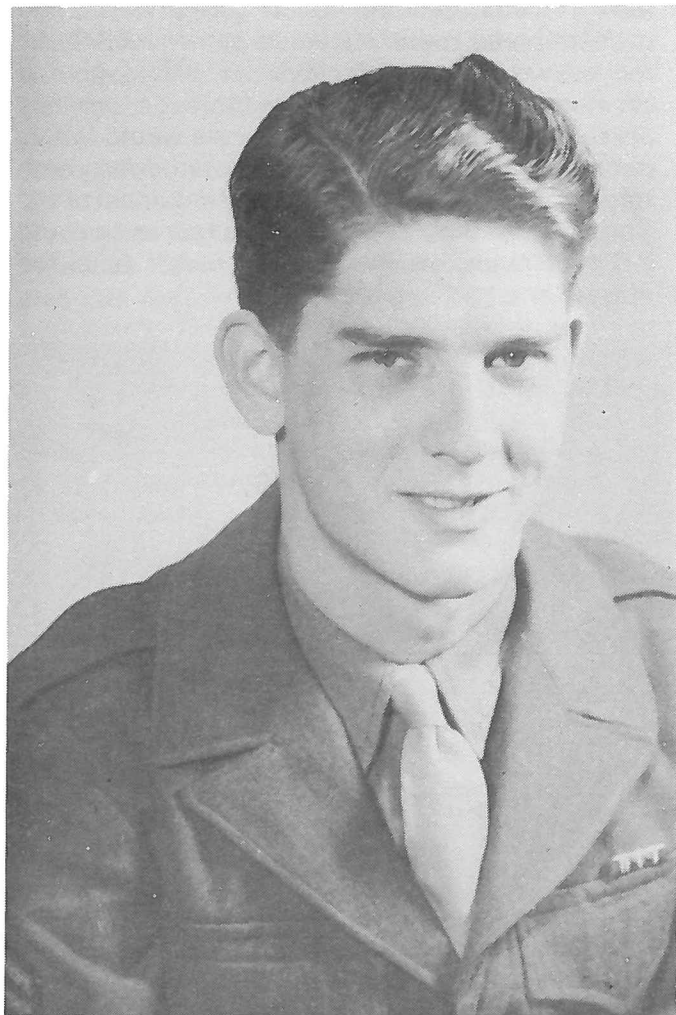


*“I had to keep my mouth shut
and do the best I could!”*



Roy Struble

This September I went to see Roy Struble to find out about the dedicated townsmen I had heard about so much. Once I got there I found out that Mr. Struble had spent some time in WWII. Having done a story on the war about my dad and having wanted to do another war story, by blind luck I was going to get to. He shared his experiences with me, and I want to pass them on to you.

“I was born October 28, 1921 in Quincy, Illinois. It was just a little town back there; I don’t recall what the population was. We moved from there to Galesburg, Illinois, when I was about six years old, and that was just a wide spot in the road. When I grew up it was about twenty thousand and considered small. The high school where I went covered a city block, and we had separate gyms and separate swimming pools. In the Midwest 25 to 30 thousand people was a small

town and everything was gauged by Chicago. I had heard about Cheyenne; everybody had, and I remember coming over the mountain and dropping down into Cheyenne. I was just amazed that it was a town smaller than where I grew up. No one had ever heard of Galesburg, Illinois, but we had all heard of Cheyenne, Wyoming. It is the same way with Steamboat Springs. It’s amazing. You take a trip, and people have heard of Steamboat Springs, but if you say Galesburg, they ask you if it is near Chicago. So I didn’t come from a small town?

“It’s funny, academically the further I went to school the better my grades got. My folks couldn’t understand why, as a freshman in high school and college, I was on probation. In my junior and senior years, when I got to the advanced courses I got all A’s and B’s. As the courses got harder I learned I had to study. Also I was a prankster, I have to admit. For example, in my third year of Latin class I bet the teacher that I could memorize a couple of hundred lines of Julius Caesar. I did it, and the next day I got to drink a coke in front of the whole class. Most of the time I was having too good a time in school. From high school to college is a tremendous adjustment, and from junior high to high school is a big adjustment, also, but I was having a good time dancing and going to parties....

“I went to Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. I majored in Botany, so I wouldn’t have to meet people. I enjoyed working in a laboratory, and I thought, boy, if I could just get a job in a laboratory, then I wouldn’t have to talk to people. I would have been in seventh heaven, but I ended up in a store. There I meet many people that I didn’t expect to be doing, since I did get my degree in Botany.

“After college I had three years and three days with Uncle Sam in the United States army. I was an aide in the medics in an infantry division. I was stationed in Germany during WWII. I was overseas about 18 months.

“That was an interesting experience to find some cockeyed colonel with an eighth grade education who couldn’t speak English, and yet somewhere along the line he had gotten into the reserves and worked up until he was a high-ranking officer. I remember this one guy in our division that I truly disliked, a colonel named Steve Lichene. He would come in and say, ‘You can’t not do that no more!’ That was his language. It left a little bit to be desired, and he was ‘god.’ He told us what to do, and we jumped, no question about it. We had no recourse. He

would come in on a Saturday night with something that bugged him during the week, and we would have to scrub the barracks floor till we could eat off it. Even at eleven at night he walked up and down, and we'd do it over. We did it over and over; we would be scrubbing the floor till three or four in the morning, instead of going out. There was nothing we could do, but it was good for us. It taught me to keep my mouth shut.

"We went overseas by ship. It was tremendous. We were moved to Fort Dix, New Jersey, and that's where we had overseas preparation. Then we went to Camp Kilmer for two days and took gas mask drills. We made sure that we had the proper equipment, no more, no less. They loaded us on the ship at midnight and made us go inside. No one could be on deck until five hours later, then they let us go on deck. When we got out we were away from port and in the middle of the ocean. There wasn't another ship in sight for twelve hours.

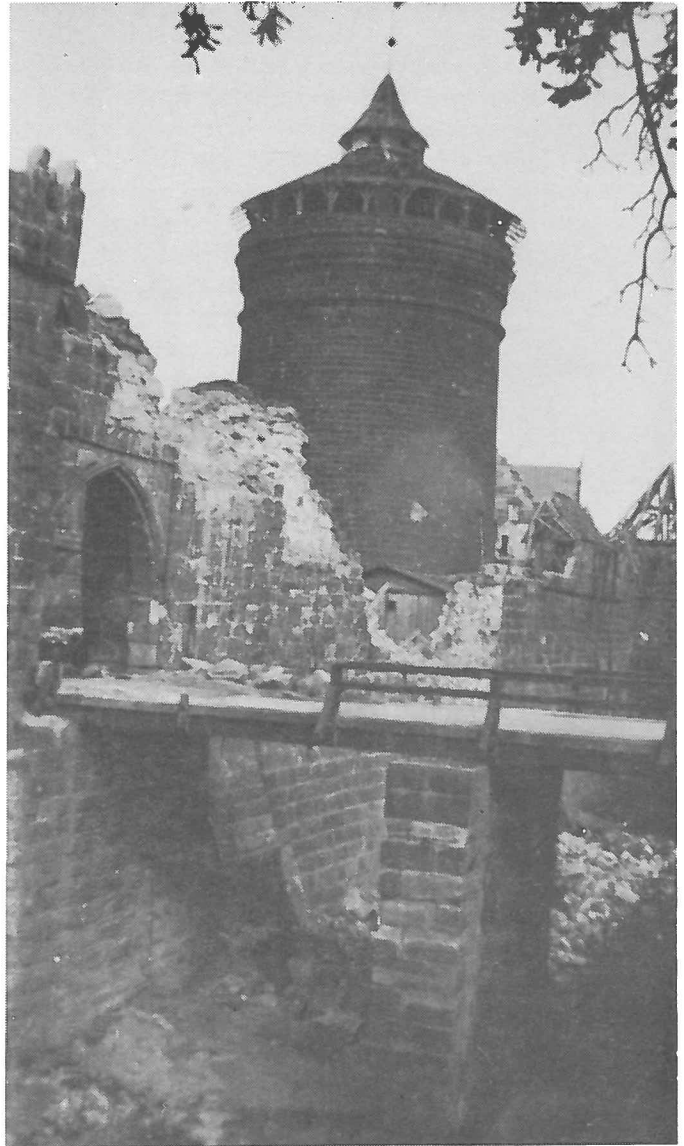
"We were on the Flagship, the biggest ship, with the generals, so we were in the middle of all the other ships. We ate at stand-up tables, once in the morning and once at night. We were eating a meal one day when some explosions occurred, so we went on deck. They were dropping depth charges. They said they had sighted a sub, but we never heard anymore. Nobody said a word, but that was enough to give us a thrill.

"We figured we would leave from the east coast, and most leaving from the east coast went to Europe. Judging from that we figured we were going to France. I can still remember getting there. We first landed on Cherbourg. The invasion had been several months before on Normandy. It was raining like mad when we got off the ship. We were in mud up to our knees, no rubbers, no overshoes or anything like that. We were just sloshing around in the mud. We pitched pup tents to get organized. We boiled water on gasoline stoves and heated C-rations. We didn't have dry clothing or shoes for the first month and a half. I thought everyone was going to be sick.

"I was in the aide station. There were twelve enlisted men, one medical officer and one dental officer. We had charge of all the medical treatment for all the special and attached troops of the division. We had a stand-up tent and a couple of Coleman lanterns, so we would take off our boots and put them next to the lanterns to dry. The next morning five minutes after we had stretched them out, they would be wet again. It was just ridiculous; what were we going to do? In the states we had chronic sick call all the time, but there I never had anyone on sick call. The only people I treated were actually hurt. It's amazing how a person can go through that, and the petty gripes kind of disappear. We had a lot bigger problems, so it was quite interesting.

"We were in the ninth army commanded by

Simpson. I have forgotten who the army general was. He wasn't very popular, but he was married to Margret something?, a popular opera singer. Our division chaplain was the general's brother-in-law. He was the biggest skunk and looter I know. Why, they would always tell us not to loot, but he was sending home silverware and everything he could. He was a son of a bitch, as far as we were concerned. He would give a sermon on Sunday, which was fantastic, but as a person, he was strictly a skunk. He would tell us not to do things, and then he would do the same things he told us not to. He was drunk most of the time, and sending things home as fast as he could get his hands on them. That didn't help the morale any."



*Gate in the original city
wall in Nurnberg,
Germany.*

I then asked Mr. Struble about supplies. "We got supplies by truck, supposedly, and by bartering. When we were at Fort Dix where we took our final physical exams, we had a list of equipment that was standard. It was what we were supposed to have to go overseas. We weren't supposed to have anything more or less. Of course, every division during basic training accumulates things, so we had a bunch of extra stuff. We wanted to turn it in there, but there was no place, so the army thinking was to get rid of the extra. Our engineer battalion took their bulldozers and dug a great big long, wide trench. We drove two and one half ton trucks, ambulances, jeeps, antitank guns and everything else into that hole, then covered them over with bulldozers. That's the way the army gets rid of extras. While we were doing that we came across a truck the division before us had buried. It's too bad because when we got overseas we started losing stuff in combat; since the war was going on we couldn't get all that we needed, and we had to do without.

"When we first landed on Normandy we were in mud up to our knees"

"Then during the war we accumulated equipment again. We had an inspection as we met the Russians at the Elbe River. We were only allowed so much equipment and nothing over that. We had extra trucks and ambulances, so we drove it into the Elbe River to get rid of it. We felt it was absolutely stupid, because it was perfectly good, useful equipment, and a lot of it brand new. That's when they issued the Yalta agreement, and we had to pull back. The Russians gave us one week. Well, there was no way we could move all our equipment, so we saw field after field of tanks, guns, trucks and jeeps that were left. What we didn't give to them we drove down into the river. That was absolutely stupid. I would get letters from home, and my folks were going without sugar. My dad was a traveling man, and he was rationed gas and tires. Yet he was perfectly willing to make sacrifices; everybody was back here, and I was in the army. But, here they were making sacrifices, and the army was just wasting millions of dollars worth of stuff. A person just can't justify that.

"We would end up bartering and trading. We'd get a quartermaster to do us a favor and get us something to trade with another unit. Medical supplies were screwy too. With some things they were very liberal and others it was just like

signing a Congressional requisition to get two ounces of Elixir Terpin Hydrate with codeine cough syrup, which is the standard cough syrup. For diarrhea we used Bismuth Sub Carbonate with paragoric which can be habit forming. So, we signed our life away for those, and morphine syrettes we would get by the handful. And for some stupid little thing for diarrhea and coughing we had to sign our life away."

"France was the only country where it wasn't safe wearing a Red Cross arm band."

Roy continued his story about the war telling me of some other aspects. "I was glad to get out of France. It was the only country where I was not safe wearing my Red Cross band. Medics were not allowed to carry any kind of weapon, so we wore Red Cross arm bands and supposedly were safe that way. But in France we weren't safe; we had to be with men who were armed at all times, even after the war was over. If they found anybody who wasn't armed they killed them, stripped them and took their clothes to sell. My dad told me it was the same in the first war.

"There were many incidents that occurred in Germany. I was along the Rhine when a German civilian car came through our lines. A sentry ordered it to stop, and they didn't hear or understand so they kept going. The sentries shot at it. Then the car stopped, and they had wounded one of the passengers of the car. It was a German civilian. There was a hospital about two miles down the road which made it behind the German lines. So, I and a jeep driver put this wounded civilian in a jeep and went to the hospital. Nobody stopped us. I remember that was the first time that we had milk, other than powdered milk. The hospital was run by a Catholic order. Someone brought the jeep driver and me a glass of warm milk.

"Then we were going out of the hospital down a long hall, and somebody stuck a gun in my stomach. I thought, 'all right, this is it!' He just said, 'Do you know the war's not over?' And I said, 'Yes, but we had a German civilian that was wounded.' He said, 'We know, go on back to your lines, and nobody will bother you.' We walked out and got back into our jeep and went back to our lines. Nobody bothered us, but apparently they knew we were there and had a German civilian. It scared the living daylights out of me. We knew we might be killed, but we trusted them. We felt as long as we carried no



Bayreath, Germany.

weapons and this German civilian could speak for us, then we would have no problem. We respected their medics, and they respected ours.

"Another thing that was amusing was the British. They were fighting right along with our division. In France everything was blackout conditions, and we moved at night with no lights. One night we moved a bit, and we were digging our fox holes when some vehicles came down the road with their lights on. Our sentry started shooting. Pretty soon some guy yelled out, 'I say, old chap, are you shooting at us?' It was the British. The sentry says, 'Yes, black out conditions, turn out the damn lights.' He says, 'Oh, chappy, after you've been in the war as long as I have you forget about a lot of rules and regulations.' They went merrily on their way, lights and all.

"A couple of days later we were in the middle of a fight, and their (British) tanks came up. They stopped and got out little stoves. It was tea time, so they brewed their pot of tea, and had their tea. As soon as tea time was over they got

back in their tanks and started fighting; nothing stopped them from having tea. It was crazy, but it happened.

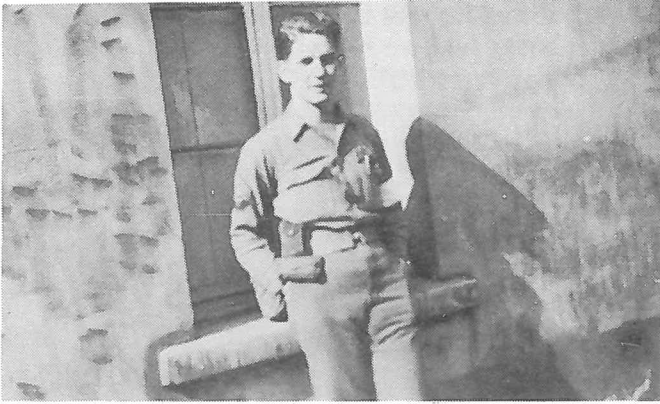
"He was sending things home as fast as he could get his hands on them."

"After France we went to Belgium, Holland and Germany. We had battles that were rough as hell. But, we had the feeling that our morale was getting better. We knew we were getting farther, when we went into Belgium and Holland and the people joined us. They helped a lot, especially the Dutch and Hollandish. They took over a lot of our duty. Of course, their language was close to German, and they knew all the tricks, so they could do things we couldn't. For instance, when we stood guard duty the American would holler out, 'Halt, who goes there?' He yelled but the Hollander just whispered, and if a person didn't halt they shot. Of course, they'd been through a lot. They were much tougher, as far as letting anybody get through. When anyone would give Americans a hard luck story, why, we always gave them the benefit of the doubt. The Hollanders didn't, because they had been affected very badly by the German occupation there."

I then asked Mr. Struble about fighting along the Rhine. "The rivers were the roughest. We would build a pontoon bridge and no sooner get it up than the artillery blew it up. Crossing the rivers was the roughest. We were just tickled to death when we got across. We had the feeling we were probably getting close to the end. The last couple of weeks we were waiting at the Elbe River for the Russians, and there was no fighting as far as we were concerned. The Germans just wanted to get away from the Russians. Our guys would watch them, and when they got across the river, they voluntarily threw their guns in a big heap; we'd let them go on down, so we knew it was over.

"What'd we do is drive it down into the Volga River and get rid of it."

"The Germans would do anything to get away from the Russians; they were like animals. When we met the Russians our general decided to throw a party of good will, so we invited a Russian general and a bunch of top brass and a bunch of nurses. The Russians were chasing our



women, which we thought was terrible. They aren't like us at all; they would just as soon shoot somebody as to look at them. They are just a bunch of barbarians. We could see fear in the faces of people when the Russians were coming, and it wasn't fun at all. but there was nothing we could do. They took over anything. When we went into Germany we took over homes to sleep in, but we didn't just destroy everything and throw the people out. I don't know how to say it, but we did it with more finesse. We tried to treat the civilians as nice as we could, especially the older people. We had the feeling they could be my mom or dad, and they were innocent. I think we should have done what Gen. Patton said, 'Beat the hell out of them and go on in.' We lost men and then we'd pull back. Again it was absolute stupidity. We had to fight to take that country and then give it back to them. We gave them a lot of our equipment, and everything was a big mistake.

"In a convoy we were to have a certain distance between the trucks, so that if one vehicle was bombed, then, it wouldn't hurt anybody else. When we were moving out we had trucks practically bumper to bumper. We hadn't seen a plane in three weeks, and we had one truck with only five gallon cans of gasoline. All of a sudden, a plane came out of nowhere, faster than we had ever seen before and dropped one bomb that happened to hit that one gasoline truck. There wasn't enough left to know if there was even a man in it. That was a shock to us. We just didn't expect that at that time. Other times we got bombed, but we would get off the road, and it wasn't bad. Of course, I remember the first Christmas day we were over there. We had lined up for the noon meal, and one plane came over strafing us. Everybody was so keyed up over our first Christmas in combat that after he had made about three passes everybody got down to shoot at him. We happened to hit him. The pilot jumped out, and everybody was so keyed up that they just kept shooting. When he hit the ground we couldn't tell he was a human being; he was just literally blown to pieces. Those are the things one remembers.

"There are a lot of things in war one can't forget, a lot of hardship and some good times. When we took over Krefeld some of our guys hung a big sign on the side of the street car saying 'From Phillie to the Rhine.' We saw humor in things like that. Some of the things we saw made us feel good, some made us feel guilty as hell. For instance, we took care of a lot of kids that we felt sorry for. It made you feel good to do whatever we could for the kids even though it wasn't enough. At the beginning of the war we'd throw our cigarette butts in our mess kits with our food we didn't eat and then throw it in big G.I. cans. The little kids were around just grabbing the stuff and shoving it in their mouths as fast as they could. So, it didn't take long until we stopped putting our cigarettes out in the mess kit. Whatever we didn't eat we made sure the kids got.

"When we went through Holland, why, we were in one place for about four or five days before we moved on. The kids were covered with scabies. So we'd get sulphur ointment by the pounds and treat them. The people appreciated it so much that one family, when they found out, before we did, that we were going to move out, they called me over to their home that night. They had managed to get some sugar and stuff and made some cookies and had a little party for us. They served us potato schnapps, which I didn't appreciate, but that was the best they could do. The 'Queen,' when she took over, had given each family in Holland a little cup made of porcelain, so they gave me the cup like that. I kept telling them I liked it, but I had taken care of their kids so that was the most valuable thing they had. So they gave it to me; I've still got it."

I asked Mr. Struble what was the German's reaction after their cities started to fall. "Most of them were glad it was over. We never knew anyone that admitted they were a Nazi, but I think they were relieved. They were glad to see us, and they were really scared of the Russians. Most of them treated us great. They were glad the war was over, 'cause when we got in Germany they knew they were done.

"I remember we came across Gardelegen and liberated that. It was the first time I ever smelt burning flesh; it's a smell one recognizes right away. I never want to smell it again. It was like a great big backer you'd see in a crematorium. Why, they shoveled their victims in them. We could just see where people had dug the walls with their finger nails, and these were stone and cement walls. Then the people who were still living were nothing but skin and bones. We couldn't believe they were still living. We really couldn't help; we just took care of our own. We weren't equipped to take care of them. But it made an impression on me.

"I came across another place, Gardelegen,



“The cup given to Mr. Struble in Holland.”

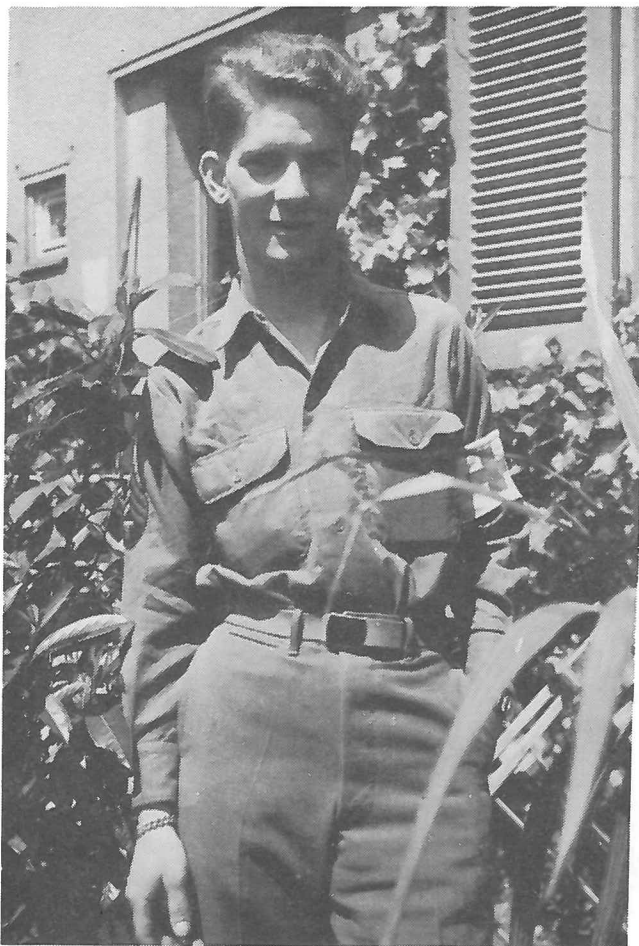
where the Germans were retreating; they had a bunch of political prisoners that weren't American. They herded them into a big barn about the size of the Good News Building and put straw all over the floor and set it on fire. Then they machine-gunned the people. We came across that about three hours after it had happened. People had dug their hands underneath the foundation trying to get out. I remember one body that they burned, he had gotten his head out so the blood was still pumping out of the veins in his neck; he was dead. That was something!

“In all, we went through France, Belgium, Holland and Germany. We saw some beautiful country. Sometimes I thought I would like to go back there, but not under the same conditions. Several months after the war we got to see some interesting places. We want to see where Sebastian Bach played as a boy. We got to see some different places, because they didn't ship everybody home right after the war was over. We've still got men over there, but they gradually sent us home. Of course, the war was still going on in the Pacific, and we were scared to death that we were going to be shipped off

from Europe to Japan.”

I then asked if he thought today's kids would understand the things he went through. “I hope they don't understand the circumstances, but I think many of our young people need some good discipline. It did me good because we did get into situations where we met people from all over. We were all different but, because of the situation, we became very close. I can remember before we went overseas, I was with twelve enlisted men, and we had two Catholics, one Jew, two Seventh Day Adventists, and the rest of us were Protestants. We would all go to a different church and meet afterwards in the evenings. We would get into bull sessions on the difference of our religion and the similarities. We were all interested in different things. A couple of us had been to college, one was a cop, and one was studying to be a machinist. We learned a lot about each other and we had to work together so there was no friction.

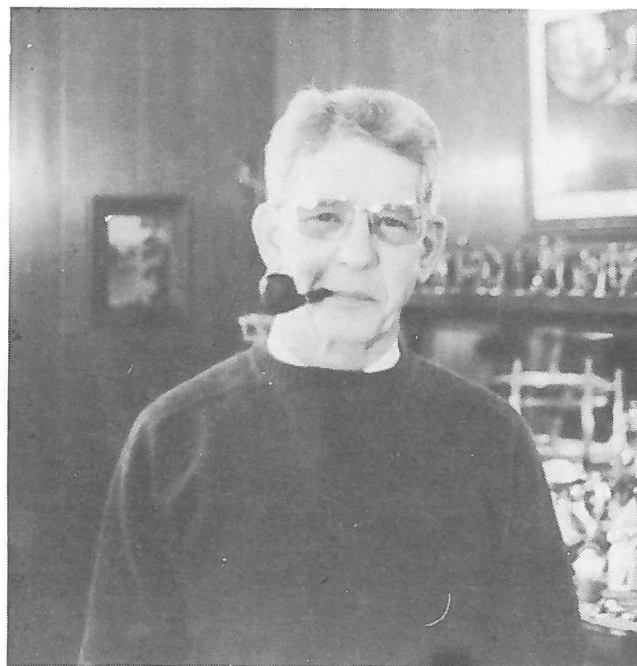
I then asked about Korea and Vietnam. “I lost a bunch of friends in the Korean War, but the Vietnam War I just didn't understand at all. We were fortunate because we knew the country was



behind us. I really felt for those that fought in the Vietnam War. The kids that I have talked to that went over there had it rough. The enemy could shoot back. Who was the enemy, who wasn't? I really feel sorry for them. They were asked to go over on traditions that to me just seemed unbelievable, yet to be treated the way they had been in this country, they were like villains. We're never going to stop all the wars, but we still can't justify it or make sense out of it. I do think we've got to stand up. I hope my son never has to go to war and people like you (talking to me) never have to go to war. At the same time, I can't see sitting back and letting the Russians overrun us. It would be nice if we could let a bunch of diplomats sit down and knock each other out over the peace table or something like that. Unfortunately it doesn't always work like that."

I asked about when Mr. Struble came back after the war. "Well, I came back, and I didn't know what I wanted to do. I swore if I ever got back home alive I'd never leave Illinois. I came back and stayed there for two weeks, and things had changed completely. I was expecting to go back there with things the way they were when I graduated from college. One can't ever go back

to a hometown or to a situation. Why, when I graduated from college it was right in the middle of the war. I was overseas just a little over three years, and it was a rude awakening to come back. I didn't know anybody there, and it was even the kids that were freshmen that I had just known as seniors, so it was entirely different, and I was the stranger. I hadn't realized that the time I was away I kept thinking, 'Boy, if I could just get back and continue where I left off. Well, you know my dad told me before I went into the army, he was in World War I, he said. 'You are going into a situation where you'll be so miserable that you won't even care what happens to you.' But he says, 'For the first time in your life you're going to meet a situation that you can't quite change. There is nothing you can do about it. You'll get in with people that have nothing in common with you, but you have to get along. I mean we just didn't tell the commanding officer, 'Well, I don't like my buddies. I'm going to pack my suitcase and go home tonight.' Like I



say, I felt completely frustrated and then it was good for me because I did have to do things that I didn't like, and I had to keep my mouth shut and do the best I could!" "

By Richard Gilbert