

1-1-1995

# Kentuckians at War: A Soldiers Perspective of WWII

Sherry Troutman Frashure  
*Western Kentucky University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/stu\\_hon\\_theses](http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/stu_hon_theses)



Part of the [History Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Frashure, Sherry Troutman, "Kentuckians at War: A Soldiers Perspective of WWII" (1995). *Honors College Capstone Experience/Thesis Projects*. Paper 55.  
[http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/stu\\_hon\\_theses/55](http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/stu_hon_theses/55)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors College Capstone Experience/Thesis Projects by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact [topscholar@wku.edu](mailto:topscholar@wku.edu).

KENTUCKIANS AT WAR: A SOLDIER'S PERSPECTIVE OF  
WORLD WAR II

A THESIS FOR THE HONORS PROGRAM

SHERRI TROUTMAN FRASHURE

SPRING 1995

APPROVED BY:

John W. Shelton chair

Walker Luthy

Sam L. Forbush 4/27/95

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the generous interviews, I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to Tullis Baird of Hartford; Mertigene Bell of Centertown; James R. Coin of Calhoun; John Doe of Calhoun; Norman V. Dossett of Sacramento; Elias Evans of Calhoun; Thomas Funk of Hartford; Nat Carol Howard of Calhoun; Thomas L. Jackson of Beaver Dam; Brownson Johnson of Dundee; Willie Lee Johnson of Calhoun; Thomas Johnston of Beaver Dam; Morris H. Kell of Hartford; John L. Kirkpatrick of Owensboro; Wendell Leach of Hartford; Curtis C. Miller of Hartford; Anonymous Nurse, formerly of Calhoun; Gus E. Paris of Owensboro; Quentin R. Payton, and Martin B. Schenck of Munfordville.

Special thanks go to Professor Jack Thacker for his careful guidance; Professor Walker Rutledge for his meticulous editing; Glen Matuszewski for her encouragement and insight; David, Wilma, and Jeremy Troutman for their support, and Tim Frashure for his love and patience.

## PREFACE

Many histories have been written about the technicalities of World War II, but few have captured the soldier's perspective of the War. One may gain this perspective, however, by interviewing actual veterans and by examining their wartime letters. In July 1994, I began my search for such primary sources by studying the Kentucky Building's collection of documents from World War II veterans. Then in August 1994, I went to the Department of Military Affairs Military Records and Research at Frankfort, Kentucky. This trip was of little value because I found the World War II records to be disorganized and in poor condition. Also, I was not allowed to copy the only valuable list of names found in this department.

In October of 1994, I ran an advertisement in the local newspaper asking all World War II veterans interested in giving personal information about World War II to notify me, just as Bart Hagerman did in War Stories: the Men of the Airborne. I was extremely disappointed when only one veteran, Curtis Miller, notified me. A few weeks later, he called to invite me to a Christmas party at the VFW post in Hartford, Kentucky. At this function, I was happily able to get

several World War II veterans to agree to do taped interviews.

I began the majority of interviews in December 1994 and January 1995, conducting them according to the active-listening techniques used by Alice Hoffman in Archives of Memory. Before beginning each interview, I had each veteran sign a release form as a legal precaution. I discovered, however, that as the actual interview process got underway, my list of veterans to interview grew longer and longer.

Most of the people interviewed courteously gave me the names of others who might be interested in giving me information. Ultimately, nineteen interviews were conducted. Even though the service of each man and woman deserved its own section, the vast amount of information made this format impossible. I organized the outline and format in much the same manner as Paul Fussell in his book Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War. This work is organized topically to allow similar experiences to be compared and combined into a logical order.

The objective of my research on Kentucky World War II veterans was to preserve an important part of our Kentucky heritage. Already much history has been lost with the passage of time. Had these Kentucky veterans not generously shared their memories, yet another chapter in Kentucky history would have been lost forever.

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on Kentucky soldiers' perspectives of World War II. By utilizing information from actual interviews with Kentucky veterans and from letters written by Kentucky soldiers during World War II, this thesis gives an accurate description of living conditions and war experiences as perceived by the soldiers.

**KENTUCKIANS AT WAR: A SOLDIER'S PERSPECTIVE OF  
WORLD WAR II**

World War II was one of the bloodiest wars in American history. Of 16,535,000 participants, 406,000 were killed. Today there are 9,765,000 living veterans of World War II who all have stories and memories of their wartime experiences.<sup>1</sup> In this war, every ideal that the United States held sacred was at stake, for the Germans and Japanese had vowed to divide the entire globe among themselves. From several directions, the security of the United States was being threatened in 1941. In Europe, for example, Great Britain was near collapse under Germany's military might, and Britain was the last European barrier between Germany and America. Then on 7 December 1941 came direct hostility from the Far East. Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor brought the issue of national security home to Americans; the decision for war could no longer be delayed.

Whether Kentuckians enlisted or were drafted, they had to go through a training program before being deployed. For many, boot camp was a rude awakening to the differences between being a civilian and being a soldier. In War Stories, Ed Dorrity of the 17th Airborne Division described

his arrival at his basic training base. He said he was very surprised that an officer began shouting commands and orders at them their first day. Dorrity remembered that none of the new recruits knew for sure how many times they had to perform their first order to "fall out" before it was performed to the satisfaction of the instructor.<sup>2</sup> 2nd Lt. Mertigene Bell of the Army Nurse Corps had basic training at Fort Knox. She recalled the many problems she and the other nurses had with basic training. Bell said that much to the disappointment of their drill instructor, the nurses had a difficult time learning to march. She also remembered how the recruits had to go through a gas chamber and how the tear gas burned and made the nurses sick when their masks were not working properly.

While in training, the soldiers were bothered by their loss of identity and lack of control over their lives. Early on, the troops discovered that they were no longer individuals but part of a unit. To reinforce this loss of personal identity, soldiers were referred to by numbers rather than by name. Such measures were utilized to strengthen a group-cohesive attitude. Also this feeling of loss was heightened in training because someone told them what to do every minute of the day.<sup>3</sup>

Many soldiers compared their training and school experiences just as they did in Wartime.<sup>4</sup> Even though it seemed cruel to send eighteen-year-olds to war,



Pfc. Quentin Payton felt they were still used to taking orders at school and at home; therefore, they were easier to train than older men. Staff Sgt. Morris Kell of the 99th Infantry Division completed his specialized training classes in computing fire direction for the field artillery. During the war, he became chief computer of fire direction. This was an extremely important responsibility because he had the burden of making sure the artillery was hitting its mark. In calculating the proper trajectory, Kell continuously had to use academic skills gained in school. He made mathematical computations on a slide-ruler his specialty.

Some of the soldiers were trained well before being sent to fight, and others were not. Kell seemed to have been trained well for making the necessary calculations to give artillery coordinates. However, Payton was trained as a fire control operator; overseas he ended up on special assignment with communications. Johnston recalled that there was too much material shoved into six months of training for him to remember everything. He felt he would have been better trained for his job if the classes had been spread out over a longer time span or if he had had prior medical training, but the army did not offer this option. Johnston remarked, "If I could have remembered everything the army threw at me in six months of medical training, I could have been a good doctor."<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of the soldiers' stateside training, no one

was prepared for the barbaric living conditions abroad. Men fighting in the European theatre spoke of the deplorable weather conditions they endured. Harry L. Jackson of Bowling Green, Kentucky, wrote on July 6, 1944, that the weather in France was most disagreeable. He complained that it had been raining since their arrival in France a month earlier. By October 1944, Jackson was writing of the oceans of mud through which the men were marching. Pfc. Quentin Payton of Hartford, Kentucky, remembered the snow began to fall in France as early as November 1944, and the ground remained covered the entire winter. He recalled always trying to find bombed-out buildings in which to take shelter from the frigid weather. Payton said only a few men could stay in each building; otherwise, if the building were bombed again, the whole unit would be annihilated. However, most of the time soldiers were fortunate to have an Army pup tent to protect them from the cold. James Coin of the "Old Hickory" Army Division recalled his company only had insulated sleeping bags between them and the snow. He said they would zip up the sleeping bags completely at night, and then in the morning they would have to dig themselves out of the newly fallen snow. Lt. Col. William Hugh Allen of the Army's 112th Infantry Division wrote on 25 January 1945 that he had to sleep the previous night in the snow without any type of bedding. Thomas Funk of the 17th Airborne Division sadly remembered his friend whose feet got severely

frostbitten at the Battle of the Bulge. He said his friend eventually had to have his feet amputated because of the severity of the frostbite.

The weather conditions in the Pacific and the China-Burma-India theatre were not the same as in the European theatre but were just as deplorable. Technician 4th grade Thomas Johnston of the Army 149th Infantry Division recollected the incessant rainfall during the Laiti campaign; he could not think of a single dry day during the entire ordeal. John S. Owens, Jr. of Calhoun, Kentucky, wrote that the humidity in India and China was so devastating that their clothes and bed sheets were never dry. With the continual heat and rain, Owens said that the prized possession of every native was an American umbrella. He wrote that the rains were actually welcome because they cooled the troops off some, but "The mud of course is another story and I don't think any amount of profanity would be sufficient to describe the Indian and Chink mud."<sup>6</sup>

The tremendous humidity, rain, and heat of the Pacific theatre invited more than discomfort; it beckoned insects, leeches, and disease. The weather conditions made a perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes, which made the threat of malaria exceedingly high. Without exception, all of the Pacific theatre veterans interviewed contracted malaria. The drug atabrine was prescribed, but many veterans stopped taking the drug after returning home. Others continued to take the atabrine for the designated amount of time but

still contracted the disease. Staff Sgt. Gus Paris of the United States Marine Corps stated that the leeches were terrible in the Pacific. Paris remembered that every time they waded through water, they had to strip and check for leeches. If one did not have to burn off the leeches, it would not have been so bad, but in the process of burning the leeches, the men also got burned. If the leeches were simply pulled off, they left harmful particles in the skin, so they had to be burned. Elias Evans of the Army's 34th Infantry 24th Division developed jungle ulcers while serving in the Pacific theater. Jungle ulcers were large open sores that did not heal until sulfa drugs were applied to the lacerations.

Under such conditions, it is not surprising that the sanitary conditions of the soldiers deteriorated. Evans fought in the battle at "Breakback Ridge" in the Laiti campaign, and during those weeks the men did not bathe or shave. Reflecting on when the 24th making their way back down the ridge, Evans felt their unshaven appearance must have been a sight to the other troops. Paris experienced similar situations while in the Pacific. He went five to six weeks without removing his boots, much less bathing. Once Paris lost his toothbrush. After a few weeks, he found a toothbrush to use, borrowing it from another marine who was using the brush to clean his weapons. H. Jackson had entered France in June 1944, and in a letter dated 26 September 1944, he

expressed great joy at taking his first bath since arriving.

Even though there were a few instances of poor rations for American troops, the majority of the time soldiers were provided with adequate food for survival. Payton said, "The rations were not as much or what you would want to eat, but they were enough to keep you going and keep you in good health."<sup>7</sup> Johnston told of having to get his meal ticket punched for each meal so that he could not go back for second helpings. He could not figure out why anyone would want seconds of Army food because many times there were only beans and hard-boiled eggs to eat. In 1944, Coin and his division thought they were going to get a real treat at Thanksgiving. They were given turkey with all the trimmings. There was just one problem: the turkey had frozen and thawed several times on its way to the line. Coin never saw so many men vomiting and sick in his life, but said they were all fine the next day. Pfc. Thomas L. Jackson of the 29th Division remembered that for fourteen days during the D-Day operation they had nothing to eat except K-rations, which only included a piece of hard chocolate, crackers, and a small can of Spam. During the D-Day operation, Payton was trapped in the English Channel for five days without any food because of a severe storm.

The civilians in Holland and France were much more desperate for food than were the American soldiers. Coin

reported seeing civilians in Holland so hungry they cut the hind quarters off horses which had been killed in bombings. Pfc. Brownson Johnson of the Army 90th Division described seeing the effects of the people of France being forced to work for the Germans in the factories and in the fields. He stated that even those who worked in the fields did not have enough to eat because they only were allowed to keep a certain portion of eggs and milk from the farms, and if they did keep more than the set amount, they were taken over a hill and shot. H. Jackson wrote home about the pitiful sight of the French refugees who were walking in the rain and mud with no food, little clothing, and nowhere to go.

The American servicemen yielded to the temptation of thievery many times to survive and at other times to satisfy their greed. Paris said they became great thieves to survive at Iwo Jima. His unit stole food and buried it. As they needed the food, they dug up a few items to eat. Carol Howard of Calhoun explained how some soldiers took German Lugers off dead Germans to sell on the black-market. One could sell the Lugers for about fifty dollars apiece in Paris, France.

The desperate situations surrounding the American soldier in all of the theatres seemed to inspire creative means of transportation and communication. According to Corporal Curtis Miller of the 104th Infantry Division, soldiers began to hitch rides across Germany on the tanks.

He said sometimes the tanks would pull wagons full of soldiers across the countryside. The only disadvantage to this practice was that the tank operators could go into dangerous areas because they were protected by armour, but they forgot the infantrymen were not protected. This was also a dangerous practice because tanks drew a great deal of enemy fire. Payton also told of another problem with transportation during the war. At night, everyone operated under blackout orders, which meant no headlights could be used when one was driving. He said that it was extremely stressful trying to drive at night without lights. Payton recalled that they did have "cat eyes," which barely allowed one to see the vehicle in front of him. "Cat eyes" were lights measuring two inches by one half inch. They were big enough to keep the trucks from running into one another, but were not big enough for German bombers to see. Lt. Col. Norman Dossett of the Army Postal Service 14th Airforce remembered there was an old man in China who refused to comply with the blackout regulations at night. Dossett described the creative communication used to correct this act of insubordination. One night an American pilot flew over the old man's house and fired a few shots just past his house. Dossett said that was the quickest he had ever seen anyone turn out a light, and said there were never any more problems with the man not wanting to obey the regulations. Corporal William Leach of the 38th Infantry Division reminisced about the impossibility of laying telephone

wire through the mountains of the Philippines. Since it was not possible for the artillery unit to communicate directly to the infantry by phone, the planes had to relay messages from the artillery to the infantry.

Depriving the enemy of efficient communication was a crucial factor in General MacArthur's strategy of island hopping. Leach felt that MacArthur saved many lives with this practice because it allowed the United States to take the islands in the Pacific without having to kill or imprison every Japanese soldier on each island. After communications were cut between the individual troops and their base, the troops were of little threat. Leach also was amazed that just a few years ago the native population of the islands were still finding Japanese soldiers who did not know that the war had ended.

In these grueling living conditions, there were two steadying factors for these young men. One was that of friendship, and the other was the jokes they shared with their friends. In World War II, friendship took on a whole new meaning. This was a bond which was formed by shared misery and fear. Coin confessed that the relationship he had with the men in his unit was stronger than that between his own brothers and him. He said one day he decided to play a trick on a replacement soldier by eating his rations while sitting on the back of a dead German soldier. He remembered that the new recruit got terribly sick, a condition



which Coin was planning. He admitted it was a cruel thing to do, but it broke the monotony of war. Paris reminisced about similar friendships and pranks. He concluded that he would always know the men he served with even better than did their wives because he saw them "...stripped of all humanity, humility, and thought."<sup>8</sup> He added that he sincerely hoped their wives never saw that dark side to their husbands.

Paris said his group had a special prank they played when one of their friends would get a "Dear John Letter" from a girlfriend. They would go around the unit collecting pictures of everyone's mother, sister, or girlfriend. Then they would give the pictures to the unfortunate man, which he in turn sent back to his ex-girlfriend, asking her to pick out her picture and send the rest back because he could not remember which girl she was. Paris thought this greatly helped the soldiers get over the hurt they experienced from such letters. These men formed amazingly close ties with the individuals in their units, and many of the veterans interviewed still have annual reunions with their friends.

The servicemen in the Second World War were subjected to all manner of physiologically and psychologically traumatic experiences. Several of the men interviewed were injured during their World War II duty. Most of the men recovered from their injuries quite rapidly, but others suffered more severe injuries, which took much longer to heal. Schenck sustained a mild injury during the assault on Pearl

Harbor. His injury resulted from his being struck in the heel by shrapnel. Coin was injured at St. Lo when a shell landed right beside him. He was not hit by shrapnel but suffered a concussion to the back. He spent three months in the hospital, and for several days the doctors were unsure if he would ever walk again because he could not move his legs. When the swelling subsided, he regained the use of his legs and was returned to the front. B. Johnson received his injury at the Sigfreid Line. He was hit in the arm, leg, and stomach by shrapnel. The shrapnel broke his arm and leg, and his leg eventually had to be amputated. Because of the stomach injury, the doctors had to remove half of his intestines. He sustained his injury in October 1944 and did not leave the hospital in England until March 1945. Paris received two injuries during the war. His first occurred at Guadalcanal, where he was injured from bomb concussions and fragments; the second injury also resulted from bomb concussions. As T. Jackson neared what he believed to be the Elbe River, he was injured from shrapnel. Howard was wounded by shrapnel blows to the back and shoulders. For treatment, he was flown to Paris General Hospital. Willie Lee Johnson of the Army's 35th Division received several injuries from driving over a land mine. In a letter home, William E. Greay of Central City mentioned a wound to the face. Terribly concerned that his wife would find him unattractive, Greay mentioned the scars the blow left over his right eye and the right side of his

nose.

The soldiers of World War II went home with serious psychological wounds that would never completely heal. Many times these injuries were much more serious than the physical ones. When one considers the emotional distress encountered by these men, one must first realize that most of these men were not much more than boys. Miller was a mere sixteen years old when he landed in Europe, and Paris was only seventeen when he fought at Guadalcanal. It is overwhelming when one contemplates the type of emotional baggage and responsibility with which these young men were harnessed.

In the midst of numerous explosions and men screaming in pain at Pearl Harbor, Schenck lost his best friend. Schenck remembered that his friend was working in the engine room that Sunday morning when the torpedo hit the USS Helena, and the explosion "...blew him [his friend] all over everywhere."<sup>9</sup>

When Coin thought back to the war, he thought of instances which damaged him emotionally. As soon as he landed at Omaha Beach, for example, he for the first time saw someone die: an American soldier shot by a German sniper. His service was difficult because he lost many good friends in battle.

W. Johnson recollected his landing at Omaha Beach. He said that he and his comrades had to cross the beach over

the bodies of German soldiers and those of the American 29th Division because there had been no time to dispose of the bodies. He also spoke of how scared all of the soldiers were. "If any man said he was not afraid, he either had not seen much action, or he was a liar,"<sup>10</sup> he insisted.

B. Johnson recalled two events which have continued to bother him through the years. One was the plight of the 81st Airborne Division's paratroopers during the Normandy invasion. He stated that the paratroopers were slaughtered by the Germans as they fell to the ground. Their bodies were hanging everywhere: in trees, on church steeples, etc. The other was the death of his friend. He remembered that his friend and he were in the middle of a battle, so they dove into fox holes to escape injury. When B. Johnson raised up out of his fox hole, he saw that his friend had not made it to the other hole. His buddy had been hit through the neck with shrapnel.

Dossett's worst memories of the war involved the deaths of his three best friends. Ironically, all three men were killed in non-combat action. The first had asked Dossett to go with him to make a mail drop, but Dossett said that he did not want to go with him. On this mail drop the man's plane crashed. Dossett seemed to be torn between joy that he was not on the plane when it crashed and guilt that he let his friend go alone. The second accident happened when his buddy failed to make a curve on the Burma Road in his jeep. The third

accident was probably the most heart wrenching for Dossett because it killed a friend whom he had known since childhood. The friend's name was John S. Owens, Jr. Owens had completed two-hundred missions in the CBI theatre and was finally on his way home when his transport plane crashed into the side of a mountain.

Paris said, "Iwo Jima wasn't hell, but you could see it from where we were."<sup>11</sup> Nowhere was safe from sniper fire, and they were constantly bombarded. In this strategic battle, half of his battalion was wounded or killed. They had 105 trucks, or tanks, and all of them were lost. He had his best friends "...die in his lap, in his arms, and on him."<sup>12</sup>

Baird's division, the 87th, was later sent to Italy, but he did not go with them because he had been transferred to the infantry. While Baird was in the infantry training program, he received word that the entire 87th Division had been annihilated. He seemed to be happy that he was still alive, but he still felt bad for men in his old division.

Thomas Funk of the 17th Airborne Division reminisced about the horrifying details of his jump over the Rhine. Their operation was called Operation Varsity, which was supposed to be a secret mission, but unfortunately, it was no secret to the Germans. Since the Germans knew about the plan and since it was a day jump, the paratroopers were easy targets. Many were killed during their descent. Funk said that the C46 planes were fire traps because their fuel tanks

were easily punctured. However, this was the type of plane that he jumped from on this occasion. Out of twenty-nine C46 planes, twenty-two were shot down. One C46 carried approximately thirty people, and there was one plane he saw shot down out of which nobody jumped before it crashed. During this operation and the operation at the Bulge, the 17th Division lost 1400 paratroopers.

In a letter home, H. Jackson wrote about one of the phenomena of war which disturbed him the most. He felt the "most trying part of war" was "the look in men's eyes after they have come out of it - They are the living dead without fear, evil or comfort - I have picked up the dead from the field - there is something tragic about that but yet there is a serenity about death that somewhat softens the tragedy - and frees the spirit from torture and torment. But this the living cannot escape and it is revealed in their face as if it were a reflection of their commiserated souls in a crystal pool -."13

After all of these dreadful experiences, it should come as no surprise that many veterans had a few problems readjusting to civilian life. Paris said when he first returned home, he could not sleep well because he was not used to the quiet. He also remembered jumping at every loud noise he heard when he first got back, and it took a while before he knew the noises were no longer caused by shelling. Bell recalled having to make sure her patients knew it was a

nurse waking them up, or they would come up out of the bed swinging at her. She said they had still not gotten used to the idea of being safe once again. Leach recollected when he first came home, a little boy threw some firecrackers at his feet. He said he hit the ground because he was still so edgy and nervous from being shot at all of the time. B. Johnson reported still having frighteningly real dreams about the war. Johnston also had memories, many of which he hoped to forget. Coin said there had been a documentary on television about the Bulge not too long ago, and that even after fifty years, he began shaking. Funk spoke of attending the annual reunions of the 17th Airborne, and participating in the candle ceremony given in memory of the paratroopers who died during the war. He explained that every time he attends the ceremony he gets upset by the thought of his friends' deaths.

One would think that the agony of the regular soldier was devastating enough for any one soul to endure, but the regular soldier's suffering paled in comparison to that of the prisoner of war. Both of the POWs interviewed were prisoners of Germany. One of the men wished to remain anonymous, so he will be referred to throughout this section as "John Doe."

Doe was in the 12th Army Division 43rd Tank Battalion. He was captured in January of 1943, and was imprisoned for fifteen months. During this time, his biggest struggle was

against hunger. The prisoners were supposed to get rations from the Red Cross, but these supplies rarely ever made it past the German guards. Doe reminisced about the underground economy of the prisoners. In this economy, cigarettes were used as currency to purchase goods from other prisoners. For example, one could buy a loaf of bread for twenty cigarettes, and a candy bar could be acquired for six cigarettes. If one did obtain food or cigarettes, he had to guard his possession at all times because someone would steal it from him to escape a few moments of hunger. He felt guilty at having swapped his cigarettes for a starving man's food. Doe wanted to tell the man that he should eat his food instead of trading it for cigarettes, but Doe also needed the food. He felt terrible when the man died a couple of days later.

Doe told about one of the work details in the prison camp which involved the collection of the dead. The prisoners were made to carry all of their dead out and pile them on a wagon. Then the Germans made them pull the wagon over the hill to the graveyard. They then would dump the bodies into a large pit. Doe was never chosen for this work detail, but after the camp was liberated by the British, he went to look at the grave site. He found this to be the worst place he had ever been.

Another work detail involved gardening and farming. Doe volunteered for this detail because the Germans told him they would give him extra food if would agree to work.



After the long day of work, not only did he not receive extra food, but they did not even give Doe his regular portion of food.

1st Lt. John Kirkpatrick of the 8th Airforce's 305th bomber group was also a prisoner of war in Germany and had experiences similar to Doe's. Kirkpatrick was a bombardier in the airforce, and was shot down over Germany on his twentieth mission. Kirkpatrick proudly stated that he dropped his load over the target even after his plane had lost one engine. He parachuted from the plane and thought he was going to land in the North Sea. However, the wind direction changed, and he landed on a roof in a small German town. He fell halfway through the roof when he landed, and said it was very painful when the people pulled him out of the roof. Kirkpatrick was captured by the German home guard; an older man had a gun pointed in his face while children were pelting him with rocks. About the time he thought the guard was going to shoot him, a German lady made them leave him alone. She even dressed his wounds before the soldiers took him away to prison camp. The lady had her work cut out for her because before Kirkpatrick parachuted from the plane he had been wounded in the mouth, back, neck, and shoulder by explosions and then he hit his knee on the bomb bay door when he jumped from the plane. He said he always wanted to thank the woman for saving his life.

The guards finally came and took him away to a prison camp

just northeast of Berlin. He found it rather strange, but the guards were fascinated with his bomber jacket and flight pants. The first thing he had to do in camp was spend thirty days in solitary confinement. He recalled in Germany solitary confinement meant no light, no sanitary facilities, and only bread and water to eat. With no light and nothing to do, he had no concept of time. After his first stay in solitary confinement, he honestly thought the thirty days had been a year. The movie The Great Escape was made about their experiences at the camp. He said that they really did help fifty-six men escape through the tunnels named Tom, Dick, and Harry. The only mistake in the movie was that the filmmakers showed too much light in the solitary confinement.

After Kirkpatrick's thirty days of solitary were up, the Germans put him in the compound for British prisoners because there were not enough American prisoners to provide a separate compound. He made three close friends in prison camp, and that friendship was even more important in the camp than it was on the battlefield. They taught him how to act so that he would not get into trouble, they helped care for his wounds, and they helped him pass the unending hours of imprisonment. When the Russians began closing in on Germany, the guards moved them. They were marched six-hundred miles in fourteen degree below-zero temperatures to the camp in Museburgh. This, he recollected, was the worst place he had

ever been, and if they had stayed in Museburgh much longer, he knew they would have died. There were about 37,000 prisoners with no sanitary facilities.

One day at noon American planes dropped pamphlets over the camp with directions from General Patton that he would be taking the camp the next day and that the prisoners should stay down on the ground and wait. The next day they were all excited about the possibility of getting to go home. Then all of a sudden they saw tanks coming toward them with big white stars painted on the sides and American flags flying in the air. The tanks came through the walls of the camp and killed the few Germans that were left to guard the prisoners. Kirkpatrick said he was so surprised when the American troops began handing out K rations, candy bars, and canned goods. Patton told his men to run water lines into the prisoners so that they could have fresh water to drink. Then Patton had some of his men stay to set up bakeries for the prisoners. Patton told them that they would all have to stay in the area because he could not have them clogging up the highways. Kirkpatrick did not mind the orders to stay put because he felt as if he had died and gone to heaven with having that much to eat. As in Doe's experience, Kirkpatrick said that the Germans had kept the Red Cross rations for themselves, so he was very thankful for the food Patton brought in to them.

Kirkpatrick had to stay in a hospital for a few weeks before he could return to his family. The hospital fed him constantly

to try to put some of the fifty pounds back on him that he had lost in prison camp. After his two and a half year imprisonment, he had gone from a healthy 177 pounds to a sickly 127 pounds.

When his hospital stay ended, he was finally allowed to go back to Kentucky. He got to see his wife along with his three-year-old daughter, whom he had never seen.

Kirkpatrick said his experience has made him a much more humble person, for he does not take things for granted as he used to do. Kirkpatrick recalled the bombs he had dropped during the war, and expressed how deeply sorry he will always be for the bombs he dropped that did not hit their intended targets.

What could have possibly motivated the men in battle field or in the prison camps to keep going, to keep surviving? For Kirkpatrick, the thought of seeing his daughter for the first time was an extremely important motivator for his survival. He also knew he had to make it back home or his mother would not be happy with him at all. He felt guilty at how worried he was making her, so he had to get home. Greay was driven to survive the war in order that he could spend Christmas with his wife. He was only one day late meeting his deadline; he arrived in Kentucky on 26 December 1945. H. Jackson was impelled by the realization that the United States absolutely had to win this war. He had to keep going to protect the people and ideals

that he loved so passionately. An anonymous nurse said, "Nurses were doing what they were trained to do. I think we did it with compassion and sorrow for the horror of war."<sup>14</sup>

Through the barbarous bloodshed and pain, there were individuals who risked their safety and health to help others, who did their jobs with bravery and pride, and who went the extra mile to bring a ray of hope to a world filled with death. Schenck was one of the brave men who fought in the Pacific theatre for four years and who earned both a bronze and a silver star. Coin received the bronze star for meritorious service in the European theatre and the silver star for saving an officer's life in the line of fire. He bandaged the officer's wound and carried him to safety. Coin also showed a great deal of compassion when he had his mother mail some new material to a little girl in Holland who had never had a dress made out of new material. B. Johnson showed his unselfish manner when he and another man helped to carry one of their buddies to safety after he got shot in the leg. Allen and his men were encountering heavy fire at the Seigfreid Line, and he went back to make sure that none of his men had been cut off from the group. When he doubled back, he found one man, and together they waded through the icy waters of the river to escape. Funk was awarded the bronze star for his meritorious service at the Rhine. Kell was the chief computer of fire direction, and he received the bronze star for meritorious service in that

position. Johnston was a medical technician in the Pacific theatre for three years and earned the bronze star for his meritorious service and dedication. H. Jackson wrote home about how impressed he was with the American soldiers who gave as much of their rations to the French children as they could spare.

Attitudes toward the enemy were extremely different depending upon which theatre one examines. In the European theatre, the American soldier grew to hate the Germans after witnessing the atrocities of war, but did not actually hate the Germans before confronting them. However, in the Pacific and CBI theatres, most American soldiers entered the war hating the Japanese because of the Pearl Harbor attack upon the United States. As the war progressed, their hatred grew even more intense.

From the Battle of the Bulge on, Coin recollected his overwhelming hatred for the Germans. One experience which cultivated his abhorrence occurred after the American paratroopers landed across the Rhine, and the Germans were afraid that the Americans were going to overrun them. When faced with this dilemma, the Germans killed all of the American prisoners they were holding near the potential Allied breakthrough point. Coin's second encounter transpired at Magdeburg, Germany. Here Coin saw a dead German girl who had been raped to death by German soldiers. He could not understand how a group of men could do such a

thing to any girl, much less one from their own country. Another example was the German practice of booby-trapping the bodies of dead soldiers to kill Allied soldiers when the bodies were moved. These three personal experiences were the reasons for Coin's sheer disgust with his German foe.

Corporal Curtis Miller of the 104th Infantry Division had mixed feelings about his German adversaries. He admired their cleverness in building huge underground factories. He felt that showed a great deal of intelligence, for bombers could not destroy the underground factories. In addition to the factories being built underground, the Germans ran the smokestacks laterally for miles away from the actual factories so that the smoke would not give away the facilities' locations. But Miller detested the German brutality. He remembered that when he helped to liberate a labor camp in Borkhouse, he discovered that there were thousands of people dead and many others who were emaciated from lack of food. When one tried to move the bodies to bury them, the bones would slip out of the muscle and skin. He said the Americans finally rounded up German citizens from the streets to come clean up the dead. Miller admired the German ingenuity but despised their brutality.

Navy Gunner's mate 1st class Martin Schenck was aboard the USS Helena when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor 7 December 1941. He remembered that he was sleeping that Sunday morning and was suddenly awakened by sirens and

bombing at 7:55 AM. He heard the loud speaker desperately repeating that it was no drill; Pearl Harbor was under attack. He saw many of the crew dead and others who were screaming in pain because they were on fire. Schenck quickly rushed through all of the confusion and death to man his battle station. The Japanese planes were flying too close to the ships to get many good shots at them. After this horrid event, Schenck wanted to go to war with Japan so that the United States could get even with the Japanese for the pain and suffering they had caused.

Leach had mixed feelings about the Japanese. He admired the courage of the kamakazi pilots, whom he had witnessed crash into an American ship until it sank. He said his ship was close enough to the one being attacked that he could see the eyes of the pilots as they made their final descent. From their eyes, he could tell that they knew exactly what they were doing and were not a bit scared to die for their emperor and their honor. He was awed by their courage, but at the same time he hated them because several boys with whom he had grown up died on the ship that was sunk. Another reason for his detestation of the Japanese was because of their notorious banzi attacks. In these attacks the Japanese ran into an American camp while almost everyone was asleep, and began yelling and banging on tin cans. In the midst of the confusion, the American soldiers were tricked into



shooting each other. Leach was personally in one of these attacks, but by this time there were not enough Japanese left in the Philippines to carry out a successful attack. Instead of shooting one another, the Americans wiped out the entire group of attackers.

Evans resented the Japanese and their war tactics. He recalled that the Japanese would hide in the tops of trees and shoot the Americans. Evans said the Americans kept missing the Japanese because they were not shooting high enough at the tree tops. After the regular machine gunner was hit, Evans took over the fifty caliber water-cooled machine gun. He proudly stated that they did not get him because he remembered to shoot high enough into the tree tops to kill the snipers.

Johnston was a medical technician in the Pacific theatre. He resented the Japanese because they did not follow the guidelines established at the Geneva Convention as the Germans did. Those guidelines provided for the safety of medical personnel, that is, anyone wearing a Red Cross emblem. In the Pacific, these agreements were not followed by the Japanese; therefore, the medics could not wear medic armbands or carry medical bags because they would have made the medics easy targets. The medics had to carry weapons just like the infantrymen, and they had to carry their medical supplies in their pockets so as not to draw undue attention to them.

Paris loathed the very plan of Greater East Asian Sphere of Prosperity with Japan acting as ruler. The goal of the plan was to conquer as many islands in the Pacific as possible for the use of the Japanese. In this plan the Japanese sincerely felt the United States would simply sue for peace after Pearl Harbor was bombed. Paris, however, gave credit to the Japanese soldiers. He felt that the Japanese troops were efficient and could go a long time on little food. He also acknowledged that their weakness was in the inability of lower-ranking soldiers to take charge if their commanding officer was killed; this weakness was exploited at every opportunity by the United States. In contrast, the American soldier's individuality allowed him to take charge if the situation merited such action.

When Paris was asked his opinion about the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan, he replied that the reaction of the troops at the time was "Where in the hell have you guys been with that thing?"<sup>15</sup> Paris went on to say that one must be careful when addressing this issue because it is "... easy to be a Monday morning quarterback."<sup>16</sup> He felt others make it too easy when they look back with the knowledge of the present, and pass judgement on what should have been. Paris said the estimates at the time did not give Americans a very good chance at all. It was estimated that 100,000 United States troops would die in the first day of an invasion onto the Japanese mainland. Paris also did not

believe that the Japanese would have surrendered under lesser circumstances because of the great loyalty they had for their emperor. Paris said that even the women and children were armed and willing to die to defend the emperor. With the knowledge of the time, Paris felt it was the correct decision to make.

Leach found the atomic bomb a terribly frightening device, but he was satisfied that the bomb ended the war, and he believed it saved thousands of American lives. In later times, Leach discovered that the first division scheduled to invade Japan was his own 38th Division. In light of this discovery, the bomb became even more palatable to him, considering the army was estimating a seventy-five percent casualty rate. He was glad too that he did not have to do what his orders would have been had there been an invasion: to kill everything that moved.

T. Jackson stormed the beach of Omaha, fought at the Bulge, and was awaiting orders in California to invade Japan when the atomic bomb was dropped. T. Jackson expressed sorrow for the losses suffered by Japan because of the bomb, but thought it was the greatest thing that had ever happened for the American troops. It was a blessing to the United States because the American soldiers would have taken severe losses had the bomb not been dropped.

Evans was the only veteran asked about the atomic bomb

who thought that the bomb was a mistake, that it was unnecessary for an American victory. Evans felt the United States ground and air troops were capable of subduing the Japanese.

As sad as it may be, one of the greatest concerns to Kentucky World War II veterans was thinking no one cared about the sacrifices they made for the United States fifty years ago. Funk said he felt that the 17th Airborne Division had been completely forgotten by Americans, even after it sacrificed over 1400 paratroopers in World War II. He resented the military's combining the 17th with the 81st toward the end of the war, because at the victory parade in New York City the 17th's contributions were ignored, and only the 81st was acknowledged. He sadly reported that he could hardly find any mention of the 17th in books about the effort of the Airborne in the Second World War. Schenck felt betrayed by his country after the war because he could not find a job and was accused by a worker in the unemployment office of not wanting to work. Schenck then punched the man in the mouth and went directly to the recruitment office to reenlist. This time he joined the army and made it his career. The prisoner of war who wished to remain anonymous did so because he did not think people appreciated what he had gone through as they once did. He said that the public just did not care about its World War II veterans anymore. Bell

concurred; she was greatly disturbed that Americans did not fully appreciate the sacrifices which the men and women made for their country during World War II.

<sup>1</sup> Veterans Administration Data, 1 October 1937.

<sup>2</sup> Bart Redburn, *ETC. 303* (Pat.), *33: Stories: 374 No. of the Kentucky* (producer, Kentucky, Turner Publishing Company, 1971), 2-19.

<sup>3</sup> John W. Hoffman and Howard S. Hoffman, *Alma Mater of Henry Clay, Kentucky*, The University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 27.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Fagrell, *Warriors, Underdogs and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 37.

<sup>5</sup> James Johnson, interview by author, tape recording, Sadler, Ky., Kentucky, 20 December 1994.

<sup>6</sup> John C. Owens, Jr., *Sketching, Aspen Valley to Myrtle Forks, Kentucky*, 20 August 1945, Special Collections, Kentucky Collection, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

<sup>7</sup> Quentin R. Taylor, interview by author, tape recording, Harford, Kentucky, 7 January 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Tom R. Paris, interview by author, tape recording, Overboro, Kentucky, 4 January 1995.

<sup>9</sup> David B. Schuck, interview by author, tape recording, Middlesville, Kentucky, 23 November 1994.

<sup>10</sup> Willie Lee Johnson, interview by author, tape recording, Calhoun, Kentucky, 30 January 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Paris, 4 January 1995.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 4 January 1995.

<sup>13</sup> Harry Jackson, *Francis S. Bellis* (Jackson), Bowling Green, Kentucky, 20 July 1994, *Francis S. Bellis Collection*, Special Collections, Kentucky Collection, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Veterans Administration Data, 1 October 1987.
- <sup>2</sup>Bart Hagerman, LTC, AUS (Ret.), War Stories: The Men of the Airborne (Paducah, Kentucky: Turner Publishing Company, 1993), 2-19.
- <sup>3</sup>Alice M. Hoffman and Howard S. Hoffman, Archives of Memory (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 27.
- <sup>4</sup>Paul Fussell, Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 52.
- <sup>5</sup>Thomas Johnston, interview by author, tape recording, Beaver Dam, Kentucky, 30 December 1994.
- <sup>6</sup>John C. Owens, Jr., Sookerting, Assam Valley to Mary E. Marks, [Kentucky], 20 August 1945, Special Collections, Kentucky Building, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
- <sup>7</sup>Quentin R. Payton, interview by author, tape recording, Hartford, Kentucky, 7 January 1995.
- <sup>8</sup>Gus E. Paris, interview by author, tape recording, Owensboro, Kentucky, 4 January 1995.
- <sup>9</sup>Martin B. Schenck, interview by author, tape recording, Munfordville, Kentucky, 23 November 1994.
- <sup>10</sup>Willie Lee Johnson, interview by author, tape recording, Calhoun, Kentucky, 30 January 1993.
- <sup>11</sup>Paris, 4 January 1995.
- <sup>12</sup>Ibid., 4 January 1995.
- <sup>13</sup>Harry Jackson, France to Sallie [Jackson], Bowling Green, Kentucky, 16 July 1944, Harry Jackson Collection, Special Collections, Kentucky Building, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

14 Anonymous Nurse, interview by author, mail correspondence, Ocala, Florida [originally from Calhoun, Kentucky], 20 February 1995.

15 Paris, 4 January 1995.

16 Ibid., 4 January 1995.

Allen, William [unclear] [Family] Henderson,  
Kentucky, 20 February 1994. Special Collections,  
Kentucky Building, Western Kentucky University,  
Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Allen, William [unclear] [Family] Henderson,  
Kentucky, 20 February 1994. Special  
Collections, Kentucky Building, Western Kentucky  
University, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Allen, William. Interview by author. Tape recording, Hartford,  
Kentucky, 20 December 1994.

Ball, Matthew. Interview by author. Tape  
recording, Centertown, Kentucky, 4 January 1995.

Ball, James W. Interview by author. Tape recording, Calhoun,  
Kentucky, 24 December 1994.

Ball, John. Interview by author. Tape recording, Calhoun,  
Kentucky, 30 January 1995.

Boswell, Norman Y. Interview by author. Tape  
recording, Jarrattsville, Kentucky, 29 December 1994.

Evans, Elias. Interview by author. Tape recording, Calhoun,  
Kentucky, 29 December 1994.

Ford, Thomas. Interview by author. Tape recording, Hartford,  
Kentucky, 4 January 1995.

Gray, William [unclear], Escape to Convictive Gray, Censor,  
Kentucky, [December] 1945. Special Collections,  
Kentucky Building, Western Kentucky University, Bowling  
Green, Kentucky.

Howard, Nat [unclear]. Interview by author. Tape  
recording, Calhoun, Kentucky, 29 December 1994.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

- Allen, William Hugh, France to [Family] Henderson, Kentucky. 25 January [194?]. Special Collections. Kentucky Building. Western Kentucky University. Bowling Green, Kentucky.
- Allen, William Hugh, [Europe] to [Family] Henderson, Kentucky. [16 or 17] December [194?]. Special Collections. Kentucky Building. Western Kentucky University. Bowling Green, Kentucky.
- Baird, Tullis. Interview by author. Tape recording. Hartford, Kentucky. 30 December 1994.
- Bell, Mertigene. Interview by author. Tape recording. Centertown, Kentucky. 4 January 1995.
- Coin, James R. Interview by author. Tape recording. Calhoun, Kentucky. 26 December 1994.
- Doe, John. Interview by author. Tape recording. Calhoun, Kentucky. 30 January 1993.
- Dossett, Norman V. Interview by author. Tape recording. Sacramento, Kentucky. 29 December 1994.
- Evans, Elias. Interview by author. Tape recording. Calhoun, Kentucky. 29 December 1994.
- Funk, Thomas. Interview by author. Tape recording. Hartford, Kentucky. 4 January 1995.
- Greay, William Estil, Europe to Genevieve Greay, Central City, Kentucky. [December] 1945. Special Collections. Kentucky Building. Western Kentucky University. Bowling Green, Kentucky.
- Howard, Nat Carol. Interview by author. Tape recording. Calhoun, Kentucky. 29 December 1994.
- Nurse, Anonymous. Interview by author. Mail correspondence. Ocala, Florida (originally from Calhoun, Kentucky). 20 February 1995.



Jackson, Harry, [France] to Bernice [Jackson], Bowling Green, Kentucky. [July] 1944. Harry Jackson Collection. Special Collections. Kentucky Building. Western Kentucky University. Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Jackson, Harry, [France] to [Bernice Jackson], Bowling Green, Kentucky. 4 July 1944. Harry Jackson Collection. Special Collections. Kentucky Building. Western Kentucky University. Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Jackson, Harry, France to Sallie [Jackson], Bowling Green, Kentucky. 16 July 1944. Harry Jackson Collection. Special Collections. Kentucky Building. Western Kentucky University. Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Jackson, Harry, Holland to [Bernice Jackson], Bowling Green, Kentucky. 26 September 1944. Harry Jackson Collection. Special Collections. Kentucky Building. Western Kentucky University. Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Jackson, Harry, Holland to Bernice [Jackson], Bowling Green, Kentucky. 4 October 1944. Harry Jackson Collection. Special Collections. Kentucky Building. Western Kentucky University. Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Jackson, Thomas L. Interview by author. Tape recording. Beaver Dam, Kentucky. 5 January 1995.

Johnson, Brownson. Interview by author. Tape recording. Dundee, Kentucky. 21 January 1995.

Johnson, Willie Lee. Interview by author. Tape recording. Calhoun, Kentucky. 30 January 1993.

Johnston, Thomas. Interview by author. Tape recording. Beaver Dam, Kentucky. 30 December 1994.

Kell, Morris H. Interview by author. Tape recording. Hartford, Kentucky. 7 January 1995.

Kirkpatrick, John L. Interview by author. Tape recording. Owensboro, Kentucky. 21 January 1995.

Leach, Wendell. Interview by author. Tape recording. Hartford, Kentucky. 5 January 1995.

Miller, Curtis C. Interview by author. Tape recording. Hartford, Kentucky. 27 December 1994.

Nurse, Anonymous. Interview by author. Mail correspondence. Ocala, Florida [originally from Calhoun, Kentucky]. 20 February 1995.

Owens, John C., Jr., Sookerting, Assam Valley to Mary E. Marks, [Kentucky]. 20 August 1945. Special Collections. Kentucky Building. Western Kentucky University. Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Owens, John C., Jr., Sookerting, Assam Valley to Margery Settle, Kentucky. 20 August 1945. Margery Settle Collection. Special Collections. Kentucky Building. Western Kentucky University. Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Paris, Gus E. Interview by author. Tape recording. Owensboro, Kentucky. 4 January 1995.

Payton, Quentin R. Interview by author. Tape recording. Hartford, Kentucky. 7 January 1995.

Schenck, Martin B. Interview by author. Tape recording. Munfordville, Kentucky. 23 November 1994.

#### Secondary Sources

Fussell, Paul. Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Hagerman, Bart. War Stories: The Men of the Airborne. Paducah, Kentucky: Turner Publishing Company, 1993.

Hoffman, Alice M. and Howard Hoffman. Archives of Memory. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1990.

Turabian, Kate L. A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Veterans Administration Data, 1 October 1987.