it would have been nearly impossible.

We were engaged before I went over [wife Marge] and when I came back I took advantage of the veterans education so I went back to school and got my engineering degree. And Marge and I got married in 1947, 64 years ago now.

I got involved in engineering I eventually worked for and became assistant chief engineer at a big gear manufacturing company and we made a lot of reverse reduction gears for minesweepers or things of this nature. That company eventually left town and I then was a plant manager at a company named Cap Plugs. It's over on Elmwood Ave. I retired from there 20 years ago.

Oh No, not at all, in no way. I can't even think of that [being called a hero]. Heroes are people like the guys that went down with the plane in Pennsylvania, you know when they called their wives and said what's going on and we are going to die now because we are going to sink this plane into the ground. Boy that's heroic. Except for that volunteering that one time I did nothing else than keep my hide. But as I think of it that volunteering that was above and beyond. I did something; I don't know how the hell I got the courage to do it. But I did it. And I've always been proud of the fact that I did do it that I didn't send somebody else to do it. I wasn't going to send a man to do a job that I wasn't willing to do myself.

Robert Heine's experience as a POW gave him a different outlook on the war. He discusses his liberation, the things he missed most while in captivity, and heroism. His return home had no fanfare he arrived alone. He further relates his views on Iraq and veterans today.

[I missed] white bread. And you won't believe it, you get a bunch of guys together, they usually talk about women, everybody talked about food. We were always hungry. I used to lay in bed and dream about eating an apple, I used to lay there and be about being home and you wake up and you're still in that damn place. I was doing the same thing when I got home. I'd have this damn dream that being home was a dream. And I'd wake up and be back in prison camp again. It took me the longest time to get over that.

When asked if he feels he is a hero Heine continues:

It gets me kind of pissed off when they say everybody that is over there coming back from Iraq is a hero. When we came back from World War II I came back, I got off the boat, they took me to a camp, gave me new clothes, reprocessed me and sent me home. I got home at six o'clock in the morning, there were no bands, there was no people waving or anything, I knocked on the door, my mother and father didn't even know I was coming home. I think they are over using that word hero.

Everybody that goes over there and comes back isn't a hero. There are more damn heroes in World War II that nobody knows about. Every guy in that camp was a hero. They got shot down. I saw one guy in the paper last week he's got medals for god sakes about that long, come back from Iraq. We flew the air battle of Europe, which is from the first time we started flying, around June of '41, until the invasion, D-Day, nobody got anything for that. We fought that battle and never got a medal or a ribbon or anything for that. I had a buddy that was in the Air Force too, he was a bombardier in B-24's flying in the 15th Air Force out of Italy, every time he flew over a certain point he got a double mission for it. We didn't get anything, you fly to Berlin and back it was one mission. The only medal I got was an Air Medal with two oak leaf clusters, of course when I got out I got a prisoner of war medal. A buddy of mine about ten years after that asked me if I got the New York State Medal, I said what the hell is that. So one day some politician knocks on my door and he gives me the box.

These guys over there now have a rough time; they have a war that is entirely different from my war. They come home with grapefruit [medals] hanging all over the front of their uniforms. Hero is a word that kind of pisses me off, we never considered ourselves heroes, and nobody ever even mentioned anything like that. We just did our duty. The whole time that the 8th Air Force was in that war they never turned back from a mission. Nothing stopped them. You take the two Regensburg missions, the first one they lost over 60 bombers, the second one almost an equal amount, now there is ten men in a bomber, a bomber goes down ten men go down, if you see parachutes come out, good, someone is going to be alive, if you see nothing come out, they go down with the plane.

People ask what was it like up there. It was like watching a silent movie. You didn't hear any noise, the only noise you heard was the four engines on your plane and if your gunners were shooting at anything. Planes would blow up on either side of you, the flak would blow up alongside you and you wouldn't hear a thing. I tell everyone it's like I was sitting there watching a silent movie. I didn't hear nothing.

Daniel Kay, having not seen combat, had a different viewpoint than those combat veterans. He had no trouble adjusting to civilian life due to the fact that he didn't see any action.

After the war I went to Canisius got my Bachelor's and Master's. [I] worked and started a family.

I wasn't in any hostilities; there was no traumatic experience or anything like that. It was good to be back and the vacation away was over [laughs] a big vacation.

Its difficult to see the war in Iraq, there weren't any mines like they are dealing with over there during World War II. The equipment of course is not like it is now a day. In Japan you would have to take a bayonet now it is done with the push of a button.

Of course like I mentioned before the machine gun turrets. That was a wake up. It would have been a massacre. And of course the A-bombs. At that time, you know, they attacked us. What were we going to do? After Pearl Harbor the idea was to get them before they get you.

If I was involved in actual warfare I would probably tried to get involved in a medical group or something like that. I would've liked to save a life rather than take a life.

The time that these men spent in the military was a short window in their lives. However, nearly seventy years later, those vivid memories of training, combat, and that last great memory, coming home, are all engraved deeply in their psyche. It is clear that most of these veterans suffer from the classic definition of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Returning to the safety of home cannot simply turn off the vision of death and carnage on the battlefield. One can only imagine how it must feel to remember a friend from an army unit seven decades ago, still be able to see his face, and know that he will never be able to live a full life. After talking with these men they will never call themselves heroes. They will simply say they were doing their service to their country. You come away with a deep respect and admiration for these young men who put their lives on hold and joined the service not knowing if they were going to live or die. Many are proud of their service and if you ask them they will simply say we did what we had to do and they fought for their buddies.

Conclusion

Veterans of the Second World War are dying at an alarming rate and soon the experiences of those brave men will be nothing more than words on a page. This research strived to keep the voices of these men alive long after they are gone. The descriptions and irreplaceable first-hand accounts are invaluable to historians. Once these men die the memories of their war experiences die with them. It is important to archive and preserve those experiences for history, even as illusion, invention, or myth.

This project was undertaken with great enthusiasm for the topic of World War Two. More importantly it was guided by the utmost respect for those veterans who served during that war.

Having given the veterans their proper respect, this study was not meant to devolve into hero worship. Through the experiences of these veterans readers can get a personal account of war on a small scale. We can see how these men formed camaraderie in the gravest of circumstances.

From time to time in dealing with these veterans they had trouble describing what they went through. The same theme kept resurfacing. The reason that the veterans had trouble explaining war is quite simply that it cannot be fully understood by someone who was not there.

The men who served in the Second World War are called the Greatest Generation. I have come to the conclusion that these men are no greater than any other men. They were, however, placed in an extraordinary world-changing event. They rose to the

occasion and served their country when called upon. They were doing their duty. The myth of the Greatest Generation is not unwarranted but I do feel that the justification for making these men out to be heroes of almost mythical proportion was heaped on them by the American media. We live in a country now that no longer sees victories. We do not declare war and when we do enter a conflict there are no set objectives to complete in order to obtain victory. I believe that this is the reason that Americans need the myth of the Greatest Generation. We need to feel that what we are doing in the world today is justified and World War Two, in 20/20 hindsight, is a perfect high watermark to measure ourselves.

At the conclusion of the interviews I was left with a very stark realization. These young men who fought World War Two had a common trait. That trait is the sense of duty. They had a duty to serve their country. That trait is evident in every man that was interviewed for this study. One can read in their testimonies that they are proud of their service.

A surprising conclusion for me was the answer I received while trying to determine why these men fought. Part of the reason they fought was a sense of duty; however, having grown up on the cut and dry version of World War Two that is simply put, good vs. evil, I expected these veterans to say that the reason they fought was to bring down fascism, to rid the world of evil and make it safe for democracy. That was an idealistic and very naïve expectation on my part. The veterans who served in Europe did not even know that extermination camps existed until they either saw them with their own eyes, or heard about them when they returned home. What motivated these men to

fight? The answer is camaraderie. The men who fought in the war fought for the man on either side of them. They had no grand idea that what they were doing was going to shape the world. They fought to survive and to protect the men with whom they shared combat.

My hope for this study is that it makes a contribution to local history through the experiences and accounts of each veteran.

The scope of the project reaches further than the superficial experiences of veterans during the war. A very deep and personal connection was made both with these veterans and with their common link to the City of Buffalo, New York.

This study has shown how men make sacrifices. I feel that this is another justification for using the term the Greatest Generation. When these men were drafted/enlisted they put their lives on hold for what they saw as their duty to their country.

These men went from doing their duty on the battlefield to doing their duty for their families. The common link between these men is their sense of duty, pride and the bonds that were shared and could only be forged in combat.

I hope to make a contribution to the local history field as well as the overall oral history of World War Two with this study. Viewed through the lens of the city of Buffalo we can extrapolate the experiences and feelings had by these veterans to speak for the aggregate experiences of the generation and the country at the time.

The veterans I spoke with will never admit to being heroic or being any different from the man next to them. They do not have to. The experiences that they have related

to me speak for themselves. These men fought and died for the man next to them. They trusted their pilots to guide them through incoming flak from anti-aircraft guns; they shared foxholes and weathered artillery and gunfire. Soldiers say that you will never truly understand combat unless you go to war. This is true. Through the words of these men, however, we can get a glimpse into the feelings and experiences they shared. It is important to preserve the memories before they are lost to history.

Greatest Generation? The debate over the use and justification for that term will continue. However, I feel that the experiences and actions of these men deserve the designation of the toughest generation. I hope that the memories preserved in this study in both print and electronic format will add to the great collection of works on World War Two.

Bibliography

Interviews conducted by the Author:

- Davis, Efner. September 02, 2010.
- Drabczyk, Edward. December 13, 2010.
- Heine, Robert. September 08, 2010.
- Lombardo, Thomas. September 20, 2010.
- Seneff, John. September 21, 2010.
- Schneider, Robert. December 6, 2010.
- Sommer Robert. November 17, 2010.
- Stefaniak, Joseph. September 10, 2010.

Books:

- Ambrose, Stephen. *Band of Brothers E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne from Normandy to Hitler's Eagle's Nest*. New York: Ambrose-Tubbs Inc, 1992.
- Ambrose, Stephen. *The Wild Blue: The Men and Boys who flew the B-24's over Germany*. New York: Ambrose-Tubbs Inc, 2001.
- Brokhaw. Tom. *The Greatest Generation*. New York. Random House Inc. 2004.
- Gilbert, Adrian. *POW: Allied Prisoners in Europe, 1939-1945*. London: John Murray, 2006.
- Junger, Sebastian. *War*. New York. Hachette Book Group. 2011.
- Leckie, Robert. *Helmet for My Pillow: From Parris Island to the Pacific*. New York: Bantam, 1957.
- Sledge, E.B. *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*. Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1981.
- Whipple, Addison Beecher Colvin, ed. *Time-Life Books*. Alexandria, Virginia: Time Life Inc, 1981. s.v. "World War II."
- Wood, Edward. *Worshipping the Myths of World War II: Reflections on America's Dedication to War*. New York: Potomac Books Inc. 2008.

Lectures:

Atkins, Rick. "The US Army in World War II: Ten Things to Know." Recorded May 11, 2011. The Pritzker Military Library.