



Interview with Claud R Black

How old were you when the war started? How old was I? I was 23 years old.

Did you join or were you drafted? I was drafted.

What was your rank? PFC

Did you move up while you were in the war? No further than PFC – no mam.

Where did you spend most of you time: Well, I was pushing most of the time. What do you mean where did I spend most of my time? I was in Germany.

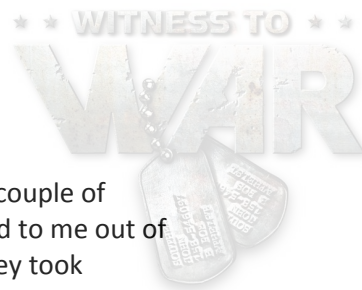
What do you mean by pushing? We were on the move. You see, we landed in North Africa, Casablanca. That's where we landed. From there we went up near Sicily. We crossed there and went to Messina for basic training, amphibious training – what you called amphibious. And I don't know how many weeks we stayed there. Several weeks – training – 25 mile march/run; run about half or better with a full field pack. At night time now – we started at dusk and got in there about morning. It was always in the night.

Why was it at night? Yep, well, that's the Army for you. It's a lot cooler – that's one thing – it's cooler. But that's the Army for you. Then we loaded on boat pads and we went to Anzio beaches. Amphibious landing – Anzio beach head. We unloaded there and of course we got an allotment. Enemy fire! And then we hit it and I mean we hit it. It was coming and going. People had to jump off and unload those little rubber boats. Couldn't do it. A bunch of them had to jump off and swim in with their packs about - all they had. We pushed back to Rome – we taken Rome. All right, they told us when you get to Rome, we will put yall in reserve and you won't fight no more. As quick as we got to Rome, in less than a week's time, we got sent back to the same spot we got before. More training for Southern France.

So we hit Southern France, when we got there, we did not get a thing in the world. We pushed through there, I can't name you the little old town, and I got wounded once after we left Anzio there– in two different places and I went back to the hospital for about a couple or three weeks. Just minor wounds. We pushed on to Strasbourg, France and I got wounded there in two different places. Back to the hospital again. From there we pushed to the Rhine River. And in January of 1945, I was taken prisoner of war at the Rhine River.

By who? By the Germans. All right, they evacuated us . And I will have to say one thing - I was a prisoner of war, and I got a book on how the boys got treated, and I am thankful to the good Lord that I got good treatment. I can say that and tell the truth about it.

Loaded us on box cars and we moved only at nighttime in a forty-eight box car. You don't know what a forty-eight is? For eight cattle and forty people – they carry eight cattle and forty people. That's what we ended up riding back in. And as luck would happen there was a young German boy on there with me. He always took care of me. He gave me cigarettes because they had done taken all my stuff when I got captured.



Well they carried me on back after we got through traveling, I don't remember, I guess a couple of weeks. We would stop at night and went in one hospital and the only thing I ever had said to me out of the way was from an old Nazi – not the regular Germans. I had my watch, I hid it, they took everything else; I hid my watch he gave me.

And that old man spotted it. I went to the bathroom one day and he came in there – he wanted that watch and I wouldn't give it to him. He told me he would come in there at night when I was asleep and (made the sign of cutting my throat). He did not get the watch because I knew we were moving out at dark. And they moved us out.

I run across a girl there who had been to the United States; she went back over there as a nurse in that hospital. She had stayed in Chicago years and years. She had a brother still in Chicago. She came back here when the war broke out.

All right, when I got wounded and I got captured there at the Rhine River. Snow knee deep. I was wounded twice – in the arm there and in the hip and about to be run over by a tank. I laid there and I tell you the honest truth that tank was coming at me and shooting at me with a burp gun we called it – similar to our machine gun. Out of 50 rounds, he got me with one round through the hip. And I thought “man, if you ain't no better shot than that, you ain't got no business shooting.” I didn't need no fifty rounds because I got a expert, a rifle expert. They got us on a tank, me and one of my buddies, two of us, from Texas and he could speak German. They got us on that tank that night – snow and one of our big guns knocked that tank out. My buddy and I we jumped off and we taken off. But we did not get very far; they caught us around the corner.

I have to say they were good to me again. I was cold hurting, no water, thirsty, sick, bleeding. I asked that boy for some water, and he did not have any. All the way back to the hospital, their headquarters, he made me snowball water. That is what I got, that is why I say I got good treatment. I got back there and they checked on my arm and stuff and there was no hospital, just their headquarters. And of course they questioned us. And I am going to tell you just what I told that there officer over there, he was a young boss. Just as nice a fellow as I would want to meet. He told me and he told my buddy “yall don't give us no trouble and don't try to break and we will treat you like you are supposed to be treated”. If you do, you can expect some rough treatment. So he also asked me “what are you doing over here?” I said “Sir I am not trying to be smart, but I am going to tell you just like this – I'm over here just the same reason why you find yourself over here on this front finding yourself fighting;” I said “I did not have no choice; they jerked me up and sent me here. Ain't that the reason you are up here” And he said “yes sir”. That is how it is.

That is when they put me on another train, about two days and nights. Then I got on another train that took me to the camp, hospital camp where I was at until I got liberated. I was in there 91 days. They were just as good to me as they could be. Only thing, there was no food.

No what? No food. All we got was one little bowl of potato soup for supper. That was it.

That was all? That was before we got Red Cross parcels and they split that three ways between three people, one little parcel, and that is what I had for breakfast. But we had a fallout shelter in the bottom. And every time they had an air raid, we went to the shelter. They had apples stored down there and they had cabbage. Of course they had a wire fence up but that did not keep us from eating food. We got some food every time they had an air raid.



They had called me in January and I guess it was around February that I got back to the base hospital. I said that German doctor who operated on me, they didn't have much to operate with. Anyhow when I got back to the states in Memphis the doctors told me there ain't a doctor in the United States that could have done the job they did. That's how good a job they done. She'll tell you I wore a brace on that hand for over a year and was able to move my wrist and fingers and make a fist in a brace they made. They were just as nice to me as they could be. There was not a doctor in the US that could do the job they did. They had a chapel there and they had services every Sunday – they allowed us to have services. They had a chapel up there and they had Catholic services. And they would have Protestant. That is what kind of treatment we had.

What branch of the service were you in? I was in the Infantry and I was a mortar man. Chief of mortar.

What's that? A 60 millimeter mortar. Well, it is tube based about 4 inches in diameter. It is about that long and you got a base, a square base about like this table, you carry it with you. You set this base on the ground and on that base, in the center of it you have a hole in it, where you set that tube in it. You had a tripod.

You had to carry this with you? Well, we had a man, one carrying the base and another carrying the mortar. We had, I think, about four people carrying extra ammunition for us. When you got ready to fire that mortar, it was similar to the rockets like they got today, And there were about that long and what you do when you get ready you had a pin and when you pulled that pin you better get it in that tube. And when he drops it in that tube and that cap hits that firing pin, she is gone and you better stay away from it.

Do you think that the young men today have as much patriotism as they did then? I don't know. I ain't going to say. There at that Anzio beachhead, I pulled many a young boys down, eighteen and nineteen years old; and some older that fell off their rocker. This guy up here from Double Springs, Overton, Ed Overton – I pulled that fellow down many times.

What do you mean, you pulled them down? They fell off their rockers, nervous. Couldn't take it. They couldn't take it. I have pulled many a eighteen, nineteen, twenty year old back in the hole.

About how many people were in your platoon? I was in a platoon. I don't remember how many were in a platoon.

Were they real big? Say we had a platoon, a mortar platoon and we had a machine gun. They had those little 30 mm machine guns. And you had your rifle platoon. And we had scouts. And I was out scouting and I would not have went out then if it hadn't been for one of these old men from the United States. I say old, I guess he was about forty years old. One of those West Point man, came over there. He did not know what fighting was. He was not as big as a – I guess he did not weigh over a hundred and fifty pounds, pack and all wringing wet. He joined us there at Strasbourg- I will never forget, on the Rhine River.

We set up in a big warehouse there. One on the right side and we were setting up on the side on the road. On the right hand side was a railroad trestle. We throwed guards up there at night; we'd have guards - daytime too.



And on that trestle they had a booth; like those you have on an Interstate where you have to stop at one of these booths and pay. That is what they had there. We set up there with a machine gun. I operated a machine gun sometime, the same as a mortar. That old man came out there; he had not been with us but about a week.

I saw some smoke coming out of the brush – they had just dug in earlier in the morning. They were cooking their breakfast. I knowed what they were doing and the other boy did too. There stood one German looking around and that old boy with me raised his rifle to take him. A Texas boy – he was the one I nearly had to push off the boat to keep from overturning at Anzio Beach cause he was scared to death. He raised that rifle to shoot and I said UN UN - don't do that or we will never make it back. I said he is not bothering us and I am not going to bother him. You just put that rifle down. If there is a gun fight, it is going to be fair. We made it back.

Is there anything else, you know that stands out most? I would be afraid to say. I will tell you the honest truth. I told them when we got in the hospital they said I was disabled. They had done called me in about two weeks before we got liberated in April. They had told me I was going to be an exchanged prisoner. In May I was going to be exchanged - American prisoners and German prisoners. Just before we got liberated.

What do you mean liberated? That's when the outfit were in there was freed. And them guards there come and pulled everyone in there and told us "Boys, they are fixing to come in and get yall; and there is nothing we can do." And they walked out and threw their rifles in one pile and put them on a white suit and they went outside.

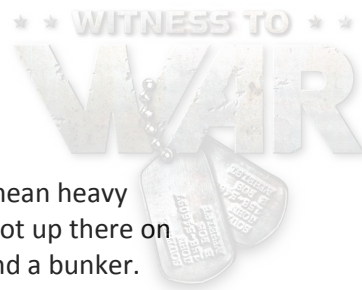
Did I understand you to say you were wounded four times? Three times, two times each.

All three times you were wounded in "two places?" Yep.

Each time you were injured, about how long did you stay on the injured list? Well, the first time I was in there, I guess I was on there for about two weeks. And the second time, I don't remember exactly. Now this is something you hardly even hear of or see. They sent me back to the convalescence hospital to build me up and send me back.

At mail call, they called out "Black - Hubert Black." I got a first cousin named Hubert. I went up there, but he had done gone. He had been there but had gone back – in the hospital. I was in the third division – he was in the fifteenth, third division – same outfit. Different situation. When we got back up there, and kind of pulled back for a few days, and reorganized, I went looking him up. It was my first cousin.

You did not know he was there? UN UN. In the meantime, we were at Naples, his daddy, I know him Naples. They let us go into town about one day ever so often. I went in there and I stumbled into a AFO, the one we were talking about – they let us go into town. We set up outside and two fellows passed by and one very big fellow spoke to me, had a handle bar moustache, and I mean it stuck out. Well he went down there about a block and he come back and he looked and grinned. I said I know that bird from somewhere. That time they come back again and about that time I said I am going to find out who that bird is. Wesley Thacks. Your daddy, I bet he knows him. I know Leman does. That was him. He was in the thirtieth division and I was in the fifteenth. There's two I met.



We went on there and after we left there and France, and we hit some heavy fire. And I mean heavy stuff from railroad, these big heavy railroad cars. We managed to knock them out. We got up there on a hill and I was lagging alone behind just to see what I could find because we had not found a bunker. I seen two fellows over there and I heard one of them say "Hey Black". I understand he was Moot Tucker. I know I did not know him one way from another. I went on up there and the other fellow was another first cousin of mine from Athens. Another Black. I didn't know he was over there. He was a first cousin to me.

I was reading about they said that World War II was the most destructive war and they said that everybody that had been in it believed if there would be another war and that it would be the end, you know. Do you that think another it would be worth it? There might not be another one like World War II, I mean it. It won't be fought by troops, not like Viet Nam either. It will be more from the air.

That's what they were talking about. That's why I told you the majority will be from the air. Now don't misunderstand me; they are going to have to have some foot troops in there too. They are going to have to have a few foot troops in there for scouting things out. There will never be another one like Viet Nam or World War II where it is all foot troops. Now we had a lot of airplanes firing, scrapers, we called them scappers and big guns.

When you went to scout things out, were you scared that you would get killed or something? Yes mam; you don't have to be scouting to be scared.

You talked about having to pull a lot of people up and everything – did anyone ever have to do you that way? Naw. I always managed to keep myself together – to keep my head cool.

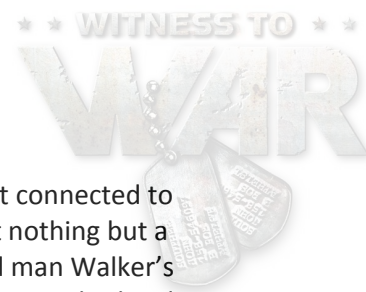
I wouldn't. I would have ran. I know that was the only way to get by.

Do you mind talking to me about the depression? What about the depression?

What you remember about it? Me – it was rough. Back in 1930, we lived out there at that time where Leman, PC lives now; that's where we lived. My daddy, he worked for the City Mill down here in Tuscumbia. A fellow by the name of Johnny Hawkins owned and ran it. They run a mill over there where Ray Lacks Feed Store is now. I think it was the building next door. My daddy worked for them, a dollar a day hauling mill all over Colbert County – Cherokee, Brick, Leighton. Dollar a day, hauling mill in a T Model Ford. About all you had to eat was what you raised. I had cornbread for breakfast many a time, young lady.

Why did you eat cornbread for breakfast? There wasn't anything else to eat? Like I said, Daddy was working down there and no more than he was making. And there was five little kids at that time. And that garden right up there where PC lives right now, my Daddy had a little plow, have you seen one of those little push plows?

I've got one too. All right we raised a garden up there and my daddy he fixed that plow. He fixed a piece on there and he tied a big heavy rope to that thing. He put a big stick out front and he hooked us boys to it. We plowed it and I mean we had a big garden. And that's the way we plowed that field. (laughs) You think I'm kidding – but that's the truth. Old man Kyle Keeton – he had a farm right up there by Walker Lumber Company. Do you know where J C lives ?



Yes: Two house above it up there. Old man Kyle Keeton farmed it. We farmed some of it connected to it. We went in there that year and I'm telling you the truth, it was in thirty-one. It wasn't nothing but a rock pile back out there where the crusher was at. What they called the Walker place, old man Walker's place. Out where the old rock crusher set, used to be an old house out there; old man Newt Taylor lived in it. That belonged to Walker too and that's where the barn was where they kept the mules. We had to go out there and get the mules. Daddy had a sled. We'd go out there with one mule and we picked up every rock on that place – we cleared them rocks. And I worked many a day out there Where Mr. Byrd lives, for Abe McKinney, who is dead and gone, making soghum

Made what? Soghum molasses. I worked up there for him helping grind sorghum for a half gallon of syrup – that's all. I was only a kid back then – I was thirteen years old.

You got a half gallon for helping? Yep

Was that half gallon for the whole thing? You helped him till he got all through with it? Naw - half a gallon a day. Soghum was cheap back then.

I seen my father do it. I thought you put a whole harvest up and he gave you a half gallon: Naw, 'he would make it for someone else. He brought his mill in there and set it up. And the people brought the soghum cane with them. And he grinded it for so much. And that was what I helped with. They brought it in already stripped. That was what I would get for feeding the mill. I would feed the mill – run that soghum through the mill.

Did you say you had a car? My daddy had a T Model Ford.

Did you have a radio? Yes mam. We moved from Athens in 1926, June of 1926. When we first moved here, old man Roberts, uh, Hudson was Supertintendent of Education. The school out there at New Bethel had burnt down and they couldn't find nobody qualified enough to build that school right. His brother-in-law, Jerry Grissom who lived up here in Rogersville told him about daddy. He talked to my daddy and he had us move down here so my daddy could build that school.

We come down here and of course the truck brought the furniture. It left about seven o'clock that morning and we left right behind it in a T Model Ford. We had to stop at every water hole, had seven flats that day coming down. Seven flats. We stopped at waterholes to fill the radiator up and at every big hill we had to turn around backwards because we could not go up the hill. They did not have a fuel pump on them then. We had to back up so the fuel would flow to it. We got out there about four o'clock and that truck done unloaded and headed back.

Yep we had them - a T Model Ford. And I have pulled for many days – fifty cents a day.

And In 1935, my father got killed in 1935- November - left my mother with 8 kids. The oldest one 18. He got married off and that left seven of us. I was going to school at Cherokee at that time. I remember in 1936, it looked like we weren't going to get nothing out of TVA. We had to fight them because he got killed at TVA. A TVA truck backed over him. Killed him. We had to fight them tooth and toenail to get it. I dropped out of school in 1936. I walked from Valdosta, on the hill out in Valdosta, up to Thogmorton Hill – do you know where that's at?



Yes? Out toward Wheeler Mountain. Do you know where that big hill out there is? Thogmorton Hill. I walked out there and plowed many days for fifty cents a day in my day.

All day long for fifty cents? Hun

All day long for fifty cents? Yes mam. Two big horses. I would get out there early in the morning and I plowed might near to dark. Yes mam for fifty cents.

And now you can't buy a Coke for fifty cents now. Back then they had the government, the state. They had different places set up. I remember Miss Dee Inman, who lived out there at Valdosta, they lived right beside your daddy up there; they lived kinda behind that Baptist Church – not the Baptist but the church of Christ. She had won the set up; they gave her so many clothes that she could fish off to different people. I mean to get them, you had to be in bad shape. And I have worn shoes back then, but I have gone barefooted every summer because we could not afford them. And you might not believe it, but I wore shoes many times when the soles came off them and daddy would take a piece of baling wire and punch holes in them and wire the soles back on them.

Is there anything most about the recession anything that comes to your mind first? Naw, not off hand.

I guess it was about the same wasn't it? All about the same.

Did yall have any theaters or anything like that? Yea, they had a theater in Tuscumbia.

Did you get to go to it at all? Hun?

Did you get to go? People were able to go, they would go but we didn't.

Not many people were able to go? Wasn't too many. The theater used to set right there in Tuscumbia.

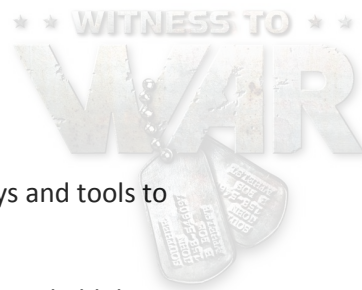
In town? Hun?

Where? Back up this way some. It used to be back up on this other block. You know where the State National Bank setting? It ain't State National no more – Across from Bank Independent. The Post office set right on the very corner. Next to it was the theater. Right across the street was Dragos; right across the street was the theater.

It cost a dime, but you did not have a dime? Where was you going to get the dime? That's what it cost – ten cents.

You did not go because you did not have a dime? That was terrible, wasn't it? The first theater I remember in Tuscumbia was called the Strand. There used to be the post office on the very corner there. Then the theater there. There have been lots of changes made. There used to be a service station there where the Bank of Independence sets. You don't remember that?

No. My brother operated that. First Kelsey run an automobile dealer there. My brother run a service station. The government, when Roosevelt first took over, furnished the farmers Jerseys, cows. That's one thing that brought us out – they started TVA. These farmers, a lot of people couldn't farm – they



didn't have no materials or tools to farm with. But the government furnished them Jerseys and tools to plow with. It was something to see someone out plowing with steers.

Times have changed. Quite a bit. People talking about the good old days. We live in the good old days now. Them past days were not nary a bit good.

I wonder when they say the good old days, if they meant the days when people were honest and people were a man of their word. Back then, as the old saying goes, a man of his word was when people said they would do something, they done it. When I say the good old days, that is what I am talking about. Well back then, you could lay down on your front porch and sleep all night on the side of the road and no body would bother you.

People didn't lock no doors – they did not think about locking doors. No Mam

Do you know the irony of all of this? People living over there in Africa in huts and things – we call them uncivilized, but they don't have doors on their huts. And here we are in civilization we have three or four locks on all our doors. See you are talking about the war –we moved from Casablanca to Algiers – there is a place you have to see. Them huts just like you said. And I mean they were poor sure enough; they were starving to death- no clothes - nothing and we thought we had it rough.

Do you remember much about the stocks and everything that was going on – the stock market crash?
Naw

Before that, they were real prosperous and everything. Naw I do not remember.

Was that in '29 or '28, the stock market crash? I think it was '29 when it crashed.

Do you think that is why the depression was so bad – they were used to - Do what?

The depression happened right after they were used to getting along real well, you know – prosperous? Why did it crash? I don't know.

I don't know why it did it either. Politics is all I can say. It had to be politics.

Yea that is all it was. The government might have owed so much money, they could not pay it back.

If that is about it, we have got to hit the road.

This interview was given by Claud R Black to Hugo Jones' daughter in 1987; I think she was either in high school or college. Occasionally, her dad would also make a comment. Some of the words are difficult to understand, but I think is at least 98% accurate.

According to Dad's Honorable Discharge, His MOS was 604, light machine gunner. He served in the following battles and campaigns: Naples, Foggia Co 105; Rome ARNO Co; Southern France Co, 105; Rhineland Co, Co 105. When he was liberated, he was in Company F, 7th Infantry Regiment, Third Army.



He was discharged at Fort McClellan Ala in June, 1946 as a PFC. He entered the Army in March, 1943. He received the following decorations: European African Middle Easter Service Medal; Purple Heart, 44 Oak Leaf Cluster.

He entered the African theater September 21, 1943 and the European Theater August 1944, and again May 9, 1945. He was in the Foreign Service one year, 7 months and 22 days. He was captured at Strasbourg, France, near the Switzerland border January 31, 1945.

His mustering out pay was \$300 and his travel pay was \$9.50.

He was in the Lazarett Rottermunster Hospital, Stalag 5 B near Villingen, Germany when he was liberated.

I would have been proud and privileged to serve beside this brave patriot.

Transcribed by his son Robert Black, January, 2011.