Charles Vincent Hartman
Veteran

No names given
Interviewer

Rome Free Academy
Rome, NY
November 24, 2005

Interviewer: Mr. Hartman, could you please say your name, rank, and date of entrance into the armed services, just for record?
CVH: It's Charles Vincent Hartman. The highest rank I received was Technician Fourth Class. I entered the service in September of 1943.

Interviewer: Just out of curiosity's sake, where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor?
CVH: When I heard about Pearl Harbor, I can't remember just where I was, but I remember being shocked. I just couldn't believe what had happened and how it had happened. Of course, since then, I've heard the whole story and seen the pictures, and it was terrible, absolutely terrible.

2nd Interviewer: When you joined the armed services, did you enlist or were you drafted?
CVH: I was enlisted. When I was enlisted, Mrs. Hartman and I were expecting our first child. Actually, I was in the service for two years, two months, and two days. Nineteen months of that was spent overseas. Our son was eighteen months old before I first saw him. I was in England before D-Day when I received the telegram saying that I was a father.

Interviewer: How did you feel when you got this telegram?
CVH: Well, I was very excited because we were waiting for D-Day. That particular day, I went with our Jeep driver down to pick up the mail for our company. Of course, when we got the mail, we were in the Jeep, and we went through the mail to find if there was anything for the jeep driver or anything for me before we even went back to the company. That's when I found the telegram. [smiles]

2nd Interviewer: Did you get to see any pictures of him or anything?
CVH: No, I never received any pictures, but my wife used to write to me regularly. Of course, I wrote back. It seemed like such a long, long time before I would ever be able to get back, but I managed after a while.

Interviewer: Did any of your friends or relatives enlist alongside you?
CVH: No. I have a picture of our unit when we were enlisted. [searches through his momentos] I have quite a few pictures here, but I'll have to see if I can find them. I think it would be in this booklet here. That was the group when we enlisted. [shows photograph to interviewer]

2nd Interviewer: Did you know any of these people?
CVH: Yes. I knew quite a few of them. In fact, the two bright boys were twins. I knew several of the other folks also, but we never stayed together after we were enlisted. We all separated. I never saw them in the service again.

2nd Interviewer: Where did you go for training?
CVH: When we were enlisted, I went to Camp Upton on Long Island. I was there until the petroleum companies were formed. When the petroleum companies were formed, I went down to Camp Claiborne in Louisiana, and that's where we had our training. Our units were different from the regular Army units because they were a group of just companies. We weren't attached to any Army or battalion or regiment or anything like that. Each company was independent of all the others. We had four platoons in each company, plus our headquarters. We did our training down at Camp Claiborne during bad weather time. Then from Camp Claiborne, we were transported over to England. We had training down there, and the weather conditions were terrible because it was rainy and wet. We just had pup tents out in the field. Down there they had wild pigs. They were running all over. We came back and pigs had gone through the tents and their footmarks were all over everything. But our head cook was pretty smart. He dug a big ditch, a big hole in the ground, put bait in there, and trapped one of the pigs. It got down there. We had fresh pork to eat for a while. But storms were bad, and there was a river that probably was maybe about eight or ten feet down. If you were at the bank, you could look down and see the water. The storms came and you saw the water rise. When it reached just about to the banks, we were told to leave and go up to higher grounds and leave our equipment. We went to higher ground. During the storm, one of the limbs fell on our lieutenant's tent and broke his leg. He was unable to leave with us when we went over to England, but he joined us later.

Interviewer: What did your training consist of?
CVH: All kinds of engineering work for building the road through the swamp. The way that it was done was, there was a cable on the front of the trucks. The cable was pulled out, fastened onto a tree, and then it winched the truck through. We laid logs in front of it. They put up gin poles and different construction that lifted heavy objects. We also had to march. I took a course in surveying. We had all kinds of different training activities.

Interviewer: What is your most vivid memory of your time in the service?
CVH: My most vivid memory was Christmas Day, December 25th, 1944. In the city of Visé [Belgium] It didn't have to do with direct military activities.

Interviewer: Could you please describe the events of that day?
CVH: Yes. At that time, there were children in very bad condition because of the unmanned aircraft that the Germans were sending over. The city was badly damaged, and the children were scared. I was in one house. The siren went off warning the approach of what we called the buzz bombs, the German V-1 planes. Two little children started crying and whimpering and scrambled right under the bed, and they cried and whimpered all the time. We heard a plane, we heard the sounds and the big explosion. And then the all-clear sounded and the children came out. That was one example. Would you like another example?

Interviewer: Sure.
CVH: The other example was in a house. They were row houses. They were all fastened together, but each one was individual. There could have been about twelve or fourteen. I was in the house there. The sirens sounded and the children ran for the cellar door. Their parents followed them and told me to come with them. We went down to the cellar and I was surprised. It wasn't a very large room, but there was a rug on the floor and a table there. They had electric lights, but on the table, there were candles. There were some chairs. Then I noticed at each end of the room there was a blanket just hanging, covering part of the wall. I asked what that was for, and they went over and they pulled one of them aside and showed me they had knocked a hole through the wall. The wall went right into the cellar of their neighbors. That was the way it was right down the whole row. The neighbor’s cellar had a cover over their side of the wall. They did that because they felt that if anything happened, they couldn't get out. They could crawl through from room to room, house to house to house, to possibly make it to the next step. Those were the conditions that people were in.

Interviewer: What did you decide to do for the children of Visé?

CVH: We felt sorry for them, so we went to a church. It was a Catholic church with a priest there. We told the priest we would like to invite ten little children to share our Christmas dinner. One of the fellows went out, found an evergreen tree and cut it. Somebody else went down to the city of Liège, which is fairly near Visé, and found some Christmas decorations. So we had a Christmas tree decorated. Then we took all of our goodies from our packages from home and put them all in a big pile. Then we divided them up into ten packages, so each child had a package. When Christmas Day came, the children came in and stepped inside of the door and they were fascinated. They saw the tree and the presents, but they never touched a single thing. But after dinner, we gave each one of them a package. They went outside lined up, and one of the fellows took snapshots. I still have a set of the snapshots that I can show you. I had forgotten about that. I mailed the pictures home to my wife, and put little notes on the back. Shall I go on after the war?

Interviewer: Sure.
CVH: After the war, I took the pictures, looked at them and wondered whatever happened to these little children. In the year 2000, I was talking to Carl Eilenberg. He and his wife Susan Eilenberg owned the *Rome Observer* [*Newspaper*]. That's a paper that was put out in Rome, New York, once a week. Mr. Eilenberg said, I'd like to write a little article in the paper. I said, All right. He put an article in the paper and showed the picture of these children. As I looked at the children, I thought, I wondered if anybody over in Visé would remember that. This was fifty six years later. I wrote a letter to the burgomaster and sent a copy of the article from the *Rome Observer* and asked if anybody over there might have remembered that. I didn't think I would ever hear anything, and I was surprised when I received a letter from the burgomaster. I have a copy of the letter here. I can show you. He and his secretary went to work. They put an article in the paper, and they had some volunteers help locate them. In the picture, there were eight girls in one boy. There was another boy that was going to come, but he was sick, so we sent his packages of goodies to his home for him. But the man in the picture, he was a boy then. Now all of those nine are in their early sixties, because they were around four, five or six at the time in 1944. He located his sister. His sister was the last one in the row of children. He happened to recognize her. Then from there, they kept following and checking. They located all nine of these former children. They all got together. They all lined up in the very same place. The very same order, and they sent me all their names and addresses, and I have that. I have pictures of the house, the present-day pictures where it was taken.

As far as the buzz bombs go, in the house picture I'll show you. I was looking out the window. I heard one of those coming, and when I looked out the window, I saw it headed exactly for the house, and I just froze. Where we were staying was on the side of the Meuse River, and just as it was coming, it banked, turned. The minute it turned, I came to, and I jumped under a doorframe. Because that's the safest place if the roof is coming down. It exploded on the other side of the river and blew in the window right where I was standing. I also have a picture of that particular explosion, which is in a booklet that was sent to me. It documented that.

Interviewer: I'm sorry, they're just going to fix your mic.
2nd Interviewer: Make sure that we scan these later.
CVH: On the back [of the photograph] are notes that I sent home to my wife.

Interviewer: Did any of these children remember each other? Did they remember the event vividly?
CVH: They had not been together in fifty six years. But since then, they have sent letters and telegrams, and they call. Now, it's interesting with some of the letters. One of the girls said that she remembered the dinner; they had beetroot. Now, evidently, our cook must have served beets, and she remembered beetroot. Another one wrote and said that she'd never seen a Christmas tree before. Now you've got to remember that they were under the German occupation for their full years. With the letter that I received that I have here, he told the conditions the children were in. That's a picture of the children. [shows photograph to interviewers] This is a picture of the two groups. They numbered them so that when they talk to me or tell me, they'll say so-and-so. I just received a letter, [from child] number two, Adamond Richel [?]. Her husband just passed away. These are pictures of them today. This is number two, and that's her husband. On the back, they still put the numbers, so that I know. [shows photographs to interviewers] There's a picture of another one. There were nine. Those are the nine that are in the picture there.

Interviewer: Do they keep in touch with each other now, or just with you?
CVH: Oh, yes. Walter LeRoy [?] is the man. Has a get-together, and invites the other members of the group plus their spouses to his home. These were the snapshots taken at his home when he had them all together. And they keep in touch with each other. These are some of the pictures of the children that were there, but they have been brought up to date. What's surprising is the expression on their faces, especially those. [shows photographs to interviewers] You can really see them. That's a colored picture of them together, which is the same as black and white. These are pictures that were taken of me in Brussels on the canal. That was in November 1944. I had that taken in Brussels and

sent home to my wife because her birthday was in November. [flips through photo album] That's my brother and myself. [shows photographs to interviewers] That was my wife taken February of 1944, and I was home on a short leave. Then I was on the boat for England, and our son was born in May. That was taken when we were married. This was taken just a couple of years ago. That's a color picture of the children as they were in the year 2000. These are pictures of the house that I was telling you. That's where the pictures were taken. This was the attic window I was looking out of when the buzz bomb came. That was the house. This happens to be the picture of the backyard of Mr. Walter LeRoy. He asked me to send him a flag and told me the size. I sent him an American flag and he put that up on his flagpole in his backyard. This is a picture of him and his sister when they were little. That's his sister and him. His father was killed disarming a bomb, and his mother told him that he had to be the father of the house, and she dressed him in a soldier's uniform [unclear] 21.23. These are pictures of other families over there that I kept in touch with for years afterwards.

Interviewer: Could you describe your first combat experience for us?
CVH: I was not in combat, really. We were not a combat unit, but we followed the front lines in many places. When we were close enough, we heard small arms fire. In other places, the big guns were shooting the projectiles over us. You heard them whistle when they went over. In one place, shortly after the invasion, we were putting a pipeline along a railroad track. There was a town further down, and we were supposed to have the pipeline laid to the town by night. All of a sudden, an Army vehicle came racing up and slammed on the brakes. This officer got out and said, who's in charge of this group? Our sergeant said, I am, sir. Just proud as he could be. The officer said, what are they doing here? He said, we've got to lay the line up to that town by night. He said, what are you talking about? That isn't even taken yet. Get these men out of here and get them out fast. It was two days later before we got back to continue. While we were there, we heard the projectiles whistling over our heads.

Interviewer: Did you receive any injuries during your service time?
CVH: Yes, I received an injury to my knee. It was during one of our constructions. We put up storage tanks to store gasoline in and to pass them on, and I injured my knee. Consequently, I'm a disabled veteran from the war, and I have been. I've had two operations on my knee, and I have considerable trouble with it now. But I am taking care of it by regular appointments at the Veterans Clinic here in Rome.

Interviewer: How did the knee injury occur?

CVH: During the construction of the tank, and I can't remember exactly how, but I was laid up for a while.

2nd Interviewer: Where did they take you when your knee was injured?
CVH: There was a hospital, [I'm] not sure just where it was located. The hospital had been badly damaged because they had blankets covering the broken windows and so forth. The orthopedic surgeon treated me and said to be sure to report it when I was discharged. He said he could send me back to the States because I had enough points. You got so many points depending on the situation with the front and the campaigns. He could have sent me back to the States. But he suggested that I stay with the unit, because I would probably get back to the States sooner than if I asked to be sent back. Because I could have ended up back in Paris and had to wait for transportation. So I stayed with our unit.

Interviewer: So you received points?
CVH: There were so many points. We landed nine days after D-Day at Omaha Beach. Being within that framework of the D-Day landings, you got so many points. Being close to the front and other campaigns, you got so many points. When you got so many points, you qualified for returning to the States.

Interviewer: Like reward points, almost?
CVH: Well, yes, I think you could consider them that, qualifying points.

2nd Interviewer: Could you describe a typical day that you went through as a soldier?
CVH: Yes, I can tell you. In Visé, we were constructing a tank in Holland, which was not too far from there. We left in the morning and went up to Holland. It was cold, very cold. The tanks we put up were different sizes. They were in pieces. The bottom would remind you of a big pie with these sections. They all overlapped with a gasket in between, fastened together with nuts and bolts. The sides were four by eight sizes, and were three high, so they were twenty four feet high. They circled around the outside. In the biggest tank, there were thirty two thousand nuts and bolts that went through to hold it together. In Holland, it was so cold that we had two first aid people with us. They built a fire. From the fire, we had canned rations for our lunch. We opened the tops so they wouldn't explode and set them around the edge of the fire so they were hot. Then we took the nuts and bolts and put them in metal cans, and set them near the fire. So they were warm enough that when we put them through, our hands and fingers wouldn't freeze. Then at night, we returned back to Visé.

2nd Interviewer: You mentioned the canned portions. What kind of canned foods would you eat?
CVH: They were what they called…I forgot the name of them. One can was supposed to be a meal in itself. The canned rations, they called them. I think you could compare them to maybe like a can of corned beef hash that you open nowadays, only it was a meal.

2nd Interviewer: You received one for breakfast, lunch, and dinner?
CVH: Yes, except we ate breakfast in Visé at the place where we were living. Then at night, we came back and our cook had dinner for us at that place. So we used those at noontime. It's interesting that you say that, because years after the war ended, our captain was in charge of our company. He kept in touch with us. This is the last one I got from him. Merry Christmas, 1964. [shows a letter to the interviewer] Now, the war ended in 1945, so every year we exchanged Christmas cards. He did that with all of these people, all of these members. These are members that he kept in touch with all those years. If you notice, he sent a letter and said, in a number of these places, do you remember? [reads from the letter] The V-1s and V-2s were unmanned German craft. He said, at Antwerp and Boom. Boom is a village near Antwerp, Belgium. The same at Liège and Visé. That was a key point. Then he mentioned the wild boar that our cook bivouacked at [unclear] 29.33. [That was] when he dug the hole there. These are things in 1964 that he's passing on. He says, The thousand pound barrel tank that we built on top of the column at Hitler's victory celebration arena at Nuremberg. That was where we were when the war ended. We put one of these tanks way up on top. He had the arena just partially constructed at that time. We had the tank then. [continues reading] The way the British couldn't build those tanks, and we helped them. The chili we had for a solid week when we first moved to Ghent in Belgium. That was an English sector and the cook couldn't find a place to draw rations from. So we had chili for a week. The ones I've checked are things that I remembered. All the canal crossings we had to make with a pipeline in Belgium. [puts letter down] Those were things that he kept in touch with us all those years.

Besides Visé and the upstate story, there were three other places that were quite interesting. One of them was Saint-Desire in France. At that time, we were in pup tents alongside a canal about a mile outside of the town of Saint-Desire. We received rations once a week. With the rations, we each got five candy bars. I went out by the roadway, and the first vehicle that came by that had children in, I gave them my candy bars. This one horse and buggy came by that had two little girls. I have pictures of them. They invited me to come down to the town to visit them. I went down, and he had been a pharmacist. The Germans came in, and took all of his supplies, even his desk and his furniture. He had his pharmacy in his home. They cleaned it right out. Their name was

André Jacquot, J-A-C-Q-U-O-T. He and his wife took things out before the Germans got there and buried all their valuables out in the backyard. And when I was there, he went out one time and came in with a bottle of wine. He dug it up; it was all covered with dirt. He said that they had put all of their securities out there. I kept in touch with them for a number of years. I have a picture here that I'll show you of the two little girls. Then the last letter I got said they were moving to Paris, and I never heard another word. The only thing I can think is that they must have lost my address.

There's another town called Givry on the west side of Belgium. That's like a country town, maybe about the size of Westernville [NY] or a little smaller. Mrs. Jacquot in Saint Desire knew English at one time, but she had forgotten most of it. I learned French at the Rome Free Academy when I went to school there, but I had forgotten it. The two of us got together and I refreshed her English, and she refreshed my French. I ended up being the French interpreter for our platoon. I went to Givry ahead of the rest of our platoon. It was very interesting because they had a school there. It was two stories high, and as I remember, I think it was brick, like a square building. We took over the second floor for our kitchen. As I went up the outside stairs, there was a window showing into the room, and it was a room maybe as long as this, a little wider. In the very center of the room was a semicircle of children sitting in chairs. A pot-bellied stove was in front of them. The stovepipe went up and out through the side, out through the outside wall. In front of them was a nun who was a teacher. As I looked around the room, there wasn't any furniture in the room. These children huddled around that stove. But when you looked at them, they had on their winter boots, winter coats, hats and mittens. They were that dedicated. The parents wanted them to have the education. They said that the Germans closed the school down and removed all the furniture.

Then I went to a farmhouse there, and the children were playing. It was cold. There was no snow on the ground, but they had a haystack outside, probably about as high as this room. They had a ladder up, and the children climbed up the ladder and slid down the other side like we do in the winter on the snow banks. That was what they were doing for fun. The mother called them in and had hot chocolate for them.

Then I also visited a windmill for grinding grain. They actually used it. The man that ran it took us up. There was a platform around the outside. He started it up. The thing shook and I thought it was going to fall over. I couldn't wait to get down. But they used that. The farmers brought their grain and they ground the grain into flour for them. Then, in the winter, it was cold, so they took trees___

Interview interrupted.

2nd Interviewer: We're ready.
CVH: In Givry, the trees along the roadway were assigned one tree to a family, another tree to another family, So all the families had trees assigned to them. Then all the men went out, cut the trees, and stacked them up in a group. Then each family took the wood for heating their place. They didn't heat the whole house. I was a French interpreter, and I went there ahead of time to make arrangements so we could have two of our men stay in each individual home. This was an English sector, and there weren't any other Americans around. I decided to stay with the town constable. The town constable, at night, when it started getting dark, checked all over the town to make sure that there weren't lights showing; complete blackout. Then right before he went to bed at night, he rechecked again, because they wanted to have a complete blackout. They heated just their one kitchen room. They had one stove. The rest of the house was closed off. When I got there, the jeep driver and myself took enough rations. It was a week before the rest of our platoon got there. We asked her if she would cook the meals for us. She said yes, We had enough rations so we shared it with her and her husband. The first night we were there, he asked if we liked rabbit. We said, yes, we like rabbits. I don't remember if I ever had any, but I figured I'd like a rabbit. He got up and went out the door. About twenty minutes later, he came back holding up a skinned rabbit for his wife to cook. It was the last rabbit they had, but they wanted to share it with us. When I went upstairs, my room had a bed. It had two feather mattresses in it. I had been sleeping on the ground under a pup tent. In one house we stayed, we slept on the floor. It was so cold that when one of the fellows spilled some water, and before he got something to wipe it up with, it was frozen solid. It was ice. Here I went up, and there were two feather mattresses. I said [to him], I can't sleep there, but I'll sleep on the floor. [laughs] [He said] oh, no. [It was] Just pure luxury, after all those months, to have a feather mattress to sleep on. The town constable where I stayed, his name was Julian DeWilde, and their son had been captured by the Germans. But they said I reminded them so much of their son that I had to call them Mama Liddy and Papa Jules. Well, we kept in touch for a number of years, and Papa Jules finally passed away. They said their son was liberated, freed. He was completely broken. He was sick, but he recovered. He moved to Paris. When his father died, he had his mother move to Paris with him. Then we received a letter that said that she passed away.

Then there's one other place, Brussels, Belgium. In Brussels it was the same situation. Brussels was an English sector. We were the only Americans there, our platoon, at that time. After we worked, we were doing some reconstructing of a petroleum place

alongside a canal. We were staying, just our platoon, in a boathouse. It was a private boathouse club. They kept their boats there and these families were members. The young people heard that we were there, so the first Saturday they all came flocking down. I became acquainted with one of the families. Their name was DeRidder. H. Julian DeRidder was the father. He was an architect. He designed the Belgium building for the World's Fair when it was held in Italy. I think it was 1928. He was commissioned to do that by King Leopold II. I became acquainted with him, and we kept in touch up to the 1960s, so it had been twenty years anyway. I have all kinds of pictures of that, of the family and the children. They had young people. It was like a family. I went down there in the evening. I caught two trolleys. Because our officer said we could go anywhere we wanted to, we didn't need passes, but we had to be in condition to go to work at eight o'clock in the morning. In the evening, I took trolleys and went down to DeRidder's place. We visited, went through photo albums of theirs, and played Monopoly which was in French. They had a room that they reserved for the British officers for their R&R, rest and relaxation, when they came back from the front. They had it reserved so that the officers could stay in a room in their house. After I was there, they canceled it. Because they thought if I had a chance to come back to Brussels, they wanted to have a room for me. Fortunately, I did get a chance to go back. When I went back, at that time, there were Americans all over the place. They had a PX down in the city. Our officer let us carry weapons. I think there were five or six of us. We were, I think, in Germany at the time, but he let us take a weapons carrier for the weekend to go back to Brussels. At that time, they had a place special for the American soldiers. When I got there, I called up Mr. DeRidder and told him that I had come back. He told me which trolleys to take to meet him. I took them and he was waiting on the corner. He said, where's your bag? I said, it's back where I'm staying. He said, oh, no. You're staying at our house. He put me back on the trolley to go back to get my bag, so I could stay in the room at their house. The only thing I could do to repay them, they had a PX then, so I went down to the PX. Purchased all the things I could think of: toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap, and took them back. They were just elated. They said, you're just like Father Christmas. That's what they called Santa Claus.

In Brussels, when I was there before, I went to one of the department stores. I was surprised when I went in. This was the early part of December. There was a Santa Claus up on a pedestal, just like we had in the United States. I thought, oh, they have these Santa Clauses over here also? The mothers were there holding their little children, and one by one, they went up and sat on his lap, just like they did here. It just amazed me, because it seemed so strange. Strange, I never thought. Well, yes, they had Santa Clauses. They had some candy and some delicious-looking licorice squares. My friend and I

thought, boy, they really looked good, so we bought some. When we got outside the store, we wanted to eat one. All it was was just plain solidified gelatin, no flavor at all. We gave our bag of candy to the first child we saw. [laughs]

I have all these pictures. We've kept in touch for years. I would like to return these original pictures to members of the family, if there are descendants of the original family. I figured, how am I going to find out? Because 1964 was the last that I heard from them. I talked to my friend on the phone, Walter Leroy, and told him about this. He said, let me see what I can find out. He didn't speak English and his companion didn't speak English, but they had a friend who was an English teacher. She got on the phone and acted as interpreter. He got the information for DeRidder from the Brussels directory. Because Mr. DeRidder was an architect, his wife's father was an architect. He was in touch with the architectural group over there, and they were researching it to see if they could locate descendants of the DeRidder family, so I can return these original photos for them. We're working on that now. Did I get carried away?

Interviewer: No.
CVH: But as far as Visé goes, that's ongoing all the time. I don't know if you have any other questions along those lines or not that you'd like to ask. Well, along the military lines, Walter LeRoy was very interested in the history of World War II, and he sent me all of this information. Unknown to me, he contacted the World War II. I didn't know anything about this until I received this information. It's an enrollment in the War Memorial Register. That was news to me. This author, Leroy, adopted a cemetery plot for an American soldier who was killed over there. The cemeteries do that. This particular cemetery is Henri Chapelle Cemetery. Those are pictures of the cemetery plot. [hands documents and photographs to the interviewer] He and his companion adopted the plot. That's an official adoption. That's a picture of him and his companion. She does patchwork quilting and does homemade things. She sent these most beautiful gifts over to Mrs. Hartman. They're just beautiful. One of them was a Christmas scene, and it's on a throw. It shows the star, it's really beautiful. He and his companion went to France last year when they had their great celebration. He sent me a box with some sand from Omaha Beach. I talked to my doctor at the Veterans Clinic. He asked if I would give him a sample of that sand. I put it in a little glass jar and put a marker on it that said, sand from Omaha Beach, France. I thought he wanted it for a collection, but he wanted to put it on his desk. Every time I go over there…this was last year, so it's been two years. Every time I go, that little jar of sand is sitting on his desk. He said that it's amazing. When the veterans come in and they see that, some of them pick it up and just hold it the whole time they're there. They're so intensified by seeing that sand from Omaha Beach,

because the scenes from Omaha Beach were terrible. There are scenes that you never forget.

[sorts through his papers, hands some to the interviewer] Here are two of the things having to do with the disembarkment. Those are just scenes, and they're very realistic. This is a booklet that they sent me. This has the pictures, the whole story all the way through the war. It shows the scenes and what happened. They're so realistic that I can picture them. We went through Saint-Lô, which had been just about demolished. I remember at the time, the only thing left standing was a steeple from a church. They didn't know where the roads were, so the Americans took a bulldozer and just plowed through to make a road through the town because they didn't know where the streets or roads were supposed to be. It was such a terrible mess. This is a booklet that was put out, I think about two years ago, from the city of Visé. It is similar to what your class is here, an oral history, except this is a booklet. They interviewed different people, soldiers and like that, who told their story about what happened to them. Each one told their story. They sent it to me. Here they have marked my friends over there. Here is what the buzz bombs of unmanned planes looked like. That is a picture of what they're made up of. This is a soldier that told the story about this. We called them buzz bombs which exploded over there. He told a story about how he was on leave to visit his parents. He was downtown and he heard this one coming. The motor stopped, because you never knew what was going to happen. There were maybe one, two, maybe three at a time. You heard them. They had a very unusual sound to their motors, like a stuttering sound. Sometimes you heard the sound of the motor running the whole time that they glided until they exploded. Other times the motor stopped. If you saw them, they glided down till they exploded. Some of them banked around. I saw one do a loop-the-loop once before it hit the ground. So you never knew. Well, this soldier had this happen to him. [shows images to interviewers] That was what it was. That's the damage it did. That was the date of the one that I saw out of the window that blew my window in.

Then also, Mr. Leroy shows his picture and his father's picture. His father was dismantling a bomb which exploded. I translated the article about him. In this book from Visé, he put this article about these children at Christmastime. It starts there. It's in French, but that's what they had been doing there. [pulls things out of his scrapbook and shows them to the interviewers] There's a postcard about Omaha Beach. Remember Omaha? This is a brochure on D-Day. This is another one on D-Day. It tells the whole story. We left from Falmouth, Lands End in England, on a small ship. We had to stay overnight before we could land on the beach. We landed nine days after, so that was eight days after. That night, the German planes came across, dropping bombs. The ship we

were on was made to carry the troops across. All there was was a little wooden step going from where we were up on the deck. All of a sudden, the guns started. We heard the explosions from the German planes. The guns on the ship started firing. The shrapnel coming down sounded like hail hitting the deck. All of a sudden, there was a big explosion. I heard the steam hissing, and the boat rocked. Somebody hollered, we're hit! Everybody on their feet! Everybody jumped down. I was on the top bunk, and there wasn't room for me, so I just stayed there. What had happened, the bomb dropped in between our ship and the Minesweeper next to us and broke the steam pipe on the other boat. But it was scary. I have a map here. You can open it up if you want. That shows the boat I took over there. Now that's a map. [interviewers show map] It's a German map that I brought back from back in 1945. So that's an old map that I outlined. We landed up in Scotland, and then we were in England. Then from there, we were all over there. We moved around a lot.

One couple who had quite a bit to do with getting the former children together came over to the States and visited Mrs. Hartman and myself. They brought all these gifts from the members of the families and from the city of Visé. They brought a plaque that the city sent over. And that was made special because it says Belgium on it. When they made any over there, they always used the French word, Belgique. They sent that over. Do you have any questions? I've been doing too much talking, I believe.

Interviewer: Maybe just a few more.
CVH: I was in the service, as I told you, two years, two months, and two days.

Interviewer: That's sort of ironic. You sort of touched on the subject of the social life of the soldiers during their service time, and you said that you didn't mingle much.
CVH: I didn't mingle too much. In Brussels, I became friends with a family, and I spent my time there. A lot of the fellows went out, and they had girlfriends. They went out and did the town, did the city. I never did. I know that one time in Brussels, my friend and I were walking down the street, and two girls came behind us. They said, you got any chocolate? Because they used chocolate to barter. He was married, I was married. We said we didn't have any chocolate. [laughs] But the fellows did. They went out at night. When we started through France, they had a drink called Calvados. It was made from apples. They used it for everything. They used it to drink. You got drunk with it. They used it like liniment to rub on their aches and pains. They used it to start fires. They poured it and lit it.

2nd Interviewer: How did you manage being away from your loved ones for so long?

CVH: It was very, very difficult. It was the letters. For instance, in Belgium at that time, Bruges was the lace center of the world. My wife and I knew it, and we were in Bruges. The letters were censored. You couldn't say where you were or anything, or else they cut it out. I stopped in a little shop there and bought a lace handkerchief. I put it in the letter and sent it back to her. When she got it, she realized and knew where I was when she got that lace. But of course, by then we'd moved on.

There was a canal there, lots of canals, but we used to cross the canal. They had a cable across, and they had like a boat, a little raft, and you pulled yourself across. I remember one time, My friend and I went across, and when we went to come back, somebody else had taken it on the other side. We had no way to get back. We had to go way down around and walk back.

In England, it was interesting because our officer took us on hikes. Two different times. He had a map. One time, we went a long way, way down and across to come back. When we got partway back, there was an airfield in the middle of that. It was barred off, we couldn't get through. We had to turn around, go all the way back in order to get back to where we were. Another time when we were on the hike, it was a beautiful day, clouds in the sky. My friend and I went by some woods, and we just stepped aside. We just laid there in the field for a long time, watching the planes. That's when the big bombers were going over. Finally, we decided it was time we got back. We went out onto the road and started back. We saw this line of soldiers coming. We said, geez, somebody else is marching. What had happened, so many of the fellows had dropped out, they turned and started over picking up all the stragglers that dropped out returning. We had to fall in, so we still had to go all the way around. [laughs]

2nd Interviewer: What was it like when you got to return home after the war?
CVH: Well, at first it was scary because we went down to the southern part of France a little. It was up top of a hill, it was a town called Aix, A-I-X, to return. But we were scheduled to have a furlough, and then we were going to have to go over to the Pacific. It was very, very frustrating. Scary and frightened, thinking we'd have to go over there. But then the Japanese surrendered, so we didn't have to go. When I came back to the States in Newport, Virginia, the first thing I saw were all of these colored cars going by, one right after the other. I thought they must just be going around the block. Because we hadn't seen traffic like that. It was just amazing to see all these vehicles.

In Wesel, across the Rhine River, was interesting. As the Allied forces went into Germany, they liberated, freed so many of the French and Belgian people that had been

taken prisoners, and they were all flocking back. Before they took the bridge, before we crossed the river, for about five days there was just steady bombardment. We were waiting. It was continuous bombardment. They were whizzing overhead. You heard them. Then all of a sudden, about six o'clock in the morning, there was dead silence. Absolute silence. It was so surprising. We said, they're crossing now. The engineers put a pontoon bridge across the River at Wesel. The next day, we went across. Trucks were going up and down. As the French and Belgian prisoners were returned, they couldn't let them cross, because if they crossed, they would clog up all the roads. They had places where they had to stay. They came back on all kinds of things, bicycles. One of them was a tractor pulling a wagon. What the Germans had done, they took a French tractor and converted it into a wood-burning truck. They had a regular stove on it. They put hardwood in and lit it. Then after the fire got going, you took a match to the exhaust pipe. If a flame came out blue, then it was ready to start. We used to take that and drive that around the field there and through the crater holes. If we got stuck with it, we'd take the truck and pull it out until we used all the wood up. Then some of the GIs tried to use coal, and they ruined the stove, so we couldn't use that.

We had another platoon that was about a couple miles further down from us. I took a bicycle and went to visit them. When I was coming back, I was crossing an open area. I heard this bullet zing by my ear and plop into the ground. I thought, "That's some crazy GI." Just then, one a little louder, a zing, plop. I thought, that's no GI. I pumped so hard, I broke the pedal right off the bicycle. It was a sharpshooter. There was a barn quite a ways over. He was up in the barn. They got him. You never knew what was going to happen.

Another time, we were in the German area. There was a big circle area, where they had not been cleared out of. We were staying in the German barracks. We raked up to clean up the stuff that was littered around to burn it. All of a sudden, you heard the gunshots going off. We thought, oh, oh. What it was, there were bullets that were in the pile of stuff that we had taken. That night, I was on guard duty. It had rained and the trees were dripping. The moon came out and went behind clouds. I could heard a metal sound. I was scared, because we figured Germans were in the area. I got my back up against a tree and just stayed right there until I was relieved. We were in one big room, and I thought, "Hey, the German could throw a grenade through the window and do quite a job on the fellows inside. But the next morning, I came to find out there was a rubbish pile out there with metal tin cans, and the water was dripping off the trees. I thought it was somebody out there. [laughs] But they were scary times.

Interviewer: Yeah, is there anything else you'd like to add?

CVH: Well, I think that I probably have talked probably long enough. There's lots of things I could talk about and tell you, but I think that I covered pretty much everything. I do have a calendar there if you want to hand it to me. They sent it to me this year, and it's very interesting. It has to do with Bastogne. I do have a map of Bastogne. General McAuliffe, they wanted him to surrender. He sent the reply back, "Nuts." They called Bastogne the Nuts City. It's a very popular tourist place now. They sent this calendar to me for 2005. It gives the scenes, it shows the scenes of different things that happened over there. [pages through the calendar] This is all in French. You'll notice they're really actual photographs. You can see the damage that those things did. They call it Nuts City. [laughs]

Interviewer: What was it like, just for my personal curiosity, what was it like seeing your wife and your son for the first time after so long?
CVH: I was flabbergasted. When I left, we had an apartment. At that time, we hadn't been married very long, and we didn't have any big savings or anything like that. I didn't need money, because I didn't smoke and I didn't drink. I had them take just about all of my pay and sent it home to her. I just kept a few dollars if I needed anything. She moved to another apartment, so it was a brand new place, or different place. It was just amazing. The first night that I was home, I couldn't breathe. It was cold. It was November. I had to go and raise the window up and stick my head out the window because I was so used to the outdoors, the open area and everything, and I was just stifled. But our son was just amazing. But then later we had a daughter, so I enjoyed the early life of a baby. I didn't show you the pictures of Brussels, but I have all kinds of pictures.

Interviewer: Thank you.
CVH: We should probably get [unclear] 1.13.34 this running. Thank you very much.

Interviewer: You're welcome. You were a wonderful interviewee.