

**Richard Walter Falvey
Veteran**

**Interviewed by:
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New York State Military Museum**

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Q: Could you give me your full name and your date and place of birth please?

RF: My name is Richard Walter Falvey and I was born in Yonkers, NY on August 2nd, 1921.

Q: What was your educational background before going into the service?

RF: I was just a high school graduate.

Q: Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

RF: Oh, positively. That is very vivid in my mind. I was calling on the girl who turned out to be my wife. While I was waiting for her to appear in the living room we heard the news on the radio that Pearl Harbor had been invaded. I had no idea where Pearl Harbor was, but I said we would clean up those silly little fools in a week.

Q: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

RF: I enlisted, which is another story. I had always wanted to jump out of an airplane. As a young boy I had watched the barnstormers up at the Altamont airfield. I went to enlist and they informed me that I had a crooked (left) arm, which I had broken playing Tarzan, and I couldn't touch my left shoulder. I could touch my other shoulder with my other hand ok. They said I wouldn't get into the airborne, as they needed only perfect specimens, so I told them I wouldn't enlist. So, a week later I went to a recruiting office in New York City where I went through the same story and the officer said raise your arm up and I brought it up and of course couldn't touch my shoulder. He asked about the other arm. So, I brought that one up and stopped it at the same point as my left arm. He said there was nothing wrong with me and that I was in. I think he knew I was fooling but he was glad to get somebody.

Q: Where did you go for your basic?

RF: Basic training was Airborne training from day one. The 506th Parachute Regiment was something new that the Army was trying out. As time would prove, it was extremely successful.

Q: What was your training like?

RF: Many people would describe it as severe. It was really tough. I was always a pretty physical person. I ran cross country in high school. I knew it was tough going, but I felt

this was the way the Army was and the training had to be severe or you were not in the Army.

Q: Do you feel that the training prepared you for what you faced in combat?

RF: Positively. All of the things we did in training came back to us during combat. It was as if our actual combat was just more of our basic training. I felt at the time of the D-Day invasion that we were over-trained. We wanted no more training and to get on with the invasion.

Q: So you were assigned right away to the 506th?

RF: Yes. It was the only outfit there was at the time.

Q: To clarify, where was your basic?

RF: It was at (Camp) Toccoa, GA. Every day was “on the double” and “hurry, hurry”. I couldn’t complain, though I wished I had more time to take a shower, etc. Time seemed to be of the essence. There never seemed to be enough of it.

Q: How long was your basic?

RF: We started in September at Toccoa and ended in November. Then we did a 118-mile march from Toccoa, GA to Atlanta. That was some kind of a new record. From there we took a train to Fort Benning. That is where jump training took place.

Q: How long was your jump school? Was it 3 weeks?

RF: Yes. It was normally 4 weeks, but because we were so thoroughly trained and so physically fit, they shortened it. I had never been in an airplane before. It was something we had so rigorously trained for and were looking at with such anticipation. They talked about the butterflies and I think I had the butterflies that day. I was the second man out of the plane and the first man ahead of me said he might hesitate and told me to push him. If they saw hesitation you were out. Everybody had to go boom, boom, boom. Anyway, I pushed him out. It happened a second time and I obliged, but I told him next time he would have to find somebody else to push him. I was not enjoying it. He washed out.

Q: Did you have anybody that did not complete the training?

RF: There were very few. I think I read that there were 3 or 4 in the entire regiment that didn’t make it. We were just so well trained and fit. I was the first enlisted man to jump for the U.S. Army.

Q: When did you go to England?

RF: It was almost exactly one year from the day I enlisted. We headed for Europe on the S.S. Samaria (sp?). It was a British ship.

Q: When you left, were you already assigned to the 101st?

RF: Yes, we were assigned about a month before we met at Camp Shanks to go overseas.

Q: How long did it take you get across?

RF: I think it was about ten days. Actually, here in the house I have all the letters I

wrote to my mother. I had them all loaded on a disc and made copies for my three children.

Q: When you arrived you were in England?

RF: I think we landed in Liverpool. From there we went to a little village called Aldbourne. That was where the 2nd Battalion was located. 3rd Battalion was in another town and 1st Battalion in another place. They were just small villages. The day we arrived we heard over the radio that "Axis Sally" was congratulating us on a fine trip over and knew exactly where we were. We couldn't believe it. Everything was secret, secret. We couldn't tell our folks when or where we were going and Axis Sally in Berlin knew exactly where we were in England.

Q: Did you get additional training while in England?

RF: It never stopped. It was ongoing and was day and night. You never knew what. We would train all day, have chow, and then they would tell us to load up, we are going on a long hike tonight. It never seemed to end. We were hoping for combat to end all this training. It was all so repetitious. I forget how many fox holes I would start digging and then have to pack up and move out.

Q: Did you have much contact with the local people?

RF: I personally did not. A lot of the fellows did, and some of them caused some grief and trouble. I was a stay-at-home guy. I didn't associate much with anybody.

Q: How often did you write letters home?

RF: As frequently as I possibly could. There was the girl that I married and naturally my mother was worried all the time so I had to write to her. There was another young lady that I wrote to quite frequently, and relatives. I did quite a lot of letter writing.

Q: How often did you receive letter back?

RF: Mail call was very important. This was something every soldier looks forward to, and maybe a package or a letter from home. It was a treat. You didn't want to hear any bad news. Even when I was in combat, everything I wrote was of a positive nature.

Q: What kinds of weapons were you trained on?

RF: I was trained on quite a number of weapons. I was trained on the Thompson submachine gun and when I landed in Holland I just had a carbine. At Bastogne I ended up in a bazooka platoon.

Q: When you were finally getting ready for the invasion did your level of training increase? Did you do any jumps while in England?

RF: Our letters were always censored and that was the only thing ever edited out of any letter I wrote. I wrote that we had done a night jump. That was several weeks before we went into the marshland areas. I guess they felt that would be a tipoff of what we were going to do. We went through several night jumps. The first night our officers jumped and some were injured. After that no officers jumped because they didn't want to lose any officers. They wanted to find out how practical it would be to jump at night and how the Air Force could drop us.

Q: Just before the invasion, were you present when General Eisenhower visited the camp?

RF: I don't think he visited our camp that time. There was an instance at one of the jumps we made to show the brass the jumps we do and what we were capable of. I almost ran into Churchill. He and Eisenhower were there but with so much brass you couldn't know who they were. I came running out from behind a hedgerow and there they were. I didn't stop to salute. I just kept on running by, doing what I was supposed to do.

Q: Can you describe getting ready for the actual jump itself?

RF: Of course, you never forget that. Loading onto the planes that night, everybody had as many hand grenades and ammunition as they wanted. We all were so weighted down that we actually had to be lifted into the plane. I was very fortunate. I was the 2nd man to leave the plane. It was something we had waited for and something we wanted to do. The time had come. We felt with all the information and the sand boxes, etc. we had all the information needed and it couldn't be anything but successful. I remember the flight over and the beautiful moonlit night. Captain Hester was going to jump just before me and then my best buddy. There were two isles we were supposed to fly between. It was Guernsey and another isle, and then there would be a light from a British ship shining straight up in the air to show we were on course. The Cherbourg peninsula sticks out like a thumb and we had flown around to the far side of it. Just as we hit French soil, a red light came on that told us to stand up and hook up. I found out later that our flight time over the peninsula was actually only 11 minutes. That was a pretty short time to find all of the drop zones that we were supposed to land at.

We were over French soil for a few minutes when I remember saying to the captain "boy oh boy, what a surprise". Being 2nd man I could see outside the plane and what was going on. We ran into cloud cover and it felt like we were trying to take evasive action. It was up and down and a wild ride there for a little bit. All of a sudden it looked like Christmas all over again. Tracer bullets and the anti-aircraft fire came up and all hell broke loose. I don't know if the pilots were trying to take evasive action or it was just the way the clouds were. I remember looking out the door and seeing a plane blow up in a ball of fire like you see on television. I remember thinking "dear Lord, get me out of this plane and give me a fighting chance". They never had the chance. That turned out to be our headquarters plane.

Eventually the light went to green and out we went. It was Captain Hester, myself, and Otto Sykes and to this day not one of us can remember who else was in that airplane. There were probably 18 of us in that airplane and we have never been able to find out who the others were. Captain Hester and the pilot were both supposed to have a list, but nothing ever materialized.

Q: Did you have a bag of equipment with you?

RF: I just had all of the necessities that I needed. I probably had more ammunition than I needed, but everybody had a little extra just in case. The three of us at the door

landed very close together. I landed in an apple orchard and I was still trying to get out of my chute when Otto Sacks came upon me. He landed about 50 feet away and he helped me get out of my chute. We had no idea where we were. There was small arms fire but not in our immediate area.

Q: Were you receiving fire as you were coming down in your chute?

RF: If I was, I never knew it. I was preparing to land and pretty soon the ground came up and hit me. I don't think we were more than 500 feet off the ground when we left the plane that night. It seemed like an awfully short drop. I remember looking up once at the chute and it looked good, and then I immediately hit the ground. Then I heard the fire and it got my attention.

Q: How long before you met up with your captain?

RF: There was quite a story concerning how we were supposed to assemble. The 2nd battalion was to land in a big field. On one side of the field would be D company, the next side E Company, then F Company, and the other side Headquarters Company. Each Company would have a different-colored light that they would place in a tree and everyone would assemble on their light. As the years have gone by, it has occurred to me that there is not a field in all of Normandy big enough to land a whole battalion. But that was the plan. Captain Hester had our light with him. Once he got organized he had someone climb a tree and hang the light. As it turned out, looking back later, we had one of the largest assemblies of paratroopers that landed on D-Day. We had over 180 people assembled that night. There were others that landed close to us. There were 82nd Airborne men and others that landed close to us.

There is a story, if I am allowed to digress. There was a Lt. Nixon, who you may recall from "Band of Brothers", and he was a drinker. He came to the light that Captain Hester had put up. He could speak French, so the Captain sent him off to a farm house to find out where we were, as nobody had any idea where we were. So off he went. He was gone for several hours when Captain Hester decided we couldn't stand around any longer. It was near day break and we had to move out.

Q: So far, you had not encountered any resistance?

RF: No resistance whatsoever. Where we were there were two paved roads that intersected. We had assembled on a dirt farm road that intersected both of them. The Captain said we could not wait any longer and we had to move out.

Just as we started to move, Nixon arrived on the scene and said we were going the wrong way and that we had to go the other way.

Q: After daylight broke, where did you go?

RF: It wasn't full daylight yet but dawn was there. We moved out in the given direction and made a left turn and then a right turn. Then there was an area that had been bombed extensively. There was nothing but bomb craters. The road was not even visible. I remember looking around and there wasn't a leaf on a tree. It was like a no man's land, not like something that I expected to see on D-Day in Normandy. This was

an area where there were supposed to be big coastal guns and our air forces had bombed it extensively. Years later French people told me that the ground shook 6-8 miles away.

That was the beginning of our day, and then we took a road down toward our objective. There were four causeways inland from the landing beaches. Our 2nd Battalion objective was causeway number two. When we got there our forces were arriving from the (Utah) beach in tanks and trucks. It appeared to be a wonderful, successful day. Later I learned what a horror Omaha Beach was compared to Utah Beach.

I was down at the beach later that day getting some communications equipment. I was communications sergeant at the time and we didn't have any radios or batteries. An officer said let's walk down to the beach, so we hiked to the beach. Only an occasional shell was coming in, but it was not pandemonium. Things were moving along rapidly. There were no radios or batteries so the officer said let's go back to the outfit. Tanks were coming in and we asked a tanker for a ride and he gave us a ride back to our outfit. I remember they let us off at a crossroads and there was a photographer taking pictures with an old hand crank camera.

It looked like a very successful day from all I could see. There was one instance earlier in the day. There was an "88" firing on a straight trajectory and somebody found out where it was. There was a machine gunner named Virgil in 2nd Battalion who said if we could give him cover fire he could get close enough to toss a grenade down the barrel. So, about a dozen of us started down the hedgerow, firing indiscriminately in all directions, but not low enough to hit Virgil. We finally located the gun and just fired and fired. Virgil ran up to the gun and dropped his grenade down the barrel and destroyed it, and we went back to the highway again. That gun had been firing in a straight trajectory into our area, not a higher trajectory toward the beach. The French awarded him some medal for what he did.

Q: Where did you go next?

RF: A little village of Saint Com du Mont (sp?) that was on one of the main lines up from the beach. Darkness started to come upon us and that is where we would spend the night. We had come in with 3 days of K-rations and we had gone through the boxes and thrown away what we didn't want. Each man was on his own as to what he ate, as they didn't have any food to feed us. We were set to do two hours on and two hours off, but it was more like one hour on and off. It was a pretty quiet night. There was some firing off in the distance, but not right where we were.

Then dawn broke and somebody in the higher echelon decided where we were going next. We started out down this highway alone and came to a village called Vierville. One or two of our Companies were out ahead of us and I was with Headquarters Company. Quite a firefight started to take place. They were firing from the other side of the road and we were firing back, but not really seeing anybody, and with the hedgerows they couldn't see us, as we were pretty much covered completely. It just kept growing and growing and getting worse as time went on. Eventually, two tanks arrived on the scene. They aimed their 75mm guns and 50cal. machine guns on top of the hedgerow and they

just poured it on. Firing those 75's and the 50 caliber machine guns at what, I don't know. I never saw an actual person. Finally, white flags went up and it was the German 6th Parachute regiment. That day we counted 125 dead and 125 captured. We lost one man. They had gotten themselves backed into a swamp and were cornered with no means to get away. We were up against their 6th Parachute Regiment three times while in Europe, and they were tough.

Q: How long were you in combat from D-Day?

RF: They promised us three days and out. So, it was 33 days later before we were completely relieved and went back to England for what we called bigger & better missions. The main thing was that after the beaches and causeways were secured we had to cut a line across the Cherbourg peninsula. The objective of the Utah Beach forces was to move toward Cherbourg as fast as possible to secure the deep-water port. Our job was to cut across the Cherbourg peninsula and cut it off and prevent German forces from entering the peninsula. We did that and then our next objective was a town called Carentan. After Carentan had been secured we set up a perimeter around Carentan. I wasn't up on the line where actual combat was taking place, but there had to be people who knew where we (Headquarters Company) were, because the shells never stopped coming in. A man next to me started mumbling for his mother, etc., and I had to call a medic in to take care of him. A minute or two after that a shell blew me right off the road. It hit the road, picked me up, and blew me into the ditch. I never got a scratch. During that same period that day I was lying on the ground and shells came in and I remember pulling grass from under my face to try to get myself just a little bit lower. I thought they would never run out of ammunition.

Q: This was German fire.

RF: Right, German fire. This was the point when our tanks appeared on the scene and changed the whole aspect of the day.

Q: What date was that?

RF: It was June 13th.

Q: When you went back to England, was it to your original base?

RF: We were back at our original base. I remember I couldn't find my barracks bag. Some of the men had stayed back at the base and I asked them where my barracks bag was. They said I died a glorious death and was a hero. My bag was in the dead pile. Somebody had come back with a story of what a great soldier I had been.

Q: So, you were there until your next action, which was Market Garden?

RF: Yes, that was when we went into Holland.

Q: Were you in training again?

RF: We were doing more training and had brought in a lot of replacements for the men we had lost. We had to get them onto the same mode of conditioning we were in and the same sort of thinking that we went through. I was in a communications platoon.

We laid out the radios and telephones, etc. I was radio chief. There was the message center.

One particular day, one of the radio operators from D Company said he was tired and asked me to get somebody else to handle the radio. I said to him that there was nobody else available right then, but if somebody shows up I'd send them out and give him some relief. He was killed that day. I made up my mind that day that I would never send somebody out to do something unless I went with them. So, when we returned to England I went into the Orderly Room and talked to the officer in charge. He said they were forming something new, a Bazooka platoon. I told him I would like to get into it. I said I would take a reduced rank to do it, but he said they needed sergeants, so I kept my rating. The bazooka platoon was not part of the Table of Organization. It was a bastard platoon that they found to be very necessary, because they found in Normandy that the bazooka was a necessary thing that we originally did not have.

Q: How many in a bazooka platoon?

RF: There were three men to a gun. Two men would carry the ammunition and one would carry the gun. One would hold the gun and fire it, one would load it and one would handle the ammunition. There were two guns to each squad. We had about 45 men in the platoon.

Q: What did you think of the Bazooka?

RF: It was a marvelous weapon. Looking back, it wasn't when compared to what we have today. It was nothing more than a stove pipe really, but it did an awful lot of good. They became a necessity after Normandy. It was destructive.

Q: Did you get any time off between Normandy and your next jump?

RF: Once we were back in England, got our barracks bags and got settled in, we had a week off. I really had no place to go and no anxiety to go anyplace. Of course, some of the fellas couldn't wait to go out and tear the town apart. The Colonel came through every barracks and told every man they were going to get dressed and get their official dress (uniform) on and you are going out. He didn't want anybody hanging around the barracks thinking about what just took place. He said to go out and raise hell. So, that is what most of us did.

Q: What about you?

RF: I went out. I don't know if I raised hell or not. I went into London. I was dressed in official garb and it was hot. I had taken my tie off and put it in my pocket and an MP grabbed me and told me I was out of uniform. I said I have my tie in my pocket and will put it on. He said that was not going to make it and that he had to take me in. I asked him if he was going to go home to his mother and tell her that he fought in the war and arrested me for not wearing a tie? So, I had to go in and was facing a court martial for not wearing a tie. Anyway, the report went back to Battalion and the officer just tore it up. I guess the MP's were not taking any lip from the airborne and were letting me know who the boss was.

Q: So, you were preparing for the next jump?

RF: We went to an airfield and were ready to make a jump at a place called Pontchartrain in France. It was right before they were going to take Paris. We were all primed and knew exactly what we had to do, when we got the word that Patton was going forward like crazy, so they scrubbed the mission. Then we were told about Operation Market Garden and that there would be no backing off. This one was for sure.

It was a daylight jump and we could see the bridge that we were to hit as soon as we hit the ground. Cars and trucks and tanks were lined up for miles it seemed. We thought “oh boy” we were going to get lots of support quickly, or so it seemed. It was bright sunshine and looked like a parade ground jump. As far as the eye could see there were parachutes coming in from all directions. A lot of the new recruits were taking in their chutes and trying to pack their reserve chute into their bags. I’m yelling at them telling them this is no parade ground!

There was a small bridge in a place called Zan and our first objective was to secure that bridge. They had landed us several miles from the bridge. I thought that was a mistake. They should have landed us at the bridge so we could have grabbed it then and there. But, the word went out and then they cried “bazookas up front!” It seemed we were always getting that word as time went on. Not just that day, but as time went on for weeks, someone was always yelling “bazookas up front”. Somebody needed a bazooka for some good reason. Anyway, we hurried through the rest of the line and got down to this village. We heard a bazooka go off out ahead of us, one of the other squads, and there was an “88” right in the middle of the road in this little village. One of our guys got down on his knee, aimed the gun, and put that gun out of commission. It was a good thing, because they had that thing lined up and it was going to give us a lot of trouble. I was less than a football field away when they blew the bridge up. Pieces of concrete were flying all around us.

That was the day when I got hit with a ricochet bullet, which knocked me down. I told the fellas to keep going, that I’d be alright. Finally, I got up looking for blood. I didn’t find any holes. Finally, I found a hole in my jacket and the bullet had stayed in my clothing. I still have that thing. It actually knocked me down. I was black and blue from my crotch down to my knee.

An officer ran up to the bridge and there were a couple Germans near the bridge who captured him. They were there when the bridge blew up, so I expect they were killed. That held up the whole movement on the highway for at least 24 hours. The bridge unit had to come in and build a bridge over the canal.

I read in one of these books, “Band of Brothers”, where Captain Winters said he didn’t understand why they didn’t land us closer to that bridge so we could secure it. That was something that always went through my mind. They dropped the British seven miles from the bridge they were supposed to secure, the “bridge to far” at Arnhem. It was an absolute disaster.

Q: Did you see any British tankers? There was a concern about them not moving fast enough. We heard comments from 82nd veterans who were angry about the British tankers stopping to have tea on the back of their tanks.

RF: Well, they didn't move as General Patton would have. I think we would have made this a success if we had American tanks and American generals running this thing. I remember one instance when we were close to a week into the operation. One night, near a little town of Veghel the Germans had broken through the highway. We had come down from the village of Uden toward Veghel. It was a rainy, misty evening and I got caught in the middle of a field. The fields in Holland are very flat. I ended up lying in a furrow with bullets flying over my head. I was thinking 'oh boy, oh boy' I didn't dare move. And I'm thinking the craziest thing, that if I survive this and get home, I am going to drink all of the Tom Collins that they can put in front of me. Once the firing stopped, there was a British tank close by, against some trees in a hedgerow. Across the field, about two football fields away a German tank came out of a hedgerow. I could see it and they could see it. I told the British tanker: "there he is, you better get him!" He says he has to get orders from his commander before he can fire. By the time he got orders, the German tanker saw them and fired, hitting the British tank and it went up. I just couldn't believe that these men had something to shoot at and had to get orders to fire.

There was also another instance in a small town. We had worked our way into it about noontime and it was later in the evening, it hadn't gotten dark yet. They (British) had been up ahead of us and were passing back through us with the intention of doing it again tomorrow. They retreated. Americans would never have done that. They would have held that town and stayed there, then moved on from there. But, it was their way of operating.

I blame the British for the unsuccessful mission. The whole plan was a mistake. That was my opinion.

Q: How long were you in combat at that time?

RF: Well, they promised us one week. One week and we would be out of Holland, and it was 72 days later when we were finally relieved. We came back and were going to have a big football game and eat. While we were in Holland, Thanksgiving Day passed. I remember writing a letter to my Mom asking her to send me some stuffing from their turkey. I don't remember ever getting it.

Q: After your 72 days, where did you go?

RF: I can't remember the exact name of the town, but the Germans had occupied it and it had been a French army camp of some sort. There were some decent buildings there and we were able to get a decent bunk. We had a football game planned for Christmas and it was going to be a big time. A lot of us had furloughs to go to Paris. Everybody thought the war was close to an end and this was our last shot at being in combat. That was when we got orders three or four o'clock in the morning to pack up, get something to eat and grab our gun. We didn't know where we were going. We loaded into trucks, but they were not Army trucks. They were big long trucks that were maybe

cattle trucks of some sort. They were open bodied with no roof. We were packed in there like sardines. Off we went. We traveled all day and when it got dark they put their lights on. That was the first time I'd seen them use lights. That was when we ended up at Bastogne.

Q: Did you have any winter gear at all?

RF: Not that I can remember. I didn't have an overcoat. I had a regular jacket. By then they had stopped the Airborne from wearing jump pants and jump jackets. We dressed the same as the rest of the infantry. They didn't want us to appear different from the others. I did have a sleeping bag and two blankets.

Q: Did you have gloves?

RF: I don't remember ever having gloves. I don't remember ever being issued gloves, except in basic training they used to give us gloves when we jumped. We had no winter boots, just our regular shoes.

Q: OK, tell us about Bastogne.

RF: Bastogne was unbelievable. It is hard for me to this day to even imagine it for myself. We lived out in the ground. I never got into a house, except when I got a scratch and went back to an aid station, where they put a band aid on it and sent me back to the line again. We lived in the ground around the perimeter of Bastogne. We would try to make the holes just a little deeper to be more comfortable. Food became very scarce. It was the only time in my life that I thought I was starving. I can't remember ever feeling hungry since. I remember scratching in the snow, looking for any morsel from a k-ration that somebody might have dropped. The cold was unbelievable. Somebody found thousands of burlap sacks and brought them up and we wrapped them around our feet. I wrapped two sacks around each foot. I think they made the difference, as I never ended up getting trench foot. Some of the men did. You couldn't take your shoes or boots off at night because you never knew who was coming through the line. The sleeping bag I had was equal to two blankets. You couldn't slide into it with your shoes or boots on because it would have been impossible to get out of it if the enemy came through. What we did was cut the bottom out, cut slits in the sides for our arms, and we wore them.

Q: Did you ever see any Germans in white parkas?

RF: One night, I don't know if we were seeing mirages, but if they wanted to infiltrate they were not going to find anything. I think I saw a patrol one night that may have been trying to find where our main line was.

Q: You talked about how you improvised to keep your feet warm. How did you keep your hands warm?

RF: That is hard to remember. I don't even remember my hands getting cold. Maybe we held them between our legs like when you do out hunting. How we survived in that weather is a miracle, as long as we were there. All that time cold weather and I never heard of anything other than some cases of trench foot.

Q: How about when the tanks finally broke through your lines?

RF: Well, we didn't see them early on. We were on the far perimeter of Bastogne. We were looking down on a little village called Foy and another called Noville. It was rolling hills that we were looking out on. We heard that our tanks had broken through and thought we were going to be fine. We figured we would leave and go back to camp for some rest. That was when someone at the high echelon decided we were going on the attack. We pushed forward to take the villages of Foy and Noville. Then there was a place called Longchamps that had to be taken. It was very disappointing. Morale at that point was falling apart because we'd had it. We'd been in harm's way for so long in that miserable winter, unable to get away, and without the kind of equipment that you really need, not getting properly fed. It was time to relieve us. But here they got aggressive and put us on the offensive. It was only about a week or so.

Q: So, how many days of combat did you see in the Bastogne campaign?

RF: Around 33 days is the number I have always used. Then they told us that the 7th Army had bad morale. They thought if they sent the 101st down to where the 7th Army was, we could boost their morale. Here we were, bedraggled and beaten and tired and they thought sending us down there would boost their morale. The first night out of Bastogne we stopped at a little village and the people were told that they could occupy a small part of their houses and we would occupy the rest of it. At the house that I stayed in, one of our boys could speak French and he said they were petrified. We were the most horrible looking creatures they had ever seen. I could imagine what we looked like after more than 30 days out there in the woods. But we had a chance that night to shave and clean up and the next day they were surprised to see a bunch of young men. We didn't look so horrible anymore.

Q: Were you issued new uniforms?

RF: No, we were not issued anything new until we got down to southern France. They had issued us shoe packs, but told us not to wear them. It never became necessary to wear them until they took them back.

Q: What was your impression of Maxwell Taylor?

RF: I had no real opinion of him. We always thought he was a man looking for bigger and better missions. He was a brilliant man. He spoke French fluently. I remember him addressing the people of a village after we had secured it. He spoke to the people fluently. Someone there must have been in communication with the Germans, because soon after he started to speak the shells started coming in and that was the end of his speech. He was brilliant but back then we thought he was looking for another star.

Q: Did you get any R&R in France?

RF: Actually, no. They were sending men to Paris after we came back from Holland, but they cut that off as soon as the breakthrough came in the Battle of the Bulge. I never got any free time. At some point they drew names from a hat and I was one of two names that came out and I got a trip to southern France. We flew down and had a week at Nice. It was positively glorious. We ate well and stayed in a big hotel. Life couldn't

have been more pleasant. We laid on the beach for a week and then flew back to be with the troops again. By then there was not a lot of shooting going on, not like it had been. The war was still going on, but we thought we had been through the worst of it.

Q: What were your impressions when you got up to the Eagle's Nest?

RF: Yes, I actually saw Hitler's house. I didn't get into it. There were men guarding the house so people wouldn't go in and tear it apart or whatever. I went back in 1986 and they had completely bulldozed it and trucked it out of there. They had dug a hole and buried it. There was a race to get to Berchtesgaden and there was a decision at high command that the 101st should get there first, and we did. It was a beautiful little town.

Q: How long were you in Europe before you were sent home?

RF: Well, I didn't have quite enough points. I found out a year later when I got home that a Purple Heart had arrived. I guess somebody in records decided I had a Purple Heart coming. It was for Bastogne, but I only had my feelings hurt. If I had the points for that Purple Heart I would have been sent home earlier. I had moaned and bitched about not going home.

Somebody in our regiment had found a Herman Goering car and a couple Hitler cars. There was a final War Bond drive going on. I was selected as one of the men to come home with the cars and we traveled through the South, the Southwest and out to Denver, then back again, stopping at all of the towns and villages along the way. I had a little book with me to count the crowds. I was told to always count the crowds and keep records of that. It was over 300,000 people that we saw on this final bond drive. We didn't come home heroes but we came to accept it, and all of our expenses were paid. Basically, we were being eased out of the service.

Q: Do you know what happened to those cars?

RF: No, I really don't know what happened. I have pictures of them. One was a little sports car convertible. It was a beautiful Mercedes. The horn played a special tune. I rode in a big touring car. There was a debate as to which was Hitler's and which was Goering's car.

Q: When were you discharged?

RF: I think it was December 20th, just before Christmas, 1945. As the old expression went: "home alive in '45". There is a story about our coming home. There we were on that bond drive. There were about 7 or 8 of us. Our orders read "first available transportation other than air". We were up at Camp Lucky Strike and a ship was ready to sail. They found room for us and we were the last ones to get aboard the ship. We landed at Newport News and a band was there on the pier playing "Sentimental Journey", and today that song brings tears to my eyes every time I hear it. There is nothing more wonderful than coming home. So, being the last ones to board the ship, we were going to be the first ones off the ship. I don't know what Division it was aboard the ship. When we 7 or 8 bond drive guys left the ship, the whole ship booed us. We were not part of their organization, so why were we getting off the ship first? The band playing Sentimental Journey and we are being booed. What a homecoming!

Q: How do you think your time in the service had an effect on your life?

RF: I didn't think it changed me. We didn't even talk about it until the 50th Anniversary thing came up. I was one of the group that was going to make the 50th anniversary jump. The media went crazy and everywhere you went they were chasing you around. Everybody wanted your autograph, they wanted your story. That was when, I guess you could say, I came out of the closet. It wasn't that I had been holding anything back. Nobody was asking me about it. My children didn't ask me any questions. I just didn't talk much about my time in the service.

Q: How many of you made the 50th anniversary jump?

RF: Forty of us. The criteria for making that jump was that you had to have been a combat jumper. Of the two men that put that together, the first jump for one of them was in Holland and the other one had jumped in southern France. It was called the "Return to Normandy" group. Of the forty, there were nineteen of us that actually did their jump there. It was a wonderful affair. The young children, wherever we went, spoke in perfect English: "Thank You". That was an emotional trip for me. We had left so many men behind. It was not as joyous as I had hoped.

Q: What kind of plane did you jump out of?

RF: C-47. Only the men that had made the Normandy jump got to jump from the C-47.

Q: What impact do you think the notoriety of "Band of Brothers" had on this decision?

RF: It's hard for me to put it all together. I think its great and I think it's overdone. I just feel sorry for fellas in other divisions and men that fought in terrible conditions and combat and get absolutely no recognition whatsoever. You wouldn't even know if they had a name, or what Regiment, or what Division they were part of. There is an awful lot of Hollywood in the Band of Brothers picture. I think the book was written as factual as any I have read. There is no question that E Company stood up above the rest of the Division. They were a great group and I think this was in spite of their Captain, who was one miserable SOB.

(RF shows photos to camera and his bronzed jump boots, etc.)