Interview with Webster Phillips

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DePue: Today is Monday, December 12, 2011. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History. Today I'm with Webster Phillips in Pontiac, Illinois. Good afternoon, Webster.

Phillips: Good afternoon.

DePue: I'm excited about having a chance to talk you. It's not too often I get to talk to people who were at D-Day, just a few days after there, and at the Battle of the Bulge, and a lot in between, right?

Phillips: Yes.

DePue: Well, let me start you from the very beginning, if I can.

Phillips: Okay.

DePue: Where were you born?

Phillips: Where was I born? Thebes, Illinois.

DePue: And when were born? What's your birth date?

Phillips: December 15, 1920.

DePue: You're coming up on your birthday in three days, then.

Phillips: Yes, I am. (laughs)

DePue: Ninety-one years.

Phillips: Ninety-one years.

DePue: Hey, you're doing pretty well. Where did you grow up?

Phillips: I grew up all over the place. My dad was a factory employee, and it was during the Depression. He'd get out of work, and he would not rest until he had found another job. And then he had brothers who were working, several brothers, and they'd call him up and say, Well, come on over here; we can get you work here. So he'd get us together—he would never go off and leave us—but he'd take us all with him. So I think it was about twenty-five different grade schools to get (laughs) through the eighth grade.

DePue: Wow. Well, your timing wasn't good if you came of age right at the beginning of the Great Depression, didn't you?

Phillips: Yes, I did.

DePue: Was your father's name, Webster as well?

Phillips: Yes, it was.

DePue: Are you a Webster Junior?

Phillips: No, Webster Elijah; he was Webster Jannings.

DePue: Okay. I know he ended up in Rockford. Did you have some brothers and sisters as well?

Phillips: Yeah. I had **three** brothers and three sisters.

DePue: That's a big family, then.

Phillips: Yes.

DePue: (laughs) No wonder he had to find work, huh? What was he doing in Rockford, then, do you remember?

Phillips: Yes, he worked in the factory. Started a trade of polishing and bumping. That's take, like hubcaps and chrome trim and stuff like that, and buff out to the bright, shiny finish. This was a job he did all the time. Actually, I started doing the same thing when I started working.

DePue: So he was fortunate enough to have work through those very tough years.

Phillips: Yeah, he made sure he had work.

DePue: Did you folks live in Rockford itself?

Phillips: Yes, we did.

DePue: Just curious. Did you have indoor plumbing?

Phillips: Yes. We had indoor plumbing in Rockford, but we lived in several places where we didn't, so.

DePue: Before Rockford, huh?

Phillips: Well, no, it was after Rockford, down in a little place called Valero, Illinois, and places like that. Payville, another little town. We didn't have nothing, no plumbing, you know; it was just out in the open.

DePue: Okay. What was your mother's maiden name?

Phillips: Ada Marie Gulley.

DePue: Ada Marie Gulley.

Phillips: Gulley, G-u-l-l-e-y.

DePue: That sounds a little Irish.

Phillips: (laughs) I guess.

DePue: Maybe. I don't know. Okay. You remember anything else about growing up in the Depression? Was that a tough time to be coming of age, or were you not conscious of it?

Phillips: Yes, it was a tough time. Well, for example, I was sixteen years old and I bought myself my first automobile. I had to make payments on it, but I got laid off and I could not find work to save my life. And I hunted and hunted. So they (laughs) repossessed my car. I lost it.

DePue: That sounds like 1937 maybe that happened?

Phillips: Yeah, about that.

DePue: I remember there was a downturn in the economy in 1937. I mean, it had come up a little bit, and then you slid right back into the bad days of the Depression. If you're sixteen years old and buying a car because you had some money from your job, that means you didn't graduate from high school?

Phillips: I did not graduate from high school, no. When I turned sixteen years old, I got a job in a factory, and the first time I ever had money to spend, you know, for myself. So when it was time to go back to school, I didn't want to go, (laughs)

I wanted to keep my job. So I did, which was a mistake, but I made it, and I lived with it ever since.

DePue: Well, you weren't alone. There's lots of kids who were dropping out at that time, I would guess.

Phillips: Yes.

DePue: What was your parents' reaction when you didn't go back to school?

Phillips: Well, my mother didn't say anything, but my dad said, "You can drop out, but remember this: if you do, you're going to have to pay room and board." And he says, "If you get laid off and you don't have any money, it just piles up. You go back to work, you can catch it up." So (laughs) I paid room and board from then on.

DePue: You said there were a lot of kids in the family. Where were you in that group of kids?

Phillips: I was the oldest.

DePue: You were the oldest.

Phillips: Yeah.

DePue: Were they worried you were setting a wrong example for the rest of the kids in dropping out of school?

Phillips: No, they never mentioned that. My dad didn't like the idea that I was dropping out, but wasn't much he could do.

DePue: I know that by 1940, the United States started up the draft again, and it looks like you were still working at that time.

Phillips: Yes, I was.

DePue: Were you thinking about going into the military?

Phillips: No. The war started, which was December—I forget the date that the war started, but it was when Pearl Harbor was bombed.

DePue: December seventh [1941]. What do you remember about Pearl Harbor?

Phillips: Well, that we was all kind of astounded because it was bombed. But it was some time before the war was declared, and whenever war was declared, the people I was working for says, "We think we can get you a deferment if you like." I says, "No." I says, "I come this far, and I think I'll just go ahead and get it out of the way." So I went ahead and was drafted, and I served a little over three years in the Army.

DePue: You said you were drafted. What kind of deferment would you have gotten?

Phillips: Just to work in a factory, manufacturing.

DePue: Okay, so that was kind of a war-related industry where you were working at the time?

Phillips: Yes.

DePue: Okay, that's interesting. What was your mom's opinion about it?

Phillips: She never said anything. If anything worried my mother, she cried.

DePue: So it doesn't sound like she was excited about you going into the Army.

Phillips: No, she was not.

DePue: Did you think about joining any of the other services or enlisting?

Phillips: No. That's what they assigned me to do, was the Army, and that was fine with me. I didn't know anything about the other services. And like I say, I spent three years in the Army.

DePue: Which would mean that you joined in 1942. Okay, I've got your service record here. Date of entry into active service: 11 November 1942. So you managed to stay out of the Army for almost a year while they were trying to figure things out themselves, I would guess.

Phillips: Yeah. I was working every day.

DePue: Did you have any sweethearts at the time?

Phillips: Oh, no more than the average boy does. (laughter)

DePue: Okay, so you had nothing to worry about, taking care of somebody if you did go in the military, huh?

Phillips: No, no worries about back home when I was overseas.

DePue: No sweetheart to write to when you were in the Army?

Phillips: No, I met this sweetheart after I got out of the service.

DePue: We'll get to that quite a bit later, Webster. I'm looking forward to that part of it. Okay, where did you go to basic training, then?

Phillips: Fort Benning, Georgia.

DePue: Does that mean that you got assigned to the infantry?

Phillips: Yes.

DePue: Did you have any choice in being assigned to the infantry?

Phillips: Never asked me anything, just put me in the infantry. (laughs)

DePue: Did you know that infantry was where all the real fighting was going to be?

Phillips: Yeah, it was a funny thing that happened. I come home on furlough one time—of course, you had to wear your uniform even when you was on furlough—and I was walking down the street in Chicago. There was an old woman says, "Pardon me, do you mind if I ask you some questions?" I says, "No, ma'am." She says, "Well, I'm wondering, do they feed you well?" I says, "Oh, yeah, very good. We have three meals a day—very good, healthy meals." She says, "Do you have warm places to sleep?" And I said, "Yes, we have comfortable barracks." And she says, "My grandson went into the service. He went into the Navy and I've been worried about it." She says, "What are you in?" And I says, "I'm in the infantry." (laughs) She patted me on the shoulder, said, "Oh, you fortunate boy. At least you won't have to go fight."

DePue: (laughs) She had no idea, did she?

Phillips: No.

DePue: No idea. Do you remember much about basic training?

Phillips: Yeah, they was pretty rough on you in those days in basic training. You did a hell of a lot of marching, and you did calisthenics and trying to build you up and everything. And then you're training on different things. For example, I was in the S-2 section. They called me in and told me they was assigning me to the S-2 section. I says, "The S-2 section, what's that?" They said, "That's intelligence." (laughs) I says, "You picked a hell of a guy for that." But anyway, I went and took my S-2 training, and flying colors.

DePue: Did you have your S-2 training at Fort Benning as well?

Phillips: Yes.

DePue: Now, when you say S-2 training, I know that part of what you did when you got to the war was reconnaissance work, right? Patrolling?

Phillips: Yeah.

DePue: Which is a lot more infantry than it is intelligence work from what I know about it. Isn't it?

Phillips: Yes.

DePue: Okay. Did you get any special training how to do these reconnaissance patrols?

Phillips: Yes. You was taught how to go on a patrol, cover and concealment, all of those things like that, and just the other things they teach you to try to keep alive while you're on a patrol.

DePue: Well, tell me if I'm wrong, but what I know about a reconnaissance during World War II is you weren't supposed to be found; you were supposed to go out and look for the enemy and find them and then pass that intelligence back.

Phillips: Yes, you was. You're supposed to try to have an escape route, but it didn't always work that way. (laughs)

DePue: So does that mean that when you're actually out doing your job, you're in front of the friendly lines oftentimes?

Phillips: Yes, you're way out in front. And you keep track with the other troops by hand signals and so forth, you know.

DePue: Before you actually were sent to Germany, you started to understand what it was that you're going to have to do once you got to the war. Were you telling those kinds of things to your parents, or did you just kind of gloss over that?

Phillips: I didn't tell them that, no. I didn't want to worry them any more than they had to be worried. (laughs)

DePue: Okay. I know that you ended up in the 117th Infantry Regiment, which is part of the 30th Division. How long after you went through basic training did you get assigned to the 117th?

Phillips: When I went in the Army, they took us downtown in Chicago here and they asked us a bunch of questions and give us some physicals and things like that. And they marched us downtown then and put us on a bus. We took off, didn't know where we was going. We went to a camp, into Rockford, but I can't think of it.

DePue: Camp Grant?

Phillips: Camp Grant, yeah. Camp Grant. It was eleven o'clock at night, and they were blowing "Taps" when I got off the bus. I spent the rest of my service until the war was over in the 30th Division, 117th Infantry.

DePue: It sounds, then, like right after you got done with your basic and your advanced training to be in the intelligence, that you were assigned to the 117th?

Phillips: Yes.

DePue: Okay. That's kind of what I figured. What I know about the 30th Division, they start off with a bunch of kids from Tennessee and South Carolina and North Carolina and Georgia, so what's a Yankee doing with all those guys?

Phillips: (laughs) We fought the Civil War over, right?

DePue: (laughs) I bet you did. But by the time you got there, it was pretty much people from all over the country?

Phillips: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: Okay. You got there, it sounds like, in 1943 sometime, to the 117th. Do you remember any of the training you did before the unit deployed over to Europe?

Phillips: Yeah, we were taught basic training, and of course that involved such things as learning how to march and so forth. It's hard for me to really come up with all of that, but it was the training that taught you to be a soldier, in other words.

DePue: I know that the 117th went around to a variety of different Army posts before they went overseas. One of the places, in November of '43, they came over to Camp Atterbury, Indiana. Do you remember that?

Phillips: Everybody was in Camp Atterbury.

DePue: That's close to home then.

Phillips: Yeah.

DePue: Did you get some furloughs?

Phillips: Yeah. No more than usual. About two or three, I don't know what it was. But I was at Camp Atterbury for—I forget how long, but it was quite a spell.

DePue: Yeah, and I think the next posting for the unit was to Camp Miles Standish, Massachusetts. Does that ring a bell?

Phillips: Yeah, we wasn't there very long, though.

DePue: That's because you were shipping overseas, right?

Phillips: Yeah, we were getting ready to ship overseas.

DePue: Okay. From what I've been able to read about the unit—and the 117th saw a lot of action, so there was quite a bit written about it—February 12th is its shipment date overseas from Boston on the USS *John Ericsson*. You remember shipping overseas?

Phillips: Yes, I do.

DePue: What was the boat ride like?

Phillips: (laughs) I was so thankful when we got over there, even though we was going into combat, because I was sick from the time I got on that ship till I got off. I've never been a sailor. That was out of the question. But no, I was seasick. But when we got off of that and got into combat, then I was all right. And I had a very good record with combat.

DePue: Mm-hmm. One of the things you mentioned when we met previously, you talked about being on guard duty on the ship. You remember that story?

Phillips: Yes. I was on guard duty, and I was leaning on my rifle. A lieutenant come up and said, "Soldier, is that a way to stand guard duty?" And I said, "No, sir, but if I wasn't leaning on this rifle I'd fall flat on my face." (DePue laughs) So he says, "Are you sick?" And I said, "I'm so sick I feel like I'm going to die." He says, "Okay, I'll be back in a minute." So he brought somebody up and relieved me and let me go back below and get in the bunk.

DePue: So just lay in bed, that was the best thing for you, then?

Phillips: Yeah.

DePue: With all the other sick GIs, huh?

Phillips: Yeah.

DePue: Okay. I don't know of anybody I've talked to that had a real pleasant trip overseas. They all have similar stories, so it couldn't have been any fun. You landed in Liverpool, England, I think on February 24, 1944, so this is still several months before D-Day. What was your first impressions of England when you first landed in Liverpool?

Phillips: Oh, I just thought it was an interesting place. And it's definitely different than anywhere I'd ever been before. And we didn't have long to stay in Liverpool. We shipped to Camp Blanding—not Camp Blanding—I can't think of the name of it now.

DePue: Well, I think you told me before, St. Albans? Does that sound right?

Phillips: St. Albans. We was at St. Albans, and we was at another place called Petworth.

DePue: Petworth. I know the unit was there. What kind of training did you get when you were in England, then? Was it different?

Phillips: Yes, we worked all kinds of problems and did all kinds of maneuvers to try to simulate combat and things like that. And just regular soldier training.

DePue: You think it was the kind of training you needed to get ready to go to fight?

Phillips: Yes, it was very good training. One of the things we had to get ready for was to be able to accept the fact that we were in combat or were going to combat. At first we thought it was a lark, you know, but we found out different real quick.

DePue: I've got to believe that when you were in England, you couldn't go anywhere in England without running into other soldiers or units getting ready or air bases. The military had to be all over that place.

Phillips: It was all over, yes. And another thing, we was at a little town—it was Camp Petworth—and we was going into town, about three of us, and some English soldier come by and he says, "Good day, Yanks." (laughs) One of the guys just hauled off, just knocked the hell out of him. And we stopped him and says, "You fool, they call us all Yanks." "Well, there's nobody that calls me a Yank."

DePue: Oh, this is one of the guys from the South, huh?

Phillips: Yeah.

DePue: (laughs) Well, I wouldn't have guessed that. Did you have a chance to get some furloughs in England, then?

Phillips: No, not really.

DePue: So you didn't have—the story about all the Americans and the Brits, the way the Brits felt about the Americans? Let's see, they were overpaid, oversexed, and over here.

Phillips: Yeah. (laughter) That's what they said. And there was a woman wrote a letter in the newspaper, and she said that if the mothers of the American soldiers could see how their sons act, they'd be very disgusted with them. Some other woman wrote a letter back, an English woman, and she says, "America is a big country. We don't have anything over here to match that with. If those boys' mothers could see them, they'd have been very proud of them, because that's the way that they act in America." Some guy had been in a tavern drinking, had a few too many, step out on the street and he's like, Whoo, (laughter) give a holler, and the English don't do that.

DePue: So in most cases you think the English treated the Americans pretty well when you were there?

Phillips: Oh, yeah, I think so.

DePue: Did you have a sense as you were there, after a couple months, that this is building up to be something very big pretty soon?

Phillips: Yeah, we knew it was coming. We didn't know just when. But it was a… oh, it's hard to explain it.

DePue: Well, I wonder if you can tell me about June 6th. That was the day that D-Day began, and I know the 30th Division—

Phillips: Oh yeah, June the 6th.

DePue: —wasn't one of the first units, but you weren't too far behind. You remember how you felt when you heard the news on June 6th that we were finally doing it?

Phillips: Yes, I did. We was very excited, and we were very nervous about it. And then they loaded us aboard ships—boats, landing craft is what they were—and we went across the Channel. And they show you how things work out. It were the LCIs, they were the landing craft infantry. They run up there. They had the gangplank on each side, and they ran that gangplank out, and they started running soldiers off. The first several soldiers went in the water over their head; they was weighted down with equipment and everything. And that was it; they went down like a rock.

DePue: That was when you landed as well?

Phillips: Yeah, it was landing craft.

DePue: Wow. I know that the 30th Division, the 117th got there, from what I read, on June 10th, so that was D-Day plus four. That's still when there's pretty heavy fighting. You went into Omaha Beach. Did you guys know how ugly it was in Omaha Beach?

Phillips: Yes, you could see all the signs of what happened and everything. Omaha Beach was a very bloody battle. I don't know, it's just, you go into that and hoping for the best. And it all turned out for the best for me, but for a lot of guys it didn't.

DePue: Well, what were you thinking, then, when you see this destruction and you know, Okay, I'm just a couple days away from actually getting in the real fight? Was your heart in your throat, maybe?

Phillips: Yeah, you were nervous about it. But we tried to be bold and cocksure, but it really was a front.

DePue: Well, you said you were in the 117th, and I think you mentioned in the 3rd Battalion?

Phillips: Third Battalion, 117th Infantry.

DePue: Which if I understand correctly, if you're in the reconnaissance, you're probably in the battalion headquarters, and they had a reconnaissance and intelligence platoon, right?

Phillips: Well, they did, but it sounds different than it actually was. When you're in the infantry and intelligence, that means that you've got to go out and get information. You pull patrols, night patrols, and things. I've went on patrols at night, and you could lay there and see German soldiers walk by, hear them talking and everything; you're laying there real quiet, (laughs) you know.

DePue: Hoping they don't find you.

Phillips: Yeah, yeah. When you went out on patrol like that, you went out looking for the enemy, and you'd come back and turn in your reports, what you saw and all, and hoping that you made it safely back. I had one incident: I was out on patrol most of the night. Come back in, and the first sergeant says, "I need somebody to take guard duty." I says, "Can't you find somebody else? I've been all over the front of the lines on patrol tonight." He says, "These guys has been pulling guard duty and they're tired of it." So I started walking back. I deliberately walked past the CB tent, and there was a major, Major Phillips. He says, "Where in the hell are you going?" And I says, "I'm going to go and pull guard duty." And he said, "We've got men to do that." I says, "Yeah, but their first sergeant said that they're tired of doing it and that he wants to have us do some of it." And he says, (laughs) "To hell with that. I'll talk to the first sergeant. You guys don't have to pull guard duty."

DePue: Yeah. What you were doing was a lot worse than guard duty. I don't know how you'd stay awake—

Phillips: Yeah, but see that first sergeant, he wasn't getting out there doing that and he had no idea.

DePue: You mentioned when we met earlier about the 4th of July. You remember anything about the 4th of July? You would have just been on the beaches a couple weeks by that time. I think you mentioned seeing the aircraft flying over.

Phillips: Yeah, well, we was always seeing aircraft flying over.

DePue: Okay. It wasn't too much longer after the unit got there that you guys got into action. I know that, if I can pronounce this right, on July 7th, you folks were close to the Vire River. Would that be how you pronounce it, V-i-r-e, Vire, in Normandy?

Phillips: Vire.

DePue: The Vire?

Phillips: The Vire Canal, yeah, Vire River. I told you about that time going on a patrol up the Vire Canal. And that's where Colonel McDonnell… they were telling him about my actions in that, and he says, "I want that man on my operation post."

DePue: Was this the battalion commander? Do you remember?

Phillips: Samuel T. McDonnell.

DePue: You remember that one pretty well.

Phillips: Yeah. He was one of my heroes.

DePue: Well, why did he want you on his patrol all the time, on his watch?

Phillips: I don't know. He just liked the way I did things and all.

DePue: Well, your daughter mentioned something about you were on patrol around that action someplace. You saw somebody in front of you, and there was a German in front of you, and you had to take your weapon out quick and didn't even get it up—you just have to kind of do a quick draw on him?

Phillips: Yeah. Well, it was a place where there were two houses on a kind of a hill. I was standing there talking to Colonel McDonnell. My rifle butt was down on the ground, and I seen a German soldier walk up from between those two buildings, and he was raising his rifle up, getting ready to fire. I swear to this day that he was aiming to get Colonel McDonnell. But I was bringing my rifle up, and it seemed like I was in slow motion. I thought, I'll never get that rifle up far enough to get a damn shot. So I got it off to the hip and squeezed a shot off from the hip, squeezed a shot off from the hip. When I did, it was just a split second before that guy fired, but he spun around, went down on his butt, jumped up, ran over between the other building. There was two GIs over there, and they shot him. He was getting a grenade ready to throw, and they shot him and killed him. They come over to me then and says, "You're going to have to learn to shoot better." I says, "What in the hell are you talking about?" And he says, "That guy had a perfectly good Luger on his belt. and that's what you hit. You tore the hell out of that pistol." (laughs)

DePue: Well you had to feel pretty lucky that day, though.

Phillips: Yeah.

DePue: And that's why McDonnell decided you needed to stay with him?

Phillips: Yeah Like I say, I got along famously with Colonel McDonnell.

DePue: Well, I want to take this opportunity to read the first of the three Bronze Star certificates you got, because it wasn't too long after the unit got into action. You guys saw your first real combat—I know you had taken some artillery fire before this—but I think it was July 7th, and on July 9th, you were awarded a Bronze Star. So here's what it reads: "Private First Class Webster E. Phillips is awarded the Bronze Star Oak Leaf Cluster for heroic achievement in action on 9 July 1944 in France. During a fierce engagement with the enemy, Private Phillips distinguished himself by outstanding devotion to duty, occupying a forward outpost when a succession of counterattacks were launched by the enemy. Private Phillips fought aggressively and not only succeeded in contributing towards repelling the enemy efforts but also helped to evacuate the wounded and direct aid men to the litter cases. His coolness under fire and determined fighting spirit reflect great credit upon Private Phillips and the Armed Forces." Do you remember that action?

Phillips: Yes, I do, very well.

DePue: What else can you add to that?

Phillips: Well, all of the years that have gone by, not too much. They pretty well wrote that out. And I always have said that what causes a guy to get like the Congressional Medal of Honor or something is the way it's written up. If you got a real good writer who can explain things out real good, he might get a great [story].

DePue: Well, it still sounds to me like you earned the Bronze Star.

Phillips: I earned the Bronze Star. And again, I earned the Bronze Star three times. It only says once here, but…

DePue: Well, we'll get to the other two. We haven't gotten that far yet.

Phillips: Yeah.

DePue: But here's what strikes me about this, Webster. What we've talked about so far, you're supposed to be going up, looking for the enemy, and not have them find you. But obviously that didn't always work out that way, did it?

Phillips: No, it didn't. It did not. Fact is, your officers in the battalion liked to have you along with them when they went on a patrol or something. See, we were not supposed to do combat patrols, we were only reconnaissance controls. But they'd say, We got to go out on patrol and we want you along because you might see something that we'll miss. So actually they was taking you out on a combat patrol.

DePue: Well, and I bet that your patrolling skills, because of the nature of what you did, that people in your section were better at patrolling than most everybody else as well.

Phillips: Right, right.

DePue: At least that's what you thought?

Phillips: Yes. But they wanted somebody from the S-2 section along with them.

DePue: Okay. I just wanted to mention here—you might not even have known it at the time—you were taking on the German Panzer Lehr Division. You remember that? You took on one of the elite German divisions at that time, the Panzer-Lehr division. Did you see a lot of tanks when you were fighting at the beginning? German tanks?

Phillips: Tanks? Yeah, we ran in there. Of course it was quite a tank, but I don't recall really everything about that action.

DePue: Yeah. Well, I know that once you're in combat, all of these things kind of bleed together because you're only working, what, twenty hours a day, and lucky to sleep a few hours?

Phillips: (laughs) Talking about sleeping, you know, when you'd go to bed at night in your foxhole, two men would dig in together. You spent two hours being awake looking for things, and you wake the other guy up, and he'd spend two hours watching. Well, I was assigned a new man. They put him in with me. He was kind of elderly as far as we were concerned—you know, we was just kids. And his turn to sleep, he just lay down, and boy, he'd saw logs. And then it was your turn, you'd wake him up, and then every little thing that happened, he'd shake your foot, "What's that? What's that?" So you'd try to tell him. So it ended up, I think he was with us for three days, and I didn't get a bit of sleep during those three days. Then he started—I don't know how it happened—but anyway, he was running, getting towards the rear, and there was German tanks. He jumped down in a foxhole, and the tank ran over him, and it didn't kill him, so it injured him up, so they had to send him back to the States. So that's (laughs) the last I saw of him.

DePue: Did you have any casualties on your reconnaissance team?

Phillips: Yeah. In fact, it was pretty close to 100 percent. You know, there are six men to a reconnaissance S-2 section. And I don't know how many times it was replaced. They'd have to bring somebody in to replace those killed or wounded.

DePue: Did you have somebody who you were especially close with in your team?

Phillips: Worked real close with? Yeah, Hank Hendrickson. I've talked about him. Me and Hank, we still communicate with one another.

DePue: Did you both go into Normandy at the same time, then?

Phillips: Yeah, just about the same time.

DePue: Were you two the only ones who managed to be there at the end as well?

Phillips: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: What did you think about the new folks coming in? Did you look out for them and teach them the ropes when they came into the unit?

Phillips: Yeah, we'd try to tell them what to do, what not to do. Some of them were very receptive to the suggestions; others wasn't. A lot of them got wounded or killed, and a bunch of them took off running. I had one case one time—I forget who it was in the foxhole with me—but right up ahead of us was another hole, and there was a guy in that hole, and he was whimpering and kind of crying, you know. I think it was Hank Hendrickson. I told him, "That guy's going to go off. Keep your eye on him." So all of a sudden a shell came in and this fellow let out a scream and he jumped up and started running. e is running along, and there was another shell coming by, blew his hand off, and he never even paid any attention; he just kept running, screaming. And I said, "Well, he's headed for the back; they'll take care of him." So.

DePue: So what was it that kept you going? I mean, you were seeing some very rough action. The 117th, as soon as it got into action, saw some very tough action. So what was it that kept you going?

Phillips: I always tell everybody I was too dumb to get scared.

DePue: Most of the time you were thinking about too many things?

Phillips: Yeah. I was very, very fortunate as an infantry soldier to have never really gotten seriously wounded. I did get hit with a piece of shrapnel right across the back of the hand. My hand swelled up till it was really big, and the aid man who dressed it says, "You should go back and have them look at that." And I says, "Oh, bullshit, it'll get by all right." He seen me about a day or two later and he said, "How's your hand?" I says, "It's still all swelled up." "Well," he says, "the aid station's just the other side of that hedgerow. Why don't you go over and let them look at it?" And I said, "Well, okay." So I went back over there, and the aid man, the doctor, says, "Can you wiggle your hand?" I says, "Yeah, I can move it something like that." "Well," he said, "you'll be all right in a few days. Go on back to your unit." Well, in about two or three weeks, our first sergeant says, "When the hell did you get wounded?" And I said—I think it was Saint-Lo—I says, "Saint-Lo, France." He says,

"What happened?" I said, "I got hit with a piece of shrapnel on the back of my hand." "Well," he says, "you've won the Purple Heart." (laughs) So.

DePue: So you did get awarded the Purple Heart?

Phillips: I was awarded the Purple Heart.

DePue: Well, "awarded," that's the wrong term to use. You earned that one. Yeah.

Phillips: That's really an important medal to win if you're in a war, is a Purple Heart.

DePue: Okay. I know that the unit was in the First Army, which means that at Saint-Lo, after you guys busted through Saint-Lo, I think Patton's Third Army came barreling through and headed on to the southern part of France, and you guys headed up farther north into Belgium. Is that right?

Phillips: Yeah. We was in the—I forget. We were the Third Army, I think. But anyway, that's the way it happened.

DePue: Did you get a chance anytime to go to Paris, after they had liberated Paris?

Phillips: I did one time <u>come</u> back to Paris for a couple days.

DePue: On a furlough?

Phillips: Yeah. A furlough or a three-day pass, whatever you call it.

DePue: Any memories about hitting Paris?

Phillips: Not really, not really. It was interesting to get back there, and it was funny to see how they was doing things. But I don't have any real strong memories about being in Paris.

DePue: Okay. Let's get back to the combat, then. I think it's October 9th you were awarded your second Bronze Star certificate. And let's see, that was I think near—your unit was in Belgium by that time, and I think it was probably after you had attacked the Siegfried Line somewhere near Palenberg, Germany?

Phillips: Yeah.

DePue: (phone rings) Well, we have to take a break anyway.

(pause in recording)

DePue: We took a quick break; during the break we had a phone call come in. But we were reminded of a story at least, going into Paris and marching along and people passing along drinks to you. Does that ring a bell to you?

Phillips: Oh, yes, sure. That happened not only in Paris but little towns and all when there was no taverns. Just marching along, and they'd be lined up along the road, and you'd go by, and they'd pour you a glass of wine. And then you'd go down and drink it as you went along. You got down there, your glass is empty, you handed it to somebody else, they'd run it back to get it filled up again. They just kept filling our glasses with wine. They celebrated very strongly.

DePue: Well, it had to make you feel great that you were wanted there, you were needed there, they appreciated what the American GIs were doing for them.

Phillips: Oh yeah. I told you awhile ago, didn't I, about the man that died holding my hand?

DePue: No, no, you did not.

Phillips: Well, we went into this little town, and there had been some shelling and the streets blowed up. So we were filling in the bomb craters, and two girls ran up, grabbed me by the arm and wanted me to go with them. So I went back and they took me down to a basement. There was a man laying there on a bed. The night before, he went to the other village, the next village, and got an American flag to wave when we went through. The Germans found him and they shot him, and he was laying there on the bed. He made a wish that he wanted to see an American soldier before he died. So (laughs) they brought me down there as the American soldier for him to see. He took my hand and was holding my hand and crying, and he died holding my hand.

DePue: Boy, that's one that stays with you, doesn't it?

Phillips: Yeah.

DePue: Wow. Okay, we had just talked before the phone call came in about the second Bronze Star. This was in action near the Siegfried Line. So you're in Germany now, October. "Private First Class Webster E. Phillips is awarded the Bronze Star for meritorious conduct in action on 8 October 1944 in Germany. During a bitter engagement with the enemy, the battalion to which Private Phillips was assigned"—that would be the 3rd Battalion, right?—"established an observation post in a town which had just been taken by friendly forces. As the rifle companies pushed into the open fields beyond the town, they were subjected to vigorous counterattack by the enemy. The hostile troops were sweeping directly into the town upon the observation points. Realizing that the rifle companies could not be called upon for help, Private Phillips and the other members of the observation post gallantly defended their position despite the numerous superior enemy and the fact that for the time they were completely encircled. These men displayed outstanding courage and contributed much to the repulsing of the determined enemy attack." Wow, so you were surrounded at this time.

Phillips: Yeah, surrounded. Had them all the way around us.

DePue: When they were talking about the other members, was that basically your five- or six-man recon team?

Phillips: Yeah, yes. Just the S-2 section. Well, I wouldn't say just the men of the S-2 section, but it had us and then maybe two or three other guys. But we defended that observation post until they relieved us.

DePue: Did that team take any casualties at the time?

Phillips: Did what?

DePue: Did you take any casualties that day?

Phillips: I don't remember.

DePue: Okay, okay. Well, we're getting pretty close to what Americans think of when they think of combat, and that's the Battle of the Bulge. And I know the 30th Division—I was looking at maps—the 30th Division at the time the Bulge began—I don't know if you're going to be able to see this real well—was on the north side of the bulge when it occurred, right on the north, kind of the shoulder of the bulge area.

Phillips: Yeah.

DePue: Tell me about what your unit did in the Battle of the Bulge.

Phillips: Well, in the Battle of the Bulge, we fought to drive the Germans back out of that bulge and straighten the lines. It was a very difficult job. Again, the Battle of the Bulge was known for its misery, because it snowed, cold, just temperatures right down around zero. Like I said before, all you had in the infantry was one blanket, and you had to sleep out in that snow and cold to fight that battle. But beside that, we managed to drive the Germans back and straightened the line back up, and that was the end of the Battle of the Bulge.

DePue: What was the worst of it? Was it the cold, dealing with the cold, or the combat?

Phillips: Well, the combat was bad, but the cold was miserable, and you couldn't escape that. Day and night you were cold.

DePue: Do you know what unit the 117th was fighting during that time, what the German unit was?

Phillips: No, I don't.

DePue: According to the history, it was the 1st SS Adolf Hitler Division.

Phillips: Oh yeah. (laughs)

DePue: So if you're the Adolf Hitler Division, you know, you consider yourself part of the elite of the German army, so you guys are fighting the elite of the German army at the time.

Phillips: That brings up another thing. There was a woman—she was on the German side—she talked, you know, about the Germans.

DePue: Axis Sally.

Phillips: Axis Sally. And she named us FDR's SS troops. (laughs)

DePue: Did you hear any of those broadcasts yourself?

Phillips: Yeah, I've heard Axis Sally talk.

DePue: What did you think when you're hearing that stuff?

Phillips: Well, we know that she was just trying to excite the Germans to get them to fight harder. But we know that when she was talking about we were FDR's SS troops, (laughs) the other units got really teed off about that. Somebody said, "Well, the 30th Division didn't ask Axis Sally to call them FDR's SS troops. That was her own idea."

DePue: Yeah. Well, I mentioned before, you guys are right at the shoulder of the northern side of the bulge, so if they're going to be successful, they've got to break through that and push you guys back. I know that there were six major attacks against the 30th Division, and all six of them were repulsed, so you guys obviously did your job in holding the shoulder.

Phillips: Yeah.

DePue: Much else that you remember about the Battle of the Bulge?

Phillips: Well, I remember that we were someplace in Belgium, I think it was. They loaded us on trucks; we drove all night long, and we were wondering what in the hell this was about. About daylight they stopped and we unloaded and started marching up the road, and that's when we ran into the shell fire and stuff. It was the Battle of the Bulge. From then on it was (laughs) hell to pay.

DePue: What was it like being under enemy artillery and mortar fire?

Phillips: It was very stressful. You'd lay there and hope that the next round would miss you. But I don't know, it was just lay there and hope for the best. Because you had to hit the ground, you know, when artillery's coming in. You don't want to stand up and thumb your nose at them.

DePue: Well, and you can't do much about it either, can you?

Phillips: No. No, you can't. No.

DePue: And I would imagine it was hard digging if you wanted to dig a foxhole, with the frozen ground.

Phillips: Yeah, you couldn't. Well, they issued us a little block of TNT, and you could chop down a little bit and get a hole started and then put that TNT in there and blow it up and make you a foxhole that way.

DePue: That's how you dug your foxholes?

Phillips: Yeah, in the Battle of the Bulge.

DePue: And I'm also guessing you weren't allowed to light any fires, were you?

Phillips: No. No, we didn't even dare to do that. Even if they said you could light a fire tonight, we wouldn't have done it because that gives away your cover and concealment, let the enemy know where you're at.

DePue: How'd your feet hold up during the bulge?

Phillips: My feet?

DePue: Yeah.

Phillips: Well, then again, it was each soldier. They told you to take your shoes off every once in a while and massage your feet and get the blood circulating. Well, it was a hard thing to do, but we did it. The guys that did it, they didn't lose their feet; those that didn't, they had to have their feet amputated because their feet froze and they cut off the circulation and they had to amputate their feet.

DePue: Was Hank your foxhole buddy during most of these times?

Phillips: Not really. We got together a lot, but he'd be assigned to something else. Hank made sergeant. The way it happened, we had a S-2 section commander that he got wounded. And they sent me back. Colonel McDonnell wanted me to take over that section. So they sent me back, and I ran the section for, oh, several weeks. But the company commander was from California, and that's where Hank was from. So he wanted to give Hank a try. So they brought Hank up. I told Hank, I said, "It's one of us going to make sergeant. If you do it, fine; if I do it, I don't want you to hold it against me." Well, (laughs) Hank was up there a couple days and he had the sergeant's rating. That company commander wanted to get another boy from California in there. So that was it. But I lucked out all the way around, too, because my affiliation with Hank, he

became a sergeant, and it got to where if they assigned a detail, if it was especially bad, they wouldn't give it to me. (laughter)

DePue: Well, it's good to have friends in slightly high places, huh?

Phillips: Yeah.

DePue: Did you stay a PFC, then?

Phillips: Yeah, I stayed a PFC all the way through.

DePue: What happened with your unit, then, after the Battle of the Bulge in the next couple months? Did you push back into Germany after that?

Phillips: Yeah, we ended up in Germany. I forget the name of the town now.

DePue: Okay, I'm going to go ahead I think now and pick up your last Bronze Star, which you got March 18, 1945. And reading this, you know, Americans now think the war was pretty much over at that time, but no, there was still some pretty tough fighting even in the March timeframe. So here's the citation: "Private First Class Webster E. Phillips is awarded the Bronze Star Oak Leaf Cluster for heroic achievement and actions on 28 March 1945 in Germany. Private Phillips heroically advanced under savage enemy fir —to be with attacking elements so that when the objective was taken he could immediately locate a forward-op command post. His courageous action allowed an immediate displacement forward and a close contact with the forward elements of his battalion." Do you remember that incident?

Phillips: Yeah, I do. There's another thing, too, people probably doesn't know, is they talk about oak leaf clusters. But you can only win a medal once. After that, if you win it, you get an oak leaf cluster to wear with the medal with your ribbon. So like I got a Bronze Star, and I got two oak leaf clusters. So actually I won the Bronze Star three times.

DePue: Yeah. Did you also get a Combat Infantryman Badge?

Phillips: Yes.

DePue: When did you receive that, do you recall?

Phillips: That was pretty close to the beginning of the fighting overseas, in Germany.

DePue: Okay. I noticed that because I saw that on one of the pictures of you in uniform. That's one of the things that infantrymen take seriously, isn't it?

Phillips: Yes, that Combat Infantry Badge—you know you had two, had a lesser one, but the Combat Infantry Badge was the highest award that you could get for an infantryman and we were proud of our Combat Infantry Badges.

DePue: Again, from what I've read about the 117th, you guys saw plenty of combat throughout the war, but do you remember May 8th, I believe it was? May 8th was Victory in Europe Day, V-E Day. Remember hearing that news?

Phillips: Yes, V-E day. It was a funny thing. The war was over as far as we were concerned, and there was no yelling and cheering. (laughs) We just found a quiet place, laid down, and took a nap.

DePue: Do you recall where you were in Germany then?

Phillips: Not really, no.

DePue: You'd seen so much combat, and you were going through a lot of these towns and villages. What was it like in Germany at the end of the war?

Phillips: Oh, it was very calm. The Germans took a liking to us, and we'd kid one another. See a German, you know, and "All is kaput for Deutschland." (laughs) Say, "Ja, ja."

DePue: Were you instructed what kind of relations you were supposed to have with the German people?

Phillips: Yeah, we didn't have any hard times with the Germans. We actually got along pretty good with them.

DePue: Well, I thought that Eisenhower had put out orders not to fraternize with the Germans.

Phillips: Well, he did. We didn't…

DePue: You weren't paying attention?

Phillips: No. We didn't give them commissary and stuff like that, but we talked with them and all. Nothing serious.

DePue: What were the conditions like in Germany? Did you see a lot of battle damage where you were located?

Phillips: Oh, yeah, yeah. There's towns that were completely destroyed. You know, you'd walk down the street, and just nothing but piles of rubble on each side of the street. They'd been gone through with tanks with dozer blades on them and shoved it out of the way so they can get trucks and Jeeps through there.

DePue: Now, just a week or two before these, you know, German soldiers are trying their best to kill you. Now, did you have any sympathy for German civilians after the war?

Phillips: No sympathy, but no animosity. We didn't want to kill them all or anything like that. (laughs)

DePue: Did you have an opportunity when you were there after the war to see any of the concentration camps?

Phillips: Yeah, yeah. We went through several concentration camps. I forget what the situation was, but anyway, we had to check them out. But didn't see too much of concentration camps.

DePue: But you did see some, and you were hearing about others. What were you thinking when you saw that?

Phillips: The concentration camps? Well, we thought it was terrible that they had to do things like that, but we could understand why they did. And I don't know. Concentration camps are a terrible thing.

DePue: Did it reinforce that you were there fighting for the right cause?

Phillips: Yeah, we always felt we were. That was never a thing that strayed from my mind, that we was there for a right cause.

DePue: Well, maybe just because of the way you were treated by the French people. That would certainly reinforce it, wouldn't it?

Phillips: Yeah.

DePue: What did you think about your fellow soldiers you were fighting with? Did you have a lot of respect for the GIs you fought with?

Phillips: Who's that?

DePue: Your fellow soldiers. Did you have a lot of respect for them?

Phillips: Oh yeah, sure we did. We did very much.

DePue: How about the officers? What'd you think about your officers?

Phillips: The officers also. The officers, they took to us kind of very kindly. The S-2 section, we were considered experts, so that if it went into something, they wanted some scouts and observers with them. Because we knew how to search that out, you know.

DePue: I know in your unit I've read some about combat fatigue, and your unit being in combat as much as it was, you kind of get worn down after a while. How would you describe the morale of your battalion and your team?

Phillips: You mean, combat fatigue?

DePue: Well, was there good morale in your unit?

Phillips: Oh yeah, good morale. We were proud of our unit. And we always felt that the combat fatigue was kind of a hokey thing, that either you—there was no such thing as combat fatigue, or you was scared shitless of it. We didn't…

DePue: Well, that's interesting. How about the enemy, the Germans? What did you think of the enemy you were fighting?

Phillips: Oh, the Germans were good soldiers, and they had the edge on everything to begin with, but then we took it away from them.

DePue: Did you respect the German soldiers you were fighting?

Phillips: Yes, we respected them, but we didn't—oh, I don't know what to say—we didn't think like we didn't want to be buddies with them or anything like that.

DePue: Yeah. After victory in Europe, now you've got—this was in May, so you've got May, June, and July. What were you hearing about what was going on in the Pacific and what would be happening to the 30th Division?

Phillips: Well, we were scheduled to go over to the Pacific, but not myself. I was a high-pointer for the combats that you was in and for everything build up, and you'd get the points system. And I was a high-pointer; they couldn't send me to the Pacific. But we were supposed to be able to go home, be the first ones to go home, but the other guys who weren't high-pointers, they would ship back through the States, and the high-pointers, they got their discharge. And the fact is, the high-pointers got discharged faster than the others did.

DePue: Well, having landed on Normandy on June 10th, you earned plenty of points then, didn't you?

Phillips: Yes, I did. I had a lot of points.

DePue: I know that the unit shipped from France to Southampton, England, on August 13th, and that's just about the time—that was just after the dropping of the atomic bomb. What do you think about that? Did Truman make the right decision to drop the atomic bomb?

Phillips: I think so. I think he saved a lot of lives. Of course, he lost a lot of lives by dropping that and killing all those Japanese people and things, but at the same time, he saved a lot of GI lives because we didn't have to go fight in the Pacific.

DePue: Do you recall anybody suggesting that was the wrong thing to do, the buddies that you were with?

Phillips: Oh, a lot of people thought it was the wrong thing to do, yeah, but I don't think any of the soldiers I was with thought it was the wrong thing to do.

DePue: Okay, and of course just after that is V-J Day, and that's probably about the time that you ship from Southampton to the United States. According to the records, you shipped home—correct me if I'm wrong here—but did you ship home on the *Queen Mary*?

Phillips: No, I don't think it was the *Queen Mary*, but it was a luxury liner that we come back on. I can't think of the name of it right now, but—

DePue: Okay, so was the trip back home a little bit easier on your stomach?

Phillips: Oh, yeah, (laughs) much easier.

DePue: Do you remember coming into harbor in New York City?

Phillips: Yes, yes. We passed the Statue of Liberty, blowing the horn and whistles and so forth, and it was a big thing. We were all standing out on the deck cheering. And then to show you how things turn in a war, they landed us and they marched us up to a place that was a—where the incoming—they held you until they could find quarters for you. So they marched us out there on a parade ground and we was sitting there, and they said, "Men, we're looking for barracks, and we're going to find quarters for you." So we were sitting there. They came out again and told us that same thing. Then about dark it started raining. (laughs) And finally they come out and he says, "Men, I'm sorry. We can't find barracks, so you're going to have to do the best you can on the parade field tonight." So we sit out there on the parade field in the rain all night long.

DePue: Well, I bet you thought that was the last time you're going to have to be cold and miserable and wet when you left Europe, huh?

Phillips: Right.

Mrs. Phillips: That's terrible.

DePue: Yeah. Okay, how quickly were you able to get back home then after that? Were you discharged almost immediately?

Phillips: About two or three weeks.

DePue: Okay, that's pretty quick at that time.

Phillips: Yeah.

DePue: You remember coming back home, then?

Phillips: Oh, I remember coming back home. A funny thing happened. I got a ride back—my folks lived in Chicago at the time—and I got a ride back into town, the street I lived on. And I started walking down the street. All of a sudden there was a bus pulled up and stopped, and two girls got off and they started yelling and screaming, running after me. (laughs) And I thought, What in the hell gives here? It was my two sisters. They'd been to the show and they'd just got off of the bus and they seen me, and they was excited as hell, and…

DePue: This is just a chance encounter in Chicago?

Phillips: Yeah.

DePue: Wow, what's the odds of that, huh?

Phillips: Yeah. Well, on a street that they lived on.

DePue: Yeah, okay, okay. So a pretty happy day for you, then.

Phillips: It was. The folks had just started to get in bed, and I come in. Then I was walking with my two sisters, and I laughed about something, and my dad says, "That's Web. I'd know that laugh in hell." (laughter)

DePue: Well, now that you're out of the Army, 1945, late 1945, what are you going to do with the rest of your life? Did you know at the time?

Phillips: No, no. I got married, got me a beautiful wife, and—

DePue: Did you figure you'd go back to the manufacturing job you had?

Phillips: I did.

DePue: Okay.

Phillips: I did, yes.

DePue: Why don't you tell us about meeting your wife?

Phillips: About meeting my wife?

DePue: Yeah.

Phillips: Well, I used to live in Rockford, Illinois, and I had some cousins that lived there also. And one weekend I was in Rockford visiting my cousins and they said, "Let's go down the street here." We know a real nice tavern down there," and they says, "have a drink." And I says, "Okay." So I went in, and she was in there. And—

DePue: What's her name?

Phillips: Sarah. Sarah Eels was…

DePue: Go ahead.

Phillips: So anyway, they were trying to get a date with her, and she wouldn't date them. So I asked her if I could have a dance with her, and she said yes. So we danced and talked, and we get along fine. So then I asked if I could take her home, and she said yes. So (laughs) I took her home, and the next weekend I was back in Rockford picking her up, and we've been together ever since.

DePue: Now, I thought I heard something about Sarah having a fiancée at the time.

Phillips: She did, she did.

DePue: What happened to him?

Phillips: Well, he owned the tavern. (laughs) And that's where we met her, was in his tavern. And I asked her if I could take her home, and she said yes, and she took her engagement ring off and laid it on the pop cooler and walked out, and that's the last she's ever seen of him. Just like that, (snaps) *boom*.

Mrs. Phillips: Bingo.

DePue: Bingo, she says. Bingo. Okay, well, that's a pretty good way to finish up here. I want to ask you just a couple questions to wrap up, if you will. You saw the worst side of combat in that six months or so that you were actually—well, close to a year that you were actually in combat. Do you think what you went through was worth the sacrifice?

Phillips: Oh, I think so. It's a shame that men had to sacrifice their lives, but we were attacked, and we didn't declare war against Japan, Japan declared war against us. They attacked us at Pearl Harbor, unprovoked. So we had no choice but to protect ourselves. And how do you protect yourself in wartime? You fight a war.

DePue: Going through something like that, do you think that experience changed you?

Phillips: Oh, I guess. I don't know. I can't really tell you, it come on so slow. That was three years I spent in the Army, and eleven months on combat, so I mean, you build up slow to whatever changes there was.

DePue: Did you have any difficulties coming back to the United States and adjusting to being a civilian again?

Phillips: Do what?

DePue: Things like nightmares or just struggles like that?

Phillips: No, I never have. Never have. That's the reason I take a dim view of these guys that's had all these combat fatigue or whatever you call it. But I went through a hell of a lot of combat, but I never had what you call combat fatigue. I've never woke up at night screaming or anything like that. I don't even wake up and lay there and think about it.

DePue: Did you get involved in any AMVETS or American Legion, VFW, anything like that when you came back home?

Phillips: Yes. I've been a member of the VFW for years. Not the American Legion. A funny thing—I'm trying to think of something. Everybody thinks of the Red Cross, talks of it so highly, you know. When we was going overseas, a bunch of our boys didn't have enough money to pay for their trips or whatever they needed. So the company commander went and took down how much we needed, and he went to the Red Cross and asked for the money, and they said, "No, we can't give it to you." So they went to the Salvation Army and asked for it and they said yes. (laughs) So we've become great believers in the Salvation Army. (DePue laughs)

DePue: How proud are you of your service?

Phillips: Very proud, very proud. I'd hate to do it again, but if I had to—well, I couldn't, but—not now. (laughs)

DePue: I know you have two children, one son and one daughter. When was your son born?

Phillips: My son was born—huh? The 29th.

DePue: What year was he born?

Mrs. Phillips: '47, '48.

DePue: Okay, the son was born in 1947, and the daughter in 1948?

Mrs. Phillips: Right.

DePue: That would mean that your son would have been old enough to be going, or at least possibly involved with the Vietnam War. Did he get into the military?

Phillips: He was.

Mrs. Phillips: He was.

Phillips: He served—I don't know how long it was. How long did Paul serve in the military?

Mrs. Phillips: Two years.

Phillips: Two years.

DePue: Did he actually go to Vietnam?

Phillips: Yes.

DePue: What was your thought about the Vietnam War? That was such a different war than the one you fought in.

Phillips: Well, it was a different war, and the attitude towards the war was so much different. When we was in combat, everybody was for us 100 percent, but they didn't do that for the GIs that fought in the Vietnam War. A lot of them got snubbed and cold-shouldered, everything, because the—

DePue: So with a son who actually went to Vietnam, did that bother you a lot, the way they were treated?

Phillips: Yeah, I didn't think it was right, but… I think if a man is fighting for his country, he didn't start the war, his country was involved in it, and he should be given all due consideration when he has to fight in that war.

DePue: Okay. Webster, how would you like to finish off our conversation? This has been great to hear your experiences. You've done an excellent job. What would you like to say to conclude today?

Phillips: Well, I really don't have too much more to say. Somebody's got to prompt me a little bit, I guess. (laughter)

DePue: Well then, thank you very much. It's been my pleasure to talk to you.

Phillips: Well, it's been my pleasure talking to you.

DePue: Okay.

(end of interview)