Louis Sass was born 23 May 1919 in St. Paul, Minnesota, and grew up there. He graduated from Washington High School in 1937, then worked at a number of jobs in St. Paul, among them the St. Paul Foundry Company on Como Avenue.

Louis was drafted into the US Army in September 1941, prior to the US entering the war. He served in the 75th Infantry Division, arriving in France in 1944. Louis saw action at the Battle of the Bulge (Dec 1944 – Jan 1945); the Battle of the Colmar Pocket (1945); and the Battle for the Ruhr (1945). He was discharged from service in Dec 1945. (information verified from narrator records)

Louis was married in 1944, prior to leaving for Europe. He and his wife Norma Jean (d. 1994) had three children. Following military service, Louis worked for the Veterans Administration, then for several other companies, some outside of Minnesota.

Interview key:
D = Daniel Borkenhagen
L = Louis Sass
[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation
(*** = words or phrase unclear
NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

D: Today is October 20th, 2001. My name is Dan Borkenhagen and I am interviewing Louis Sass. Thank you for agreeing to do this interview, Louis.

L: You're welcome.

D: I’m just going to start off with a few biographical questions, so that people can get an idea of where your history has been. When were you born and where was that?

L: I was born May 23rd, 1919, in St. Paul. My father was Andrew Sass and my mother was Kate Sass. They were both born in Hungary, and they emigrated over here in 1908.

D: Really, so nine years, no, eleven years before you were born. Do you have any siblings?

L: I had an older brother. Let’s see, there was Andrew, and Frank, my sister Regina, Helen, and Catherine, and there was one other brother. And both of these brothers died at birth, or a year after, in 1910.

D: So were you the oldest?

L: No, I was the youngest.

D: You were raised in St. Paul then?

L: I was raised in St. Paul. I went to school at St. Andrews Catholic, baptized at St. Andrews Catholic Church, in the Como Park district there.

D: And you went to high school then?

L: I went to high school, Washington High School.

D: You went to Washington, and graduated in, what year would that have been?

L: I was supposed to get out in 1936, but due to the economy I stayed over until 1937. I graduated in 1937.

D: And then after that you started working somewhere?

L: I worked at St. Paul Foundry Company on Como Avenue, making blueprints there. And I did various other jobs throughout, making candy, parking cars, and then I
wound up as a mechanic right here on Chatsworth and Front. And then I was drafted into the army on September 18, 1941, that’s before the war.

D: I’m going to skip the direct war years, just so we can finish up the biography stuff. When did you come back then from the war?

L: December 8, 1945.

D: So six months, not quite that after the war was over.

L: I spent fourteen months over there.

D: And after you came back, what did you do?

L: Then I went to work for the Veterans Administration.

D: And worked there until you retired?

L: No. After the Veterans Administration cut back, I went to work as a printer, did typesetting. I moved out to Houston, Texas, to open up a new plant for Curtis 1000, as a typesetter. I returned after five years, went to work for Frank in Minneapolis, Instyprints. I set up their original logo. Remember that dunce cap, that Instyprints? I set that up.

D: Oh, that’s you?

L: I set that up originally. That was one of my handiwork. I worked for him until he went into Instyprints totally, then I took over his equipment and went into business for myself over in Minneapolis. Typesetting. I worked typesetting for whoever wanted it until they disposed of the equipment and then until last year, year 2000, I worked up here at a small print shop, because of the old equipment that they had. I could still run the equipment. Whenever they needed me I’d go up and work.

D: So are you officially retired now?

L: No. They closed. I work at Proguard, it’s hockey equipment. I work there whenever they need me or as much as I want.

D: So you’re still going.

L: Still going.

D: You’re married then, or were?

L: I was married for 50 years until my wife passed away, she was in the WACS in the army. She had cancer for 34 years, then she passed away seven years ago [in 1994].

D: So what year did you two get married?

L: In 1944, that was before I went overseas.
D: And you had children?

L: Oh yes. We had three children, two daughters and a son. They still live in the area here.

D: They live in St. Paul too?

L: Well, one lives in Cedar, which is up by Andover, and my daughter lives out in Shoreview, and my son lives in New Hope [all in Minnesota].

(A, 110)

D: What do you, you said you still work at Proguard, is there anything else you like to do today as a hobby or anything like that, things that keep you busy?

L: Well, this is something that I’ve discontinued a lot of. I still usher at our church, and next year, I’ll be an usher there for 65 years.

D: Oh my gosh, that’s a long history of ushering.

L: For 65 years. I delivered Meals on Wheels for about 15 years. I worked at the food shelf. I worked as a Befriender at church. I go visit people at the nursing home. I worked as a license judge for about 12 years. I figure the younger ones can still do that. I volunteer and now I’m starting to cut back just a little bit.

D: Giving yourself a little bit of a break. Sounds like you’ll never stop.

L: I still keep occupied.

D: Well, I guess that covers most of the biography info I need, so maybe we’ll go back and start with the war years.

L: That’s fine.

D: Easiest place to start is 7 December 1941. What were you doing and where were you when you heard the news?

L: Well, I was... where was I then? (pauses three seconds) I was in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Fort Warren, Wyoming, and I was in the service club, ready to go to Cheyenne. And it was on a Sunday morning, having breakfast, that’s when I heard. The war was declared.

D: And what was your initial reaction to that?

L: We didn’t know what was going to happen and we were just getting ready, getting all the equipment ready for whatever was inevitable.

D: Do you remember the response of people around you at all, what were other people thinking?
L: Well, they were in the same situation that I was. We were all there basically for one year's training in the Army. Due to the situation, we had to stay [in the Army for the duration]. One year lasted four and a half years. *(chuckles)*

D: That's a lot longer than the one year you thought you were getting into, huh?

L: Right.

D: How'd your family react when they heard the news, do you remember that at all?

L: No, not too much. They were concerned, we were going to war, we were going overseas. Fortunately where I was, I was a mechanic, and I had finished my Basic Training there in Fort Warren, Wyoming. Then they sent me to Fort Stockton, California, which was a new place. Just tents and sand what have you. And to this day I believe it's one of the largest depots down there in Southern California. And I stayed down there for a whole year, and I played football for the Army down there, and I played baseball, and softball for the Army. I was a catcher.

And after that, I had a year down there, that was enough for me. I wanted to leave. So I said, “Send me to Alaska.” And Coach Steele, who was a coach for the Chicago Bears at the time, he was our coach. I says, “Can you do something, get me out of here?” And they did, they sent me to Atlanta, Georgia.

D: Not quite Alaska is it?

L: No. And I was sent down there as cadre for the 75th [Infantry] Division. There were eleven of us, from different parts of the country. And after we spent about three months there, we were sent to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. That's where the 75th Division was activated. And from being a mechanic, they put me into the headquarters division. Special Troops Headquarters.

D: I'm going to jump back a little bit actually. I made a little goof. I should probably start actually when you were drafted.

L: On September 18, 1941.

D: Do you remember the day that you got the draft notice?

L: Oh, definitely.

D: What was your reaction when you saw that?

L: Well, I was more or less anticipating the call, because my brother had a smaller number than I did, and he was deferred because my dad was dead, and he was the breadwinner. And I was more or less waiting for my call, which was a low number.

*(A, 195)*

D: So you saw that and were more or less waiting for that call to come?

L: Right.
D: Did your family react at all when they heard it, or were they expecting it too?
L: They were expecting it, because there wasn’t any war at the time, and I was going in for training.
D: So you got drafted that day. When did you head out to join up?
L: Well, September 18th. I reported to Fort Snelling, in Minneapolis.
D: So you went to Fort Snelling, and what did you do after that?
L: They sent me to Fort Warren, Wyoming.
D: And that’s where you did your Basic Training?
L: Right.
D: What do you remember about Basic Training?
L: What do I remember? Well, especially in Wyoming, same kind of weather we had here. Cold and snow. The elements were almost identical, except wind.
D: And so that was kind of rough on some people?
L: Oh yes, especially on the ones from the South. They still complain about it, I guess.
D: You probably were all nice and stoic though and didn’t say anything, right?
L: Oh yes. (both laugh)
D: Was this was your first time significantly away from home?
L: Yes.
D: How was that for you?
L: That didn’t bother me at all. No.
D: It was just something you had to deal with?
L: It was something I could deal with. I was not married, and did not have any, just the family. My work, and that’s it.
D: What do you remember about Basic Training?
L: It was something that most people don’t realize, what we go through as Basic Training. It’s the fundamentals of army life, to work with each other. Otherwise, if you don’t work with your buddies, you’re lost.
D: So, it was just an important and necessary part?
Oral History Project: World War II Years, 1941-1946 – Louis Sass
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L: Yes, absolutely.

D: Did you ever see any different racial groups come into contact when you were in Basic Training, or when you were in training anywhere else?

L: No, it was, everybody worked with each other. It was different religions, and different groups, different ethnic groups. They were from all parts of the country. You got to realize that people from the South were a little bit... their lifestyle was a little different than we had.

D: Was that ever an issue of conflict?

L: No.

D: Or because you were in the military things seemed to work?

L: No. It seemed to work, because as I say, you had to get along. And it’s still basically the same. There are individuals, it depends on the individuals.

D: You guys learned to work together.

L: Had to.

D: So after Basic Training and Wyoming, where were you next?

L: Fort Stockton, California.

D: Was that where you did the baseball and football then?

L: Yes.

D: How did you get into that?

L: Well, I played baseball and softball here in St. Paul. I played in the, against Sonny Balmer, and Stubby Weemer, and the boys that were good softball players. The baseball, I always caught, I caught baseball. I didn’t catch baseball, but I played at St. Andrews Elementary School. And on their championship teams.

D: Did they have a lot of activities like that then at the bases?

L: They did.

D: And these were formal teams?

L: Oh yes.

D: How’d you guys do?

L: We did fine. Wasn’t excellent, but we did fine.

D: Enjoyable part of it then. Nice release from everything, I suppose.
L: Especially the football. We got to play against pro teams, University of Nevada, and some of the boys from University of Michigan, Ronald, and (***) Emeschefsky, that’s before your time. But they were pro football players.

D: That would be kind of interesting.

L: Yes, that was interesting. (chuckles)

D: So then from Stockton, California, where were you sent from there?

L: Atlanta, Georgia. And then from there, we went to Missouri, to Fort Leonard Wood. Then we did more training there. And then we went to Louisiana on maneuvers. That’s more training.

D: And the 75th was formed at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri?

L: Yes.

D: The 75th was sent down to Louisiana.

L: Louisiana, on maneuvers.

D: What were you doing?

L: Crawling around in the dirt and mud. Training for the inevitable. Then we were sent to Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky. And then for more or less getting ready to go overseas.

D: How did they ship you, was it always by train?

L: We went by train, always by train. Then we went, actually when we left the United States, we left on the *Aquitania*, which was a big British ship. It was a luxury liner at one time, it was converted to troop transport. We went through, to Europe, all by ourselves. We didn’t go in a convoy. Because it was a big ship and it was fast. And the seas were rough, in the wintertime, big storms. This was in 1944, was when we left. December. Well, November we left the states.

D: And you said you took off in the *Aquitania* and went by ship over there by yourselves.

L: We landed in Scotland. When we landed, you couldn’t see your hand, it was so foggy you couldn’t see your hand in front of you. Then the next day, the sun came out. I never saw so many ships. I don’t know how we got in the harbor. You could walk almost from ship to ship. We took one of their trains from Scotland and went down to Tengrie, Wales. Reassembled there, and then we went from there to Portsmouth, England, to get on LSTs [landing ship tank] to go across the Channel. And we started to cross the Channel, and it was so rough we had to turn around and come back. Then the next day we went across and we landed in Navarre, France. From there we went to Belgium and into the Battle of the Bulge.
(A, 305)

D: How was the trip across to the Atlantic? I mean, do you have any memories of that, that stick out?

L: Not very much. A lot of guys got seasick.

D: Was that a problem for you at all?

L: No.

D: Did they just have you all on big bunks, or what?

L: Yes, they were stacked up. They weren’t luxury suites. And when you ate, you had a counter that was stainless steel counter. You got your mess gear and you got your food. As the ship would lurch from one side to the other, the food would slide sideways. If somebody got sick down there, it went down there too.

D: Did people kind of get used to it after a while?

L: Some were sick for the whole trip. This is the humorous part of it. I mean, we can talk about that now. I would go every day with the captain. It took us five days to go across. Every day I was delegated to go with the captain to inspect the ship, from the top to the bottom.

D: How’d you get picked for that?

L: Oh, well I had the rank, I guess. They sent me along with him.

D: What was your rank then?

L: Tech sergeant.

D: And so you were just inspecting mechanical things?

L: Everything.

D: You got to Scotland. You were formed up there and sent to a couple of places in Wales. From Wales to a place to England. How long was your time in those different areas?

L: It wasn’t that long.

D: So in a week, you were already on the continent?

L: Definitely.

D: You went over on the LSTs, and on the second try you made it to France and landed. Were you immediately thrown into things?
L: Yes. We went right into Belgium in December... it was Christmas Eve, 1944. On December 25th we went into battle against the Germans, during the Battle of the Bulge. It was Christmas Eve.

D: It was on Christmas Eve. I’d heard that before. How long were you guys in combat?

L: You’ll see different dates. From December ’til January, what is it, 27 days. (pointing at document with information on his division) The Battle of the Bulge. Then when that was over, they put us on more trains and we went down to Southern France, [by the city of] Colmar, which is near Swiss border. There was another bulge down there, at Colmar. We helped liberate them down there, in Colmar. And when that was finished, we got back on the trains again and went back up north to the Battle of the Ruhr, which is going across the Rhine River into Germany.

D: So you were involved with those three major battles.

L: Right. From December ’44 until what was it, April of ’45.

D: Were you always part of the 75th? Did you move as a unit?

L: As a unit.

D: Were you part of any larger groups then as well?

L: We were attached to the 9th Army. We were attached to the Free French Army. We were attached to the... There were about four or five different armies that we were attached to while we were battling in those areas.

D: You were a tech sergeant. Did you take care of equipment?

L: Oh no. We took care of records, for the reconnaissance corps, signal corps, medical corps, and the military police. We were always with the front, but we weren’t right in the front.

D: If you were close to the front, I’m assuming you saw the combat going on around you.

L: Oh yes.

D: What was that experience like for you? Was it kind of like what you expected, or was it something completely different than you had ever thought of?

L: Well, the elements that we had to contend with, especially during that Battle of the Bulge was the cold, the snow. We never seemed to get warm. But we weren’t too cold. Over in Belgium they had manure up against the houses to keep the houses warm. Which is logical. We would lean up against the houses to keep warm. We learned. Rations, sometimes we’d take a can of, whatever we had, stew or whatever. We’d puncture holes in them and put them on the manifolds of the jeeps, and set
them up there to keep them warm, or to warm them up. Sometimes they’d forget to poke holes in them and they’d blow.

D: So the weather and things like that were a little different than what you’d expected.

L: Yes, most of the casualties I’d say were trench foot and cold related. And then also, some of the replacements we got, some of the replacements we got were 18 year olds, just over. And they sent them over and they’d go out for one day and they’d come back, and they were out of it. I was considered old at that time, I was 25, 26 years old.

D: Just completely rattled psychologically?

L: Right. One day of battle. I’ve seen them.

(A, 396)

D: Did you deal with those kinds of people a lot?

L: I’ve seen them. They, I knew two of them. They were brothers. One day they went up, the next day they didn’t know me. So, it was traumatic.

D: You are describing events at the Battle of the Bulge, in December 1944 to January 1945. Did you see the same kinds of things at the other battles that you were in?

L: No, at Colmar it was altogether different. Down there it was spring, and you’d get the mud and the rain and stuff like that. It was altogether different. The elements were different.

D: More trench foot then maybe?

L: No. Not there.

D: I would have thought maybe with the mud.

L: No.

D: How did you guys live during that time? Did you have tents, or what?

L: No. Whatever we tried to do, we’d try to find a bombed out house or building or something. Manage to find something that was out of the elements. That’s the way we went. And you could go from some of those areas, some of those towns that they had. You could go from one end of the town to the other end. In the basements, they were all stocked with provisions, gas masks and everything else. You could go from one end of the town to the other end, underground.

D: They had a tunnel system down there?

L: Yes. Well, see they started building this way back in the ‘30s.
D: These were French towns that you saw this?

L: No, Belgium and Germany.

D: You were part of the push, pushing the Germans back at the Battle of the Bulge. Then came Colmar, and then the final push in the Battle of the Ruhr. April ’45, that was right around the end of the war.

L: Right, May was the end of the war, in Europe.

D: So how far did your unit go into Germany?

L: We went into, our outfit that I was with, we went into what they called Wardol, Germany. It was a small town. We had advanced that far, and that’s all the further we had to go. The other outfits were all around us. And we had come in during the Battle of the Bulge. I don’t know if you remember hearing about the Battle of Bastogne, where the General McAuliffe said “nuts” to the Germans. They wanted him to surrender, in the Belgian town of Bastogne. We came in from the north, our division came in from the north and Patton [Gen. George Patton, US Army] came in from the south to liberate them.

D: To free up the city? He was just holding the city against German forces?

L: Correct.

D: These were pretty intense battles, I imagine.

L: Yes, that’s right. Especially the initial push was really tough.

D: What was it like being over there and being involved in combat, and realizing it was Christmas time, and things like that? Because you’re out of your element there.

L: Yes. That was something that you just had to cope with.

D: Just, a lot of those experiences you just kind of accepted because that’s where you were?

L: That’s right.

D: How did you cope with these things? Did you have any ways of trying to release the tension for yourself?

L: Well one thing, after the Battle of the Bulge they sent us to Holland for three days to relax—if you could. Swimming pools, and they had American Coke and American beer. It was altogether different.

D: What was it like being in Holland for you? Did you enjoy that?

L: Holland is a beautiful place. It’s one of the cleanest I ever did see.

D: Did you get to interact with some of the natives and stuff like that?
L: Oh, well during the Bulge we got... Some of these houses we lived in, people let us live in their house. They’d always live in the basement and we’d live in the upstairs where there was holes in the ceiling and what have you. We’d play cards with the children. I’ve still got coins that they gave you, if you won, something different.

(A, 454)

D: Yes, be kind of a completely different experience form the rest of the stuff that was going on.

L: And after the war, Colonel (**). He selected me, I don’t know why, but he had a friend in the Red Cross, who was a nurse. He took me as a driver on his jeep. And we toured the Black Forest and we went through into Paris and we saw the various cemeteries that were there, from World War I. In the Black Forest you could still see artillery pieces from World War I. And the stench in there is still in there. From World War I.

D: So you got to see a lot of different places.

L: He was a military man from way back, a West Pointer. He knew the whole area, so he would point out all these different things.

D: What was it like meeting all those people? Were there any that stuck out in your mind really well, fondly, or maybe not fondly?

L: Well, to me the people themselves in Belgium and Holland were very friendly. The French people were, at that time, they were friendly in a way, but they were aloof in a way, yes, because... Holland was immaculate as far as the towns were concerned. It’s all tile; they kept everything clean. Every morning they were out there scrubbing everything clean, in that weather.

D: What kind of things did you do on leave? I know you said you were shown some of the sights, but did you, for example, go out to different places?

L: Oh yes, I went to see the Follies, for sure. In Paris. And I met one of the friends of my wife, who was back in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. And she was over there as a WAC, and I met here over there. And also I met my brother. Before we went across the Rhine River to, we went over on pontoon bridges. The engineers put them up, because everything was bombed out, the bridges were bombed out. I was laying underneath an LST, ready to go across. We could see the Germans across the river, they were shaving and doing their thing. Nobody was bothering anybody. Then I heard somebody call my name. I looked up from under this LST and there was my brother. He was in the artillery 20 miles back.

D: So you just ran into your brother in the midst of all this craziness, while you were in Germany?

L: I didn’t even know he was over there.
D: You weren’t able to tell each other where you were?

L: Oh, well sure, I went back to his unit. I got leave to go back with him. I’d just as soon be up there where I was, because back there, if they started shooting their artillery pieces at the Germans, they’d in kind receive from the Germans. We could see what we were doing where we were.

(A, 494)

D: Up on the front area there, where you were just about ready to cross the Rhine, nobody was bothering anyone. The battle hadn’t started yet, so it was leave it off until you had to?

L: That’s right.

D: Did you have any contact with Germans while you were there?

L: Oh yes.

D: What was that like?

L: Mostly the people were, not the servicemen, but the people themselves, I mean they were just plain ordinary people. They respected us and we respected them.

D: Did your perception of the German people change at all during the war? I mean, when you came in, did you kind of look at them as the enemy, did that change?

L: No, to me, now this is my opinion. I mean I have no animosity against anybody or, any religions or any groups or anything else. I look at the broad side of it. The big view.

D: So when you went over there, it was just a matter of, this is what had to happen?

L: A job.

D: What was it like when you came in contact with actual German soldiers? Did your unit take prisoners?

L: Oh yes, there was a few that we took.

D: Was that hard dealing with them at all?

L: No, they were passive. They were in worse shape than the Americans and the Russians.

D: How did the combat experience impact you? Did it change you, would you say, being close to that? You talked about some of the guys being shaken up.

L: I believe I grew up.
D: What was life behind the lines like? You said you lived in bombed out houses most of the time, and just kind of ate the meals that the army provided.

L: That’s right.

D: Did you ever run into nicer meals?

L: Oh yes. We... This one home that we stayed at. It was in Belgium. The lady that had the house, she was an elderly lady. And every morning we’d get up, she’d have one fried egg; she’d make an egg for us. We never had fresh eggs like that. That was a real treat.

D: What did you guys actually eat? What did the army provide for you to eat?

L: Oh, it was usually dehydrated food, crackers and coffee, when they had the mess gear. The mess groups, they’d give us hot food.

(A, 528)

D: You came into contact with women a number of times, who were involved in the military. What kind of different positions did you see women involved in?

L: Oh they were truck drivers and mechanics and they worked in the records, or departments, offices, and they did just about everything. Except for the, I would say, the rough part. None of them were involved in the fighting.

D: How did you meet your wife while you were there?

L: Well, we went to the service club, and they had just moved in from Iowa. They’d had their Basic Training in Iowa and they were sent to Missouri. I saw her coming across the floor to mail a letter. She was looking for a place to mail a letter. I asked if I could help her, yes, so I showed her where and that was it. We kept in contact with each other for from March until June of the next year. So it was over a year and then we got married [in 1944] at the chapel at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

D: Before you headed out overseas?

L: Right.

D: What was it like getting married and then having to head out right away?

L: Well, to be away after being married, yes, that was the hardest part.

D: You kept in contact well?

L: Oh yes.

D: You sent letters. What did your wife do?

L: She worked at the post headquarters.
D: What was it like staying in touch with her?
L: Well we wrote a lot and there was a lot censored, too.
D: Oh really?
L: Oh yes.
D: You saw letters that you had sent to her, later, that had things censored?
L: She showed me some of the letters that I’d sent her, and it looked like somebody had peppered it with holes. They’d cut out certain things that they didn’t think was appropriate at the time.
D: Just because they thought it might reveal where you were?
L: That’s right.
D: Or were there other things that they censored too?
L: Actually, we didn’t say where we were, but the general area. And we moved across borders back and forth from one country to another one almost daily during the war. That’s just like going from here to Wisconsin, and then to Iowa, and then to Illinois, and then to Dakotas. That’s daily. That’s like going to France, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg. Back and forth.
D: Did you stay in contact with the rest of your family pretty well then too then?
L: Well, I stayed in contact, but there was nothing but to say, “I’m okay.”
D: Did they send letters?
L: Yes.
D: Soldiers all looking forward to mail call?
L: Yes. That’s something you always wanted to hear, how everybody was. I assumed they wanted to hear how we were, too.
D: Did you guys have papers or any other information from home, besides letters you got while you were over in Europe?
L: Well, we got the newspaper Stars and Stripes, which is a military paper that they had there.
D: Was that an important thing to read then, to keep up with?
L: Oh, of course. If you could get a hold of it.
D: It was hard to get a hold of it?
L: Well, no, they’d distribute it.
D: I’ve heard some people describe favorite little stories that they saw in it, or jokes that they remember. Do you have any favorites?

L: Usually some of the cartoons that they’d have in it.

**End of Side A. Side B begins.**

D: You were just going to describe something from the paper *Stars and Stripes*.

L: The cartoons, they called him Sad Sack, really a humorous thing. Sad Sack soldiers, they were cartoons there, they really humorous.

D: The highlight of that. Anything else you remember from *Stars and Stripes* or other papers?

L: Well, they had, I know we got to read stories about Ernie Pyle. He was a correspondent over there that got killed [at Okinawa, in June 1945]. He was in the South Pacific. We never contacted with him, but we’d love to read some of the articles that he had in there.

D: Yes, he just wrote in real stories about where he was and what he was doing, correct?

L: What had happened to him. I guess he went through Italy and Sicily and southern parts there.

D: Did you guys keep up on what was going on in the United States at all while you were there, or was that kind of a whole different world than you?

L: Only things we could decipher. My wife would send me clippings from certain things that happened around there.

D: So you were able to keep up on a little bit.

L: A little bit of the news. In fact they had more information about what was going on where we were than we did.

D: They kept you pretty in the dark you think, or...?

L: Well, we were there, but they knew what we were doing better than we did.

**(B, 605)**

D: They didn’t tell you a lot, or what?

L: That’s right. We were doing it, but they had the information.

D: What was an average day like for you while you were over on the Continent?

L: Long.
D: Long. What do you mean by that exactly?

L: Well, actually you were... You didn’t get rest the way you normally would. You always had the unexpected. And I remember one time, I had... I was sergeant of the guard duty, had the perimeter to walk around. And I had, both my hands were burned from a fire and they, I had them bandaged with white, and I had to go walk around in the dark to check the perimeter where all the rest of the guards were.

D: So you were just checking up on all the other guards?

L: Oh yes, as a sergeant I had to walk around. I always had that feeling. Because the Germans at that time were dressed in our uniforms and infiltrating our area. You always had that on your mind. Are they Germans or are they American soldiers?

D: Did you guys ever come in contact with men who’d infiltrated?

L: I didn’t personally, no. But they were in the area. They were dressed in... they had bed sheets and white clothing and clothing that was white. And we had just regular clothes.

D: So you guys stuck out, while they could hide in the snow a little better. Did you resent the fact that you didn’t have the white clothes too?

L: No. There are things that you could think of.

D: What was your job specifically while you were there? What duties did you take care of?

L: I was a sergeant major of records of special troops.

D: What do you mean by special troops?

L: Well the different, different... The infantry themselves were composed of different companies and everything else. The headquarters took care of medical records, and they took care of everything that came through as far as medical records are concerned. And you had your reconnaissance company, which would go out and do their reconnaissance. And you had your signal corps that would do the communications. And you had your military police, who’d direct the traffic. And then your artillery, which was attached to us which you would take care of the...

And another thing about the artillery that we had, when we were down in Colmar. They got the first German jet fighter that they had. They shot it down. The artillery did. We didn’t know what that was. Normally, the planes that you’d see they had engines and propellers and everything else, but this one here didn’t have anything. You could see it, and then it was gone.

And the Germans did have what they called buzz bombs. Radio controlled airplanes with a bomb. When the fuel went out it, would just circle and drop wherever it is. So when you heard, when you didn’t hear any more noise, you knew it was coming down, but you didn’t know where. You knew it was around the area, but...
D: So you learned some of those little things to listen for.

L: Right.

D: Your job was with record keeping then, but did you deal with the troops individually then, or were you kind of back a little from everything?

L: A little back from the initial groups.

D: Were there any guys that you met while you were there that really made an impact on you? Was there an officer, or just friends that you had during the war, that were really big ones?

L: From the time that I went in I met a lot of people. A lot of good people. There were a few deadweights. One thing that happened while we were in training in Wyoming, I still remember, it’s humorous now, but it wasn’t at the time. I was talking to the sergeant. I wasn’t a sergeant at that time. I was talking to the sergeant, which I was a good buddy of. We were talking face to face. He had this .45 [caliber pistol]. He had taken it out, locked. He could carry that. He had taken it out of the bag there that they had. He was talking to me and he pointed it at something in the distance and unfortunately when he pulled the trigger, it went off, and the thing whizzed by my face. What had happened was somebody had used his gun as the payroll guard. They didn’t take the bullets out of it. He thought it was empty and he didn’t check it. So that was, I still have the .45 slug. I went out to the barracks next door and I dug it out of the wood.

D: It actually shot into a barracks?

L: Went right through the one that we were in.

D: A bit of a close call then.

L: And I had training in all the different weapons. I carried a .45 all the way through and we, I had a carbine at the time. I was well versed in using that. I even used a Thompson submachine gun.

(B, 743)

D: They trained you in that?

L: Yes. I was trained in it.

D: Were there any guys that you palled around with a lot then?

L: Just in, when we were first in the Basic Training. From then on when we were overseas, you had to be close to everybody.

D: But there were no guys that really...?

L: No.
D: VE Day then was the 8th of May, 1945, you had gotten done with the Battle of the Ruhr then in April. What did you guys do from that time until VE Day?

L: We just sat around waiting to see whether we had to go over to Japan, or what would happen. Then, fortunately, I had what you called points to get out of the service. I had enough time as far as years, and overseas time, and also whatever the way they figured it to get out in December.

D: Did you know that you had enough points? I've heard a lot of guys refer to, “I had this many points.” Did they tell you, “This is how many points it’s going to take to get out?”

L: We figured it out. (laughs) I think it was 4 ½ years in the service, by months. Then you figure so many points for overseas, so many points for decorations, you get so many for all of this stuff.

D: So you knew you were probably going to be heading out pretty quick?

L: Yes. So we just sat around and gathered in; they had what they called staging areas, in tents. When your number was up then you went.

D: Do you remember VE Day at all then?

L: Do I remember it? Sure, because I had even gone down to the red school house where they signed the treaty. [in Reims, northern France]

D: When did you do that?

L: That was after the war, when we made our little tour.

D: That was one of the places you ended up stopping. How did the guys all react when they finally signed the treaty, and the announcement was made that Europe was done?

L: Well, it was apprehensive because we didn’t know whether we were going to go to Japan, or whether we’d be discharged. Because the war in Japan was still going.

(B, 784)

D: And so you were sent back, on what day? Or do you remember the approximate month?

L: Well, it was... I was discharged on the 8th of December. So that was, it took us four days by ship, because we came back on the America, which was an American luxury liner.

D: So you weren’t actually discharged until December, and didn’t actually ship back until December either?

L: Yes.
D: So you spent time in that unit all the way until VJ Day, 15 August 1945?

L: Correct.

D: But you were at that time still waiting and wondering about Japan?

L: Right.

D: What was the reaction then on VJ Day, when you heard that the whole darn thing was done?

L: More or less relieved and glad to be hopefully going home.

D: Was there a celebration at all?

L: Yep. There was celebration when we hit New York. They greeted us with tugboats and they had a big bands playing on tugboats. And spraying water in the harbor as we pulled in. It was nice and they greeted us as we got off the ship. And they gave us milk, fresh milk in little cartons, which made me sicker than… Because I wasn’t used to milk. We’d gone so long without those things. It made me so sick. I was glad just to get out of there.

D: So there was a big celebration. Was there a parade?

L: No, just...

D: I guess there is one other date, one specific date that I want to check. The 12th of April 1945 was when FDR died. Do you remember that incident as well?

L: We heard it.

D: You heard it, what was your reaction or the guys then?

L: Very somber.

D: Was he generally well respected and cared for?

L: He was the first president I voted for.

D: So he was kind of your man?

L: I voted for him three times.

D: Did any of the other guys react, about the same way?

L: About the same way, yes.

D: Did you know who Truman was?

L: No.

D: No, it was, it was one of those I’ve heard described as, “Who’s Truman?”
L: *(laughs)* No we didn’t know. No one really had any idea.

D: So whoever takes over, takes over. That’s fine, or…?

L: Yes. That’s right.

D: Was there a little apprehension about a new guy taking over?

L: No. Actually we were more concerned about just getting home.

D: So you got home in December, or you got back in the US, on what date, do you recall?

L: To New York. It took us what, two days to… I got discharged on the 8th, so it was a couple of days before then. Let’s see. See what I did is I wrote it down. December ’45. *(looks through some notes)* I do have it on my records someplace.

**B, 835**

D: That’s okay. So you were discharged two days after you got to New York. From New York you took a train to where?

L: A train to Capricorn, Wisconsin.

D: And that is where you were mustered out and discharged?

L: Right.

D: What was that day like for you?

L: It was a happy occasion. Relieved. And glad to be home. I got on a train and went down to Missouri to see my wife.

D: I suppose you did. That’s where she still was?

L: Yes.

D: Do you remember seeing her for the first time?

L: Oh yes.

D: Did you guys paint the town red?

L: No. Just spent time together. With her friends.

D: When did you get to see your family again for the first time?

L: Well, after she was discharged. She was discharged about a week later.

D: Ok, so you guys got out around close to the same time. Was that a result of you getting back that she was able to get discharged too, or was she just, she had her points too?
L: No, but she had enough points, she was in three years or so.

D: Where did you guys go after that?

L: We came up here to St. Paul.

D: And stayed here then, found a place to live?

L: Oh yes, we stayed with a family next door.

D: What was it like getting back to civilian life then? Was it kind of a hard transition?

L: It was strange. Strange. Because in the military everything was exacting. Everything is regimented. In the civilian you find, so to speak, you do it as you want to. Another thing you worry about it is, where you going to start getting a job? Because everybody that wasn't in the war got first dibs; they were already in.

D: So all of a sudden a bunch of guys started coming back and looking for jobs, too.

L: That’s right.

D: Was it hard to find one then, or did you do okay finding one pretty quick?

L: I found it okay.

D: Was it weird working then, or did you adjust to that lifestyle working pretty easily?

L: Pretty easily.

D: Did you stay in touch with anyone after the war?

L: Oh yes. We, my wife and I both, we kept in touch with people we were in the service with. In fact, I just got a letter from another fellow that was in our outfit. He was telling me what’s wrong with him physically. I couldn’t believe it, because he was one of the 18 year olds. But he was telling me about some of the other people, they’re all gone. There’s not many of us left. And we’re getting up there; the man upstairs hasn’t called my number yet. He will one of those days. And I accept it.

(B, 879)

D: Do you ever go to reunions or anything like that?

L: I was going to… They had a reunion this past year over at the, by the Maplewood Mall, no, the Mall of America. Something came up and I didn’t get to it. There wasn’t anyone there that I knew anyhow.

D: But you did go to that one thing that Paul Hendrickson put on. He ended up having a little thing to get a few guys of the 75th together.
L: That was really nice. That was the first time I actually heard of anything of the 75th Infantry Division since I was discharged out of the Army.

D: Was it neat to see guys again?

L: Yes. He did a big, big thing about me. He had pictures and everything else.

D: Told some of the stories that you had?

L: Yes. He did a really bang up job. I appreciated that.

D: What, do you do mostly letter writing then to stay in contact with people? Or do you call and meet some of them every once in a while?

L: I don’t see anyone anymore. This is just this one, in fact I just got this letter and I get the... they call it the Bulge Buster; it’s a newsletter that they send out every few months. Tell about who’s where and who’s died. Things like that. Kind of nice to know.

D: Always nice to keep up on those kinds of things. I don’t know how much you heard about these kinds of things. Do you what some of the situation was back home with your family and stuff how they were doing during the war?

L: No, because there were things that... businesses that were around here. Like the ammunition plants, I didn’t even know they had those around here. Because I was gone before. All this gas rationing and food rationing, because we had food, we had gas. We had everything, so I didn’t realize it, what they were going through. Which was a hardship on them. When we did come home to visit, which we did once in a while. They tried to make up for the food and everything else. And here we had all we could have.

D: So you didn’t see the changes right away during the war, you just kind of heard about them later?

L: That’s right.

D: How had the community changed when you came back? Was there a change in it because of the war do you think?

L: No.

D: People were acting the same, interacted the same?

L: Right. Thankful that it was over.

D: Was there any kind of celebration in the community, in St. Paul do you know?

L: No.
D: How did people react when all the guys started coming home? Was it just grateful to have them back or...?

L: That, I can’t really think about. More or less glad, trying to get back into the neighborhood. Some people, they’d get off the train, see all these celebrations. That I didn’t pay any attention to, I had my home. I was glad to get back.

D: Did you brothers get back about the same time then?

L: No, he got back later.

D: The last couple questions take things on the big, broad scale. What did the war mean to you at the time, when you were there? What was it like for you, what did you see the war as, how did you perceive it at that time?

L: Well, when I first went in, it was just more or less something I had to do, basic. Everything was basic. Then when war was declared, to me it was something that had to be done as far as I was concerned. The thing is that everyone else was in the same situation. We were not segregated as far as, well this one’s got to do this or that one’s got to do that. But we were all in there doing the same thing. One ultimate thing.

(B, 943)

D: Okay. And now that you’ve had some time since you were over there, has your opinion about the war changed at all in the years since then, or has it remained close to the same?

L: Opinion about war? War is hell. I mean, you can’t describe unless you actually come into contact with it.

D: It’s just an experience that...

L: That’s right.

D: How would you say being involved in World War II changed you?

L: I don’t think it’s changed me; it had me value life more, as far as the maker upstairs is concerned. At my age it brings you closer, because you know that ultimately that’s our goal.

D: Was religion a strong factor for you during the war?

L: Oh yes. Definitely.

D: Read the Bible a lot while you were there, or went to chapel services?

L: Oh definitely. I’m a Catholic but I used to do... I’ll tell you a story. The major that we had was a priest, of course. He would say Mass on top of the hood of a jeep. And
I have seen Mass, I would answer it in Latin, because I was a server years ago. I did that right during the war, right there in the middle of everything.

(B, 966)

D: Do you think that was the same with a lot of guys. That a lot of them were drawn closer to God? A lot of guys that weren’t so religious when they started?

L: Oh yes. Probably.

D: Did you see that at all personally?

L: Oh yes, definitely. You can bank more on the man upstairs.

D: How do you think the war changed your life? Maybe not so much you personally. You said once that you think it kind of made you grow up, but how do you think the war changed the direction of your life, or did it not?

L: I don’t think it’s changed it.

D: Just took a chunk of it.

L: That’s right, it took four and a half years that was dedicated to doing one thing, and that was it. From then on I went on with the rest of my life, the way I normally would.

D: At this point, I don’t really have any more questions. I’d just like to open it up. I don’t know if there’s anything I missed, that maybe you would like to fill me in on an important part about what you remember about the war, or not?

L: Oh, I don’t think so, but what I will do after we get done here is, I’ll bring down a couple of the albums and I’ll show you a couple of the pictures I took while I was over there. And you can see some of the things. It’s not a lot of them but it’s enough.

D: That would be wonderful. Thank you very much.

L: Yes.

END OF INTERVIEW