

Library of Congress Veterans History Project

Interviewee: Col. C.J. Arcilesi, World War II Veteran

Interviewer: Nadia [REDACTED], student

Assistant Interviewer: Karen [REDACTED]

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Interview Place: [REDACTED]

(Nadia) Were you drafted or did you enlist?

Neither. 'Cause I was a commissioned officer. I went into the Army right after college. As a Second Lieutenant. Initially even though I'm an engineer I served with the infantry. The two branches I've been concerned with were the infantry and the infantry does the fighting mostly on ground. I was also involved with the Quartermaster Corps, which at the beginning of World War II, had responsibility for construction. At that time the Corps of Engineers was only responsible for military construction. Then the Quartermaster Corps ceded its duties to the corps of engineers.

(Nadia) Yes. Did that happen before or after Pearl Harbor?

Before Pearl Harbor. I was on active duty when Pearl Harbor happened, so the answer to your question is...I was in the service, in the Army, before Pearl Harbor.

(Nadia) Where were you living at the time?

At that time I was living in Washington, not Washington itself. It was in the northern suburbs of Washington, because I was stationed at the Quartermaster Corps headquarters at that time, before Pearl Harbor. Somebody knew that we were going to get into the war eventually...and we were producing vehicles and constructing camps and doing everything that would prepare us for what we thought would be coming.

(Karen) Did you know when you were in college....were you in the Reserve Officer Training Corps? Were you in that because a war was going in?

Oh no. I was in the ROTC at Johns Hopkins and in fact that is why I went into the Army. At that time, they had passed the Thomason Act. The idea was that the Army was short of officers graduating from West Point and wanted to expand its structure, so they offered commission in the Army to the top ranking ROTC student at each major university. It so happened that scholastically I was the number one student and actually, I wasn't interested at all in the Army. I was going with my wife-to-be and I wanted to get going, make money, get married and so forth. It may seem strange now, but the best job I could get at the time, civilian job, was \$25 week, which wasn't bad really. That's what my dad was making and we were living quite well. A week's groceries cost less than \$5. So I wasn't interested.

The PMST, which stands for Professional Military Science and Tactics, kept after me to take advantage of this. I kept saying I wasn't really too interested in making the Army my career. But I met him on the street one day not too long after graduation and to make a long story short, the salary of a Second Lieutenant was \$2600 a year, which meant about \$50 a week. Well that was living high on the hog, as the saying goes, so I decided OK, I'll go into the Army and I went into the 34th Infantry at Fort Meade. I was assigned to the 34th Infantry, Company B. Of course, the whole idea in my life was that I wanted to get married and I didn't know that the Army had a rule that Second Lieutenants could not get married the first year of service. Couldn't do that today, but at that time, they thought in the interest of the officer, that he wasn't prepared for marriage, so I had to wait a year and then we married.

President Roosevelt....we were still suffering from the Depression...and one of the things he had started was the CCC, Civilian Conservation Corps. It was run by the Army, administratively. The work that the boys did - there were young men and there were veterans. I'll confine myself to the young men. The work that they did was supervised by either the Department of Interior or the Department of Agriculture. The camp I was assigned to was Camp Number 3 in Shenandoah on

Skyline Drive and the mission of the camp was to construct Skyline Drive and the walls and the visitors Lodges and all that , and if I do say so myself, they did a darn good job. It's still there.

(Nadia) What were your first days in the service like?

I was assigned to the 34th Infantry at Fort Meade and it was scary. Because I was wet behind the ears. I was a Second Lieutenant and the people I commanded had years of service. They were practically old men. I'm talking about sergeants with 30 years of service.. So it was scary. Especially scary was the fact that the Captain of the company I was assigned to went on leave for 30 days and who do you think he picked to command the company, but yours truly. That was really scary. What saved me was the fact that the First Sergeant, who had more than 30 years of service at the time, would come into the office and say "Lt. I would suggest..." etc, etc. Well his suggestions were orders as far as I was concerned. And it worked quite well, but to sum it up, it was just a little bit scary.

(question not on tape: When did you go overseas?)

I went overseas after Pearl Harbor, after war had been declared, and actually after Hitler had declared war on the United States, which was a stupid thing for them to do really. And I went overseas in April of 1943. Little things that might be of interest. I spoke French rather fluently, because I studied French for 12 years in school, just because I wanted to, it was not required in the curriculum. And I was supposed to go overseas to be with the railway system with the French. So I arrived there and no one knew anything about it.there was a depot where you went until you received your assignment. I was supposed to go there, get my assignment from the railway system and you weren't supposed to stay very Long at this depot. But we waited and we waited and I was there about two weeks and they said, are you interested in...actually I was assigned, while I was there, to the staff - General Eisenhower's staff. Not the big staff, the little staff as we called it, who did all the legwork. Don't misunderstand me. I don't think I ever saw Gen. Eisenhower. I did see him later on, but not at that time.

So I was floating and they had a vacancy and was I interested in occupying a position as Assistant Port Engineer in the Port of Liverpool. Of course I was. Not only to get an assignment but it was something in my line. So my first real assignment was as Assistant Port Engineer in the Port of Liverpool. The Americans were running the port because we had the preponderance of troops and supplies. I think that answers your question.

(Nadia) What battles were you in?

To provide some continuation, from the Port of Liverpool, as the invasion drew near – of course we didn't know when it was going to be – we were stationed in the southern part of England and they determined that the invasion would take place, much to the surprise of the Germans, because the invasion had the most unlikely time. Bad weather, wrong place as far as the Germans were concerned. We landed in swamps. Who in their right mind would do this? But in any case, to answer your question, the battles I was in were the Battle of Normandy and the Battle of Northern France.

(Nadia) Tell me about some of the experiences you remember most.

We landed at Utah Beach, which if you look at the map of France is in the peninsula leading up to Cherbourg. We landed on marshy ground. We were following the Infantry First Army 7th Corps under General Bradley. We were not a fighting unit. We were special troops. Our mission was to follow the infantry up to the time they captured Cherbourg and then run that port. We landed on Utah Beach...swampy...we were following the white tapes put down by the sappers, like today's treasure hunting instruments which detected mines. There were lots of mines. And so they were finding and detonating mines at the same time laying down white tapes for us to follow so we wouldn't be stepping on mines. All of a sudden the tapes stopped, so we stopped. The commanding officer of our unit called me up; I was at the rear of the column; he called me up front and said, "Arcilesi, you speak French. Find out where we are and where the nearest road is." Just about that time, a French fisherman came up and of course I asked him. But he was more interested in fishing. He had a whole mess of eels – the French are very fond of eels – over his shoulder and he wanted to tell me how successful

he had been with these eels and I was more interested in finding out where we were. So that was an interesting experience. But he told me. He wasn't at all concerned with mines, but he told us where the road was because actually, where we were was impassable. We were having a hard time coming through the marshes, so he told us where the road was and I translated it to the commander and we went off to the road.

But it was not an easy thing to travel. We did not get to Cherbourg until the end of June and the invasion was the 6th of June. We had hoped the Germans would have been routed so they wouldn't have time to sabotage the port, but no such luck. They messed up Cherbourg to a fair-thee-well. Cherbourg was an important rail and sea terminal. This is where the railways and the ships came together. It was at the very end of the Cherbourg peninsula...*(showing map)* This is Normandy and Cherbourg is at the very end and it was a very important port. Railroads, rail cars would meet the ships and transfer their cargo. They had messed it up so the rails were a heap of junk. The sea coastline where the ships would unLoad had been wrecked completely. They had sunk a ship right in the harbor. This is interesting to tell you.

Cherbourg has a 23 foot tide. Between high tide and Low tide there are 23 feet. That's quite a tide. One of the highest. And they had sunk this ship to prevent us from rehabilitating the port. So our first job was to rehabilitate the port. Fix up the rails to a certain degree. Cherbourg had an outer harbor and an inner harbor. Because of the tide, the inner harbor consisted of a rather large harbor that could accommodate...I may be a little wrong in this...if my memory serves me, maybe 9 ships. And the only way it would accommodate them, was to let the high tide come in and then you cLose the gates. The sea gates. And the ships would stay there at high tide. The gates had been demolished. So the first thing we had to do was repair the sea gates, which we did. I could go on and on with what we did at Cherbourg. But essentially, Cherbourg was to be the place of input of supplies and troops until they had conditioned Le Havre to be the port.

(Karen) You essentially had to bring Cherbourg back into service.

Yes. It was really the only port that you could use. Omaha Beach, which sustained far more casualties than Utah Beach, was closer to a city called Caen. C-A-E-N. And there we were hoping to bring in, in fact we did bring in, prefabricated docks made of cement, which were designed so they could float, and ships were supposed to come in there. But the weather was very unkind to us. Most of those prefabricated docks were destroyed, which put more of a burden on Cherbourg. We had several ways of bringing in troops and supplies. One was the rehabilitation of the inner harbor and having ships unloaded by cranes, called stiff leg derricks.

We brought in supplies by ships being unloaded by derricks in the inner harbor after it had been repaired and could accommodate the ships. We also brought in supplies on the beach with what we called *dukw* or simple called ducks. These were 2-1/2 ton amphibious trucks. They could go into the water from land and go out of the water onto land and that's how they were designed. They would take supplies from the ship with the ship's own derricks, which would unload onto the ducks. And the ducks would come to the beach and unload to trucks that would take the supplies or the troops to their destination. That was very slow going, because you could only unload so much. So the main thing was to come in with the ships in the inner harbor and unload. Let me ask you a question... would this be the time to tell you interesting incidents about this operation?

Yes.

While all this was going on, keep in mind the infantry was going inland and captured many Germans. I don't want to downplay the fact that they were having a hard time but they were being successful. And what would they do with these people? They brought them to Cherbourg. They brought the German prisoners to Cherbourg with the idea - a good idea - for us to cull through these prisoners and get plumbers, and carpenters and tradesman and so forth - out of the prisoners that we could use in the port and the rest of them we would give to the French to take care of them. Well, there was a difference in attitude between the Americans and the French. We viewed the Germans as an enemy, human

beings, whom we treated rather fairly. The French hated them, very hostile and they weren't about to be goody-goody to them. So we gathered several thousand prisoners, some of whom said they were tradesmen, because they knew they would be in the hands of the American troops.

Typically American, when the ships came in, they also brought in dunnage. Dunnage was lumber which held the supplies in the holds of the ships, because of the movement of the waves and the ocean, they didn't want the supplies to be shifting around. They unloaded the dunnage at the same time – they had no use for it until they went back to the US. So we used the dunnage – various kinds of lumber – 2 x 4s, light lumber – we used this for construction of the prisoner of war camps. And what we did was we gave the prisoners barbed wire and dunnage and tools, nails and so forth, and told them to go build their camp, which they did. And they did a good job of it. We took some senior enlisted people like sergeants and put them in charge of units. And out of their dunnage they built huts for themselves; they put barbed wire fencing all over, which of course we inspected to make sure they didn't leave holes, but they were very well mannered. We always held the threat over them – if you don't behave, we'll transfer you to the French. They were well-behaved. We did some stupid things. We had them prepare our food in the kitchen. We had them in barber shops shaving us with razors.

(Karen) Amazing you all lived through that...

It is miraculous that we weren't poisoned and our throats weren't cut by some fanatic.... "you're the enemy, you're going to kill me when I do this, but I'm doing this for my country".... Miraculous. I think it was stupid. We had...this may or may not have followed the Geneva convention, because you weren't supposed to use prisoners against themselves, against their own. This was questionable. We had them operate the stiff legged derricks to unload supplies. And you might say that was assisting the enemy. Well they knew that too. So we had a rash of cut lines to the operating portions of the derricks. All of a sudden, a derrick would become inoperable through unknown sources. We knew very well what the sources were – it was the prisoners of war. There we suffered and we

took immediate action to replace all of them with American troops. We had to request labor battalions, which at that time, we weren't as open minded as we are today, the labor battalions were composed of black troops, but they did very very well. So I thought that might be an interesting thing for you to know. Another interesting comment...

We had to move petroleum, gasoline. That was believe me, a chore. By this time, General Patton with his 3rd Army had come into play and he was going so fast we couldn't keep up with him. By that time also we had an "advance section" which included the troops and "base section" which included those people responsible to move people and supplies. We would have some meetings about how we were going to do things and one morning out of the clear blue sky comes Gen Patton into one of the meetings. The head of the base section was a General Plank (sp?). He was short in stature. And General Patton was a big towering individual with pearl handled pistols at his side. Quite conspicuous. And he came into the meeting, just burst into the meeting, grabbed Gen. Plank by his collar, and to the embarrassment of all the rest of us junior officers, by that time I was a Major. He grabbed Gen Plank by the collar – I think he raised him off the floor, at least it seemed like he did – and said "Where is my gasoline, you son-of-a-so-and-so?" That has stuck in my memory, that scene.

(Karen)Where was his gasoline?

The gasoline had to be moved. So what happened... Three regiments of engineers were to assigned to the Port Engineer. I was Assistant Port Engineer first and when they reassigned the Port Engineer, they put me in as Port Engineer at Cherbourg, which for a man in my late 20s or early 30s, was a fantastic responsibility. And they assigned to me three regiments of engineers headed by CoLonels. My job was to tell them what their work was to be. Because we couldn't keep up with the gasoline, we had to construct an airfield. And the airfield was built of pierced planking. Have you ever heard of pierced planking? If you ever see old movies of World War II, you will see it. They were planks of steel with holes in them to make them lighter. I don't remember the exact size, but they were maybe 18 inches wide and 6 or 8 feet Long. They were interLocked and

you'd have bulldozers bulldoze a field so it would be free of trees and brush and the engineer troops would make an airfield with pierced planking. Locking together the planks with the holes in them and making a flat surface for cargo planes to land with petroleum. Then we constructed a pipeline for trucks to be carrying containers and try to follow General Patton. We had to have liquid flowing.

(Karen) This was mostly for tanks?

Essentially for the tanks, because General Patton was motorized and armored with tanks. He would hijack anything that came close to him, no matter who it was intended for, if it had containers of petroleum, forget it, he took it. This is the funny thing I am leading up to. We constructed the oil pipeline with booster stations to keep the liquid flowing and one of my duties was to inspect this oil pipeline and see that it was going according to schedule – a very fast schedule I might say – and make sure that the oil was flowing the way it was supposed to flow.

There was a town called St. Lô just about at the base of the peninsula. I think the peninsula was Cotentin. The pipeline was going so fast that when I inspected it to see that it had gone that far, I was in my jeep with my enlisted driver and it was eerie quiet, very very quiet. I didn't know what it was, but like Spiderman says, my nerves tingled. There was something wrong. Anyhow, everything was as it was supposed to be as far as the pipeline. I and my sergeant with the jeep started back. What do you think we were met by? The point. The point in infantry is the forward group of soldiers, like a wedge, that would head the advance. And we were met by the infantry point and we were challenged. What were we doing coming from the enemy lines? We found out later that we had been in St Lô before St Lô was destroyed. St Lô was occupied by the Germans and they were being very quiet for this one jeep that was there so they wouldn't disclose their position. So I can say I was in St Lô before the infantry took it.

(Karen) just before they took it...

Just before.

(Karen) And you had no way of knowing the Germans were there...

No way. It was eerie. You didn't see animals. You didn't see people. The Germans. In the first place, they had evacuated the people and the animals probably went with them and they weren't making any noise. Not that I would have investigated. But it was very eerie quiet. They were all there, ready to defend their position and it was quite a battle between our infantry and their forces and St Lo was ultimately destroyed by artillery. When I saw it next, it didn't look like anything. The church that was very near the substation of the pipeline was a pile of rocks. So that was an interesting thing that I wanted to mentioned. I think I'll stop.

(Nadia) Where you injured?

Miraculously, no because the Germans had in the early days still had snipers not too far from Cherbourg, and whenever they saw someone they thought they could hit, they would let go. So no, I was not injured, thank God for that.

(Nadia) Were you a prisoner of war?

No, I was not a prisoner of war.

(Nadia) How did you stay in touch with your family while you were fighting?

What we called v-mail. Remember that tonnage was important, so v-mail was very thin sheets of paper, very very thin, that you wrote your message to your family on. Obviously our return address was a post office box in New York. They didn't know where we were or what we were doing. We folded this thin sheet over so it became an envelope. And hardly weighed anything. Actually it was rather stupid folding it over because our mail went through censors and they opened it up anyhow and they blacked out anything that remotely suggested what we might be doing. So we kept in touch with our family through this v-mail, but we couldn't tell very much. We certainly couldn't tell what we were doing. We couldn't even tell them about the weather because that was of military significance. Our letters were rather blah. I love you, etc etc. Things like that. Very little we could tell them except very personal items.

(Karen) Did you get mail back?

Yes, we got mail back, always much later than when it was mailed but we did get mail back.

(Karen) Were you able to get cookies or treats or anything nice from home?

Not in the early days. Later, yes. We would get... another funny thing. Some of the boys – single I hope – who were trying to make out with the girls – would ask their friends in the US to send them women's stockings. Which they traded for favors. *(laughter)* But I got books that I would read. I don't think my wife sent cookies too often, but she would send me books. I remember her sending me *The Razor's Edge* and several other books.

Let me tell you something about that... At night time, we were housed in what used to be civilian quarters in Cherbourg. My people were housed in the Hotel Atlantique, which was not a first rate hotel. Their bathrooms were somewhat lacking. And we would at night time when... you see I'm getting way ahead of myself... because sometimes there wasn't such a thing as nighttime. We ran 24 hours. It wasn't a 9-5 operation and you went home and sat down. But whenever we had a chance, we would read. Clara, my wife, had sent me this *Razor's Edge*. The Germans had stockpiled in Fort du Roule, which was pocketed like a honeycomb with caves. When the troops investigated it, it was boobytrapped and many lost their lives. It was stocked with thousands of bottles of liquor. Thousands. *(laughter)* So much that we didn't know what to do with it. So we parceled it out to everybody. Once a week, all enlisted men and all officers who were available and who weren't on duty would get the rationed bottles of liquor. So one night I sat reading this *Razor's Edge*. I liked this cherry liqueur. It was my favorite. I would trade liqueur for whisky all the time. So I kept drinking cherry liqueur and reading *Razor's Edge* when some of my buddies who were on duty. I wasn't on duty at that particular time. This was well past midnight. They said "You still here?" "Yes, I said, I better get to sleep." So I got up and started to go. And I just passed out. I was not the least inebriated while I was reading if you can believe that. I was reading very nicely, until I got up, and then I fell flat on my face. Just thought I'd mention that.

(Nadia) What was the food like?

The food was fine. Remember it was prepared by the prisoners of war. And they were really cooks – not cooks because they were assigned to be cooks, which is a lot different than being a regular cook. So we ate quite nicely. The problem was that we ate too much of the same thing. The ships were bringing over frozen turkeys from the US and they were bringing Brussels sprouts from England and spam from the United States, so it was too much of the same thing. We could always tell what we were going to have. We were going to have turkey or ham, frozen hams, and we were going to have Brussels sprouts until they just ran out of their ears. To this day I can't stand the sight of spam or Brussels sprouts. As far as eating good, yes.

The Germans had, for example, a knack, which our people didn't possess, of making whipped cream out of milk. Our people – our cooks – didn't know how to make whipped cream out of milk. We would have jello with whipped cream on top for dessert. The secret we found out was the Germans would chill everything. The milk, the utensils, the beaters. Everything had to be chilled and if you did that, you could make whipped cream out of milk.

(Karen) Have you ever tried that since?

No. But they were really good cooks. To answer your question, we ate pretty good.

Tape 2

(Nadia) Did you have enough supplies?

Yes I don't remember any problems with supplies. One little anecdote regarding supplies. Ever since we had been in England, we used for lamps – for light at night – remember this was a 24 hour thing we ran and we needed light at night. We used lamps called bayonet-type lamps. Our lamps are screw type. Bayonet-type lamps are you push them in and they turn them and they have two pins that catch. That's how they light. We used bayonet-type lamps which they were using in England at that time. We were running out of lamps. They were burning out naturally and no supplies were coming in and we were... that was the only item of supply we didn't have enough of. We would send urgent messages back to headquarters, back to England, because everything had to go to England. "We need 'em. We need bayonet-type lamps." Nothing. We used the French Locally for assistance as employees. They were being paid, rather handsomely by the US, to work for us. One of them was a fellow , rather charismatic fellow who came to me. I had to speak French all day Long because of the French employees... and the French would call me "mon commandant". This fellow came to me one day,

"Mon commandant, you need bulbs. I know where there are plenty of bulbs. In Paris."

I said, "You're kidding. It's in German hands. We haven't gotten there yet. How are you going to get to Paris?"

"All you have to do is give me a jeep and I'll bring you back lamps."

I said, "Give you a jeep? You're never coming back! How am I going to account for this jeep?" We didn't have to account for guns. They were expendable or ammunition, but jeeps were not. We had to account for them. But to make a Long story short, we were in dire need.

I said, "Louis, take the jeep, come back with lamps."

He was in the French resistance, by the way, and this is how he did it, through his French resistance contacts. French resistance were people who had

dedicated themselves...Frenchmen...to thwart the Germans by working underground with each other, passing communications, spying, giving the information to the Americans. This is what they call the French resistance.

(Karen) working in secret against the Germans.

And they were very good at it and lots of them...many of them gave their lives and nobody paid them. They were doing this out of dedication. And I said, "Louis, take the jeep. How you are going to get to Paris and get back, I haven't the faintest idea. But go." He went. And a couple of weeks passed and I thought, I told my people in the office of the Corps of Engineers, "Louis is not coming back." And don't you know, the day after I mentioned this, here comes Louis with the jeep full of bulbs. Packed full of bulbs. How he got through the German lines, going in, coming out, to this day, I couldn't tell you and he didn't tell me. It just amazes me.

No, we were not short of supplies, Nadia, except for these darn light bulbs. And that's how we got them.

(Nadia) Were there breaks when you could do anything fun?

No. I'm afraid to say no, I can't think of any breaks as such, unless you call...yes, unless you call reading fun. I can't think of any other kind of fun except the favors regarding the silk stockings. But as far as predetermined breaks there was no such thing. It was a 24 hour operation.

(Nadia) Did you keep a journal?

No, I didn't keep a journal. I was too busy to keep a journal.

(Nadia) Did you receive awards?

Yes, I took the liberty of bringing some awards, nothing spectacular or silver stars or what have you. My wife, as a present I forget whether it was Father's Day or birthday - some event before she got sick - she gave me this and I'm quite proud of it (*shows framed display of medals; picture attached*). There is a company that will do this for you as a memento of your service. I suppose it will go down in the family although I don't have much of a family for it to go down too, but anyhow I'm proud of it. The A is First Army, with which we were associated. General Bradley's Army. This is the 21st Corps. The castle is the

emblem of the Corps of Engineers that we worked for. This is the last rank I held before I retired as a Colonel. What are these? Well... there's another one that is not in here that was given to me, was about to be given to me. A medal of appreciation from the French for what the American troops did. It would be nice if I get it while I'm still alive. Anyhow, the very first one – they are sort of ranked in here in the rank of the medal, but I'm not so sure they are, because what's on the second line I value far more than on the first line. This is the Army Commendation Medal. This is the Superior Service Medal. This is a medal that everybody got who was in the American theatre of operation. That meant if you were in the American theatre, which was thought to be anything from the United States through the waters and the ships and so forth until you got there, it was the American sector. So this is the American defense medal. This is the National Service Medal. I can't remember exactly what this was given for.

Now this is the European theatre of operation with which I am just as proud as with that, perhaps more so. The medal itself, the ribbon, was given to anyone who participated in the European theatre of operations. But please note there are some clusters of. Each one of those stars – each one is for a battle. One is for the Battle of Normandy and the other is for the greater battle of northern France. The other one is for Utah Beach, the one on the left. I'm proud of the stars because... here comes another anecdote. I guess we're near the end...

When we landed and were working our way up to Cherbourg from Utah Beach, was a town called St. Mer Eglise. It was quite a battle. And going toward St Mer Eglise, we, following the infantry and the Germans were very active, took advantage of occupying the foxholes the infantry had for their use. So we were in foxholes. And here one night in my foxhole – remember that the Germans were quite active and one of the weapons were 88s. These were artillery pieces – 88 millimeters, the diameter of the shell. There were quite a few of them and quite dangerous. Anyhow, these 88s were being fired over our foxholes like crazy from the Germans. They were trying to defend themselves from the incoming forces. During the night someone jumps into my foxhole and talk about being scared. It

was a young man who – how did he know I knew French? whether someone had told him to jump in my foxhole I don't know.

He said, "Monsieur, my sister is about to have a baby. Can someone help her?"

I told him that there was no one in our unit that could help him. I said there are doctors with the infantry or the units that are coming in to St. Mer Eglise. He was from St. Mer Eglise and he was the mayor's son and his sister was having a baby and he wanted a doctor. Talk about being scared. Out he went. I found out later that the 82nd Airborne which took St. Mer Eglise...they were scattered. They didn't land like they should have landed. Some were shot coming down. Only a fraction of their unit got to the ground, to their mission. But they were good. They beat the Germans. They got St. Mer Eglise and I learned that one of their doctors delivered his sister's baby. This kid had the gall finding his way to my foxhole and scaring the daylight out of me. So when I Look at these stars, I remember things like that, you know.

This was the Victory Medal that was given to everybody who participated in the victory of the allied forces. And this is a medal for superior service. I don't exactly recall what the difference is between the two. And this one is for the medal itself, the base medal, represents ten years of service. Each one of these Xs, which represent the Roman numeral ten, represents ten years. So the base medal and the 2 Xs together are 30 years of service.

(tape turned off for a few seconds – he began talking again about when he first entered the service as a sophomore in college)

ROTC wasn't enough for us. We had to be in the National Guard. So in 1933 I enlisted in the National Guard. We trained at nights and on weekends and in those two years I went from private to staff sergeant, only because I was in the ROTC. So the commander figured I knew a little more than the rest. So 1933 represents really the first year I was in the military. 1975 on the plaque represents when I retired. That's what those dates mean.

(Nadia) Did you make friends of your fellow soldiers?

Oh absolutely. We were all friends. You couldn't be otherwise. You had to be a friend. Otherwise you wouldn't succeed on your mission. You might not like the guy. But you had to be friends.

(Nadia) Are you still in touch with any of them?

No, I don't know anybody from my wartime experience.

(Nadia) Where were you when the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan?

I was in Cherbourg. I was Port Engineer.

(Karen) What was the reaction?

Happiness I guess. We had a secret now. We had a secret weapon. We didn't realize the nastiness of this bomb, the horrible things that the bomb caused. But we thought hurray for the Americans – they got a secret weapon. This will bring the war to an end. Wish we had known what an atomic bomb did.

(Nadia) Do you remember when FDR died?

Yes indeed.

(Karen) What goes through your mind when you say that?

What goes through my mind – here was a man...FDR..President Roosevelt was very very popular. The only president to have served four terms as president. That's a Lot of years. What goes through my mind is here was this man who had taken us out of the depression, the CCC , what was the other thing – Public Works Administration – here was a man who had essentially saved the country from might have been, had Hitler prevailed....he was dead and I felt very sorry and those things still go through my mind. I didn't know what Truman would do.

(Nadia) Do you remember the day the war ended?

Yes indeed. V-J Day. That's when the war ended. V-E day was the day the war in Europe ended and the Germans surrendered, but the war wasn't over until Japan surrendered. So yes, I remember the day indeed.

(Karen) What did you do on that date? Were you still in Cherbourg?

Yes, we were still in Cherbourg. Cleaning up.

Celebrate?

Oh absolutely, good Lord Almighty. I had been away from my family for almost three years – 1943-46.

(Karen) Did you have a daughter by then?

Yes Perine was born before I went overseas. Perine was born in 1938.

(Karen) What was it like when you came back and saw your family?

I can't describe that...being away from your wife for three years. You haven't seen your daughter grown up. She was just a preschooler – five years old. I went overseas in April of '43 and she was 5 years old in October of '42. I can't describe the joy that you have. This terrible war was over. You were back to what you hoped would be normal life, back to this little daughter.

(Karen) Carl was born after...

He was born in 1947, the year after I came back. He was one of the baby boomers.

(Nadia) Why did you decide to stay in the Army Corps of Engineers?

Well, that's all I knew. Quite frankly. It was not a bad life. I have no regrets, except one in England. And I wanted, by this time, I was Army. I wanted to stay in the Army. I wanted to stay in the Corps of Engineers. I was assigned initially as the Assistant Post Engineer at Fort Monmouth and I was asked to give lectures...speeches on port rehabilitation, which I had become, in other people's eye, an expert on. That was the thing to do, was to stay in.

(Nadia) Do you go to veterans reunions or organizations?

No I don't go now and I don't recall if we ever had a reunion.

(Karen) And you haven't belonged to VFW...

I belonged to VFW. I belonged to almost all the military organizations, but I'm not an active participator. I've been most active in the Military Order of World Wars at Leisure World. It's a Leisure World organization. It's difficult to have a reunion. See the kind of work, mission, that we had was not so much a unit mission as a personal assignment, type of thing. Personnel were shifted around in the unit. Commanders were changed so there's not this cohesiveness of

a unit like say I was during in Company B in the 34th Infantry. That's different. Those are the groups that have reunions. I don't go to reunions of units but I do belong to officers and veterans organizations.

(Nadia) Is there anything else you would like to say about your World War II experience?

No, I don't think so unless I give you an item of prejudice. I'm not sure that's appropriate...but we did have some prejudice that affected me.

(Karen) against you?

I might as well tell you. When I was in England as Assistant Port Engineer, there was a table of organization, a TO&E. A chart that says these are the positions in the unit and these are the ranks that go with that position. Table of Organization and....Equipment. The TO&E said the Port Engineer was a Colonel and the Assistant Port Engineer was a Lt Col. As it was, the Port Engineer was a Lieutenant Colonel and the Assistant Port Engineer, me, was a Captain. I had gone from Second Lieutenant to Captain in the interval. Soon after I was assigned, the commanding officer of the port put my recommendation in for promotion. It didn't take very long. Orders came out the following week. New orders came out and Arcilesi was not among them. A few weeks went by. The Adjutant General of the port would tell me that these things get from one desk to another, etc. Just wait. So I waited. The commander of the unit, who I'm glad to say had a high regard for me, "I'm going to base headquarters and I'm going to inquire about this." He came back, he called me in and he says, "I hate to tell you this, but General C.C. Vaughn said two things. When you came in and saluted, you snapped your heels and that was too Nazi like. And secondly, your name is Arcilesi and it's an Italian name and he didn't care to promote you because you were of Italian origin." And believe me, that killed my morale for awhile.

(Karen) There must have been thousands of Italian soldiers.

But I was Assistant Port Engineer over whom he had control. I wasn't somebody that some colonel had control over. Our colonel was occupying a general's spot and he could promote certain people, but he couldn't promote to major. And this guy was so bigoted...I think it's a lot of poppycock this clicking

of heels... I gave him a snappy salute, I answered all of his questions positively and I came away feeling very satisfied with myself, so there wasn't anything he could pin. That was the only incident in my Army career that gives me some regrets. I have no regret with anything else in my whole Army career.

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