



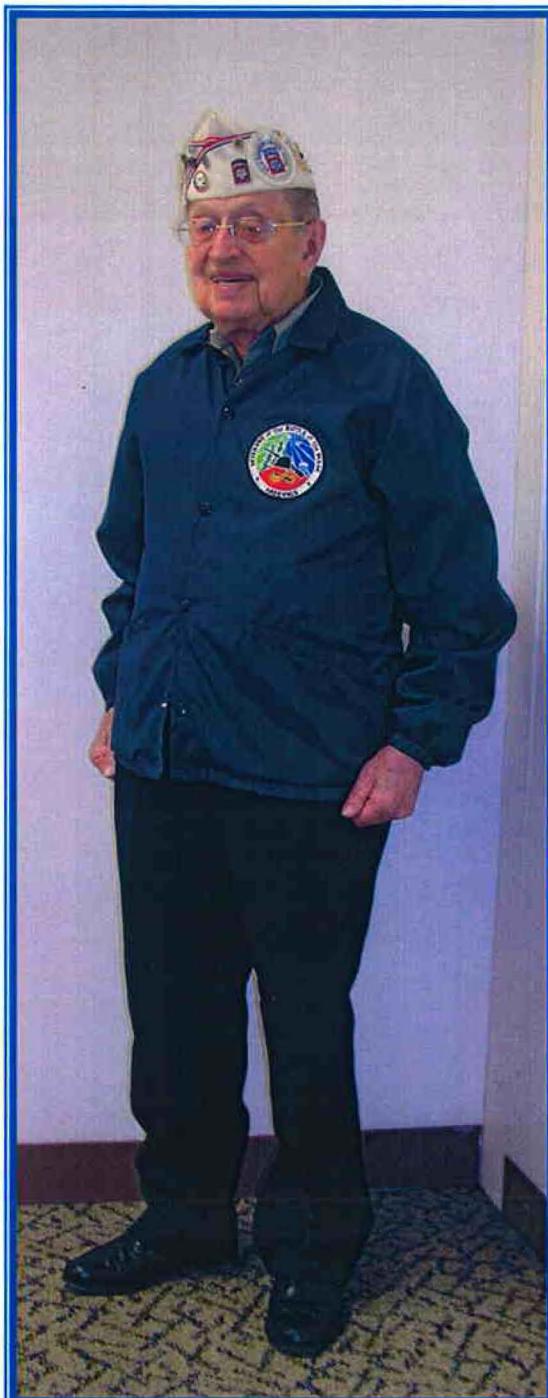
Matthew F. Wojtaszek
World War II - Europe
U.S. Army
HQ Battery
82nd Airborne Division
Artillery
Technician Fifth Grade

Matthew F. Wojtaszek

**Veterans
History
Project
Transcript**

**Interview conducted
April 22, 2009**

**Niles Public Library
Niles Public Library District
Niles, Illinois**



Niles Public Library District
Veterans History Project Transcript

Veteran: **Matthew F. Wojtaszek**

Rank: **Technician Grade 5**

Branch of Service: **U.S. Army**

Theater: **World War II - Europe**

Unit: **HQ 82nd Airborne Division Artillery**

Interview Date: April 22, 2009, 2-4:30 p.m.

Place: Group Study Room

Equipment: Philips Digital Pocket Memo Recorder

Interviewer: Neil O'Shea

This Veterans History Project interview is being conducted on Wednesday, April the 22nd, here at the Niles Public Library. My name is Neil O'Shea, and I am a member of the reference staff, and I'm speaking with Mr. Matthew Wojtaszek. Mr. Wojtaszek was born on January the 27th, 1922.

Right.

And he has kindly consented to be interviewed for this Veterans History Project here at the Niles Library. This interview is taking place in the group study room off of the reference department. And we're very appreciative that Mr. Wojtaszek was able to come this afternoon. And his son-in-law, Hank, drove him to the interview, and he's going to pick him up afterwards. Anyway, we'll move on to the suggested questions here. And, so, Mr. Wojtaszek, when did you enter military service? (Interviewer's words in italics)

In 1942. In 1942, I was drafted. I didn't enlist. I was drafted. My number was called, and my friends and neighbors "invited" me to get into the Service. (Mr. Wojtaszek's answers)

Where were you living at that time?

I was living in Chicago, Illinois.

Were you on the North Side?

On the North Side around St. Josephat's Parish, St. Alphonsus, and St. Vincent de Paul.

Oh, yes, kind of Lincoln Park, or west of Lincoln Park.

Lake View area, yes.

Were you attending high school at that time or had you finished high school?

I had just finished high school in 1940. And then I thought I'd, instead of going to college, I went to the Art Institute of Chicago. I thought I'd be some kind of an artist. I was going to go for a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. But, in the meantime, my dad was

paying the tuition, and I hated to see him pay all that money for tuition. And, so, I got a job in the meantime. And I worked so I would pay a lot of the tuition.

And that's when I got the call that I was being drafted.

Yes. What high school did you attend?

I went to Holy Trinity High School on Division Street.

Oh, yes, I think that high school was still going the last time I checked.

It's still going now. Right.

Yes.

At one time it was all, mostly all, Polish students over there. Now, it's everything, the League of Nations! It was an all-boys school.

Yes. So, your background is, ethnically, is Polish?

Polish, right.

Polish.

My father and mother came from Poland. They're immigrants from Poland. They became citizens and stayed here until they died.

So did they come over after World War I or before World War I?

Well, my dad had-- he had to sign up for World War I, but he was never called. So it was around that time, that he was here.

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Yes. I had one brother and one sister. And I was the youngest. My brother was the oldest, my sister was in the middle. And I was the youngest, of course. And they're all deceased. My brother lived until he was 85. My sister died at 60--65. And my father, he died at 85, too. So, I'm 87, so I'm living longer.

Congratulations.

It's quite an accomplishment.

*It is, yes, when you consider you went through what you went through in World War II.
Did-- was your brother in the Service at all?*

No, no.

No.

He didn't make it.

So how did the family feel about your going into the Service? It was just something that--

Everybody else was going, so they took it in the right manner.

Yes, so you wound up in the Army, was that right?

Yes, the U.S. Army, right.

Did you choose the Army or you were just assigned to the Army?

Well, yes, they chose it for me. I mean, if you enlisted, you had the option of either enlisting into the Air Corps, the Navy, or Marines, and that would be different. But I just let things go the way they would go, so I got into the Army.

So you were inducted at-- where were you inducted, downtown somewhere, or?

At the draft board, well, I guess the induction took place over there, where we, raised our hands, pledged allegiance, and all that kind of stuff.

And then they sent you off to boot camp somewhere?

Well, I first started out at Fort Sheridan, Illinois, when my draft board called me up and told me that I should report to their office and wear only the clothes that you got on.

"Don't bring anything else, because you're going to have breakfast here, and then you're going to go to Fort Sheridan, Illinois, and you're probably going to send your clothing back home. And we're going to issue you an Army uniform." And that they did! So, I sit here for a short time, there was an orientation, and Army talk, and all that stuff, and soon it was time for me to go for basic training. They sent me to Fort Bragg in North Carolina where I would join the 82nd Airborne Division.

And, at this time, they were starting something new in warfare. It would be what they called airborne, and it would consist of glider troopers and paratroopers. The Germans and Russians were already using this type of warfare, and we were starting to get into it, too. So, this was a new kind of warfare for the Army.

Had you ever been in a plane before?

No, no, that's the fun of it, you know! I mean, I never flew, and here I'm flying in a glider towed by a C-47 airplane. Oh, it was a big thrill for me! I liked it.

You and I are not too tall. I'm just wondering if they chose you for the glider because you weren't a heavyweight person.

No. I was only a hundred and twenty-eight pounds when I went into the Service. When I came out, I was a hundred and forty-eight, so I didn't get a whole lot heavier.

But do you think your height or weight had anything to do--

That didn't have anything to do with it at all.

So how did you, how did you enjoy, if that's the word, boot camp and basic training? Was that pleasant?

Basic training is what they called it. Boot camp is usually in the Navy.

Thank you.

It's a Navy term.

Yes.

I enjoyed it. I met a lot of friends, and we made a lot of good choices over there.

Was that the first time you'd ever been away from home for an extended period of time?

Yes, it was, for that period of time.

So you met all kinds of different people from different parts of the country?

Oh, from almost every state. Well, All-American means that there were soldiers in there from every state in the Union, from all 48 states, you know. There was somebody from all the states. That was why it was called the All-American division.

And did you get along with everybody, or everybody got along? There was no problem.

I got along pretty good. I'm an easy-going person and I make friends easily, so, I mean, I had no problems.

And the food was okay?

The food was good. For me, it was good. No complaints.

And you weren't exhausted from doing all the basic training or anything like that?

Yes. I had the basic training at Fort Bragg.

Yes. And was that tiring, was it pretty tough?

Well, that lasted a short time. Soon after basic training, we got the order that we would be going overseas. So they cut the basic training short, and we were on our way for overseas duty. First, by train, we went to Camp Edwards in Massachusetts, where we were fitted

with khaki clothing. Khaki clothing is usually worn in warm areas and as summer clothing, you know, in the States here. So, I was figuring we might be going to a warm place, you know, like, well, wherever a warm place is.

But, anyway, from there, we went to the ports in New York where we boarded ships, troopships, and we got on the troopships, I think it was the USS George Washington. And nothing was happening. We were sitting there, nightfall came, and we went down in the hold to get some shut-eye. We had tiers of guys, so many on that ship over there, and, towards morning, you felt the movement of the ship and the splashing of the water on the sides of the ship, you know, Oh, what's this? I ran upstairs to see what's happening just in time to wave goodbye to the Statue of Liberty. We were on our way. We were sailing the Atlantic Ocean.

So was the US George Washington a troop carrier?

It was a troopship, yes. They said it was an old one from World War I that was taken from Germany, so--. I don't know.

So, you had been drafted, you entered the Service in December of '42?

'42, right.

So, is it-- is it in early '43 then that you are heading for Europe, would you say, probably?

Right, May, 1943.

And then did you go to England or North Africa?

Well, the thing is there were German submarines and U-boats in the area looking to sink our shipping. And we didn't make a straight line to where we were going. We zigzagged, you know, to kind of fool them. So, after a couple of days on the Atlantic Ocean over there, we were given pamphlets on how to speak French. And a guy with a loudspeaker would say how to pronounce those French words. They're kind of hard.

Yes.

And we would say them over, and over, and over again. And then I'm thinking to myself, hey, we must be going to France! But, at this time, Germany had occupied all of France, so that was a no-no. I don't think we were going over there! And then we did end up in the port of Casablanca, French North Africa. So that's why the pamphlet was in French, because in Casablanca they spoke French and Arabic.

Did you have any problems with being seasick or anything like that?

No, no.

So that probably took what, about a week, or ten days, to make that zigzag to North Africa?

Twelve days.

Twelve days.

Twelve days to zigzag, you know, all the way to Casablanca. So, after Casablanca, we stayed there for a short time, we went to another place, a camp called Oujda, O-u-j-d-a, and we lived in pup tents as far as you could see. A one man pup tent, you know, one man to a pup tent. And as far as you could see, the pup tents were all lined up over there.

Was it pretty warm at that time, pretty hot?

It was warm, hot. And the trouble over there was there were scorpions around there, and they liked to nibble on your toes there. So, some of the guys, they slept with their boots on, so they wouldn't get, you know, bit by scorpions.

But you didn't?

No, no. I just let things go. If I got bit, I got bit, what the heck!

So all those people in those big lines of pup tents, those are all Airborne?

All Airborne.

All Airborne.

In the 82nd, right.

So let me, if I can just ask, when you were going through basic training, you didn't know that you were going to be Airborne at that time, did you, when you were starting?

Yes, when I got the basic training, I knew.

They said you were Airborne there, yes.

Because it was an Airborne outfit, the 82nd Airborne.

From the beginning, you knew, yes.

They put me in the 82nd Airborne Division.

Yes, so when you jump, when you are on a glider coming in, do you wait until it lands, or do you have to jump down off it?

No, you don't jump. It's not like the helicopters that they use today. The helicopter comes down, and, even before it touches the ground, these guys, they call that assault

troops, they just jump to the ground, you know, and start firing or whatever they have to do, but we would land.

So while you were in Casablanca or in Camp Oujda--

Oujda.

Were you doing any glider practice then?

Yes, glider practice there, and paratroopers were making jumps over there. We stayed there for a short time, and then we moved to another place further down. And what was the name of that place Kairoan, Kairoan, that was another camp where we did some of the same stuff that we were doing here. But we hit there at a lucky time. Bob Hope was having a show over there for us. So we got to see a Bob Hope show, which was great. There was Frances Langford, Jerry Colonna.

Jerry Colonna, wow.

Yes, Jerry. Oh, they were funny, and a lot of nice dancing girls and everything. Oh, we really enjoyed that show! So, after Kairoan, we went into Tunisia. We pushed into Tunisia. And, from Tunisia, we trained there a little bit, and then they took us to the airports where we made the invasion into Sicily. So that was the first airborne operation for us into Sicily. We went by air and by sea.

So that was in--was that in like May or June of '43, or, when do you think, I wonder when that was, the Sicilian, I can't think now, that invasion, yes. But did that-- so you-- so the first time you landed on enemy ground was in Sicily?

I came by sea that time, July, 1943.

By sea.

I didn't go by glider, but there were glider troopers coming in and paratroopers coming in, too, but, yes, we--

I think Patton was in Sicily, too, wasn't he? Patton, General Patton was in Sicily?

Oh, yes. Hey, he did that British general a lot of dirt!

Yes. Montgomery.

Yes. Montgomery.

Yes.

They didn't get along at all. They didn't get along at all.

So if you're invading or attacking, how do you use the paratroopers and the gliders, who goes in first?

Well, the paratroopers are in a C-47 by themselves, and the gliders are towed by C-47s, but there's no paratroopers in there. We're just above treetops coming in there at a hundred miles an hour when we hit the ground. You have to stop in a hurry.

And that could be in front of enemy lines or behind enemy lines?

Yes. A lot of times, mostly, it was behind enemy lines.

So when you hit the ground or when you get off the glider, what do you, what kind of armaments do you have?

And the thing you want to do is get out of that glider as fast as possible, because the Germans, if there are Germans in the area, they're lobbing all kinds of 88s and mortar shells, you know, so you want to get away from them.

So what do you carry when you are in the glider?

Well, an M1-- I had a 30 caliber carbine, a folding stock carbine, 30 caliber.

But there's no backpack or anything like that?

No. No. Just what I had in my pockets over there, food and whatever, you know, because we were only supposed to be there for, you know, a short time.

Then how do you get out?

Well, thing is, we didn't get out. After things settled in Sicily, the Germans and Italian troops, at that time the Italians and Germans were fighting as a team, well, they started to retreat, and we started to follow them. So, they got into the big boot of Italy, itself, and we followed them. We got in at Salerno. We got in at Salerno, we fought all the way up to Naples, Italy. And things were going so good, General Mark Clark was very satisfied with the way the 82nd Airborne Division, did war, and he wanted to keep them.

But we figured, hey, the way things are going, maybe Rome will be next. But it wasn't to be. They got orders that they wanted an airborne operation. At this time, the Russians were being pressured by the Germans. They were moving in on them. And the Russians wanted to scope out a second front, and that would be Normandy. So, they took us out of --they pulled us out of Naples, Italy, and sent us back to the British Isles. And we sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar, and we ended up in Northern Ireland first, and we stayed around Belfast for a time. And then after that we shipped over to England proper, and we stayed around Leicester where we trained some more over there. And it was getting close to June, and as soon as June 6 came, we went to the airports, the British airports, along the English Channel, heading for Normandy.

That was June 6?

June 6, 1944, D-Day, and I was a part of that D-Day operation.

Yes, one of the veterans was telling me that they knew something was up, but they didn't know exactly when it was going to be.

They didn't know where it was going to be.

And then they gave them some false runs.

Yes, right.

And then they were so glad to hear we are finally going. So you were flown by a C-47 out of Leicester, from

the airports of England, not out of Leicester. They were in various spots over there in England.

So when you got into France, that was-- you were there as a glider trooper?

Yes, we ended behind the enemy lines, and the first ones to go out, these are the pathfinders. Now, these pathfinders are paratroopers that are schooled in radar - radar systems. They were schooled in radar systems, and they would parachute down in designated areas, drop zones for paratroopers, landing zones or LZ for the landing zone for the gliders. And as we would be flying over the English Channel toward Normandy, we would hone in on these radar systems and we would know where we were allowed to land.

So whose radar systems were those? Were those the German radar?

No, ours. Ours.

Your guys would set things up?

Our pathfinders.

So, you when you come in on--so, a C-47, it tows one glider?

Yes, he cuts the tow line, and he goes back to England and gets more gliders or more paratroopers. And we are on our way down. There is no place to go but down.

How many people are on the glider? How many troops?

15, yes. A pilot, a copilot, and the rest of them are riflemen.

So, when you landed, do you recall where you landed in France when you came over?

It came up right side up, some of them landed upside down, some hit trees, some hit buildings. The other guys had stakes put out there, too, to disrupt our landing or it would turn over the gliders.

So were you near Sainte-Mère-Eglise, or some one of those towns, do you recall?

We landed around Sainte-Mère-Eglise.

Yes.

The paratroopers landed almost on top of Sainte-Mère-Eglise.

Yes.

And we landed somewhere over there. It was for us to take over railroad stations, and byways, and highways. We had to watch so the Germans, if they would retreat, they couldn't, you know, get very far. And then, of course, we had to turn around this way, because reinforcements might be coming from the other way. So we were fighting both sides.

Were you scared?

Being young, I mean, you don't have that fear, it seems. Now, I fear. But, at that time, I didn't.

So, did you meet with a lot of resistance then, when you were-- when you landed or when you moved out?

No, not very much.

Not too much.

Not very much. As a matter of fact, we only stayed in Normandy about a little over a month, maybe 33 days. See, the airborne operation was over. We came in there about after midnight, and, by that time, the seaborne troops were coming up the beaches. There were five beaches. Omaha, Utah, Gold, Sword and Juno.

Yes. And Omaha and Utah would be operated by the Americans.

Yes.

And the other three would be taken over by the British, Canadian, French, and Polish soldiers, so that was it.

So then were you injured at any time?

No. No.

Thank God, yes.

I was lucky.

Yes. So the land troops get ashore, and then your unit is then moved somewhere else?

When these troops were coming up, seaborne troops were coming up, oh, they had-- they were bringing up more infantry divisions. They were bringing up tanks, trucks, supplies, and everything. Finally, they made a breakthrough, and then that's when we left. And there was another airborne operation waiting for us. They sent us back to England from France.

By boat or by plane?

By boat. Yes. And, once again, we did the same type of training in September. Three months after D-Day, June 6, in September, about the middle of September, about the 15th or the 17th, somewhere in there, we made the drop into Holland. That was called Operation Market Garden. And that one would include-- there were bridges that we had to take and hold because the Germans, they had them all dynamited, you know. They were going to blow them up so we couldn't follow them. They would stop us from reaching them in a hurry.

The British were involved in that, too, weren't they?

Yes, the British, the 101st Airborne, too.

Yes. And that was successful?

Yes.

How did you get out of there? How did you move out of Holland then? Did they--

Well, the thing is, they were thinking, hey, after Africa, Sicily, Italy, Normandy, and now Holland, it's time for these guys to get a rest. We lost a lot of men on the way, and it was time to get replacements and stuff. So what they did was to send us, the 82nd Airborne Division, back to France on an R & R. And they took us to and, oh, life was good over there. I mean, we got to sleep in real beds, we had hot baths, hot showers, good food, had CSO shows. And I got to see Maurice Chevalier, even Marlene Dietrich.

Yes.

I got to see all these people. They visited us over there. And life was good. But this didn't last long. All of a sudden, we were alerted that the 101st Airborne was being surrounded by the Germans. The Germans were making a breakthrough. They were trying to get to Antwerp.

Yes.

That was a port, and if they could get to Antwerp, they could bring in supplies and more reinforcements over there, but the 101st Airborne, they kind of held back there. Eventually, overnight, we were alerted, we packed up, and headed for Belgium. And we entered the war at a place called Werbomont, Belgium.

Was that by train, or by bus, or by car?

No. By truck.

By truck?

Long trailers, open air trailers, there were no lights, and pitch black. You weren't allowed to smoke.

Yes.

Or light a flashlight, or anything, you know. And no lights were on the trucks. They had just little slits on the taillights where one truck, you know, one trailer, could follow another one. And darkness. And you could hear the drones of the German planes out there trying to find out where we were, what we were doing, and trying to knock us out.

So that's how you participated in the Battle of the Bulge.

Right, right.

But you participated in the Bulge as like an Army-- a land-based soldier?

General Patton was even there, too.

Yes.

And, eventually, we started to drive the Germans back. They started to retreat a little bit. They got them out of there. They were advancing toward the rear. They were going back into Germany, and we were following them. And, by this time, it was already in May, and the German army finally surrendered. And whole divisions were surrendering to the 82nd Airborne Division. And on May 8, it was the end of the war, and it was what they called V-E Day, Victory Europe. And it was time--now, the war was over in Europe. That is, the war was still going on in the Pacific over there, because that war didn't end until August when President Truman dropped the bombs over there, and the Japanese gave up.

Yes.

But, you know, now we had so many men in Europe, there was no need for them. So they came up with a, you know, how do you get rid of some of these men? It was time to discharge some of them, so they came up with a point system. You had to have 85 points to get out. This would be years of service, and medals that you got, and, you know, how long you were in the service and all that kind of stuff. So you had to have 85 points. I had 81 points. I was four short, so I couldn't go. So the guys that had 85 and more, they

shipped them back to the states. And we, on the other hand, the rest of the division that was under 85 points, we went to Berlin, Germany, for occupation duty. So, I stayed there for several months until I got 91. I had 91 points. They tapped me on the shoulder, "Okay, you're ready to go." So from there, they trained me to Le Havre in France, boarded a Liberty ship, off to New York we went. But that trip to New York was shorter than the one--

No zigzags.

Than the one to Casablanca.

Yes.

That was 12 days. This was a short trip. It was a Liberty Ship.

So did you ever wind up speaking any French when you were in France? Did those language lessons ever come in handy?

Very little, very little. You know, those people spoke English over there. Germany, too. I mean, spoke fluent English, real good. I guess they teach them in school, English.

Yes.

All of the countries. I mean, they're real nice people, very.

So you don't, when you're young, a lot of times, you don't have fear.

Yes. right. As a matter of fact, I never thought that I was going to die. I never thought that I was going to be killed. That's a funny reason but that's the way it was.

So, on D-day then, your C-47, that left during the night?

Yes. Yes. Around 3 o'clock in the morning.

3 o'clock in the morning?

Yes.

That must have been exciting or something?

Oh, yes, it was. But when we were coming in there, it was nice flying, it was smooth, but as soon as we hit the coast of Normandy over there, everything started to come up over there! Tracer bullets, and ack ack, and whatever, you know.

And tracer bullets, every fifth bullet has got a light on it.

A marker, yes.

And it shows you the direction where you're shooting in. And when you look down over there, it looks like every one is coming right for you!

Yes.

Kind of scary.

Yes.

So did your unit suffer a lot of casualties? Did the 82nd suffer a lot of casualties?

Not as much as some of the other outfits.

Yes.

We were kind of lucky in that respect.

Was the invasion of Normandy, was that the roughest, or the bloodiest for your unit?

Yes, I think that was where, yes, we lost quite a few men over there.

Yes.

Then how did you find the-- how did you find the German people when you were on occupation duty in Berlin?

As a matter of fact, when we were in Berlin, Germany, it was almost like being home. The center of Berlin, all the buildings that were standing were just four walls, brick walls. The insides were all burnt out by incendiary bombs that our Air Force lit down on them. So, we lived on the outskirts of Berlin, and we had kind of apartment buildings, so that was kind of nice, too. We slept in beds, and had hot showers, and whatever, and we even had a nightclub of our own. I mean, we had beer that would be brought in to us. And, as a matter of fact, most of the guys had German girlfriends. They would bring the girlfriends in there. They would dance. They would drink beer and everything. You would be like, "Oh!"

I suppose some of them might have married some of them?

Some of them did.

A couple of war brides?

Yes. Most of them. If they married anybody, it would be a British gal.

A British gal.

British or an Irish gal.

Yes. Yes.

So, you received a bronze star, bronze stars for the operation in Normandy and for the Market Garden in Holland.

Yes.

So that trip back on the Liberty ship that must have been fun. I mean, thinking you're going home!

That was real nice. That was real nice. Boy, we hit the port in New York, they put down the gangplank; as we were coming down the gangplank, there was military bands playing all good military music. Man, you threw out your chest, you felt good. Some of the guys went there and they kissed the ground glad to be back home.

And, from there, we stayed there for a short time, they tried to fatten us up, we went to Camp Kilmer in New Jersey where they had the best food you could ever want. But there was a sign saying, "Eat as much as you want, but make sure that you eat everything that you take." There would be no waste. So you made sure that you ate everything.

And shortly after that, it was time to get close to a base that would be close to your home. The guys were going different places in the U.S., and I was scheduled to go to Fort Sheridan, which was my home base, but there was so many being discharged at that time that they couldn't handle it. So, they sent us to Camp McCoy in Wisconsin. I was discharged at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin.

So you had to make your own way home from Camp McCoy?

Then they gave us our discharge papers at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. They gave us train fare to get home, and I took a train and got back to Chicago, downtown Chicago.

Wow. I suppose you can remember that day coming out?

Boy, that was nice!

Yes. So did you take the train or the bus home from downtown?

I think I took a streetcar.

A streetcar?

I think they had streetcars at that time.

Yes. Yes. So, during the war, were you able to write home at all?

Yes. Yes. Yes. As much as you wanted. As a matter of fact, they made me a postal clerk, so I had mail--I'd pick up the mail at the station there, and call mail call, and hand out the mail to the guys, and make money orders for them, and all that stuff.

Yes.

So when you came back to civilian life, then did you have a hard time adjusting to being back?

No. No, not at all.

Not at all.

When I came home, see, my father was living by himself. He was a widower. He had a flat of his own. And my sister asked him to come and live with her, so he did come to live with my sister. And I didn't have a place to go. I didn't have a home, because he gave up that, you know, apartment that he was living in. And my sister invited me to stay over there. So, I stayed there until I got married in '46. And then I moved to Niles. I've been in Niles now for 35 years.

Before you went into the Army, you mentioned that you were taking courses at the Art Institute.. You wanted to get a degree in fine arts?

Yes. Yes.

Did you think about going back to school on the GI Bill?

No. I had no-- I lost my interest in that. Yes. Well, thing is, my girlfriend, my childhood sweetheart, wanted to get married and all that. So when I got married, I had to get a job, you know.

Yes. So you married your childhood sweetheart?

Yes.

So had she ever seen you in uniform?

Well, yes.

Since 7th, 8th grade there, we'd been going on all that time. Of course, we had our arguments and stuff.

Yes.

Where we'd break off. She'd go with other guys. I'd go with other girls, but--

Yes.

Eventually, we always got together again.

Did she go to Holy Trinity, also?

No, it was an all-boys school.. She lived on the same street that I did.

Wow. And so she saw you in your uniform then?

Oh, yes, yes. I wrote her all the time.

Yes.

Sent her pictures from over there and stuff.

Yes.

So when you came back here, you must have kept up with some of your 82nd Airborne friends?

Yes, I tried to, and there was five that I was writing to, and they were writing back to me. I'd get Christmas cards and a letter here and there. But there's only three that I know are still alive. And I don't know about the rest. We had a big battery so, I mean, I don't know if they're all gone, or they just don't --

So, then, you joined the veterans' organizations?

Oh, yes.

You joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars?

Oh, I joined the American Legion, Niles Veterans of Foreign Wars, the national chapter of the 82nd Airborne Division, plus the Chicago chapter of the 82nd, and then this here outfit here, too, that I joined--

Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge.

Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge. So I joined a lot of outfits.

Yes.

So when you came home, I think you mentioned that you went to work

Where I worked before I went into the Service. I worked in a machine shop, tool and die.

Yes.

It was a-- they made nameplates over there. And I stayed there for a while, and then I was figuring, you know, and then when I took that exam for the post office job--

That was your wife's suggestion that you take the exam?

Yes. Yes. And then I was waiting-- the pay was about the same that I was getting here. And then I was getting, which was a low pay at that time, I wasn't getting very much. But, anyway, I decided to take the post office job and quit this one, because here there was no pension, no health benefits. And at the post office, I had security. I had a pension. I had health benefits. And with 30 years of service, and 55 years of age, you could retire. But I stayed there for 44 years.

44 years. Do you think there was any connection between your being a postal clerk when you were passing out the mail in the Army--

Because it's on my discharge papers that I did postal work and there's--

Yes.

That might have been an influence, you know.

Yes. Yes.

So we're coming to the end of the interview now, and we always ask these questions. How do you think your military service and the experiences you had there, how do you think it affected your life?

Well, I think it disciplined me more. I'm more disciplined. I'm not wild or nothing like that. I, in many ways, it was good. I mean, I enjoyed military life, met a lot of nice people. It was a good life, but it was good to get out of it, too.

Yes. You never considered making a career of the military?

No. No. When I got discharged, that was it.

Do you think your military experience influences your thinking about war or about the military in general?

Well, that's another thing, like when we were in Germany close to the end of the war, when we were meeting the Russians at the Elbe River, before we met them at the Elbe River, we came upon a concentration camp. And we went in there, and we liberated--and, oh, the people there were dying. There were dead people stacked up, you know, in buildings and makeshift, you know, beds, and stuff like that. And the smell was terrific. I mean, it's-- you had-- the name of the camp was Wobelein Concentration Camp in Ludwiglust, Germany. And, by this the time, most of the Germans that were in that concentration camp, they already retreated. They were, you know, leaving.

All gone?

What was left over there, the guards and stuff, we took them as prisoners, POWs. But that was about the most horrible thing I'd seen over there.

Yes.

Mostly, I think, Jewish boys, Romanians, just about every kind of nationality that didn't agree with the Nazis, you know, they put them in concentration camps.

Is there anything you'd like to add to the interview that you-- that we haven't talked about?

I can't think of anything.

Were there any times that were really, really funny? I mean, a good joke, or, I suppose, people--

Yes. I'm trying to think of something. There was my best friend, Tony Martorelli, a lightweight paratrooper. We would kid him about when he would jump out of the plane, the war would be over before he hit the ground.

Yes.

I suppose a good sense of humor helps?

Yes.

As soon as I leave, something will come. I'll think of something.

Did you find that a lot of the people, a lot of your Army friends, were they very religious in the war?

Yes. Well, as a matter of fact--

Did they pray a lot?

One thing that I thought was real nice were the chaplains. I mean, if you were in trouble, or you wanted to have a letter written home, or something, you'd go to a Catholic priest, you'd go to a Protestant minister, you'd go to a rabbi. They were superb. I mean, they would help you in every way they could. They were real nice. I really looked out for them.

So the American clergy or whatever the religious--

Yes. Yes.

They also contributed to the war effort?

Oh, yes. And then like before we went into the Service, into the war zone, I was a Catholic, and we'd have a Mass said. The priest would set up an altar on the front end of a jeep, you know, candles, and crucifix, and everything like that. And we'd have Mass, and he'd hand out Communion. And before we went into the Service, he gave us a

general absolution. He made us feel sorry for our sins, and he gave us a general absolution. You know, we felt that, if we got killed, we'd go straight to heaven. So, I mean, that was a good feeling.

Yes, being in a state of grace. Yes.

Wow, I just keep thinking it must-- what it must have been like to be in that glider being towed over the English Channel early in the night on D-Day morning. Wow!

Well, the thing is-- we never-- we didn't have parachutes. That was the bad thing, you know. Well, we flew too low. A parachute wouldn't do any good because you'd hit the ground before a parachute would open. So that wasn't a good thing. But, yes, the paratroopers, at least they had a parachute to jump out with, you know. But they were at a greater height where the parachute opened. And, then, they had these other ones that you could open up and throw it out there at a lower height -- a reserve chute.

Did you ever have to wear those Mae Wests?

That's what I was thinking of! . That's all we had in a glider, a Mae West. You would press a thing like that and it would blow up. And in case we had to ditch the glider flying over the English channel, if we had to ditch the glider in the water, we wouldn't, you know, drown. But I can't swim anyway, so I would drown.

Good thing you were in the Army!

Yes! Yes. Yes.

Well, Mr Wojtaszek, it's a good thing you're here today. I want to thank you for sharing some of your memories with us so we can compile this memoir of service so that it will be part of the official record at the Library of Congress and then here in your community's library, and people can appreciate the heroism of the greatest generation. Thank you very much for coming in.

Okay. By the way--

Yes.

You know this Chicago honor flight?

Yes.

I got word from them that I would be on that honor flight on May 12th.

Wow.

I'll be going to Washington D.C. I was telling the guys at the VFW, I'm not going to Disneyland. I'm going to Washington, D.C. I said I got the call from these people that I would be on a flight. And my daughter's coming with me. She's going to be a caretaker.

She's going to have to take care of two or three people. That are disabled, you know, maybe push a wheelchair. And my daughter called them up and asked, my granddaughter is a nurse at Resurrection Hospital, she asked if she could get on that same flight. And they agreed. They let her come. So she's going to be on there. They told her to bring her first-aid kits and everything. So the three of us are going May 12th.

Wonderful.

Washington, D.C.

Yes. That's a wonderful activity or service, yes. I think one of the vets mentioned that at the last veterans' breakfast we had here. One of the-- Mr. Weinberg, he went on that trip, and he thought that was wonderful!

Yes. Yes.

So you'll be able to see the World War II Memorial and all that.

I was in Washington D.C. before it was completed, that World War II Memorial. They said come next year, and it'll be all finished. But I didn't get there. But now I'll get to see it.

Yes.

All the memorials that are there.

That's terrific, yes. So I suppose you'll be-- I might see you out on Memorial Day at the--

At the waterfall.

At the waterfall.

Yes. Yes. Yes. I'm there every time.

I think so! Yes.

At the Fourth of July parade, I'll be riding on a vehicle, all decorated and everything.

Not in a glider! Yes. Yes.

Thank you very much.

So that's it then. It was nice talking with you.

Reader's Notes:

The appendix includes scans of photographs, documents and other materials that illustrate Mr. Wojtaszek's interview:

3 photos taken in England before the invasion

A map of the D-Day attack routes

3 pages of scans of photos provided by Mr. Wojtaszek and taken at the horrific Wobelein Concentration Camp near Ludwiglust, Germany when it was liberated by the 82nd Airborne Division

Mr. Wojtaszek's Enlisted Record and Report of Separation

Mr. Wojtaszek's Honorable Discharge

Mr. Wojtaszek's double picture with pertinent details of his military service and life

Scans of Mr. Wojtaszek's paratroopers and glidermen cap

Copies of Mr. Wojtaszek's page in the VFW Honor Roll, the Airborne and Special Operations Museum Roll Call, and the World War II Memorial Honoree Registry

Scan of Mr. Wojtaszek's retirement certificate from the U.S. Postal Service and letter of congratulations

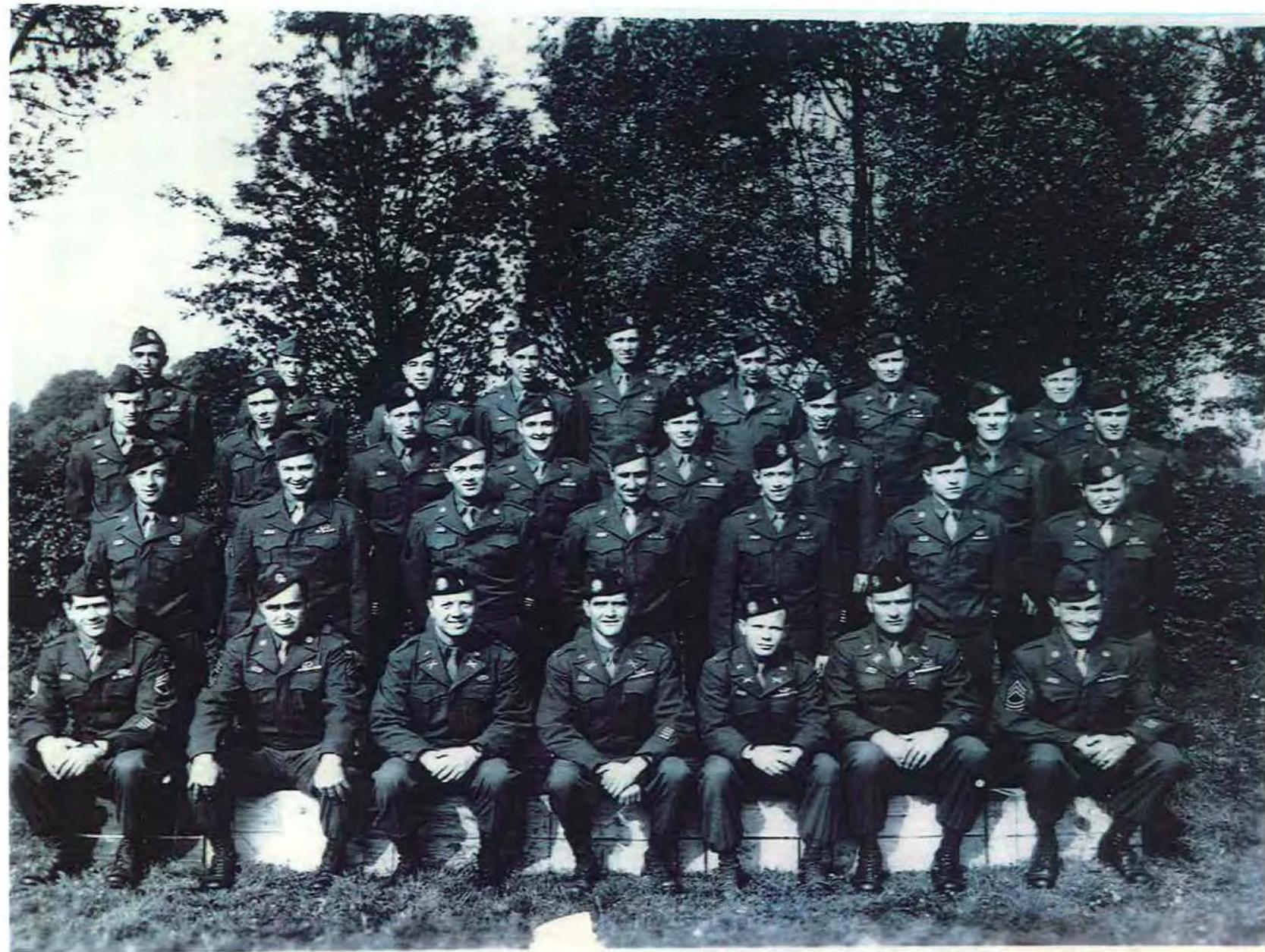
Scans of photos of Mr. Wojtaszek's visit to Normandy on June 6, 1999.

Mr. Wojtaszek saluting at the Niles Memorial Day observation

Scans of photos from Mr. Wojtaszek's Honor Flight to the war memorials in Washington, D.C.

Scans of Mr. Wojtaszek standing with the Tres Bella's Andrew Sisters at their World War II program at the Niles library.

The Niles library's strong collection of military history includes the book, The All Americans: the history of the 82nd Airborne Division, by Leroy Thompson at on the 3rd floor at 358.4 T473a.



One of 3 pictures taken of Mr. Wojtaszek's battery unit in May, 1945 in Europe. About 1/3 of the men are shown above. He is third from the right in the second row.

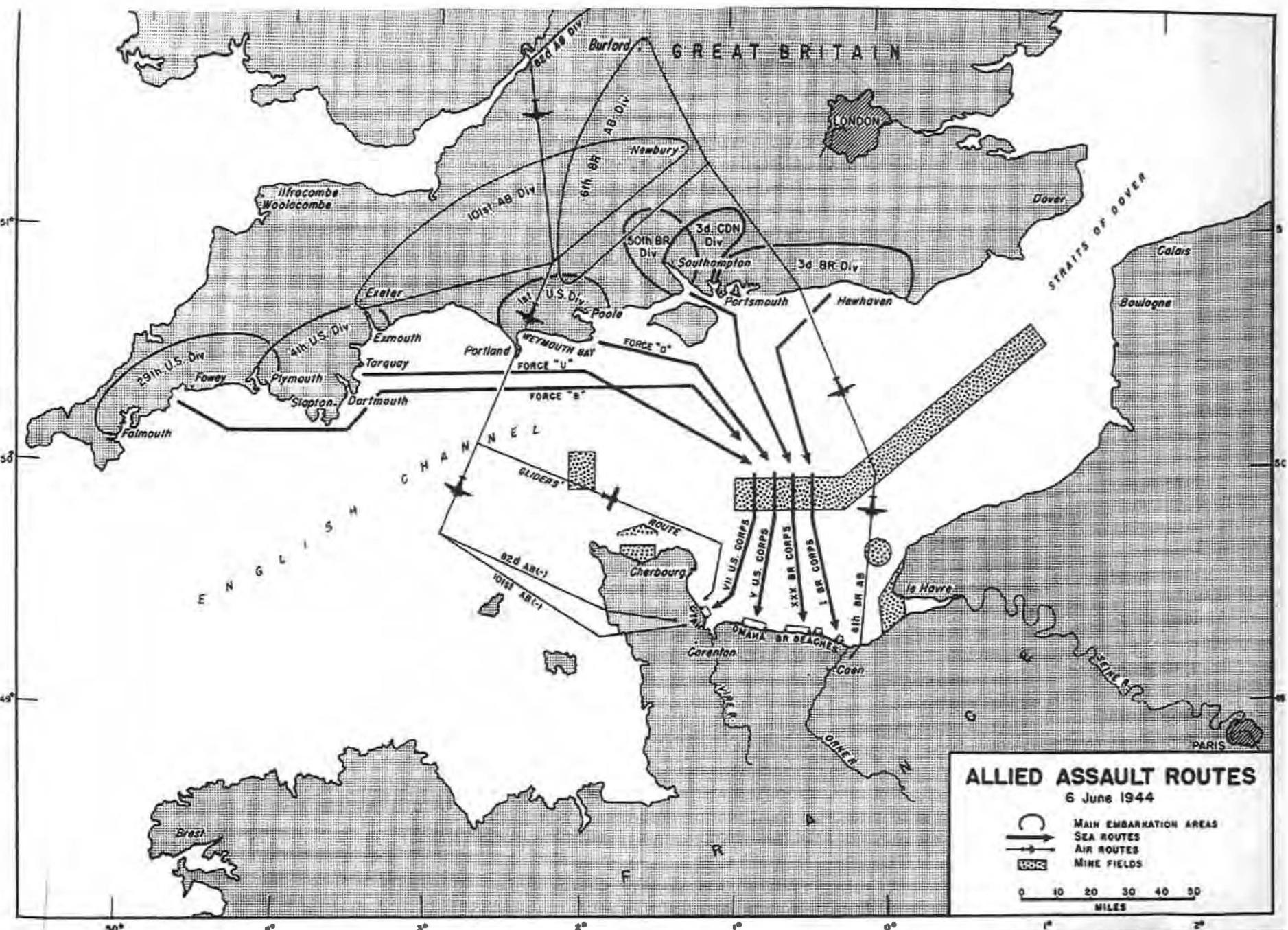


Taken in England



**Taken in England as Mr. Wojtaszek stands in front of the WACO
glider which would be towed by a C-47**

the D-Day attack routes, including those of the 82nd Airborne



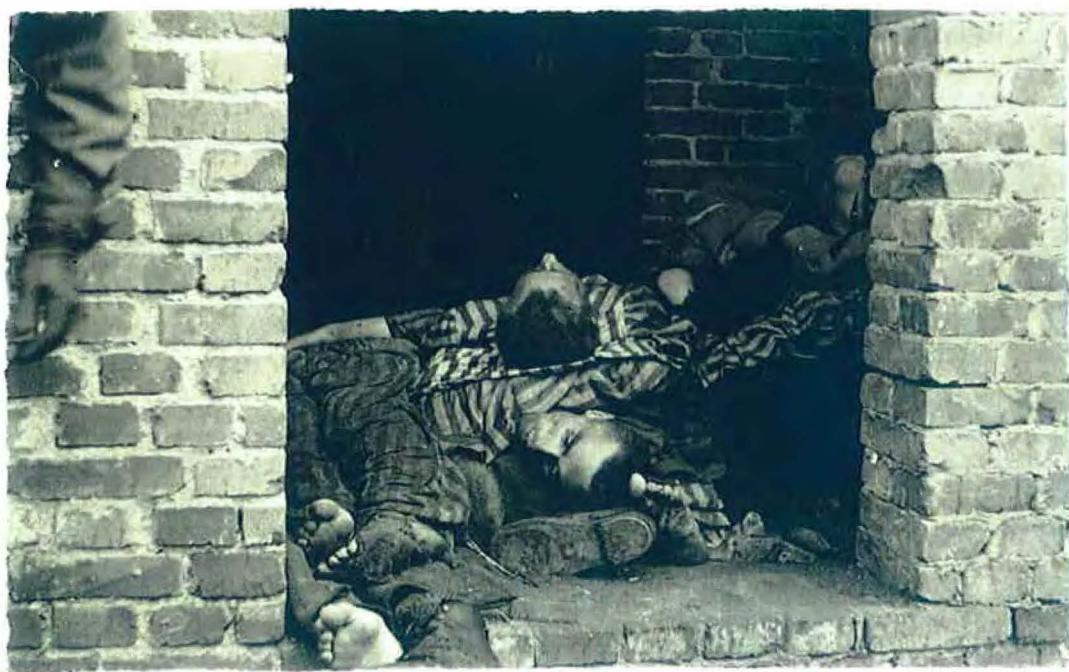
Map appears at

http://airbornecombatengineer.typepad.com/airborne_combat_engineer/2004/06/the_airborne_ro.html

Wobelein Concentration Camp near Ludwiglust, Germany.
The camp was liberated by the 82nd Airborne
and its commander, General Gavin.

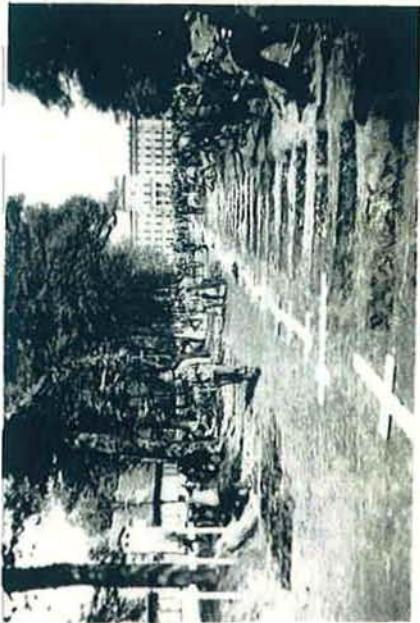


the dead , unburied inmates of the camp



General Gavin's orders:

German civilians of
Studienplatz are ordered
by the Reich's commander
to leave to big graves
for the countless dead
at the Ludwigsburg
concentration camp.
Graves are dug in front
of the Barnes of
Duckenberg's place.
Commanding General
and members of command.



Enlisted Record and Report of Separation

ENLISTED RECORD AND REPORT OF SEPARATION BOOK 258 PAGE 392 HONORABLE DISCHARGE

1. LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE INITIAL WOJASZEK MATTHEW F		2. ARMY SERIAL NO. T/5	3. GRADE T/5 FA	4. ARM OR SERVICE AUS	5. COMPONENT
6. ORGANIZATION HQ BTRY 82ND AIR BORNE DIV ARTY		7. DATE OF SEPARATION NOV 45	8. PLACE OF SEPARATION SEP CENTER CP MC COY WIS		
9. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES N WAYNE AVE CHICAGO 14 ILLINOIS		10. DATE OF BIRTH 27 JAN 22	11. PLACE OF BIRTH CHICAGO ILLINOIS		
12. ADDRESS FROM WHICH EMPLOYMENT WILL BE SOUGHT SEE 9		13. COLOR EYES BLUE	14. COLOR HAIR BROWN	15. HEIGHT 5-6	16. WEIGHT 126 LBS.
17. RACE WHITE		18. MARITAL STATUS SINGLE	19. U.S. CITIZEN YES X NO	21. CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND NO. MACHINE OPERATOR 5-13.000	

22. DATE OF INDUCTION DEC 42	23. DATE OF ENLISTMENT DEC 42	24. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE DEC 42	25. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE CHICAGO ILLINOIS
SELECTIVE SERVICE DATA X	26. REGISTERED TEC NO	27. LOCAL R.R. BOARD NO. 146	28. COUNTY AND STATE COOK ILLINOIS
30. MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY AND NO. MAIL CLERK 055		31. MILITARY QUALIFICATION AND DATE (i.e., infantry, aviation and marksmanship, etc.) GLIDER BADGE	

32. BATTLES AND CAMPAIGNS SICILIAN NAPLES-FOGGIA NORMANDY ARDENNES RHINELAND CENTRAL EUROPE			
33. DECORATIONS AND CITATIONS BELGIAN FOURMAGERIE, MILITAIRE VILLEES ORDER EUROPEAN-AFRICAN-MIDDLE EASTERN THEATER SERVICE RIBBON W/6 BRONZE STARS GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL DISTINGUISHED SERVICE BADGE BRONZE ARROWHEAD W/1CL ST			

34. WOUNDS RECEIVED IN ACTION NONE			
35. LATEST IMMUNIZATION DATES MEASLES MAR 45 TYPHOID MAR 45 TETANUS DEC 45 OTHER (Specify) -----			
36. SERVICE OUTSIDE CONTINENTAL U.S. AND RETURN DATE OF DEPARTURE DESTINATION DATE OF ARRIVAL 29 APR 43 NATO 10 MAY 43 18 NOV 43 ETO 9 DEC 43 UNKNOWN USA 13 NOV 45			
37. TOTAL LENGTH OF SERVICE CONTINENTAL SERVICE FOREIGN SERVICE YEARS MONTHS DAYS YEARS MONTHS DAYS			
38. HIGHEST GRADE HELD 0 4 14 2 6 15 T/5			
39. PRIOR SERVICE *American Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medals NONE Honored at W. Randolph Chicago, Ill location (R.R.) date			
40. REASON AND AUTHORITY FOR SEPARATION CONVENIENCE OF THE GOVT RR1-1 (DEMobilization) AR 615-365 + 15 DEC 44			
41. SERVICE SCHOOLS ATTENDED NONE			
42. EDUCATION (Years) Grammar 8 High School 4 College 1			

43. LENGTH FOR PAY PURPOSES YEARS 2 MONTHS 11 DAYS 9	44. BUSTLING OUT PAY TOTAL \$ 300 THIS PAYMENT \$ 100	45. SOLDIER DEPOSITS NONE	46. TRAVEL PAY \$ 12.25	47. TOTAL AMOUNT, NAME OF DISBURSING OFFICER \$ 177.44 H L OLDENBURG MAJ FD
INSURANCE NOTICE IMPORTANT IF PREMIUM IS NOT PAID WHEN DUE OR WITHIN THIRTY-ONE DAYS THEREAFTER INSURANCE WILL LAPSE. MAKE CHECKS OR MONEY ORDERS PAYABLE TO THE TREASURER OF THE U. S. AND FORWARD TO COLLECTIONS SUBDIVISION, VETERANS ADMINISTRATION, WASHINGTON 25, D. C.				
48. KIND OF INSURANCE Nat. Serv. U.S. Govt. None	49. HOW PAID Allotment Direct to V. A.	50. Effective Date of Allotment Discontinuance 30 NOV 45	51. Date of Next Premium Due (One month after 50) 31 DEC 45	52. PREMIUM DUE EACH MONTH \$ 6.50
53. INTENTION OF VETERAN TO Continue Continue Only Discontinue X				

54. RIGHT THUMB PRINT	55. REMARKS (This space for completion of above items or entry of other items specified in W. D. Directives) FIVE (5) OVERSEAS SERVICE BARS LAPEL BUTTON ISSUED ASR SCORE (2 SEP 45) 91 INACTIVE SERVICE (ERC) FR 11 DEC 42 TO 20 DEC 42
56. IN BEING SEPARATED	
57. PERSONNEL OFFICER (Type name, grade and organization - signature) JOHN F BURRIS 2D LT INF ASSISTANT ADJUTANT John F. Burris	

Honorable Discharge

BOOK 258 PAGE 391



Honorable Discharge

This is to certify that

MATTHEW F WOJASZEK [REDACTED] TECHNICIAN FIFTH GRADE

HEADQUARTERS BATTERY 82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION ARTILLERY

Army of the United States

is hereby Honorably Discharged from the military
service of the United States of America.

This certificate is awarded as a testimonial of Honest
and Faithful Service to this country.

Given at SEPARATION CENTER
CAMP MC COY WISCONSIN

Date NOVEMBER 1945

Thomas B. Hammond

THOMAS B. HAMMOND
MAJOR AGD



MATTHEW F. WOJTASZEK SR. was born Jan. 27, 1922. Raised in Chicago, IL and presently resides in Niles, IL. Drafted Dec. 11, 1942, at Fort Sheridan, IL. Basic and airborne training at Fort Bragg, NC, and qualified for the Glider Badge. Assigned to HHB DIVARTY, 82nd ABN. Participated in the glider invasion of Normandy, France and Nijmegen, Holland. He was awarded two Bronze Stars in his Glider Wings.

Other campaigns include: Sicily, Naples-Foggia, Ardennes, Rhineland and Central Europe.

Awards include the EAME Service Ribbon w/6 Bronze Battle Stars, Good Conduct Medal, Distinguished Service Badge, Bronze Arrowhead w/cluster. Unit Citations include Belgian and French Fourragere and Dutch Militaire Willems Order.

Discharged from Separation Center at Camp McCoy, WI, Nov. 19, 1945. Employed by US Postal Service and retired with 44 years of honorable service.

He married Bernice (deceased Feb. 5, 1995) and has two children, Matthew F. Jr. and Margaret Mary; and four grandchildren, Christine, James, Steve and Mary.

Double picture with details of Mr. Wojtaszek's military service and life



Digital scans of cap Mr. Wojtaszek brought to the interview.





THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

MEMBER HONOR ROLL™

[ADVANCED SEARCH](#)

ENTER LAST NAME



Military Service

VFW Member since: 1990

Branch: U.S. Army

Theater of Operations: 82nd Airborne Division, 1942-1945; Casablanca, North Africa to Berlin, Sicily, Italy, Normandy (D-Day), Holland, Ardennes, Battle of the Bulge, Bastogne; Occupation Duty, Berlin

Military Medals: Glider Bdg w/2 Brz Stars (Normandy, Holland); Dist Svc Mdl; Pres Unit Cit'n; French & Belgian Fourragere; Good Conduct; EAME Campaign w/6 Btl Stars, Brz Arrowhead w/OLC; Militair Willems Order

Matthew F. Wojtaszek Sr.**Born:**

January 27, 1922

Veterans of Foreign Wars
of the United States,
Kansas City, MO

[Convert to a Lifelong MeMemories®](#)**Post:**

#7712-Niles Memorial
Post
Niles, IL

[PRIVACY POLICY](#) | [TERMS OF SERVICE](#) | [TRADEMARKS](#)

©1998-2006 Making Everlasting Memories®
Patent(s) Pending

[Military Service](#)[Send Tribute](#)[Print](#)[E-Mail This Page](#)[Send My Best®](#) [Charitable Gifts](#) [Purchase Products](#)



AIRBORNE & SPECIAL OPERATIONS MUSEUM

ROLL CALL

Matthew Francis Wojtaszek

Date of Birth: 1/27/22

Hometown: Chicago, IL

Highest Rank: SPC Specialist

Year Entered: 1942

Year of Exit: 1945

Branch: Field Artillery

Combat Jumps: 0

Units:

82nd Airborne Division 1942 - 1945



Medals & Honors:

Glider Badge with 2 Bronze Battle Stars for spearheading 2 invasions, Normandy & Holland
Distinguished Service Medal, Presidential Unit Citation, French and Belgian Fourragere, Good Conduct Medal

Presidential Unit Citation

European-African-Middle Eastern Theater Service Ribbon with 6 Bronze Battle Stars. Bronze Arrowhead with 1 Cluster.

Militaire Willems Order

Combat Experience: Casablanca, North Africa to Berlin, Germany. Sicily, Italy, D-Day Normandy France; Holland, Ardennes; The Bulge, Bastogne Belgium; Occupation Duty, Berlin, Germany.
Discharged 11/19/45. 82nd Airborne

Important Civilian Achievements: Decided to stay with the Federal Government. Joined the U.S. Postal Service and retired with 44 years of Honorable Service. My Military Occupational Specialty was Mail Clerk 055.

Airborne & Special Operations Museum

100 Bragg Blvd.

Fayetteville, NC 28301

(910) 483-3003

www.asomf.org



World War II Honoree

World War II Veteran



**Matthew F. Wojtaszek,
Sr.**

BRANCH OF
SERVICE
U.S. Army

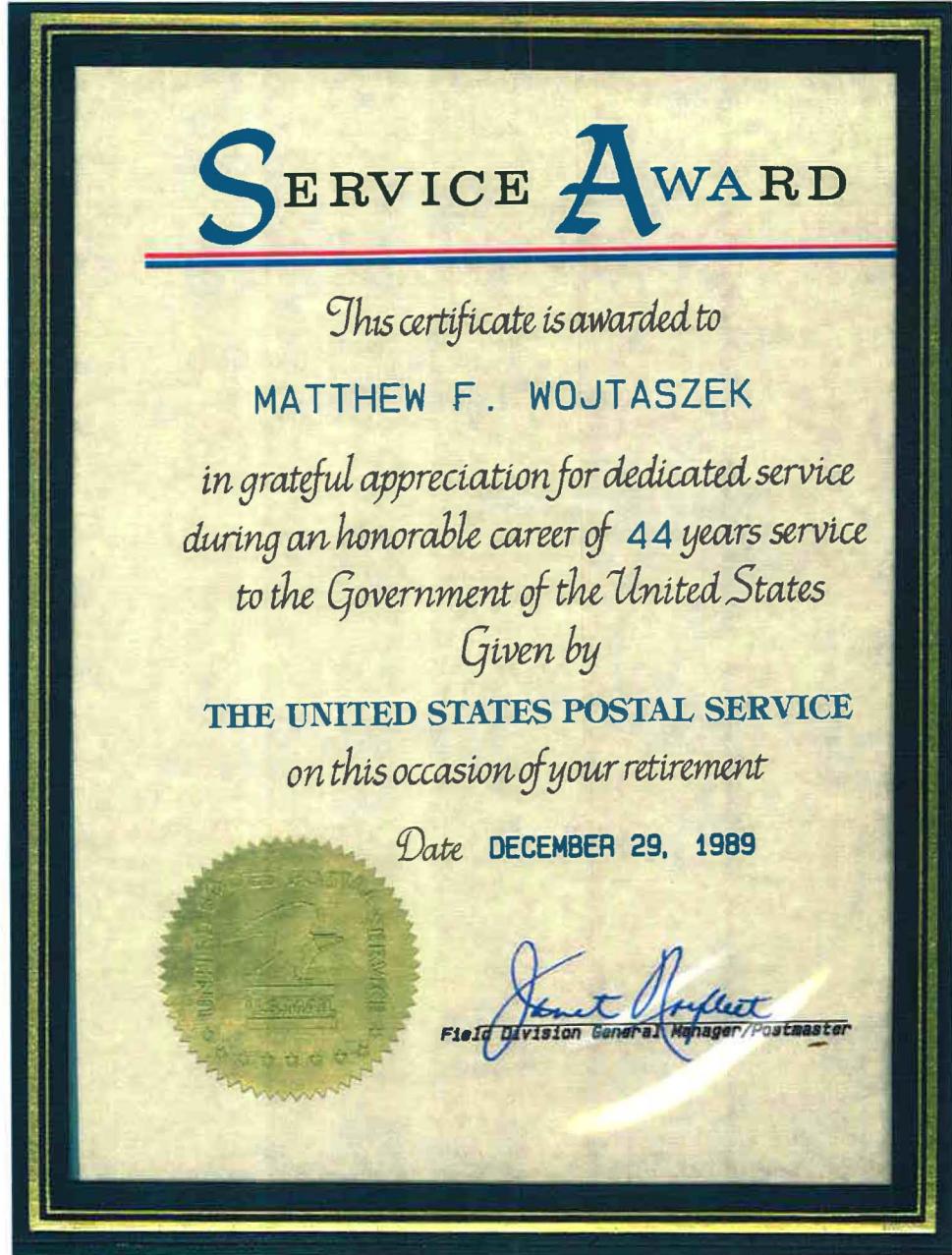
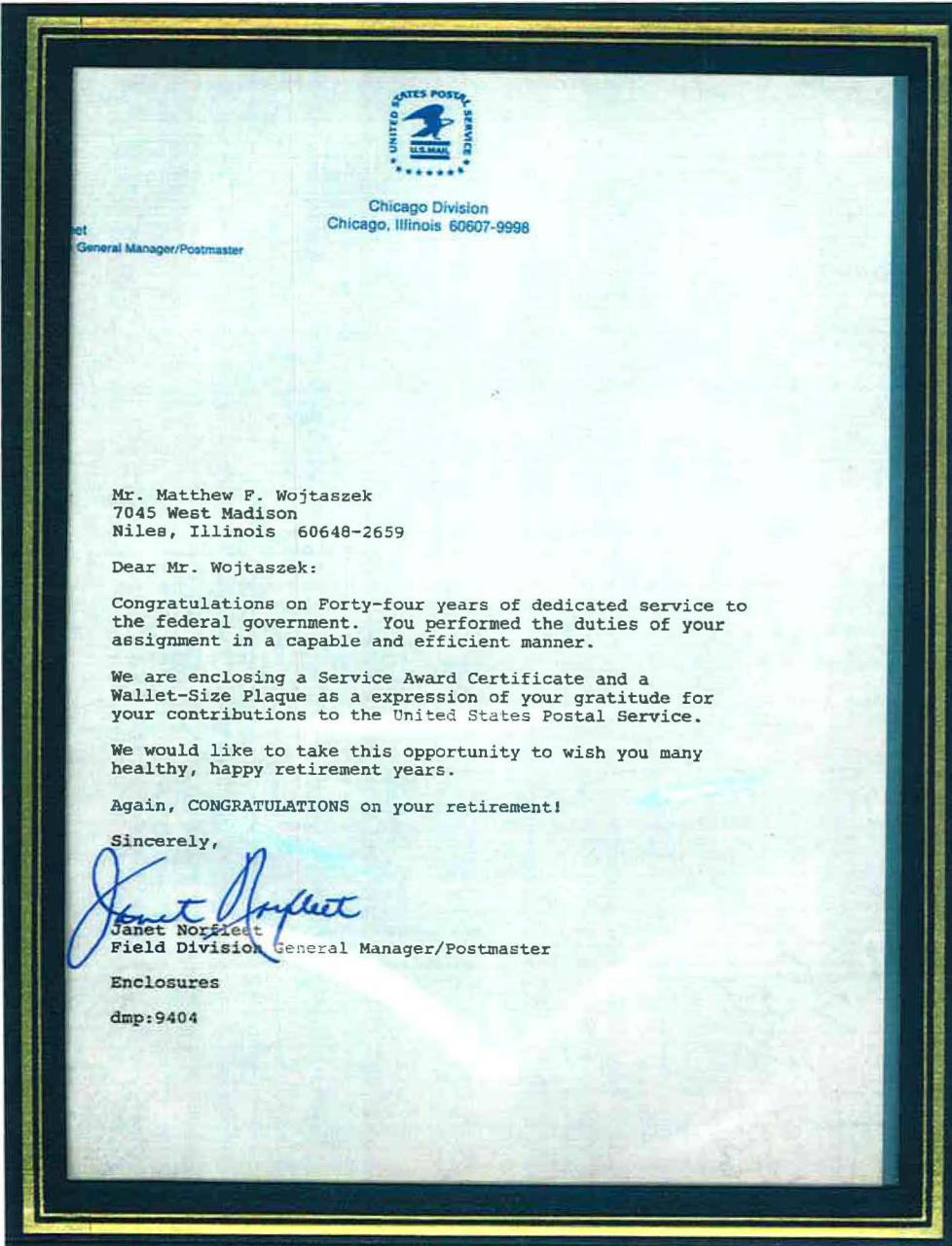


HOMETOWN
Chicago, IL

HONORED BY
Matthew F. Wojtaszek

ACTIVITY DURING WWII

SERVED FROM CASABLANCA IN NORTH AFRICA TO BERLIN, GERMANY.
PARTICIPATED IN SICILY, ITALY, D-DAY NORMANDY, JUNE 6, 1944
OPERATION OVERLORD, HOLLAND, OPERATION MARKET GARDEN
SEPTEMBER 18, 1944. THE BULGE BASTOGNE BELGIUM DECEMBER 19, TO
JANUARY 1945. OCCUPATION DUTY BERLIN, GERMANY 1945. DISCHARGED
NOVEMBER 19, 1945. 82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION.



After his return, Mr. Wojtaszek began a long and successful career with the U.S. Postal Service, working at the "big house" at 404 W. Harrison in downtown Chicago.

Mr. Wojtaszek visiting Omaha Beach on June 6, 1999 during a 15-day tour organized by the airborne veterans group Static Line.

Mr. Wojtaszek would use the sand to fill commemorative vials of his visit to Normandy on the 55th anniversary of D-Day.



Mr. Wojtaszek standing among the crosses at the American Cemetery in Normandy where 9,000 heroes are buried

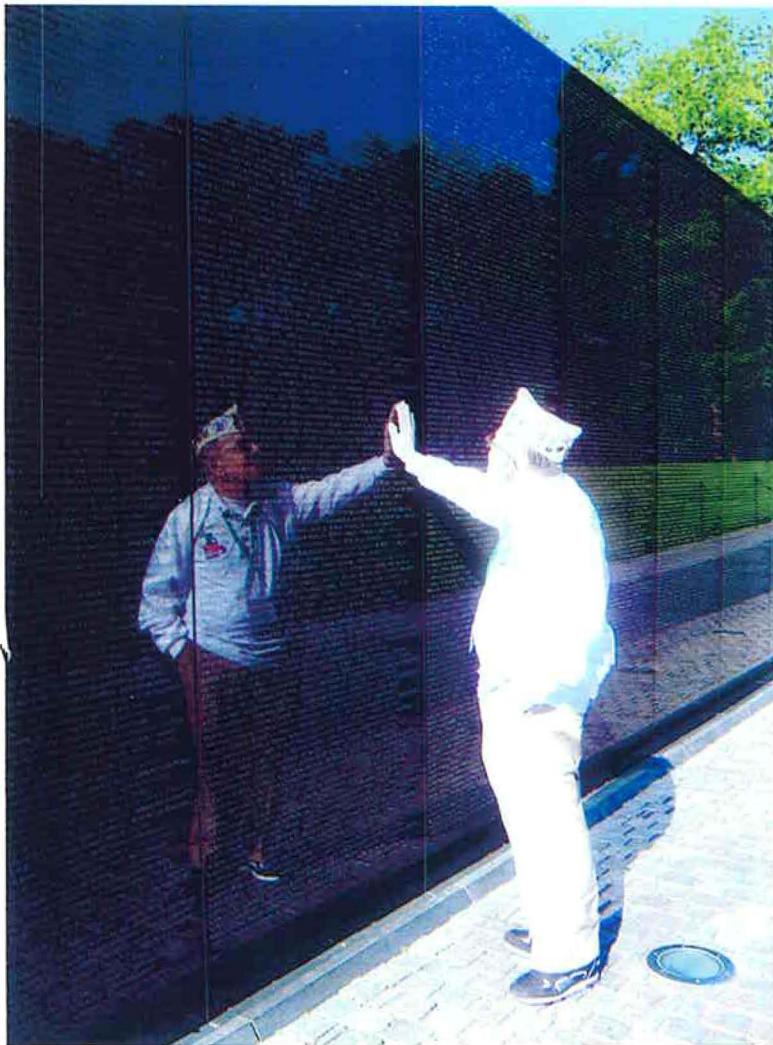




Mr. Wojtaszek salutes during the Niles Annual Memorial Day observance held at the Veterans Memorial and Waterfall at the southwest corner of Touhy and Milwaukee.

Mr. Wojtaszek touching the Viet Nam War Me-

memorial in Washington, D.C. during his Honor Flight trip to the capital on May 12, 2009.



On the Honor Flight from Midway Airport, Mr. Wojtaszek was accompanied by his daughter, Marge, and her daughter, Chris, who as a nurse, was available to provide any necessary medical assistance to the veterans.



Mr. Wojtaszek standing with Tres Bella's Andrew Sister's Revue of WWII Songs on Saturday afternoon , May 16, in the auditorium of the Niles Library. The “Andrews Sisters” also perform at Midway Airport as part of the Honor Flight program.

