

## **George Lamprinakos**

Interviewed by Deborah Miles

Mr. Lamprinakos graduated from Lee Edwards High School when he was 16 years old. He wanted to enlist but his father refused to sign the permission so he went to NC State in Chemical Engineering until 1944 when he turned 18 and was drafted. Gas was rationed so he only came home at Christmas and summer each year.

His family had lived at 45 and 47 Charlotte St. (right where the gas station is now) until 1935 when they bought a house at 182 Montford Av. He recalls hearing about the bombing of Pearl Harbor on the radio and thinking “here we go”. He explained that most folks expected it to happen sooner or later.

He recalled a funny story from NC State. Across from his dorm were billeted soldiers. Each morning they would get up to revelry to the sound of a bugle at 6:00 am. The non-soldier boys got sick of it. One morning at 2:00 am they got Richard Gasterson to blow revelry. All the soldiers piled out dressed and in formation.

Once he was drafted he was inducted at Ft. Bragg and then came home on leave then to Ft. Bening and Ft. Shelby in Hattiesburg, MS. Someone suggested that he stay behind due to his flat feet but he did not want to do KP duty for the rest of the war. His particular unit was destined to go to Asia so they were training in the swamps in Hattiesburg. When the Battle of the Bulge hit they changed direction and were sent to La Havre off the coast of France. They landed there in sub zero weather on January 10. They were put in open cattle cars. The roads were sheets of ice so they were lots of accidents “my feet looked like blocks of ice. When I jumped off the truck the shot of pain when straight up. When we got to Camp Lucky Strike we found that it was a big mess. Everyone there had been set to the Bulge. We set up the camp. The tents were crammed with snow – worst winter they had in years. Our baptism was in the Saar Basin on the border of France and Germany. We drove there, got out, and took our position. We went over the rise and there was the battlefield – bombs going off. From there on we were marching across Europe backed by Patton’s tanks. I saw the first dead person I had ever seen.”

“We mostly stayed in buildings – you could call them buildings. (They were marching through the heart of Germany’s industrial complex in southern Germany where there was heavy bombing.) At night we’d be shifted. We’d get on a truck and off we’d go. One night I started to get on a truck and a buddy called “get on with us”. The other truck went off the side of the mountains. Then we went across Germany – crossed the Danube. We picked the wrong place to cross. We had gone between two towns with big towers and snipers in them. I was in the heavy weapons platoon with two bags of mortar shells. Once on the other side it was a big open field and folks were shooting. People were falling on either side. I could not drop this amo or we wouldn’t have any”. Finally he got to a bunk where we could dig a slip trench – like a grave – long and narrow. “I didn’t have a shovel. I was digging with my helmet. A buddy said we don’t need it – we aren’t going to be here that long. I dug and just as I finished the shell I hit. I leaned down to

scrape the bottom of the hole with my helmet when it hit (He demonstrates how he was digging in the hole when it hit). All of my friends who were standing were dead.”

“We ended up being the spearhead of the campaign. We had to get to Enns Austria before the Russians. Our line was so extended that when folks went back to get supplies they were captured as POW’s. We were afraid this would keep going. We go there first and made a POW camp. “

“We billeted in a castle – that was nice. We got up in the castle and looked across the valley.- as far as you could see Germans were coming to us to surrender. They wanted to surrender to the US instead of the Russians. We searched them and took their weapons and then set them in an area – there were no fences. We turned them over to the guys behind us.” There were over 20,000 that surrendered to them.

As they were going across Europe they noticed that the Germans more than the French were cleaning up from the bombing. They were stacking the bricks as they went along. C- rations was their main food. At one point there was a dock strike and they got nothing but spam for 6 weeks.

After that they were patrolling the river. He had guard duty and the Russians would swim over to visit and buy cigarettes. “I did not smoke. I also sold my pocket watch for \$100.00. They would tie them to their heads they wouldn’t get them wet. They were all real young guys.”

Mr. Lamprinakos got leave and visited Switzerland than the Riviera. Then the Japanese Surrender came. “My dad wrote and told me that I needed to go see my grandmother in Athens. ‘I am not going to Athens to get killed’”. He left Europe on Feb. 1, 1946 and landed here on February 11. My Lt. called me and said “You are not going home. You are going to communications school. ‘Why me?’”, because you are the only one qualified. ‘Do I get leave?’ No leave”. He was discharged on May 11, 1946 from Ft. Brag. My parents picked me up. Troy Simpson worked at Fathers store the Biltmore Soda Shop. He closed the store and Troy drove them. It was a happy day. When I came back I was having nightmares all the time. I procrastinated about going back to NC State. I went to Biltmore College and transferred in 1949 to the engineering school. And in 1950 I switched to textiles. I married in 1948 and soon had a son. “I worked at the Enka plant during my career.”

I hope there are no more wars and folks don’t have to go. There is an old saying “ I wouldn’t take a million dollars for the experience but not a nickel to do it over again.”

Mr. Lamprinakos also kept a picture from the paper of the Greek Ladies working on bundles for Britain for the Red Cross. Also an ad that the Greek merchants put in the Asheville Paper in support of aid to Greece. At the end of the interview he said “This is only the 2<sup>nd</sup> time I have told this story. The first was to my grandson when we were making a long car trip. And now this”.