

*The Ghost Army*  
SPIKE BERRY

[Tape GA 440, TC 11:00]

Q: Name, rank, and unit in the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

A: Well, the name I know. That's Al Spike Berry. And my rank was T4, and 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Troops, Signal Company Special. I remember that.

Q: What were you doing before the war?

A: Well, I was just a high school graduate and a college freshman. I enlisted in the Service, and—and of course my enlistment was called up. So I was just growing up before the war. I was just a teenager, 19-20, something like that. And went to Fort Snelling in Minnesota and its process there. Went down to Fort Knox, Kentucky, and went to radio school, because I had worked part-time at a radio station as a weekend announcer. And so I went to this radio school and graduated. And at graduation time, there's an awful lot of us in that room. I can't remember how many there were, but the fellow said, "Okay, you've graduated, congratulations. All you people on this side, fall out. You people stay here. Well, I was in the "fall out" side. And we went outside and he said, "You people get ready to pull out. We're going to take you to Camp Forrest, Tennessee." So we got on a train the next day and went to Camp Forrest, Tennessee, which was empty. Wasn't anybody there. 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne had left. And in that was a couple of empty barracks that were prepared for us, and some officers; and we were all radio men, and we had about 600 of us; and they had interviews to select what turned out to be 288 radio operations. And I luckily was interviewed by Fred Fox. And I had two interviews. And I was one of the lucky 288, I guess. And from there we went to New Jersey to .. Fort [Monmouth] or something, and then we shipped overseas. And that took me to England, and of course eventually to the continent.

Q: What was the interview with Fred Fox like?

A: Well. Anything with Fred Fox is delightful. I was bewildered and— I was just a young kid. I mean, I was— all this Army stuff. But he found out I'd been a broadcaster. And he used to work part-time for Mutual Broadcasting System. So we had that in common, sort of. And we hit it off real well, and he had me back for a second interview. And second one was real short, and he just said, "We're going to take you, Berry, and you're going to be part of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Troops," which I didn't know what that was. And that was just quite— That was [my] first exposure to Fred Fox. That wasn't the last, but the first.

Q: What, in your words, was the mission of the 23<sup>rd</sup>?

A: Well, our main mission was deception. You learn those things as you go along in the outfit. A lot of this is Fred Fox's philosophy, but— The Germans had a very structured command, very brittle. And they had a very low opinion of the intelligence of the American soldier. They thought we were a bunch of cowboys. And we had to play dumb. And we gave them a lot of false information, but— The mission of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Troops was deception and to save lives. And (you know) in some— one of the books that's been written, they estimated that we saved between 15[,000] and 30,000 lives with our maneuvers. But (you know) even if we'd only saved 15 or 30, it was worth it.

Q: What was the radio part of that deception?

A: Radio was the stage setter. Now, when you think of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Troops, you think of the inflatable tank, or the sound guys. And they're great. But they have to have a stage on which to perform. And we provided that stage. Because radio's awfully easy on the eyes, you know, and we painted a picture in the German intelligence, high definition screen, in their mind, as what was going on. And our radio operation, the little that I was with it—and I'll get to that later, I guess, but—we were good at convoys. If the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division was going to move from point A north to point B, say 100 miles away, we would either be embedded

or monitor the radio signals and method of the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored. They all had little quirks. They all had their system. Like the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored would go “dit-dit-dit-dit.” That’d be four. Real de– big deal, but it was their identifier. And so we would send some of our fellows into town, to the bakery or the coffee shop or bar, saying, “Well, we’re moving out tonight. We’re moving north.” And of course there were collaborators in all these little villages, because they had family in prison that they had to protect. And so what we would do is string out maybe 8 or 9 radio trucks. And we would have checkpoints, just like I– If I was checkpoint 1, I’d radio “Convoy number 1, 4<sup>th</sup> Armored, going by,” either by voice or in code (which was easy to break). And then we just kept moving them along, fictitiously, up to the north. And in the meantime, the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division is moving east, under the radio silence and in–at night.

But here we had set up a fictitious camp for this 4<sup>th</sup> Armored. Well, that’s when the dog-and-pony show starts, because that’s where the sound comes in, and that’s when the inflatables are used. So by the dawn’s early light, when the German reconnaissance planes came over to photograph it, they got a beautiful picture of the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored, north.

And so we set the stage for the other guys. But we weren’t as well known, because we were– we’re the silent orchestra underneath the musical on the stage.

Q: You also had to do some radio talk during the convoys. What would you say?

A: Well, it was pretty uniform. We-we kept checking in, “Convoy 2, going by checkpoint 1. Convoy 3, going by checkpoint 4.” And they would just be timed so that the Germans would figure– they just followed this thing right along. But—

Q: What were you assigned to do? Your given assignment.

A: Mine was like the rest of the guys. I had a radio truck. And it would hold four people and a radio transmitter, and I-I was a T4 in charge of a radio truck. That was my assignment. And I did that, and we had other little things that we’d do.

Course if we had to go to town to do a number, like wear somebody's fake patch and say we're pulling out or— a little dramatic stuff there. Fred Fox called those “special effects.” But basically my assignment was a radio operator. And I was on several— not a lot, but quite a few missions. Some were small, some were convoy movements. But I always thought the 23<sup>rd</sup> Signal Company Special was excellent at convoy dramatization. We— And we had them fooled. We had—

Q: You were talking about your assignment.

A: (Yeah. I-I told the radio truck thing.) Radio's so flexible. And the fl— the situation in Europe was so fluid, that it was kind of hard to say what you do from one day to the next. It isn't like an infantryman or whatever. But they— You just never knew what you were going to have the next day.

And [when] we first got to Europe, the continent, we went there with high hopes of being (you know) the— what a big deal we were. We finally got together, and I think Fred Fox arranged for three tents to be put up in a hedgerow. And we went from one tent to the other, and we're told at one tent what— about this part of the mission, and so on. By the time we got out of tent 3, we finally knew what we were supposed to do, overall.

Now we had to get jobs. We weren't getting any jobs. And so we're just sitting around, waiting to— for our curtain call, you know. And Fred Fox came around, and I talked to him briefly, and he said, “You know, Berry,” he said, “if we don't get work, we're out like trout. I mean, it's just— We have to get jobs, and— or we're going to have to disband the outfit.” And he said, “We have all this equipment and all these people and”— So he decided to do a spot, a-a little 5-minute presentation. And he wrote it, and he had me voice some of it, because I had done a little radio work. And he took that around to the various intelligence planning people. It got us some work.

Q: What was the promo like?

A: I can't recall the content. It was short. And I remember it was .. the effect of sound, and the-the deception of the inflatables, and the radio that'd give life to these things. It was— He didn't want to take a lot of their time, because they didn't give him much time. I think the thing was less than 5 minutes. But the content, I don't know. It's probably in the archives someplace.

Q: What was it recorded on?

A: Wire. Wire recorder. That was the thing. And the sonic people had the, at that time, wire recorders, and they're pretty effective and pretty good. And their speakers were just state of the art. I know today we have all this high-fi stuff, but for 1942, '43, '44, those were just marvelous speakers.

Q: Do you remember interactions with the sonic groups?

A: They-they usually followed us, after we set up an imaginary camp, because they would have sounds of the tanks coming in, and guys cussing and unloading gas tanks and— The only— The only time I really was with the— or saw the results of the sonic group— They had their own mission. General Patton had gone way ahead of his supply lines. And this guy was in deep trouble. And he had to have gas [for those] tanks. They were sitting ducks. That's the only time I ever saw General Patton. He came out of the tent wearing his pearl-handled pistol, and— The sonic group went to a forest area, and I don't think they used their expensive speakers. I think they had cheaper, fairground type speakers. They wired up these speakers in the trees, and played the sound of gas cans being unloaded. And they could project that quite a ways. And of course the Germans just bombed the dickens out of those speakers. In the meantime, gas was being unloaded 10 miles away. But that was my first and only experience right up close, to see how those— Those guys were good. They really were. And they fooled the Germans. That was the main thing.

Q: The first two weeks on the continent. Do you remember your first mission?

A: No, I don't remember the first one. The first one was less than memorable, because it was not too well done. I wasn't in it, so I stayed behind, and— That was Brittany. But then they moved— we moved, and then got more involved in other operations and stuff. But after the tents, we were— It wasn't too long after that, that we finally got a job. But we—we'd take anything (you know) to get-get work. But—

It was kind of funny that we had to use a Madison Avenue approach to-to do this [sort of thing]. But Fred Fox is a Hugh Grant personality. And Madison Avenue runs in his blood. And he's very innovative and creative. And that-that little presentation he made, I think saved the day, because I could be washing dishes (you know) for the Army, if it hadn't been for that getting jobs.

Q: What was a job like?

A: [A mission.]

Q: Walk me through.

A: Well, it depends on the mission.

Q: One that you—

A: Like a convoy, a fake convoy, or— .. Sometimes, I wasn't on them, but sometimes the fellows'd be— just a few radio trucks would go out and pull off a little something or other. But we were the ones to set the stage for a lot of the dog-and-pony show, because we had to get in the mind of the German intelligence monitor what was happening. And they— Usually by convoys and troop movements and—and— It took on different situations, but radio is very fluid and flexible, and we were— we kept pretty busy after we got going.

Q: Were there any scripts?

A: No.

Q: You had already started another line of work while you were looking for work.

A: Well, yes, that's— That's why I was on a lot of the missions. And Major [Raggio] had liberated a General Electric 16 mm sound projector. And he talked to Fred Fox about it, and in my interview with Fred Fox, I had told him I had been a projectionist at my high school, in Jamestown, North Dakota. And so they got 2 and 2, made 4, and they came over and saw me, and said, "Would you like to run the projector?" And I said, "Sure." So I got this projector, and I would show movies to our guys, because when you're not working— You couldn't mingle with the other Army people. We were off to the— to ourselves. So they had no entertainment whatsoever. And— So the mission was to have movies.

So I went to the different corps film depots, and they were less than enthused about my requests, because only 1200 men, and "What's this— We never heard of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Troops." So we were unheard of and unwanted, and out there all by ourselves with no film to show on our projector. But I finally got a few prints. And you had to return them by 11 o'clock the next day. So Bob Conrad (Lt. Conrad), who was in charge of the motor pool, saw to it that I had a jeep and a driver, and I got those films back at 11 o'clock the next day, wherever it was. That [may mean] getting up at 3 or 4 in the morning and driving, but we got those films back on time. Because we had to be good, or we wouldn't get films.

And then one day I was getting more acquainted with these guys, and I-I noticed on the shelf, I said, "What are all those projectors doing up there on the shelf?" The guy says, "They're dead in the water. Can't use them." I said, "Why?" He said, "Exciter lamps are burned out." Now, an exciter lamp's the small bulb that fits inside the machine, that puts a beam of light on the sound track. And that's your sound. And without that, you're dead in the water. And they were burning out because the guys were not running the power units correctly. Those are 4-cylinder power units that were on 2-wheel trailer, and they'd get a surge in power, and that'd be okay for the motor and the projection

lamp, but the exciter lamp was burned out. It was just about this size. This was just a sample of what it looked like.

So I thought, well, that's kind of too bad. So I went back to the— after the show, and I wrote a letter to General Electric. I got the address out of the name plate in the projector, just wrote it to General Electric, whatever park it was, New York, and said, “We need— We can't get them from supply. Send me some. I'll pay you for them.” And about month later I get this package and there's a little egg crate with little, oh, about 8 exciter lamps, free from General Electric. And so I had those. I had the power of those lights. And with those little exciter lamps from GE, I got some very good films, because they needed those for their projector. They didn't know how I ever got them, and I didn't tell them. I just said, “We're a secret outfit. That's a secret.” So we had those, and got some pretty good— got some films, and I sh— I got more popular all the time.

And we had the Blarney Theater. And I had an assistant that ran that power unit, because we didn't want to burn out our exciter lamps. You had to have a steady— We had to have our own power because in-in the continent you didn't— well, you could— You're in the middle of the forest anyway. So that's— That was my other job. And it turned out to be a little bigger job than I had really thought it's going to be. And I got to be quite well known, and the films ..... in-in Central Europe;

And-and after the war, we had to do something before we got shipped back to the States. And we were in charge of taking care of displaced persons. And so in the back of my radio truck, I put that projector and shot the film from the-the truck, backed it up, and formed a-a picture on a white barn, in Germany or wherever it was; I can't remember now, but— We showed that movie, “Meet Me in St. Louis,” to displaced persons. And we had a Polish interpreter telling them what was— really what was happening in the movie. It wasn't much. You had Judy Garland singing all the time. They loved the color and the music and the fact they could— they were liberated anyway. And that was really a thrill to show that picture to these displaced persons. They loved the movie. And I got, with my

lamp, my– with my exciter lamps, I got– I got some good prints, and “Meet Me in St. Louis” was one of my most popular ones. And I-I own that film.

Q: I wonder if showing the film made the situation a tiny bit better. It was tense.

A: Well, they were-weren't too tense when I was there, because they were– they were liberated and they were being treated decently. And I showed it to some Polish prisoners that were liberated. And I took it right into the camp and showed it to them there, and the captain who was in charge of the– The Polish fellows maintained military discipline, even as prisoners. So the captain, as a gesture of thanks, had me come into his tent (or barracks or wherever it was), and I had a glass of Mosel River wine. I remember that. And that was his thank-you for showing the film. But things weren't too tense there. They're pretty-pretty loose and pretty well handled. And the movies helped keep them entertained and– We had all kinds of people see that movie. It was amazing.

Q: Anything else going on at the DP camp? Did the signal company guard them?

A: I don't think so. Course the inflatable guys, the 603<sup>rd</sup> and the sound people, their stuff was so sensitive and so classified that they– when the thing was over, they bundled that stuff right up and got it ready for shipment right back to America. And we were– We were in the first 10% to go back to the States. We landed in Norfolk, Virginia on July 3 or something, and got 30 days leave. And aft– That was August, and then the VJ Day was upon us.

So I always said that Harry Truman saved my life, because we had had the 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Troops, which was being expanded, for the October invasion of Japan, I don't know how that would have worked, because Japan ain't the continent. That's for sure. And all these islands; and I figured they'd be a little harder to fool also. I didn't think we had a– I wasn't too excited about going to Japan. Luckily, I didn't have to, but–

I think the Blarney Theater was the only thing I remember with displaced person. We might have done some guarding or haul supplies or something, but I don't think so.

Q: Tell me more about the Blarney Theater.

A: That's what I called my movie thing, and— Whenever the troops moved, why, we moved with them, and set up and— and I would get the films, and [Morstein Moorefield], my assistant, would keep that motor in good shape. And— I never kept track of how many films we showed, or what their titles were, but I wasn't even thinking about that, but I should have kept a record, but—

Q: You were sent to another unit to learn, and some unusual things happened?

A: Yeah, we called it f— infiltrating at that time. And once in a while, we would be sent into a headquarters, a radio thing, and we would have no patches, usually a new shirt, and would be [like] replacements. So the people in the radio whatever, thought we were just replacements being sent in. And I— That happened to me one time. I went in, and we were to watch the way they operated, and learn their system, and I'm not sure why we did it in person, but we did. And I went in and I went in there and I— I was on KP right away. And you have to play the game, you know. And then afterwards I'd go to the radio shack and— and they were pretty-pretty well embedded where they were. And they were going to be moving out. So we took over in their location when they moved out that night. And that was my only experience with being embedded. But— And most of it was KP.

Q: Why did they put you on KP?

A: I was a recruit. I was new— Anybody new got KP. And they didn't— They couldn't be told that we were radio deception people, 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Troops. I was just Alfred G. Berry, Private, replacement. And you had to play dumb, and I was. [laugh]

[Tape GA 441, TC 12:00]

Q: When you put on fake patches and went to town, what would you do and say?

A: Not only the patches, but we had to repaint our bumper. You'd O.D. it out, paint it out, then have a stencil and put the— like "4<sup>th</sup> Armored." And we'd go into town and— I was in the— what they called Special Effects a couple of times, and we'd go into a bar and say, "Let's have a drink for everybody here, because you know, tonight we're— (you know) keep it quiet: we're going out tonight. (you know)" And it-it was— It was just amazing how fast it got to Berlin.

But I remember the one time we pulled this thing off, and in a couple hours, Axis Sally had it on the air that "We want to say goodbye to whatever division, because we know you're moving tonight," or something. I just was amazed at the— The collaborators they had were forced collaborators. I don't mean to say the French were disloyal, but you got your brother or sister in a prison camp, you tote the mark or they're toast. And so— But it-it was— it was an excellent tool for deception. It really was. And that was a Fred Fox innovation, I think. He called it Special Effects.

Q: How did he present it to you guys?

A: Well, he'd get us in a huddle and just go over this with us, and say, "This is what's going to happen, and this is what we want you to say, and just be natural," and (you know) do this and do that. A lot of the guys went to the bakery, got rolls and stuff and said, "We got to get an extra supply because we're moving out tonight," that kind of thing.

Fred Fox was a Madison Avenue, Broadway play type guy. He-he knew how to get them to— He got kids to do stuff that was— They were amazingly good. And there was one company, an engineer company, that was assigned to protecting this

very expensive equipment we had. And they did a lot of the work too. They-they didn't get much credit but they were some of our special effects guys.

But those rubber tanks and those speakers, they were really top of line, I'll tell you. They were— And they had to be protected. And-and where do you put them up? Had them in-in— like other tanks. They had to have somebody watching them, because you— there— if they sprung a leak, you'd have to get somebody there right away to repair it. And we had a few of our tanks kind of deflate on us, in kind of embarrassing way. But it was— it was— Like you said in your— previously, that saw these four GIs carrying this tank, much to the surprise of the locals. You had to be careful of that, because they— you didn't want them to know it was fake. But from the air and from 200 or 300 feet away, they really looked real. I was just— I didn't care for the personnel. They had some inflatable people. So-so. The artillery piece was good. The jeep was good. But that M-4 tank, that was the beauty. That was a— That was a piece of work. Really was.

Q: It looked very real.

A: It really did, yeah.

Q: Fred Fox had to guide this thing, like a production manager.

A: Yeah. He was. He was— he was on— He-he was a hands-on implementer of what they had in mind. And you [can have] all the theories you want, but takes somebody to get the guys to get rolling. In the radio department, for a fake convoy, that was pretty-pretty-pretty easy to do. Other radio operators did other radio transmission work and so on. But I do remember the— Convoys is one thing I remember we did the best. That was probably a Fred Fox innovation because he was pretty good at that deception role.

Q: He thought constantly about how things could look to—

A: Right. He— He had a good grip on what he thought the Germans wanted to hear. And we tried to keep them entertained, that's for sure.

Q: The Germans didn't think too highly of American intelligence?

A: Oh, no. It was a given that the Americans were all stupid. No question about that. And the thing that was also in their disfavor was the fact that their Command and Control was very brittle. I mean, a private in the German army couldn't do anything on his own. He had to get permission to do it, whether it's to retreat or attack or get shot or whatever. Americans were more like the Fred Fox type, you know, go with the flow. But because they were so brittle, it-it was to our advantage, because they would be confused and would panic, because they wouldn't know where the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored was. They thought it was up north, and then they find out it's south, and they didn't know what to do. And they had to have a higher command tell them what to do. Just like on the invasion of Europe. They thought the Pas de Calais was the area where they were going to come in. And we-we made them think so, with increased radio traffic; General Patton used to be in charge of it, and they were pretty convinced that it was going to be up there. And when they found out it wasn't, they still didn't believe that it was going to be there. So they were confused then from the very beginning. But the 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Troops had nothing to do with Pas de Calais. Fred Fox had a little to do with it, but— That was the first time radio was used to fool the Germans, I think, in Europe. But we were still at Walton Hall then, waiting to land on the continent.

Q: Story about liberating some caches of liquor.

A: We were in northern France, and the Germans had been smuggling wine, [Omar] Benedictine, and cognac and calvados out of Paris. And they have a depot halfway between Berlin and Paris. And it was camouflaged and hidden. And we just— I don't know how we liberated that, but we stumbled across this, and there

was—my word!—all kinds of wine and-and— So as a result of this “liberation,” we all got three bottles of booze. And Stanley B. Nance, who you probably have interviewed, was not the drinking type, and so he gave me his supply. He’s been a friend for life. [laugh] And the— We all part— We all liberated that very nicely. We saved the Germans a lot of work by taking care of it. The calvados, if you’re familiar with that, is an apple, Everclear, kind of. And I used it for my cigarette lighter. I didn’t drink it.

Q: What was Stanley like during the war?

A: Stanley Nance? Stanley Nance was a very astute and disciplined, knowledgeable operator. He-he was called upon for many things that I didn’t even know anything about. He had a radio truck, and he did his job, and very systematic and— he kept records and he— He was much better than me. I was too busy running around getting movies. But I’d see him from time to time, and I-I knew him well enough for him to give me his booze. But he was a excellent operator. Yeah. Very dependable and-and— He could figure things out. He was very good.

All of our guys were pretty good. They really were. For kids. We were only 19, 20, 21 years old. We started picking up that mission pretty well. And I can’t say that anybody was bad. They’re all— But Stanley Nance was exceptional.

Q: Who were the brains behind the Signal Company Special?

A: Well, I never knew who the brains were behind it. Captain VanderHeide was our-our-our company commander, and we had other lieutenants, and also attached was Lt. Conrad, in charge of the motor pool and the message center. And— I guess VanderHeide would be the implementer. But always behind every operation was a touch of Fred Fox. And he— I think VanderHeide kind of would depend on Fred to kind of help a little bit in figuring out who’s going to do what, when. But I think that Capt. VanderHeide was probably the director of record. But Fox was the assistant, that’s for sure.

Q: What do you recall about the Rhine operation?

A: I was in on that. I-I don't know too much about it. It was our biggest and best, I think. And I know there was no movie that night, .. because they said, "Berry, you're going out." And so my- I took my radio truck and- The radio guys performed the- I- As I recall it, we had a fake convoy, and we moved this unit down south on the Rhine or- and went across on the north or- I can't remember how- exactly what happened. But .. that was our best operation. And I just had a small part of that, but I was in on it, and it was a radio, sonic, inflatable thing. It was just- It was the whole nine yards. That was our final re- our final curtain call, as I recall.

Not much after that, because- I should- I could find out what happened by reading the book. Like Bill Blass said, we finally find out what happened by reading these books that have been published. But that was a big operation. I wish I knew more about it, but-

Q: Why was the 23<sup>rd</sup> "unheard of and unwanted"?

A: Well, first of all, we were nonexistent. Even where we were was classified. And I- my experience of course was with mail. We finally got mail, but it was- Sometimes they couldn't- Nobody knew where the 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Troops were. And then also like getting film. They want to know how many people you're going to show to, because the films were limited. And if I would say, "Well, I show to about 300 guys a night, when-and we have a division that's going to show it to 1,000," well, it's- you're kind of at the end of the list there. But I-I finally got that overcome with these exciter lamps. But it's-

It was just unknown, that's all. It wasn't .... they didn't like us, but they didn't know us well enough to like us because they didn't know who we were. And to this day, there's- people don't know- I mean, in the Army records sometimes there's not the 23<sup>rd</sup> mentioned. I mean, we're just kind of nonexistence. And like releasing this information that we have in this program,

Fred Fox, who worked for President Eisenhower, tried to get that information released when Eisenhower was in the presidency, and he had a pretty good in, but it couldn't be released. It was not released. And so it had to wait until now for it to be told. But that's— So you can imagine why they wouldn't know who we were in Europe, if they didn't know who we were in the States. But we—we're getting known now, but it's a few years later.

Q: Was there a lot of secrecy imposed on you at the time? During the war?

A: Oh yes. I mean, we knew that if—if things went wrong— If we have a bunch of dummy tanks and a Germans attack it, that's not too good (you know). So we had to be very careful about— That's why we were separated from the rest of the American troops (we used to call them), because you know, guys start talking about what are you doing, where are you located, or how many guys are in your outfit, and where have you been, and— Well, we couldn't intermingle with the rest of the— go to the USO or— because it's just— it just wasn't part— We were in a— like a priesthood in a nunnery area, (you know) like— Fact, we were in a seminary in Luxembourg. And we had to keep away from the rest of the American troops (we called them). It's pretty secret.

Q: How did you feel about that?

A: Didn't bother me. I—I— It was part of the mission. That was— you know, it's— And that's why I thought the movies were so important. And they really were, much more than you'd— person would think. But the fact the fellows could go to a show at night, and not have to just sit around and write letters home, was a little bit of a morale booster. It really was. And the Blarney Theater was— got more popular all the time.

Q: You had a strange thing happen to you in Worcester, after the war?

A: “Strange” isn’t the word for it. I had— Captain VanderHeide was a—a gentle, fatherly type guy. Now, he wasn’t much older than we were, but (you know) anybody 30 years old was old at that time, because I was 19 or 20. But our Congregational minister from Jamestown, North Dakota, had been transferred to Worcester, Mass. And so my mother had told me in a letter that Rev. Thomas was in Worcester, Massachusetts, and so I went to see Capt. VanderHeide, who’s easy to see, and asked him if I could have a pass to go to Worcester to visit my minister. And he said, “Sure.” So I got this pass, took the train to Worcester, and stayed overnight. And the next morning, course he gets the paper. On his front door was this paper, *The Worcester Telegram*. And on the front page was this feature story, “Ghost Army fools the foe in the neatest trick of the war.” And I just couldn’t be— All the secrecy we had, and they had us on the front page of the *Worcester Telegram*! Well, I just— We had breakfast, I excused myself and asked the Rev. Thomas if we could go downtown. I wanted to buy a couple papers. And I went to one place and bought all the papers they had, which was six. And I went to another place. There were two papers there. The other papers, they’d pulled the story. And that was the fact that this chap had told his reporter friend about our outfit and—

When the war was over, the Office of War Information closed down almost immediately after Japan surrendered, just a day or two afterwards. So the War Information Office had rejected this fellow’s story as top secret. And he was— He followed the rules. He sent it in, they rejected it. He had it published— had it printed and ready to go, but there was nobody to say no anymore. The office had closed. So it wasn’t all his fault. And he published it in the paper. But the fault was that this chap had given the information to his reporter friend, when he shouldn’t have. That was the no-no part of it. That was the unusual thing in—

So when I went back to Pine Camp, I could have sold those papers for \$10 apiece! But— I had about ten of them, and they’re-they’re well circulated now. Many copies made. That was a— Just happened to be at the right time at the wrong time, or whatever. But that was an interesting—

And of course Rev. Thomas wondered why I was getting these papers. And I said, "Well, I want some souvenirs of Worcester, Mass." So.

Q: Did it ever seem strange, what the 23<sup>rd</sup> was doing?

A: I never thought in my wildest dreams I'd be lucky enough to be in an outfit like that: 1,200 men, some pretty-pretty good guys. I could learn a lot from them. I'm just a North Dakota farm boy, and here I am with these 1,200 people, and— We always had a fear that— a fear that we'd be found out.

And we also had a rumor at one time that the Germans had a dummy outfit. And that was a little concern to us, because fooling people can work both ways. And one time it was not true, but at one time the rumor was that both dummy outfits were facing each other. But that wasn't true. That was a rumor. But you always had the feeling that if somebody figures this thing out, it could be bad news, Charlie, because we were skirting (you know) danger a little bit, and it-it was a— It was just life and limb really that— I didn't want to get shot (you know).

Q: Were you in any close situations?

A: Only one time. We— The lieutenant, who I won't mention, we had a little convoy of some kind, doing something. We were moving to another location. He got— He didn't read his map right. And he drove us almost right into the German front lines. And we quickly got out of there, but— We lost a couple of fellows with artillery fire. Captain Wells, George [Peddle]. But we were pretty much back of the— a little out of artillery range, anyway. But— (Did I answer your question?...)

Q: Do you remember the day you heard the war was over?

A: The day that the war was over, I went from— I was in Trier, I think. And VE Day came upon us, it was announced, and we had— (of course on radio), and I went right back to Luxembourg, which is my— one of my favorite places in the whole world, and celebrated there. And it was a lot of celebrating going on. That's for

sure. And yeah, I got out of Ti-Trier and went back to— We had a— We'd taken over a Catholic seminary for the 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Troops. And so I got to know Luxembourg reasonably well. And so that was the place to go to celebrate, because they were— everybody was pretty happy about it, as you can tell. But that's what I did. I went back— right back to Luxembourg.

Q: Your strongest memories of the war?

A: Strongest memories.

Q: Or most vivid memories.

A: Well, I think graduating from radio school was important. Being selected by the— Capt. Fox to go with the 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Troops, and finding out what we were going to do. Because I had no idea we were going to be doing what we did, when I was being interviewed by him. He didn't tell us anything. He couldn't. Just wanted to know if we were qualified. And you know, they had a— They had a good system to pick out the guys. And as you could tell from the artists and so on that were in there, the joke of course is that with the Army, Army personnel, if you graduated from Baker College, you were in the kitchen. But not this case. They were pretty precise. And they also—

I went back the second time. And there was a few days' gap there. I didn't know it until later, but they had interviewed my mother in Jamestown, just briefly. Some FBI guy or whatever. I don't know what it was, but— I was an adopted child, and my real parents were German Russian. And they were a little sensitive about that, because they thought I might have had German relatives or German loyalties. And my foster mother reassured them that I was an American true and blue, and it was okay. But I was surprised they were that thorough. But they were, and they— I passed, and that was an— That was an important highlight for me. And of course Walton Hall in England. That's a special place in the whole world. And

then of course the landing and—and then our eventual victory. And of course the exciter lamps. [laugh]

Q: In the Signal Unit were the people who were involved in radio or telephone communications before the war?

A: Captain VanderHeide was a employee or supervisor for Southwestern Bell, in California as I recall. I don't know of any guys that were in broadcast radio in our outfit. I'm trying to think. I don't— I really don't think so. Just Capt. VanderHeide and—and— I may think of somebody later, but—

Q: Tell me about Capt. VanderHeide.

A: Well, he's a very even, older chap, and very fair. Seemed to enjoy what he was doing, and was— liked the Signal Company Special. And— He was very likable. He was very pleasant. He wasn't a strict, "Look, shine your shoes" kind of guy. He was more like Southwestern Bell (you know). And he-he was very, very understanding and— I remember I asked him for that-that pass to go to Worcester, Mass. And also, four of us got permission from him to go to Philadelphia to visit the parents of George [Peddle], who had been killed. And he allowed us to do that. He was very sympathetic that way. Nice guy.

Q: Tell me about Fred Fox and why he's important to this unit.

A: Well, he had kind of a Hugh Grant personality, like I said. And he— He wasn't as handsome as Hugh Grant, but he-he had a mannerism. He had a sharp mind. And he never put anybody down. He always gave you credit for— encouraged you to do whatever. And he was a— he had— He was very innovative. He had a touch of Madison Avenue in him. .. And— I can't describe it any better than that, I guess, but he— I always thought he was the on-the-ground, hands-on implementer of the overall mission for the signal or camoufleurs or the sound. He— He used to be

involved in the Princeton (what is it?) the Princeton Theater or Princeton— What do they call it? The—

Q: I can't remember the—

A: Anyway, he was with the Princeton Broadway shows, and he was showbiz. He really was. And—

Q: He seemed to bring a touch of showmanship.

A: Oh yes. Absolutely. He was showbiz. He was— he— He made the job interesting and challenging, and it got results. He was a— He was a very, very important guy, I thought. The others were important too, but we saw more of him because he was more hands-on. As I say, I was busy running around doing other things, but everybody that you talk to in this-this program, I'm sure, has the same opinion, that Fred Fox was a real fox. He really was.

[Tape GA 442, TC 13:00]

Q: You had one close call. . . . From the beginning.

A: Close call. You asked about a close call? The only one I remember was, I was doing the Blarney Theater bit, we were stationed in Luxembourg, and I was going to return this film, which I always did at 11 o'clock every day. And I went into this town, and I always stopped at a bakery, got some rolls, take back to the guys. And bakery's closed. And I went down the block, where 8<sup>th</sup> Corps was (I think it was 8<sup>th</sup> Corps). Film library was closed. Gone, nobody there. I thought, well, hell, what's going on here? And so I went to the middle of the town, a little square, and there was an MP there. And I said, "What's everything— What's going on here?" He said, "What the hell are you doing here?" I said, "I'm returning a movie film." He said, "You're returning what?" He said— I said, "I'm returning a movie film." He said, "Listen, sir," he said, "you get that constant submachine gun that's in

your leather holster along your spare tire, put oil on it and get it running, and shoot if for— get-get it operational. And then you and your driver get the hell out of town.”

And so we left Bastone, I would imagine at least a half hour before it fell, or was surrounded. And we went back to where you had the picture earlier of the snowfall and the— It was winter weather. It was terrible. And we-we got there, and I got the film back to 8<sup>th</sup> Corps or whatever it was. They thought I was crazy, but they want the film at 11 o'clock, they got it at 1 o'clock. But that was my closest call.

And Captain VanderHeide, I told you what I— a family sort of— He was a father to us guys. And he g- became very concerned about the situation, and knew that I had gone to Bastone to return this film. And Bastone was in the news for sure. And he went to where I was staying, in-in the seminary, and talked to some of the fellows in my room and said, “You better gather up some of Berry’s personal effects, because I’m not quite sure what this is going to be— what’s going to happen here. But just be prepared.” And so they were, and in the meantime I was scooting around and got stopped by an Army checkpoint, because they were— they were always quite— This is a bad— This was a bad time. And the Germans had captured Americans and taken their uniforms. Those who could speak English were posing as checkpoint operators. They had you stop and then they’d shoot you, which is unkind. And so I luckily caught an American checkpoint, and told them who I was and— They didn’t know the 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Troops from a load of hay. But I said I was with 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group, and I said, “Don’t ask me any questions about baseball. I don’t know anything about baseball, except that the Brooklyn Dodgers play in Brooklyn.” And he said, “Go ahead.” So I got back to Luxembourg, or that ar— back to where that-the— I think it was Liege or something, where the pictures you had of the artist sketching in the snowfall. That was a— That was a bad time. It really was. Bad weather, bad tactical, and we weren’t doing too well at that particular time. So I was glad to get out of there. That’s for sure. That was my close call.

Q: When you got back, hearing that they collected your belongings—

A: Well, VanderHeide just wanted to prepare the guys that-at- because the Germans were pretty aggressive. That's to say the least. There's- (Is the camera going now? ... Oh, it is going.)

There was a rumor. And this is- I thought this was between us. But there was a rumor that one of our movements, fake movements, had triggered the Germans to attack. But I don't think that was true, because they had planned that Battle of the Bulge well in advance. But we had done some missions around there, and it might have- You never know. But as it turned out, we won the war anyway, so I guess—

Q: ...

A: That's the end of my close calls.

[End of Interview]